

Chapter 1

Manifestation of Ills and Hazards of Racial Inequality in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Introduction

This research examines the lingering traces of racial and gender trauma endured by the narrator of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Throughout her struggles, the narrator goes through the long period of traumatic suffering. Her effort to preserve her self-dignity and distinct personality is repeatedly hindered by setbacks and obstacles created by racist practices and sexual assault on her. As young children, Maya and Bailey struggle with the pain of having been rejected and abandoned by their parents.

Maya also finds herself tormented by the belief that she is an ugly child who will never measure up to genteel, white girls. She does not feel equal to other black children. One Easter Sunday, Maya is unable to finish reciting a poem in church, and self-consciously feeling ridiculed and a failure, Maya races from the church crying, laughing, and wetting herself. Bailey sticks up for Maya when people actually make fun of her to her face, wielding his charisma to put others in their place. Growing up in Stamps, Maya faces a deep-seated southern racism manifested in wearying daily indignities and terrifying lynch mobs.

Beautiful and alluring, Vivian lives a wild life working in gambling parlors. One morning Vivian's live-in boyfriend, Mr. Freeman, sexually molests Maya, and he later rapes her. They go to court and afterward Mr. Freeman is violently murdered, probably by some of the underground criminal associates of Maya's family. In the aftermath of these events, Maya endures the guilt and shame of having been sexually abused. She also believes that she bears responsibility for Mr. Freeman's death.

because she denied in court that he had molested her prior to the rape. Believing that she has become a mouthpiece for the devil, Maya stops speaking to everyone except Bailey. Her mother's family accepts her silence at first as temporary post-rape trauma, but they later become frustrated and angry at what they perceive to be disrespectful behavior.

In Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the narrator's effort to develop creativity, dignity, career and good social standing faces unexpected difficulties. Her struggle to build up independent mindset and nonconformist outlook come to a halt as she is raped by her mother's lover. In addition, the surprising murder of her rapist creates guilt and false sense of responsibility for his murder. The narrator of Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is traumatized by various racist practices like discrimination, fear of excommunication within black community and harsh patriarchal ideology. The fact the narrator is a female being makes her more vulnerable.

Seeing her vulnerable position, the lecherous man mounts sexual assault on her whereby she is traumatized viciously. Her vehement passion to go beyond racist restriction and racially divided society clash. Resultantly, she gets traumatized miserably. The lack of moderation and self-restraint lead to the disintegration of an individual's role in society. The prospect of transforming this world under the grip of racism is questionable. It would be really tough and challenging for people under the grip of racism to make life fruitful and satisfactory. This research is strictly confined in this area.

Biography of the Writer

Marguerite Annie Johnson Angelou was born on April 4, 1928 and died on May 28, 2014, known as Maya Angelou, was an American author, actress,

screenwriter, dancer, poet and civil rights activist best known for her 1969 memoir, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which made literary history as the first nonfiction best-seller by an African-American woman.

She published seven autobiographies, three books of essays, several books of poetry, and was credited with a list of plays, movies, and television shows spanning over 50 years. She received dozens of awards and more than 50 honorary degrees. Angelou is best known for her series of seven autobiographies, which focus on her childhood and early adult experiences. The first, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), tells of her life up to the age of 17 and brought her international recognition and acclaim.

She became a poet and writer after a series of occupations as a young adult, including fry cook, sex worker, nightclub dancer and performer, cast member of the opera *Porgy and Bess*, coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and journalist in Egypt and Ghana during the decolonization of Africa. She was an actor, writer, director, and producer of plays, movies, and public television programs. In 1982, she was named the first Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. She was active in the Civil Rights Movement and worked with Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Beginning in the 1990s, she made around 80 appearances a year on the lecture circuit, something she continued into her eighties.

With the publication of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou publicly discussed aspects of her personal life. She was respected as a spokesperson for black people and women, and her works have been considered a defense of black culture. Her works are widely used in schools and universities worldwide, although attempts have been made to ban her books from some U.S. libraries. Angelou's most celebrated

works have been labeled as autobiographical fiction, but many critics consider them to be autobiographies. She made a deliberate attempt to challenge the common structure of the autobiography by critiquing, changing and expanding the genre. Her books center on themes such as racism, identity, family and travel.

Review of Literature

Maya Angelou produced most of her known work in twentieth century. Her early writings are mainly concerned with sufferings and agony of Blacks who are trapped in various inner and outer malaises and maladies. She raises genre of Black writings to the peak of sophistication and artistry. She captures the ethos and shifting trend of the American society which is exposed to countless ills and hazards like racism and deprivation. Regarding to Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, he makes the following remarks:

Maya's personal displacement echoes the larger societal forces that displaced blacks all across the country. She realizes that thousands of other terrified black children made the same journey as she and Bailey, traveling on their own to newly affluent parents in northern cities, or back to southern towns when the North failed to supply the economic prosperity it had promised. African Americans descended from slaves who were displaced from their homes and homelands in Africa. (13)

Black peoples' resistance to racism takes many forms in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Momma maintains her dignity by seeing things realistically and keeping to herself.

Karen Weekes concentrates on the valorous and puzzling disposition of Maya. He takes Maya as the most complex character. Weeks discloses the following view regarding Maya:

Maya's real name is Marguerite, and most of her family members call her Ritie. The fact that she chooses to go by Maya as an adult, a name given to her by her brother, Bailey, indicates the depth of love and admiration she holds for him. When Maya reunites with her mother and her mother's family in St. Louis at age eight, one of her uncles tells her the story of how she got this name. Thus, finding her family is connected with finding her name and her identity. (16)

Maya notes that naming is a sensitive issue because it provides a sense of identity in a hostile world. This world aims to stereotype blacks and erase their individuality and identity. Maya notes the danger associated with calling a black person anything that could be loosely interpreted as insulting.

Scott Rettberg is of the opinion that in the mind of the narrator, obsession, and guilt are represented as the ruling motive. These feelings are intense, over-mastering passion. Such chronic sense of fear is gratified at the expense of every just and generous principle, and every feminine feeling. Rettberg makes the additional commentary in the following excerpt:

There are many different devices that Angelou uses to communicate her message. Angelou uses figurative language to bring the reader to further understand the point she is trying to make. Angelou has strong use of onomatopoeia. The most powerful use of onomatopoeia is at the end. The fact that she winced definitely makes the reader realize the determination and pain the Negroes went through just to make something of them. (12)

Maya is certainly innovative in her choice of style, diction and figurative language. Despite her innovative hallmark, she is content to work in forms and genres that are

long established. Slightly, linguistic structure is praiseworthy. This work of Angelou presents the story of character that faces life in terrific way.

Mark Osteen examines *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in the light sensuous images which exist abundantly in the novel. Evocation of puzzling impact makes each character particularly distinct. Osteen makes the following pronouncement regarding to this aspect of the novel:

Angelou tells of the little sensory details that make her life working and living in the store an adventure for a young girl. She recalls the smells, and unfamiliarity of the place, and the constant stream of people who made the place seem exciting and almost magical.

However, the theme of romance vs. reality soon becomes plain. For even as the cotton pickers come in each morning, each afternoon they come back bitter and wonder as to how to make enough money. (19)

Angelou notes the difference between the wonderful mornings and the hard reality of the afternoons. She knows that things carry more meaning than their face values. Without penetrating into the surface, she tends to delve deep into the profundity of confusion.

Robert Alter is critical of Angelo's implication of probing race relation in America. Race relation has undergone massive change in America. Those who were oppressed and enslaved are now equipped with every rights which a white person can get in America. In this current context, Angelo's historical mode of reiterating the painful past hardly carries conviction. Alter asserts his view in the following extract:

The relationship between the history of slavery in North America and the current state of race relations in the USA remains unarticulated in the story itself, requiring the reader of Angelo's saga to construct a

belief system capable of imposing coherence on this labyrinthine constellation of accidents, genetics, language, and capital. (41)

History cannot be important at all time. When the present race relation is strained, historical reminiscence can be fruitful. But present scenario has undergone huge progress and change. It would not be relevant and sensible to scratch the old wound when the society is heading towards the unique level of progress. Alter's interrogation of the race relation is convincing and appealing as well.

Richard Schickel notices subversive ethos in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Angelo discourages the trend to separate history from fiction. Both fiction and history can come in joint cohesive form. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is a good example of how the fusion of both history and fiction serves humanity trapped in the chaos of silliness and shortsightedness. Schickel discloses the following viewpoint:

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings destabilizes conventional categories of fiction and reality in a way that mirrors the sense in which slavery itself is a tragic historical reality supported by an elaborate fiction of racial superiority. By challenging the Western separation of history and fiction, *Roots* has been enormously successful in provoking dialogue and deepening our understanding of the factions that constitute our social environment. (27)

Angelo's praiseworthy accomplishment is similar to that of his distant ancestor. He is aware of the genealogical history only through the help of narrative either written or oral. It is through the fusion of historical reminiscence with fiction that he becomes aware of summoning the power of myth.

Departure from Other Critics

Although all these critics examined *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, none

of them examines the issue of the exploration of racial trauma endured by the protagonist. The torturous and traumatic effects of various events like her rape by her mother's lover, her rejection in the community of other black girls and family disintegration. The society she lives in is dominated by racially charged norms. Discriminations, deprivation, seclusion, inability to express repressed feelings are all the effects of racism. Racial politics and various manifestations of discriminations give tortuous and traumatic agony. Being a black girl, Maya is subjected to various traumatic situations which arise in racially divided society. Since, the topic of the disruptive effect of late capitalism is untouched and unexplored, the researcher claims that it is the fresh, new and original topic.

Methodology

The theoretical notion of racial trauma serves as the methodological basis of this research. Many racial setbacks harm both the psychological and social makeup of those Blacks who are victimized by racism practiced by white. Within the black community, blacks belonging to the higher level of social hierarchy give lots of troubles and tortures to those who belong to the lower rung of social ladder.

According to Ron Eyerman, "The racial trauma consists of collective memory which is extremely painful. It refers to a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation of a people. There is a difference between trauma as it affects individuals and as a cultural process" (9). As cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory.

Kali Tal's insight into the traumatization of women in the patriarchal society serves as the main methodological basis. Women are prone to various harsh forces like sexual molestation, harassment, exclusion and subjugation. Constant exposure to

these hazards and pitfalls traumatize them. In *A World of the Hurt*, Tal extensively concentrates on this aspect of women's traumatization. Men who sexually abuse children are also virtually immune from prosecution.

A significant part of the psychological establishment believes that young female children fantasize sexual interactions with their fathers or stepfathers. Such fantasies are part of normal development. Prosecution of abusive men is difficult or impossible without corroborating evidence. The motives of "wives or girlfriends who accuse their partners of sexually abusing their children are often questioned by civil courts, and their charges are looked upon with suspicion" (Kali Tal 87). Incest is so rarely reported, and prosecution is so rarely effective. Pornography obsessively focuses on "rape as a pleasurable experience for the male rapist, and often casts female children in the role of the seducer" (Kali Tal 76). These views of Tal are key to the constitution of the methodological basis of this thesis.

Capra says that the historical past should be reconstructed objectively along with conducting dialogic exchange with inquiries. This model of analysis is driven by the assumption that knowledge involves affect, empathy and question of value. In Lacapra's method of analysis, hyperbole is given with plenty of importance. In addition, polemics and parody are also used to conduct the inquiry. Dialogic mode must be adopted to conduct an intensive and extensive inquiry. LaCapra is of the view that truth claims exist at all levels in historical discourse. According to LaCapra, cognitive way should not be followed to achieve information. Experience is enough. The complex network of power, truth claims and ideological effects must be analyzed with an acute sense of sharpness.

Past historical events are important. Evidences, information and proofs are collected to make referential statements. On the basis of this statement, truth claims

are made. Event, evidence and information about the past events give the basis on which claims and truths are made. In this model, structure and events are given big importance and value. Statements and truth claims are examined and evaluated in relation to structure and events. This model is objective in its treatment of historical past and events. Primary documents are chosen by those historiographers who prefer to use this model.

LaCapra asserts that experience involves affect both in the observer and the observed. He puts forward two different concepts (a) acting out trauma and (b) working through trauma. Trauma is a disruptive experience. It disarticulates the self. It creates holes in experience. Trauma has belated effects. These effects are controlled with difficulty. They are never fully mastered. To respond to the traumatic experience of others is not only to appropriate (take) their experience but also display empathic unsettlement. Working through trauma means articulate or rearticulate affect. Working through is an articulate process. This process distinguishes between past and present. Working through counteracts the force of acting out and the repetition compulsion. It involves mourning. It engages in the possibility of making distinction between what haunts and why it haunts the way it haunts. It fosters resistance to undecidability. It enables survival. LaCapra deplors the use of middle voice in historiography.

Organization of the Study

This thesis has four chapters. In the first chapter, the researcher introduces the topic, elaborates the hypothesis, and quotes different critics' views regarding to the text. In the same chapter, the researcher shows the departure also. In the second chapter the researcher uses the theorist idea of the insights of racial trauma by LaCapra, Ron Eyerman and Kali Tal. In the third chapter the researcher makes a

thorough analysis of the text, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by relating with the tool of the second chapter. The last chapter contains the conclusive ending of the research.

Chapter 2

Theory of Trauma

The researcher makes use of the notion of cultural trauma to test the proposed hypothesis. The theoretical insight of Dominick LaCapra is used to probe the issue. La Capra asserts that experience involves affect both in the observer and the observed. He puts forward two different concepts (a) acting out trauma and (b) working through trauma. Trauma is a disruptive experience. It disarticulates the self. It creates holes in experience. Trauma has belated effects. These effects are controlled with difficulty. They are never fully mastered.

To respond to the traumatic experience of others is not only to appropriate (take) their experience but also display empathic unsettlement. Working through trauma means articulate or rearticulate affect. Working through is an articulate process. In Capra's own words, "this process distinguishes between past and present. Working through counteracts the force of acting out and the repetition compulsion. It involves mourning. It engages in the possibility of making distinction between what haunts and why it haunts the way it haunts" (12). It fosters resistance to undecidability. It enables survival. LaCapra deplors the use of middle voice in historiography.

Jeffrey Alexander, Caruth and other popular theorists of cultural trauma will be quoted in order to probe the proposed thesis. Robert Mason is the leading theorist of cultural trauma. He makes an extensive study of the pervasive effects of cultural trauma. Mason analyzes "the long-lasting effects of traumatic shock unleashed by war. The effect of in human psyche is unimaginable and unthinkable" (162). Cultural trauma generates fatal and detrimental consequences. Both social memory and individual memory are dynamic processes of continuous change and development.

Furthermore, memory is divided and the subject of controversy and conflict, dominance and hegemony, neglect and forgetting.

Coming to terms not means rituals, monuments, remembrance and memory. It also means mourning and recovery. Cultural exhaustion can result in temporary or chronic illness. According to Mason, "Cultural trauma will have vicious consequences. Even after the end of war, its effects can easily be seen. The post-war period rather intensifies the lingering effects of cultural trauma" (54). During the time of warfare, only the physical bruises and wound can take place. But in the aftermath of war, the cultural effects of war will be seen in a fierce and formidable way.

Jeffrey Alexander is the leading theorist of trauma. He is of the opinion that it is through the narrativization of trauma that traumatic effects spread like wild fire. Alexander gives emphasis upon the narrativization and representation of trauma rather than the core content of trauma whether it is cultural or psychological or national. In every collective memory there are several specific moments. These moments are crystallized as turning points. These points evoke a sense of rupture with the past. The sense of rupture is inextricably bound up with a sense that a rift has occurred in memory. Conversely, every collective memory also includes templates for handling traumatic events.

Jeffrey Alexander examines any kind of traumatic terror within the context of socio-economic parameters. He links traumatic assault in relation with the fragility and vulnerability of identity. Jeffrey Alexander delivers and divulges the following insight into the core idea of trauma:

The paradigm of trauma first of all assumes the existence of an original culture, which has clear and maintainable economical, institutional, and spiritual systems and mechanisms for storing and transmitting the

experiences of the pre-aggression period. Additionally, it is supposed that the offensive culture could radically alter the identity and sustainability. Emerging from the challenge of the unknown and alien value-constellations of the trespasser, the rapid changes within the systems of original culture could lead to dissolution. (85)

Alexander says that cultural trauma is a gives an outlet of the original deviation. These deviations are necessary for reinforcing the identity and keeping the continuity. The need for utilizing trauma becomes acute during these periods when natural balanced development becomes strongly disturbed. The continuity is ensured by widely accepted and followed norms, customs, and rituals.

Cathy Caruth defines trauma as mental laceration or psychological injury. It is caused by plenty of events and occurrences. Crauth says that "Psychological trauma is a type of damage to the psyche that occurs as a result of severely distressing events" (87). When that trauma leads to post traumatic stress disorder, damage may involve physical changes inside the brain and to brain chemistry. It changes the person's response to future stress. The sense of being overwhelmed can be delayed by weeks, years or even decades. Caruth clarifies the concept of trauma in an explicit way. Psychological trauma can lead to serious long-term negative consequences that are often overlooked even by mental health professionals. Trauma can be caused by a wide variety of events, but there are a few common aspects. Trauma may accompany physical trauma or exist independently of it.

It is universally true that horrific experience are so deeply disturbing, so overwhelming, those victims of trauma will try to surprise bad memories rather than confront them. But many trauma researchers believe that it is the repression of memories and feelings that is the heart of trauma suffering in both the short and long

term. Time does not heal trauma. According to Ron Eyerman "A victim of war trauma must be helped to express suffering and to confront bad memories, with the support and guidance of an empathic and informed adult" (67). The very act of talking or writing about or even acting out, traumatic events is a way for trauma-victims to being healing and start on the road to recovery.

Every culture has its own way of dealing with traumatic experience. To quote Eyerman again, those who are aware of the fatal effects of war trauma "show that each has very different concepts of psychological distress. And much also depends on the family circumstances of the victims of cultural trauma, as well as their age and the nature of their exposure to traumatic events" (105). In all cultures one of the most important factors is the cohesion of the family and community, and the degree of nature and support that children receive. Indeed, out of the most significant from parents-often more distressing than the war activities themselves.

Trauma bears certain resemblance with historical trauma as well. Thus it becomes imperative to quote Dominick LaCapra. LaCapra is pinpointed the difficulties faced by the interpreters of trauma. He maintains that it is not possible to gain an insight into the disastrous event by just applying theory like psychoanalysis or any other postmodern theories. Even the psychological trauma of camp inmates has socio-cultural implications. Trauma has to be worked through. LaCapra mentions the following view:

Defying comprehension, the tragic history has been alternately repressed and canonized in postmodern Western culture. Recently our interpretation of the trauma has been the center of bitter controversies. From debates over Paul de Man's collaborationist journalism and Martin Heidegger's Nazi past to attempts by some historians to

downplay the trauma's significance. Many of our efforts to comprehend the fatal effect of trauma, he shows, continue to suffer from the traumatizing effects of its events and require a working through of that trauma if we are to gain a more profound understanding of the meaning of the Holocaust. (54)

LaCapra is a major voice in the domain of historiographical discussions. Dominick LaCapra projects a new clarity to the issue of trauma as he examines the intersections between historical events and the theory through which we struggle to understand them. LaCapra dwells upon the problematic that are involved in the historical mode of understanding trauma. He explores the problems faced by historians, critics, and thinkers. According to them, the efforts of theorists to understand Holocaust trauma is vain and fruitless. He considers the role of canon formation and the dynamic of revisionist historiography. Throughout, LaCapra demonstrates that psychoanalysis is not merely a psychology of the individual, but that its concepts have socio-cultural dimensions. It can help us perceive the relationship between the present and the past.

Alexander states, "The situation in which the speech act is carried out is related to the specific structural situation in which it is situated. It is historically, culturally and institutionally dependent" (173). The speaker intends to convince the audience that it, in fact, has been traumatized. This is how Alexander puts it:

In doing so, the carrier group makes use of the particularities of the historical situation, the symbolic resources at hand, and the constraints and opportunities provided by institutional structures. With these tools at hand, the first step is convincing the own group of its traumatization. Once this has been successful the work towards spreading the claim to other groups within the general public begins. (79)

According to Alexander the trauma process, the emergent trauma process, relies on, a spiral of signification. An actual carrier group needs to tell a convincing story. The success of such a story is dependent on constructing a compelling framework of cultural classification. Constructing a compelling and successful story is a complex process. It is a process that can be plagued by conflict and opposition as conflicting narratives clash for the right of creating a new master narrative. In order to coerce a wider group the story needs not only to be contingent, but meaning that can reach out to wider collectivities must also be ascribed to it.

Alexander says that collective trauma process has the capacity for identity reconstruction. In the different historical periods, realization of trauma paves the way for the reflection on historical past. It also reviews how painful events of history are repressed to develop the utopian vision of progress and freedom. Alexander examines the establishment of civil society in the light of this collective trauma process. The program to construct civil society has been often talked repeatedly in different periods of time. But true ideals of civil society are not achieved.

In the name of establishing civil society, several crimes, murders, genocide, exclusion and repression are committed. The process of constructing civil society is not free from accusation and egregious errors. If civil society achieves some positive things, it also has the likelihood of committing fatal blunders and organized crimes. The following extract illustrates and then clarifies Alexander's view regarding how genocidal violence begets traumatic trace:

Genocidal violence, cultural disruption and imposition of western cultures are some of the means whereby the colonizers sought to construct civil society. Civility and civil order are created through genocidal violence, cultural aggression and suppression of indigenous

voices. In this colonial process of constructing civil society, the trauma of genocide and cultural aggression lies. The very attempt to establish civil society itself generates violence, exclusion and subjugation. (27)

Trauma of genocide and harsh effect of colonialism lie at the back of civil society which the white colonizers created in the nonwhite countries. In the name of establishing civil society, several crimes, murders, genocide, exclusion and repression are committed. The process of constructing civil society is not free from accusation and egregious errors. If civil society achieves some positive things, it also has the likelihood of committing fatal blunders and organized crimes.

Klein Parker is another eminent theorist of racial trauma. He puts forward the new notion of the transmission of trauma. He is of the opinion that there are some of the methods whereby traumatic legacy get transmitted via interpersonal relation, mutual sense of communication and sharing of parental stories and legend. The survivors of racism tell and re-tell their children those catastrophic situations which they faced in the concentration camp. Through this way, the legacy of trauma continues to get disseminated, affecting those who are the part of broader range of the history of racial trauma. Parker makes the following remarks regarding to the transmission of trauma:

Unconscious and conscious transmission of parental traumatization always takes place in a certain family environment, which is assumed to affect a major impact on the children. Though Holocaust survivor families certainly differ from one another in many ways, the more pathological families are described as tight little islands in which children came into contact only with their own parents, with their siblings and with other survivors. In such highly closed systems

parents are fully committed to their children and children are overly concerned with their parents' welfare. (46)

The effects of trauma diffuse from one generation to another. One example of the transmission of trauma is the racial trauma. Oral narration, written discourse and search for relief via confessing about the sufferings and trauma are the usually practiced means whereby trauma is supposed to get transmitted. The effects of Holocaust trauma are invincible.

According to Alexander, “the trauma process, when the collective experience of massive disruption, and social crises, becomes a crisis of meaning and identity” (54). In this trauma process carrier groups are central in articulating the claims, and representing the interests and desires, of the affected to a wider public. His view is cited below:

In this case, intellectuals, in the terms widest sense, play a significant role. Intellectual here will refer to a socially constructed, historically conditioned role rather than to a structurally determined position or a personality type. Although bound up with particular individuals, the notion will refer more to what they do than to who they are. (23)

Generally speaking, intellectuals mediate between the cultural and political spheres that characterize modern societies, not so much representing and giving voice to their own ideas and interests, but rather articulating ideas to and for others.

The importance of Joe Louis's world championship boxing match to the black community reveals the dearth of publicly recognized African American heroes. It also demonstrates “the family had been so close to starving that they had to feed themselves slowly. Yellow Kettle started them out with soup and broth, and gradually they began to eat the meat of the bear as well” (121). She comes to learn how the

pressures of living in a thoroughly racist society have profoundly shaped the character of her family members. The following extract clarifies the case in point:

Vivian's family cultivates toughness and establishes connections to underground forces that deter any harassment. Maya first experiments with resistance when she breaks her white employer's heirloom china. Her bravest act of defiance happens when she becomes the first black streetcar conductor in San Francisco. Blacks also used the church as a venue of subversive resistance. (122)

The preacher gives a thinly veiled sermon criticizing whites' charity. The community revels in the idea of white people burning in hell for their actions.

The victims of trauma are miserably haunted by depressive inclination, identity problem, guilt and shame. Kathleen Miriam argues about the traumatic disaster:

A traumatic event is an event which threatens injury, death, or the physical body of a child or adolescent while also causing shock, terror or helplessness. Trauma refers to both the experience of being harmed by an external agent as well as the response to that experience. Youth who experience trauma may also experience emotional harm or psychic trauma which, if left untreated, can have a significant impact. Trauma typically exists along a spectrum which ranges from global to individual. (13)

The depthless trauma involves repeated traumatic events occurring over a period of time. Simply trauma usually refers to a single event, such as a rape or a shooting. Simple trauma is more likely to lead to posttraumatic stress disorder. Post-traumatic stress disorder refers to the sporadic outburst of hidden traumatic trace. Complex

trauma leads to a deeper and more pervasive set of changes. Those changes involve emotional deregulation, distorted thinking, and behavioral dysfunction.

It also consists of patterns of dysfunctional interpersonal relationships. Early researchers noted that exposure to trauma may lead to feelings of anxiety, helplessness, dissociation and behavior. These symptoms are now included within the broad category of traumatic disorder. These symptoms may be consequences of trauma. They do not always occur following trauma. Additionally, risk events can moderate the influence of exposure to trauma and the development of psychopathology.

The concept of trauma in relation to gender is the vital part of the methodological framework of this research. The notion of psychological trauma is applicable to describing the predicament of a woman who is compelled to live in a critical situation. He suggests a number of typical strategies by which societies cope with cultural traumas.

Racial trauma is treated as a link in the ongoing chain of social changes. It depends on the number of concrete circumstances. Cultural trauma may be a phase in the constructive “morphogenesis of culture or in the destructive cycle of cultural decay” (84). The patriarchal culture paves the way for the emergence of trauma which is tantamount to cultural trauma.

Jeffrey Alexander examines any kind of traumatic terror within the context of socio-economic parameters. He links traumatic assault in relation with the fragility and vulnerability of identity. Jeffrey Alexander delivers and divulges the following insight into the core idea:

The existence of an original culture has clear and maintainable economical, institutional, and spiritual systems and mechanisms for

storing and transmitting the experiences of the pre-aggression period. Additionally, it is supposed that the offensive culture could radically alter the identity and sustainability of the original culture. Emerging from the challenge of the unknown and alien value-constellations of the trespasser, the rapid changes within the systems of original culture could lead to cultural dissolution. (85)

Alexander says that cultural trauma is a gives an outlet of the original cultural deviation. These deviations are necessary for reinforcing the identity and keeping the continuity. The need for utilizing cultural trauma becomes acute during these periods when a culture's natural balanced development becomes strongly disturbed. The continuity of a culture is ensured by widely accepted and followed norms, customs, and rituals.

The idea and insight proposed by Jeffrey Alexander contribute really to the creation of sound methodological framework. Alexander initiates the formulation of his theory with the following definition:

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.

(35)

In accordance with my reading, this opening definition constitutes cultural trauma in terms of five significant and interwoven elements. Firstly, it starts with a group of people being subjected to what they perceive as a horrendous event. Secondly, this event must be recognized and felt by members of a collectivity as being horrendous. Third, for the event to be a cultural trauma it must be deeply felt in such a way that it

leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness. This mark upon the group consciousness is, fourthly, supposed to influence the memories of this group, or collectivity, forever. Fifth, and last, the at this point, undoubtedly so, existing cultural trauma will, due to the effect of the collective memory, also change the future identity of the actual suffering group and, eventually, a wider, enlarged collectivity.

These are some of the questions examined in Dominick LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. As the comma between them suggests, writing history and writing trauma are not incompatible representational practices, even if they have been traditionally opposed as the dichotomy between history and literature, historicism and psychoanalysis or historiography and literary criticism. LaCapra instead proposes to weave a dialogue between. On the one hand, traditionally historicist approaches to the past invested in truth claims, propositional contents and reference, and, on the other, postmodern, psychoanalytically informed approaches characterized by transference, performativity and aporia. La Capra makes the following remarks regarding the working out and acting through of trauma:

Rather than seeking a compromise between writing history and writing trauma, LaCapra rethinks these terms in order to envision a hybrid historical practice attuned to the affective, literary and experiential dimensions of history, while also remaining mindful of regulative ideals, sociopolitical agency and the claims of reference. (54)

LaCapra returns to key issues broached in his previous books on transmissions of the Shoah, *Representing the Holocaust* and *History and Memory after Auschwitz*. This works that focused on the distinction between acting out and working through a traumatic past, on the inevitability of transference and of second-hand trauma in this past's reception, and on the impasses of deconstruction with regard to historical

traumas.

Guided by the intention to deepen the account of Alexander's cultural trauma theory, the researcher will now take the reader on a short journey through what the researcher would like to call significant specifications of the trauma theory. These specifications concern the scientific character and applicability of the theory. It all ends with notions of a collective memory that have not yet been touched upon. According to Alexander, "his cultural trauma theory is a scientific and an empirical theory. As such it suggests new meaningful and causal relationships between previously unrelated events, structures, perceptions, and actions" (87). It is also of relevance to state that he considers the theory to be universal. "Collective traumas have", Alexander writes, "no geographical or cultural limitations" (54).

Ron Eyerman formulates his theory's basic assumption against the backdrop of a critique of what he sums up as lay trauma theory. The common denominator for this lay theory is, as contended by Eyerman, "the belief that events that are traumatic have a more or less given natural fallacy to be so. Thus according to the lay theory the trauma potential is understood as an intrinsic part of the events themselves" (154). Eyerman rejects any form of lay trauma theory and argues for a more theoretically reflexive alternative. In accordance with his initial definition cultural trauma is "always to be understood as something that is socially constructed. It means that social construction is to be understood as a social process in form of mediation through representations" (175). Thus, it is only through representations that the experience of the traumatic event can be conveyed.

As Eyerman puts it, imagination is intrinsic to the very process of representation. What is of interest here, he states, is neither ontology nor morality, but epistemology. Again, the harmfulness of an event is not determined by the event itself,

as it is argued in lay trauma theory. Regarding to the emergence of cultural trauma, Eyerman makes the following opinion:

Thus, in Alexander's own words, for traumas to emerge at the level of the collectivity, social crises must become cultural crises. This is the quintessence of cultural trauma understood as a socio-cultural construction. Meanings must be ascribed to an event in order to make it traumatic. Hence, the formation of an emergent trauma is a social process in which an event is credited as traumatic. (76)

This trauma process occurs in the gap between event and representation. The construction of collective identity involves a cultural reference. Collectivity are abruptly dislodged is traumatic status attributed to an event. It is rather the layers of meaning that are assigned to it that define its damaging effects and trauma character. Hence, again, a cultural trauma is a social construction by the means of mediating imaginations and representations.

The ascription of trauma to an event is a process that involves human agency informed by systems of meaning. These claims are made by reflexive social agents and conveyed to other members of the collectivity. Alexander calls these actual groups of agent's carrier groups. To quote Alexander:

According to the cultural trauma theory these groups can originate from different parts of the social structure. They may be elites. They may be denigrated and marginalized classes. They may also be "prestigious religious leaders or groups whom majority has designated as spiritual pariahs. These groups may also be generational or determined by different institutions. No matter what conditioned them, they are the collective agents of the trauma process. (161)

Therefore these claim makers of cultural trauma can come from a wide range of social, economic and political backgrounds. The story told is one of a terrible wrong that has been done to them and that threatens their collective identity. It is a wrong that needs to be rectified. Hence, the act of conveying the trauma claim has a lot in common with a speech act.

The traumatic effect of rigorous practice of anti-Semitism is carefully examined before using as methodological framework. Cultural trauma engages in the possibility of making distinction between what haunts and why it haunts the way it haunts. According to Ron Eyerman, the cultural trauma consists of collective memory which is “extremely painful. It refers to a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation of a people. There is a difference between trauma as it affects individuals and as a cultural process” (9). As cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory. Alexander’s view on the cultural trauma lays the groundwork for the methodological framework of this research.

Racial trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible. According to Alexander, “the relationship between cultural trauma and collective identity is entirely problematical. No threat to marks upon group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their identity in fundamental and irreversible ways group identity” (76). The cultural trauma should be “reconstructed objectively along with conducting dialogic exchange with inquiries. This model of analysis is driven by the assumption that knowledge involves affect, empathy and question of value.

Chapter 3

Trauma in Maya Angelo's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Nominated for a National Book Award in 1970, Maya Angelou's first autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is the one of the best-seller touchstones of black female autobiography. Angelou's first attempt in nonfiction raises her up to the successful black writers canon. Angelou's autobiography which can be called as a literary achievement concentrates on herself as a black girl and finally a black woman in a racist society. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* treats themes that are traditional in black women autobiographies such as the maturity, the importance of the family, self-reliance as well as the definition of motherhood. She celebrates black motherhood by focusing on entirely her own life.

The autobiography takes place in 1930's and 40's of America. There was segregation and Black people were not allowed to go to good schools, and welfare Jobs and so they were kept poor and uneducated. They were paid less than the whites and they were humiliated. The Ku Klux Klan was an anti-black organization that attack blacks especially at nights. They wore a mask on their heads and sometimes burn the houses of blacks. Segregation lead the inferiority of blacks and the superiority of whites. Moreover the women were also thought to be inferior to men regardless of their color. Therefore being a woman meant to be in the lowest status of the society. However the situation was easier and better for the blacks in the North. Although there was still segregation in the North, Blacks earn better and live in better conditions. In her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou moves from Arkansas to St. Louis so she encounters these two different worlds.

The title of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* seems to give the basic matter of the book. She sees the blacks especially the black females as the birds locked in a

cage but nevertheless they keep on singing. The title of the book reveals the sense of displacement. It represents the restriction of the hostile world on blacks. Patriarchy, the rules of fathers, is the basic cause of woman's oppression. The black women characters exposed to physical, psychological, economic, social and sexual oppression that lead to their traumatic ends. Black women's search of their identities are thoroughly made by, their struggle over patriarchy, and their experiences with "whites".

A young black girl named Maya stands in front of her church congregation on Easter. She is unable to finish reciting a poem. She wears an unflattering altered taffeta dress. This dress is probably a secondhand dress from a white woman. She fantasizes that one day she will wake up out of her "Although she was bent low to the earth, picking with great speed and industry, she had noticed that her baby was watching something" (34).

Prior to this incident, when Maya is three years old and her brother, Bailey, is four, their parents' divorce. The traumatizing effect of her parents' untimely and unexpected divorce is obvious in the following extract:

As she helped build the rack back up and replace the slices of meat on it, and as she washed sand off the pieces that had fallen onto the ground, Omakayas felt something balloon up inside of her like a cloud. It was a strange, buoyant feeling-she felt that she could be lifted away by it. As if she'd held on to an eagle and been dragged up into the air! After Deydey left, she understood what it was – pride. It was so rare that Deydey ever showed that he was proud of what she had done. (54)

The Store is the center of the community. Mother is one of the community's most respected residents. But the individual quest of the mother puts the life of Maya in

confusion, alienation, and nightmare and anxiety attack. Maya wants to grow into a dignified lady having good social standing and exposure. In this society only the White color and patriarchal arrogance gain ground. Her passion and ambition remain unfulfilled. From one moment to the other, she is harassed and frightened by racist mentality and patriarchal arrogance.

Willie is the neighboring friend of Maya. He is fated to suffer a lot. He is crippled in a childhood accident. He acts as the children's disciplinarian. Willie becomes the butt of jokes in the community due to his handicap. Maya returns home from school one day to see him. For the first time, Maya hides his handicap from two strangers who have stopped briefly at the Store. Maya understands and sympathizes with Willie. Maya falls in love with reading, especially William Shakespeare, though she feels a bit guilty because Shakespeare was a white man. Even in her educational choice and reading activity, she is doubtless about the writer of color. She fears Shakespeare despite her preference due to the fact that he is a white dramatist. With guilty sense, Maya takes cognizance of how Black laborers are paid less just because they have black skin. Maya observes:

This was a question that nobody else would have dared ask, for the very mention of Deydey's father had in the past caused his brows to lower, his eyes to flash. But this was a special night. A night they had to endure together, and so Deydey answered this question for the very first time. Geget, said Deydey, I met my father once. And I never cared to meet him again. (67)

The laborers never earn enough to pay their debts. They work in the same spirit as the White. For the same jobs also they are deprived of making the same earning as a white man earns. Having seen this instance of deprivation and racist practice, the

narrator is shocked. She asks a question to herself how Black people can hope to make their future better if they are collectively fated to endure such cases of deprivation.

As a child, Maya constantly hears from others that she is ugly. She has kinky hair and dark skin. She is large for her age. Bailey, on the other hand, is a small, graceful and attractive child. Whenever somebody remarks on Maya's ugly appearance, Bailey makes sure to "This is a good sign from the Great Kind spirit who loves us all, Said Nokomis. This is like a smile from the creator, my children" (59). The only children who do not respect Momma are poor white children. It pains Maya to hear them disrespect Momma and Willie by addressing them by their first names. The following extract exemplifies how Maya is acutely aware of racial disparity and discrimination rooted in such disparities and discrepancies:

It seemed like the whole night was on fire. Hot winds from shore sickened everyone, and the smoke hung down in a choking mass. The grown-ups took turns lying down in the bottoms of the canoes, but they were cramped and could not stretch out. Quill, whose porcupine coughed on top of his head, slept sitting up with his arms folded for a while, then slowly wedged him into the front of the canoe. It was better for Omakayas and Bizheens, who lay in the bottom and breathed cooler air. (66)

Maya imagines that people judge her unfairly by her awkward looks. They will be surprised one day when her true self emerges. At the time, she hopes that she will emerge as if in a fairy-tale as a beautiful, blond white girl. By the age of five or six, Maya has already begun to equate beauty with whiteness, a sign that the racism rampant in the society in which she grows up has infiltrated her mind.

Uprooted and sent away from her parents at age three, Maya has trouble throughout her life feeling that she belongs anywhere or that she has come to stay. Her sense of displacement arises in part from the fact that black people are not considered full-fledged Americans. On the contrary, she feels abandoned by her family. The following extract is an index to her growing agony of traumatization:

The pitiful settlers' children had reminded Deydey of something he rarely mentioned. His father had been a trader, his mother of the Anishinabe people. He gazed at the children in Fishtail's canoe and at one point shook his head and said, I feel very sad for these lost ones. I was lucky my mother's people adopted me, and my uncle became my father and loved me as a father does. My own father, who was mostly white like these children, did not love me. (67)

Maya continues to experience the emotions of this episode over and over again throughout her life. She says that growing up as a black girl in the South is "nasty. His father has gone away into his country but would return. When this great man did return, she taught his son to be ready" (69). She says that her displacement is an unnecessary insult. She prepares us to witness a childhood full of such extra insults. Maya manages to escape the critical, mocking church community and laugh about her liberation.

Maya's experiences in the store tell much about black rural small-town life during the 1930s. After the Civil War and after they had been promised land and animals with which to farm, blacks in the South entered into a period of American history nearly as discriminatory and violent as the period of slavery. The post-Reconstruction era, known as the Jim Crow era, witnessed "Mama howled with joy and threw herself on Old Tallow, who patted her awkwardly. Nokomis sat on the

ground, breathing hard, weeping along with Omakayas” (81). The Jim Crow era also brought with it severe segregation laws that affected every walk of life. It contributes to the development of white racist organizations. This extract, cited below, is illustrative of the terror and trauma caused by formidable racist organization:

The porcupine tumbled off his head, and Nokomis took the opportunity to grab J Quill in a hug, so there was nothing he could do but hug her back. Omakayas stood aside and tried not to feel anything but the happiness of seeing her father and brother, but part of her was bereft. She missed Animikilins and Miskobines. She wondered if she would ever see the boy who seemed to understand her, or the old man with his great sense of thoughtful dignity. (87)

Maya recounts Mr. Steward’s warning of the white lynch mob as an example of the conflicted nature of many whites’ acts of kindness toward blacks. His casual attitude toward the terrorization of the black community destroys any virtue his gesture might indicate. Even Willie has to hide in a potato bin all night while the white men target mercilessly the black section for a scapegoat.

Against the backdrop of terrifying events, Momma keeps her faith and self-respect. She provides an influential example for Maya and Bailey. Her confrontation with the three white girls becomes a victory for Momma because she refuses to be displaced. Such confrontation is another example of de facto racism. While Maya feels apprehension, Momma’s refusal to retreat inside the Store at their approach “Deydey and Quill lifted the canoe that belonged to Miskobines and Animkiins up into a tree, where it would not rot, and where Miskobines and his son would find it when they returned from the Bwaanag” (89). Momma addresses the girls with respect, demonstrating her maturity and poise.

In the context of the girls' ridiculous and terrible behavior, Momma's respectful address becomes ironic. Maya shows that Momma and Bailey provide her with a loving, respectful foundation that will support her in the future. But this sort of graceful endeavor ends in fiasco. As young children, Maya and Bailey struggle with the pain of having been rejected and abandoned by their parents. Maya also finds herself tormented by the belief that she is an ugly child who will never measure up to genteel, white girls. She does not feel equal to other black children. At one moment in her rejected life:

Scooped into Mama's arms, Bizheens stopped crying and began to play with her bead necklaces. After this, although the three women continued to pick, they kept themselves in a circle around Bizheens. At last, his belly tight, his mouth, cheeks, and face red with berry juice, he tumbled over and slept. Mama hoisted him onto her back and tied him to her with a cloth. Now he would be safe. (37)

Beautiful and alluring, Vivian lives a wild life working in gambling parlors. Since she is mature enough to perceive reality, she is less traumatized by racially motivated remarks and stereotypes.

One morning Vivian's live-in boyfriend, Mr. Freeman, sexually molests Maya, and he later rapes her. They go to court and afterward Mr. Freeman is violently murdered, probably by "She bent over, looking closely at the ground for rabbit tracks or dropping. Quills, who now wore the raggedest of skins and old makizinan, passed her without a laugh. He did not even tease her about her lack of skill" (101). The recurrent memory of Mr. Freeman inflicts traumatic agony in Maya. In the aftermath of these events, Maya endures the guilt and shame of having been sexually abused. She also believes that "Angeline passed around a basket of nuts- she was very smart

about watching where squirrels and mice put their caches, and she raided them” (110). Her mother’s family accepts her silence at first as temporary post-rape trauma. But they later become frustrated and angry at what they perceive to be disrespectful behavior.

Several attempts are made to help Maya recover from psychic wound and injury. Momma manages to break through Maya’s silence by introducing her to Mrs. Bertha Flowers, a kind, educated woman. This woman tells Maya to read works of literature out loud, giving her books of poetry that help her to regain her voice. But such attempt ends in futility over time. Maya’s agony becomes increasingly acute day by day. Maya becomes aware of both the fragility and the strength of her community. The following extract illustrates her efforts towards recovery from the traumatizing memories:

Painfully, slowly, the two dragged themselves onto their hands and knees, and then they stumbled out the door. They wrapped skins around their shoulders and set off in the tracks of Old Tallow, weaving slightly, praying for strength. Omakayas now rose. Somehow she found the will to follow them. Omakayas now rose. When she was a tiny girl, the old woman had saved her and brought her to Yellow Kettle so that she could live. (117)

Maya endures several appalling incidents that teach her about the insidious nature of racism. At age ten, Maya takes a job for a white woman who calls Maya “Mary” for her own convenience. Maya becomes enraged and retaliates by breaking the woman’s fine china. At Maya’s eighth grade graduation, a white speaker devastates the proud community by explaining that black students are expected to become only athletes or servants.

When Maya gets a rotten tooth, Momma takes her to the only dentist in Stamps, a white man who insults her, saying “felt her carried. Tasted a heavy broth. But for a long time she knew nothing. She did not want to emerge. She wanted to stay in the darkness with the old woman she had loved” (119). The last straw comes when Bailey encounters a dead, rotting black man and witnesses a white man’s satisfaction at seeing the body. Momma begins to fear for the children’s well-being and saves money to bring them to Vivian, who now lives in California.

Maya runs away and lives for a month with a group of homeless teenagers in a junkyard. She returns to San Francisco strong and self-assured. She defies racist hiring policies in wartime San Francisco to become the first black streetcar conductor at age fifteen. At sixteen, she hides her pregnancy from her mother and stepfather for eight months and graduates from high school. The account ends as Maya begins to feel confident as a mother to her newborn son.

Maya confronts the insidious effects of racism and segregation in America at a very young age. She internalizes the idea that blond hair is beautiful and that she is a fat black girl trapped in a nightmare. Stamps, Arkansas, is so thoroughly segregated that as a child Maya does not quite believe that white people exist. As Maya gets older, she is confronted by more overt and personal incidents of racism, such as a white speaker’s condescending address at her eighth-grade graduation, her white boss’s insistence on calling her Mary, and a white dentist’s refusal to treat her.

Maya struggles with insecurity and displacement throughout her childhood. She has a remarkable number of strong female role models in her family and community. Momma, Vivian, Grandmother Baxter, and Bertha Flowers have very different personalities and views on life. They all chart their own paths and manage to maintain their dignity and self-respect. None of them ever capitulates to racist

indignities.

Maya also charts her own path, fighting to become the first black streetcar conductor in San Francisco, and she does so with “Bizheens’s round face popped up under the heavy bearskin that covered them both. He smiled in innocent delight. Mama! He has another tooth” (131). Maya’s real name is Marguerite. Most of her family members call her Ritie. The fact that she chooses to go by Maya as an adult indicates the depth of love and admiration she holds for him. When Maya reunites with her mother and her mother’s family in St. Louis at age eight, one of her uncles tells her the story of how she got this name.

Given the predominance of pejoratives like nigger so often used to cut down blacks, Maya notes “When they were starving, he had been so weak and still, not like himself. Now he was rolling around their wigwam, halfwasy in the fire sometimes but smart enough to pull away at the last moment” (132). Mrs. Cullinan wishes to manipulate Maya’s name for her own convenience. Maya becomes enraged. The incident inspires her to commit her first act of resistance. Daddy Clidell becomes the only true father figure Maya ever knows. She loves his strength and his tenderness. He is dignified, but not haughty. He has no inferiority complex about receiving little education, but he also lacks the arrogance usually associated with men of great accomplishment.

Daddy Clidell introduces Maya to his con-men friends who have learned to swindle bigoted whites. His evocation evinces:

My relative, we were frightened when we found your medicine bag by the edge of the lake, said Miskobines to Deydey. What does it mean? We heard rumors and thought perhaps you had fallen into some evil, and we were afraid for you. We have asked ourselves, over and over,

why you would throw away your medicine. (137)

Bailey undertakes the Search for relieving escape from traumatizing atmosphere. Bailey makes frequent trips to Mexico supposedly to buy groceries. One day Big Bailey invites Maya on one of his shopping trips, inciting Dolores's jealousy. During the trip, he jokes with a guard by offering Maya to him as a wife. He drives past the border towns and stops outside Ensenada.

Over time, Big Bailey becomes a different person. He relaxes and stops putting on airs. Maya begins to "As they began walking they saw in the distance the threads of several cooking fires. A small band of people had come to camp out there in the night on an island of rocks and pine" (141). Maya drives fifty miles back to the border even though she has never driven a car before, let alone one with a clutch. But she receives a traumatizing event. Its effect is perceived by her. She expresses her response to it in this extract:

There were so many, each so different, the trees weathered by the wind and water into shapes resembling people. As they began walking they saw in the distance the threads of several cooking fires. A small band of people had come to camp out there in the night, on an island of rocks and pine. They came closer, and then stopped. Omakayas wanted to go see them immediate. (142)

Maya notes that she has changed much since the start of the summer. But Bailey shows indifference toward Maya's tales. Still, they share an interest in dancing and become a sensation at the big-band dances in the city auditorium. Meanwhile, Maya notes, Bailey and Vivian have become estranged. Unconsciously seeking Vivian's approval, Bailey begins wearing flashy clothing and dating a white prostitute.

Vivian seems unaware that her own preferences have influenced his tastes.

She demands that he stop dating the white prostitute, and he begins disobeying her rules. Eventually, Bailey moves out. He and Vivian quickly reconcile. She promises to arrange a job for him in the South Pacific. Meanwhile, Maya acts as a neutral party but becomes terribly upset when Bailey moves out. Bailey assures her that he has a mature mind and that the time has come for him to leave the nest.

Maya decides to take a semester off from school and work. For weeks, she persists in trying to get a job as a streetcar conductor despite racist hiring policies. She finally succeeds in becoming the first black person to work on the San Francisco streetcars. When she returns to school, she feels out of place among her classmates. American black women, she says, must not only face the common problems associated with adolescence, but also racism and sexism. Therefore, it does not surprise her that black women who survive these conflicts possess strong characters.

Maya's exposure to lesbianism is significant. She does not really understand what a lesbian is. She begins to fear that she is turning into one because she confuses lesbianism with being a hermaphrodite. She notes that "They may already have seen us. Miskobines and I will sneak around the other side of that island, while quill and Animikiins walk toward those people, waving and shouting" (142). Vivian's answer relieves Maya, but she still has unanswered fears about whether she might be a lesbian. Maya decides to get a boyfriend to settle the matter once and for all. However, all of her male acquaintances busily chase light-skinned, straight-haired girls.

Maya casually and frankly propositions one of two handsome brothers who live near her. But their unromantic, unsatisfying encounter does not relieve her anxieties about being an abnormal girl. The following extract illustrates some elements of trauma which Maya experienced because of her feminine gender:

Amoosens had become a happy, round-faced, excited girl of nine winters, who was always obedient and contented. She and Twilight, who was Omakayas's age, had to stick close to defend each other when their older cousin Two strike tried to disturb their peace. Two strikes was just a year older, at thirteen, but she was much stronger than her cousins. And now Amoosens finds that Quill enjoyed troubling her even more than when she was very little. (147)

Vivian and Daddy Clidell calmly accept Maya's impending, unwed motherhood without condemnation. But it is the society that denounces and excommunicates her. Resultantly, she is traumatized.

Accounts of Black domestic workers stress the sense of self-affirmation the women experienced at seeing racist ideology demystified. But on another level these Black women knew that they could never belong to their White families. They were economically exploited workers and thus would remain outsiders. The result was being placed in a curious outsider within social location. Maya undertook the mission to create culture of opposition to organized oppression of women. Concerning the necessity to create a culture of opposition, Maya contends:

The wind vibrated in the trees with a dismal growl. Omakayas knew it was the spirit of the wiindigoo and she found the strength to growl back. She asked the bear woman to help find Old Tallow, and so spare the old woman, although she had killed so many of her kind. (118)

Black women's oppositional knowledge has long existed. This collective wisdom in turn has spurred U.S. Black women to generate a more specialized knowledge. This specialized thought is Black feminism. Some U.S. Black women were profoundly reformist while more radical thinkers bordered on the revolutionary.

Dialogic mode must be adopted to conduct an intensive and extensive inquiry. Experience is enough. The complex network of power, truth claims and ideological effects must be analyzed with an acute sense of sharpness. The effect of segregation of any kind is still lingering. Nobody is immune to it. Margaret Andersen delivers the following commentary:

Perhaps she had imagined that she would get out of the constant hide-scraping. No such luck! Now she wished she had the old scraper, which was better. It was boring work and stinky too. But doing chores with Angeline was not so bad anymore, because ever since they had left often spoke of their island. (39)

The dialectic of oppression and activism also influenced the ideas and actions of Black women intellectuals. The exclusion of Black women's ideas from mainstream academic discourse has meant that U.S. Black women intellectuals have found themselves in outsider-within positions in many academic endeavors. The assumptions all negate Black women's realities. Prevented from becoming full insiders in any of these areas of inquiry, Black women remained in outsider-within locations.

Chapter 4

Angelou's Concern with Racial Equality

In America, the social status of black and white women has never been the same. Although they are both subject to sexist victimization, as victims of racism black women were subjected to oppressions which no white woman was forced to endure. In fact, white racial imperialism granted all white women, the right to assume the role of oppressor in relationship to black women and black men. The group experience of slavery and lynching for blacks, genocide for Native Americans, and military conquest for Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans is not substantively comparable to the physical abuse, social discrimination, and cultural denigration suffered by women. Those forms of racial oppressions are greater or more unjust.

Black women's political and economic status provides them with a distinctive set of experiences. Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women's experiences. Sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination. The combined effects of practices discriminate on the basis of race and on the basis of sex. And sometimes they experience discrimination as Black women.

When black people are talked about, sexism militates against the acknowledgement of the interests of black women. When women are talked about racism militates against recognition of black female interests. When black people are talked about, the focus tends to be on black men. When women are talked about the focus tends to be on white women. The compounded nature of their experience is absorbed into the collective experiences of either group or as too different.

Thus, it can be deduced that Maya is subjected to plenty of traumatizing events. She is encircled by racist obstacles and harsh constraints of patriarchy.

Though she makes an effort to rise above these traumatizing events, she cannot go beyond these obstacles. Finally, she is fated to live a traumatized life.

Maya confronts the insidious effects of racism and segregation in America at a very young age. She internalizes the idea that blond hair is beautiful and that she is a fat black girl trapped in a nightmare. Stamps, Arkansas, is so thoroughly segregated that as a child Maya does not quite believe that white people exist. As Maya gets older, she is confronted by more overt and personal incidents of racism, such as a white speaker's condescending address at her eighth-grade graduation, her white boss's insistence on calling her Mary, and a white dentist's refusal to treat her. The importance of Joe Louis's world championship boxing match to the black community reveals the dearth of publicly recognized African American heroes. It also demonstrates the desperate nature of the black community's hope for vindication through the athletic triumph of one man. These unjust social realities confine and demean Maya and her relatives. She comes to learn how the pressures of living in a thoroughly racist society have profoundly shaped the character of her family members, and she strives to surmount them.

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