

**RESEARCH PAPER**

## Reclaiming the Self: Lacanian Psychoanalysis and the Trauma of Identity in *The Color Purple*

**<sup>1</sup>Dr. Saima Bashir and <sup>2</sup>Jawaria Ahmad**

1. Lecturer, Department of English Literature, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan
2. M. Phil. Research Scholar, Department of English Literature, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan

**Corresponding Author** [saima.bashir@iub.edu.pk](mailto:saima.bashir@iub.edu.pk)

**ABSTRACT**

The paper makes a Lacanian psychoanalytical exploration of Alice Walker's *Color Purple* in the context of trauma and construction of self and identity. The ways in which early trauma interferes with development of ego and forms subjectivity, and how experiences of violence, silences and symbolic exclusion experienced by Celie influence her transition into mirror stage and her relationship with the Other leading to the fractured sense of self which is characterized by lack and dispossessed desire are the focus of the research. Qualitative and interpretative textual approach is carried out to the application of Lacanian lens of misrecognition, desire, and symbolic order. Identity in the novel is not created through wholeness or resolution but as a negotiation carried on with trauma and deficit. Thus Lacanian psychoanalysis gives a fruitful basis of explaining literary representation of traumatized subjectivity, suggestive of more psychoanalytic exploration of literature on trauma and identity formation narratives.

**Keywords:** Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Mirror Stage, Other, Desire and Lack, Trauma, Identity, Self, Subjectivity

**Introduction**

Reclaiming the Self: Lacanian Psychoanalysis and the Trauma of Identity in *The Color Purple* applies the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan to the text written by Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, focusing on Celie's journey from trauma to empowerment and Lacan's ideas of the mirror stage, the Other, desire, and lack. Lacan's theory involves the belief that the establishment of a person's identity is a fragmented process; with recognition mis-recognition in the mirror stage, followed by the continual pursuit of self (actualization) through the desire and exchange of relations. In *The Color Purple*, Celie's trauma, caused by the abuse and domination of the patriarchal society she lives in and the abuse she experienced as a child causes her to distort her self-image and causes her to become estranged from herself. Through her relationship with Shug and with Sofia and other women, and through the process of writing, Celie comes to more integrated, empowered sense of self, symbolizing Celie's emergence from the mirror stage into a more whole self. This study will use the psychoanalytic concepts of Lacan to analyze the psychological development of Celie especially focusing on the fragmented self, her relation towards desire, and the effect of the Other in constructing her identity.

*The Color Purple* is about the life of a woman named Celie, an African-American woman who has suffered greatly due to sexual abuse, physical violence, and social oppression. Written in the form of letters, the novel follows Celie's journey from subjugation to self-discovery to empowerment. Early in the novel Celie is emotionally and sexually oppressed by her father and later her husband, Mister. This abuse leads to Celie having a fragmented identity, separated and alienated from her desires, voice, and body. However, through her relationship with Shug, Celie learns to recognize herself as an autonomous

subject rejecting the patriarchal Other through which she has been defined for so long. The process of writing letters, which starts as an act of survival, becomes a vehicle for Celie's self-expression and self-realization which enables her to reclaim her voice and identity. Lacanian psychoanalysis gives us a lens through which to consider the way in which Celie's trauma is intimately connected to her inability to recognize herself, her relationships with male figures of authority for herself, and her eventual transformation through her interaction with the female Other.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* was released in 1982, during a period when African American women's voices in literature were coming to the fore. Set in the early 20th century South, Walker's novel grapples with the themes of racial and gendered oppression, and helps to capture themes of intersectionality and identity among black women in America. Walker's attention to trauma, resilience, and connections between women is a powerful examination of the influence that historical and personal pain has upon developing identity. The novel reflects the larger socio-political situation of the African-American experience, yet at the same time, it provides an intimate portrait of a woman's psychological and emotional development. Walker's ability to weave together the personal and political is very important in understanding Celie's journey from silenced victim to empowered survivor. Through her relationships with other women, particularly Shug, Celie copes with her trauma, questions the patriarchal system that oppresses her and finds her sense of self again.

Lacan's psychoanalytic theory focuses on the mirror stage, an important moment of identity development when the child becomes aware of his or her reflection in a mirror. This recognition however, is always an incorrect recognition, as the image is an idealized image and not the fragmented self. Lacan's theory posits identity as a continual process of misrecognition and desire for the self that is constituted by the Other, a figure beyond the individual and therefore a power or force that determines an individual's sense of self. In *The Color Purple*, Celie's trauma and oppression leaves her confused and unable to see herself as her true self. Lacan's concept of the Other is key here because Celie's notion of herself is mostly formed by patriarchal characters such as her father and Mister. Her sense of lack (a Lacanian concept) is central in her character's early development: Celie lives without recognition, love, and autonomy. Through her relationship with Shug and her empowerment in the end, Celie starts to battle what she wants and finds her voice and to challenge the Other. Lacanian psychoanalysis helps to see how Celie's change is not one of behaviour, but rather a radical reformation of her own identity through the recognition of her desires and breaking the oppressive authority of the patriarchal figures in her life.

Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) was a French psychoanalyst and also a psychiatrist whose work strongly impacted literary theory, especially with the application of Freud's ideas to the development of the human subjectivity. Lacan's theories on 'the mirror stage', 'the Other' and 'desire' have been widely applied in the analysis of literature and provide insight into the formation of identity, psychological trauma, and the complex relationship of the self and the society. In Lacan's model, identities are never entirely reached because the subject is ever in search of the ideal image of the self, mediated via external influences (the Other). Trauma, in Lacanian terms, is not only that event which causes psychological damage but also a profound disruption of the sense of self for the subject. Lacan's philosophies on desire and lack offer a model in Celie's emotional and sexual development as a process of completion through the understanding of the self and desire for fulfillment beyond the patriarchal structures that have marked her. Lacanian theory will be employed in this study in order to consider and investigate Celie's evolving subjectivity, paying particular attention to how she works through trauma, the return of repressed memories, and the process of identity reconstruction.

## Literature Review

*The Color Purple* has undergone a great number of scholarly studies with much focus on the disciplines of feminism, theory of trauma, and identity formation. Nonetheless, in spite of a thorough psychological and emotional trauma contact within the novel, Lacanian psychoanalysis, 'mirror stage, the Other, the desire' have not been implemented fully. Existing research has commented on the multiple aspects of the psychological development of the character Celie and has not paid significant attention to the framework of Lacan in the entirety. This literature review reacts on important studies critically explaining what they offer and what the gap is that this research aims to fill.

Calderon (2007, Redalyc) in "A Psychoanalytic Reading of Alice Walkers The Color Purple: The Female Signs in Celie's Discourses" of Desire deals with the theme of sexual awakening of Celie, her desire in the anti-feminist world of patriarchy. Though Calderon tries to apply Lacanian ideas, he is only applying it to the concept of desire and not the main concepts introduced by Lacan, the construction of identities and the mirror stage. The focus on the formation of desires in Celie is more present in the work of Calderon but the impact of traumas experienced in her early life as the repressed returns is not completely resolved by the facilitator in influencing the construction of her own identity. It will be noted that the current study will elaborate feminist reading suggested by Calderon to incorporate concepts of the Lacanian theory of desire, mirror stage and the Other, which can be thought of as a complete psychoanalytic perspective on the model of the problem psychologically transformed in Celie through trauma

Soleimani (2015), in his work "A Lacanian Reading of The Color Purple by Alice Walker" (2015, TJELLS) makes the first step toward a Lacanian approach to psychoanalysis, namely in terms of Celie becoming an empowered and capable person upon progressing to her next level. The emphasis of this awakening of Celie through language by Soleimani is similar to the theory by Lacan, which only partially covers the stage of the mirror to describe how Celie started developing her self-awareness. Nevertheless, the analysis is rather superficial, as it selectively employs the Lacanian theory and leaving out the complex examination of the Other and the influences of desire on defining Celie with her fractured identity. The psychoanalytic approach described in the paper fails to deal with the role of trauma in the reconstitution of the subjectivity of Celie, which is a gap in this study that is supposed to be filled by the full implementation of the psychoanalytic theory as developed by Lacan with trauma as the strategic organizing concept.

The article by Lewis, "A Critical Examination of Trauma in The Color Purple" (2017, SHU Scholar) provides a trauma-infused interpretation of *The Color Purple* and examines how the trauma of one of the characters, Celie, gets transferred to the subsequent generations and forms the basis of her emotional and psychological maturation. As much as Lewis rightly points to trauma as a pivotal theme to the story, the psychoanalytical paradigm is general and there is minimal interaction with the Lacan theory. The article does not give due attention to the way the aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis especially the notion of repression and the reemergence of the repressed can be applied to explain psychic processes that led to trauma and subsequent self-realization of Celie.

In her article, "A Feminist and Trauma Theory Analysis of The Color Purple" (2025, Journal of Pakistan Studies and Arts), Naseem discusses how Celie recovers emotionally in the context of the feminist theory and trauma theory and the importance of female solidarity in the healing process. Although Naseem defines most important relational dynamics between Celie and other women, the study fails to address the Lacanian psychoanalysis to clarify how Celie became emotionally healed by building her identity subjectively through the mirror stage and through the Other. My work will bridge this gap by applying Lacanian psychoanalysis to portray that Celie not only recovers through a relationship with

somebody she genuinely cares about but also through an unconsciously intense and psychoanalytically profound way, which is the awakening of the repressed trauma.

To conclude, substantial research has been done on *The Color Purple*; however, Lacanian psychoanalysis was not fully used on the novel. Current literature is unable to provide a comprehensive and detailed explanation of Celie and her psychological development and trauma without including the mirror stage, the Other, and desire into a singular framework authored by Lacan. The proposed study aims at addressing this gap by applying the Lacanian theory to the exploration of how trauma shapes the development of selfhood and identity formation in Celie in order to create a more psychologically appropriate and theoretically viable reading of the novel by Walker.

### Theoretical Framework

In this paper, *The Color Purple* will be examined in the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis with specific emphasis given to Lacanian ideas of the Mirror Stage, the Other, desire, and lack. These theories, bases of the initial ideas of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud, develop into the conceptualization of identity formation and trauma of Lacan. This theoretical framework will examine how this concept of subjectivity and fragmentation of the self, developed by Lacan, is applied to the psychological elements of the story in regards to traumas, repressions, and self-recovery concerning Celie.

*Psychoanalytic Stance Evolution; Freud to Lacan:* In order to see the theoretical development of the psychoanalytic stance of Lacan, it is necessary to consider how it was based on the foundational theories of Freud. In his compilation on the unconscious, Sigmund Freud made the concept that identity in humans was not based on deliberate intention, but through unconscious wishes and repressions. In his contribution to the development of identity in humans, Freud significantly discovered the role the self plays in the human identity development; the self is actually constructed by the process of repression of desire, fears, and memories, not by forgetting them, but rather by suppressing them as a phenomenon that has a constitutive effect on the subject, a phenomenon that cannot be easily controlled by a conscious mind. In his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud claimed that the major issue in trauma and neurosis is repression. To Freud identity formation was a dilemma between the conscious and unconscious with the repressed feelings and anxieties shaping the desires and anxiety of the subject and his identity (Freud, 1900/1953, p.215).

Though the ideas of Freud are the basis of the Lacan theory, they are changed in an immense way. Lacan advanced his ideas on how identity is formed and it did not take shape under a continuous format of internal development but under a format of mis-recognition. Lacan developed that of Freud repression and unconscious desires but unlike the latter who treated the self as an object that was constantly in battle with the subject, Lacan added the concept of the Mirror Stage to explain the experience of the subject as he experienced his own reflection. In the case of Lacan, this is the critical point of the self-development. The Mirror Stage, an early child developmental stage, wherein the first comprehension of an infant is his or her image, brings about a feeling of wholeness that is instantaneously frustrated by the understanding that the image of his or her reflection is not a real one, but idealized. This is the proper mis-recognition upon which the subject identity most importantly is erected; a never-ending search of something like a sense that can make the self-coherent and is never truly achieved (Lacan, 1977, p.2).

Whereas Freud emphasized on the process of repression and unconscious as the forms of the trauma, Lacan focused on the dynamics of the Other in the formation of the subject. The Other, in the Lacanian use of the term, can be defined as exterior figures or forces, such as parents, society, language, etc., which participate in organizing the identity of the subject by brokering the subject of the self. Lacan, in his turn, views identity as

something always constructed by the gaze of the Other, and the subject could never do without this external confirmation of his/her self-worth. This is an essential difference of the original image of the self-proposed by Freud where identity is a psychicalized and more internalized phenomenon (Lacan, 1977, p.10). The focus of Lacan mentioned in the Mirror Stage, the Other, and the identity creation process based on desire is more relational model of subjectivity than the earlier theories presented by Freud. However, where Freud viewed the self as a highly personal struggle, Lacan stated that identity was never established on exposure to other people and the subject interaction with the other people, especially the other, which offers the subject a reflecting pool, within which the subject will view themselves.

*Lacanian Concepts and their applications in the Color Purple:* The character in *The Color Purple* is the name of Alice Walker, Celie. The author uses her character to narrate a story of an identity that is torn apart by past trauma and repression, along with the oppressing power of patriarchy. Lacanian psychoanalysis applied to the case of Celie and her transformation as a trauma victim into an empowered person shows how the concepts of the Mirror Stage, the Other, and the desire structure applied to her psychoanalysis.

*The Mirror Stage:* The Mirror Stage by Lacan is one of the crucial stages in the development of self-hood: the moment when the infant perceives his/her reflection in a mirror and does not realize that it is not the full self. In the case of Lacan, this mis-recognition translates to having a lifelong quest of the ideal self which is not fully achieved anyway. This Lacanian framework can be used to describe the psychological development of Celie in the case. Since she is a young child, Celie has to endure self-destructive traumatic experiences of being sexually abused by her father, which not only derail her sense of identity but also make her incapable of imagining herself as an articulate subject. The identity of Celie is divided and her self-image is harmed with traumatic gaze of her father and husband and then Mister.

The fact that Celie does not recognize herself as complete subject can be found in the early letters addressed to God that she wrote in her effort to make sense of her trauma in the novel. The figures of patriarchy in her life have greatly influenced her sense of self, and the patriarchal figures hold an idealized image of her, which is not the way that she is. This can be compared to Lacan and his theory of the Mirror stage where the identity of the child is created out of the idealization image which never perfectly matches the disjointed self. The role of the object of male desire impedes the self-identification of Celie and prevents her from attaining a whole self because of the negation of her image (Walker, 1982, p.22).

*The Other:* The concept of the Other introduced by Lacan is very important in the context of understanding how the identity of Celie is formed by the external figures. The Other to Lacan is the figure or force that shapes the conditions of subjectivity, more often playing the role of a mirror that points back the identity of the subject. However, in the case of Celie, patriarchal figures, her father, Mister, and the men around her later on, form the Other that defines her. The trauma that she suffers is not the only solution that suppresses her psychiatric identity but also the manner in which these men see her. Celie is first of all represented as the object of the male desire, a passive of the male power and dominance.

Nevertheless, in working with her connections with women like Shug and Sofia, Celie starts to question and oppose the authority of the Other. As a free woman, Shug is another gaze that enables Celie to view herself as an entity in her own right. This association is akin to the concept of the mirror that Lacan presents, as Shug provides Celie with a new vision of herself, and no longer as an object of male desire but rather as an independent subject who can desire and express herself. Celie also starts to see herself and her desires with the help of Shug, reestablish her voice, and claim her independence (Walker, 1982, p.65).

*Desire and Lack:* According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, desire does not serve as the wish to have something but represents the lack of the subject. What the subject wants is that which he/she does not possess, what Lacan refers to as the *objet petit a*, the inaccessible object of desire that represents the emptiness at the subject. In Celie, she is not only seeking love or affection but when whole selfhood. The need is based on the deprivation that her trauma has caused: the deprivation of recognition, love and independence. The object of Celie develops over the course of the novel to begin as a wish to be treated considering her appearance as desired by a father and Mister, but subsequently, to the internal realization of her self-worth. Celie is taught by Shug to want herself and her subjectivity. This change of desire can be compared to the theory of the development of the subject presented by Lacan: Celie ceases to be an object of the desire but becomes a subject possessing the ability to create her identity (Lacan, 1977, p.11). Celie is able to unify her broken self by the novelist by focusing on the self, and she no longer wants others, but herself and the power therein to accomplish her self-realization objective.

The theories of Lacan are a strong source of analyzing psychological development of the character of Celie in *The Color Purple*. Mirror Stage, the Other, desire, and lack as the concepts that help to reveal the fragmented identity of Celie and her path to self-empowerment. Celie also retrieves her fragmented self through the relationships with other women, especially Shug, and her writing, and this is where the healing process of the trauma in which she is defined starts. Lacanian psychoanalysis does not solely serve the purpose of shedding light into the psychological aspect of Celie developing, but there is also an aspect of comprehending that trauma, repression and seeking recognition as means of identity formation. This is one of the theoretical frameworks which is based on the psychoanalytic school of thought by Freud and Lacan and therefore, one could understand the psychological transformation of Celie better and have a more comprehensive approach towards *The Color Purple*.

## Material and Methods

The research follows a qualitative, textual, and interpretative method of research based on the Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in order to explore how identity and trauma are constructed in *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. This work is a critical analysis of the primary text, which is the psychological growth of Celie expressed through language, relationships, and structure of the narrative. The major concepts in Lacanian theory are used as methods of analysis to discuss the way trauma shatters the sense of self, and identity is built up using other dimensions of perception especially female relations and writing as an expression of self. The methodology also includes the critical prior encroachment of secondary academic literature to put the Lacanian theory into perspective and put the analysis into the academic discourse. Based on the previous theoretical background and conventional psychoanalytic critique, the study systematically applies it to the chosen textual moments of the novel in an attempt to substantiate the main premise that the journey of Celie is the process of misrecognition and repression to self-realization and empowerment. In the end, the given methodology will allow the coherent and theoretically informed reading of the text on the topic of trauma and identity formation.

## Results and Discussion

*Fragmented Subjectivity and the Trauma of the Mirror Stage:* The mental state of Celie in the novel, *The color purple*, is a representation of the fractured subjectivity as defined by Lacan where the creation of the ego is inconsistently formed by trauma instead of a state of recognition. Lacan argues that the ego commences with the stage of misrecognition in the mirror, which creates an illusion that creates coherence, hiding a world fragmented in pieces (Lacan, 1977, p.2). This illusion of unity is predetermined even in early life by Celie. Her subjectivity is determined not by self-recognition but by sexual violation and by imposed silence which deprive her of creating a stable ego. According to

Cathy Caruth, trauma is not completely assimilated during the occurrence but is recurring back through repetition and the later appreciation of it (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). This lateness is present in the fragmented manner of narrative voice of Celie in which she reveals a self that has not integrated. The opening injunction— “You better not never tell anybody but God. It’d kill your mammy” (Walker, 1982, p.1), is a traumatic dictum, which collapses speech into secrecy. The letters by Celie are therefore a derailed reflection of the self, a self that is made by fear and not by recognition. She admits, “I don’t know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive” (p.17), which highlights the weakness of the ego in the situation of the formation of the symbolic entry by means of violence instead of validation.

Judith Herman, a trauma theorist, highlights the fact that chronic abuse is a restructuring of identity around survival and not agency (Herman, 1992, p.95). This is exactly the state of Celie at a young age of subjectivity; an ego that is fabricated through the element of endurance rather than of desire. Rather than providing imaginary wholeness, the mirror stage turns into the location of psychic discontinuity, Celie finds herself imprisoned in false and reduced identity. This fragmentation is also supported by the fact that Celie continues to erase herself whenever she is in a reflective state. As she sees, “I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That’s how come I know trees fear man” (Walker, 1982, p.23), she expresses the dissociative mode that is quite similar to the interpretation of Lacan concerning the defensive reaction of the subject to the trauma. The idea of turning into wood is an indication that an attempt to avoid bodily and psychic pain is made through the suspension of subjectivity at all. According to Slavoj Žižek, trauma tends to cause a dead zone in subjectivity where an individual remains alive by retreating into the lack of desire and recognition (Žižek, 1991, p.44).

*The Patriarchal Other and the Production of Silence:* The Other by Lacan is the key to comprehending how Celie is silenced in terms of the identity imposed on her by patriarchal structures. The Other is the symbolical order dominating the language, law and meaning in which the subject is placed in the social relations (Lacan, 1977, p.10). This symbolic power is expressed by the patriarchal authorities in *The Color Purple* that determine the life of Celie by authoritarianism and marginalization. The demand of control by Mister makes Celie an object in his home and this status is echoed when she remarks; “he beat me like he beat the children” (Walker, 1982, p.23). This analogy wipes out her subjectivity putting her beyond the adult agency and symbolic marks. This is a very important addition of the Lacanian theory complemented by the analysis of patriarchy by bell hooks which argues that domination by patriarchy is exacerbated by its capacity to normalize violence and eliminate the marginal voices, especially those of Black women, the misery of which becomes socially invisible (hooks, 1984, p. 84). Celie adopts this invisibility and she admits, “I feel just like i’m not there” (Walker, 1982, p.44). Such erasure is in line with the assertion made by Lacan that the subject can only exist as far as how it is perceived in the symbolic order. The silence of Celie is not, thus, the act of passivity but is the consequence of being symbolically excluded.

The other is the patriarchal force that deprives her of language and meaning, creating a subject whose existence is material, but not symbolic. Celie is oppressed, according to this perspective, in a psychoanalytic and socio-political manner which involves a symbolic hierarchy in which the male as a source of power is prioritized and the female subject is unspeakable. Patriarchal Other power is also demonstrated in the fact that Celie sublimates to misogynistic discourse. She says, “I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice it” (Walker, 1982, p.196). Although this line later marks the awakening of the spirit, the lack of it initially indicates the dominance of the Other that governs the symbolic world of Celie to the fullest possible extent. According to Lacan, the subject never speaks in the first person but rather in the Other: a language its counterpart speaks (Lacan 20). That Celie cannot recognize beauty or value at a young age is a reflection of her symbolic non-inclusion in the meaning itself. According to Luce Irigaray,

a feminist theorist, the language of the patriarch makes women objects instead of subjects who talk (Irigaray, 1985, p.133). Such progressive re-possession of the perception by Celie is hence a displacement of power of the Other, in a way that disrupts the symbolic monopoly that used to characterize her silence.

*Desire, Lack, and the Emergence of Subjectivity:* According to the Lacanian psychoanalysis, desire emerges out of lack and is a continuous motion but not out of satisfaction (Lacan, 1977, p.11). The trauma experienced at an early age by Celie virtually eliminates desire and, thus, separates her from pleasure and bodily agency. Domination interferes with recognition as Jessica Benjamin observes whereby desire is subdued with submission (Benjamin, 1988, p.47). The confession made by Celie- "I don't even look at mens. That's the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I'm not scared of them" (Walker, 1982, p.73)-indicates the shift back to desire in a resistant patriarchal writing. Such re-orientation is an important psycho-psychological break through because desire is now emerging beyond the logic of domination. As an alternative mirror, Shug Avery allows Celie to see herself as a desiring subject instead of an object. Celie recounts what might be said to be embodied pleasure in one of the most transformative moments of the novel: "For the first time in my life, I feel just right" (p.89). This scene is quite the reprocessing of the desire in terms of new symbolic relations as Lacan himself writes. Shug is recognized enabling Celie to experience herself through affirmation than none based on violence.

According to the arguments of feminist psychoanalytic critics, intimacy between two sexes in male dominated societies is usually controlled to serve the mechanisms of psychic redemption and not deviance (Mitchell, 1974, p. 66). The connection between Celie and Shug, in turn, allows restoring the subjectivity partially. Moreover, the growing attraction in Celie upheavals the patriarchal self-ownership economy, which formerly characterized her body. She continues to say, later; "My mind run a little crooked. However, I do not believe that I feel worse than no one else" (Walker, 1982, p.191). This statement is of great Lacanian importance as it signifies imaginary identification to a symbolic assertion. The desire no longer demands confirmation by the Other but, on the contrary, starts to express itself. According to Zizek, complete emergence of desire is attained through subjective emergence in which the desire is not governed by the external authority (Žižek, 1991, p.57). The awakening desire of Celie does not eradicate lack; but rather, it is converted to a generative space through which agency is produced hence the assertions by Lacan that desire does not eliminate subjectivity on the contrary, it generates a subjective space.

*Writing, Language and Reconstruction of the Self:* Language comes to define Lacan as the place of subjectivity, which is constituted and alienated; the subject joins the symbolic order at the price of the entire self-presence (Lacan, 1977, p.7). The early writings of Celie are seen as a way of survival and not a way of self-authorship. Nevertheless, with the further development of her psychic state, writing is an arena of symbolic agency. The personages change, writing to God to writing to Nettie- "DEAR NETTIE, I do not write to God any more. I write to you" (Walker, 1982, p.178) indicates a paradigmatic shift in the attitude that Celie has towards the Other. This is further refined by Julia Kristeva, who considered language as a location where identity is built. According to Kristeva, narrative can enable the marginalized subjects to renegotiate the symbolic exclusion through re-inscribing themselves into the discourse (Kristeva, 1984, p.124). The process of writing transforms Celie's confession to self-definition thus helping her circumscribe all the trauma instead of being crippled by it.

Terry Eagleton remarks that psychoanalysis healing fails to remove alienation, but rather reorganizes the subject position of the language (Eagleton, 1996, p. 142). By writing, Celie takes her story as hers, and claims to be symbolically present in a system that formerly refused her acknowledgment. Lack is now spoken and not silently tolerated through language. Moreover, the language of Celie is changing which can be explained by the transition to submission. When she tries to deal with Mister:

Then I feel Shug shake me. Celie, she say. And I come to myself. I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here. Amen, say Shug. Amen, amen. (Walker, 1982, p.207)

She does not apologize but proclaims it using language. Lacan points out that being a subject of speaking means a position of being in the symbolic order instead of a repetition of a discourse that is forced (Lacan, 1977, p.63). This struggle is the beginning of symbolic agency in which language is used as a tool of self-expression instead of a tool of self-repression by Celie. Writing, therefore, is not a therapy but rather a symbolic reconstitution, according to which Celie can live in language and not erase herself.

*Trauma, Healing, and the Limits of Wholeness:* Although it seems that Celie is empowered by such transformation, Lacanian psychoanalysis opposes the discourse of a full-scope psychic healing. According to Bruce Fink, trauma cannot be experienced entirely into consciousness but instead it remains as an absence of structure that forms subjectivity with time (Fink, 1997, p. 98). The subsequent contemplation of Celie proves the absence of trauma removal but, rather, it is a redirection to the trauma. Her statement, - "I am pore, I am black, I am ugly and cannot cook... But I am here" (Walker, 1982, p.207)-indicates that imperfection is made at peace with instead of being brought to an ideal ego. The acceptance is consistent with the modern trauma theory which focuses on the resilience instead of recovery. Maximum Dominick LaCapra's one of the arguments is that trauma should not be resolved but instead, it should be worked through (LaCapra, 2001, p. 70). It is this principle that manifests in Celie as she finds herself in her ultimate form: she does not overcome lack but knows how to live with it without annihilating herself. Her subjectivity is incomprehensive, but relational, no longer subject to domination.

Instead of becoming whole, Celie, in Lacanian sense, attains symbolic agency, distributive selfhood, and existential selfhood within a state of limitation. The very end with Celie having her peace-de-Dieu. "DEAR GOD. DEAR STARS, DEAR TREES, DEAR SKY, DEAR PEOPLES. DEAR EVERYTHING. DEAR GOD" (Walker, 1982, p.285). Such amplifications of address are indicative of change of reliance on individual Other to plural symbolic world. Lacan also points out that the subject is never in isolation; absolutely it is always in relation (Lacan, 1977, p.21). This is the understanding of Celie in her last pose: under the influence of symbolic connections instead of oppression. *The color purple*, therefore portrays healing not as finalization, but as a constant self-awareness under the disappearance of possessions, trauma, and relation cumulateness.

## Conclusion

This research exposes that *The Color Purple* is an identity formation process that is psychologically fragmented and trauma-oriented, due to symbolic domination, lack, and misrecognition. The psychoanalytic analysis of the situation through a Lacanian perspective has revealed that the mirror stage was interrupted by Celie because she was sexually abused and forbidden to speak out her mind at a young age and the subject could not develop a coherent ego and was instead a subject shaped around survival as opposed to desire. Patriarchal power functions as the Other which governs the language, recognition, and agency of Celie making her identity undiscernible as belonging to the symbolic order. The paper goes further to establish that desire serves as the crucial location of psychic opposition especially through the relationship of Celie with Shug Avery who helps her gain a different form of acknowledgement beyond patriarchal domination. Also, writing is another important symbolic activity because of which Celie slowly regains subjectivity and the language ceases to be a tool of oppressing, and it becomes the territory of expressing oneself. All these findings confirm that trauma, lack and symbolic exclusion is not an impediment to subject formation but looks being constitutive factors that influence the changing sense of self experienced by Celie.

Finally, this study focuses on *The Color Purple* as a complicated psychoanalytic study about subjectivity where the healing is not treated with wholeness or closure but rather with the bargaining of the trauma and deprivation in the symbolic order. Through the Lacanian theory and trauma, the work supports its main thesis that the character of Celie can be discussed as the movement of the symbolic erasure into the negotiable agency but not full psychic integration. The novel debunks redemptive regimes of empowerment by projecting the continuation of fragmentation and at the same time maintaining the self-recognition and meaning. However, in the end, this study will add to the literature by showing that the psychoanalytic theory is still relevant today, whereby marginalized identities are analyzed and that *The Color Purple* has been re-framed as a text that reveals the structural formations through which subjectivity is harmed and revitalized.

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