

ASEMKA

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OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS
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ASEMKA: EDITORIAL

The Number 11(1) June 2021 Edition of *ASEMKA, The Bilingual Literary Journal of the University of Cape Coast* contains seven (7) papers centred on diverse areas of teaching and research in the Humanities, spanning between themes in Literature and Religion. This Edition contains only one (1) manuscript in French. The remaining six (6) are in English. The papers span between thematic areas in Literature and Religious Studies. The contributors are from Ghana and Nigeria. These papers were taken through rigorous blind peer-review processes and painstaking editorial work.

First Section

*Britnum, A. G.'s paper titled, "Mariama Bâ/Ramatoulaye en un combat douteux dans *Une si longue lettre* »,*

Second Section

*Nyatname, P. N.'s paper titled "An ecocritical reading of Victor Yankah's *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana and Sikaman*" examines two plays of Victor Yankah concepts within analytical framework of ecocriticism. It is a critical assessment of Yankah's ecodrama in the light of ecocriticism, a field of literary theory and criticism. It draws on the broader concepts and discourses of ecocriticism and demonstrates how the playwright shares a symbiotic relationship which has become a significant feature of the selected plays. This is to emphasise Yankah's view and preoccupations about the mutual relationship between the human other and nature - the natural world of environment with the view to prove the playwright's concern about the interference of human beings into the world of nature. A situation which adversely results in the disruption of the symbiotic (human-nature) relationship. The significance of the paper lends credence to ways in which Yankah provokes environmental debate and a rethinking in African playwrights concerning environmental issues to raise awareness and inspire environmental consciousness and ecological sustainability among people in Africa, Ghana in particular. The findings reveal both the epistemic and retributive forces of nature as well as raising concerns about the environment, ecological consciousness in advocating for ecological sustainability in modern African theatre and dramatic literature scholarship. The paper offers insight into and expand the frontiers of the discourse of ecocriticism in the global south and adds to the relatively new and developing interest in environmental discourses on the African continent and what they reveal about African environmental consciousness and ecological dimensions.*

Amissab-Arthur, H. W.'s paper, "**Examining mothering: Race and abjection in Wilson's *Our Nig* and Walker's *The Color Purple***" analyses the concept race and abjection in African-American women's writings. It specifically emphasizes the idea of mothering during the freedom epoch of the African Americans after slavery. The focus is on mother characters in the novels of Wilson and Walker. The paper borders on some thematic components which come together in unravelling the identities of both the mother characters and their children when faced with issues of race and abjection.

Awojobi, P. O.'s paper, "**The Ministry of Moses Orimolade and the prophetic tradition of Israel: An ecclesio-historical study**", examines the ministry of Moses Orimolade and the prophetic tradition of Israel from an ecclesio-historical perspective. The thrust of his paper is to investigate the origin, and the place of ecstatic prophecy in ancient Israel and its reflections in Moses Orimolade's prophetic ministry in Nigeria. Historical method was used for the research. It uses historicity and ecclesiology as conceptual framework to contend that Israel's prophetic tradition started before Israel settled in Canaan where she interacted with other nations. While it cannot be disputed that Israel must have been influenced by the culture of its neighbours, there were some elements in the religion that were peculiar to Israel. The study concludes that Israelite prophetic heritage cannot be compared with the divination in ancient Near East. There exist a parallel between ecstatic prophetic ministry in ancient Israel and Moses Orimolade prophetic ministry in Nigeria. The paper recommends that contemporary Prophets in Nigeria and beyond must strive to fulfil divine mandate received by them at all cost.

Ofei, D. & Oppong Adjei, D.'s paper titled, "**Sexual Identities in Africa: A Queer Reading of Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees***" analyses queer sexual identities in Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*. It draws on the broader concept of queer analysis and demonstrates how *Under the Udala Trees* uses its narrative to conceive space and language whose midpoint encompasses literary innovations and the significance of some experiences of queer individuals within an African setting. Ultimately, instead of simply emphasizing these sexualities as alternative solutions in adverse conditions to some individuals who cannot help being the way they are, the paper unravels the literary merits such as shock, characterization and thematic values of queer sexualities in Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*.

Sam, C. A. & Nkansah, S. K.'s paper, "**Evidences of our Inhumanity: Representations of Evil and the Quest for Postcolonial Healing in Tadjoo's *The Shadows of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda***",

explores the literary representations of evil in relation to the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda while simultaneously looking at therapeutic strategies in healing the wounds of the past as depicted in Veronique Tadjó's *The Shadows of Imana: Travels in the heart of Rwanda* using Kant's conceptions of evil and postcolonial literary theory. The results of the analysis is that hatred, otherness, genocide and remembrance constitute conversations for understanding travel writings and historical violence.

Inusah, A-R.'s paper, "**Lundaa as speech surrogate of Dagbamba**" examines surrogate language in Dagbani, a Mabia language spoken in the Northern Region of Ghana. The paper pays attention to its functions and its transformation from traditional to the contemporary sociocultural issues. Premised on participant-observation, the paper supports the multi-toned language represented on a pressure drum capable of many pitches. It attests that the *lundaa* 'pressure drum' is a speech surrogate used among Dagbani speakers. The *lundaa* has a wide distribution of functions but this paper is focused on the core functions of drum language that include *molo* 'announcement', *salima* 'Panegyric', *ginguani* 'invocation' and *naba* 'proverbs' as examples of drum literature and transformation. The paper suggests that the communication potential of the *lundaa* rhythms and its interpretation leads to an understanding of the sociocultural life of the people.

Examining mothering: Race and abjection in Wilson's *Our Nig* and Walker's *The Color Purple*

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Abstract

The end of slavery sought to grant freedom to Blacks. However, a plethora of African-American novels portray different impressions that this perception of freedom is not as entailed as should be. African-American women writers have subtly and bluntly, portrayed how the African-American mother characters in their novels deal with segregation and abjection as freed women in the society. Employing the Race theory, this paper focuses on mothering as a unique and complex practice of motherhood that empowers the African-American woman and as a non-patriarchal experience in Walker's *The Color Purple* and Wilson's *Our Nig*. The paper concludes that Walker and Wilson's novels analysed in this paper are hinged on race and abjection through the mother characters as well as thematic issues discussed in the study. This paper also has implications for African-American studies.

Keywords: abjection; african-american; mothers; mothering; race; slaves.

Introduction

In describing race, Delgado and Stefanic (2000:8) describe identity as being ordinary and not aberrational. This means identity is an everyday activity which is difficult to address except where the concepts of equality is vividly spelled out. This definition brings to the fore the idea of the segregation between the whites and the blacks which is evident in both novels under study. In defining abjection, we employ Kristeva (1982:4) who is of the view that it is neither lack of cleanliness nor health that causes abjection but rather what disturbs identity, systems and order. To her, abjection does not respect borders, positions, rules, etc. This paper discusses the black mother characters and how they deal with racial segregation and abjection as freed people, as well as the children they

bear and how the children survive race and abjection in the society. By employing the terminology “freed people”, we imply the era of freedom when slavery has been abolished and Black mothers are allowed or made to live anywhere they want. The analysis will focus on the characters Frado in *Our Nig* and Celie in *The Color Purple*. These two characters are justifiably used because the novels are set in the era when chattel slavery no longer exists, but black people go through segregation and abjection in communities. These two characters, Frado and Celie, are victims of circumstances taken by their freed mothers who are expected to know better. The victimization will affect them all their lives, both as daughters and as mothers themselves.

The Color Purple by Alice Walker focuses on two sisters, Celie and Nettie, who grow up together but are separated due to the diabolic nature of their stepfather, who wants to rape both sisters. Celie, the elder of the two, who is married off at a very tender age narrates her life in letters to God and her sister, Nettie, who has relocated to Africa, and describes all the horrors she goes through as a mother and a wife.

Wilson’s *Our Nig* is about a young woman, Frado, who is abandoned by her mother at a very tender age to a white family, the Bellmonts, and the problems and abuses she faces as a result of being a mulatto. She finally leaves the place after so many years and gets married to an ex-slave and has a child.

In analysing the two literary texts, it is important to observe that the institution of motherhood and the practice of mothering have undergone various redefinitions. Some scholars are of the view that motherhood is under the influence of patriarchy, whereas, mothering is an experience which is a source of power and without patriarchal influence (Green 2004; O’Reilly 2004; Rich 2004). The African-American woman writer therefore portrays mother characters who are empowered to be independent and nurture their children as well as take various decisions concerning their welfare whether it favours the children or not. It is based on this view of the term mothering, that the mother characters in these novels will be analysed. These novels facilitate my response to the research question: In what ways racial segregation and abjection help define mothering amongst women in black communities in Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig* and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*? This analysis is an attempt to answer the research question on race and abjection in relation to mothering amongst women in the black community. The focus of this analysis, therefore, is to critically examine the mothers and their children in the novels *Our Nig* by Harriet Wilson and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker as black women who lived in societies surrounded by racism and abjection. Based on these concepts and definitions, we analyse the two novels by Wilson and Walker based on the components of abandonment, step-fathers, religion and society.

Abandonment by mothers

The issue of racial segregation which entails restricting people to certain areas on the basis of their race is constructed and poignantly revealed through various issues. The first issue to be discussed is the idea of abandonment by mothers which is linked to poverty. The issue of poverty is closely associated with women in the two novels. Black women are always poor due to lack of education and the unconscious quest of mothering which inhibit them from seeking for more profitable ventures. In the quest to alleviate themselves from poverty, Mag Smith and Celie's mother (name not mentioned), the mothers of Frado and Celie respectively abandon them. This abandonment is to make the young girls fend for themselves. Frado's mother abandons her to a white family whilst Celie's mother dies and leaves her together with her siblings. The idea of abandonment by these two women is implicated by a literal death and an actual death. This idea of death is supported by the novel which confirms that Frado never came across her mother again even though she had the hope that one day she would be reunited with her. The idea of never meeting her mother again signifies the end to the relationship and bond they never had together. The literalness of this death is evident in the psychological state of the child. Hence, Frado, though might never have voiced her feelings and emotions towards her mother for abandoning her, psychologically, erases all memories of her mother so she can forget her, move on and progress in life. The idea of shutting her mother out of her life is captured in the following passage:

Why the impetuous child entered the house, we cannot tell; the door closed and Mag hastily departed. Frado waited for the close of day, which was to bring back her mother. Alas! It never came. It was the last time she ever saw or heard of her mother.”
(p. 23).

In Celie's case, though her mother physically dies, it would be inadequate to ignore the fact that before her mother's death, she had “cussed” her (Celie). She writes, “Dear God, My mama dead. She die screaming and cussing. She scream at me. She cuss at me... she ast me bout the first one Whose it is? I say God's...Finally she ast Where it is? I say God took it” (1982:2). The screaming and “cussing” are because Celie's mother is aware of the amorous happenings between her husband and her daughter Celie but is refusing to discuss it with anybody. She is aware that her husband is taking advantage of her ill health to rape her daughter. She, therefore, vents her anger

on her daughter through the screaming and “cussing” even though she knows the fault is not from her daughter.

Interference of step-fathers

It is important to note that the interference of step-fathers in the lives of these characters is another factor that does them more harm than good. These men are in no way kind towards their step-daughters. Frado’s step-father, Jim, an African, encourages her mother to abandon her at an age when most children begin to bond with their parents. It is assumed that his advice to Frado’s mother concerning the abandonment is to enable them (himself and Frado’s mother) have enough time for each other without any interference whatsoever from a highly exuberant child. It is quite intriguing to realise that a mother would abandon her only daughter and refuse to look back ever. This advice by the step-father initiates the entire plot of the story of Frado as well as her life. It is obvious that the bond between the two is strained even at that young age. The step-father, in my opinion, does not have any affection for her and as such is able to channel his nonchalant feelings towards the girl through her mother.

It can be argued from one perspective that Frado is hated by her own mother because she is a mulatto who does not fit wholly into any of the two recognised societies; the black or the white. She is a product of the two opposing societies and as such cannot lay claim to belong to any of them. According to Ernest (1994:428), cultural identity is maintained at the expense of an individual’s moral character, hence though Mag Smith, the mother of Frado who is also a white woman repents of her prejudice, she remains an outsider and Frado becomes the outcome of the transgressions. She is, therefore, the cultural product who is defined before birth. This identity eventually finds way on the title page as *Our Nig*. Ernest opines that Frado is a victim of both an oppressive culture as well as her experiences. It is of interest to note that Mag Smith, mother of Frado, after the death of Frado’s father, whom she married willingly, marries another black man. Therefore, it can be established that the idea of racism on the part of Mag Smith pertains not to the men she marries, but to the children she has. It is interesting, therefore, to note that the issue of racism does not only pertain to the society but also in some instances, from mother to child in the case of Mag Smith and Frado and also among the blacks themselves. This idea of intra-racism in the novel extends to the step-fathers as well. Their cases challenge O’Reilly’s (2004:11) assertion that:

In a racist culture that deems black children inferior, unworthy, and unlovable, maternal love of black children is an act of resistance; in loving her children the mother instills in them a loved sense of self and high esteem, enabling them to defy and subvert racist discourses that naturalise racial inferiority and commodify blacks as other and object.

The mothers of these two characters do not attempt in any way to provide sufficient love to them or instill in them these acts of self and high esteem. The racist discourses are dominant in their own households, and as such there is no need to search for them elsewhere. Even at home where there is to be love and care and show of affection, Celie and Frado are made to feel less important and a burden to their families because their mothers do not inculcate in them the love and affection needed in a household setting.

Celie's step-father treats her badly when he rapes and gets her pregnant at a very tender age of fourteen. The death of Celie's mother marks the beginning of adulthood for Celie as she takes on the role of a mother to her siblings and a 'wife' to her step-father. Her two babies both disappear mysteriously leaving her to imagine that one is killed, and the other, sold. Celie's step-father finally marries her off to 'Mr_' and describes her to Mr._, according to Celie, as:

She ugly. He say. But she 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... Fact is, he say, I got to git rid of her. She too old to be living here at home... (1982:8).

It is not surprising that Alphonso, Celie's step-father illegally inherits the house in which they live from Celie's father and indirectly evicts the dead man's children from the place. By marrying Celie off and by attempting to have sexual affair with Nettie, Celie's younger sister, Alphonso chases both children out of their rightful house. It is only years later that the truth comes to light and Celie together with her sister Nettie are able to rightfully own the house after his death.

It is significant to note, therefore, that the step-fathers of both Celie and Frado maltreat and care less for them. Considering the period of freedom, where blacks also have access to free education, it is significant to note that these girls are not put through school by their step-fathers. Instead, they are tagged with derogatory names and looked down upon by their step-fathers. Celie is continuously raped by her step-father which affects her both physically

and psychologically. The freed man, specifically the African-American man, is not exceptional with regard to rape. The issue of rape is a universal phenomenon. As such, I do not in any form connect the psyche of the African-American man raping his step-daughter to any trauma experienced during slavery. The African-American man under slavery would kill to protect his kind, especially the females. It is at this point that I would agree with Freud in what he refers to as the pleasure principle. This principle has been defined as the desire of instantaneity of satisfaction of instinctual drives and which ignores both moral and sexual boundaries. It is the ignorance of the sexual boundaries by the unconscious mind and instinct that propels the act of rape between a step-father and a step-daughter.

It can be argued that all these forms of maltreatment, be it physical or psychological, stem from the fact that their mothers helplessly look on whilst all these happenings are ongoing. The refusal of these mothers to stand up for their children might be based on the reason that there is the fear of losing these men who had agreed to marry them after the deaths of their husbands. This, therefore, raises the question whether these mothers looked on helplessly because there were not enough “quality” African-American men in the society or did they sacrifice their daughters for the phallus? Mag Smith, Frado’s mother, who is white, is shunned by the white society because of her association with a black man and her pregnancy. She welcomes another man after the death of her husband Jim. It is this new husband, also a black man, who advises her to leave Frado behind and journey with him to seek greener pastures.

Similarly, Celie’s father is lynched by a white mob, a situation which leaves her mother deranged and ostracized by the community because the community does not want to associate with the wife of a man who had issues with the white community. This ostracism continues until the arrival of Alphonso who marries and stays with her till her death. The marriage to Alphonso is a mark of acceptance and care by at least one person in the community. Its significance is of immense importance to Celie’s mother. The fear, therefore, of being neglected by him like the rest of society makes her vulnerable to the control of her husband, resulting in her inability to protect her children. It is worth clarifying that these women embrace the new men in their lives wholeheartedly even to the detriment of their own children because of the assurance of love demonstrated by these men which caters for their emotional well-being as well as the economic and the physical assurances added to it. These vulnerable women, both illiterates and poor, relieve their roles and duties to the men they marry due to the psychological stigmatisation they endure from the society over time: being a Black mother without a husband. Therefore, the step-fathers assume hegemonic roles over the

households and play very important but negative roles in the lives of their step children. It must be noted, therefore, that children like Frado and Celie not only face abjection in the society, but right within their homes in the forms of their step-fathers who call them “black devils”, “ugly” and all sorts of names which is a hallmark for identifying black people in the communities whilst their mothers helplessly look on.

Religion as source of comfort

Another important issue to discuss under the issue of racism and abjection is religion. Religion plays a very important role in the lives of both Frado and Celie and is a very substantive issue with regards to racism. Frado seeks solace in God right from the moment she learns to read and dedicates most of her time to read the Bible and attending church meetings. She expresses such love in God and this is obvious in her active involvement in church activities and the things of God. She also expresses her hatred for God at a particular point in time when she has a conversation with James, a son of Mr. and Mrs. Bellmont.

“Who made me so?” “God”, answered James

“Did God make you?” “Yes”

“Who made Aunt Abby?”

“God”

“Who made your mother?”

“God”

“Did the same God that made her make me?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, I don’t like him”

“Why not?”

“Because he made her white, and me black. Why didn’t he make us both white?” (1859:60)

The conversation between Frado and James signifies the essence of religion in the politics of colour. It also buttresses the importance of Celie’s fear and outburst. Frado expresses her hatred for God because of being coloured. The purpose of the hatred is not in the colour per se, but in the observations she has made with regard to Black people and religion. She is also of the view which is expressed through her attitude and thoughts that religion is for the White man and no matter how hard she attempts, she (a Black person) would in no way be associated with heaven which is for religious people. Though she reads the Bible daily and religiously, she has no confidence

in going to heaven like all those around her. Though she feels she loves God, she is so unsure of many tenets of the religion. Her thoughts on heaven reveal her inconsistency with whatever she is doing.

Her doubt was, is there a heaven for the black? She knew there was one for James, and Aunt Abby, and all the good white people, but was there any for blacks? She had listened attentively to all the minister said, and all Aunt Abby had told her; but then it was all for white people (1859:73).

The level of abjection of the Black people concerning the religion is vividly spelled out in the mind of Frado. The Black person is relegated to the background in church and scarcely mentioned. It is therefore very easy to assume that salvation is for only the whites or all persons. If heaven is for the white, why did God hate her so much as to make her black? Her hatred for God can be justifiably argued from her standpoint. To sum up her argument, there is no essence of making a person black if only whites would be allowed in heaven. To compound her insecurity as pertaining to heaven, Mrs. Belmont, her guardian discusses with Mr. Belmont about Frado's consistency in going to church. She says,

I have let Nig go out to evening meetings a few times, and if you will believe it, I found her reading the Bible today, just as though she expected to turn pious nigger, and preach to white folks. So now you see what good comes of sending her to school (1859:74).

Mrs. Belmont voices the fear inhibiting Frado all this while. She does not expect a black person reading the Bible to become pious, not to talk about preaching salvation to the white. It has to be vice versa according to Mrs. Belmont. Frado's consistent attendance to church services is abominable to Mrs. Belmont who does not believe in educating the black person.

Celie, on the other hand, writes her feelings and thoughts to God at the initial part of the novel. She seeks solace in writing to God. Her strong belief in God as a confidante is expressed in her letters. All her letters begin with "Dear God" to signify how emotionally close she feels God is to her. According to Priya K (2014:52), Celie's "only confirmation of existence to herself is the letters initially written to God both in hope and hopelessness". Her trust in and self-reliance on God is portrayed in her telling God about how she feels, what she thinks and how she thinks. To her, the ability to spell the word God is an achievement and an assurance of some sort. To her

therefore, “Never mine, never mine, long as I can spell G-o-d I got somebody along” (1982: 17). This indicates the reliance on and commitment of Celie to God at the beginning of the novel. This is frequent in the novel as Celie shows so much love and dedication to God till the latter part of the novel. After learning all that there is to know about her late father and late mother, her affection for God takes another dimension. She accuses God of all the bad happenings in her life and likens God to man. She says:

What God do for me? I ast...Yeah, I say, and he give me a lynched 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...Let 'im hear me, I say. If he ever listened to poor colored women the world would be a different place, I can tell you. (1982:192)

The essence of Celie's blasphemous statement is an attempt to criticise and draw God's attention to the fact that she has been ill-treated because of her colour. There is a dramatic dialectical change in her psychology: from loving God to hating God. This can be attributed to maturity. Celie has matured and psychologically grown as a character as compared to how she was presented at the beginning of the novel. She is, thus, presented as a dynamic character who undergoes changes as the plot of the story unfolds. Her growth is accounted for on the basis of experience whilst living with her husband and her interactions and relationships with other characters. As Faurar (2011:494) puts it:

The interrelation between the individual and the whim of locations Celie is subjected to is meaningful in the sense that the spaces that Celie occupies have the power to bring about redemption. Therefore, the spaces she experiences, either domestic, spiritual or indulged in fantasies, although eliciting inhumane experiences, they also represent an essential means to convey the engulfing element of transformation which integrates physical healing and spiritual salvation (p. 494).

Celie is of the view that maybe God would have made her life much easier if she had been of another colour. The acceptance of being a poor coloured woman is an important identification observed by Celie. This blasphemous announcement by Celie comes out after so many years of staying faithful and writing to God almost every day. It is obviously a turning point for

a woman like Celie to make such pronouncements. The life of a coloured woman is one that requires so much yet, given less. In terms of education, power, mothering as well as working, the Black woman feels woefully inadequate as compared to her fellow woman who is a White. Celie is asking for equality between the White woman and the Black woman from God. In buttressing this point, I refer to Araujo and Schneider (2017:199) who are of the view that Mrs. Belmont is observed to be the aggressive, abusive figure in the household though she is a woman. They agree with Leveen (2001:200) who argues that the Belmont house follows the imperatives of slavery and challenge the notion of white female authority by showing how unjust and aggressive a white woman in a position of power can be in relation to a Black woman.

Celie's strong belief in God and His abilities give her the courage to ask such a question. She represents the black woman, in what she stands for and what she inwardly seeks. Religion at this moment therefore becomes a tool with which the Black woman seeks to curb the issue of abjection and racism. To her therefore, only God is responsible for stopping the racial canker. Thyreen (1999:51) asserts that the identity of God in the novel is reduced to a being identified with oppressive white patriarchy, hence the reason why Celie addresses her letters to God. This is because she is ashamed of speaking directly to Him. The idea of God being reduced to oppressive white patriarchy, I agree to the extent that Celie displays that thought in the latter part of the novel when she refers to God as a man and displays her disappointment in Him. The other part which talks about Celie addressing her letters to God because of being ashamed speaking directly to Him is arguable to the extent that the whole idea of writing instead of speaking is a form of discourse for a suppressed individual. Her suppressed nature which is explained through oppression, sexual exploitation and physical abuse she undergoes is confined in her letters to God. She writes to God not because of shame but because she is lonely and suppressed and therefore finds it therapeutic to write.

The concept of religion is very important to the Black community. Frado and Celie for instance take solace, consolation and peace from their association with God through writing and reading. They are of the view that God alone is responsible for the life and plight of the Black woman and as such He alone can make things better or worse for them. To sum this interpretation up, I quote Fanon (2008:55) in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth* when he says, "a belief in fatality removes all blame from the oppressor; the cause of misfortunes and of poverty is attributed to God: He is Fate. In this way the individual accepts the disintegration ordained by God, bows down before the settler and his lot, and by a kind of interior restabilisation acquires a

stony calm”. In my conclusion, when God fails, He is likened to a common man or a racist. At other times, God is hated for the role He plays. The effect of racism therefore on religion is akin to that of the prejudice of whites against the blacks in the society.

The role of society in race and abjection

The role of society is another key factor in analysing the issue of race and abjection. Though both Frado and Celie find themselves in a free community, they are still victimised because of their colour. Frado has her share of the abjection right from the moment she sets foot in the Bellmont house. Her name becomes Nig, shortened form of the word Nigger. She is reminded of her colour every day of her life and made aware of not being in any way equal to the whites who have been kind enough to provide her with shelter. Leeven (2001:562) purports that the sub title of the novel “*Sketches from the Life of a free Black, in a Two-Story White-House, North. Showing that Slavery’s shadows fall even there*” gives the novel a set of both relations and disjunctions. To her therefore, the identity “nig” though assigned to a free black seems quite odd. The use of *Our Nig* itself indicates a collectively owned object rather than a self-owned subject.

She is ostracised during dinner time, and in the night, given a strange place to sleep. “Where would she sleep” asked Mary. “I don’t want her near me”. “In the L chamber,” answered her mother. “How’ll she get there?” asked Jack. “She’ll be afraid to go through that dark passage, and she can’t climb the ladder safely.” “She’ll have to go there; it’s good enough for a nigger,” was the reply (1859:51).

The various racist remarks by Mrs. Bellmont and her daughter Mary are clear indicators that they are not ready to accommodate or feel comfortable getting themselves involved with a black person. The incessant attributes and insults meted out to her represents the notion of the black being inferior in all aspects compared to that of a white person in a society. Farber (2014:472) likens *Our Nig* to a slave narrative and argues that the only deviation of the novel from the conventions of a slave narrative is that the level of oppression in *Our Nig* is through racism and not slavery.

With regard to education, the Bellmonts argue over whether to send Frado to school or not. This is because Mrs. Bellmont is of the view that there is no sense in attempting to educate people of colour who are incapable of elevation. Even at her tender age, Frado recognizes that she is going through

all the hardships at the Belmont house because of her colour. She thus remarks:

Oh! Oh! I heard, “Why was I made? Why can’t I die? Oh, what have I to live for? No one cares for me only to get my work. And I feel sick; who cares for that? Work as long as I can stand, and then fall down and lay there till I can get up. No mother, father, brother or sister to care for me, and then it is, You lazy nigger, lazy nigger-all because I am black! Oh, if I could die! (1859:69).

The colour of a person, when reiterated over a period of time in a negative way, influences the person in one way or the other. This is exactly how Frado feels after incessantly being called Nig by her guardian. The name Nig may not have had any implications on her, but the abuses that follow indicate that being of such a colour, has its negative appeal. According to Kocsoy (2013:1258), the title of the novel signifies racism and not affection. The dualities in the title and descriptive subtitle are evident as the words are juxtaposed to create the dualities of Nig/ Free Black, Free Black/ White house and North/ Slavery’s Shadows. These represent the contradictions of racist ideologies of the North. Though it is essential to note that not everyone in the house refers to her as Nig or abuses her, the impact made by Mrs. Belmont and her daughter, surpasses all the love and affection shown her by Mr. Belmont, James and Aunt Abby. This is because the acts of abuse together with the name Nig become one and complement each other.

She ast me Who is my husband, now I know all bout hers. She laugh a little. I say Mr._. She say, Sure nuff? Like she know all about him. Just didn’t know he was married. He a fine looking man, she say. Not a finer looking one in the county... We sure do thank you for your hospitality. She laugh again, look at the horses flicking flies off they rump. Horsepitality, she say. And I git it and laugh. It feel like to split my face. (1859:15).

Celie, on the other hand, meets the woman who adopted her daughter and strikes a conversation with her. Unlike most white people that the other characters meet in the novel, this woman is very friendly and hospitable. She answers Celie’s questions and chats heartily with her. This might be interpreted as a switch in norm, considering how other black characters in the novel are stigmatised and face abjection. This act of kindness may also be interpreted to be the role being played by the woman’s husband. He is a priest and as such

taught to embrace and love all humankind. This woman might therefore just assume her role as a reverend minister's wife who is supposed to be tolerant and accommodating. Though Celie lives in a society which accommodates both the whites and blacks, she does not encounter any racial subjugation or abjection with the white people. Whatever she encounters that is deemed as racism or abjection comes from her household and amongst her own people.

Conclusion

The issues of race and abjection in the two novels provide enough evidence that the African-American women writers found the need to narrate how women survived the crisis of race and abjection in the form of oppression. Through the characters of Frado and Celie, the mothering dispensation of their mothers is revealed through oppression which is an essential group experience for blacks. As posited by Kristeva (1982), the idea of abjection is immoral, sinister, scheming and shady. The oppression of being treated unfairly because of one's colour becomes a canker which characters like Celie and Frado go through every day of their lives, not only as children of black parents, but also as black children in the community. It is essential to note, that racism and abjection run through the African-American women's personal lives, society, religion, education, poverty, as well as discourses.

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