

Original Article

Crushed, Yet Resilience': Towards a Constructive African Trauma Theology

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Abstract: The study attempts to develop a constructive Afrocentric trauma theology under the theme "Crushed Yet Resilient," exploring how African Christian thought can respond meaningfully to the enduring wounds of colonization, slavery, apartheid, poverty, and eco-violence. It contends that trauma in African contexts is not merely personal but deeply communal, intergenerational, and structural, rooted in disrupted cosmologies, cultural dislocation, and historical expurgation. Dominant Western trauma theologies often prioritize individual psychological recovery and abstract theological categories, offering limited relevance in contexts where suffering is collective and memory is ancestral. In contrast, the study draws upon African cosmologies, liberation hermeneutics, and biblical motifs, especially the crucified and risen Christ, the Psalms of lament, and the Book of Job, to frame a theological response that engages both trauma and resilience. That theology affirms lament as a legitimate theological act, honors communal memory as a source of healing, and positions resilience not as denial of suffering but as a sign of divine accompaniment and spiritual agency. It calls for the reimagining of the Church as a site of wounded hospitality and healing, and for theological education that equips ministers to address trauma with cultural sensitivity and prophetic engagement. By reclaiming African spiritual resources and integrating them with Christian theological traditions, that Afrocentric trauma theology affirms that African communities, though crushed by trauma, remain resilient in hope, faith, and their capacity for renewal.

Keywords: trauma, theology, African cosmology, cultural, resilience

1. INTRODUCTION

Defining trauma is context-specific, and quite problematic. Grauer suggests that the controversies associated with defining trauma, in part, stem from the study academic training and professional background [1]. For instance, a medical practitioner may define trauma from a medical perspective (to emphasize anatomical pathology or homeostatic imbalance), while a Mental Health professional will define it from a psychological perspective. No matter how it is defined, trauma is considered a pathological condition that requires a therapeutic attention, either pharmacotherapeutic or psychotherapeutic depending on the etiology. For the purpose of the study, the study will view trauma from a psychological perspective. Trauma can be defined as a psychological and emotional derangement of an individual due to confrontation with a distressing event that has the propensity of distorting a person's sense of safety, well-being and relationship. Gansevoort, in his study on Scars and stigmata: Trauma, identity and theology, defined trauma as the "psychological wound resulting from the confrontation with a debilitating event that shatters a person's integrity and induces powerlessness and estrangement" [2]. According to the American Psychology Association (Dictionary of Psychology), trauma is a mental health challenge involving an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, crime, natural disaster, physical or emotional abuse, neglect, experiencing or witnessing violence, death

of a loved one, war, and more [3]. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. Trauma affects people regardless of their socio-economic and religio-cultural backgrounds. Over the years, eco-violence, civil war, terrorism, gender-based violence, and interpersonal and economic injustice have increased the rate of trauma worldwide particularly in Africa. A study by Musisi and Kinyanda in Uganda affirms that trauma is usually predominant in areas of political and intertribal conflicts, war, sexual abuse, health, disease, conflicted modernity, climate, culture, religion, ethnicities, race, poverty, famine, governance, economies, migrations etc. They argued that many of these psycho-social glitches have been driven by war-conflict [2, 4]. In recent years, interreligious conflict is on the rise in Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, Nigeria and Somalia, inter-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia, Cameroon and northern part of Ghana, political conflicts in Togo, Nigeria, Libya, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Northern Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Cameroon all in Africa [5]. The 23-year retrospective study (2000-2023) also reported that 1436 major natural disasters were recorded in 29 African countries with the following composition: 66% flood-related, 15.4% storm-related, and 11.7% drought-related natural disasters. The report continues to state that Kenya (60 events), Mozambique (55 events), and South Africa (54 events) experienced the highest number of disasters as they regularly face storms, droughts, and flooding. The 3 most populated Sub-Saharan countries, Nigeria (49 events), Ethiopia (43 events), and D.R. Congo (41 events), also fall into the top 10. In terms of death tolls, Somalia ranks first primarily as a result of the 2010 drought, while Algeria ranks second with most deaths occurring from a single earthquake [6]. Meanwhile traffic-accident-related deaths increased to 84% in the past four years. In Ghana for instance, an average of 14 traffic accidents occurs every day resulting average death toll of 4 people per day [7]. All these events predispose the people of Africa to trauma. Nanthambwe postulated that these numerous traumatic incidents highlighted above confronting the African continent as a whole make pastoral care indispensable in Africa [8]. The 21st-century African continent continues to bear the psychological and theological consequences of historical traumas—colonization, slavery, genocide, civil wars, poverty, and spiritual violence. These traumas are inscribed not only in personal memory but also in social institutions, religious practices, and theological discourses. Christian theology, historically complicit in the colonization of African lands and minds, has yet to provide an adequate response to these wounded realities. While trauma theology has gained traction in the Global North, particularly in response to the Holocaust, racial injustice, and gender-based violence, such frameworks often fail to consider Africa's communal cosmologies, socio-political contexts, and spiritual epistemologies. The study therefore calls for a new theological orientation; one that is deeply African, radically contextual, and profoundly theological.

2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION OF TRAUMA

Trauma has become a central concern in both psychological and theological discourse, especially in contexts where suffering is widespread, complex, and deeply rooted. From the horrors of war and genocide to systemic racism, gender-based violence, and colonial exploitation, trauma pervades human experience, especially in the Global South. Africa, in particular, bears the scars of historical injustices and contemporary suffering, which challenge not only social systems but also theological frameworks. While modern psychology explores trauma as a disruption of cognition, emotion, and identity, theology is compelled to grapple with deeper questions: Where is God in suffering? Can pain have theological meaning without being romanticized? Does Scripture offer resources for engaging trauma honestly and redemptively? These questions resist simplistic answers. Yet, a close reading of biblical texts reveals a consistent thread: trauma is not denied, glorified, or explained away, it is acknowledged, mourned, carried, and, ultimately, held within the presence of a suffering God. The term "trauma" originates from the Greek word for "wound," and its theological significance lies not only in identifying the brokenness

caused by overwhelming events but also in recognizing the existential and spiritual rupture it creates. Shelly Rambo, in her book *Spirit and trauma: A theology of remaining*, describes trauma as the interruption of meaning, time, and identity, a condition that outlives the event itself and remains embedded in memory and body [9]. From that perspective, trauma challenges traditional theological responses that assume linear healing, triumphant resolution, or redemptive closure. Serene Jones likewise argues that trauma theology must avoid rationalizing pain or offering premature consolation; instead, it should focus on accompaniment, grace, and divine solidarity in the midst of suffering [9, 10]. Biblical texts engage trauma in a raw, unfiltered way. The Hebrew Bible in particular is a vast archive of communal trauma. The destruction of Jerusalem, the Babylonian exile, slavery in Egypt, and cycles of conquest and displacement form the backdrop of Israel's story are epitomes of traumatic events. The Book of Lamentations, written in response to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, is an extended poetic expression of collective devastation. The city is personified as a woman violated and abandoned, and the laments cry out not only to God but against God. Rather than resolving suffering, the text provides space to grieve its magnitude. Similarly, the Psalms are filled with lament, Psalms 13, 22, and 88, among others, giving voice to anguish, abandonment, and protest. Walter Brueggemann emphasizes that lament is not an expression of weak faith but of covenantal trust: the one who suffers still holds God accountable, still dares to speak, and still expects a response [11]. The Book of Job provides perhaps the most concentrated theological reflection on trauma. Job, an innocent man, loses everything including his children, wealth and health, and receives no adequate explanation. His friends offer conventional simplistic monophasic theodicies: simply, he must have sinned and God has punished him for that. But Job rejects these rationalizations. He insists on his integrity and demands a hearing with the God of divine justice. God's eventual response, from the whirlwind (Job 38–42), does not offer logical explanations but rather a vision of creation's mystery and divine presence. Carol Newsom suggests that Job's moral imagination is expanded, not through resolution, but through encounter [12]. The story critiques rigid theological systems that seek to domesticate suffering and instead honors the complexity of pain. In the New Testament, trauma continues to be central. The crucifixion of Jesus is theologically unparalleled in its depth of suffering. Jesus experiences physical torture, public humiliation, betrayal by friends, and what appears to be divine abandonment. His cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34), quotes Psalm 22 and brings biblical lament into the heart of the Passion. That cry confirms that suffering, even the feeling of divine absence, is not outside the realm of faith. In fact, it is part of the experience of divine solidarity. The resurrection does not negate the trauma of the cross but rather transfigures it. The risen Christ still bears his wounds (John 20:27) of suffering, suggesting that resurrection does not erase trauma but incorporates it into new life. Shelly Rambo calls that "wounded presence" a Christ who remains with the traumatized, not to explain their pain but to endure it with them [9]. Pauline theology further underscores that theme. Paul speaks of being "afflicted but not crushed" and of carrying the death of Christ in his body (2 Corinthians 4:8–10). He emphasizes weakness as the site of divine strength (2 Corinthians 12:9–10), reframing suffering not as punishment but as participation in the life of Christ. Yet Paul's theology must be interpreted cautiously. While it encourages resilience and perseverance, it must not be used to glorify suffering or perpetuate injustice by urging silent endurance. Trauma theology must distinguish between bearing suffering faithfully and tolerating abusive systems. Goldstein warned against a "masochistic" theology that sanctifies suffering without seeking its end [13]. The inadequacy of traditional theodicy becomes apparent in light of trauma. Classical theodicies attempt to justify God's goodness in the face of evil through logical categories, thus free will, soul-making, or greater goods. But trauma defies rational comprehension. It is not merely a problem to be solved but a wound to be witnessed. Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Lament for a son* captures the shift. After the death of his son, he writes not as a philosopher but as a grieving father, affirming that God too suffers loss [14]. The suffering God is not a new idea. The crucified Christ has long been understood as God's self-

identification with the broken. But trauma theology intensifies that claim: it demands a God who remembers wounds, who stays with pain, and who validates protest. Theology must therefore move from justification to accompaniment, from explanation to presence. In the African context, the urgency of the theological reframing is particularly acute. African history is marked by profound and enduring trauma, ranging from colonial domination, slavery, economic exploitation, ethnic violence, gendered abuse, to ecological devastation. Yet much of African Christian theology has been shaped by Western paradigms that spiritualize or individualize suffering, often failing to address its communal, historical, and structural dimensions. African cosmology, however, offers a relational and holistic view of the human person, embedded in community, ancestors, land, and spirit [15]. Trauma, in the worldview, is a rupture in relational and spiritual harmony. Healing must involve not just the individual psyche, but the whole moral and spiritual ecology of the community. Biblical texts resonate deeply with African experiences of lament, exile, and longing for justice. Job's story challenges theological fatalism and legitimizes protest; Lamentations echoes the cry of communities displaced by war or poverty; the Psalms model how to speak to God out of rage and despair; and the wounded Christ affirms that God is not removed from African suffering but is embedded within it. African theologians like Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Mbiti insist that theology must be liberative, decolonial, and grounded in African epistemologies. Trauma theology in Africa must reclaim oral traditions, storytelling, ritual, and song not only as cultural forms but as theological acts. Theologically, trauma is not justified in the sense of being good, necessary, or deserved. Rather, Scripture justifies trauma in the sense that it acknowledges, dignifies, and engages it as central to the story of faith. Biblical theology does not deny suffering, but it does not leave it unaccompanied. God is portrayed as the One who weeps, listens, wrestles, and remains. From Job's ashes to the cross of Christ, the Bible offers a theology that refuses both despair and denial. In conclusion, trauma demands a theological response that is honest, contextual, and compassionate. It cannot be resolved by doctrine alone but must be carried in culture, liturgy, memory, and hope. Scripture offers not a justification of trauma in the philosophical sense, but a deep engagement with it through lament, protest, divine solidarity, and wounded resurrection. For Africa, and for all traumatized communities, such a theology offers not closure, but companionship: a God who walks with us in the ruins (even in the waters and fire—Isaiah 43:2) and promises that even there, healing can begin.

3. REFRAMING TRAUMA IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS

Trauma in African contexts extends beyond individual wounds to encompass communal, historical, and spiritual ruptures caused by colonization and systemic injustice [16]. Grounded in relational identity, African trauma demands theological responses that affirm communal healing, ancestral memory, and spiritual resilience [9].

4. BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL: TRAUMA AS COMMUNAL DISRUPTION

In African societies, the self is defined not in isolation but in relationship—"I am because we are" (ubuntu). Trauma thus ripples through families, clans, and nations, disturbing not just the individual psyche but the very fabric of communal life. The erosion of land, culture, and language constitutes a theological trauma—an existential dislocation from what African cosmology regards as sacred continuity. In African ontologies, the human person is fundamentally communal rather than individualistic. As Mbiti famously stated, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am." [15] The foundational principle underscores a deeply relational anthropology in which identity, well-being, and morality are embedded in the community. Consequently, trauma in African contexts is not merely a personal psychological event—it is a communal rupture. When a person suffers, the entire community is affected, as relationships, kinship systems, and social cohesion are disrupted. The communal dimension of trauma manifests clearly in experiences of war, forced migration, colonization, and systemic poverty.

Such events not only cause individual pain but fracture families, destroy cultural heritage, and sever the intergenerational transmission of memory and wisdom. For example, colonialism disrupted traditional structures of governance, spirituality, and family life—inflicting what Lartey describes as “relational trauma.” [16] Similarly, gender-based violence, political unrest, and ethnic cleansing do not isolate victims; they destabilize entire communal ecologies, causing existential and spiritual disorientation. Western trauma paradigms, which often emphasize the internal psyche of the individual, fail to address the relational and spiritual consequences of such collective suffering. As Rambo argues, healing must therefore extend beyond personal therapy to include communal rituals of remembrance, storytelling, lament, and reconciliation [9]. In biblical theology, especially in texts like Lamentations and the Psalms, trauma is voiced communally through liturgical language, revealing a theological precedent for collective lament and hope. Thus, trauma as communal disruption challenges African theologians to move beyond individualist frameworks and develop healing practices that restore social harmony, spiritual continuity, and cultural dignity within the wounded body of the community.

5. GENERATIONAL AND STRUCTURAL TRAUMA

Unlike acute trauma, which results from discrete events, African trauma is often chronic, structural, and generational. The colonization of theological education, the alienation from indigenous spiritualities, and the systemic disenfranchisement of African peoples perpetuate theological disempowerment. The trauma is thus ontological and epistemic; it disorients identity, memory, and meaning. African communities continue to bear the weight of trauma that is not confined to a single generation or event but is inherited through time and reinforced by structural conditions. Generational trauma refers to the transference of psychological and socio-spiritual wounds from one generation to the next, often without conscious awareness. Structural trauma, on the other hand, is perpetuated by systemic injustices—poverty, racism, gender inequality, political violence, and the lingering effects of colonialism, that continue to disenfranchise communities across the continent. The transatlantic slave trade, colonial subjugation, cultural denigration, and missionary imposition of foreign theologies collectively fractured African identities and social orders [17]. These collective traumas disrupted kinship networks, spiritual traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems. Even after formal decolonization, many African states inherited political and economic systems that continue to marginalize the majority. As Lartey [16] notes, the colonial legacy persists in “interpersonal, institutional, and ecclesial relationships,” embedding trauma into the very fabric of postcolonial life. The trauma is passed on not only through socio-economic structures but through silence, fear, and fragmented memory. Children of traumatized parents often internalize unresolved grief, shame, and anger—producing cycles of violence, low self-worth, and spiritual dislocation. As O’Donnell observes, trauma lingers in the “afterlife of wounds,” resurfacing unpredictably and refusing closure [9, 10, 18]. An African trauma theology must therefore attend to the layered nature of these wounds. Healing must be both psychological and prophetic, addressing emotional scars while confronting unjust structures. Theological responses must move beyond individualized healing to encompass collective memory, historical reckoning, and structural transformation. Only then can communities begin to recover from such a ‘devastation of identity’ and reclaim a theologically grounded sense of dignity and wholeness.

6. CRITIQUING WESTERN TRAUMA THEOLOGIES

Western trauma theologies have made significant contributions to the field of theological reflection, particularly in the wake of the Holocaust, racial injustice, and gender-based violence. Theologians such as Serene Jones [10], Shelly Rambo [9], and Karen O’Donnell [18] have emphasized the theological implications of trauma, highlighting how divine presence, human vulnerability, and theodicy intersect in contexts of extreme suffering. Their work challenges triumphalist theology and instead embraces a theology of woundedness, rupture, and ambiguity. However, when such frameworks are uncritically

applied in African contexts, several critical limitations emerge—anthropological, epistemological, and contextual. First, Western trauma theologies often operate within an individualistic anthropology rooted in post-Enlightenment psychology. Trauma is frequently interpreted as a personal, interior disruption to one's sense of self, with healing oriented toward psychological integration or post-traumatic growth. Yet in African worldviews, the self is inherently communal and spiritual [15]. Suffering is not merely a psychological event but a communal, cosmological rupture affecting the entire relational network. Western trauma theology's focus on interiority can therefore obscure the relational, ancestral, and social dimensions that are essential to African understandings of suffering and healing. Second, the epistemological foundations of much Western trauma theology rely heavily on psychoanalytic and existential paradigms, privileging memory, language, and personal narrative as primary tools for recovery [18]. While these tools are valuable, they marginalize oral tradition, ritual embodiment, and ancestral memory which are core elements in African cosmologies. In my opinion, African theology must resist the application of crude colonial epistemologies that invalidate indigenous ways of knowing without appropriate contextualization. Any theology that does not speak to the practical life experiences and problems of the people in their cultural context is as a devastating problem as the problem it attempts to solve. The prioritization of verbal narration and rational coherence in Western trauma theology often clashes with African spiritual practices that emphasize silence, ritual, song, and embodied lament. Third, many Western trauma theologies lack a sufficiently political or structural analysis of trauma. By emphasizing individual resilience and spiritual perseverance, they risk depoliticizing suffering and inadvertently perpetuating systems of oppression. In postcolonial Africa, trauma is inseparable from histories of colonization, racial capitalism, structural poverty, and theological domination. As Lartey insists, theological healing must be linked to justice, restitution, and liberation [16]. A theology that does not engage the political roots of trauma fails to offer a holistic or transformative response. Moreover, the implicit theological assumptions in many Western models, such as the emphasis on divine absence, theological ambiguity, or the impossibility of redemption may not resonate with African Christian communities. These communities often maintain a strong belief in divine presence, spiritual warfare, and the continuity of life through ancestors and community. As Rambo highlights, trauma often resists resolution, but in African contexts, spiritual continuity provides an enduring source of meaning and resilience even in the face of unresolved wounds [9]. Thus, while Western trauma theologies have advanced important theological insights, they must be critically appropriated, not transplanted, into African contexts. An African trauma theology must emerge from the soil of African suffering, faith, memory, and resistance. It must engage indigenous cosmologies, affirm communal identity, and center structural justice—reclaiming theology as a liberative and contextual response to deep, communal wounds.

7. THE URGENCY OF AN AFRICAN TRAUMA THEOLOGY

The call for an African trauma theology is both timely and theologically imperative. Africa continues to be a continent marked by deep and enduring wounds: the historical violence of slavery and colonization, the spiritual alienation caused by cultural and theological imperialism, and the continuing trauma inflicted by poverty, political instability, gender-based violence, and interethnic conflicts. These realities have left indelible scars on individuals, communities, and nations. However, despite the prevalence of suffering, theological reflection on trauma in African contexts remains underdeveloped, under-contextualized, and often shaped by foreign frameworks that do not adequately reflect African worldviews or experiences. The urgency of developing an African trauma theology lies first in the need for contextual relevance. Much of the trauma theology currently in circulation arises from Euro-American experiences—most notably the Holocaust, 9/11, or post-Vietnam war psychologies—and while these contexts provide valuable insights into the theological dimensions of suffering, they often presuppose individualistic anthropologies and Western modes of healing. In contrast, African

epistemologies understand personhood as communal, healing as relational, and trauma as a disruption of both spiritual and social harmony [16]. Consequently, a contextual theology must emerge that resonates with African cosmology, ethics, and pastoral practices. Second, the absence of a robust African trauma theology leaves a critical vacuum in pastoral praxis. Many African churches offer spiritual responses to suffering—prayer, deliverance, and sacramental rites—yet these practices are not always theologically interrogated or pastorally integrated into a trauma-informed framework. Without such integration, the church risks spiritualizing psychological pain or, worse, pathologizing trauma as a sign of moral or spiritual failure. An African trauma theology would equip pastors, theologians, and caregivers with the tools to respond to woundedness holistically—addressing the psychological, spiritual, cultural, and systemic dimensions of suffering. Third, trauma is not only personal but political and theological. The scars of colonialism are etched not just in African landscapes but in African theologies—many of which have been constructed through the lenses of European missionaries and Enlightenment rationalism. As Lartey a decolonized theology must reclaim the African theological voice, lament its historical silencing, and construct new models of divine solidarity that affirm African dignity and agency [16]. Trauma theology in Africa, therefore, is not merely an academic exercise but a form of resistance—a theological activism that confronts the theological distortions that have contributed to African suffering. Finally, African trauma theology is urgent because it offers the possibility of hope amid devastation. It invites African Christians to remember their wounds, not as a path to despair but as a step toward communal healing, prophetic protest, collective resilience and spiritual renewal. Through storytelling, ancestral memory, liturgical expression, and theological reflection, African trauma theology reclaims the sacredness of wounded bodies and the theological legitimacy of suffering narratives. In short, the task of African trauma theology is both pastoral and prophetic: to give voice to the voiceless, to name wounds that have been buried, and to affirm that God is not absent in African suffering but is deeply present, weeping, healing, and calling the community to wholeness.

8. SOURCES FOR AN AFRICAN TRAUMA THEOLOGY

An African trauma theology must draw from both indigenous and Christian sources to respond meaningfully to African experiences of suffering. African cosmologies provide a relational and spiritual framework where trauma is understood as a rupture in communal and ancestral harmony. Oral traditions, rituals, and storytelling are key mechanisms for preserving memory and fostering healing [16]. Christian resources such as the theology of the cross, biblical lament (e.g., Psalms, Lamentations) and the resurrection narrative offer hope and divine solidarity with the wounded. Postcolonial biblical interpretation also serves as a tool to deconstruct theological imperialism and reclaim African agency in theological discourse, making trauma theology both liberative and restorative.

9. AFRICAN INDIGENOUS COSMOLOGY

African cosmologies affirm the interrelationship between the physical and spiritual realms, the living and the dead, the personal and the communal. Healing is a process of restoring cosmic balance, and trauma is seen as a rupture in the equilibrium. Such cosmologies offer rich symbolic and ritual resources for theological reflection and pastoral care. African indigenous cosmology provides a vital foundation for constructing a contextual trauma theology. At its core, African cosmology views life as a dynamic and interconnected web of relationships involving the divine, ancestors, the living community, nature, and the unborn. Human beings are not autonomous individuals but are deeply embedded within the communal and spiritual network [19]. The worldview affirms that the disruption of any aspect of the network, whether through violence, displacement, spiritual desecration, or moral transgression constitutes a cosmic trauma requiring restoration, not only at the psychological level but at the communal and metaphysical levels. The African cosmos is sacred. The land, ancestors, and rituals are integral to the moral and spiritual health of the community. When trauma occurs—such as war,

colonization, or cultural erasure—it is seen not merely as physical suffering but as a fracture in the cosmic order. Healing, therefore, cannot be reduced to psychological therapy alone; it requires the restoration of relationships, reestablishment of harmony with the ancestors, and ritual acts that reclaim moral and spiritual balance [16]. In the context, rituals of lament, cleansing, reconciliation, and communal storytelling function as theological acts. They are not merely cultural expressions but are central to reweaving the torn moral fabric of the community. Moreover, these practices affirm that the past, present, and future are interconnected, a principle that resists the linear temporality often assumed in Western trauma paradigms. African indigenous cosmology thus offers a deeply relational and spiritually holistic lens through which trauma can be understood and addressed. It challenges theologians to move beyond Eurocentric dualisms and to embrace an embodied, ancestral, and sacred approach to suffering and healing.

10. CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

The cross of Christ, especially in its resonance with unjust suffering and redemptive solidarity, provides a theological grammar for articulating African pain. The crucified Christ stands not only as a symbol of divine empathy but also as a protest against imperial violence, both ancient and modern. The Christian theology of the cross offers profound resources for articulating an African trauma theology. At the center of Christian faith is the image of a suffering God—Jesus Christ crucified—who enters into the depths of human pain and identifies fully with the oppressed, violated, and forsaken. For African communities marked by historical and contemporary wounds—slavery, colonization, genocide, poverty, and systemic injustice—the cross becomes not merely a doctrine of salvation but a symbol of divine solidarity in suffering. In contrast to triumphalist theologies that emphasize only victory and resurrection, a theology of the cross insists on the legitimacy of lament and the redemptive significance of suffering. Jesus' cry of dereliction on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34), resonates with the cries of African peoples who have experienced abandonment, dispossession, and collective trauma. The cross thus legitimizes protest, gives voice to anguish, and affirms that God is present not in spite of suffering but in the very heart of it [10]. The image of the wounded Christ holds profound theological and pastoral relevance for African communities grappling with generational and systemic trauma. In contexts marked by colonization, slavery, apartheid, civil conflict, gender-based violence, and economic deprivation, the figure of Christ crucified emerges not as a distant redeemer but as a co-sufferer—one who bears the wounds of history in solidarity with the oppressed. The African theological appropriation of the wounded Christ offers a corrective to triumphalist and abstract Christology's that fail to reckon with real suffering and the need for concrete healing. Traditional Western theologies of the cross have often emphasized penal substitution or sacrificial atonement, framing the crucifixion in legal or metaphysical terms. While these models have theological value, they frequently marginalize the affective, relational, and communal dimensions of suffering. In African contexts, where pain is not only physical but also communal, spiritual, and ancestral, the image of the wounded Christ must be reinterpreted through the lens of solidarity and shared affliction. African theologians such as [20] and [21] have emphasized Christ's presence among the wounded of history, not simply as a savior from suffering but as one who sanctifies the suffering itself through divine participation. The theology of the wounded Christ echoes Shelly Rambo concept of “wounded presence”, [9, 10, 22] in which Christ does not erase trauma through resurrection but carries the marks of crucifixion into new life (cf. John 20:27). The continuity of suffering affirms that resurrection does not deny trauma but redeems it through enduring presence. In African communities scarred by violence and abandonment, the wounded Christ becomes a theological anchor, embodying divine remembrance and compassion. His wounds are not only symbols of suffering but also sites of healing, protest, and relational restoration. Moreover, the wounded Christ resonates with African cosmological understandings of pain as a communal reality and healing as a social process [10]. Christ is not merely

a personal savior but an Ancestor who mediates healing across generations, affirming the broken and restoring relational harmony. His woundedness challenges cultural silences around pain and empowers communities to lament openly, ritualize trauma, and pursue justice. The crucified Christ becomes a mirror in which survivors see their pain reflected and transfigured into hope. Furthermore, in African contexts where suffering is often spiritualized or stigmatized, the cross challenges prevailing assumptions that trauma is evidence of divine punishment or spiritual weakness. Instead, it reframes suffering as a site of divine encounter, moral clarity, and communal resistance. The crucified Christ becomes a theological companion for the wounded, a God who suffers with, rather than presides over, human pain. Therefore, integrating the theology of the cross into African trauma theology allows for a powerful reinterpretation of divine presence, not as distant or indifferent, but as actively engaged in liberating and healing the broken. It invites a theological imagination that embraces both crucifixion and resurrection as realities of African Christian existence.

11. AFRICAN THEODICY AND PROPHETIC PROTEST

African theologies of suffering must grapple with theodicy, not merely as a philosophical problem, but as a communal outcry. Lament, a central motif in both African oral traditions and biblical texts, becomes a theological act of memory, protest, and hope. The Psalms, Job, and Lamentations offer hermeneutical entry points for contextualizing lament within African contexts. African theodicy grapples with the persistent question: If God is good and powerful, why do African peoples continue to suffer so profoundly? Unlike Western theodicean frameworks that often seek philosophical coherence, African approaches to theodicy are embedded in existential realities, communal memory, and spiritual cosmology. The African experience of suffering, through colonization, slavery, poverty, war, disease, and systemic injustice, demands theological responses that affirm divine justice without denying the reality of pain or the agency of African peoples [16]. African theodicy does not seek to explain away suffering but to give it meaning within the framework of relational theology. God is not viewed as distant or punitive, but as relational, present, and responsive. The divine is actively involved in the community's suffering and healing. The theodicy is often expressed through lament, a deeply communal and spiritual practice that functions as both protest and prayer. Lament in African traditions is both a theological and cultural act. It includes dirges, drumming, weeping, proverbs, and storytelling. Lament names the suffering, acknowledges injustice, and holds God accountable in a covenantal relationship. The resonates with the biblical laments found in Psalms, Job, and Lamentations, where suffering is not denied, but articulated before God with raw honesty. In both African and biblical traditions, lament is a vehicle of faith, not its failure. African lament also resists colonial silencing by reclaiming the right to voice pain and assert hope. Through lament, African theodicy becomes a space for theological protest, communal healing, and eschatological expectation. It asserts that God is not absent in suffering but suffers with the wounded, listens to their cries, and moves with them toward justice and renewal.

12. ELEMENTS OF AN EMERGING AFRICAN TRAUMA THEOLOGY

An emerging African trauma theology integrates biblical faith with African cosmology to respond to collective suffering. First, it affirms God as a co-sufferer, present in the wounds of African communities through the crucified Christ. Second, it reclaims lament as a sacred, communal practice that voices pain and demands justice. Third, it values storytelling and ritual memory, where healing emerges through oral narratives, dance, and ancestral remembrance. Fourth, it insists on structural justice, addressing systemic causes of trauma such as colonialism, patriarchy, and poverty. Finally, it champions spiritual continuity, reconnecting the living with ancestral and divine presence to restore identity, hope, and communal wholeness.

13. JESUS AS CO-SUFFERER AND ANCESTOR

The African image of Jesus Christ must evolve beyond impassible distance toward relational intimacy. God is not merely transcendent but deeply embedded in the suffering of communities. As both Creator and Ancestor, God grieves the loss of land, dignity, and memory [23]. The suffering Christ becomes the wounded healer who walks among traumatized peoples, not to erase their pain but to accompany them through it. In African trauma theology, God is not viewed as a distant, impassible deity, but as an intimate presence that enters into the suffering of the community. The image of the crucified Christ embodies a Jesus Christ [the Immanuel] who suffers with us in the midst of the storm; the divine co-sufferer who bears the wounds of colonization, exploitation, and generational trauma. Jesus' identification with the broken (Isaiah 53; Mark 15:34) affirms that African suffering is not ignored by God but carried within the divine pathos. Simultaneously, African indigenous spirituality sees Jesus Christ as the Great Ancestor, the origin and sustainer of life, deeply invested in the moral and spiritual well-being of the people. That dual image of the co-sufferer and ancestral protector grounds theological hope in a God who is both transcendent and incarnate in the pain of the oppressed. It encourages healing not through forgetting suffering, but by encountering a God who remembers and redeems it.

14. Reconciliation And Structural Justice

Healing cannot be reduced to inner peace; it demands structural transformation. An African trauma theology must engage questions of restitution, reconciliation, and political liberation. Forgiveness, though central to Christian ethics, must not be cheapened into silence. True reconciliation involves truth-telling, memory, and justice. In African trauma theology, healing is incomplete without addressing the structural injustices that cause and perpetuate trauma. Reconciliation must go beyond interpersonal forgiveness to include systemic transformation, confronting the lingering effects of colonialism, economic exploitation, ethnic violence, and political oppression [23]. True healing involves truth-telling, memory, and reparative justice. African theologies of reconciliation must therefore be both pastoral and prophetic: comforting the afflicted while challenging the systems that afflict them. Reconciliation is not a passive forgetting of the past but an active process of communal repair rooted in justice, accountability, and restored dignity. Churches, as central moral institutions, must create spaces for lament, dialogue, and restitution. It reflects the biblical vision where peace (*shalom*) is inseparable from justice (Amos 5:24). In African cosmology, reconciliation also includes restoring harmony with the ancestors, the land, and the community, healing not only wounds, but the moral and spiritual order.

15. MAKING GOD PRACTICAL IN PRACTICAL TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES: IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICAN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Theology must be lived before it is articulated. Nowhere is that more urgent than in contexts of trauma, where abstract theological constructs often fail to meet the embodied needs of suffering communities. In the African context marked by a historical colonial violence, socio-political upheaval, economic precarity, and generational injustices, the question is not merely where is God, but how is God present and practical amid real-life trauma? African Practical Theology must thus make God "practical", locating divine presence not in abstract speculation but in the concretely embodied experiences of wounded communities. African cosmologies already present a relational and immanent understanding of the divine. God is not distant but is encountered in rituals, ancestors, land, and community [24]. Trauma in these traditions is not simply psychological but a rupture in relational, ancestral, and moral equilibrium. Healing therefore is not only clinical but communal and spiritual, requiring reintegration into the moral universe through prophetic protest, ritual, memory, and justice. Making God practical in traumatic context demands that theology enter the pain of the people. Practical theology becomes a discipline of

incarnation, where God is present in suffering bodies, broken systems, and disrupted communities. The cross as the locus of divine suffering becomes central here. Jesus' cry of abandonment (Mark 15:34) and his wounded resurrection (John 20:27) reflect the paradox of divine solidarity: a God who does not erase trauma but dwells within it. That "wounded presence," as Rambo argues, is vital for trauma-informed theology [9]. It allows survivors to encounter the God who permanently remains, empathically listens, and consistently accompanies, even when healing is not immediate. In African Practical Theology, the church becomes a site where trauma is voiced, lamented, ritualized, and resisted. Preaching becomes a space of naming injustice and offering hope. Pastoral care becomes an act of solidarity and presence. Liturgical life becomes communal protest against despair. Traditional healing practices such as narratives, music, and communal memory can be integrated into Christian rituals to foster deeper cultural resonance and holistic restoration [16]. Moreover, making God practical requires addressing structural violence. Trauma in Africa is often rooted in systemic oppression like economic exploitation, gender inequality, and political brutality. Practical theology must thus be prophetic as well as pastoral. It must move from comfort to confrontation, from therapy to transformation. A practical God is not only with the broken but also acts against the structures that break them. In essence, African Practical Theology must make God credible and tangible in the face of trauma. That means constructing a theology that is embodied, contextual, liturgical, and liberative. It must draw on African cultural wisdom, biblical lament, and Christological suffering to articulate a God who is truly Emmanuel—God with us, even in the ruins. Only then can theology serve as a resource for resilience, resistance, and resurrection amid Africa's traumas.

16. THE IMPACT OF AFROCENTRIC TRAUMA THEOLOGY ON NEUROPLASTICITY AND RESILIENCY

Afrocentric trauma theology which rooted in African cosmologies, communal worldviews, and liberationist biblical interpretations offers not only spiritual insight but also psychological and neurobiological benefits. Contemporary neuroscience has demonstrated that neuroplasticity, the brain's capacity to reorganize and form new neural connections in response to experience, is crucial for trauma recovery [18]. Trauma can impair emotional regulation and memory integration, but practices that generate meaning, connection, and hope can foster positive neuroplastic changes. Afrocentric trauma theology, by affirming cultural identity, ancestral memory, and theological meaning-making, engages these healing processes directly. Unlike Western trauma paradigms that emphasize individual pathology and clinical treatment, Afrocentric trauma theology centers communal resilience, ritual healing, and theological narratives grounded in suffering and survival. Liturgical practices such as lamentation, testimonies, singing and listening to music (music therapy), and collective prayer—core components of African Christian spirituality—not only promote spiritual grounding but also stimulate brain regions responsible for emotional regulation and memory processing [25]. These embodied theological expressions help rewire trauma-affected neural pathways through what calls "social neuroplasticity." Moreover, theological constructs such as Jesus as co-sufferer, particularly in the image of the wounded Christ, provide traumatized individuals and communities with a redemptive framework to process pain. The result is not only spiritual resilience but psych spiritual integration, whereby traumatic memories are situated within broader communal and eschatological narratives of hope, justice, and restoration. Afrocentric trauma theology enhances resilience by aligning theological, cultural, and neurological dimensions of healing. It not only restores broken theological and social imaginations but also promotes neurobiological integration—making it a holistic, culturally resonant, and scientifically informed response to trauma in African contexts.

17. IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND PRACTICAL MINISTRY

Theological education in Africa must integrate trauma-informed pedagogy that prepares ministers to engage the realities of suffering with theological depth and pastoral sensitivity. Curricula should include

African cosmologies, lament traditions, and contextual approaches to pastoral care that reflect lived experiences of trauma. Ministry training must go beyond abstract theology, equipping leaders to accompany wounded communities, facilitate communal healing, and address systemic injustices. Practical theology should be rooted in spiritual resilience, liturgical lament, and prophetic advocacy. By grounding theology in trauma realities, theological institutions can form ministers who embody the compassion of Christ, serve as agents of reconciliation, and empower communities to find meaning, voice, and hope in the midst of suffering and historical wounds.

18. DECOLONIZING THEOLOGICAL CURRICULA

Decolonizing theological curricula in Africa entails reimagining theological education through indigenous epistemologies, historical consciousness, and postcolonial critique. Traditional seminary training often privileges Western theological frameworks, marginalizing African worldviews, languages, and spiritualities. A decolonized curriculum must recover African theologies of liberation, oral traditions, lament, ancestral wisdom, and contextual hermeneutics. It involves shifting from Eurocentric normativity to plural theological voices that reflect the diverse lived experiences of African communities. The transformation challenges theological institutions to integrate African authors, themes of communal healing, and methodologies rooted in storytelling, ritual, and social justice [16]. Decolonization is not merely additive but epistemologically revolutionary—it resists intellectual dependency and cultivates theological imagination grounded in African realities. Such curricula empower students to become reflective, contextually rooted leaders who embody a theology of resistance, relevance, and liberation. African seminaries and theological institutions must revisit their curricula, which often reproduce Western theological paradigms without critique. Trauma theology should become part of theological formation, integrating pastoral care, intercultural theology, and African spirituality.

19. EQUIPPING PASTORS FOR TRAUMA-INFORMED MINISTRY

Pastors in Africa are frontline responders to trauma—from grief and domestic violence to communal disasters and poverty. Training in trauma-informed pastoral care, grounded in African values and Christian hope, is essential for equipping spiritual caregivers. Equipping pastors for trauma-informed ministry is essential for effective pastoral care in African contexts where collective and generational trauma is prevalent. Trauma-informed ministry requires theological training that integrates psychological insight, cultural sensitivity, and biblical wisdom. Pastors must be trained to recognize the signs of trauma, listen empathetically, and avoid spiritualizing or moralizing pain. It includes learning the theology of lament, understanding woundedness through Christ's suffering, and employing African communal healing practices such as storytelling, music, and ritual. Practical tools such as trauma counseling, crisis intervention, and community-based care, must be incorporated into ministerial formation. Moreover, trauma-informed ministry emphasizes presence over answers, healing over explanation, and justice over silence. By preparing pastors in that way, theological institutions foster ministers who can serve as compassionate witnesses, spiritual companions, and advocates for justice and healing in wounded communities.

20. THE CHURCH AS A HEALING COMMUNITY

The African church must become not only a site of proclamation but of restoration—a sanctuary where wounded bodies and stories are welcomed without judgment. Healing ministries, lament services, and contextual liturgies of reconciliation should be normalized. The Church, in the African context, holds immense potential to function as a healing community; restoring dignity, nurturing resilience, and addressing both personal and collective trauma. As a spiritual, relational, and cultural hub, the Church

can create sacred spaces for lament, storytelling, and ritual that honor suffering and affirm communal identity [16]. Rooted in the theology of the crucified and risen Christ, the Church embodies a God who suffers with the wounded and brings transformative hope. Healing is not only emotional or spiritual but also social and structural; therefore, the Church must engage in justice-oriented ministry, reconciliation, and advocacy. Through trauma-informed liturgy, inclusive pastoral care, and prophetic witness, the Church becomes more than a religious institution—it becomes a living sanctuary of grace, truth, and restoration. In doing so, it reclaims its mission as a vessel of holistic healing in a broken and traumatized world.

21. CONCLUSION

African trauma theology compels the academy and the church alike to confront a fundamental question: can faith retain its integrity and prophetic voice in contexts marked by profound suffering, violence, displacement, and collective wounds? Rather than treating trauma as a peripheral concern, this study argues that it must be recognized as a central theological locus for contemporary African reflection. Trauma is not merely a psychological or social reality; it is also a theological reality that shapes how individuals and communities understand God, themselves, and the world around them. This article has demonstrated that African trauma theology offers a critical framework through which experiences of suffering can be interpreted, articulated, and transformed within faith communities. By drawing on the rich resources of lament, collective memory, storytelling, ritual, and communal spirituality, it resists the tendency to suppress, sanitize, or forget traumatic experiences. Instead, it insists that trauma be named honestly, remembered responsibly, and engaged theologically. Such engagement creates space for wounded communities to bear witness to their pain while simultaneously affirming their dignity, agency, and capacity for renewal. Moreover, African trauma theology challenges reductive theological responses that seek to explain suffering through simplistic answers or triumphalist narratives. It presents a vision of God who is intimately present with the wounded, accompanying communities through grief, loss, and uncertainty. In this understanding, divine presence is encountered not in the denial of suffering but in solidarity with those who endure it. Consequently, hope emerges not as an escape from trauma but as a resilient and transformative response forged within the realities of suffering itself. Ultimately, this study contends that African communities do more than merely survive traumatic experiences; they actively interpret, negotiate, and theologize them. In doing so, African trauma theology makes a significant contribution to global theological discourse by offering a perspective rooted in lived realities of suffering, resilience, and communal healing. Its distinctive voice enriches broader conversations on theology, trauma, and human flourishing, demonstrating that faith can remain meaningful even in the aftermath of catastrophe. As such, African trauma theology stands as a powerful testimony to the enduring capacity of wounded yet hopeful communities to encounter God's healing presence and to envision pathways toward restoration, reconciliation, and renewed life.

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