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BATI DİLLERİ VE EDEBİYATLARI ANABİLİM DALI

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YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

**LITERARY NARRATIVES OF TRAUMA:
RECOGNITION, RECONSTRUCTION AND
NEGOTIATION IN BORDERLANDS/LA
FRONTERA, THE COLOR PURPLE AND
BLACK GIRL, WHITE GIRL**

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ABSTRACT

**LITERARY NARRATIVES OF TRAUMA: RECOGNITION,
RECONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATION IN BORDERLANDS/LA
FRONTERA, THE COLOR PURPLE AND BLACK GIRL, WHITE
GIRL
DINA ISLAM**

The aim of this study is to perform a close reading of three texts, namely, **The Color Purple** (1982) by Alice Walker, **Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza** (1987) by Gloria Anzaldua, and **Black Girl, White Girl** (2006) by Joyce Carol Oates in the light of Trauma theory and Postcolonial Feminist theories in order to analyze the traumas experienced individually and/or collectively. It will analyze the processes of 1-) confronting the trauma, 2-) reconstructing the traumatic experience, and 3-) reconciling the traumas experienced, in a three-staged study, to identify its impact on the characters' reconstructing a new identity. As a result, it will scrutinize the transformation of the characters by transforming from silent "objects" in the early stages of trauma to eventually become speaking "subjects".

KEYWORDS: Trauma, Postcolonial feminism, confrontation, reconstructing identity

ÖZ

LITERARY NARRATIVES OF TRAUMA: RECOGNITION, RECONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATION IN BORDERLANDS/LA FRONTERA, THE COLOR PURPLE AND BLACK GIRL, WHITE GIRL

DİNA İSLAM

Bu tezin amacı, Gloria Anzaldua'nın **Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza** (1987), Alice Walker'ın **The Color Purple** (1982), ve Joyce Carol Oates'ın **Black Girl, White Girl** (2006) başlıklı eserlerinin, Sömürgecilik Sonrası Feminist Kuram ve Travma kuramları ışığında bir okuması yapılarak, adı geçen eserlerin ortak bir tema olarak ele alınan bireysel ve/veya kolektif bir biçimde tecrübe edilen "Travma" olgusunu incelemektir. Bu eserlerdeki başkarakterler tarafından, 1-) travmanın yüzleşilerek tanımlanması, 2-) travmanın yeniden yapılandırılması, 3-) travma ile uzlaşma şeklinde üç aşama ile tecrübe edilen travmanın, yeni bir kimlik yapılandırılma sürecindeki etkisini belirlemek için bir yakın okuma yapılacaktır. Sonuç olarak, travmanın ilk aşamasında nesne konumunda bulunan bu başkarakterlerin, süreç tamamlandığında nasıl bir ses sahibi olan öznelere dönüştüğü izlenecektir.

ANAHTAR KELİMELER: Travma, Sömürgecilik sonrası feminizm, yüzleşme, kimlik yapılandırması

PREFACE

The aim of this study is to scrutinize three separate experiences of three different women in traumatic contexts in the novels of Alice Walker, Gloria Anzaldua and Joyce Carol Oates. I will study the pattern of the traumatic experiences of individuals as it is affected by collective traumas inscribed on their psyches in a manner of layers. Through analyzing their act of writing as a testimonial account, I will use Trauma Theory to study their realizing of their identity by creating a new consciousness. As the characters studied in this dissertation embark on a healing attempt, I will use Postcolonial Feminist theory to further analyze their layered traumatic wounds as they are affected by their collective traumas in order to develop a discourse that will enable their existence within the context of societal norms.

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ABBREVIATIONS LIST

Ibid. : In the same source

Ed. By : Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

Cathy Caruth in her book **Unclaimed Experience Trauma, Narrative and History (1996)** emphasizes that the original meaning of trauma in both the Greek and English languages derives from the notion of a wound inflicted on the body as an injury. The injury caused by an unexpected damage, intentionally or unintentionally, provides a strong base to further develop the way Sigmund Freud in his studies has employed the word to his definition of trauma as “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind.” (1996; 3). Caruth expands Freud’s concept of the wound as

[...] the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that, [...] is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor. (Ibid, 4)

In the light of this definition, it can be argued that trauma theory deals with the issues of unclaimed experiences which affect the sense of time, memory and experiences and their representation in language that help define the individual’s identity and the collective culture. The unclaimed experiences scope can be further interpreted as incomprehensible to the individual’s consciousness, and as suppressed, on comprehensive events lying deep down in the psyche. They develop the quality of haunting the individual, which challenges and at times ruptures the individual’s concept of time and perception, as repetitions do not occur on a conscious level, nor do they make sense in the frame of reference available to the individual’s mind at the time. Hence, what shapes the basis of a traumatic experience is, as Caruth puts it, “not simply an affect of destruction but also, fundemantelly, an enigma of survival” (Ibid, 58). The core of the traumatic experience lies in the enigma of harboring such distressing experiences that are surfacing from time to time in irrelevant contexts, disrupting the thought system of the afflicted and challenging their linguistic capabilities to mediate it. It is because of this fact that trauma itself resides within the

psyche only since it has survived what otherwise would shatter the afflicted. Freud establishes an analogy between traumatic experience and a train collision, as in a train collision a person might witness it and yet goes unharmed, only to suffer the shock of the accident weeks later in a repetitious pattern. The incomprehensible event that is not fully grasped is, as Caruth interprets it, is what makes it a profound example of what trauma is.

Having established the definition of trauma, it can be considered that such traumatic events, with their recurring and haunting residue are always at bay to surface from the of depth of their distressingly dark abyss, in order to form a meaning out of the survival, through constructing a sufficient language enabling them to testify to the existence of their survival. The essence of their survival does not depend on having lived through a traumatic experience itself, but on the psychological toll a traumatic experience has on the psyche. In the light of Freud's views on the defining quality of the experience that is not fully grasped, of the individual's identity, it can be interpreted as the turning point for birthing a theory. The distressing recurring elements of an incomprehensive collision, and yet the knowledge of having survived it, prompts a state of disturbance, further motivating the individual to mold a meaning of it, and the medium through which one chooses to do so, is the defining quality of the individual's experience.

This thesis thus scrutinizes different cases of individual traumas as observed in the three texts written by female writers, namely, **The Color Purple** by Alice Walker, **La Frontera/Borderlands The New Mestiza** by Gloria Anzaldúa and **Black Girl, White Girl** by Joyce Carole Oates. These texts portray three testimonial accounts of traumatized characters, and the ways they manage to recognize the discontent in their distressed psyche as they variably try to grapple the ungrasped accidents caused by social, historical, political and sexual collisions; mourn the loss of the bits and pieces of their identities; testify to their existence, and bear witness to their recreation of their new identities as they harbor their traumas as inseparable entities of their existence all the way through. The three protagonists, Celie, Anzaldúa and Genna Meade, share a common means through which they testify to their existences; that is, through the creative act of writing they confront the unmediated external to be finally internalized,

lending them a means through which cognitive and linguistic skills utilized to voice the incomprehensive experiences — cry to construct a meaningful connection in the context of their personal experiences.

Freud in his seminal book **Civilization and Its Discontents** (1930) writes about

[...] cases in which parts of a person's own body, even portions of his own mental life — his perceptions, thoughts and feelings — appear alien to him and as not belonging to his ego; there are other cases in which he ascribes to the external world things that clearly originate in his own ego and that ought to be acknowledged by it. Thus even the feeling of our own ego is subject to disturbances and the boundaries of the ego are not constant. (Freud, 1930; 3).

It is a significant representation of the protagonists' need to activate their own unclaimed experiences through the act of writing itself. It is a means of witnessing to themselves, and an individual and solitary act, since the “alienness” residing in their subconscious can be worked out only through themselves. Through the act of writing, one creates his or her own listener, whether these texts are initially intended to be shared, or published, or kept private. This does not form a decisive quality. Since the sense of being heard from the inside, the sense of witnessing to the disturbances that are challenging the boundaries of comprehension are the crucial components towards a new consciousness, these writers are able to carve out a path from which they can embark on an odyssey towards recognizing the alien/unclaimed collisions. Mediating between the inside and the outside, they reconstruct their traumas in meaningful frames of references through their testimonial acts of writing.

The importance of an addressed and vocalized trauma can be best observed in a contrasting situation in which the survivor is not able to break the chains of silence. The silent trauma survivor, can neither fully recognize the trauma nor apprehend the vitality of the defining quality of trauma, compelling himself/herself to suffer from a distorted sense of self, memory and time, and ends up failing in relating to their past as meaningful parts of their identity.¹ Due to the lack of a listener, or a willing to create a listener, the silent survivor might attempt to change the past since its causing them

¹This is also studied in Mary K. (Cassie) Premo's study “**We Heal From Memory: Trauma, History, and American Women's Writings**”

so much pain, by suffering the haunting and recurring events. Hence, without the effort to make sense out of them, the survivor is encapsulated within a recurring pattern of returning to the past, reliving it without reconstructing a conscious experience out of it, resulting in a state of alienation from their present, which practically redeems them as survivors only in the physical sense. Dori Laub in his article “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival” (1992), examines the psyche of a silent survivor of the Holocaust and interprets the sense of alienation of the survivor, even to her own family, and her relation to her past that is perceived as a vain attempt to relive the past as it was before the traumatic experience;

In her present life, she relentlessly holds on to, and searches for what is familiar to her from her past, with only a dim awareness of what she is doing. Her own children she experiences with them deep disappointment as unemphatic strangers because of the ‘otherness’ she sense in them, because of their refusal to substitute for, and completely fit into, the world of parents, brothers and children that was so abruptly destroyed.’ (1992; 78)

The main disturbance observed in such a silent survivor is that she is unable to relate to her past, including the traumatic experience of losing her family and the harsh and diminishing experience that is the Holocaust, which in itself constituted a degrading sense of self filled with shame and distortion. The survivor has created a boundary, a clear cut rift between her life as before and after; before the trauma, the breach on her mind and after. The contrasting concepts of time, that is a severely distorted concept in itself, handles time as a straight and an undisrupted line, is alien to the personal experience of the individual. The concept of a vertical timeline eliminates the importance of the experiences in the individual’s life that give meaning to the individual sense of time, through their experiences whether pleasurable or painful. The split creates a belief which compliments the past as a satisfactory and merry one, and condemns the present as a disdainful, painful realm in which she is punished to reside in. In regards to the split between the past and the present and its affiliation with the survivor’s unconsciously glorifying of the past, it extinguishes the possibility of a reliable evaluation of the past, whether it was a source of pleasure or pain. The clear cut conviction on the necessity of contrasting her life in a “before and after” dichotomy, and in her desperate obsession to bring back the past shows her inability to relate to her past in the context of the wound in her psyche as an individual. Unable

to recognize the wound, she is also unable to confirm the loss of her beloved ones and the loss of her past life, which eliminates the possibility of mourning the loss she experiences. Her lack of the skill of relating to herself before others, and of her not being able to recognize and own her experience, no matter how painful it is, forecloses her reconstructing a meaning out of her trauma. E. Ann Kaplan in her book **Trauma Culture The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature** (2005) quotes a South African psychologist who worked with victims and perpetrators during the country's Truth and Reconciliation Trials; "The narratives of trauma told by victims and survivors are not simply about facts. They are primarily about the impact of those facts on the victims' lives and about the painful continuities created by violence in their lives.'" (2005; 42). Such statement further accentuates the necessity of the trauma survivor to burst the effort to reconstruct their traumas in order to formulate a meaningful impact on their lives and identities.

In the texts this study analyses, the survivors of the traumas seek refuge in the act of writing. Through creating a space to allow for the possibility of a listener, they recognize that there reside in them various unclaimed experiences which speak volumes to them, which create a confused and disturbing occurrence in the present time of the survivors, further crippling their perception of what might the future look for them. The residing traumas repressed deep in their subconscious are inaccessible to their full cognition, and in the world of opposites, they symbolize darkness in contrast to light. The repressed traumas in this sense resemble an enraged, incoherent mythological creature, whose face is yet unrecognizable, and whose voice has not yet transformed into a voice; it is still an infantile loud cacophony, constantly roaring due to the bleeding wound, constantly crying out for the aid of the conscious. Freud in his essay titled "**Beyond the Pleasure Principle**" (1920) states that

Most of the unpleasure that we experience is perceptual unpleasure. It may be perception of pressure by unsatisfied instincts; or it may be external perception which is either distressing in itself or which excites unpleasurable expectations in the mental apparatus that is, which is recognized by it as a 'danger'. (Freud, 1920 ;5)

The perception of the repressed trauma that is causing distress in the conscious of the survivor, is potentially dangerous for its unknown and incomprehensive quality, which ignites fear and anxiety that if not treated, might lead to an irrevocable total destruction of the survivor. Freud explains that the traumatic neurosis contains a characteristic quality; that is, the inflicted wound or injury simultaneously works against the development of the neurosis, and Freud defines the emotions that come with it:

‘Fright’, ‘fear’ and ‘anxiety’ are improperly used as synonymous expressions; they are in fact capable of clear distinction in their relation to danger. ‘Anxiety’ describes a particular state of expecting danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one. ‘Fear’ requires a definite object of which to be afraid. ‘Fright’ however, is the name we give to the state a person gets into when he has to run into danger without being prepared for it, it emphasizes the factor of surprise.” (Ibid, 6)

The three emotions defined by Freud are present in conjunction with a traumatic experience, since as the above mentioned trauma definition inherently has that quality of an unknown, unexpected collision creating a lasting wound which bleeds every time it is enacted.

Through incoherent mumblings and cries, roaring from the depths of the subconscious of three wounded women analyzed in this study emerges a courageous attempt of survival. What enables Celie, Anzaldúa and Genna in creating a possibility of healing is the fact that they do create a listener who actively accompanies them by witnessing their journey in decoding the incomprehensiveness in their minds. Throughout the journey they firstly eliminate the sense of fright, since it is no longer an unexpected occasion, and then through their writing they become equipped with the necessary awareness to dive deep down to confront the shadow deep down inside. Dori Laub in his essay “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening” (1992) writes about the act of witnessing and the role of the listener in transforming the event of the trauma into ‘real’ event:

The emergence of the narrative that is being listened to – and heard – is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the “knowing” of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo* (from new). The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time.[...] The listener has to feel the victim’s victories, defeats and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony. (1992; 57-8)

However, in Celie, Anzaldúa and Genna's case of writing the texts as their testimonial accounts, the present study observes that although there might not be a physical witness to the texts, still the survivors unknowingly create a listener, or a witness, that actively participates through the writing process as they confront with their wounds, frights and frustrations which are all the way documented. By the tremendous aid of the sense of being heard and listened to, they enable their texts to become their testimonial accounts to their losses, their mourning, and eventually to their rebirth through reconstructing the meaningful wholeness of their existence, especially by formulating a pattern with which they relate to their past.

While addressing the trauma and the processes of witnessing and testimony, it is of no question necessary to address them in both ways; as an individual experience and as a collective one. Considering the fact that trauma theory has reached its zenith with the studies on Holocaust survivors and their testimonies to the atrocities, no other source has been as unique in projecting an individual and at the same time a collective experience as that of the Holocaust survivors. Individuals cannot detach themselves from the context of their communities, for the community is a crucial element in shaping the individual's frame of reference. Through history one's perception of the world is profoundly shaped and affected by the thought and linguistic system in which the person is born into. Despite the fact that the traumatic collision is experienced individually, it cannot be stripped off of the culture's frame of reference through which one establishes an understanding of it. As E. Ann Kaplan explains "The painful personal memories explored expose the complex interrelatedness of the subject with the powerful and inevitable historical and political forces in which she is inescapably caught up." (2005;20) In this light, considering the contexts of the traumas experienced in the texts studied in this thesis, it is crucial to construct the base through which they are tied to their cultural, historical, political, racial and gender/sexual traumas in the collective sense. Ann Kaplan quotes Kristeva in this context and writes, "Kristeva links the two kinds of trauma – the political and the personal – and claims both do damage 'to our systems of perception and representation'"(Ibid, 51).

With the presence of issues of race and political oppression portrayed in Walker, Anzaldúa and Oates' texts, it is crucial to point out the theories addressing the issues of geographical displacement, political assimilation, cultural annihilation and the rule of linguistic terrorism in the light of white hegemony. In the basic sense, Postcolonial Theory deals with life after independence, mainly of colonized countries with the true sense of military colonization, however the theory can be adapted to any context in which people attempt to reclaim their freedom, their heritage, their language, their way of life and their frame of reference. In the face of distortion, displacement and dispersion of their heritage that transformed them, Spivak, in her essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985), calls it "'Worlding'" (1985; 243), a term to that is translated and interpreted so that the world of the white man can understand it. The post-colonial life of the locals has transformed into a matter of reclaiming one's own history, heritage, language and perception. Just as how the notions of independence, freedom, self determination and representation had once been limited only to white people, redeemed the notions as troubled conceptions. As it will be further studied in the chapters on each text, the collective traumas of racial issues, the African American and the Latin American, and a collective trauma evolved into a familial sense, are not excluded from the individuals' concepts of self referentiality, their ability (or inability for that matter), to relate to the history of their own races and their own memories and their claim of owning the traumatic experience as a collective. In this sense, there exists more than single kind of a shadow, haunting the individuals and distorting their sense of self and their perceptions, and creating multiple layers of hardened skin vaguely covering the wound, ready to resurface whenever the wound gets "interrupted" or "scratched" by an external force, or collision.

From the aspect of a feminist outlook on the texts that are testifying to three women's struggles with hegemonic mindsets, it is also crucial to note the shortcomings within the feminist theory. Similarly to the invasive White culture's approach in setting the tone and constructing the norm for their cultural hegemony to rule over the world, feminists have also set a hegemonic tone for their theory. The norm is set according to their system of thought, their way of life and their necessities, regardless of

geographical, racial, economic and familial relations within the society, which renders the theory from formulating an inclusive approach. The traces the theory bears from the white frame of reference are put forth in Dr. Ritu Tyagi's paper titled "Understanding Postcolonial Feminism in Relation with Postcolonial and Feminist Theories" (2014). Tyagi states that

White feminists have overlooked racial, cultural and historical specificities that mark the condition of these women. In so doing, they have imposed White feminist models on colonized women, and thereby, worked as an oppressor.[...] the exclusion of the notion of "race" and the denial of the socio-historical context that characterize the work of Western feminists in their approach toward "Third World" women." (2014; 47)

Tyagi further quotes Hazel V. Carby from her essay "White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood": "

In Carby's view, Western feminism frequently suffers from an ethnocentric bias in presuming that the solutions which White Western women have advocated in combating their oppression are equally applicable to all. As a result, issues of race have been neglected which has hindered feminists from thinking about the ways in which racism and patriarchy interact. (Ibid.).

"White" feminism neglected that there exists different people, cultures, histories and contexts in which their "sisters" suffer. Spivak argues that they cannot think outside of the male constructed white discourse to actually see their female counterparts in other parts of the world as their equals. Their history was denied, their way of life did not fit their criteria, so their 'sisters' (1985; 244) did not see them as their equals, or rather did not try. From this point of view, feminism is limited to one certain race and class and is absolutely not inclusive. The limited mindset has expanded not only outside the confines of race and status, but also to the equally harmful system of patriarchy. Adrienne Rich in her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (1972) states that Virginia Woolf left out the women who were washing dishes and looking after their children, and also the women who were washing the dishes of other people and looking after other people's children. (1972; 20) and Alice Walker in her essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" (1972) questions Woolf's sentiments on the issue and asks what should we make out of the slave girls that were once denied the very basic human rights and adjusts Woolf's text in an impressive intrusiveness, to create a space for the feminists of color;

Virginia Woolf wrote further, speaking of course not of our Phillis, that "any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century [insert "eighteenth century," insert "black woman," insert "born or made a slave"] would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard [insert "Saint"], leered and mocked at. For it needs little skill and psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by contrary instincts [add "chains, guns, the lash, the ownership of one's body by someone else, submission to an alien religion"] that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty." (1972; 404)

Confining feminism to the single paradigm of "class" or "race" has made it a troublesome notion which needs to be reconstructed afresh. However, the women in the Third World were not only politically colonized by outsiders, but they were also colonized by their own brothers, fathers, husbands and even sons. "She simultaneously experiences the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy. Her colonized brother is no longer her accomplice, but her oppressor." (2014; 45). Women are doubly exploited in this sense. They are confined to strict patriarchal roles and subjected to societal dogmas even in postcolonial discourses. They are fighting layers and layers of oppression in the Third World in order to reclaim their rights and assert their presence.

Spivak remarks that there are two stakes at which imperialism asserts power over women: childbearing and soul making. The first is to exploit their bodies, and the other is to exploit their civil society. She very strongly argues against the Europeanizing of the native culture in order to sell it as an exotic source. In this respect, it is understandable what Spivak calls soul making is the part the white feminists neglected. The reason why they neglected it can be understood in Adrienne Rich's essay when she says "I want female poets to be the equals of men, and to be equal was still confused with sounding the same." (1972; 21) White feminism could not differentiate between race and gender because they were already speaking in their language, the man's language that veiled their eyes to the fact that, imperialism destroyed other people's lives just as patriarchy did. They proceeded in speaking with "imperialist axiomatics" as Spivak names it, and when discussing the Third World. Spivak suggests that "Narcissus' madness is disclosed when he recognizes his Other as his self" (1985; 250) The White imperialist man demanded freedom, independence, equality in class and justice at home, but they could not bring them to their counterparts

in colonies or the people he colonized. The postcolonial nationalistic discourses demanded freedom, independence, equality and justice brought to them, and yet they could not bring the same values to their wives, daughters, sisters and mothers. White feminists demanded freedom, independence, equality and justice but they could not bring the same things to their “sisters” in the Third World and failed in addressing the women in their society that are fighting for their mental individuality. Since they weren’t ready to reflect upon themselves, to see the Other in the looking glass or in the water, and to realize that inequality, violence, annihilation and physical and mental oppression has affected women everywhere, a need to construct a new understanding has emerged.

Hazel V. Carby states in her essay “White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood” (1982) states that “we do wish to bear witness to our own her stories.” (1982; 212) In the light of the individual and collective traumas, coupled with the wounds of their racial, political and sexual history; this thesis commences with an analysis of the novel **The Color Purple**(1982) by Alice Walker, and the protagonist Celie’s testimonial accounts through her epistolary pattern, in which she initiates the process of witnessing by asking God to help her understand what is happening to her. In the forms of letters addressed to God, Celie, the uneducated black girl reveals her troubled familial and domestic life in her letters. With the absence of a functioning family, and her subordinated stance in life as a girl, she is subjected to domestic violence in the form of rape and splitting from her own children, and later in the form of physical and psychological abuse in her matrimonial house. As Celie is isolated in the sense of being physically estranged from her sister and family, and with the loss of her beloved sister and confidante, Celie begins her testimonial account by writing to God, and addressing him with the journal-like letter forms by spilling her words, in order to reconstruct her severed and mutilated sense of self. The chapter will study how the relationship between the women in the novel, in the different forms of approach and healing they offer to Celie, end up mothering each other in the face of the despotic black patriarchy in the midst of a white hegemony in a pattern of sisterhood. The chapter will scrutinize how the importance of a listener, both hypothetical and physical, enable the traumatic individual to initiate the process

of healing enacted by the sense of being real, of their experience being documented through the witness, and testifying to their existence by using her own words only, Celie is able to heal with realizing her own voice to become vocal, and with the enactment of the vocalization, communication is made possible for her, as when Celie confesses, her fate becomes a pattern which she stitches herself.

The second chapter focuses on the Chicana author Gloria Anzaldúa's genre-defying text, **The Borderlands/ La Frontera** (1987) as a testimonial account to the author's journey as she constantly departs, investigates, reshapes and defines her identity in order to reconstruct a third path in which she can realize herself as a resident of the border in the form of a writing. As the daughter of a Mexican-American family, the chapter studies the way the border is a persistent pattern in the life of Anzaldúa, and how she theorizes it as a pattern in several aspects of life which people tend to ignore. The ignorance of the border causes a wound in the lives of the people related to it, shaping a duality through which life is seen in two constructed choices. The duality of the concepts, or the allegory of the border, bothers the psyche of Anzaldúa as an individual, and unknowingly the psyche of a whole race, the Chicanos, as they conform to either side of the opposites. The chapter will examine the pattern of traumatic speeches occurring in the course of the text, as Anzaldúa recognizes and listens, or rather witnesses, to her shadow residing in her unconscious, and embarks on a journey through which she questions the notions of belonging, national pride, colonialism, language, historical and cultural appropriation, patriarchy, sexual taboos and the vicious cycle of oppression inflicted on the weaker, and refuses the learned distorted concepts related to these fields, and eventually departs in the search for the truth that will satisfy her rationale and spirituality as well. The chapter proceeds in scrutinizing how Anzaldúa, at the end, becomes her own healer as she enacts her own truths in the face of a world of opposites, and introduces the concept of a new consciousness which is truthful to her heritage and her acquired identity, and a linguistic system which transmits her inner world to the outer without confinement, projecting her text as a lively object that will enable others to actively witness to it.

The final chapter of this study analyzes **Black Girl, White Girl** (2006) by Joyce Carol Oates, as the protagonist Genna Meade spills her guts on paper in an endeavor

to make sense out of her unclaimed experiences both at home and university. The chapter scrutinizes the familial aspect of the traumatic experiences as Genna's main looming trauma is caused by her estranged familial bonds. Suffering from a distorted memory which triggers out of context and unpleasant memories, Genna goes on an expedition through the kneaded words that are hinted by her mother on several occasions, only to realize that what she regards as her painful experience is merely a symptom of a much deeper and totally incomprehensible wound inside her mind. The chapter examines the testimonial account of Genna as she practices writing as a means of her unearthing the layers of historical, racial, sexual and familial traumas residing in her troubled mind, to eventually achieving a successful discovery of harboring an adopted frame of reference that is prevailing in her mind. In the end, Genna becomes able to acknowledge her losses and transgress from a state of melancholia into a healthy mourning state that is enabled through her testimonial text.

CHAPTER ONE

LETTERS AS A TESTIMONY OF EXISTENCE IN *THE COLOR PURPLE*

Dori Laub, a clinical professor at the Department of Psychiatry in Yale University, is an expert on testimony methodology and trauma studies. What is more, he is a Holocaust survivor himself. In his article, “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival” (1992), Laub quotes a Holocaust survivor in the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale: “We wanted to live one day after Hitler, in order to be able to tell our story.” Stressing on the importance of *telling*, Laub expounds this statement: “The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive” (1992; 78). Following in the footsteps of Laub’s interpretation, Alice Walker’s prize winning novel **The Color Purple** (1982) testifies to Laub’s statement, since the book is an epistolary account of the protagonist’s letters addressed to God. As the present chapter shall analyze, these letters which have initially emerged from Celie’s strong urge to survive by telling her stories “*to nobody but God*,” (1982; 3) eventually become a testimonial account of her existence which she denies, iconographically, in her opening letter: “~~I am~~ I have been a good girl [...]” which formulates a crucial starting point to her testimonial writing in which she transforms from a silenced object into a speaking subject. Shoshana Felman in her article “Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching” (1992) asserts that the decision to testify for one’s own truth, in itself, is a reclaiming of one’s identity by becoming a speaking subject. “To testify – to vow to tell, to promise to produces one’s own speech as material evidence for truth – is to accomplish a *speech act*, rather than simply formulate a statement.” (1992; 5) Celie’s testimony reflects the racial aspect of traumatic experiences in the context of domestic and familial life.

Celie narrates her story through a series of letters to God because from the onset she is deprived of all choices but a solitary state of domestic confinement;

social muteness and patriarchal subservience with no means of communication to the world at large. Her only means of *telling*, or survival, is through writing these letters to a sublime power, in hope for finding a response. Later on, Celie, who does become equipped with the skill to vocalize the burden of being a victim of rape, attains her voice – consequently, enabling her to take on her own journey against patriarchal conformity. Since “‘not telling’ of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny” (Ibid; 79), throughout Celie’s narrative what enables the protagonist to heal herself is her conscious choice of telling her story. During his interviews with Holocaust survivors, Laub ascertains that “[...] who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly ‘external evil’ which causes an endless struggle with and over delusion” (Ibid, 78). In a similar vein, Celie, in her very first letter writes, “Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me” (3), displaying her determination to overcome a distorted traumatic memory, strengthened with the need of grasping the meaning of her traumatic experiences.

Walker’s choice of presenting Celie’s story through the use of the epistolary form profoundly contributes to the act of Celie’s witnessing to her day-to-day existence and her own traumas which lie at the core of her muteness and solitude. Celie’s forced solitude, or isolation, which results from the unspoken/unspeakable traumas she experiences, consist an important element to her testifying letters. In her book, **Woman, Letters and the Novel** (1980), Ruth Perry asserts:

The isolation of the characters is essential to the epistolary formula because it throws the characters back into themselves, to probe their own thoughts, their own feelings (...) what the characters enact in their seclusion is at the core of epistolary novel: a self-conscious and self-perpetuating process of self-examination which gains momentum and ultimately becomes more important than communicating with anyone outside the room in which one sits alone writing. (1980; 117)²

²This is also argued in Maria Berg Jorgensen’s study “**The Role of the Epistolary Narrative in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple***”

Celie, who is initially unable to find a voice of her own, is also unable to find a witness to her repressed traumas. Furthermore, the reason why she writes letters in the first place that are never intended to find a real audience in the traditional sense, is that she has no faith in finding a witness. As Laub asserts: “[...] it was also the very circumstance of being inside the event that made unthinkable the very notion that a witness could exist.” (Ibid, 81).

However, the process of Celie’s healing starts when she finds an actual addressee, a witness in the midst of her isolating milieu that has provoked nothing but an internalized sense of self-degradation. As Shoshana Felman states, in her study with Laub titled, **Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History** (1992), testimony is a solitary act, it cannot be repeated or reported, and that the act of “witnessing” is a unique experience that comes from, and brings solitary burden: “And yet, the appointment to bear witness is, paradoxically enough, an appointment to transgress the confines of that isolated stance, to speak for and to others” (1992; 3). Healing is thus stimulated when one is finally able to get out of the confining territory of solitude. Hitherto silenced and unable to question—let alone finding any answers—the victim-witness is imprisoned in an unconscious state of unacknowledged trauma, being constantly repressed. While the victim is unable to grasp reality, the victim is forced inside a dark abyssal territory, creating a distorted sense of self, place and memory. Cathy Caruth interpreted Freud’s definition of trauma in her book **Unclaimed Experience Trauma, Narrative and History** (1996) that trauma, the breach in the mind, is not merely a wound in the surface of the body which can heal with ease; “What seems to be suggested by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that the wound of the mind – the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self and the world – is not like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event” (1996; 4). The process in the end leaves the victim with a state of mind severely numbed, making the victim unable to recognize the reality of their own traumas.

“Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me” (1982; 3), writes Celie in her first letter to God. This statement marks Celie’s first attempt to removing herself outside the above mentioned abyssal territory of dehumanization. Felman explains that testimony is the very first step outside what one cannot fully construct and comprehend, and thus Celie’s first cry is a concrete evidence of her determination not to conform, testifying to own her past and presence in order to reconstruct a new frame of reference with which the healing process will initiate. As Felman claims: “As a relation to events, testimony seems to be bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frame of reference” (Ibid, 5).

Celie’s episodic journey of bearing witness, reclaiming her memory, acquiring a consciousness, healing and (re)birthing herself, is a sound testimony of her existence against conforming to a reality which has initially locked her in a state of mere survival as she expresses several times throughout the novel: “All I know how to do is stay alive” (18) or “I don’t fight, I stay where I’m told. But I’m alive” (22). This is ontogenetically detected also through the form and content of her letters, marking a great effort in Celie’s part throughout her quest of transforming from a silenced object into a speaking subject against conformity. As Felman states that the act of bearing witness, that erupts from an “uncurable” incident, itself has a remedial quality, a first step in the healing process. (Ibid, 3) In order to further delve into the significance of Celie’s letters throughout her testimonial quest, a close reading of the series of her traumatic experiences is required at this stage.

When the novel opens the reader directly is situated vis-à-vis Celie, a 14-year-old African-American girl living in Georgia of the Deep South in the early 1900s. From her childhood and early adolescence onwards, she is raised in a disrupted family unit. All conventional interpretations and definitions of *family*

orbit around the concept as an essential milieu of human development during which one is nourished with emotions of love, support, trust and connection. On the other hand, Celie's experience of family is devoid of all these feelings. From the onset Celie is introduced into a violent torrent of experiences of abuse, silencing and dictated inferiority. Moreover, as the older of the two sisters, she is constantly raped by her *Pa*, who tells her now that she is grown up enough: "You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't" (1982; 3). Her sickly mother, who never becomes a real character thus almost a nonexistent voice in the text, is not able neither to fend for her daughter nor provide her with any kind of support. Too silenced as a woman, she only stops fussing around because *Pa* is good to her now. "She happy, cause he good to her now" (Ibid). She dies very early on in the narrative. Eventually, Celie twice gets pregnant and has to drop school, an event that seals the vicious circle of isolation and abuse which will linger on for the many years to come.

Celie is forced to give up her two children of incest rape—a girl and a boy—presumably killed by *Pa* in the woods. Deprived of a real mother figure, Celie herself is now deprived of motherhood with "breasts full of milk running down [...]" (Ibid, 5). However, later in the narrative Celie comes across, in a cloth store, with this black woman known as the missionary's wife with two children that look so similar to her. Physical similarity aside, Celie discovers from the girl's diapers, which she has embroidered them, and thinks that they are alive and sold to this childless missionary couple.

Consequently, near the age of twenty Celie is married off to a Mr.____, a widowed man whose name the reader as well as Celie herself do not get to know for a long time in the narrative. Initially, Mr. desires to marry her Nettie, the beautiful younger sister, but *Pa* decides that Nettie is too pretty to give, and offers Celie like a chattel, resonating a trade discourse that might be heard in a slave market: "She ugly. He say. But ain't no stranger to hard work. And she clean. And God done fixed her. You can do everything just like you want to and she ain't gonna

make you feed it or clothe it” (Ibid,10). The fact that *Pa* ensures Celie’s future husband that he can do to her whatever he pleases strengthens the idea that Celie is perceived as property, rendering her physical being, stripped off her humanity. Virtually an orphan herself, Celie is thus sold into marriage to care for four other motherless children while the burden of domestic responsibilities dictate her to “work like a man”(10) in the farm, as well as performing as a decent wife which at all times entails silence, obedience, and industriousness.

Considering the time and geography in which Celie has led her life, those qualities are requisite for women from all walks of life. And yet, Celie’s teacher at school, Addie Beasley, who pays a visit to *Pa* to send her back to school, is presented as an alternative to these longstanding patriarchal norms. Confronted with such an educated and independent woman, her father evaluates the teacher thus: “Whoever listen to anything Addie Beasley have to say. She run off at the mouth so much no man would have her. That how come she have to teach school” (Ibid, 11-12). According to this restricted and biased worldview, Addie Beasley is who she is, that is independent and vocal, because no man would take her. A woman can only exist in the presence of a man, and for the sole reason of marrying and serving the man; and bearing and raising the children of the man. Outside these normative boundaries, even though as educated as Addie Beasley, a woman is rendered unworthy of taking advice from, thus becoming herself a social outcast.

All her life Celie is undermined as ugly and dumb: “You too dumb to keep going to school, *Pa* say” (Ibid, 11). Consequently, she forms a distorted perception of self by what is iterated continuously. Constantly exposed to physical violence by Mr._, and mistreatment by his children, Celie leads a life of abuse and misery within the domestic boundaries of the farm like an outcast. The only person who thinks that she is not dumb has always been her sister. Celie has a strong connection with Nettie from whom she receives unconditional love and support. Nettie tries to teach Celie some of the facts about Columbus she learned at school

and Celie, in return, tries to protect her from an abusive father. For a while she even takes in her sister, the smart and beautiful Nettie, in lieu of the ominous fate that awaits her in the “home” over which *Pa* rules. Even as an uneducated naïve girl, Celie displays her understanding of how things work when she advises her sister, “[...] to keep her books” (Ibid, 6). However, just as she was separated from her two children, Celie is once again forced to separate from her sole source of compassion, now, by her husband Mr. who simply commands her that Nettie needs to go away. Celie gives her sister the name of the missionary couple to seek refuge too, telling her that they are the only black people she saw who had money. The vicious circle of isolation once again hits Celie hard. Now deprived from her only source love and confidante, Celie is left all alone to lead a life of distress, abuse, humiliation and neglect.

A significant woman model, offering an alternative to Celie’s life of distress, is presented when Mr._’s son, Harpo, falls in love with a girl called Sophia Butler. Mr. resist their marriage until Sophia has Harpo’s baby. The relationship between Harpo and Sophia soon becomes a reverse reflection of Celie’s matrimonial life. Harpo, taking his only cue from his father as the sole patriarchal figure he has ever known, tries to act as the upper hand of his marriage obviously. However, Sophia is not a conventional woman, in her own way, to accept such state of subservience. Because from her childhood onward, Sofia has realized: “[...] All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles” (Ibid, 39). Unlike Celie, she has literally been a fighter all along; earlier in her father’s home and now in her own. Sophia does not accept the fact that there is a person in this world who can tell her what to do, or force her to do something. Harpo, on his part, tries to subdue her with the only means familiar to him, that is physical violence, and yet the act of physical violence is backfired, for Sophia does reciprocate the violent act, defending herself, “I’ll kill him before he beat me” (Ibid). This attitude of Sofia’s is in direct contrast to Celie’s reaction to abuse and violence; when asked why she never stands up for herself

Celie replies: “But I don’t know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive” (Ibid, 18).

Another alternative model on gender roles is ushered into Celie’s life with the blues singer Shug Avery, about whom she has previously heard a lot of rumors in the town. Earlier on in the story she learns that Shug (short for sugar) and Mr._ used to be lovers. During a visit to her sisters-in-law Celie learns how Mr._has previously neglected his wife, Anne Marie, for Shug which tragically ended with Anne Marie taking on a boyfriend who shoots and kills her out of envy. And now, Shug is reintroduced in Mr._’s life as he decides to bring her in his household when she is in need of a shelter and medical care due to some sickness. Celie is now forced to take her in, and care for her as if she was looking after a sacred goddess. Celie professes to herself the sacredness of Shug’s existence in her life when she bathes her: “I wash her body, it feel like I’m praying” (Ibid, 47). In fact, Celie’s first memory of Shug predates her marriage to Mr._ Upon seeing a photograph of Shug’s, Celie contemplates: “The first one of a real person I ever seen. [...] Shug Avery was a woman. The most beautiful woman I ever saw. [...] An all night long I stare at it. And now when I dream, I dream of Shug Avery” (Ibid, 8).

In the first phase of their relationship, Celie is mistreated by a mean-tempered Shug, however with time, and as Shug recovers, they start to form a connection, a form of sisterhood, or camaraderie if you will, when Shug offers Celie to help with her quilting. Soon, Shug gets back on her feet and to her singing, and she realizes that the long line of abuse which Celie endures has led to nothing but a broken spirit. Celie is broken because she is silenced, neglected, and isolated. Shug is further mortified to find out that Mr._who was a great lover to her at the time, is the same person who beats and degrades Celie: “He beat me when you not here, I say. – Who do, she say, Albert?” (Ibid,71) In fact, Shug is Celie’s first witness

and audience, in the presence of whom the torrent of her testimonial account flows freely which used to be kept private in her letters to God.

Shug is someone for Celie to look up to. In Shug, Celie sees a bodacious, independent spirit who is able to stand on her feet despite the prevailing etiquettes about what a “decent” woman should be. Shug does not seem to care about what other people think of her, nor does she conform to the prevailing norms about what her life should be. Shug feels free to live according to her own understanding of the world which is reflected, for instance, in the way she opts for her dress: “She not lying down. She climbing tween Harpo and Mr._. And she dress to kill. (...) She look so stylish it like the trees all round the house draw themselves up tall for a better look” (Ibid, 44). What astounds Celie the most is seeing Shug, even at the peak of her illness, is Shug’s uncompromising attitude concerning her strong and smart looks.

During the next phase of their relationship, and as they develop a more intimate bond Shug discovers the mental and spiritual wounds Celie nestles. She notices that Celie is estranged to her body, femininity and sexuality; and gives her a mirror to discover it. By this first sexual awakening initiated by Shug, Celie further grasps the vitality of the concepts of sexuality, love and support. With this new frame of reference she takes a leap in the process of understanding the extent of how mutilated her self-worth and identity have been. Hence, the two women start to form a connection through Celie’s wounded perception of herself, which in turn evolve into a love affair between them. Not only does Celie find someone to accept her, love and care for her, but she also finds someone to guide her to heal her maimed conception of self. Celie does not only look up to Shug because of her beauty, strength and liberated self, but because her admiration grows even more when she sees that Shug has also experienced pain herself: “When you look in Shug’s eyes you know she been where she been, seen what she seen, did what she did. And now she know” (Ibid, 244). Shug is now who she is because she has

internally struggled and learned to love herself, not because everything is provided to her on silver plate from above.

Considering the time and geography in which Walker situates her novel, abuse, humiliation, degradation and silencing are the common denominators around which the lives of black women have revolved. They are expected to occupy a limited and limiting social space, as uttered by Celie: “When a woman marry she spose to keep a decent house and a clean family” (Ibid, 20). With no alternative means of outlet, they either are forced into marriage or get married themselves to escape abuse at home, as Sofia says: that “A girl child ain’t safe in a family of men” (Ibid, 39). The sole reason for this is that women have always been regarded as properties rather than human beings. Shug was not an exception in this sense. She loved Mr. but was refused by Mr.’s father as a bride. Like Celie, she got pregnant twice and yet ended up separated from her children. Deprived from her love and family by the decision of men, she has created her own path, though. Instead of a higher authority, commanding from above to direct her life, Shug’s strong will has carved her into who she is now.

Shug’s presence does not only inspire Celie on the basis of gender roles. Celie’s admiration of Shug further deepens when Shug reveals other aspects of life that help Celie form a healthy self-image and identity, which have previously crippled Celie on the way to becoming a subject. Celie, throughout the narrative, addresses her letters to God. From the very beginning, Celie has been commanded above by *Pa* with this discourse: “*You better not never tell nobody but God*” (Ibid, 3). This opening statement is obviously set apart from the entire narrative which ensues with the first letter; it is vaguely hanging above the page visually, thus left outside the perimeters Celie draws in her letters. It is at this point the narrative opens as Celie is forced to believe that God is the sole authority figure who “can” listen to her. On so many levels, this statement is true; she is a woman, and more to that she is a black woman, indicating that there is not anybody around “willing” to listen

to her (story). On the other hand, she is constantly abused and raped, and the knowledge of it would kill her mother; either because of her mother's feeling of shame or guilt for her inability to help her daughter. Celie is presented with the only option to tell God; an abstract figure for a fourteen year old rape victim, who is taught that God is the omnipotent force to depend on. However, she was not yet aware of the fact that the reason why God has been offered by this commanding voice as Celie's sole addressee, is the fact that this commanding voice is also sure of that a responsive God will never be "present" in moments of despair in the upcoming years of Celie's life. Considering the vast amount of importance religion held at the time in African-American communities, it is not surprising to see that God was the only option offered to Celie.

As mentioned above, the way Celie has been offered to Mr. resembles a slave trade scene presented in dozens of slave narratives. These texts testify how the institution of slavery has been established on the ground of alienation from the self, and also from family. Since family is the binding force that help them form a sense of unity, which the white masters feared the most, separating the child from the mother, the woman from the husband, played a significant role in demeaning them from being 'human'. Perhaps the most important figure in this issue is Frederick Douglass, who in his autobiography **Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass** (1845) provides an insightful instance of a case of separation perpetrated by the hegemonic white plantation owners as a politics of inflicting the spirit of slavery and supremacy through dissolving familial bonds.

"My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant—before I knew her as my mother. It is a common custom, in the part of Maryland from which I ran away, to part children from their mothers at a very early age. Frequently, before the child has reached its twelfth month, its mother is taken from it, and hired out on some farm a considerable distance off, and the child is placed under the care of an old woman, too old for field labor. For what this separation is done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder the development of the child's affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the inevitable result."(2)

Therefore, the black church has played a significant role; becoming a unifying space for the uprooted black community, and a motivating force that

boosts faith and elevates the soul in times of desperation. Moreover, the belief that God will provide them with an 'audience' amidst distress as an external force constructs a strong basis of catharsis.

In **The Color Purple** (1982), Celie's letters reveal the frequency of black community's attendance at church services. Celie's sister Nettie meets Mr. in church, for instance; and Celie is beaten by Pa because of a false accusation that she has winked at a man at her in church. After getting married to Mr., Celie continues to go to the church as a family ritual with her stepchildren, and mentions that she loses focus because of the children's loudness. Harpo meets Sofia in church. The black church in the narrative functions rather as a communal space for social gathering than a personal space of refuge where one seeks spirituality in isolation. However, in a degenerated patriarchal society, where the rule of the strongest permeates, the ecclesiastical atmosphere of the church has also been transformed; now the church is but a social space for the young to find a partner, devoid of its spirituality and reduced to an edifice that is habitually frequented to please the elders. Harpo tells Celie he sees Sofia in church and winks at her, to the surprise of Celie she asks where was her father he responds "Amen corner" (Ibid,24)

In her loneliness, passivity, and desperation Celie has to tell someone of what is happening to her in order to contextualize her life at that specific moment in time. In the process, the reader does not detect a tone of blame or anger in the letters she writes, displaying a status of freezing as put forth by Henry Krystal in his article, "Trauma and Aging: A Thirty Year Follow Up" (1995): "The adult traumatic state is initiated by the recognition of inevitable danger, and the surrendering to it. Thereupon the affective state changes from the signal of avoidable danger (anxiety) to a surrender pattern which is the common pattern of 'freezing,'" (1995; 78). The letters are a proof of her existence, her suffering, and

every event in her life that constituted her day-to-day routine. As a person cut out from a tree, she testifies her existence to God.

However, Shug portrays an entirely different view of God, which will help Celie shift the very concept and significance of God's existence in her life. By time, Celie realizes that in her imagination God has always been an omnipotent force, aiding, forgiving and healing; but in reality, God is a he. God is a man who keeps 'reading' her letters with no real effort to aid her. In one of her letters Celie tells Nettie about their conversation with Shug about God, starting out by asking, "What God do for me?" (Ibid, 173), and when contradicted by Shug who tells her, "He gave you life, good health, and a good woman that love to death" (Ibid), Celie replies: "Yeah, I say, and he give me a lynch daddy, a crazy mama, a lowdown dog of a step pa and a sister I probably won't ever see again. Anyhow, I say, the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown" (Ibid). When hushed for the fear that God might actually hear her, she replies in a rather defiant voice: "Let'im hear me, I say. If he ever listened to poor colored woman the world would be a different place, I can tell you" (Ibid). The nature of this conversation reveals that the authority of God, and the qualities he bears in Celie's imagination are very much similar to those of an actual white man: "Anyhow, I say, the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all other mens I know. Trifling, frightful and lowdown" (Ibid). "Trying to chase that old white man out of my head" (Ibid, 177). He is also arrogant, forgetful, ignorant, selfish, blind and deaf by choice. The fact that Celie opts for the word "listened" instead of "heard" to what she has been writing for so long, strengthens the idea that he does so on purpose.

Shug introduces a new concept of religion to Celie whose faith has been utterly shaken by the presence, or rather absence, of an unresponsive God. For Shug, the established church does not represent what true religion should function as: "People think pleasing God is all God care about. But any fool living in the

world can see it always trying to please us back” (Ibid ,177) and she adds, “Everything want to be loved” (Ibid). This statement further strengthens Shug’s self-styled perception of religion by deconstructing the false and off-cast concept of God in the white man’s discourse: “When I found out I thought God was white, and a man, I lost interest. You mad cause he don’t seem to listen to your prayers. Humph! Do the mayor listen to anything colored say?” (Ibid ,175) Although Shug shakes all of the taboos about the symbolic order of religion, she is by no means unfaithful. Contrary to all the rumors about her being a “bad woman,” she does believe in the divine power that formed her, and everything around her. Being a black woman, Shug cannot be isolated from all the dictates concerning her gender and race: “Ain’t no way to read the bible and not think God white, she say. Then she sigh. When I found out I thought God was white, and a man, I lost interest. You mad cause he don’t seem to listen to your prayers. Humph! Do the mayor listen to anything colored say?” (Ibid). Shug has found her way to her own spirituality not by accident, but by her own critical mind. She realizes that what matters is not going to church every Sunday because it is a must. Rituals such as praying or reciting the Bible without questioning it at all have, apparently, failed Shug in finding her own god: “She say, Celie, tell the truth, have you ever found God in church? I never did. I just found a bunch of folks hoping for him to show. Any God I ever felt in church I brought in with me. And I think the other folks did too. They come to church to share God, not find God” (Ibid ,174). For Shug, God is not a symbol that reveals himself whenever anyone looks for him. What seems to fit into Shug’s definition of God is very much personal; taking shape according to each individual’s frame of reference. For her God happens to be everywhere, giving her a sense of unity she has never found in church, “[...] that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that If I cut a tree my arm would bleed” (Ibid,176). According to Keller this represents a sense of oceanic feeling, which Freud in his article **Civilization and its Discontents**(1930) explains as a feeling of eternity, limitless and unbound, deriving from religious needs (6-7)³, indicating a feeling of

³This is cited from the book **The Voices of African American Women** by Yvonne Johnson

connectedness to all of creation. In her own personal quest of connecting with her inner self, Shug expresses that it is foolish to live by the book, to live by the institutionalized rules that mean nothing to her: “I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice it” (Ibid).

From such a perspective, God seems to be very different from what Celie has all along been trying to receive a response from. For Celie, God is now a spiritual power that surrounds her, listening to her to bring spiritual clarity and peace. It is at that moment Celie recognizes that finding God depends on one’s “choosing” to find God around her, rather than God “choosing” to listen to her. It is not only Celie that shifts God’s perception, her sister Nettie does as well.

Nettie is in a more delicate situation regarding her relationship with religion as an institutionalized body of conventions. After being expelled by Mr. from their house, Nettie was advised by Celie to go find the missionary couple, Samuel and Corrine, who offer Nettie a family she has been longing for. The reverend and his wife further educate her, and set off to Africa together as missionaries. As devout Christians, they firmly believe in what they do to help people in Africa by educating them, too. On their route, Nettie’s first encounter with institutionalized religion happens to be in the Missionary Society of New York. There, she realizes that all the missionaries are white. After setting off to London, she meets with Doris Baines, a white missionary who has spent years in Africa helping out the locals. However, Nettie soon realizes that Ms. Baines’s motivation to go Africa has been far from a religious one, but to escape a long matrimonial life of dismay with potential candidates she found unimpressive. Later on, when they arrive in Africa, Nettie is introduced to the native tribe of the Olinka people, who reciprocally try to teach the missionaries about their own way of life. Initially, Nettie is struck by the warm welcome, but later on, starts to get disillusioned as she gets to know them better. She finds out that they have their own understanding of life imbued with a longstanding bulk of folklore, myth, and a highly respected belief

system, on their part, they do not simply need missionaries to teach them about religion.

It is no surprise that Nettie and her missionary family seem to fall short of fully comprehending such new mode of living; since their point of view, even though well intentioned, carry the burden of institutionalized concepts on faith and life. From Nettie's letters to Celie from Africa the reader gets a glimpse of an alternative origin of religion; "They say the white missionaries before Nettie and them come told them all about Adam from the white folks point of view and what the white folks know. But they know who Adam is from they own point of view. And for a whole lot longer time" (Ibid,247).

"They say everybody before Adam was black. Then one day some woman just right away kill, come out with colorless baby. They thought at first it was something she ate. But then another had one and also the women start to have twins. So the people start to put with the white babies and the twins to death. So really Adam wasn't even the first white man. He was just the first one the people didn't kill." (Ibid,247-8).

Deducing from this conversation, we can find out that in the eyes of the Olinka tribe, Nettie, Samuel and Corrine, unconsciously, stand for the whiteman's symbolic order. By time, Nettie witnesses the destruction of the Olinka tribe by the colonial forces, confiscating their land and forcing them to either get displaced or join the guerrilla group called *mbeles*. It is at that moment of realization that Nettie grasps the extent of her internalized notions of a religion with direct connotation to white power. Nettie tells Celie that "God is different to us now, after all these years in Africa. More spirit than ever before, and more internal. Most people think that he has to look like something or someone- a roof leaf or a Christ- but we don't. And not being tied to what God looks like, frees us" (Ibid, 233).

Freeing herself from what she is 'taught' to believe, Celie finds the God that reaches out to her, manifesting itself to her, so that that the addressee of Celie's

last letter is not limited to God, but to all of creation: “Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear everything. Dear God” (Ibid, 259).

In the novel, the first thing that follows the introduction of the young protagonist is the depiction of her mother who is very sick. From infancy onward, Celie has witnessed the constant abuse of her mother by her *Pa*,

“Last spring after little Lucious come I heard them fussing. He was pulling on her arm. She sat it too soon, Fonso, I ain’t well. Finally he leave her alone. A week go by, he pulling on her arm again. She say Naw, I ain’t gonna. Can’t you see I’m already half dead, an all of these children” (3).

Subjected to the total indifference of her husband towards her, the sickly mother figure is also an ill representation of the notion of motherhood for Celie. The mother herself is a helpless victim, and she is thus unable to form a real mother-daughter relationship with Celie. Celie gets to witness her mother’s illness and later on her death, however in the long chain of abuse that will shackle Celie for the years to come, her mother has already been a dead silent figure in her life. While her mother can not keep her temper against Celie in her final moments, “My mama dead. She die screaming and fussing. She scream at me. She cuss me”, (Ibid, 4), she becomes relieved and more peaceful as Celie takes the role of wife for her *Pa*. Since the focus of abuse is now on Celie, her mother “enjoys” the brief time she is left alone, until she sinks into oblivion.

Motherhood is also denied to Celie. After bearing two children, they are presumably killed by *Pa* in the woods, which not only spiritually but physically maims Celie’s notion motherhood. Despite the fact that she later on discovers that her children are alive with the missionary couple, the detrimental effects of that forced denial lingers on. When Celie observes her own body in the mirror, she says: “I haul up my own dress and look at my titties. Think bout my babies sucking them. Remember the little shiver I felt then too. Sometimes a big shiver. Best part bout having the babies was feeding’em” (Ibid,75). Bereft of a mother figure, or a proper

role model, to aid her in phases of distress, Celie is pushed deeper into the abyss of silence, captivity and confusion.

Hence, the notion of motherhood is a constantly recurring theme throughout the narrative. What is worth mentioning, though, that the women of that black community portrayed in the novel, almost always end up becoming a custodian of other women's children. For instance, Celie's children are looked after by the Reverend's wife Corrine and later by Nettie. Celie is mothering Mr._'s children from his previous marriage. And Sofia's children are mothered by her sister Odessa for a long time when Sophia is incarcerated for punching the mayor. Also Sofia, after getting out of prison, is forced to become a nanny for the mayor's children. Echoing the dozens of incidents found in the previously mentioned slave narratives, the common denominator is that all of these mothers are forcefully separated from their children at one time in their lives, resulting a profound sense of alienation, or a rift, between mothers and children. Celie gets to meet her children decades later when they have become adults; Sofia gets totally alienated from her children, especially, her daughter Henrietta since she is never permitted to visit her family. Such occurrences, which spiritually and physically maim these women, also offer a common pathway, culminating, in the end, an understanding of solidarity, of sisterhood amongst them. So that, that even though not by their choice, they mother each other's children, without question.

For instance, the tragic separation of Sofia her children leads to yet another distorted kind of motherhood. When forcefully taken in by Miss Millie as a nanny, Sofia is impelled to take care of Eleanor Jane, the mayor's daughter. As a reward for behaving well the mayor's wife offers to drive Sofia herself to her home and children for some kind of reunion. However, since Miss Millie is half capable of driving the car, only forward and not reverse, she breaks her promise in afrenzy of panic and decides to return back, allowing Sophia only fifteen minutes to spend with her children. Ironically, Sophia is called ungrateful for troubling a white

woman so that a black woman can spend time with her children! The indifference to her pain by Miss Millie is later reflected in her daughter, Eleanor Jane, who tells Sofia: “All the other colored women I know love children. The way you feel is something unnatural” (240). The indifference exemplified here is a greater representation of the inability to form the correlation between sexism and racism as a means of oppression. Bell Hooks in her book **Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism** (1982) expresses the failure of acknowledging oppression perpetuated through various concepts are, in essence, identical: “When the women’s movement was at its peak and white women were rejecting the role of breeder, burden bearer, and sex object, black women were celebrated for their “innate” ability to bear tremendous burdens, and for their ever-increasing availability as sex-object” (6). Hooks points out to the inability of white feminists’ vision to comprehend the racist oppression they practice on a daily basis while fighting off sexism and gender inequality, which is a different form of oppression.

The notion is strongly mocked in **The Color Purple** when it comes so unnatural to the naïve child that Sofia does not take care of her own children but her. Eleanor Jane does not know that “Sofia never wanted to be there in the first place. Never wanted to leave her own children” (240). When so ignorantly asked why she behaves so “unnaturally” she replies; “I love children [...] But all the colored women that say love yours is lying. They don’t love Reynolds Stanley any more than I do. But if you so badly raise as to ast ‘em, what you expect them to say? Some colored people so scared of white folks they claim to love the cotton gin” (240). Sofia, with this striking remark on the ‘choice’ of motherhood is the first character to claim her own right, out and loud, for mothering her own children, who deserved her pure and unconditional love, since the act of mothering is here not by force, but by deliberate choice.

The most striking example of motherhood occurs between Shug and Celie. On the one hand, Shug astonishes Celie with her bodacious and independent spirit. On the other hand, Celie amazes Shug with her fortitude as she is constantly

rendered subjugated in the face of the daily abuse and humiliation. The qualities that Shug stands for are only qualities attributed to men at the time, but what grabs Celie's attention specifically is Shug's femininity. Shug wears whatever she sees fit for her; she acts however she finds appropriate and speaks loudly whenever she thinks is necessary. However, when they first meet first, Shug is severely sick. Celie's motherly deeds towards her, such as taking care of her well being, feeding her, bathing her, entertaining her, grows day by day into a greater admiration of Shug. Reciprocally, Shug's physical healing that is prompted and perpetuated by Celie's care, is directly proportional to the initiation of Celie's spiritual and mental healing prompted by Shug.

Celie is always told to be ugly, out of shape and dumb, and the constant exposition of such 'statements' has obviously made her believe in them. Subjected to such notions of being a property, or an object in other words, she has no self worth, and her distorted sense of self is sourced from her distorted sense of sexuality. Her body is used to work in the farm, to work at house, to 'work' in bed, to bear children and give birth to them. She does not have a saying in how she can use it, and thus, was never introduced to the notion of bodily healing as well. The first person to introduce her what her body is capable of, is Shug, who first awakens her sexuality for the first time when Celie bathes her; 'I thought I had turned into a man.' (Ibid, 47) and follows with 'I wash her body, it feel like I'm praying.' (Ibid) However, when with Mr. , Celie describes sexuality as 'Most times I pretend I ain't there. He never know the difference. Never ast me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep.' (Ibid,74). Shug gives Celie a mirror to discover herself, because all Celie knows about herself and her body are attained through male gaze. Celie discovers the possibilities of her body, and this awakening follows by the possibilities of her own self will.

Celie is not only protected by Shug, she is also loved by her. Shug plays the double role of a mother and a lover to her, as she guides her through her path of self-birthing. Shug is the only one, after her sister Nettie, to love her

unconditionally; further guiding Celie to cease assessing her self-worth through a distorted mirror of self loathing. Celie is mute, passive, broken and unfit to depend on herself when Shug has first met her, but soon Shug, who starts to form a connection with her through quilting, brings out the power inside her. She loves her, teaches her about her body and sexuality, stands with her in solidarity against the atrocities Mr. _ commits towards her. For instance, together they happen to find the letters sent periodically over the years from her sister Nettie which have been hidden away by Mr. _ . The fact that she opens up to Shug about her rape, indicates the strong ties and trust in Shug's love for her, and the confession does more to Celie than relieving her from the burden of her shameful secret, but also gives the momentum she needed to start her journey towards healing.

Shug, after long years of ups and downs in her relationship with Celie, convinces Celie to come to Memphis, after she inherits the family house, and she is the one to convince Celie to start up a pants business because she sews perfect pants, that by time she can not handle the business alone and hires two other girls to help her. Celie becomes the woman she always longed for, and does so by not only getting away from her husband, the master, but also by getting away from her old self. She admired Shug for independency and outspokenness, serves as a beacon to Celie to follow, and once Celie attains her financial independency, she becomes the independent, strong woman she once admired. By producing, by doing a job that has an outcome to her, she attains the spiritual and the physical liberty she was once jealous of. Her self-finding journey is not that of regaining her identity, but rather it is a birthing of a new one. This is not in the means of a positive violence that enriches her with experiences that make her who she is now, but rather, the refusal to succumb to conformity of her situation, with the help of the inspirational women around her, that she forms a new image of her self.

The initiation of Celie's healing is inspired by the breaking of the chain of violence that is encircling her life. Marthe J. Cutter in her article, "Philomela Speaks: Alice Walker's Revisioning of Rape Archetypes in **The Color Purple**"

(2000) interprets Celie's method of breaking the chain by assuming her subjectivity not through confronting the violence practiced on her; but through her own 'language', that is the needle. "Celie's sewing functions as an alternative methodology of language that moves her away from violence and victimization and into self-empowerment and subjectivity" (2000; 163). Celie is defined by the two opposing characters women in the novel; Shug and Sofia. Sofia provides the unconscious representation of Celie's self. Despite coming from a similar environment that justified the rape and silencing of Celie, Sofia is a vocal, strong and independent woman, a character that forms a striking opposition between the two women in the novel. When first encountered with Sofia, Celie states "Look like the army change direction" (Ibid, 32). Her unyielding and unapologetic attitude resembles an army riding against potential oppressors. Sofia gets married to Harpo according to her own will, opposed to Celie's marital bargain in 'slave market'. Sofia defies cultural dogmas, as she gets pregnant outside of wedlock, a situation Celie considers to be a scandal but Sofia, a fact. 'I ain't in trouble. Big, though.' (Ibid). Sofia's marriage is not conventional one, either. Sofia gets married when she desires, and fights back when she is assaulted, it does not matter whether it is her father, or husband, who are thought to be entitled to exercise all kinds of violence against women, because they 'own' them. Whereas Mr. _sees women as children who need a beating whenever necessary, Sofia represents an instance of a liberated personhood who cannot be broken. As a direct contrast to Celie, Sofia does not spend her days merely in a survival mode; she alone defines the parameters of her life. Experiencing the suffocating blanket of patriarchal oppression, Sofia never becomes a victim neither in her father nor her husband's home, though: "All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I'd have a fight in my own house.....I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me.'" (Ibid,39). Sofia's outspokenness, assertive and unyielding character creates a symbolic physical existence to Celie's suppressed unconscious. For Sofia and Celie share similar backgrounds, are inflicted with similar kinds of violence (not exclusively rape) and are subjected to similar types of oppression. However, Celie and Sofia constitute a crossroad character wise. Whereas Celie, subjected to

oppression, physical and mental violence, is silenced, ripped off of her tongue, of her right to claim her existence, and denied of all forms of healthy communication, Sofia, who is also subjected to oppression and violence, in contrast, insists on her existence, on defending her body and mind, and denies-defies all forms of authority. Considering the confining and demeaning general perception of women, Sofia's stigma is all that hegemonic patriarchy fears and despises. Sandra Gilbert and Sandra Gubar, in their book **The Mad Woman in the Attic** (1979) define Bertha, or Antoinette, i.e the mad woman in the attic as the subconscious double of Jane Eyre. Whereas Jane Eyre, despite her strong will and convictions, cannot oppose the societal oppression fully and act out as her mind leads her, Gubar and Gilbert, in their feminist reading of the novel, interpret the mad woman as her double that acts out as she wishes, and since her wishes are against the societal dogmas, she is labeled as 'the mad woman'. When in doubt of her imminent marriage, Jane who doesn't have the courage to break out the wedding due to societal and emotional commitments, is struck watching the mad woman wearing her veil with the intention of tearing it, the intention that actually represents hers and the liberation from her fears. Sofia, with her impulsive reactions and violent when needed, resembles the mad woman in the attic, but the attic in the novel is not that of a physical one, but the attic of every victimized woman's, especially Celie's. Since Sofia acts as Celie's subconscious desires, a fact Celie never realizes until the moment she advises Harpo to beat her (Ibid,36). Celie's jealousy is misdirected to Sofia's person, as a result of her own inability to perform the same stance, and of Sofia reminding Celie of her lack of voice, strength and perseverance. The misdirected rage and its horrendous consequences haunts Celie that later, she confesses " I sin against Sofia spirit." (Ibid,38) and adds that she advised him because " you do what I can't." (Ibid,39)

Martha J. Cutter examines the myth of Philomela as a vicious cycle, encapsulating the never ending pattern of 'violence-revenge-violence'. Philomela, who is raped by her sister's husband Tereus, is imprisoned in a tower and weaves tapestry for her sister Procne in which she depicts the story of her rape. Procne

interprets her sister's story and plots a revenge plan, she kills her son Itys, grills his flesh and serves it in a dish to Tereus. When Tereus understands the plot, Gods intervene and turn all three into birds:

The structural pattern of the myth (and its warning to women) seems clear; as Patricia Joplin explains, the myth fixes in eternity the pattern of violation-revenge-violation. The women, in yielding to violence, become just like the men. The sacrifice of the innocent victim, Itys, continues, without altering it, the motion of reciprocal violence'' (2000;162)

Sofia's warrior attitude results in a violent clash between her and the mayor, whose wife offers her a babysitting job at her house. Offended by the comment, Sofia turns her down in a 'distasteful' manner, and as a result of a quarrel between her and the mayor, she punches him. Sofia is thrown into prison with the intention of crushing of her wild spirit, and beaten brutally that she is no longer recognizable: "When I see Sofia I don't know why she still alive. They crack her skull, they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side. They blind her in one eye. She swole from head to foot. Her tongue the size of my arm, it stick out tween her teef like a piece of rubber. She can't talk. And she just about the colour of a eggplant" (Ibid,82). The physical mutilation is intended on a spiritual mutilation as 'she can't talk'. Sofia's stance in life, violence against violence, 'an eye for an eye' mindset results in a more violent sequence of events, and turns her, in the perception of the society, as the mad woman who dared.

Shug Avery, opposed to the fiery personality of Sofia, is a political 'mad woman'. Not significantly different from her counterparts in the novel, she is also grown up in the oppressive patriarchal environment. Shug's persistence, defiance and assertion of her power and self does not derive from her violent attitude, but from her 'verbal' existence. Celie's expresses her first encounter with her " ' She dress to kill. She look like she ain't long for this world but dressed well for the next. if a snake cross her path, she kill it.' "(Ibid,44) Shug's encounter strikes a crucial opposition to that of Sofia's. Shug's poised existence is resulted from her charm, through her creative art, as she is a famous blues singer. Shug's

non violent language succeeds in attaining her right to claim her identity, her right to become free from the suffocating public gaze. She maneuvers the circumstances through her 'language' at the bar. Her self-made identity and inner peace derive from her denial of conforming to institutionalized discourses of society and religion. "God love everything you love – and a mess of stuff you don't. But more than anything else, God love admiration." (Ibid,177) The God she creates according to her own belief is opposed to the institutionalized God that resembles an arrogant and ignorant white man. Shug's persistence to claim her own belief is a proof of her own persistent stance to not to succumb to societal dogmas that would lead to her mouth being 'tongless'. Instead, with her reclaimed sense, she creates a constant state of oblivion towards the oppressive and confining stigmas through her art. The political and non violent stance, Shug is able to transform the vicious cycle of 'violation-revenge-violation'.

Celie, when beaten constantly, turns herself into an element of the environment. "It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how I come to know trees fear men." (Ibid ,23) Celie numbs her feelings of degradation and subservience by tricking her psyche into being a piece of wood that wouldn't be affected by the physical violations of Mr.____. Her oblivion and total adoption of the violence inflicted on her are confined to her physical existence. Since raped, Celie's realization is that rape has silenced her existence and diminished it to mere physical one, is of utter importance regarding the turning point of her journey, which starts with her testifying to her existence. However, Celie with the help of Shug, finds out the hidden letters her sister Nettie sent to her, and her numb reaction toward physical violence transforms into an explosion of the feeling of rage that has been accumulating drop by drop with every beating. "I watch him so close, I begin to feel a lightening in the head. Fore I know anything I'm standing hind his chair with his razor open." (Ibid ,110) Celie's reaction is provoked by the violent action perpetuated by Mr.____ which is similar to that of her *Pa*'s. *Pa* silences her after raping her, offers her to tell only God, and not only steals her subjectivity and diminishes into mere physical property, but he also manipulates her potential chances of claiming existence by telling Mr._____

“She tell lies.” (Ibid ,10), which is an expression that steals her credibility as well. Hence, Celie’s stolen letters provokes her revolting feelings, since it silences all kinds of potential communication with the only person whom she truly loved, and was loved by. “Albert’s physical attempt to rape Nettie fails, but he finds a discursive way of ‘raping’ both women when he refuses to deliver any of Nettie’s letters to Celie.” (2000; 168)

The need to as Laub mediates one of the survivor’s words; live one more day to be able to tell her story; to testify before God, herself and all creation, Celie goes through, with the help of Shug, what Betye Saar calls “creative grieving” in an interview at *The New York Times*⁴ magazine, she explains the importance of owning the spiritual existence and of creating something beautiful out of the hardship and tragedies in life, which transforms to be a part of the self by embracing the unpleasant experiences and the feeling of grief, instead of denying them by misdirecting the power coming from the inside;

“I think the chanciest thing is to put spirituality in art, because people don’t understand it. Writers don’t know what to do with it. They’re scared of it, so they ignore it. But if here’s going to be any universal consciousness-raising you have to deal with it, even though people will ridicule you. And you have to deal with personal emotions, because they’re there. I think people are afraid of those too. My younger sister’s husband died this year. I said to her you’ve got to start making something beautiful. Beauty is a form of spirituality. Once you start making something with your hands, the healing starts. I call this creative grieving.”

Sofia, Shug and Celie compensate their distorted encounters with each other by the symbolic quilt making ritual. After Celie’s confession to Sofia about advising Harpo to beat her, they mend their relationship by making quilts out of the ripped curtains and Shug donates her yellow dress and Sofia and Celie quilt a pattern they call ‘Sister’s Choice’ (Ibid,56). The creative grieving of the female characters through sewing, building and singing forms the creative language of non-violence, offering them a way to communicate in order to exist outside of the never ending

⁴<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/17/arts/design/betye-saar-moma.html>

violence circle. The women in the novel are able to liberate their silenced selves only when they acknowledge their spirituality, that was trapped into the confines of male discourse. The creation, production of arts become a methodology which substitutes language, since language is a male formation foreign to their spirituality. ‘‘The novel also deliberately conflates the pen and the needle, thereby deconstructing the binary oppositions between the masculine and the feminine, the spoken and the silenced, the lexical and the graphic.’’ (Ibid, 164) Cutter suggests. Indeed, the quilt making process become the artistic acknowledgement of their selves, and their method of communication in the world of violence and silencing, with each stitch and each thread, the voice of a silenced woman speaks with an irredeemable loudness which answers Walker’s question in her essay ‘‘In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens’’(1972) ‘‘How was the creativity of the black woman kept alive, year after year and century after century, when for most of the years black people have been in America, it was a punishable crime for a black person to read or write?’’ (1972; 403). Elsa Barkley Brown in her article ‘‘African Women’s Quilting – A Framework for Conceptualizing and Teaching African – American Women’s History’’(1989) explains the Gumbo YaMa, a pattern of talking in which all parties speak at once, a pattern though looks like a chaos from outside, is a polyrhythmic pattern that keeps everyone in touch. (1989; 925) The colors of the quilts and the speaking stitches and threads are a living, vibrant and vocal testimonies to the silenced and suppressed spirits of the novel. The general patterns the quilts that are woven from torn off pieces of cloth, worn out cloth into new ones are an evidence of their, as Saar puts it, ‘creative grieving.’ ‘‘A people’s cultural aesthetic is not different from their economic or political aesthetic; it is visible to us in different form. Elements of material culture, such as quilting, are in fact illustrative of a particular way of seeing, of ordering the world.’’ (Ibid, 926) Indeed, it is not until Celie starts a pants business that she fully grows and constitutes her identity. Through sewing, a practice that has been present all her life, she sews her identity, her torn apart and worn off psyche, into ordered stitches, cuts off the excess burden that has been weighing her deep down into the dark abyss of victimization and silence, and coloring it with vibrant colors that speak volumes of her blossoming self. ‘‘Celie’s skills as a seamstress both retrieve and refigure the myth of Philomela’s tapestry/text. Celie’s sewing functions as an alternative

methodology of language that moves her away from violence and victimization and into self – empowerment and subjectivity.’’ (Ibid, 163). It is then that Celie signs her letters to Nettie, with the address of her business;

“Your Sisre, Celie
Folkpants, Unlimited.
Sugar Avery Drive
Memphis, Tennessee” (193)

It is at that very moment of self-discovery and declaration of independence that the reader encounters for the first time a letter with Celie’s signature and address, declaring her newly found sense of presence-in-the-moment which displays an acute contrast with the opening of the novel, where the young Celie has denied herself: “~~I am~~ I have been a good girl [...]” (1982, 3) Celie’s reborn identity, and newly attained sense of self acknowledges Mr._’s unhealthy drive in life, that towards the end of the novel, she comes to peaceful terms with him, a crucial proof of the healing from the bleeding breach in her mind. Not only with Mr._ does she find compensation, but with all creation, that is evident with the address of her last letter, which serves as a timeline of her testimony that started with “Dear God”, from hoping help from an oblivion *old white man*, to embracing all creation, and her self; *a creative grief* “Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God.” (Ibid, 259)

CHAPTER TWO

CROSSING THE THRESHOLDS OF INTERSECTING SELVES IN *BORDERLANDS/LA FRONTERA*

The constant act of *crossing-thresholds*, or *crossing borders*, is perhaps the most fitting way to describe Gloria Anzaldúa's pattern in her odyssey of unfolding the multi-layered blankets of her racial, historical, social and sexual traumas towards wholeness. In her seminal **Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987)** the Chicana⁵ poet accomplishes such a daunting quest of uncovering the burden of artificial sheets of covers superimposed on her since childhood. Here, Anzaldúa not only proves an unyielding act of bravery against the seemingly impregnable fabrics that are clothed on her layer by layer, but by recognizing the need to bare oneself from these inscribed covers, she infiltrates multiple thresholds laden with thorns, barbed wires and social exclusion. In the end, Anzaldúa reaches to the core of her "true" self, and then rises back finally to reconstruct an authentic representation of herself. Tantamount to Celie's racial trauma in **The Color Purple**, Anzaldúa's text, however, expands the span of a traumatic experience as she introduces an identification trauma in the context of linguistic dilemma.

Anzaldúa claims that people in their conscious, and most of the time unconscious, act of conforming to imposed identities are blinded with a limited and limiting understanding of the world which is reduced daily to a monochromatic perspective of black-and-white. The vicious cycle of duality inevitably results in an infertile mode of thinking that confine people in a world of binaries: "What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other" (1987; 41). The twisted perception of the "self" derives from such an unnatural boundary drawn at the very core of the mind, locking the entire world to over-simplified dualities, which inevitably results in the discrimination of what is regarded as the "deviant"

⁵ The etymology of the term 'Chicano,' or *Xicano*, dates it to an Aztec word, *Méshica*, before the Spanish conquest of the 1520s. But the term was politically charged and gained its utmost currency during the U.S. Civil Rights Movement of the mid-1960s to denote "Mexican-Americans." See Cordelia Candelaria, **Chicano Poetry: A Critical Introduction** (Westport: Greenwood, 1986), xv.

other. A striking case Anzaldúa provides in her book is the story of what the entire neighborhood called a *mita y mita*, translated as half-and-half. *Mita y mita* was neither a girl nor a boy, but a shape-shifter who is told to transform into a girl for six months and lives as a boy for the rest of the year. Anzaldúa states that people called this figure “half-and-half” because for them, s/he is “a strange doubling, a deviation of nature that horrified, a work of nature inverted” (Ibid). Therefore *mita y mita* is alienated from society for not confirming to society’s simplistic definitions of identity in terms of gender. Such a figure is readily stamped as a “deviant” because s/he is feared: “For them, abnormality was the price a person had to pay for her or his inborn extraordinary gift” (Ibid). The pattern of dichotomies exists in all fields of society; as girls and boys are confined to strictly drawn borders and are, too, expected to grow within the fences constructed in terms of gender.

In Latin American culture, the socio-historical dichotomy on womanhood is drawn acutely between the figures of Lady Guadalupe and La Malinche; the pure and the whore.⁶ They are the only models reserved for young girls to choose from. Traditionally, the Church and society draw the lines for women to be subservient to males, to serve them, to wed them, to bear and raise their children, to comfort them and to pass on their patriarchal cultural legacy. Any alternative route in life leads to the path of La Malinche, the *puta*, the whore, especially the choice to enter “[...] the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons” (Ibid, 39). Anzaldúa, early on, passed the threshold of gender roles in society through questioning and rejecting such a binary mode of thinking embedded in her culture. Rejecting the myths, which have been traditionally used to empower patriarchal rule, Anzaldúa goes back to the roots of those myths that create and validate the

⁶ Legend has it that the Virgin of Guadalupe is the brown-colored incarnate of Virgin Mary who divinely appeared on December 9, 1531, at Mount Tepeyác in the outskirts of what is now the capital of Mexico. See Wolf, Eric R. “The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 71, no. 279 (1958): 34-9.

Historically, Malinche, a native-American young girl, is the translator of Hernán Cortés, the captain of the Conquistadors. She accompanied him during his campaign, and bore him a child – Martín, the first mestizo. She is thus blamed as a traitor for the fall of the Aztecs, and metaphorically the mother of a bastardized mestizo nation, modern day Mexicans. See Paz, Octavio. **The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings**. Trans. Lysander Kemp, Yara Milos & Rachel Phillips Belash. New York: Grove Press, 1985. (pp 75-77)

dichotomies, to tame their spirit and colonize their bodies. In doing so, she excavates the fact that those myths have always been used as a disguised form of control:

Guadalupe has been used by the Church to mete out institutionalized oppression; to placate the Indians and Mexicanos and chicanos. In part, the true identity of all three has been subverted – Guadalupe to make us docile and enduring, La Chingada to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and La Llorona to make us long suffering people. This obscuring has encouraged the virgen/puta (whore) dichotomy. (Ibid ,53).

However as Anzaldúa further excavates the truth behind such a subverted history for manipulation, she discovers the base of the primal fear of “duality” that has been embedded in the figure of this powerful Amerindian entity called *Coatlicue*, Lady of the Serpent Skirt, the duality of male and female, light and dark, life and death. (Ibid) Containing all opposite elements in one body, the lady serpent represents for Anzaldúa that in the form of dualities, the elements of the world may very well be in conflict with one another. In order to eschew promoting any one counterpart of the duality as the normative and “correct” form (and the other “faulty”, for that matter), such a mode of understanding evaluates dualities from an “inclusive” stance rather than “exclusion.” Dualities are natural entities contained in all peoples, races and societies’ psyche, as a structural bone that defy simplistic boundaries.

As she (re)claims her myth, the duality of her own being start to emerge when Anzaldúa goes back to her childhood to recall her mother, warning her, “Don’t go outside at night [...] a snake will crawl into your nalgas, and make you pregnant” (Ibid ,47). It is a memory laden with a twisted meaning; while the mother is trying to protect her daughter from the terror of night by creating stories about the most feared subject; that is, getting pregnant in the dark, Anzaldúa claims the memory to hail her own serpentine association as a female. By doing so, she acknowledges and claims her body and sexuality. This is a prominent case where Anzaldúa maneuvers sexist folk tales and rewrites them through her own unique mode of thinking — not letting it scare her, or get in the way of reclaiming her self, especially against a longstanding tradition where umbilical cords of infant girls are buried under the house so that they will never venture outside the domestic boundaries and gender roles. (Ibid, 58)

Indeed, the despotic duality does not reside only in the psyche of the Mexicanos/Chicanos/Indians, but also on the other side of the US-Mexican border –a

dividing line between “the third world” and “the first world.” It very well dwells in the mode of thinking, called the Western rationale (with a capital “W”). Now, facing these two opposing modes of thinking that derive from two modes of living and understanding, Anzaldúa’s search for identity is once more superimposed, now with another added layer of duality; that is, western reason and indigenous spirituality. Western consciousness, which renders itself as the rational, and thus superior, now opposes the indigenous spiritual consciousness strongly embedded in Anzaldúa’s psyche. The dichotomy of the rational against the spiritual creates yet another “dichotomy” which “is the root of all violence” (1987; 59). After all, inherently all binaries are constructed hierarchically, where the two components are locked constantly in a deadly duel to suppress each other for survival; hence, creating a never ending zone of conflict between all elements present in both the physical and the spiritual worlds.

As a Chicana living in the U.S. this would mean for Anzaldúa to utilize a specific skill to switch the on-and-off-button of realities where necessary, so as to embrace each and exclude neither. She is now fighting on two battle grounds; one, on the home front, where the patriarchal Chicano culture reduces and confines women to domestic roles through subverted myths, and terrorizing them in the name of protection. On the other hand, she concurrently fights against western logic which demands total annihilation of her Mexican/Indian spiritual thinking, further compelling her to accommodate a frame of reference totally alien to her reality. As Anzaldúa does not conform to the either/or dichotomy of perception, she transgresses to deconstruct both, and reconstructs the neither/nor by rejecting to conform to neither, the alien perception of reality or nor the unnaturally confining one.

Anzaldúa calls this new form of perception the *new mestiza consciousness* against the dichotomies which are based on never ending battles, where one has to choose sides. She creates this perception by taking her heed from an unyielding and untamable force called “The Shadow Beast” (Ibid, 38). The shadow is a common representation of a restless psyche with no regard for rules. It is the force inside her psyche that revolts against authority even against her own will; yet it is the force that she needs to recognize to face and embrace dualities. In a world of binaries, it occupies the grey

zone that is indisputably horror inducing, especially when fought against instead of being recognized. As Anzaldúa recognizes this untamable force, she questions the problematic area of religion which the despotic mentality rules over against “the Shadow [...] the unsavory aspects of ourselves. But even more it fears the supra-human, the god in ourselves” (Ibid, 59). The sharp knife of institutionalized religion hence creates “a split between the body and the spirit and totally ignore the soul; they encourage us to kill off parts of ourselves” (Ibid, 59). But in order to move one step closer towards the perception of the reality that it is true to her and her psyche, Anzaldúa has to embrace her Shadow. Such a daunting task of cultivating the curative power of the shadow instead of stigmatizing it as an evil force, requires one to leave behind the strong human urge to be accepted in society, to go with the herd.

She does so by parting her way from the systematic form religion, leaving behind all its trauma inflicting doctrines especially upon women. Anzaldúa’s own perception of religion revolves around the notion as a unifying force rather than a dividing one. As she embraces and celebrates the spirit that resides within every cell of her body, and every creation in the world, Anzaldúa does acknowledge the omni-presence of the spirit world, thus heals a part of her restless shadow in her quest of reconstructing the fragmented elements of her identity. (Ibid. 58) As she journeys all the way back to Coatlicue, the Goddesses of her pagan heritage, to take claim of these pieces as part of her, of her existence, of her identity; Anzaldúa embraces and rectifies the fragmented pieces of her multi-layered identity, now, as symbolic forces that nourishes her shadow:

This very minute I sense the presence of the spirits of my ancestors in my room. And I think *La Jila* is *Cihucoatl*, Snake Woman; she is *La Llorona*, Daughter of Night, traveling the dark terrains of the unknown searching for the lost parts of herself. I remember *la Jila* following me once, remember her eerie lament. I’d like to think that she was crying for her lost children, Los Chicanos/mexicanos. (Ibid,60)

The folkloric tale of the cry of *La Llorona*⁷ for her lost children gains a multi-dimensional meaning with respect to the historical experience of Chicanos in the

⁷ There are a number of versions to the legend of *la llorona* (the crying woman): in one of them she appears as a young farmer who, in a moment of hysteria, kills her illegitimate children from a Spanish aristocrat when he abandons them to marry someone in his own class. In another version she again kills

United States. The physical border between Mexico and the U.S. is famously described by Anzaldúa as a “1,950 mile long open wound” (1987; 24), dividing an entire continent into two; it is a historically inflicted incision which never truly heals and bleeds since the year 1848. It is a border that is man-made, an “unnatural” (b)order that reinforces the despotic duality.

The word “trauma” is defined as a “wound” and is generally used to refer to emotional wounds.⁸ The psychic wound in the minds of the lost children of Chicanos, is further reinforced with existence of the physical border as the embodiment of a traumatic wound which stands between two different worlds, two cultures, two histories, and two realities. Chicanos hence find themselves confronted on several different aspects of their traumas; and a prominent area is their unique language which is regarded deficient and deviant on both sides of the border.

Cassie Premo Steele in her study “We Heal From Memory: Trauma, History and American Women’s Writings” (1996) explains that the collective trauma of the Chicano experience is transforming as it is being passed on to new generations:

[...] the birth of a child within that group is already bound up with not only the biological, familial, cultural, and historical determinants of the individual child, but also with the trauma that defines the survival of the group. Moreover, the child's identity is tied to the traumatic history from birth, and these ties are continually reinforced by the practices and institutions of that group, which means that the child grows up and forms her identity through the continuing processes of departure and return. (43)

Anzaldúa exclaims that the collective trauma experienced by Chicanos since the erection of the border, has created “a shock culture, a border culture, a third country, a closed country” (33). In the shock of being forcefully split; separated from their land, culture, history, and identity, the collective trauma is historically present in the Chicano’s distorted sense of self. As liminal subjects they do not belong; they do not fit into the safe and simple definitions of binaries in terms of Mexico and the U.S. Belonging neither here nor there; not being able to claim one identity over the other;

her own kids, this time, by drowning them in a river to run away with another man. Almost all variants of this tale conclude in the suicide of the mother who then becomes a ghost, cursed to search for her children. See Domino Renee Perez, **There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture** (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008).

⁸ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trauma>

not being able to own one history nor the other, Chicano existence instinctively renders its perception of self with confusion and self-degradation. As Anzaldúa puts: “As a person, I, as a people, we, Chicanos, blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves. Most of this goes on unconsciously; we only know that we are hurting, we suspect that there’s something ‘wrong’ with us” (67).

The definition of “collective trauma” is most strikingly present in what Anzaldúa says here, where the despotic duality of either/or perspective is slyly woven inside the Chicano’s mind, created once by such sudden and unnatural rupture in time and space with the erection of the US-Mexico border. Dori Laub in his essay, “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival” (1992), recounts a psychoanalyst interpreting a Holocaust survivor’s testimony: “Hitler’s crime was not only the killing off of the Jews, but getting the Jews to believe that they *deserved* it” (italics added, 79). The projected self-loathing and self-shaming result in the distorted sense of self as a collective, a distortion Anzaldúa, similarly, experiences as a woman in a macho oriented culture. It is the betrayal of the mind, the feeling that one does *deserve* the feeling of inescapable “fate” that is played upon them as a pattern ever since the historical chain of events from 1) the conquering of the Aztecs by the Spanish conquistadors, 2) the loss of their homeland by the U.S. with the Treaty of Hidalgo Guadalupe and finally 3) the defeat of the “Mexican” consciousness against by the current social, economic and political invasion of the white powers. Anzaldúa exclaims, “I acknowledge that the self and the race have been wounded” (110).

It is at this moment that Anzaldúa presents this skill she calls *La Facultad* as a way for healing the perverse frame of reference that encourages self-shaming and self-erasure. For Anzaldúa *La Facultad* is the ability for survival by scratching the surface of visible reality in order to see what truly lies below. Only those people, who are forced to be social-outcasts due to their gender, color, sexual orientation and “foreignness” may develop this skill. Anzaldúa says: “Pain makes us acutely anxious to avoid more of it, so we hone that radar. It’s a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate. It is latent in all of us” (Ibid ,61). Anzaldúa, in her quest to confront the causes of her pain, confronts the aspects that her people are causing pain in return.

“From the men of our race, we demand the admission/ acknowledgement/ disclosure/ testimony that they wound us, violate us, are afraid of us and of our power” (106). The painful experience of the border continues to penetrate through the layers of her fragmented identity, as Anzaldúa experiences a different form of oppression from the patriarchal rule in her culture. The pattern of inflicting violence upon others is observed in almost all colonized cultures that have experienced humiliation and subjugation themselves; further causing several internal forms of superiority in different forms of oppression such as classism, elitism, sexism.

In the form of sexism and misogyny, there exists a universal pattern of internalized colonization which becomes a destructive obsession of “subjugation” perpetuated especially by colonized men in their own households — a similar form of it also dwells at the core of **The Color Purple** (1982). The analogy between Alice Walker and Anzaldúa may very well be established over the theme of struggle of the two protagonists for their freewill within domestic boundaries where they have initially experienced the despotic duality of “male/female”. Anzaldúa exclaims hers and reflects many other victimized women’s opinion in her words on how women adopt men’s behavior by calling them “childish.” When Anzaldúa writes, “Mothers made sure we didn’t walk into a room of brothers or fathers or uncles in nightgowns or shorts. We are never alone with men, not even those of our own family” (39-40), the reader of **The Color Purple** readily establishes a relation to Sofia’s conundrum: “A girl ain’t safe in a family of men” (39). Such similarity in these two victims’ plight proves the “colorless” hue of oppression; rather, it simply derives from a sickly obsession of asserting power by letting the “other” feel “somehow they deserved it.” It is a rotten foundation on which the two girls once stood, however they acknowledge now that the wound is universal and not “race” related.

As a young girl, Anzaldúa was raised within a culture that celebrated the domestic role of women, and prepared young girls to a life of subservience and servitude. Sacrifice and muteness are the celebrated qualities every female needs to have, or else she would be brutalized and marginalized: “Women are made to feel total failures if they don’t marry and have children” (1987; 39). Such sense of immobility is embedded in the subconscious of young girls via countless idiomatic phrases used by the elders around

the themes of *fear* and *protection*: “Flies don’t enter a closed mouth [...] Well bred girls don’t answer back” (Ibid ,76) is amongst them, for instance, that is used to subvert the girls’ perception of her own reality. The usage of a language outside the constraints of the patriarchal society, or the questioning of the rules and concepts, is so immensely despised that Anzaldúa cannot recount:

How many times have I heard mothers and mothers-in-law tell their sons to beat their wives for not obeying them, for becoming *hociconas* (big mouths), for being *callejeras* (going to visip and gossip with neighbours), for expecting their husbands to help with the rearing of children and the housework, for wanting to be something other than housewives? (Ibid ,38)

The artificiality of the social rules which tilts women’s consciousness from above and distorts its perception of self is at work in their homes as well. Women’s perception of their reality is so utterly disrupted that they dread everything extrinsic to their predefined roles within society, confining them to a life of imprisonment from which they cannot break free. For instance, the protagonist Celie in Walker’s **The Color Purple** is locked up in an extreme feeling of jealousy towards her doppelganger, Sofia. As Sofia acts, revolts and fights back against the unjust and oppressing patriarchal order, Celie is so blinded to her own potential in executing her own will that she yet has to come to terms with her own Shadow beast to triumph over such simple feeling of human jealousy; she but tells Harpo, to beat Sofia. A similar pattern of this vicious cycle is observed in Chicano culture and tradition. As Chicanas themselves are also imprisoned by their illusionary confined roles, they are immobilized to step out of the artificial border of their existence while carrying a darkened and frustrated psyche that is constantly fed with the rhetoric of fear and conquest.

On a high note of alienation, Anzaldúa experiences yet another border to be transgressed. It is a taboo border for both sexes, that is, homosexuality. She *made the choice to be queer* in the world of prohibitions; it is a symbolic act of rebellion which reflects the layers of denied and repressed identities, through which she is now able to crack a border. However this new border that does not separate, but rather embraces her to cross into the realm of her truth: “The queer are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe’s fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore sub-human, in-human, non-human” (40). Cherrie Moraga, who is the co-editor of the anthology, **This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color**

(1981), addresses the vicious cycle of oppressed/oppressor in the context of internal divisions amongst women. In her article titled, "La Güera" she writes about women who fail each other by adapting their oppressor's state of mind: "We are afraid to see how we have taken the values of our oppressor into our hearts and turned them against ourselves and one another. We are afraid to admit how deeply "the man's" words have been ingrained in us" (1981; 32). The fear that is present in the souls of the victims of oppression, coupled with the sense of guilt and shame, derives from the daily practices of degradation and humiliation. The oppressed is stripped off the power of free will, and hence falls victim to yet another oppressing force; that is, the desire to consolidate their state into different forms of oppression. Hence, the vicious cycle of oppression lingers on many levels as long as the dual frame of reference is present. However, the process is tackled when, as Moraga puts it, the fear of failing one another is an unrelenting beast in the psyches of the women trapped in the cycle. (Ibid, 32)

Anzaldúa's approach towards the addressing this "fear" goes further into a possibility of transforming it into an eye-opening, fruitful outcome that starts with the recognition of the presence of the fear itself; "If we can't see the face of fear in the mirror, then fear must not be there" (1987; 67). The ability, or the power, to confront oneself in the mirror is both a challenging, and yet a crucial step towards the initiation of a possible liberation from the cycle of oppression ruled over generations. Anzaldúa, as a pattern observed in her journey towards identifying herself, crawls back into history and myths in a serpentine motion, and acknowledges the importance of the mirror in the Aztec culture. She recalls the time her father dies and her mother covers all the mirrors in the house so their souls will not accidentally follow her father's lead through the mirrors. (Ibid ,64) Anzaldúa further informs that indigenous people in ancient Mexico used to make mirrors from a volcanic glass called the obsidian. For her, the act of looking into the mirror is not merely the act of seeing and being seen, but rather, it is a symbol for the experience of "seeing through" where she has the opportunity of confrontation. In other words, looking at the mirror is an act of self confrontation, recognition and testifying, the act that made the writing of this her books possible. Once Anzaldúa laid eyes in the mirror of her psyche, of her Shadow Beast, the Coatlicue residing inside her, there was no way of concealing, or hiding who she is. The difference between

“looking” and “seeing” is enacted in the act of being able to face the fears, the oppression, the victimization, the anger, and the urge to claim a presence that is true to the image she is seeing in the mirror.

“An image is a bridge between evoked emotion and conscious knowledge; words are the cables that hold up the bridge” (Ibid, 91). Anzaldúa’s confrontation with the images she sees in the mirror emerging from deep down her traumatized psyche speaks volumes of testimonies to her existence. However, the issue arises on how these cables forming the bridge. The language through which Anzaldúa is able to write and transmit her testimony is the most delicate and yet the thickest part of the knot Anzaldúa has to untie during her odyssey. In her chapter titled “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” Anzaldúa recalls a time when she went to the dentist, who fights off her tongue in order to perform, an event which leads him to eventually exclaiming the symbolic words, “I have never seen anything as strong or as stubborn” (Ibid ,75). Anzaldúa’s “tongue” consists one of the most crucial and influential part in her testimonial journey, since it is the only means through which she is able to confess, to witness to her people’s and her self’s existence, to bridge, to see and enable others to “see” through them her identity. Anzaldúa proclaims that she speaks a “forked tongue”, an expression which is a truthful reflection of her state of living on boundaries. Through language, Anzaldúa experiences the most brutal war on identity through the institutions of the white community, the school. Anzaldúa recalls the time she was beaten by her teacher for getting caught speaking Spanish. Another memory that resided with her is when she was sent back to the corner of the classroom for answering back her teacher whereas all she did was correcting her on how to pronounce her name correctly. (Ibid) Indeed, it is a striking reaction that composes a milestone in understanding the extent of the brutality of the cultural war on Chicano identity. One’s name is the first means a person is identified with. The attack on Anzaldúa for her of correcting the way her own name is pronounced is far more wounding than a simple incident of classroom clash between a student and a teacher. Her identity, her history, her culture and her language is wounded through the censor of the American hegemony. To be personally punished for her attempt to declare the correct form of her name and identity is historically present in that encroaching physical US-Mexican

border which wounded her entire people since the year 1848. One of the most despotic dualities Anzaldúa fights against ultimately centers around her tongue which is intricately tied to the border that she sees as an open wound. Her tongue is as split as her mind, body and psyche.

The severity of the war on her language is aptly described in Gay Gwyn Smith's quotation at the onset of the chapter:

“‘Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?’”

Anzaldúa and other Chicano students had to enroll in speech classes to get rid of their “accents” (Ibid, 76). Annihilation of the cultural existence renders people into becoming mere physical entities ripped off of their history, culture, and the concept of conscious existence since their understanding of the reality of the world becomes as distorted as their memory. The internalization of the systematic attempt of assimilation forced by the white dominant culture as is observed in Moraga's “La Güera.” Moraga recalls her mother's extreme poverty and life conditions which compelled her to stay as an illiterate working class woman, who aspires for her children's future in the country to have a better life than hers; and pursues on realizing her aspiration through assimilating her children fully into the hegemonic American reality by way of language: “It was through my mother's desire to protect her children from poverty and illiteracy that we became ‘anglocized’; the more effectively we could pass in the white world, the better guaranteed our future” (Ibid, 28). A similar approach is observed also in Anzaldúa's own mother when she scolds her daughter for speaking English like a Mexican. (Ibid, 76) The politics of annihilation imposes yet another either/or duality; this time through the border that crosses right in the middle of their cultural identity; the choice is but a narrow and an unpleasant one; whether to fully leave behind the Chicano self or not. The mothers' insisting on becoming “one of them” is a brutal example of the collective trauma the Chicanos have historically been subjected to because of their ethnicity. This narrow choice to “liberation” necessitates unfortunately conforming to the rules of the hegemonic culture, so that the vicious cycle of collective trauma lingers on.

However, Anzaldúa was not speaking English like a Mexican on purpose, since she was literally a Mexican speaking English, which is a quality as concrete as her flesh that cannot be ripped off. The silencing of her Mexican side through language is another face of the coin Anzaldúa experiences, since through her layers of identities, she has been silenced numerous times; she has been asked to silence herself for being a girl, she has been silenced the Mexican, the Indian and the spiritual layer of her identity. Through speaking, through her authentic language, Anzaldúa is able to enact her unyielding will to claim and assert her identity, in order to bridge the images from her subconscious.

Anzaldúa does not conform to the powerful hegemony of the English language superimposed on her; on the contrary, she argues that conforming is a cowardly act since her language is the most valuable entity through which Chicanos have survived in the face of cultural annihilation: “We know how to survive. When other races have given up their tongue, we’ve kept ours. We know what it is to live under the hammer blow of the northeamericano culture” (Ibid, 85).

The power of survival through language is explained in the chapter when Anzaldúa embraces the different layers of her identity by way of speaking multiple accents according to the needs of each occasion — standard and working class English for her professional life, Chicano Texas Spanish for when speaking with her parent and Chicanos in the Valley, Chicano Spanish for when speaking with Chicana from Arizona, Tex-Mex for when speaking with her sister and brother and it being the closest to her heart. (Ibid ,78) The multiple languages spoken by her and many Chicanos/as are a testament to the deep split in the personalities she has to put on in order to fit in, to survive.

The language terrorism is deepened as the split is not only degrading and demanding on the American (English) side of the border; but also equally on the Mexican (Spanish) side: “In childhood we were told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self” (80). Since her language is “forked”, she is neither fully assimilated into the Anglo side of her personality nor clinging tremendously onto her Mexican side, since the Mexican projects its blames

linguistically to the Chicano. She asserts: “Deslenguadas. Somos los de español deficiente” which translates as “Unleavend. We are those of poor Spanish” (Ibid, 80).⁹ As a people of the border, who do not belong neither there, nor here, Chicanos occupy a space right in the middle of two cultures, both of which evaluate Chicano language as “deficient”. It is “an orphan language” (80) as Anzaldúa puts it; a new, hybrid language sprouted on the fence of the border. On the other hand, Chicano language as a “living language” is their only recourse in the face being denied by both sides of the border, since singular linguistic form does not suffice to vocalize the experience of the border.

The linguistic frame of one language falls short in expressing the duality of the experience the Chicano. The Chicano language is a harmonious mixture of the two languages with its “unofficial” and “illegitimate” existence, however it is a vivid and lively language through which Chicanos can only “connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves – a language with terms that are neither espanol ni ingles, but both” (Ibid, 77).

Anzaldúa has developed a strong sensitivity toward her language since it is the only means she exists as she is; without one crossing over the other, without denying the existence of the other self, without a conflict of references, without confining herself to narrow classifications. Through her language, she can reach the images of her subconscious unmediated, and being able to grasp the reality of her existence through it, she can become both languages. Ana Celia Zentella in her preface to **Bilingualism and Identity: Spanish at the Crossroads with Other Languages** (2008) states: “For bilinguals who are accustomed to switching to accommodate monolinguals, switching with other bilinguals may come to symbolize their identification with two speech communities, i.e., they ‘speak both’ because they ‘are both’” (6).

Anzaldúa exclaims her adamant loyalty to her “patois” language since it is the undeniable constituent to her existence as concrete as her physical being:

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity. I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until

⁹ Translation mine.

I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue – my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence. (81)

Indeed, Anzaldúa utilizes her Spanglish unapologetically and by no means offer any translation in her writings. Walter Benjamin in his “The Task of the Translator” states that the translation he deems correct — as opposed to the mechanic translation many practice on a daily basis — bears the quality of transmitting the vocality of the text, expanding the gates of the language so wide that at the end it renders the translator into exploding into silence himself: ““meaning plunges from abyss to abyss until it threatens to become lost in the bottomless depths of language”” (1923; 262). Benjamin states that fidelity in translating “individual words can almost never fully reproduce the sense they have in the original” (Ibid, 259). This statement further strengthens the livelihood of Anzaldúa's Spanglish, which posits a raw representation of her *mestiza* (hybrid) identity and her liminal experience of perception of reality through such unsterilized language. Anzaldúa's language invites the readers to become active recipients to her writings, to witness to her testimony through her untranslated language. Following the footsteps of tribal cultures, who appreciate and keep their art not locked up in museums but in their homes and in everyday lives, Anzaldúa writes: “The ‘witness’ is a participant in the enactment of the work in a ritual” (90) Since through her language, Anzaldúa prompts the “speech act” through producing her language as a material evidence for her truth. (Felman: 1992; 5).

“I had to leave home so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on me.” (1987; 38) Anzaldúa's most crucial threshold she had to cross earlier is to leave behind the home she was born into; that is also the home of her culture, of her distorted history, of her doubts and frustrations. In doing so, Anzaldúa does not seek total alienation or denial of her roots, though. She opts rather for a serpentine movement that moves forward only to come back to where it all started. However, parting from the roots is a daunting act; that means the rejection of fundamental parts of her existence, that is draining her psyche and filling it with

horrified images, provoking the Shadow beast inside her by bending her bones in every aspect of her existence; her gender, her sexuality, her power and free will, her perception and reality is not an easy threshold to acknowledge, let alone to dare to pass. Anzaldúa strongly states her wish to do so: “To separate from my culture (as from my family) I had to feel competent enough on the outside and secure enough inside to live life on my own” (Ibid, 43). The act of leaving home behind to be able to move forward as far as she can not only physically but also spiritually to find herself, is a process of bearing witness to her coming to terms with her traumas, and reconstructing the fragmented pieces of herself as she picks them on the way.

In **The Color Purple** Celie writes to God begging for an explanation: “*Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me*” (3) in order to feed her broken soul through her testimonial questioning; to form a meaningful frame of reference to her past; and to relate to her present and the future. Anzaldúa, on the other hand, states that “Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences – if we can make meaning out of them – can lead us toward becoming more of who we are” (68). Anzaldúa’s acknowledgement of her painful experiences does not stem from a belated consciousness. Throughout the book, Anzaldúa expresses her sense of wrongdoing towards the events and realms that is causing her pain. She numerously expresses her ever lasting state of consciousness of the concept of the border between the physical and the spiritual causing an internal wound which bleeds at all times. Anzaldúa has proven her acceptance to the presence of the trauma inside by acknowledging the need “to make a hole in the fence and walk across, to cross the river, to take the flying leap into the dark, that drives her to escape, that forces her into the fecund cave of her imagination[...] If she doesn’t change her ways, she will remain a stone forever” (Ibid ,71). For if she remains in an allotted space dictated by the authority figure(s) as a Chicana, as a woman, as a queer and as a writer, she would have to conform to a reality that is alien to her, for the sake of escaping rejection.

The fear of looking into herself through the mirror is coupled with the fear of “remaining a stone” by rejecting her image that she confronts in her reflection. Anzaldúa’s Shadow beast lays restless in the deep abyss of her subconscious that is enacting the strong urge to cross the border, to step out of the threshold of the dogmas

inscribed in her, to depart from the home that is no longer a home. Yet it is also fraught with endless cycles of frustration, self degradation, rejection and other extremities. Anzaldúa's fear of being trapped in a set of linguistic existence that is alien to her reality is the main step towards the testimonial writing of her journey. "Daily, I take my throat in my hands and squeeze until the cries pour out, my larynx and soul sore from the constant struggle" (Ibid, 94). Anzaldúa testifies in this statement that merely acknowledging the borders and the images coming from the subconscious is not an adequate quality in tearing down the wall of silence. To step into the verbal world, to vocalize the sentiments and the cries through writing in a linguistic system suffices in bridging them. This act is strikingly similar to the act of giving birth. Joan Pinkvoss in her editor's note to **Borderland/La Frontera** tells about the process of Anzaldúa's writing of the book and uses the specific phrase "Being midwife to her creation was difficult." The phrase does justice to Anzaldúa's testimonial writing since it is, indeed, a process of birthing oneself, a process that is experienced with the full correspondence to that of the literal giving birth; the pain, the cries, the blood and the union in the end. "It was Gloria who reached down into herself with her own bloodied hands to wrench out what would become her defining work" (Ibid).

Anzaldúa asserts that her writing is "twin skin" to her existence. It is through writing that she confronts her psyche, her Shadow, and becomes more adept at seeing the colors residing inside the underworld of her subconscious. And it is through those colors and various voices, Anzaldúa passes through the other side of the mirror to identify with her polyphonic identities embedded layer by layer within her. Her journey into introducing herself with her other half from the below is enacted and made possible only through her constant act of writing. However, tantamount to the act of giving birth, the process of writing is not an easy one, nor the outcome is always pleasant, since the direct confrontation with the root of oppression requires strength and bravery to claim it as one's own. But there is that possibility of healing at the end of such difficult journey. As Cathy Caruth writes in **Literature in the Ashes of History** (2013):

The origin of a history, the possibility of conceptualization, of thought – which is also the condition of the possibility of memory, and thus of history – only happens to be thought by chance. It is this singular

event of chance from which is born the chance of a writing, and of the writing of a new origination of thought, *after the end*. (88)

Anzaldúa enacts the possibility of writing through as she claims her unrelenting, distressing shadow, she says:

When I don't write the images down for several days or weeks or months, I get physically ill. Because writing invokes images from my unconscious, and because some of the images are residues of trauma which I then have to reconstruct, I sometimes get sick when I do write. [...] But, in reconstructing the traumas behind the images, I make "sense" of them, and once they have meaning, they are changed, transformed. It's then that writing heals me, brings me great joy." (1987; 92)

When Anzaldúa states that in order to hear the "soundtracks", she needs to stay in a solitary state; her words echo to those of Felman's that witnessing is a solitary burden (Ibid, 3). Anzaldúa's writing as mentioned above is a state of giving birth that can only be assisted and witnessed.

When questioning how the act of writing is related to the act of bearing witness, Felman quotes Elie Wiesel's notes on the subject: "If someone else could have written my stories" says Elie Wiesel, 'I would not have written them. I have written them in order to testify. And this the origin of the loneliness that can be glimpsed in each of my sentences, in each of my silences'" (Ibid.). Despite the fact that language can be perceived as a medium to the thoughts and sentiments unknown and perplexing to the conscious, as Wiesel states it to be so, it is in itself also a systematic method of connecting the inner world to the outer of the psyche. The genuine spillage of the words onto a piece of paper is a sacred ritual for the writer who feels the uncontrollable urge to utter the reality sprouting from the deep. As Anzaldúa asserts: "Writing produces anxiety. Looking inside myself and my experience, looking at my conflicts, engenders anxiety in me. Being a writer feels very much like being a Chicana, or being Queer – a lot of squirming, coming up against all sorts of walls" (94).

Freud in his study **Beyond The Pleasure Principle** (1920) describes anxiety as a state of expecting and preparing for danger (5) and adds "There is something about anxiety that protects its subjects against fright and so against fright-neuroses" (7). In the light of this statement Anzaldúa's writing prove to be a protective shield against her frustrated psyche. Anzaldúa does not confine her writing (and by extension, her act of

witnessing and testifying) to a mere spillage of her imagination, does not employ her words at the service of a beast laying inside, nor does she transform them into tools at the use of building meaning. Rather, she herself takes the responsibility of selecting the images that talk to her, that repress her and compel her to bridge them out in one way or another. As the repetitious pattern of crossing borders and thresholds, both literally and figuratively, is present throughout her life, Anzaldúa follows the same methodology when it comes to traversing her own subconscious and imagination as well. After all she is a rebel who has dared to move away from home in order to find hers; and as a Chicana who is able to confront her people's myths, victories and yet the realities as well, and she is always critical of her own culture and its legacy when it perpetrated the same concept of oppression in a different form. Therefore, Anzaldúa exclaims that in the process of confronting images, she needs to put aside her imagination at times in order to be able to make changes in her belief system and rewire her consciousness: "This involves looking my inner demons in the face, then deciding which I want in my psyche. Those I don't want, I starve; I feed them no words, no images, no feelings. I spend no time with them, share not my home with them. Neglected, they leave. This is harder to do than to merely generate 'stories'" (92-93).

The concept of *creative grieving* can be applied to Anzaldúa's creation of her identity, of her home away from home, as she is using her words, critically picking up images and visions from her subconscious, in reconstructing what is once attempted to be destroyed. Anzaldúa's writing is derived from living in a state of "psychic unrest", but in a Borderland it "is what makes poets write and artists create" (95). The creative grieving experienced in Anzaldúa, is a rather curious form, as the *creation* that emerges out of the *grief*, is a new consciousness, through which Anzaldúa finds the ultimate consolidation and meaning out of the pains she has experienced. She likens her pen and a carving knife of a sculptor's, as she becomes, through her crossings of endless wounds, an artist herself, who is able to reach out to the other/double in the mirror, and give birth to her self: "When I write it feels like I'm carving bone. It feels like I'm creating my own face, my own heart – a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body" (Ibid).

Celie in **The Color Purple** utilized both her pen and needle as the doubles of her testimony, through which she has practiced the “speech act” and claimed her identity, witnessing finally to her existence first before God, and later before all creation. Similarly, Anzaldúa specifically uses phrases such as; “I am an act of kneading,” and “woven” (Ibid ,105), resonating the testimonial existence of the oppressed Celie, in an attempt to assert existence through the creative means outside the conventional methods of the oppressor. The need to create is undeniable; the urge is as powerful as the oppression, and the possibilities to activate the genius inside supplies countless possibilities once the consciousness can reach out to it through the mirror. It is then the artist can acknowledge her essence with all its rawness, testifying to its existence against any single system of representation.

Anzaldúa’s statement, “Let the wound caused by the serpent be cured by the serpent’(68), marks a prominent pattern of the serpent, creeping through the curvy lines of the chapters of her book. It posits a symbolic healing pattern as well. For Anzaldúa the reason why the conflicts she faces on a personal level and the conflicts Chicanos experience communally emerges from the “despotic duality” which offers no in-between choices. The clear cut splits of the both sides of the border, according to Anzaldúa, is what compels the people traumatized by the sudden shifts and jumping into conforming to one reality to the other, is what compels them to reside on the border as a home.

Excluding oneself from all elements of the collective culture is impossible, especially when one becomes a victim due to a series of political and cultural annihilation policies leveled against the group. It is impossible to evade the group’s collective experience of lived realities and traumas. Hence, Anzaldúa offers the need to act as a group in order to heal from the collective trauma and its repercussions such as distortion, deviation and degradation in perceiving oneself. Anzaldúa in her testimonial writing in which she, alongside with the reader witnessed her existence as a woman, as a queer, as a Chicana, as an artist and as a resident of the border, adds one more testimonial act; that is, Anzaldúa as a healer. The characteristic feature of the book is that it develops a unique theory of its own which resembles Anzaldúa as a unique character of her own.

Throughout the book Anzaldúa considers the concept of duality in regards to the school of thoughts, the modes of perception of the world and the reality around, it creates an endless field of conflict for both parties, where there is no triumph for none. Anzaldúa calls it the “despotic duality” that is at the core of the borderlands which categorizes, stigmatizes and confines people. As a person gets closer to the core of his/her existence through their frame of reference which is aligned with their reality, they realize that the borders do not only exist physically but spiritually as well. They dwell not only on the surface of the language and the mind, but in the depths of subconscious as well. “I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, one” (85). The constant struggle between dueling parties, whether be they the Mexican and the white, English and Spanish, the rich and the poor, the female and the male, the chaste and the whore, the home and the outside, the conscious and the unconscious, etc., the images and the words are the only means of survival — on a personal or communal level. The ceaseless struggle of the two opposing forces concludes disastrously in the destruction of the possibility of negotiation of ambiguities. Tolerance towards is the sole solution: “The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts” (102). Anzaldúa’s response to the despotic duality which causes a split in the minds, is through being able to consolidate the dualities not as a conflicting two contradictions, but rather as elements fundamental to the creation of the identity. She opts for the consolidation of the two ends, for the creation of land between them in which the trapped can find refuge, and call it home.

As an individual, Anzaldúa leaves her home in order to find hers. She crosses the threshold of our household to the outside, in a rebellious act to the authorities of the dualistic mindsets, since as a little girl, she has been the one who reads, studies, paints and writes instead of ironing her younger brothers’ shirts or cleaning the cupboards, she has been crossing the borders of her assigned roles by not conforming to them, resulting in the distressing opposite of the dual worlds: “Nothing in my culture approved of me” (38). Entering the world through education and not conforming to the dual path drawn for women, the home or the street, Anzaldúa rebels against the

shattering of her inner power and will in taking control over her right of taking responsibility in regards to her life decisions and actions. In searching for the roots of the indigenous myths and native goddesses, she rebels against a distorted version of history filled with political agendas and psychological wars. So in embracing the goddess Coatlicue, the Lady Serpent, as her symbol of dualities, Anzaldúa embraces all elements of the opposites through recognizing their existences instead of perceiving them as opposites. Through her daring to look into the mirror to confront her Shadow, she identifies herself as a queer, symbolizing the shadows of the society and its fears of recognizing it. In her determination of legitimizing her mestiza language, which is considered to be deficient on both sides of the border, she creates a realm in which the existence and the sense of belonging *on* the border itself is made possible. Anzaldúa resolves the issue of the split by annihilating entirely the border itself, she writes: “I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry ‘home’ on my back” (43).

In her attempt to heal the border as an open and bleeding wound image, Anzaldúa proposes the mindset which enabled her to ‘see’, to step out of the confines of her perception, to deconstruct the unbreakable statues of her and her people’s oppression. Her artistic creation, which can be considered as the concretization of her creative grieving, is her concept the new mestiza consciousness. It is a settled subconscious which succeeds in making peace with its past, focusing on its present, and its realities in order to constitute a frame of reference that is true to its experience. Anzaldúa creates a new paradigm with this mindset:

In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. The third element is a new consciousness – a mestiza consciousness – and through it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keep breaking down the unitary aspect of each paradigm. (101-2)

Prior to **Borderlands/La Frontera** Anzaldúa has introduced her concept of “Theory in the Flesh” in her seminal anthology **This Bridge Called My Back** (1981): “A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives - our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings - all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (21). The entire anthology with the contribution of many women writers of color, is itself a bridge as its title entails. It further promotes a correlation

between the need to bridge the reality of their border experience, and its consequence in necessitating a new vision which creates its own melting pot, a new mestiza consciousness;

We are the colored in a white feminist movement.
We are the feminists among the people of our culture.
We are often the lesbians among the straight.
We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words''(Ibid ,22)

Anzaldúa considers her writing as a testimony to her birthing the mestiza consciousness; and in her journey of witnessing to the pains and the cries of the birth, she asks the reader to be an active participant to her writings; since as long as they are read, they are functioning as creations of a living soul. "My 'stories'," she claims:

[...] are acts encapsulated in time, 'enacted' every time they are spoken aloud or read silently. I like to think of them as performances and not as inert and 'dead' objects [...] Instead, the work has an identity; it is a 'who' or a 'what' and contains the presences of persons, that is, incarnations of gods or ancestors or natural and cosmic powers. (89)

Anzaldúa passed away in 2004, but left behind a legacy of a testimony that will probably outlive the ink and paper with which her words are inscribed; words she utters from the core of her theory for existence, for claiming her experience, to pass it on as a living creations emerging from the pains of her, and of her entire people.

"We are interested in pursuing a society that uses flesh and blood experiences to concretize a vision that can begin to heal our 'wounded knee'""(1981; 22) as contradicted to the Western school of thought regarding the breaking down of communities and analyzing it through the frame of reference of white reason; Anzaldúa, and many other third-world feminists have taken the pen and write, to testify to their existence, the self made, self realized existence, carrying around with them the traumas of their "grandmothers" that they picked from their gardens, and by testifying, they can reach the point where they can start healing, since healing does not start by denying, raging, reacting but by showing the courage to question, to stepping out of the threshold, both physically and mentally, in being able to look at ourselves, our cultures and histories through the "obsidian" mirror, in confronting the realities through our constructed frame of reference, and in testifying to the world on our newly, but bloodily acquired identities;

For only through the body, the pulling of the flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images, words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body – flesh and bone – and from the Earth's body – stone, sky, liquid, soil. This work, these images, piercing tongue or ear lobes with cactus needle, are my offerings, are my Aztec blood sacrifices. (97)

Collectively, Anzaldúa proposes the confrontation of the two cultures to be able to come to terms with their dualities by acknowledging that each one exists in their own reality, and that does not render one inferior to the other; and insists on the end of the conflict between the eagle and the serpent, the reason and the spirit, the conqueror and the conquered. Anzaldúa suggests that the American has to step out of their limited knowledge and intentional ignorance towards the Chicano existence and calls for them to admit that Mexico is their double, to recognize that it exists in its shadow, that it is the doppelganger in its psyche (Ibid ,108) and sides with Moraga's accounts on why the oppressor fears the confrontation of their shadow in "La Güera"; since "He fears he will have to change his life once he has seen himself in the bodies of the people he has called different. He fears the hatred, anger, and vengeance of those he has hurt" (1981; 32). However, what Anzaldúa seeks for is not yet another war of the two ends, but a consolidation of the worlds inside the shared wound/border. Instead of pulling the rope into destruction, she raises an offer to the Gringo to pass through their own mirrors to the other side, to confront and acknowledge their Shadow Beasts, as she, as an individual, did to create a third option and adds "By taking back your collective shadow the intracultural split will heal" (108).

Throughout **Borderland/La Frontera** Anzaldúa transforms into a *curandera*, a healer, developing unconventional cures and unusual remedies from the bits and pieces of the remnants of traumas from her personal and communal history. She ultimately declares her own remedy to tackle the deadly fever caused of the despotic duality, a remedy she has birthed herself through blood and pain, she writes:

[...] it's not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white consciousness [...] At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once, and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes. (100-1)

In the light of this statement, one can truly tackle the issue of the war of the opposites through tolerance and the will to coexist in harmony; since anger and rage directed each

other with the intention of annihilating the other resemble an unconscious fever. Anzaldúa's remedy that she offers with her *new mestiza consciousness* can only be realized when one decides to get rid of the instinct of fighting, and takes the initial step toward carving a third path, and perhaps a fourth and even fifth toward a new consciousness since, in her words, "The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react" (Ibid).



CHAPTER THREE

TRAUMA AND THE RECOGNITION OF LOSS THROUGH THE TESTIMONIAL JOURNEY OF GENNA IN *BLACK GIRL WHITE GIRL*

“Ohhh God. I was awakened by this cry. I was awakened instantly.” (5) are the opening lines of the novel **Black Girl White Girl** (2006) by Joyce Carol Oates. Genna, the protagonist, sets the tone of the novel by depicting a state of horror and puzzlement in a symbolic sensation in which the rest of the novel proceeds. Genna’s puzzlement and fright upon hearing her roommate’s cry, is a symbolic and powerful representation of the hidden wounds within her psyche, that resurface fragmentally and disrupt the reality of Genna’s traumatic mind. The cry which shocks Genna’s sleepy mind resonates Cathy Caruth’s quoting of Freud in the attempt of accurately grasping the extent of the traumatic experience and its toll on the psyche : “Freud writes, “can be found in the story told by Tasso in his romantic epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*”: Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders’ army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again” (Caruth; 1996, 2) and goes on to express that what is particularly striking is not just being injured without fully grasping it “but the moving and sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound.” (Ibid, 2) Indeed, in the novel, Genna’s frightful waking from her sleep by a cry, is resulting from a wound. Genna’s roommate cries out as she sees a crack on their dorm room window resulting from a thunderstorm the day before. The crack provides a perfect representation of a traumatic experience. The day before the incident, Genna mentions a thunderstorm, but does not recall actually seeing the crack happen, nor does she hear it, in fact she is not even awakened by it, but by her roommate Minette’s cry. It is a wound inflicted on the window without them fully experiencing the incident on time, but belatedly, a quality that corresponds to the very essence of a traumatic experience.

Having survived the incident, the crack, after a while, posits a shocking effect on them, as they recognize its existence in their room. The fragile crack on the window, as Genna describes it, “ that looked as if the slightest touch would cause it to shatter and fall in pieces on your head.” (2006, 5) bears a great representation of the characters’ fragile psyches and traumas and resonates the aftermath of the traumatic experiences and their destructive repetitions. Similar to the pattern in which Celie and Anzaldua testify to their accounts of truth, Celie in the pursuit of her self-birth and Anzaldua in the search of her identity in the span of the 1,950 mile long wound, Genna pursues the journey of testifying her reality, and reemerging from the confines of her traumatic mind by the medium of the pen.

The novel is consisted of a written account of the protagonist Genna Meade, who is now an adult woman, starting to take an account of a series of events that took place at the time of her first year at College. Genna Meade is a member of one of the prominent families in Pennsylvania. Her great great-grandfather is known as a quaker who provided refuge to runaway slaves and helped them in their escape towards north. The family legacy lives on as her father becomes an influential intellectual and a fearless lawyer. With his radical views and vocal opposition to the constitution and the government, he has collected the admiration and respect of many of the like minded activists. Radical in opinion, unyielding in character, Maximilian Meade firmly believes in violating traditional concepts of family and work, and despises capitalist system and way of life. He thoroughly enjoys challenging the system by using its own rules against it, which indicates his uncanny wit and relentless qualities. Veronica, her mother, on the other hand, presents a contrasting character to that of her husband’s. Occasionally, physically present in Genna’s life, Veronica is defeated to her own familial wounds and to the events she has witnessed but never addressed. Under the pressure of a constantly buzzing unconscious resulting from facts she has preferred to ignore and distort to her own good, Veronica unknowingly feeds her mental and emotional instability which results in a spoiled mother daughter bond. Genna is estranged from her brother who finds Max and Veronica to be unqualified to be parents, and rejects their projections of their ideals onto him by fleeing the house and becoming a finance specialist, a part of the capital system his father passionately

despises, in a bold reaction to Max's unbearable authority. Bearing on her shoulders the legacy of her family, Genna's black roommate Minnette Swift plays a crucial role in her life. Influenced by her father's remarks and statements regarding race and class, Genna experiences a life shaping and an illuminating journey through her confused relationship with her.

What starts out as an account of the events that lead to her roommate Minette's death, takes a rough turn into the unaddressed occasions of a severely damaged psyche which constantly haunt Genna. The text starts with Genna's wish to testify to what has happened to her roommate fifteen years ago, during her unpleasant short year at college resulting in a symbolic death. Genna, as a person who had to raise herself in a disfunctional household, commits herself to befriend a black roommate as a way of redeeming herself worthy in the eyes of her neglectful family. Her obsessive need and yearning for acceptance and love is mirrored in her undeterred attempts in befriending a roommate who is as reckless and neglectful of her presence and needs as her family. The text narrating the incidents of Minnette Swift is frequently disrupted by sudden intrusions of Genna's memories of her family and events taking place in her familial house at Chadds Ford, indicating her suffering under a heavily traumatised mind and perception. Throughout the year, Genna restlessly continues to prove herself worthy of Minnette's friendship and keeps closely scrutinizing her unsteady attitude and demeanour. As Minnette faces a series of racist attacks to her personal belongings which disrupt the order of the dorms, Genna is willing to help and support her, however on the contrary, she hits an invisible wall standing between them as she fails in interpreting her roommate's psychological and mental state. The accounts of a highly agitated Genna takes a rough turn by the intrusions of her familial memories triggered by current events, which clears the way and sets the base for her realising that her ignorance in interpreting the world around her and the people surrounding her is a result of blindly and unquestionably harbouring a frame of reference and a worldview that is not native to her, but to her father's. Dori Laub in his essay **An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival** (1992) handles the concepts of witnessing and giving testimony. While working with Holocaust survivors, he studies the effects of the neglect of traumatic experiences with the hopes of living through

them, leaving behind a pile of unaddressed experiences. Laub reasons that living in pretense and keeping silent about traumatic experiences and events leaves the person in a purgatory between reality and the unconscious without a sense of the moment they are in, resulting in a degenerated and untrusted account of truth; “Moreover, survivors who do not tell their stories become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly “external evil,” which causes an endless struggle with and over a delusion.” (1992, 78)

Accentuating the vital need to tell the story, in other words address the experience, Laub with his tremendous experience with Holocaust survivors concludes that the essence of healing starts with the action of speaking. It is evident in the testimony of Genna, as she constantly recalls and relives the familial traumas while narrating the events between her and Minnette, that Genna suffers from a distorted memory caused by an accumulated sum of unaddressed experiences. Her testimony to her own truth is shaped, especially by the intrusions of her previous oppressed traumas, by her decision to fight for her own sanity and reality while tracing her wounds that has not yet fully healed. Genna follows a pattern in her testimony in which she operates as a time traveller who finds her way by tracing secretly bleeding wounds with the help of bits and pieces of memories here and there. As she bears witness to her own truth and her own sense of justice, Genna reaches the bottom of her bleeding wound, to find out that the core of her traumas is residing in a familial dark secret which had been kept and ignored for years, but ironically, is revealed unknowingly, by Genna.

Genna takes on the long-awaited journey of testifying to her account by writing what seems to be an autobiographical account of an incident back during her college life. However, as she travels back and forth in time while documenting her memories in the attempt to grasp and reclaim her experiences, it is strikingly evident the tremendous effect of the act of going back and forth has had on her reality. Caruth while explaining the distinctive features between normal neurosis and trauma, interprets Freud’s explanation as such : “ Unlike the symptoms of a normal neurosis, whose painful manifestations can be understood ultimately in terms of the attempted avoidance of unpleasant conflict, the painful repetition of the flashback can only be understood as the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way. In trauma, that is, the outside has gone inside

without any mediation. Taking this literal return to the past as a model for repititive behaviour in general, Freud ultimately argues, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, that it is traumatic repetition, rather than meaningful distortions of neurosis, that defines the shape of individual lives.” (1996, 59) Considering that trauma results not from experiencing an accident, but from having actually survived the accident, Genna`s text becomes an evidence to her wounded psyche and disrupted memory which obsessively force previous traumas back and forth, and disturb the procession of events. Genna`s struggle in recognizing and defining her traumatic experiences through mixed signals that frequently blur her perception, is in fact the defining qualities of her testimony.

Genna`s testimony commences with her words that form the frame her testimonial narrative. It is a narrative which in itself, at the time of writing, does not fully comprehend its path but its foundation relies on the aim of staying true to its labyrinthine memory and its apprehension while proceeding in the dark halls of the unknown : “Some truths are lies my father Maximilian Meade has said [...] No truths can be lies is my preferred belief. And so I begin, my text without a title in the service of justice.” (2006, 2) Genna attempts to initiate a narrative structured around her perception of the events and her acknowledgement of the outcomes solely on the basis of her truth as she proclaims “For facts can be made to distort, to lie. The most insidious of lies is through omission.” (Ibid)

Genna`s fiery commitment to truth and reality traces back to her relationship with her father. Maximilian Meade is a lawyer who works with what he sees as anti-system, outcasted people ranging from political activists to draft-dodgers. As a personal character, he is a fiery advocate of his beliefs and convictions, and radical in his behaviour and judgement. Coming from a wealthy family with roots tracing back to a Quaker Pennsylvanian great-grandfather, Max revolutionises the lifestyle of his family with his radical views and moves. He does not conform to the stereotypical means of institutions such as governments, policies, law, religion, education and family. He falls out of the legal system as he views it as a monstrosity causing people to lose their authentic self by disciplining them into conforming into a certain prototype backed by the government. He preaches against capitalistic wars waged over third-world

countries, he supports and provides legal services to draft-dodgers and radical leftist activists. He despises the institution of religion as he finds it extremely backwards and confining designed to brainwash the minds of the less fortunate. He takes pride by envisioning himself as an open-minded human, who is able to transgress the taboos and dogmas he is born into and form a conviction beyond the confines of his racial, social and political status. Claiming to have a high sense of racial awareness, he develops a counter attitude towards blacks in his community, defending their traumatic history is a result of his race as a whole. Able to comprehend the burden of the collective trauma caused by collective and systematic behaviour of white supremacy policies; “We protest – ‘Oh! We are innocent! We would never do such a thing!’ But we are all incriminated, the blood is on our hands, we are of the privileged white race, it’s our curse. People who feel as I do are reviled as ‘nigger lovers’ – ‘bleeding hearts.’ Because we are not fearful of loving, and we are not fearful of bleeding.” (2006, 93) He proclaims his ability and bravery in confronting the historical human disasters and traumas inflicted upon blacks by his privileged white race, and represents a conscientious responsible stance in order to reclaim the experience without excluding himself from the burden, illustrates his passionate, enthusiastic and challenging qualities in the hopes of his intellectual aspirations. He speaks of a certain confidence preaching what is right and what is wrong, in a manner as if it is a service to the less educated and intelligent people in order to open their eyes. As a character in his circle he owns a strong and confident presence that heavily influences his surroundings. His daughter, Genna, is the one most fascinated and disgusted by his charm.

In her testimonial text, Genna’s conflicted relationship with her father is the main trauma that is disguised in different events. As the daughter of a prominent figure, her life and, so is her character, are shadowed by his influence. In her text, she does not introduce her father in a traditional manner, but talks about him as she is reminded of him as she narrates her experiences. Her father’s presence bears a paralysing effect on Genna’s mind. He has spent his life aiding what he believes are heroes in the community, fighting hegemonial power and inscribing ideologies and theories into Genna’s mind in order to make an activist mirroring him. By exposing her into his convictions in a radical way, he believes to be educating her to become a self-aware

woman who does not confine her knowledge and perception in the heavily institutionalised educational system nor conforms to societal and racial norms of her surroundings. Since a young girl, she is exposed to the never ending battle that Max rages against the government and legal system. In a memory she tells out of a sudden that disrupts her narrative, she explains a picture hung above his desk of a lynched black man with all the atrocities inflicted upon him by white mobs presented in a raw image. Genna recalls this picture as something she wishes she was never exposed to as a young girl as it is pushing her towards feeling guilt about a problem she was never a part of and exclaims “Whenever I entered my father’s study in his absence it was this picture that immediately drew my eye though I would instruct myself each time No! Don’t look!” (2006, 8) She unconsciously attains the talent of ignoring the disrupting truths and images in her life in order to proceed, a quality gained thanks to her father’s roaring statements.

Genna’s learned habit of ignoring unpleasant truths develops as a method of a self defence mechanism. Growing up in a family in which the concepts of parenthood and the sensations of familial bond, love and support is non-existent, Genna’s sense of self and self-regard is hit by a blow from a roaring father and an emotionally absent mother. Throughout the novel, Genna’s search for a substitute for her long-lost family leads to an eternal sense of fright, denial and a severely damaged self-esteem. Genna’s opening chapter in her testimonial text comprises of detailed descriptions of about her roommate Minnette and her family. Her main focus does not only encompasses Minnette’s black skin, but also her family’s presence as a unity, as Genna describes them; “ They were of an era when family still prevailed.” (Ibid, 31) Genna, in detail, describes their outfits, their looks, their interaction with their surroundings and closely scrutinises their demeanour in an obsessive attitude as if by doing so, Genna might earn a seat in their unity. Genna exclaims that what fascinates her the most is their skin color, and tries to befriend them by staying close, however the subtext of her remarks lies in her yearning for gaining her family’s, and mainly her father’s, attention and endorsement of her endeavour in befriendng a black roommate. The desperate need of her family’s presence, acknowledgement and appreciation is translated into an obsessive wish to earn her black roommate’s love and friendship. Her search for a

substitute to the concepts of family and home is best described in her remarks about what she believes is a safe house ; “Safe house. Saying these words to myself in secret. For safe house made me smile. Safe house made me feel warm. Safe was something small you could hide in, I thought. Like a dollhouse where if you were small enough to fit inside you would be so small nobody would come looking for you.” (Ibid, 61) The desperate yearning for a house she could call home, Genna sets on a journey in which she carves her way into the unknown of what she might find as a house.

The roots to her existence and psyche, Genna’s own familial house stands as a physical representation of the remnants of what Genna calls family. Genna recalls her familial house in a sudden twist in her text, as if it is an unwelcomed memory which she prefers to ignore; “ [...] the grounds were overgrown; fallen tree limbs lay haphazard and scattered where they’d fallen, for months.” (Ibid, 12) In a family where the father’s focus shifts toward constant political battles and courthouse fights and physical existence is divided into accompanying comrades and frequently going into hiding, a mother whose physical existence is made possible through drugs and drinks and who is mentally unavailable for the people around her, and especially her daughter, and an estranged brother who left the house at his teenage years and never attempted to establish a connection, the house becomes the witness of the emotional and physical wreckage to the people it hosted. Day by day, and bit by bit, the house in which Genna took her first steps in, uttered her first words and formed her personality through an accumulation of bitter experiences and realisations, the house which bears on its shoulders the legacy of the Meade family, resembles its residents and provides a physical reflection to the neglected traumas and scattered bonds it has once witnessed.

One of the most prominent and desperate needs Genna reveals is her non-existent mother-daughter relationship. Between her parents, Genna is physically more in contact with her mother, however, as she proceeds in her testimonial text, Genna remarks her mother as a mentally unstable and emotionally unavailable mother who turns to become a person Genna needs to provide attention and care for. In the twisted mother-daughter relationship, Veronica is the one who accompanies her daughter to the Schuyler College on the day to meet and get introduced to her college. However, Genna’s remarks lay the ground for a highly troubled relationship blocked by

miscommunication and unwillingness toward opening the path for mutual understanding and support. Genna asserts her state of uneasiness when around her mother since she is unpredictable in what she might say and how she might act; “ I was in dread of what my mother might do. My middle-aged-hippie mother.” (Ibid, 31) Introducing her mother by accentuating her age and her style, Genna shares , in a striking image, the distorted relationship between them. Genna, the daughter, is the one who gets to be the adult self-controlled and plausible party in the relationship. Veronica, harvesting in her psyche a deeply wounded self-perception fed by unhealthy relationships and unaddressed experiences, exhibits child-like behaviour in an attempt to display her inner self in an unmediated way. However, in her attempt, she is unable to acknowledge the presence and needs of others around her, as her reactions tend to be more of an outburst of pressed emotions, resulting in unwittingly shattering her surroundings.

As Genna accounts in her text, one of the most powerful and striking memories flash in sudden and quick intrusions are that of her mother's. Genna frequently recalls the times when she was taken care by her mother, especially when her state of fright and wellness mattered to her mother and grabbed her attention. Genna remarks numerous times in her account about small and random events in which she had been able to communicate about it with her mother. A frequent pattern in her memory that now as an adult, and in the middle of confusion and frustration, indicates her utmost need for it. As time proceeds in Genna's memory, her mother's memories also transform from the warm and caring ones that Genna so desperately yearns for, to take a dark twist which represents Veronica's current state. The intrusion of her mother's memory is triggered by her roommate's behaviour and the sounds she makes, which strikingly correlates with that of her mother's. The intrusions change in pattern as Genna's mental state and psychological well-being deteriorates, as it is obvious from the time Genna hears the sound of grinding teeth and remembers her mother consoling her and interpreting that time as “Those lost nights in Chads Ford when Veronica had been mommy, concerned for her daughter's well-being.” (Ibid, 72) However, as her roommate demonstrates aggressive behaviour and sudden and disproportionate reactions with bursts of rage Genna's memory of her mother's darken and worsen as

well; “Veronica crying, hysterical and weeping, tearing at her clothes and hair, screaming when I ran to console her. Don’t touch! Get away! I am poison.” (Ibid, 100) Veronica referencing herself as ‘poison’ is a powerful depiction of how she perceives herself and a great representation of her damaged psyche which eventually leads to diminishing her self worth and distancing herself both physically and emotionally from her daughter Genna. The unsurpassable distance between mother and daughter has been generated by an actual distance when one day, Genna and her estranged brother wake up to find out that both of their parents has gone. Genna recalls the memory with the feeling of shame; a powerful sentiment which haunts her as it derives from witnessing her parents’ wreckage; “I had too often witnessed my parents in states of emotional detonation [...] I was not certain whose shames I had witnessed.” (Ibid, 27) Upon their return, a borderline appears between the mother and daughter, dividing the relationship into past and present, and introduces a new person whom Genna does not seem to comprehend, let alone recognise. “Already I had known what shame was. What shame is. My mother had been Mommy then. It was later she became Veronica. Went away and when she returned she was not Mommy and did not wish to be touched for she did not wish to ‘contaminate’ me for she loved me so much.” (Ibid, 24) It is a moment shaking the foundation of the concept of motherhood in Genna’s mind as she witnesses her mother’s transformation into an unrecognizable hysterical woman, whose actions and reactions are unexpected. The defining moment is best represented when Genna interprets with the way she addresses her mother. Her mother leaves her and goes to the unknown, as they never discuss what happens or where they had been. The long border that is sealed between them resemble a wound occurring after an unexpected blow, dividing her between Mommy and Veronica. Mommy’s warm and relatable address, takes the form of a formal name, Veronica, as if Genna is dealing with a person she has known very well but cannot relate to anymore.

As Genna matures and realises her mother’s mental and psychological state, she realises that her mother is as under Max’s influence as she is. Veronica is heavily under the influence of Max and his lifestyle, and she has accommodated her personality and frame of reference to that of his with an eternal sense of loyalty. Veronica is physically and mentally attributed to Max’s remarks to the point that she is unable to function in

an environment in which he is absent. Failing to acknowledge herself as a separate person both in mind and in life, Veronica is unable to perform in life as an independent entity. Veronica has had a contaminated relationship with her own family because of the fact that they think she has adopted her husband's radical views and dangerous lifestyle, which subtext lies in her losing her individuality and dissolving into his frame. Veronica does not talk about her family since she thinks they belong to the uneducated, ignorant and foolish white Republican section of the community, and demeans their stand with the hegemonic capitalist system, which she thinks is the reason of their suffering. Considering Veronica's remarks about her family, it is evident of Max's influence and rather, hear out as his exact words. Veronica justifies her parents' concern about adopting Max's views, as when describing them, Veronica indeed sounds as a parrot who has memorised the words of its owner. Veronica's dissolution into Max's person becomes so dangerously obsessive that Veronica does not comprehend how to exist without the influence, that she resides to a devastating alternative which diminishes her reliability;

"I was resolved not to investigate my mother's medicine cabinet to see what powerful medications she might be taking for chronic insomnia, depression, loss of appetite and libido, "suicidal thoughts"— that catalogue of woes shared by middle-aged hippie-survivors of the psychedelic revolution. I would not even ask if Veronica was seeing more than one doctor and hoarding prescriptions." (Ibid, 105)

Veronica's poisonous self-perception results in a blurred vision and an unreliable sense of reality, that her conversations, actions and thoughts become so hysterical and delirious that Genna does not take it into account. Veronica swings between moods and memory and often she expresses her wishes and emotions as if they are a cry for help. Although she has not completely withdrawn herself from Genna's life, she steps into the other side of the wound, and delves into the unknown that Genna loses her connection to her. Veronica reaches out whenever she feels lonely and in need of a companion, a neglectful and indifference to her daughter's state of mind and needs is a powerful example of her total state of apathy. In the occasional meetings, Veronica holds in her hands the grips of the conversation leading it to her point of view and

interpretations which result in Genna losing her belief and trust in her. Veronica's self-centered remarks, hysterical and emotional interpretations, extreme sensitivity and inconsistent statements loses her one of the most crucial quality she needs for her testimony; her accountability. Her delusional speech is so powerful that it covers over a pattern of memory intrusions which seem, at the time, irrelevant. What seems as Veronica's sudden blasts have an effect on Genna's mind, and without the reach of her control, bit by bit kneads into her mind the hidden and suppressed truths, however hands her over a tiny bit of thread from which she can follow the pattern. Her mother, unknowingly leading the conversations to Max, bursts into blasts, and obsessively repeats that her father is the man of the law, he has never violated it nor perpetuated anything to hurt anyone, however that he has so many enemies that the police and the federal agents are after him trying their best to find a loophole to blame him, that their house and their phones are under surveillance. Genna hearing these statements in conversations that are out of context, interprets them as statements of a hysterical lost woman who used to be her mother, but is now estranged from her. "This woman who was my mother and whom I was obliged to love, to feel sorry for and to love, to be embarrassed of, ashamed of, impatient and disgusted with yet to love, this woman and I were – what were we doing?" (Ibid, 134) Veronica, on her behalf, unable to acknowledge what has she witnessed and covered over, coupled with the influence of heavy drugs blurring her vision, gives her testimony of her truth by blasting and obsessively repeating words which, at the moment of speech, seem to be words repeated compulsively as if trying to make herself actually believe them. Her accentuating of Max's innocence and idolising him in front of her daughter, she weaves a pattern of verbal testimony, kneading the thread in Genna's mind. The fine thread, one one end, holds the path for Genna to follow, and on the other, holds a thin bond between a mother and a daughter.

"It is my failing. My wounded soul. I come from a 'wounded' class: exploited, but unconscious of being exploited. Identifying with their oppressors. How can I expect Max, or any man, to heal me! Healing must come from within. Better to be proudly raw and wounded, and never to heal, even to fester, than to hope for healing from 'without'. I believe this." (Ibid, 131)

Despite her inability in realising herself as an independent person from a toxic and consuming relationship, and her failure in addressing her truths and traumas, Veronica manages to reach out only once, in a confessional revelation, to the deep wound constantly bleeding in her. Veronica identifies herself with the class she has detached herself so passionately, the momentary and abrupt, indirect confession is in fact, an act of speech, an act of testimony on her behalf. Unconsciously, and unintentionally, Veronica holds a beacon to Genna, encrypting in her the only means through which healing is possible, with her fading light. Acknowledging her constant struggle and conflict with appropriating herself to a character that is not original to her, living in pretense a life that she hasn't chosen to, bearing witness to events and concepts she hasn't taken part of, and identifying with a frame of reference that is imposed on her, Veronica holds on to the sole thing that belongs to her, is her wounds. Her sole advice is perhaps the most symbolic moment throughout the text, it is to stay true to herself, even if broken, in order to enable healing to take part.

Despite her mother's sentimental and heartfelt confession, Genna is drawn into a mental purgatory between the reality and the delusion, which is blocking the way towards healing. Genna is exposed to numerous hints, bits and pieces of proofs and is handed over a thread to follow, however she is unable to recognise the pattern and what is lying beneath. The stream of her narrative is abruptly interrupted as she, out of context, repeats to herself the words of her mother; "He has never violated the law. You know that, you are the man's daughter." (Ibid, 146). However she is unable to interpret these interruptions since under the influence of her radical father, Genna too, is an exploited and wounded character. Throughout her text, she shows an obsessive need to be loved, however, since it is a misdirected one, she constantly faces neglect and indifference. Genna constantly attempts at gaining the love and trust of her black roommate Minnette, and each time her endeavour is met with total indifference. As it is aforementioned, what attracts Genna to the Swifts the most is their unity as a family. It is obvious that Genna yearns to be part of a unity, and accepted as she is. Hoping to earn herself a seat at their table, Genna obsessively recruits herself in the service of a motivation that is so wrongly misdirected. Each time she is met with total ignorance

on Minnette's behalf, Genna exclaims her despair by questioning; "Love me! Trust me! I am so lonely!" (ibid, 15) and goes further as to blame herself while reasoning why she might not be loved and accepted; "She trusted me, and I let her down. Out of ignorance, stupidity." (Ibid, 18)

Genna suffers because of her inability to acknowledge the fact that she has been wounded. A sickly admiration to her father with whom she maintains a stranded relationship that swings between love and hate results in her distorted sense of self and aspirational approach to be admired by her authority figure. Suffering from adopting a frame of reference that is not hers causes her to harbour a state of mind that blinds her. Following in the footsteps of her influential, radical, intellectual and admired father, she does not differentiate between Max's theories and preaches and his actual character. She is conflicted by the split ends of his person, who advertises himself to be the man of the society running after the help of those in need, and whose loyalty lies solely on justice itself, however, in the meantime, turns a blind eye to the person in need of him, his daughter. Not only emotionally neglected and is met with total apathy in regards of her person as an independent girl, Genna's feeling of inferiority is resulted from an unquestionable appropriation of Max's sentiments and regards, a point her mother warned her against. It is best represented in Max's essay Genna finds;

"Maximilian Meade had written in the 1960s of the distortions of "skin-consciousness"; how what we see is largely determined by who we are as what we know of the world is largely determined by the linguistic structures into which we are born. I knew, I understood! If you believe some truths are lies you must believe some lies are truths." (Ibid, 64)

Genna is trapped in Max's words, mind, psyche and ideology. She is born into a world he has constructed, with its twisted concepts of family and individuality, and its constant conflict with society and institutionalisation, she is subjected to his frame of reference. She learns how to distort her reality for her own good, as she learns from her father, whose way with words is his main quality. With his uncanny wit, Max has dedicated his life to perform his means of justice by twisting the language of the law. Genna's most powerful realisation of her father's impractical theories is when she meets her roommate Minnette. As a black girl, Minnette is personified as an enigma, since from what Genna knows of black people is deriving solely from Max's filters.

She hits an invisible wall as she realises she has, or in fact Max has, categorised people into certain characters. Minnette does not correlate to what Genna thinks of her as a member of the black community. It is most obvious when Genna observes that Minnette does not intend to befriend the other black girls at college and when she tries to appeal to her by mentioning prominent Jazz singers, Minnette responds in a harsh way, expressing her discontent with them, since they do not own the same lifestyle Minnette does. It is a concrete example of Max's disconnection with his ideals; as Genna recalls a moment exemplifying his determined arrogance when categorising people according to what he believes is ideal;

“Especially, Max was upset by the willingness, the childlike eagerness, of so many American blacks to align themselves with a religion that preached pacifism (while waging war), heaven after death (while seizing and exploiting the world's resources), hellfire for the damned (while imagining themselves “saved”): exactly as Marx named it, the opiate of the people.” (Ibid, 14)

Exploiting and appropriating is a concept that Max passionately fights against, that it becomes a pattern in which he forms his relationships with others. Genna's ability to remember these words at times of her despair in understanding and internalising her roommate, is an ironic coincidence, since she is unable to decontextualise her as a black girl from what she expects black people to be like. Indeed, Minnette does not fail in surprising her and destructing her acquired taboos; as a merit scholar, Minnette's academic success is shockingly below standard, she has a surprisingly literal mind that hinders her assignments as that of a ninth grader, as a black girl she does not intend, nor approve of, other black girls at college, and as a daughter of a reputable priest she does not attend church every Sunday, and instead fashions a ritual consisted of candles and meditation. What Genna initially intends to testify to is Minnette's subjections to a series of attacks aimed at her skin color that are in fact perpetuated by Minnette herself, which leads to her symbolic death as she burns down her room as she performs her ritualistic candles. However Genna is unable to transgress the abyss between them no matter how hard she tries, only to realise that her inability to do so is deriving from her inability to transgress her own linguistic consciousness. Genna writes about the linguistic confusion that is Minnette Swift as; “Minnette was a medley of irksome sounds: mutterings, mumbles, exaggerated sighs, humming, singing, and ofcourse

praying, grinding-teeth, occasional weeping.” (Ibid, 79) Genna is unable to recognise the sounds Minette creates; that he confusing and unpleasant sounds she creates are in fact emerging from the lack of a language Minette can use in order to accomplish her speech act. Genna fails to interpret the mutterings and the hummings she hears as grasps for air of someone who is drowning into the deep seas of silence and suppression.

Minette’s incomprehensible sounds bear a shocking parallel to that of Max’s. Genna describes his way of speech as such; “When Max Meade spoke in righteous anger his voice was hoarse, harsh. His voice was furious like dried reeds whipped in the wind.” (Ibid, 61) Although Max’s words, unlike those of Minette’s, produce a meaning, they do not spare him from the very essence of his existence. In Genna’s life, Maximilian Meade is the human version of trauma. He bears the qualities of that of the trauma. Max is harsh, radical and abusive, and Genna does not recognise the effects of his words and actions at the time they take place. As it is observed throughout the text, Genna only mentions them as a memory interruptions. She does not comprehend the extend of the effect they create, nor is she able to acknowledge their existence. The memories repetitively occur out of context as they are triggered by Genna’s emotional and mental state, just as the traumatic experiences keep recurring to the surface from the bottoms of the psyche when triggered. The repetitive quality of Max is strikingly concrete as he is almost never physically existent at the time Genna writes about, and moreover, she is constantly told by her mother that Max is in hiding. Genna hears the narrative of her family house being under surveillance, that their phones are bugged and their phone calls are being taped, that the enemies are lying at every corner possible in order to defeat them. Whenever Genna wonders about Max’s place, she is told that he is in a confidential safe place. Just as trauma’s presence in a person’s life, it is kept in confidential parts of the mind as if it is a valuable possession, only to occur when triggered to be sent back to dark curves of the mind, untouched and unharmed. Genna recites her feelings regarding truths about her father as “I was like one who has been anesthetized, who has no knowledge of how she has been “wounded”, or even, with certainty, that she has been “wounded”.” (Ibid, 221)

Under the influence of Max and the endless and inexplicable admiration to him can be explained with the state of anaesthesia. It is a great and a salient representation of the wounds of the trauma that is her father, and how it is processed into her mind and psyche as if it is the work of an artist weaving it into her mind while her consciousness remains in a numb state. Genna's state of numbness if prolonged to a constant state of paralyses. Max's influence over Genna's mind and psyche is very powerful, she is unable to realise that she has been undergoing a process of loss. Unable to recognise the loss itself can be affiliated with a state of melancholia. Ilit Ferber in her book **Philosophy and Melancholy: Benjamin's Early Reflections on Theater and Language** (2013) interprets the paralysed state of the melancholic to be resulting from the inability to acknowledge the loss the person has experienced;

"The mourner's recognition of the loss makes it possible for him to perform the work of mourning, whereas the unabridged and therefore unidentifiable nature of the melancholic loss makes it almost impossible to detach oneself from the loss, since for the melancholic there seems to be nothing from which a detachment is at all possible. The melancholic, therefore, remains immersed in loss (with "an excessive devotion") unable to acknowledge and accept the need to cleave to substitute object of attachment. In self-destructive loyalty to his lost object, he internalizes that object and makes it part of his ego, thus circumscribing still further the conflict aroused by the initial loss. The lost object continues to exist, now as part of the dejected subject, who can no longer clearly demarcate his own subjectivity from the lost object he has embraced." (2013; 20)

Considering Genna's state of extreme attachment and loyalty to her father is resulted from the crack he opens in her soul, however her inability to separate herself and her consciousness from that of his, is resulted from her blindness towards the fact that she has lost an admiration for him as she immerses into experiences triggering realisations that of his vision's impracticality. The inability to mourn over her loss, Genna herself is lost in her never-ending cycle of swinging back and forth in memory as Freud explains in his essay **Mourning and Melancholia** (1917) "The occasions giving rise to melancholia for the most part extend beyond the clear case of a loss by death, and include all those situations of being wounded, hurt, neglected, out of favour, or disappointed, which can import opposite feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce an already existing ambivalence" (Freud, 1917; 161) Indeed, Genna's loss

of her parents and brother, and the incapacity to acknowledge the loss is transformed into a physical paralysis as Genna proceeds to tell her advisor what she knows about the attacks on her roommate, she experiences a numbness in her legs as she realises she cannot use them and drags herself to her room and in a situation resembling to that of a delirium, confesses a crime of her father's that she wasn't aware until then she knew. She confesses having known all the time about a bombing by a spiritual son and a disciple of her father, Ansel Trimmer, has executed which resulted in the death of an innocent security man. As it is confidential, all her time Genna has been avoiding to acknowledge that she has known a truth as influential and wounding as her father's presence, the unbearable heaviness of appropriating her sense of reality leads Genna to give away her father to the police he passionately despises. Not until then does Genna realise the parallel lines between her and Ansel Trimmer; as she is interrupted by an image she has witnessed of his; at the rear of their house in Chads Ford, she witnesses Ansel Trimmer committing suicide by spilling his guts with a paring knife. Genna does not address her memory of the event, in a learned manner of avoiding unpleasant truths and ignoring disturbing facts which she labels as things she isn't supposed to know. However, Genna remarks the method of suicide as ``Now I know, as I could not have known as a child, that the wish to commit suicide is not invariably the wish to die. The wish to commit a showy suicide, a suicide to make a statement, is certainly not the wish to die.'' (200,6 122) Her flashback of Ansel Trimmer coupled with previous memories of his throughout the text, posit a milestone of Genna's text consisting of memory intrusions, to painfully lead her to an act of rebirth, as Caruth exclaims that "What one returns to in the flashback is not the incomprehensibility of one's near death, but the very incomprehensibility of one's own survival. Repetition, in other words, is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died, but, more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt to claim one's own survival." (1996, 64) The image of the paring knife and the spilling of guts invokes and inspires Genna in her text to perform a suicide of an already dead/lost bits in her.

``Now you are eighteen: no need to love them in such desperation.'' (Ibid; 74) consists the forming of the separation in her life between herself and her loss. Genna transgresses between the state of paralysis, of melancholia which Freud depicts as "The complex

of melancholia behaves like an open wound.” (1917, 163) to the state of mourning, in which the person is able to identify and acknowledge the loss. Genna exclaims very vividly her stand in her family as “For a daughter is a leash around the neck. A daughter is a thorn in the heart. Daughter is acid-anguish shaken in a bottle and froth and spill over scalding your head.” (2006, 74) Genna’s main loss is her state of being a daughter, as she acknowledges the dysfunctional qualities of her family, and suffers a loss in her ego. Her symbolic slippage of her tongue as she questions her dad’s presence carves a path for her to transgress the wounded ego; “If Max is dad. I mean, if Max is dead.”(Ibid, 74) Genna’s linguistic murder of her father’s glooming shadow enables her transition into a state of mourning as Freud explains; “Just as the work of grief, by declaring the object to be dead and offering the ego the benefit of continuing to live, impels the ego to give up the object, so each single conflict of ambivalence, by disparaging the object, denigrating it, even as it were by slaying it, loosens the fixation of the libido to it.” (1917, 169) Genna gives up her father by informing on him, and painfully witnesses to his decay, both mentally and physically in prison, and his transformation into becoming literally mad Max, she accepts the figurative death of who was once, her roaring father. Finally, she is able to exclaim “I am not homesick. I am free of home.” (2006, 86)

Genna, fifteen years after the whirlwind she experiences, takes up the pen to testify to her truth and grieving her losses.

“Initially I’d thought of writing my text without a title for my father to read. Max in a lucid state, not in the other. As the months passed, and the text became longer and more complicated, I came to doubt the wisdom of giving it to Max. For, unwittingly, as I composed my text about Minette Swift, I was composing a shadow-text that had little to do with her. I’d intended to compose an inquiry into Minette Swift’s life/death exclusively, but like an eclipse of the sun the shadow-text began to intrude. I could not seem to prevent it! The shadow-text is an inquiry into Max Meade and a portrait of a daughter who betrayed him.”(Ibid, 262-3)

Genna calls her stream of consciousness “There was a kind of spillage of my guts.”(Ibid) Genna achieves in unleashing the strains of her father’s linguistic consciousness with the help of the pen instead of a pairing knife, however this time not in the attempt to commit a “showy suicide”, but to perform a linguistic autopsy

onto her long-lost part of herself that was paralysed under a shadow-beast. Genna is able to provide an exquisite testimony through her commitment to her truth, and her pen becomes the sole tool with which she is able to carve out her real self in order to initiate the act of healing that is struggling to sprout from within and states; “What I’ve acknowledged here in my text without a title, I could not acknowledge in my life.” (Ibid, 255)



CONCLUSION

Gloria Anzladua in her essay **Speaking in Tongues** (2002) states that the vital importance of the process of writing while addressing the women of color; “To write is to confront one's demons, look them in the face and live to write about them. Fear acts like a magnet; it draws the demons out of the closet and into the ink in our pens.[...] Writing is dangerous because we are afraid of what the writing reveals: the fears, the angers, the strengths of a woman under a triple or quadruple oppression. Yet in that very act lies our survival because a woman who writes has power. And a woman with power is feared.” (Ibid, 190) In the light of this quotation, it is evident in the three voices this dissertation studies, that healing starts when one is able to confront the pains and fears they harbor inside their psyches. Through listening to their inner unrelenting and stubborn beasts, Celie, Gloria and Genna are courageous women who do not succumb to a delusional life by ignoring the roaring voice inside of them.

The irresistible need of outpouring what is suppressed in the minds and the psyches of Celie, Gloria and Genna, is an attempt at surviving a suffocating shadow beast that is called knowledge. The inability to vocalise their truths and knowledge holds them captive of a world of delusions and distorted truths and keeps them intact for an extended period of time, however on the contrary, it triggers them to take hold onto the pen in the hope of taking a grip of their own realities. Their determination in finding the courage and strength to transform from silent objects into speaking subjects is deriving from the knowledge that it is the only way to survive. It forms a cycle with two ends connected to each other, as they survive by telling their stories, while they survive to tell their stories. Greatly, what Celie, Gloria and Genna have been waiting for is nothing but a pen and a pencil.

The unsettling and bleeding breaches in Celie's self-loathing mind witnesses to her existence and truth by kneading in her words a quilt made out of wounds and blows with the help of a pen instead of a needle. As she proceeds determinedly with her

unaddressed letters to a non-existent God in the hope of making sense of her unacknowledged, incomprehended traumas, Celie is only able to practice the speech act when she finds a listener/witness. Her acquisition of a witness enables her to physically realise her potential in survival and in reconstructing a narrative of her own, which leads to her reconstructing a new life with the ability of reconciliation with her past.

Gloria with a wound as long as the Mexican-American border, is able to confront her beasts and shadows roaring restlessly inside her by writing an account in a serpentine manner, representing her suffering from a past that is glooming over her future, and her determination in reconciling with a distorted past enables her to overcome the despotic duality by crawling between her past and future, English and Spanish, American and Mexican and reconstruct a reality in which reconciliation is possible.

Genna with her swinging memory between past wounds and present, is able to follow a pattern her mother unknowingly constructs to lead her to a reality she has always ignored. With the help of a text without a title in the attempt to testify to a certain event, Genna performs a linguistic autopsy to her traumas and shadow traumas which help her identify her wounds. By acknowledging her traumas, Genna with the help of her text, is able to transgress the threshold from a melancholic state to a mourning state on the way to reconstructing a new and native frame of reference.

The three women experiencing trauma in a drastically different contexts, engage in a testimonial odyssey filled with uncertainties, ambiguities and rugged paths. With the mutual medium of the pen, they testify to their accounts of truth and reality, by courageously acknowledging their wounds and pains in order to prevent the shadow of their broken pasts to prevail over their future. Their testimony resides in their words line by line, as they speak to an absent witness they grow out of their subjugated stances. Through their practice of the speech act they transform into speaking subjects while reconstructing a new perception of themselves, on their odyssey towards home, they bravely found a new home.



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