

Tuba BAYKARA \* 

**INHERITED BURDENS OR ANCESTRAL STRENGTHS?: RACE-BASED TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN BLUE DOOR**

**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to critically analyze *Blue Door: A Play with Original Songs* in the light of race-based transgenerational trauma theories and offers a deep exploration of the protagonist Lewis's internal conflict. Transgenerational trauma focuses on the effects of past horror such as slavery, colonization, or genocide on subsequent generations while race-based trauma analyzes the psychological and sociocultural impacts of racism and discrimination under the intersection of trauma with stigmatized identities and systemic power dynamics. Lewis, an accomplished mathematics professor, is in conflict with his black identity, suffering from insomnia one night when he begins to engage in dialogues with the spirits of his ancestors. These moments are portrayed as both traumatic and healing as a psychological toll of reconciling past and present. This study suggests that Lewis's interactions with the spirits serve as a confrontation with the weight of inherited trauma and the dissonance between his personal achievements and the cultural legacy he seeks to suppress. While the inherited trauma initially alienates Lewis from himself, the journey through his ancestral memories ultimately allows him to achieve a sense of healing. This study concludes that Lewis reconciles with his sense of self, embracing his ancestral past as an essential and inseparable component of his identity.

**Keywords:** transgenerational trauma, race-based trauma, *Blue Door*, Tanya Barfield, internal conflict

**MİRAS ALINAN YÜKLER Mİ YOKSA ATALARDAN GELEN GÜÇLER Mİ?: BLUE DOOR OYUNUNDA IRK TEMELLİ KUŞAKLAR ARASI TRAVMA**

**ÖZET**

Bu çalışma, *Blue Door: A Play with Original Songs* adlı oyunu ırk temelli kuşaklar arası travma teorileri ışığında eleştirel bir şekilde analiz etmeyi amaçlar ve başkahraman Lewis'in iç çatışmasını derinlemesine inceler. Kuşaklar arası travma, kölelik, sömürgeleştirme veya soykırım gibi geçmiş vahşetlerin sonraki nesiller üzerindeki etkilerine odaklanırken, ırk temelli travma, travmanın damgalanmış kimlikler ve sistemik güç dinamikleriyle kesiştiği noktada ırkçılık ve ayrımcılığın psikolojik ve sosyokültürel etkilerini irdeler. Başarılı bir matematik profesörü olan Lewis, siyahi kimliğiyle çatışma içindedir ve uykusuzluktan muzdarip olduğu bir gece atalarının ruhlarıyla diyaloga geçer. Bu anlar, geçmiş ve şimdiki zamanı uzlaştırmanın psikolojik bir bedeli olarak hem travmatik hem de iyileştirici olarak tasvir edilir. Bu çalışma, Lewis'in ruhlarla etkileşimlerinin, geçmişten miras kalan travmanın ağırlığı ve kişisel başarıları ile bastırmaya çalıştığı kültürel miras arasındaki uyumsuzlukla yüzleşme niteliği taşıdığını öne sürer. Miras alınan travma başlangıçta Lewis'i kendinden uzaklaştırırsa da, atalarının anıları boyunca yaptığı yolculuk sonunda ona bir iyileşme duygusu aşılar. Bu çalışma, Lewis'in benlik duygusuyla uzlaştığı ve kimliğinin temel ve ayrılmaz bir bileşeni olarak atalarının geçmişini benimsediği sonucuna varır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** kuşaklar arası travma, ırk temelli travma, *Blue Door*, Tanya Barfield, içsel çatışma

\* Assist. Prof. Dr., Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Faculty of Education, Department of English Language Teaching, Nevşehir/Türkiye, E-mail: tubabaykara@nevsehir.edu.tr / Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi ABD., Nevşehir/Türkiye, E-posta: tubabaykara@nevsehir.edu.tr

## Introduction

The complexity of human nature requires their actions to be considered from sociological and psychological perspectives. Trauma studies, hence, have expanded beyond the limits of medical research to involve broader areas incorporating social and cultural dimensions. Rather than merely focusing on the diagnosis and treatment of the psychological and physiological effects of trauma, trauma studies recognize that individual or collective experiences of trauma are deeply intertwined with social contexts including cultural norms, systemic inequalities, and collective histories. Since trauma is inherently complex, analyzing trauma requires a profound and multifaceted approach to understand its causes, effects, and consequences. Because of this complexity and sophistication, various frameworks are used in trauma studies, each aiming to discuss the different aspects of traumatic experiences. Scholars and researchers have developed a wide array of theories and methodologies to analyze trauma, resulting in an interdisciplinary field that intersects with psychology, sociology, history, cultural studies, and literary analysis.

Among the diverse theoretical frameworks, key concepts such as cultural trauma, collective trauma, post-memory, transgenerational trauma, historical trauma, and race-based trauma have emerged as pivotal analytical tools. Each of these concepts contributes to understanding the intricate layers of trauma, particularly in contexts shaped by systemic oppression, historical injustices, and intergenerational legacies of suffering. By addressing the ways in which trauma is experienced, remembered, and transmitted across generations, these frameworks illuminate the intersections of individual and collective experiences, which offer critical insights into the enduring impacts of historical and socio-cultural upheavals. Relatedly, the main concern of this study is to argue *Blue Door* under the main tenets of transgenerational trauma and race-based trauma. The traumatic experiences of the main character, Lewis, have been transmitted from his ancestors, and the origins of these traumatic experiences lie in the racist practices towards the black community. Hence, transgenerational trauma theory is used and linked to race-based trauma in this study to scrutinize Lewis's traumatic experiences. Pivotaly, the related link provides critical lenses to analyze Lewis's identity crisis and self-perception, which are shaped by his ancestors' experiences of slavery and racist practices of the past in *Blue Door*. Through Lewis's questioning of his blackness, this study argues that *Blue Door* reveals the profound psychological burden of inhabiting the intersection of historical and contemporary forces, positioning racial identity as a complex site of both empowerment and struggle.

### ***Blue Door: A Play with Original Songs*<sup>1</sup> by Tanya Barfield**

*Blue Door* (2007), written by the African-American playwright, Tanya Barfield, explores the African American historical and cultural legacy through the lived experiences, which deeply shaped black individuals over generations. Barfield's priority has been to focus on the experiences of the black community. She fortified her place in the American theater landscape with her *Blue Door*. Barfield deftly uses her pen to "invent characters and incidents, based on her experience but extended through her imagination, to address issues of racism in the culture" (Champagne, 1999, p. 157). Delving into the psychological and emotional dilemmas of black individuals, Barfield focuses on the effects of slavery and racism to scrutinize identity crisis, sense of self, and belongingness. Her plays, hence, become a means of understanding the internal conflicts of black

<sup>1</sup>Although the original name of the play is *Blue Door: A Play with Original Songs*, only *Blue Door* is used by scholars and researchers.

people and their ways of coping with such dilemmas. According to Natalie Genter-Gilmore (2015), her plays infused with sensitivity toward characters that are human beings rather than mouthpieces intertwine subjective memory, truthful relationships, and poetic language like fingers clasped together. The inner turmoil of the characters, their confusions, and the realistic relationships between characters provide actual lenses to understand their struggles. Relatedly, as Genter-Gilmore (2015) remarks, Barfield's plays focus on a microcosm along with the macrocosm of the world we live in, the lies we tell to protect ourselves and those we care about, and the truths we must face to grow through sexuality, class, race, gender, politics, and love. In this way, Barfield portrays both the individual and collective struggles to reveal the complex interaction of personal identity and societal expectations. Similarly, *Blue Door* represents Lewis's inner conflicts in a white-dominated academic world through his painful family past as he grapples with transgenerational trauma, the expectations placed upon him, and his own sense of belonging. Through a series of introspective and supernatural encounters with his ancestors, Lewis confronts the ways in which systemic racism and personal choices have shaped his identity.

Ben Saypol (2009, p. 302) emphasizes that *Blue Door* suggests a profound relationship between the acknowledgment and embrace of the past and the healing of identity and legacy. The play incorporates a range of performance techniques, such as oral-history storytelling, Negro spirituals, and movement forms reminiscent of twentieth-century choreopoems. These elements reflect the various ways in which the past informs and interacts with the present, creating a dynamic and cultural richness along with a stunning theatrical experience. A belief painting a door blue can protect against evil spirits (Hill and Barnett, 2009, p. 33) becomes an inspiration for the title of the play. The folklore and spiritual practices traditionally links the color blue with protection, peace, and spiritual clarity. Similarly, the blue door in the play symbolizes the line between Lewis's conflicts and reconcile; his frustrations and hopes. It represents a barrier between the past and present; between ancestral memory and contemporary identity.

*Blue Door* centers on Lewis, a black mathematician professor who is caught between his historical past and his current conditions. He is left by his wife as he refuses to participate in the 1995 Million Man March on Washington, a public demonstration of African American men which fosters racial solidarity. Lewis believes that this political event is not related to his personal life and current position in the white society. His wife, however, relates her husband's refusal to his inner struggles with espousing his African past and African-American identity, which hinders Lewis to become a 'whole person' (Barfield, 2015, p. 7), according to his wife. His wife is not physically on the stage and the readers learn about the conflict between Lewis and his wife through the conversations with the spirits of three deceased relatives. Lewis suffers from insomnia and is hunted by the spirits from his ancestral past. According to Saypol, each character embodies the racial oppression endured during their respective generations. Those include Simon, Lewis's great-grandfather, a former slave who witnessed emancipation; Jesse, Simon's son, who experienced Jim Crow era; and Rex, Lewis's brother, who ultimately became homeless and died because of a drug overdose (2009, p. 302).

These spectral visitations act as narrative devices, reflecting the weight of transgenerational trauma and ancestral memory. Through these encounters, Lewis is forced to confront the aspects of his identity intentionally suppressed or ignored by him. The spirits recount stories of survival, suffering, and resilience, creating a space for African heritage that provokes Lewis to reevaluate

his position both in family and society, which subsequently reshapes his African American identity.

### **Race-Based Transgenerational Trauma in *Blue Door***

Transgenerational trauma is related to traumatic experiences and their profound psychological, emotional, and social impacts that are passed down from one generation to the next, influencing and shaping the lives of descendants who may not have directly experienced the original traumatic events themselves while race-based trauma focuses on the psychological and emotional wounds caused by institutional slavery, systemic racism and arbitrary deprivation. Rooted in Greek word, ‘wound’ referring to an injury on a body, which is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind in its later usage. The wound of mind is related to the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world and “it is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). Unlike physical wounds, which are immediately apparent and localized, mental wounds disrupt the continuity of time and the coherence of self-perception. Relatedly, trauma studies provide critical lenses through which literature explores human experiences, which primarily deal with the aftermath of wars, massacres, racism, violence, sexual oppression, personal or collective losses to underscore the complexity of memory, identity, and resilience. Judith Herman (1997, p. 9) emphasizes the significance of social contexts in trauma studies since “a social context that affirms and protects the victim and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance to hold traumatic reality in consciousness” and “the social context is created by political movements that give voice to the disempowered for larger society”, according to her. Relatedly, the experiences of black people are shaped by the social context created by political and ideological movements that weaken or oppress them. These movements such as slavery, institutional racism, and systemic inequalities result in psychological and emotional destructions as in *Blue Door*:

“You won’t go to the Million Man March. A million black men are gathering in public and you won’t go. And maybe it’s because you’re married to a white woman, but I don’t think that you should use the fact that I’m white as an excuse to erase your history.” (Barfield, 2015, p. 7)

Lewis’s wife directly confronts his internal struggle with his racial identity by emphasizing that his attempt to distance himself from his past is not inherently connected to their interracial marriage. For her, Lewis’s reluctance to participate in a significant collective movement for black men is a reflection of his deeper psychological struggle with his traumatic history. His wife shows that Lewis’s troubles with his sense of self is not actually the result of his personal experiences but is profoundly shaped by the historical and cultural legacy of slavery and racism endured by his ancestors. These inherited traumas permeate his consciousness, striking his understanding of identity, his sense of belonging, and dignity. The interplay between these two forms of trauma in *Blue Door* features the persistent and pervasive effects of historical injustices that shape African American identity.

Literature of trauma defined by the identity of its author focuses on the reconstruction and recuperation of the traumatic experience, according to Kali Tal (1996, p. 17). It also intersects the writings that produced by feminist, African-American, and queer writers. Similarly, Michelle Balaev (2008, p. 160) discusses the role of novels in trauma studies suggesting that the personal and cultural histories imbedded in landscapes that define the character’s identity and the meaning

of the traumatic experience can be analyzed through the physical environment. Balaev emphasizes the spatial and environmental dimensions of trauma, showing how the physical world is deeply entangled with identity and memory in literary studies. It reveals the capacity of literature to explore trauma not only as a psychological phenomenon but also as a culturally and historically situated experience.

According to the central tenets of trauma studies in literature, *Blue Door* is considered to be a representation of intergenerational trauma along with race-based trauma inherited from slavery and racism, embodying how historical injustices occupies the lives of African Americans in contemporary society. In line with the Ruth Leys's definition of trauma (2000, p. 8) as "a situation of dissociation or 'absence' from the self in which the victim unconsciously imitated, or identified with, the aggressor or traumatic scene in a condition that was likened to a state of heightened suggestibility or hypnotic trance", Lewis suffers from his black identity resulting in the deep and complex internal conflict. The first voice Lewis hears from the past is a Yoruba song, related to his African heritage. Hearing the song, Lewis starts his story from his wife's demand to divorce, which reveals that the play is about identity crisis resulting from traumatic experiences: "You want a divorce because I don't want to march on Washington, not as any form of protest but just to announce to the world that I'm black?" (Barfield, 2015, p. 7). The internal conflict excited by the Yoruba song is vividly portrayed on stage through an imagined conversation with his wife. This dialogue not only externalizes Lewis's inner turmoil but also underscores the fragmentation of his sense of self: "I have the sensation of being watched. I watch my wife leave, and as she leaves, I divorce myself from myself. I become two selves- my self and the self that watches my self" (Barfield, 2015, p. 7). It is clear that Lewis experiences the lingering effects of trauma, which profoundly impacted and distorted his sense of self. Although Lewis has a respected position in his career, his inner struggles lead to denial of his black identity intertwined with his personal history and the pain inherited from the traumatic experiences of his ancestors.

Rather than arising from his individual traumatic experiences, Lewis's inner conflict is deeply rooted in the inherited trauma of his ancestors, who suffered under the weight of slavery and systemic racism. This type of trauma, known as transgenerational trauma, refers to "deep and distressing experiences within and across generations" (Barlow, 2018, p. 903), which is related to the "symptoms of traumatization experienced by subsequent generations, following the traumatization of their parents or grandparents" (Day and Shloim, 2021, p. 1). Transgenerational trauma is transmitted by the collective traumatic events including slavery, genocide, war, or serious natural disasters through historical realities, family stories, or cultural practices. Congruently, Lewis's hallucinations are related to his familial past tied to the historical and cultural legacy of his ancestors. The first spirit who visited Lewis is Simon, Lewis's great grandfather. And he explains his role in the play to tell old stories (Barfield, 2015, p. 8). His stories are about his personal experiences during slavery and its harsh effects on black community. While Simon is talking about the story of how he and his wife were married during the slavery period, a moment with historical and emotional significance, Lewis begins to tell his story related to his marriage. Lewis's interaction with Simon is reflected as a story within a story: "[...] I can't fade in the country. [...] Even if I dress differently, cut my hair differently, speak differently. I can't slip into the expanse. [...] I can't not be black" (Barfield, 2015, p. 10). Lewis relates his wife's demand to take a vacation in a country with his blackness. Passing the experiences, emotions, and traumas of previous generations on Lewis's consciousness, these memories revive on his mind

through the stories that are the real history of black people. These spectral figures are like the missing part between Lewis's past and present. Accordingly, Yael Danieli (1998, p. 2) argues that as a fundamental aspect of human history, the multigenerational transmission of trauma is passed down through verbal communication, written accounts, body language, and even through silence, and has existed as long as humanity itself. It is clear that effects of trauma are not confined to the lives of those who directly experience it but are passed down through successive generations, shaping the psychological, emotional, and cultural perspectives of their descendants. Thus Lewis is not peace at himself as he struggles to reconcile the various conflicting aspects of his identity and his inherited history. His conflicts stem from a deep disconnect between who he is, who he wants to be, and the weight of the ancestral trauma that shapes his existence. As Ron Eyerman (2019, p. 28) emphasizes, "the memory of slavery is a cultural marker, a primal scene, and a site of memory in the formation of African American identity". Relatedly, traumatic experiences shape Lewis's identity, influence his behaviors towards his family, his wife and his colleagues, and remind intergenerational relationships.

Then Simon transforms into Rex, Lewis's brother and the nature of their interaction changes from storytelling into an interactive dialogue. This interaction reflects that Lewis is caught in a liminal space between reality and the constructed narratives of his mind since Rex insistently seeks ways to confront Lewis with the realities that he tries to escape from:

REX: [...] He a White Devil in black skin, my bro. [...] Why don't you tell Whitey how both our mama's boys (you the good son and me the bad) suffer the same sickness: self-loathing, the silent affliction, a plague of the skin. Both our daddy's sons suffer the phantom illness called self-hate. (Barfield, 2015, p. 12)

Rex confronts Lewis with accusations of betrayal and self-denial. Highlighting the sacrifices and failures within their family, Rex criticizes his brother for living a life that erases their shared struggles. Both brothers, Rex argues, are plagued by self-loathing and a deep, inherited sense of shame rooted in racial identity. Pivotaly, Rex is a voice from Africa, urging Lewis to recognize and embrace the cultural and historical legacy, from which Lewis has distanced himself to be approved by the white society. Rex highlights the illusion of recognition and belonging that Lewis perceives in the white-dominated academic and social spaces, emphasizing that these spaces cannot fully encompass or validate his identity as a black man. Luminita Dragulescu (2018, p. 271) relates this dilemma with race-based trauma since traumatic memories embedded within the fabric of the American national identity, originating from the transformative experiences of the Middle Passage, have profoundly influenced the formation of American identity and continue to have significant consequences in the present. Dragulescu delves into the historical experiences of black individuals through the lens of race-based trauma, claiming that the essence of African American identity is deeply rooted in the collective experiences of slavery. To him, several major traumatic events including conquest and colonization, Middle Passage, slavery, and the rampant lynching during the Jim Crow era have led to the emergence of race-based trauma, which was sustained by recurring, omnipresent acts of racism that span the entire history of the United States. Hence Dragulescu (2018, p. 271) underscores that African American communities serve as depositories of this traumatic legacy, embodying the historical experiences of the enslavement and forced displacement endured by their African ancestors. Accordingly, Lewis is like a 'depository of traumatic legacy' in the play who fails to consolidate his current position in life due to the

overwhelming weight of his inherited past, which manifests as a psychological and emotional burden he cannot escape:

SIMON : (to Lewis) Every night 'fore sleep, I ax Momma, "Why us slaves?"

LEWIS: Just go away!

SIMON : Momma, why I don't got no daddy? Daddy shot down. Why my daddy shot? Shot for tryin run. Why my daddy run? (Barfield, 2015, p. 13)

Rex transforms into seven-year-old Simon, who began to question slavery period, resulting in Lewis's struggle with the heavy burden or unresolved trauma. Faced with the painful reminders of his ancestral past, Lewis attempts to hold on his prestigious identity, a mathematician professor, actually a kind of a mask which he thinks that enables him to protect from the discriminative world: "LEWIS: Think about math. An infinite sequence of numbers exist before zero" (Barfield, 2015, p. 13). To demonstrate competence and avoid the emotional complexities of his racial identity, his profession becomes a safe haven or refuge, a way to lighten the burden of his past. His coping ways of his traumatic past, however, are not forceful since it is related to race trauma embodied in the "[r]efusal to remember, denial, dissociation, and disavowal [that] are all echoed in the absence of slavery from the trauma literature, and until recently, from psychoanalytic literature" (Graf, 2014, p. 183). His inherited trauma is inextricably intertwined with his identity, which exists at the intersection of his African ancestral heritage and his American present. This duality reflects a complex and often conflicting relationship between the historical legacy of slavery and systemic racism and the realities of contemporary life because the memory of slavery and its representation through oral traditions, literature, and artistic expression have played a foundational role in shaping African American identity (Eyerman, 2019, p. 2). It is clear that cultural past enabling African Americans to connect with their ancestral heritage and confront the historical realities of enslavement are a powerful tool for preserving sense of self. Yet Barfield positions Lewis at the heart of identity crisis that underscores the tension between his African ancestral past and his American present, illustrating the complexities of 'African- American' identity shaped by historical and contemporary factors. His African past serves as an enduring reminder of generational pain and his American present demands a form of adaptation and conformity that requires him to suppress or deny aspects of his heritage, creating a profound sense of dissonance. Clearly, Barfield's portrayal of Lewis reflects the shared African American struggle to reconcile the legacies of a painful past with the demands of contemporary existence, highlighting the enduring effects of intergenerational trauma and systemic oppression on identity formation.

The accounts of the spirits serve as powerful catalysts for Lewis, compelling him to recall specific and deep personal memories within his present moment. Upon hearing Simon recount harrowing events, including the sale of his mother during slavery and the abuse he endured as a child, Lewis remembers the departmental tea party in his honor hosted by dean's wife. Lewis, however, experiences a profound sense of otherness, an emotional and psychological alienation that compels him to question his black identity during the party: "But, in actuality, I have a pit in my stomach; what if they don't know I'm black?" (Barfield, 2015, p. 18). Lewis struggles between his external environment and his internal sense of self. Lewis thinks his experience of discomfort and self-consciousness when he notices a white woman at the party intently observing his hands. Her gaze unsettles him, as it seems to linger on the physical contrast between the lighter skin of his palms and the darker skin on the backs of his hands—a characteristic he perceives as being

racialized. His discomfort intensifies as he grapples with conflicting emotions: a desire to confront her for the implied judgment, a fear of reinforcing stereotypes, and a deep sense of guilt for harboring violent thoughts. Broadly speaking, a surge of conflicting emotions—anger, fear, and guilt—arises which reflect his internal struggle with the weight of racialized perceptions and their impact on his sense of self. His awareness leads him to scrutinize his blackness, not merely as a cultural or racial marker but as an indispensable aspect of his identity. Eyerman (2019, p. 2) relates trauma with “a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion”. As a part of black community, Lewis is grappled with feelings of disconnection from both white society and his own sense of self. This alienation viscerally pushes him into a serious and complex identity crisis. The party serves a microcosm of these broader societal pressures, symbolizing the intersection of his outward success and the internalized conflicts. Lewis, in-between this dilemma, suffers from displacement. Most notably, Lewis becomes trapped in a liminal space, neither fully accepted by the white society where he strives to succeed in nor able to fully embrace his black identity that ties him to his familial and cultural past. This sense of in-betweenness intensifies his internal conflict, leaving him without a clear sense of belonging.

Coming from the Jim Crow era, the last spirit visited Lewis is Jesse, Simon’s son. Although slavery was legally abolished, inequality was sustained through ‘colorblind’ Jim Crow laws and administrative action. The efforts to disenfranchise African Americans including the grandfather clause, the poll tax, literacy tests, and felon disenfranchisement laws seemed “race neutral” in design, precisely in order to evade prohibitions on facially race-based voting restrictions, which became successful in abrogating the voting and jury service rights of African Americans (Eyer, 2019, p. 1033). Jesse reflects this restrictive atmosphere of Jim Crow era when his father’s attempt to exercise his right to vote resulted in a tragedy. For Jesse’s father, voting was not just a civic duty but a powerful act of defiance and self-assertion in the face of a society that sought to deny blacks’ humanity and agency. However, his courage costs his brutally murder, a stark reminder of the violent resistance to black progress during the Jim Crow era. In this respect, Jesse’s father’s murder is not merely a personal loss; it is a representation of the systemic oppression that sought to silence African American voices and strip them of their political power. This story transitions to another significant moment in Lewis’s present life: his twentieth year at the university and the night his wife hosted a party in his honor to celebrate his success on writing a book, *Mathematical Structures and the Repudiation of Time*. His parents also attended the party, but there was not a common ground between them and his colleagues from the department. A few weeks after the party, Lewis visits his family, marking a poignant confrontation with his roots and identity. During this visit, his father shares his feelings about the party, exposing the sharp disconnect between Lewis’s perception of himself and the reality of blackness. This moment reveals the profound gap between Lewis’s past, shaped by his family’s struggles and cultural heritage, and his present, defined by his efforts to integrate himself into a predominantly white academic world. While Lewis views the party as a testament to his success and integration into white society, his father insistently tries to show that his achievement cannot break the racial barriers and systemic inequities that persist: (Father:) “ [...] Better a son take a beatin from his own father than take a beatin from the world. What’s my son do? He goes out and embarrasses my ass” (Barfield, 2015, p. 23). This interaction clearly shows the extreme tension between Lewis’s desire for acceptance in white society and the expectations and experiences of his father, who perceives Lewis’s efforts as a



rejection of their cultural roots. For Lewis, striving to integrate into the white society represents an attempt to define himself on his own terms, distancing himself from the weight of ancestral trauma and cultural constraints. Lewis, hence, says that “I will divorce myself from my father” (Barfield, 2015, p. 23) and it becomes their last shared moment, deepening the irreparable rift between them. Actually, his father illuminates the painful reality that, despite Lewis’s accomplishments, he remains an outsider in the eyes of both worlds- the world of privilege he wants to belong to and the world of heritage and history he cannot escape. It is one of the significant moments that forces Lewis to confront the fractured nature of his identity and the enduring influence of race-based trauma. Dragulescu (2011, p. 6) explains this situation with the cumulative aspect of the American race trauma, which is both exclusive in the specific historical and geographical contexts that predate America and inclusive in the American context, where it evolves into a pervasive pattern of racial oppression that affects marginalized communities. The interplay between these exclusive historical origins and the inclusive shared experiences of racial inequities in America highlights the enduring and interconnected nature of racial trauma as a defining element of the nation’s identity.

Jesse reappears as a young man, sharing another story about not being allowed into a church because of his race. This exclusion highlights the pervasive and insidious nature of racism, even in spaces that are supposed to offer sanctuary and equality. Jesse’s experience becomes a vivid reminder of the historical and ongoing exclusion faced by African Americans in institutions that claim to embody moral and spiritual values. The preacher’s refusal to allow a black person into his church symbolizes the deep-seated hypocrisy and racial prejudice embedded in society, further intensifying the intergenerational trauma Jesse represents. This memory transitions into a parallel moment in Lewis’s life, a lecture at the university. Repeatedly Lewis is forced to confront his own racialized reality in different contexts, evoked by the stories told by the spirits. He remembers a lecture at the university, which leads a misunderstanding when a student talks about the philosopher Heidegger, and Lewis misinterprets the word as ‘house nigger’. This triggers an intense and racially charged polemic between Lewis and the student, exposing the fragility of his position in academia: “I’ve done everything, everything I’ve done is to succeed because when you’re black, you have to be better than better, the best” (Barfield, 2015, p. 27). The dean, however, puts Lewis on mandatory leave because he is caught in a relentless struggle, grappling with the heavy burden of his ancestral past and his inner dilemma. His inability to reconcile his present circumstances with the echoes of historical injustices leaves him in a state of perpetual conflict. Lewis’s misinterpretation of contemporary situations, coupled with his tendency to frame issues through the lens of racial conflict, provokes his sense of alienation. This distorted perception not only disrupts his relationships but also undermines his ability to engage effectively with the world around him. The interaction between his internal complexity and the external factors he faces highlights the outcomes unresolved trauma, illustrating how the lingering effects of historical oppression can fracture an individual’s sense of self and significantly complicate their adaptation through the complex dynamics of modern societal structures and expectations.

Lewis’s journey of grappling with ancestral trauma reaches a climactic resolution through his dialogue with the spirit of his brother, Rex. Their last interaction includes their childhood and family memories and their family history, enabling Lewis to fully confront the historical and personal pain passed down through generations. Lewis’s sleepless night is filled with pain and loss, which intertwines memories of his father’s rebuke, the death of his great-grandfather, his

wife's abandonment, and an overwhelming sense of entrapment. Pleading to his ancestors, he seeks release from the suffocating solitude and anguish of this long, unending night. After his conversation with Rex, Lewis actively seeks solace and guidance from his past for the first time, which marks a significant shift in his relationship with his ancestral heritage: "[...] please, great grand-dad, please, Great Simon, please, great wise man from the skies, please take me out of this night, tonight" (Barfield, 2015, p. 36). Previously, the spirits appeared unbidden, confronting him with painful memories and unresolved trauma. However, Lewis's conscious decision to summon these spirits signifies a transformative moment in his journey of self-reconciliation. By deliberately engaging with the past, he acknowledges its intrinsic role in shaping his identity and begins to harness its presence as a source of healing rather than torment: SIMON: "Today is the day you're free" [...] LEWIS: Great Simon. I don't know where –who-why I am. All these years, I don't know why I am (Barfield, 2015, p. 36). The resolution of Lewis's internal struggle is intricately tied to the historical moment of the abolition of slavery, as conveyed by Simon's spirit. In this respect, the notion of freedom operates in multifaceted ways: the historical emancipation of enslaved individuals and Lewis's personal liberation from the psychological weight of inherited trauma. It is crystal clear that this simultaneous recognition of historical liberation and personal freedom is related to the interaction between collective history and individual healing. Mainly, the abolition of slavery symbolizes not only a collective historical milestone but also serves as a metaphor for Lewis's own journey toward self-reconciliation. For Lewis, freedom is achieved through a transformative process of confronting and embracing his ancestors' pain and resilience into his understanding of self. This parallel between historical and personal liberation underpins the interconnectedness of identity, past, and healing, highlighting how acknowledging and transcending the burdens of the past can lead to a renewed sense of agency and inner peace. More precisely, the individual liberation is deeply connected to recognizing and addressing the broader societal and historical factors that shape identity. In this way, Lewis's journey symbolizes the enduring impact of race-based trauma through intergenerational trauma and the possibilities for healing and self-actualization through the act of remembrance and reconciliation. Accordingly, the blue door in the play emerges as a potent symbol of healing and hope, embodying the possibility of transformation and renewal in the face of intergenerational trauma. The blue door is firstly introduced to the audience as a pivotal symbol when Simon's mother is sold as a slave:

(Momma:) "Take dishyuh bucketa blue paint, honey-boy, paint up dis do'."

(Simon:) Now ain't no time to be paintin doors, Momma. Tomorrow you be sent to auction.

(Momma:) "Paint dis do'way blue. Keep d'good spirits in. Keep d'ghost out." (Barfield, 2015, p. 16)

This moment mirrors the door as more than a physical object; it becomes a repository of collective memory and ancestral pain. Blue linked to trust, authority, and peaceful in African culture is also the color of Osanyin, a Yoruba God who symbolizes healing and liturgy (Ayodele, 2020, p. 299). Relatedly, the act of painting the door blue in the play transcends its literal function, becoming a powerful symbol of solace and resistance for black individuals. The blue door acts as a sanctuary, offering a sense of stability and spiritual grounding amidst the chaos and despair inflicted by slavery and racial injustice: "Jesse, go get ya momma a bucket of indigo. Paint that door up blue. Keep the night terrors out. Keep ya soul-family in." (Barfield, 2015, p. 21). This is the second instance of painting the door blue in the play which reinforces its symbolic role as a

marker of resistance and continuity. Simon, who went to vote despite the efforts to prevent his right to vote and was killed, gives this advice to his son Jesse before leaving the house, just like Simon's mother did to Simon before the auction. This recurrence highlights the door as a site of both historical reflection and proactive defiance against systemic oppression, particularly in the context of Simon's fatal determination to exercise his right to vote. The act of painting thus becomes more than a protective ritual; it embodies a legacy of resilience and the transmission of hope amidst the relentless struggle for justice and equality, linking personal sacrifice with collective perseverance: "SIMON: How bout us paint up this door? Paint it blue" (Barfield, 2015, p. 37). Finally, the act of painting the imaginary blue door becomes a climactic convergence of symbolism, ritual, and resolution in the play. Simon's call to paint the door signifies a transfer of ancestral wisdom and the transformative power of embracing one's heritage. The absence of a physical door on stage highlights its metaphorical weight, inviting the audience to engage with its deeper significance as a space of healing, protection, and identity reclamation. The Yoruba song accompanying this act strengthens its cultural resonance, grounding the scene in a communal and spiritual framework that transcends the personal narrative. As the play ends, the act of painting and singing together represents Lewis's reconciliation with his past, a ritualistic affirmation of belonging, and a vision of hope rooted in cultural and ancestral past.

### Sonuç

*Blue Door* poignantly focuses on the lasting effects of intergenerational trauma, and the effects of race-based trauma and it emphasizes how the echoes of past experiences, particularly those rooted in slavery and systemic racism, reverberate through generations. The play indicates the psychological and emotional burdens carried by black individuals, and deeply explores how these inherited traumas shape their identities, relationships, and self-perceptions. Although Lewis has not personally endured the traumas of his ancestors, the psychological and cultural weight of these experiences deeply influences his sense of self and his interactions with people around him. His deliberate attempt to prioritize his professional identity as a mathematics professor over his racial identity highlights a desire to escape the limitations imposed by societal stereotypes. Barfield, however, demonstrates that past cannot be erased or ignored; it resurfaces as an integral part of identity, demanding acknowledgment and reconciliation. Through Lewis's journey, the author illustrates the necessity of confronting historical pain to achieve healing and self-understanding, ultimately asserting that identity is not only a product of individual achievement but also a reflection of communal and ancestral heritage. The actual freedom is related to embracing one's root rather than denying them. The recurring motif of the blue door symbolizes both a barrier and a passage- a connection to the past that, when acknowledged and engaged with, offers the possibility of healing and renewal. At the end of the play, Lewis's journey transforms from one of denial to acceptance, underscoring the resilience inherent in confronting the weight of ancestral trauma. Through its exploration of history, memory, and identity, *Blue Door* serves as a powerful narrative that not only addresses individual reconciliation but also advocates for a collective understanding of the enduring impact of historical injustices.

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