

AUTOBIOGRAPHY, TRAUMA, AND SCRIPTOTHERAPY IN *I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS* (1969) BY MAYA ANGELOU, Mariame WANE LY (Associate Professor in American Literature Department of Anglophone Studies Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar), Fama SECK (Laboratory of American and Caribbean Studies Department of Anglophone Studies Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar)
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Abstract

The present study examines the inferences between autobiography, history, story, trauma, and scriptotherapy in Maya Angelou's *I Know why the Caged Bird Sing* (1969). The primary objective of this paper is to examine the discourse and debate surrounding trauma theory. Focusing on Angelou's womanist and psychological discourse, it scrutinizes how history and micro-history impact the construction of identity. It also shows how life experience is unique and depends on the direct or indirect positioning of personal psychic history and individual memory. It also examines how scriptotherapy engages writing as both a healing process and resilient posture to respond to communal and intimate damages. Eventually our analysis uses trauma theories and shows the umbilical tie that exists between trauma and writing as source of psychoanalysis.

Keywords: Autobiography, identity, memory, race, therapy, trauma, writing.

AUTOBIOGRAPHIE, TRAUMA ET SCRIPTOTHÉRAPIE DANS *I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS* (1969) DE MAYA ANGELOU.

Résumé

La présente étude examine les liens entre l'autobiographie, l'histoire, le récit, le traumatisme et la scriptothérapie dans *I Know why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) de Maya Angelou. L'objectif liminaire de cette étude est d'analyser le discours et le débat entourant la théorie du traumatisme générationnel et individuel. En se concentrant sur le discours féministe et psychologique de Maya Angelou, il examine comment l'histoire et la micro-histoire influencent la construction de l'identité. Il montre également que l'expérience de vie est unique et dépend du positionnement direct ou indirect de l'histoire psychique collective et individuelle. Elle examine également comment la scriptothérapie engage l'écriture à la fois comme processus de guérison et comme posture de résilience pour répondre aux dommages communautaires et intimes. En définitive, notre analyse fait recours aux théories en référence aux traumatismes et met en évidence le lien ombilical qui existe entre ceux-ci et l'écriture comme sources de psychanalyse.

Mots clés : Autobiographie, écriture, identité, mémoire, race, thérapie, traumatisme.

Introduction

In his seminal work, *Black Autobiography in America* (1974), Stephen Butterfield establishes the existence of a black autobiographical ritual that has its pedigrees in the American slave narrative, a genre "so powerful, so convincing a testimony of human resource, intelligence, endurance, and love in the face of tyranny, that, in a sense, it sets the tone for most subsequent black American writing" (1974, p.19). Endorsing Butterfield's statement, Henry Louis Gates asserts:

Deprived of access to literacy, the tools of citizenship, denied the rights of selfhood by law, philosophy, and pseudo-science, and denied as well the possibility, even, of possessing a collective history as a people, black Americans – commencing with the slave narratives in 1760- published their individual histories in astonishing numbers, in a large attempt to narrate the collective history of race (1991, p.4).

According to Gates, slave narratives paved the way to the literary genre of autobiography for African-Americans. Along with Frederic Douglass and Booker T Washington, autobiography has always been the locus of great challenges for slave women as reflected in Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859), Frances E. Watkins Harper's "The Two Offers" (*The Anglo-African Magazine*: 1859), Harriet Ann Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), and Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins' *Talma Gordon* (1900). In *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, Joanne M. Braxton argues that "black women autobiographers constitute a tradition within a tradition, operating within the dominant, familiar, and essentially masculine modes of autobiography" (1969, p.6). Thus, women's autobiographies are documents of prodigious historical substance as they echoed the conservancy of the African American identity and ethos.

Then, it is a literary tradition within the American literary ritual to engrave autobiographies to gauge and redefine personal experience within a sociological charter. For African-American writers, "it is a tradition within a tradition" (Braxton 1989, p, 5), as Joanne M. Braxton postulates it, to formulate a testimony of their painful experience as an alternative to official history. As such, Black women writers unremittently retort to autobiography that attest to the exclusive and painful female experience in the United States of America. In this perspective, Maya Angelou traced the footsteps of her elders and wrote several autobiographies among which *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* (1969), *Gather Together in My Name* (1974), *Singin' and Swingin' and Getting' Merry Like Christmas* (1976), *The Heart of a Woman* (1980), *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (1986), *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002) and *Mom Me & Mom* (2013). Angelou's autobiographies mainly address experiences of her young and adult years. They are distinct in style, narration and geographical location, although unified referring to racial tyranny. The caged bird, an image Angelou uses throughout all her writings, parallels the figure of the manacled slave. Like the bird that is shackled in the barred enclosure and banned from soaring to convey its self-determination, Maya Angelou voices her objection against the segregated system.

Specifically, our study revolves around trauma theories and literary psychoanalysis. It backs its conceptual framework and themes around Maya Angelou's first autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (from now on the autobiography will be referred to as *Caged Bird*). *Caged Bird* which reviews the

estranging experience of a black girl who grew up (From Chapter I: Growing Up Black to Chapter 15: Maturity) in a racially prejudiced milieu. Angelou's autobiography informs about the formation of the young Maya, from age three to her early sixteen, and voices her story laden with historical inferences entangled with personal exultations and traumas.

Autobiography is of unceasing concern for novelists, essayists, and theorists. Through centuries, autobiography has become of academic interest. Sub-genres such as diaries, memoirs, slave narratives and trauma narratives attract more and more intellectuals and theorists. Thus, the core theoretical aspects of our analysis will focus on notions and concepts developed by theorists as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (*Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*-1992); Dominick LaCapra (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* -2001); Cathy Caruth (*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*- 19XX; *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* -1995); Dominick LaCapra (*Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* -1994); *History and Memory after Auschwitz* -1998) and many others who provided a valuable support for conceptualizing and discussing autobiography. They all brought this nascent interest in trauma into literary field.

When trauma theory emerged as a distinct approach of literary and cultural analysis in the 1990s, re-thinking psychoanalytic models of trauma through a post structural prism enabled literary texts to be read as structurally and linguistically traumatized, rather than simply describing, directly or thematically, the experience of trauma (Felman and Laub, 1990, p.5). As such, autobiography serves as an instrument in the process of healing trauma. Scriptotherapy is a term coined by Suzette A. Henke in her book *Shattered Subjects*. For Henke, biography is a space perfectly designed for the writer to explore his/her writing for therapeutic purposes and overcoming traumatic events.

According to Richard Riordan, in *Scriptotherapy: Therapeutic Writing as a Counseling Adjunct* (1996), the term "scriptotherapy" is derived from the Latin root "scriptum" that stands for "thing written", and "therapia", "to nurse or cure" (1996, p.264). It is then necessary to incise autobiography within the discourse and framework of trauma studies and literary trauma theory. Trauma is a deeply laden psychological and psychoanalytic term. By the end of the 20th century trauma theory had emerged from its geneses in psychoanalysis and the experience of listening to the testimony of Holocaust survivors to deepen understandings of violence and vulnerability (Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* -1998).

As such, the present study aims to study *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in a psychoanalytical and therapeutic perspective. As Angelou's autobiography unveils traumatic events of her life, the study aims to clarify how autobiographical narratives foreshadow psychological trauma and therapy. This perspective reveals the ontological bound existing between writing and psychological rehabilitation. The present study explores then the intersection of trauma theory and race construction, two sites of outstanding significance in contemporary literary, cultural and political studies. As such, it is then obvious that both notions provide vital perceptions into individual and collective experience in the prism of new textual analyses and theoretical approaches.

As mentioned above, the present analysis aims to articulate the themes of race, autobiography and scriptotherapy in theoretical, historical and intimate perspectives. When joined, the notions of autobiography and therapy are an incomparable framework to debate black female discourse. Consequently, the ensuing questions monitor the present principle of research. Is autobiography a consistent literary recipe for gauging Maya Angelou's autobiography in terms of narrative? Can writing provide the suitable site to enable therapy? In other words, can writing be the reflection of female quandaries and sociological predicaments? These questions are the dashboard designed to guide our research protocol.

In order to assess the complex experience of trauma, childhood and scriptotherapy, our study is divided into three major sections. The first section provides key definitions and discusses concepts of trauma and scriptotherapy in a hostile and destructive sociological framework. The concept of trauma theory in the literary arena convenes Angelou's personal and communal harrowing experience from youth to adulthood. Providing a conceptual framework, the assignment of the section consists in questioning those notions in the realm of race corollaries. The second section investigates the notion of scriptotherapy as a technique of writing out traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic restoration from a repressive historiography and despotic intimate experience. The last section demonstrates the usability of autobiography as a psychoanalysis procedure. Here, our assignment is to scrutinize how an intimate document can be credited by psychologists as valid healing methods, because it is entangled with sociological and personal undercurrents.

1. Writing Trauma and Breaking the Chains

The first part of our analysis aims to set a bridge between the notion of writing trauma and identity construction. Its ambition is to demonstrate how writing can offer a platform to cure intimate contingences. For instance, Maya, the younger version of Angelou, and the book's central character, is the figurative persona of the black female child growing up in America. As regards to the estranging sociological and identical framework of African-American experience, one can assume that the black woman is socially sequestered because of her racial and biological condition. As such, it is essential to foreground how autobiography and trauma combine, how history (collective oppression) and story (intimate experience) model the identity of the young Maya. Very interestingly, trauma and its post stressful syndromes can be explored in the field of literature, for, writing, as a creative procedure can be at the juncture of trauma and race. According to Cathy Caruth, "the story of trauma ... as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality, the escape from death, or from its referential force, rather attests to its endless impact on life" (1996, p.7). For Michael Richardson and Meera Atkinson, in *Traumatic Affect* (2013), trauma and post-traumatic syndromes stand as spaces designed to encompass unbearable and "unspeakable" (T. Morrison, 1993) realities. It is then essential to view autobiography as a powerful instrument to witness trauma.

1.1. Autobiography and Verbalizing Trauma

In an attempt to chart trauma, autobiography is an appropriate site to invest. According to Edward Bulwer-Lytton, autobiography is "mightier than a

record"(1839, p. 89). It is quite impossible to dissociate writing from context, whether personal or collective. Trauma studies first developed in the 1990s and relied on Freudian theory to develop a model of trauma that conceives an extreme experience which defies the limits of language and significance of the world. The idea that a traumatic experience challenges the limits of language, fragments the psyche, and even breaches meaning altogether detonate psychological stability.

In our specific purpose, concomitant to race, trauma has infinite undertones such as hysteria, damage, and catastrophe, is of a profound and intergenerational nature. From the macro of historiography to the micro of familial realm, the recognition of trauma is essential as it gives name and shape to a form of experience that is rupturing of the capacity to make sense of the world and recognizes the impossible event as existing (M. Atkinson and M. Richardson, 2013, p.4).

Psychological trauma, its representation in language, and the role of memory in shaping individual and cultural identities are the central issues that define the field of trauma studies. The concept of trauma is generally conceived as a severely disruptive experience that profoundly impacts the self's emotional organization and perception of the external world. Trauma studies then explore the influence of trauma in literature and society by questioning its psychological, rhetorical, and cultural significance. Scholarship analyzes the complex psychological and social factors that influence the self's comprehension of a traumatic experience and how such an experience is molded by language. As such, *Caged Bird* untangles Angelou's childhood years of growing up in the times of economic recession and covers the period from 1928 to 1944. Thus, the idiosyncrasy of Maya Angelou can be viewed in all her texts as they center on the experience of black women's trials and tribulations. Even though Angelou was a child, she could acknowledge the jaundiced condition in which she lives. As she states "If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her difference is worse. It is an unnecessary insult."(M. Angelou, 1969, p.1). Unerringly, what Angelou calls "insults" is psychologically converted by Cathy Caruth into traumatic paradigms.

1.2. Writing Silence and Voicing Absence

Silence and absence are of paramount interest in Maya Angelou's *I Know why the Caged Bird Sings*. For instance, Angelou's description of being raped as an eight-year-old child, by her mother's boyfriend Mr Freeman is very awesome and lacerating "I had a strange feeling on my left leg ...it was his "thing" on my leg...his "thing" stood up like a brown ear of corn" (M. Angelou, 1969, p. 29). The incident can be read as the ultimate token of parental absence and adults 'accountability. According to psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), traumatic hysteria develops from an inhibited and previous experience of sexual assault. As a post-traumatic disorder, Maya feels mortified and extracts herself from community but her brother "*The only thing I could do was to stop talking to everyone except Bailey*" (M. Angelou, 1969, p.37). After a horrendous and "unspeakable" (T. Morrison, 1987) psychological trauma of the rape episode, Maya became completely mute. UlkaAnjaria's "the poetics of silence" (2001), Didier Girard's "radical no-saying" and Laurence Tatarian's "vocal voices" (2009), all convey the idea that, silence is of paramount interest in trauma experience.

After Maya was taken from her paternal grandmother to her mother's house, the narrator/ character recalls the lonely and hard times she and her brother spent crying the absence of their mother, Vivian Baxter. The words "*icy wind of silence, unwanted children*" (M. Angelou 1969, p. 50) inform about the painful quandary the children lived deprived of maternal presence.

Subsequently, for the first five years of her life, Maya conceives herself as an orphan and finds comfort in the thought that her mother is deceased. Her feelings for and relationship with her own mother, whom she blames for her abandonment, express themselves in inconsistency and inhibited forceful antagonism. For example, Maya and her brother destroy the first Christmas gifts sent by their mother and the incident propels psychological and existential questions:

The gifts opened the door to questions that neither of us wanted to ask. Why did they send us away ? What did we do so wrong ? Why, at three and four, were we sent by train alone from Long Beach, California, to Stamps, Arkansas, with notes attached to our arms and only the conductor to look after us ?" (M. Angelou, 1969, p.19)

Maya's attitude confirms John Bowlby's analysis in his essay *Attachment and Loss* (1982) in which the psychiatrist observes that abandoned children mourn the absence of their parents but in the run of time, in an "instinctive behavior", they become emotionally committed with the persons they come to live with. What Bowlby describes as the "child mourning" happens to Maya because the first time she met her father after four years of abandonment, she describes him as the "first cynic" (M. Angelou 1969, p. 45) she had met. She asserts: "he was unreal to me, I felt as if I were watching a doll talk." (M. Angelou, 1969, p. 48). For the young Maya, the world of adults is full of cynicism and treachery which she calls the "grownups' betrayal" (M. Angelou, 1969, p. 49). Embedded in a negative and hostile environment, Angelou engraved her own experience in a private tune in the midst of a collective cacophony.

2. Typifying History and Story: from Communal trauma to Intimate Ordeal

Angelou operates her autobiography as an instrument to explore existential issues such as race and identity. Stamps, Arkansas, as depicted in *Caged Bird*, is a dualistic universe divided between Black and white racial precincts, male and female biological confines. The sociological tribulations that infuse her society outlined Maya's young life and molded her representation of adulthood. For instance, in a striking incident in her life, Angelou expresses how the racist pattern of rechristening African-Americans elicits negative effects on identity construction. Her white employer, Mrs. Viola Cullinan, insists on calling her "Mary" : " Marguerite is too long. She is Mary now" (M. Angelou 1969, p. 47). Angelou's treatment of racism provides a thematic unity to *Caged Bird*. In the South, lynching and hanging were recurrent occurrences during the 1930s. So, the historical context inspired autobiographical writings as a powerful political instrument.

2.1 Experiencing Transgenerational Trauma

In Susan Gilbert's article "Paths to Escape" Joanne Braxton argues that Angelou was delineating "not one person's story, but the collective's" (1999, p. 104-105). Definitely, Angelou argues in an interview with Plimpton that she used the

literary technique of "speaking in the first-person singular talking about the first-person plural, always saying I meaning 'we'". (Plimpton Interview, 1990). In *Caged Bird*, Angelou then attests for her entire community and portrays with talent the quandary condition of African Americans under segregation in the 1930s: "in Stamps, the segregation was so complete that most Black children didn't really, absolutely know what whites looked alike. We knew only that they were different and to be feared (...)" (M. Angelou, 1969, p. 12).

Subsequently, collective trauma resonates throughout *Caged Bird* and the reader perceives that the pronoun "we" replicates in the text and testifies to the communal voice. Therefore, it is essential to foreground how autobiography and political inducement conspire, how history (collective oppression) and story (intimate experience), model the identity of the young Maya. Very interestingly, for the Black community of Stamps, the boxing match between Carnera and Joe Louis triggers racial pride "If Joe lost we were back in slavery and beyond help. (...). It was our people falling. It was another lynching. Yet another Black man hanging on a tree. One more woman ambushed and raped. A Black boy whipped and maimed." (M. Angelou, 1969, p.113). For the black community, it is of paramount importance Joe Louis wins the boxing match so as to annihilate the stereotypes conceived by white supremacists for racial preeminence.

It is vital then vital to highlight the way trauma triggers individual torment. For instance, Angelou sketches the employer's renaming as the "*hellish horror of being called out of one's name*". (M. Angelou 1969, p, 91). Scholar Debra Walker King qualifies the episode "*as a racist insult and an assault against Maya's race and self-image*" (A. King 1998, p. 189). The rechristening heightens Maya's feelings of social inaptitude and disparages her identity, individuality, and uniqueness. Subsequently, growing up in such bigoted and degrading circumstances impel Maya to apprehend herself as a white girl. That inner and fabricated conception plunges her into a realm of fantasy. In the first chapter of the book, the young Maya is fantasizing about being a white little girl. She affirms: "Because I was really white and because of a cruel fairy Stepmother, who was understandably jealous of my beauty, had turned me into a too- big Negro girl, with kink black hair, broad feet and a space between her teeth that would hold a pencil." (M. Angelou, 1969, p.2). Even more specifically, the general environment of racial despotism extremely infuses Maya's familial context. *Caged Bird* is definitely a narrative about filial abandonment which leads the young Maya into a boundless and timeless quest for identity.

2.2. Mapping Personal Torment

When Maya was two, her parents parted and this peculiar familial framework actuates a tremendous impact on her life because she and her brother were on perpetual and changing custody:

When I was three and Bailey four, we had arrived in the dusty little town, wearing notes on our wrists which stated-"To Whom It May Concern"- that we were Margueret and Bailey Johnson, Jr, from long Beach, California, on our way to Stamps, Arkansas, to Mrs Annie Anderson. Our parents had decided to put an end to their disastrous marriage, and my father shipped us home to his mother. (M. Angelou 1969, p.3).

After Maya's and Bailey's paternal abandonment and entanglement in a continuous geographical displacement, Maya articulates her relinquishment with resentment and bitterness: "I was neither glad nor sorry. He was a stranger, and if he chose to leave us with a stranger, it was all one piece" (M. Angelou, 1969, p.50). What psychiatrist John Bowlby's analysis in his essay *Attachment and Loss* (1982) describes as the "child mourning" happens to Maya because the first time she meets her father after four years of abandonment, she describes him as a "doll", an intruder into her private life "stranger, cynical and unreal" (M. Angelou, 1969, p. 45). Maya describes him further in the text like a "machine". She asserts: "he was unreal to me, I felt as if I were watching a doll talk." (M. Angelou, 1969, p. 48).

As an emotional compensation, the yearning for paternal affection and warmth leads Maya to hope Mr Freedman's physical proximity. One morning when her mother leaves early, he begins fondling Marguerite. Finally, he escalates to fully intercourse with Marguerite. Angelou's description of being raped as an eight-year-old child is horrendous and traumatizing. The following quotation testifies to the horror of the act. She says: "I had a strange feeling on my left leg ...it was his "thing" on my leg...his "thing" stood up like a brown ear of corn" (M. Angelou, 1969, p. 29). After the act, Maya is bedbound for two days before the family figures out that Maya has been raped. As a post-traumatic disorder, Maya feels guilty and withdraws from her community but her brother "The only thing I could do was to stop talking to everyone except Bailey" (M. Angelou, 1969, p.37). Very informatively she described Mr. Freedman with "cold face and empty eyes" (M. Angelou, 1969, p. 39). Convinced her denunciation has somehow killed Mr. Freedman, she confesses: " a man was dead because I lied. Where was the balance in that? One lie surely wouldn't be worth a man's life" (M. Angelou, 1969, p.86). Marguerite becomes completely dumb for almost a year; she ends talking because she feels betrayed by language. She relapses to a babyish phase, what the Freudian revisionist psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan calls the "Mirror Stage".

Because of their atypical familial typology, Angelou and Bailey become profoundly traumatized. She says, "Because of ...our hectic lives, Bailey and I were afflicted: he physically and I mentally. He stuttered and I sweated through horrifying nightmares"(M. Angelou 1969, p.72). Their experience as black children can be read as the ultimate emblem of parental absence and adults 'accountability. For the young Maya, the world of adults is full of cynicism and treachery which she calls the "grownups' betrayal" (M. Angelou, 1969, p.49).

However, the description of Maya's mother and that of the father are poles apart. It is discernible that the illustration of her mother, Vivian Baxter, is brilliant, glowing and full of life. Maya subverts the biased characterization of women and gives new avenues of seeing gender. Very meaningfully, Valerie Smith argues that "Black feminist theorists argue that the meaning of Blackness in this country shapes profoundly the experience of gender, just as the conditions of womanhood affects ineluctably the experiences of race" (1987, p.47). It is here important to discern how *Caged Bird* supports Angelou's vision of racism and sexism. Precisely, the autobiography illustrates how scriptotherapy can help withstand and heal trauma.

3. Autobiography as Scriptotherapy

The method of writing out traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment is termed by Suzette Henke as "scriptotherapy" (2000: xii). Thus, autobiography is viewed as scriptotherapy if it allows the traumatized and devastated subject to restore, and become re-integrated into society. Angelou portrays her aversion to prejudice, sexism and deprivation, which she subtly expresses in her language and style, probably because her approach is not conventional and paves the way for a wider perspective. Angelou also displays characteristics prominently through her emotional posture. In a PBS interview with Bill Moyers, Angelou puts forth that when she holds a pen to write, she scrubs it across the scars to polish the point which discloses the deep psychological trauma she still experiences. As such, for Maya Angelou, writing becomes a site for psychic restoration.

3.1. Writing and Compensation for Psychic Void

According to Sacha Gibbons in her article entitled "Writing through Trauma: Ruby Langford's My Bundjalung People", scriptotherapy serves as "a testimonial writing which works to re-externalize trauma so that it can be properly intergraded into the sufferers' life and that of their society" (1999, p. 64). One of the early attempts at defining the therapeutic effects of writing was that of Gordon Allport (1942), one of the first psychologists to highlight the relation between writing and psychology. He perceived intimate documents such as journals, memoirs and autobiographies as instruments to reveal authors' 'psychology. He recommended that such personal documents be credited and certified by psychologists as valid sources of medical diagnosis. In a related vein, Richard Riordan, in *Scriptotherapy: Therapeutic Writing as a Counseling Adjunct*, defines scriptotherapy as "the deliberate use of writing designed to enhance therapeutic outcomes" (1996, p. 264). He points out that "verbally labeling and describing a trauma through writing allows an individual to cognitively process the event and gain a sense of control, thus reducing the work of inhibition" (1996, p, 266). Riordan warns against the deliberate reduction of the scope and applicability of therapy to clinical illness. He refers to Ira Progoff's *At a Journal Workshop* (1975), scrutinizing the value and use of journaling in creative experience. In Progoff's theory, many life tribulations stem from the conflict between the conscious self and the unconscious self. As such, writing diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies helps accomplish the wished-for reconciliation between the two sides of the self. Riordan concludes that writing can be therapeutic through "allowing the unconscious to become conscious" (R. Riordan, 1996, p. 266).

Similarly, in "The Beneficial Effects of Writing and Narration in the Context of a Traumatic Experience" (*Reflections on psychological mechanisms of trauma and posttraumatic development* - 2012), Emilia Soroko points out that "pro-health functions of writing in the context of a traumatic experience may result from elaborating on an experience in a narrative manner and from meaning-making process which in turn can influence the sense of inner integration"(2012, p.215). Thus autobiography particularly functions as scriptotherapy in the instance of writers who are cognizant of the function and purpose of writing as a therapeutic activity. Writing an autobiography provides the space needed for the self to envision one's experience with therapeutic perspective. According to Emmanuel Babatunde's article "The president's physician: An African play" in *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*,

the vitality of journeying through life and the eventually to discard the encumbrance of confession is projected. Scriptotherapy is a morphological realization of the combination of scripting and therapy which prompts the semantic recognition of writing-therapy as alternative therapy (E. Babatude 2017, p. 577). For T. M. Nick, in "Traumatic memory and scriptotherapy in Malawian poetry: The case of Bright Molande's Seasons", studies have established that recounting the story of a traumatic experience can be salutary to the victim (M. Nick, 2014, p. 55). Accordingly, autobiographical writing helps chronicle painful memories which function as foundational site of resilience, growth, and empathy. In the last two decades, research has proved that writing about painful memories and traumas can be an operative form of psychotherapy. More recently, scientists evidenced that writing about oneself in a positive perspective is interconnected to healthier condition.

According to Susan Lutgendorf, PhD, of the University of Iowa, it's even more constructive if one gives sense to a memory. She finds that individuals who extract sense from their writing secure better health than those who write about their experiences without therapy objectives: "You need focused thought as well as emotions. An individual needs to find meaning in a traumatic memory as well as to feel the related emotions to reap positive benefits from the writing exercise" (S. Lutgendorf, 2002, p. 249). Equally, Sigmund Freud's ideas regarding the process of writing in his article "The Relation of the Poet to Day-dreaming" (S. Freud, 1959, p. 178), convey that writing compensates for a psychic deficiency. In the essay, Freud defines the "wish-fulfillment novel" as one in which the writer visualizes and fantasizes the realization of desires which may be frustrated in actual life, whether collective or personal. Precisely, literacy and writing provided for Maya the appropriate site for trauma recovery.

3.2. Literacy and Writing: The Curative Dimension of Mrs. Flowers' Lessons

Angelou's description of the strong and cohesive black community of Stamps demonstrates how African Americans subvert repressive institutions to overcome racism. According to Alice Walker, Angelou's sociological stance is inherent to the fact that "what the black writer inherits most is a sense of community" (A. Walker 1967, p.18). Subsequently, the young Maya gained positive perspective from the collective wisdom of the African-American community; mainly from Mrs Bertha Flowers who was "the first lady who threw Maya her first life line" (M. Angelou 1969, p.77). She introduces her to a world of literary fantasy and existential reflection.

In the history of African-American literature, freedom and literacy are intimately interrelated. Precisely, Maya's dependency upon books becomes the sole stable element in her life "I spent most of my Saturdays at the library" (M. Angelou 1969, p. 31). Mrs. Berthe Flowers "*the upper-class woman of Black Stamps*" (M. Angelou, 1969, p.40) by introducing Maya to classic literature and poetry, imparts her, during her self-imposed muteness, about the positive power of language. Consequently, during adult years Angelou becomes influenced by writers who designed worlds as entryway to imagination, fantasy, and identity:

During these years in Stamps, I met and fell love with William Shakespeare. He was my first white love. Although I enjoyed and respected Kipling, Poe, Butler, Thackery

and Henley. I saved my young and loyal passion for Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, James Weldon and W.E.B and W.E.B Dubois's "Litany at Atlanta" (M. Angelou 1969, p.6).

The heroine recalls the impact this woman plays on her life when she declares: "she has remained throughout my life the measure of what a human being can be" (Angelou 1969: 41). The first lesson Mrs. Flowers gives to Maya is a metalinguistic lecture; she invites her to give vent to her mind and express her emotions. She asserts: "Now no one is going to make you talk. Possibly, no one can. But bear in mind, language is man's of communicating with his fellow man and it is language alone which separates him from lower animals". (M. Angelou, 1969, p.82). As a therapist, Mrs. Flowers procedures meta-language to invite the young Maya to read poetry in order to feel comfortable with her voice and eliminate her anxiety: "words need the human voice to give them deeper meaning" (M. Angelou 1969, p, 43). She imparts a literary pattern to all the dramatic aspects of her life. Critic Mary Vermillion sees a connection between Maya's rape and Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* (a narrative poem written in 1594), which Maya memorizes and recites, finding comfort in the poem's identification with suffering (M. Vermillion 1992, p.250).

Above all, Mrs. Flowers helps Maya secure racial pride and contributes to the girl's affirmation of her own beauty and self-confidence. The narrator declares: "I was liked I was respected... for just being Marguerite Johnson... She had made tea cookies for me and read to me from her favorite book "(M. Angelou 1969, p.48).

The signs of respect and attention from Mrs. Flowers's behalf ensure a constructive effect on the young Maya. She acknowledges the curing dimension of Mrs. Flowers' lessons and qualifies them as "*valid and poetic*" (M. Angelou 1969, p. 82). Here, Mrs. Berthe Flowers stands for the Alma Mater or "mother wit" (M. Angelou 1969, p. 83) whose mission is to help pass knowledge from generation to generation. She teaches the mystical power of words, similar to Western African traditional ability "to listen to the deep talk" or the "utterances existing beneath the obvious"(D. King, 1998, p. 215).

Mrs. Flowers's literary and communication education, through books and reading, helps Maya build new avenues of identity. She develops from a victim of racism with an inferiority complex to a self-aware individual who responds to racism with dignity and a strong sense of her own identity. Thus, the formation of female cultural identity is interlaced into the book's narrative, setting Maya up as a role model for Black women.

Conclusion

Black women autobiographies in the United States of America are framed by a unique literary legacy. By submersing us in her own traumatic memories, Angelou dexterously suggests the healing and inspiring spirit of restoration and persistence as captured in her famous poem "Still I Rise". It says opens: "You may write me down in history, with your bitter, twisted lies, You may tread me in the very dirt but still, like dust, I'll rise. Right on". Her attachment to literature and reading books made her unpolluted soul soar with her winged imagination and

gigantic ambitions. The appeal and enticement of the literary form of autobiographies memoirs indicates the way self-exploration help soothe internal conflicts. Julie Hilden in *The Bad Daughter* (1998), Gunter Grass in his recent and controversial *Peeling an Onion* (2007), and many others resorted to the literary psychoanalysis and recovery. This process is a resilience device for Angelou as she is able to negotiate her traumatic experiences by redeeming herself through writing. Literary critics lately applied theories in the field of trauma studies in their approach to women's texts, analyzing the writing of traumatized artists like Anais Nin, Virginia Woolf, H.D. Charlotte Brontë, and others, as scriptotherapy. As for Angelou, she configures literature as a psychological mechanism to challenge collective racism and personal trauma. In the course of *Caged Bird*, Maya is transmuted from a victim of prejudice, a moody, timid person, to a self-possessed and dignified young woman.

Through her autobiographies, she provides answers for unanswered questions in her life and explores subjects such as rape, identity, race, and self-recovery (M. Waqar& Ali 2018, p.5). As such, Angelou reframes the myth of Black women's role in society to construct the "true womanhood cult". She, the, offers an authentic incursion into the American culture and history with all its racist and patriarchal creeds and practices. She published the drama *Georgia, Georgia* (1972), becoming the first African-American woman to have her screenplay produced. She earned a Tony Award nomination for her role in the play *Look Away* (1973) and an Emmy Award nomination for her work on the television miniseries *Roots* (1977), among other honors.

President Barack Obama, presenting Maya Angelou with the 2010 Presidential Medal of Freedom, called her "a brilliant writer, a fierce friend, and a truly phenomenal woman." He adds " a childhood of suffering and abuse drove her to stop speaking, but the voice she found helped generations of Americans find their rainbow amidst the clouds". According to S.R. Cudjoe, in his remarkable article "Maya Angelou and the autobiographical statement", Maya Angelou, "is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power" (1984, p.66). To be black and female in the United States is to be doubly marginal, twice removed from the dominant power group and handicapped by a burden of racial prejudice and gender stereotypes. But, through writing and scriptotherapy she managed to restore from historical ghosts and personal torments.

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