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Mohammed Khider University of Biskra

Department of English



Sexual and Racial Trauma in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

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Supervised by

Mrs. BOUGOFA Zeyneb

Submitted by

MIRA Awatef

Members of the Jury

Mr. Boulegroune Adel

Dr. Lamjed El Hamel

Mrs. Djaalal Meriem

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Dedication

This work is wholeheartedly, dedicated to my mother.

To my husband who has been my source of inspiration and gave me the power to go on, the

Person who provided moral and emotional support.

To my children: Islem, Taym, and Djouri and to my family brothers and sisters.

To my supportive friend Ilhem Slimane who used to encourage me when thinking of giving up.

This research is dedicated to all of you.

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My little angel Ilhem Slimane who made my couple academic years meaningful. I wish to acknowledge her support and help to accomplish this modest work.

Abstract

The present work studies a feminist novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* written by the African American female author and activist Maya Angelou in which she portrays the struggles of her Black American community especially female children. This trauma novel embodies the exposure of black girls to the intersectionality of diverse forms of discrimination like oppression and sexual violence. Two approaches are applied to conduct this study; the first one is Psychoanalysis employing Trauma Theory and feminism using objectification theory. The implementation of both theories enables the reader to understand the suffering of the black female in a racist and sexist America. The study aims to expose the reasons that cause the sexual and racial trauma in the protagonist's psyche due to different incidents based on sexism and racism that erupt the Black American communities. Besides, it explores how Maya succeeds in standing up for herself and how she becomes a model of a black female who uses the corpus of her black writing to raise the consciousness of her people so as to be proud of their race.

Key words: intersectionality, oppression, sexual violence, sexism, racial trauma

ملخص

يدرس العمل الحالي الرواية النسوية "أعرف لماذا يغرد الطائر الحبيس" بقلم الكاتبة والناشطة الأمريكية الإفريقية مايا أنجيلو والتي تصور فيها نضالات مجتمعا الأمريكي الأسود وخاصة الأطفال الإناث. تجسد رواية الصدمة هذه تعرض الفتيات السود لتقاطع أشكال متنوعة من التمييز مثل القهر والعنف الجنسي. تم استخدام نهجين لإجراء هذه الدراسة؛ الأول هو التحليل النفسي الذي يستخدم نظرية الصدمة والنسوية باستخدام نظرية الشبيبة. إن تطبيق كلتا النظريتين يمكن القارئ من فهم معاناة المرأة السوداء في أمريكا العنصرية والمتحيزة جنسياً. تهدف الدراسة إلى الكشف عن الأسباب التي تسبب الصدمات الجنسية والعرقية في نفسية بطل الرواية بسبب حوادث مختلفة على أساس التحيز الجنسي والتحيز الذي يندلع في المجتمعات الأمريكية السوداء. إلى جانب ذلك، يستكشف كيف تنجح مايا في الدفاع عن نفسها وكيف تصبح نموذجاً لامرأة سوداء تستخدم مجموعة كتاباتها السوداء لرفع وعي شعبها حتى يفخروا بعرقهم.

المصطلحات الأساسية: التقاطعية ، القهر ، العنف الجنسي ، التحيز الجنسي ، الصدمة العرقية

List of Acronyms

KKK Ku Klux Klan

UCLA University of California, Los Angeles

RBTS Race Based Traumatic Stress

BIPOC Black Indigenous People of Color

PTSD Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

SO Sexual Objectification

SOEs Sexual Objectification Experiences

EBPs Evidence-based Practices

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General Introduction

Tragic and painful experiences of the Blacks are mainly represented in African American literature during and after slavery. Black children especially girls suffered from different cultural and historical traumas due to slavery and racial discrimination in America. The Colored children's literature in the United States contains a vast array of literary productions that depict racist practices against them. Thus, the African American literature becomes a very rich field that is reinforced by the historical events and the social circumstances of the American community. The White superiority and legalized racism took part in increasing the amount of traumatic events and experiences that Black children in general and Black girls in particular have experienced. This type of trauma has caused difficulties in knowing one's identity and hindered self-advocacy.

Trauma was a big phenomenon that influenced the lives of many black Americans especially children and it arose from all of their suffering and agony, as well as their concealed wrath and need to speak up and break their silence. They always sought change in their dreams and hopes, it was hard to be realized; it needed sacrifices to overcome the blunt trauma that influenced their daily life.

One of the African American women figures Maya Angelou who is a victim of various sorts of traumas that caused her psychological disorders and mental distress. Angelou writes her bestselling seven autobiographies including the most famous one *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in which she talks about her own life up to the age of seventeen. The novel reflects Angelou's early childhood experiences that include rape, racism displacement, and loss of identity. Angelou exposes racial and gender crises evoking her psychological state, she struggles to develop her dignified self. When her mother's boyfriend rapes her, she prefers silence for many years, however, when members of her family hear about the rape, one of them kills the rapist. Maya feels shame and guilt, therefore a powerful conflict starts in her psyche as

she thinks that this crime is her responsibility. Angelou attempts to realize self-identity in the racial and sexist America through flashback memories that are full of traumatic situations.

The author also deploys juxtaposition presenting the free bird and the caged bird to symbolize the White Americans and the Black Americans' relationships that are full of enmity, grudge, and arrogance. The caged bird has been obliged to live captivity for his whole lifetime. This caged bird represents the African American community that suffers from racism and inequality. Whereas the free bird represents the White American citizen who terrorizes and abuses the Blacks' rights as they think that it is their legitimate right.

This work is divided into two chapters each one contains either information about the topic of the research or a development of an aspect of the problems that the analysis undertakes. The first chapter includes a historical background and information about the author and the novel in addition to definitions of the key terms. The second chapter is divided into two sections: The first one is a theoretical framework of the study talking about the theories that have been employed in the analysis whereas the second is the application of the theories of the first chapter to analyze the novel through psychoanalytical and feminist lenses.

Methodology of the Research

The paradigm of this research paper is mainly descriptive. The qualitative method will be used. This research will tackle Angelou's novel from a psychoanalytic perspective implying trauma theory as an attempt to portray the traumatic events and mental distress during childhood period among black American citizens. In addition to psychoanalysis, a black feminist study will be required to show how a black girl is treated in a racist and sexist society. Thus, to enhance this research, the researcher will use various resources such as books, articles, and encyclopedias.

Research Objectives

Some of the objectives of this study are to provide a comprehensive study of some hidden aspects granted in the novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* on basis of employing a set analysis of a narrative autobiography written by a female writer.

Statement of the problem

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is a postcolonial novel written by the African American author Maya Angelou in which she exposes the marginalization and abuse of the Black Race, especially girls. Because the basic rights of little black girls are violated, Angelou suffers psychological trauma and mental distress.

Research Question

- To what extent does the novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* demonstrate the violence and injustice of the gender and race-based oppressors in the USA?

Subsidiary Questions

- How is Maya Angelou doubly marginalized?
- What are some of Angelou's struggles and to what extent does the novel contribute in her recovery from different trauma?

Aims of the research

The chosen topic has multiple aims some of which is exploring the different obstacles Blacks faced in the book. In addition to analyzing the numerous sexual and racial abuses that African American girls have experienced. The research also aims to analyze how the Whites impose restrictions that hinder the evolution of the Black Race.

Significance of the research

The study of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou seems to be helpful when examining a literary work written by a Black American woman in a postcolonial era. The author has lived a personal experience that serves as a raw -material to the creation of this masterpiece. In addition, the present work will help other students to collect clearer data about the suffering of African Americans in a sexist and segregates America.

Literature Review

The history of the African Americans is full of issues related to racism, sexuality, oppression, and patriarchy. Therefore, authors like Maya Angelou wrote poetry, autobiographies, stories, and articles to describe the impact of those issues on her community. Many scholars, psychologists, and critics were interested in studying and analyzing the trauma of Maya Angelou in her famous autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird sings* as a black American girl who experienced rape, displacement, and racial oppression. In the review of this research the researcher reviews some previous studies conducted by other researchers who tackled topics related to Angelou's novel deploying a number of theories to analyze and study the struggles of the protagonist.

The first study conducted by Dawn M. Szymanski and Erika R. Carr in 2011 entitled *Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to Theory and Research*. The researchers offered different information about objectification theory and how it provides a detailed framework for researching and understanding the position of women in society and how to improve their lives. The researchers aimed to apply objectification theory to explain trauma cases related to the sexual objectification of women. The scholars used Fredrickson and Roberts ' (1997) analysis of objectification theory to provide a basis for understanding what it means to be a female in a society that objectifies the female body. Thus, this study based on Fredrickson and Roberts'

work, contributed in explaining the reasons behind issues related to sexual objectification of women

The second study is an article entitled *Gender and Racial Trauma in I Know Why the Caged Bird sings* written by Ramesh Adhikari from Trihuvan University, the article was published in 2020, he analyzed the cultural trauma of the African American female children without identities through a deep study of the main source *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. The researcher analyzed and discussed the struggles of the storyteller to develop her dignity and to describe her traumatic experiences after her rape. He also talked about the psychological impact of the rape of the protagonist by her mother's boyfriend M.R Freeman who was dead later. The murder of the rapist develops a self-remorse and led her to five years of mutism. The researcher aimed to provide the reader with the causes that may lead to the oppression on the storyteller because of many incidents that erupt in African American communities. In addition, this study aimed to explore how Angelou in the novel suffers different practices such as alienation, dehumanization, racism, and sexual abuse.

1. Chapter One: Historical Background of the Book

Introduction

Black women in the United States lived and still live hard experiences related to prejudice and abuse that are presented through the African American writings before and after the Reconstruction. Thereby, a group of Colored intellectuals from different backgrounds emerged to employ their pens, ideas, and voices to improve Blacks women's political, social, and economic freedoms and to obtain equal rights as the White Americans.

White supremacy, racial hierarchy, sexism, and gender roles were the raw materials to the emergence of many American female activists like Maya Angelou who was a dancer, poet, actress, screenwriter, and civil rights activist best known for her seven autobiographies in which she discussed different themes of the era such as racism, sexual abuse and identity.

Maya Angelou, who wrote about racism and colorblindness, reached a high level in writing and won the highest literary rewards especially for her famous narrative autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* that is about her early life experiences. This African American novel emphasizes issues related to racial confrontation and the struggle for human and civil rights in addition to sexual oppression.

In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou depicts her coming of age as an intelligent but unsafe black girl in the American South during the 1930s and in California during the 1940s. As a black child; Maya struggles the pain of having been rejected and abandoned by her parents and by society.

1.1 African American Literature

African American literature is the literary art written by Americans whose origins are from Africa. Those literary productions cover different genres such as Autobiographies, drama, poetry, and novels of fiction. The starting point of the African American writings was based on slave narratives that are about slavery and runaway slaves, this Afro- American experience related to slavery and segregation contributed to shaping the literary history of the United States at that time

After the American Civil War and the abolishment of slavery, Newly Freed Men suffered from racial segregation under The Jim Crow Laws that legalized racism and strengthened the discrimination of the Black Americans. Consequently, a group of black intellectuals struggled to prove and find their identities in a racist and sexist America. They established The Harlem Renaissance and The Civil Rights Movement including famous female writers such as Toni Morrison who deployed fiction to imagine Blacks' living during slavery, and Alice Walker who wrote *The Color Purple* (1983) which tells stories that allow women to resist oppression and hegemony.

Blacks' writings were mainly prose for more than ten decades: Fugitive-slave narratives, personal experiences, ex-slave stories, biographies, and autobiographies inspired from Black Americans real lives were the backdrop for fictional characters and some incidents. In addition to blacks' daily life, these writings included the suffering of those colored citizens (Andrews).

After the reconstruction and the decision of abolishing slavery by President George Washington, White Americans refused this decision to maintain hegemony over the former slaves and prove white supremacy through multiple racist laws to legalize racial segregation, inequality, and prejudice. As a reaction from the part of black intellectuals who established the

most influential movement in the African American literary and artistic history. The Harlem Renaissance aimed to correct the stereotypical image that the White Americans drew about the Blacks' heritage and attitudes. One of the most prominent writers of the cultural movement the Harlem Renaissance was Langston Hughes who shows his art through Blacks' experience in the American community. In addition to black male writers, there are very famous black female writers as Maya Angelou who was a corner stone in the African American literature. Another female black writer is Zora Neale Hurston who celebrates the Black culture of the rural South. The poet and activist, Dunbar Nelson who published her first novel *Violets and Other Tales* (1985), about racism, sexuality, and family.

African American male and female authors have explored issues and themes about the roles of Black Americans in building the American entity socially, politically, and economically. They spoke about oppression, racial injustice, and identities by using the spiritual narrative that addressed many themes similar to those of slave narratives. Authors like Booker T Washington and W.E.B Du Bois debated how to fight racial segregation and Black Nationalism in the United States. Black American female writers have contributed to bring African American women's personal experiences to life for thousands of audience, among these authors: Mary Church Terrell who was an activist fought for racial discrimination.

1.2. About the author: Maya Angelou

The talented author, poet, actress, dancer, playwright, and director Maya Angelou whose works made her famous all over the world. She wrote seven autobiographies, the most famous one is *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in which she depicts her early life from the age of three to seventeen in Stamps Arkansas (Spring).

Angelou's original name is Marguerite Annie Johnson, was born on April 4, 1928, in St Louis, Missouri in the US, she is the second child of Bailey Johnson, a doorman and a navy

dietitian and Vivian Baxter Johnson, a nurse and card dealer. Her brother named Bailey, and her parent's marriage did not last, Angelou and her brother Bailey were sent to their paternal grandmother Anne Henderson, in Stamps, Arkansas (Spring).

As a black American girl, Maya had a difficult childhood full of discrimination and racial discrimination. She experienced rape by her mother's boyfriend Mr. Freeman. When her uncles had heard about this crime, they took revenge for this sexual assault and killed the rapist. The traumatic chain of incidents left her almost completely silent for many years. Angelou moved with Vivian to San Francisco to work as a waitress, a cook, and a dancer. She was professionally named "Maya Angelou" when she worked as a dancer (Spring).

Angelou won a scholarship during Second World War when she moved to San Francisco, California, then she became the first black female cable car conductor but for a brief period. Angelou was a civil rights activist and joined Harlem writers in the 1950s, she starred in music and acting. Angelou appeared in an off-Broadway production of Jean Genet's *The Blacks* with James Earl Jones, Lou Gossett Jr, and Cicely Tyson in 1961(Spring).

Maya became a national figure, and her books along with a considerable number of her autobiographies won her a great audience and readers. She worked as a teacher and a lecturer in different universities and colleges all over the world. She wrote screenplays and she was invited by many US Presidents to serve in different missions.

Maya Angelou lived in Egypt and in Ghana where she worked as an editor for freelance writers, she joined a community of "Revolutionist Returnees" Malcolm X, a Black Nationalist leader, and a civil rights activist, became Angelou's close friend whom she helped found the Organization of Afro-American Unity. After many years of hard work, she suffered from health issues for many years and died on May 28, 2014.

A big loss caused by the death of the great literary icon Maya Angelou. This author left behind her poetry, autobiographies, essays, and well-known books that created her artistic fame. Her seven autobiographies tell her life stories during childhood and early adulthood. Moreover, she wrote cookbooks and a list of plays. All these works and literary productions made Angelou receive dozens of rewards. She was the recipient of various recognitions and honors including the Ladies Home Journal Woman of the Year in Communication Award (1976) and she was named one of the Top 100 Best Writers of the 20th Century.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969; TV movie) is Maya's most famous autobiographical narrative in which she speaks about her early childhood experiences from the age of three till the age of seventeen starting from the moment of her parents' divorce when she and her brother Bailey were sent to live with their grandmother. She suffered from poverty, racism, and sexual abuse when her mother's lover rapes her at the age of eight (Brown).

Concerning poetry, in 1978 she published *And Still I Rise*; it was the third volume of Angelou's poetry that includes 32 poems. Another work is *The Heart of a Woman, All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes, Mom and Me and Mom, and Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water Fore I Die* (Brown).

1.3. Themes of I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

The narrative autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, written by the black American female author Maya Angelou, describes Maya's early childhood memories of abandonment by her parents. The novel portrays a personal journey the writer works through her poor self-concept, unstable home life, sexual assault, and teenage pregnancy.

Maya and her brother Bailey lived their early life with Momma in Stamps, Arkansas where they experienced prejudice and racial discrimination. They also suffered from poverty

and financial crises, in addition to Maya's sexual abuse and teenage pregnancy. The story includes the most significant themes of that period in the US such as racism that represents the most prominent issue of America during the twentieth century in addition to identity.

1.3.1 Racism

Maya and Bailey in the novel live with their paternal grandmother who is respectful since she is the only grocery store owner in the area of black people of the town. Maya Angelou remembers when the sheriff of the town stopped Momma and told her: "Annie, tell Willie he had better stay out of sight tonight. A crazy nigger assaulted a white woman today. Some of the boys will be coming over here later" (Angelou 17). Maya knows that members of the KKK will search for a black man to kill him. Thus, Momma hides her son Willie in a vegetable bin where he spends a whole night crying due to his being handicapped. Racism in the story is not resulted from the color of the citizens' complexion only because when Maya moves to Mexico, she fears the Mexican community for no obvious reason (Gray).

1.3.2 Identity

Identity is another important theme in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Angelou experiences a loss of identity when her mother's lover rapes her at the age of eight and when she became a mother at the age of seventeen. As a result, she is a mother and a child at the same time. She was trying to find her identity throughout the rest of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Maya attempts to search for her individuality, identifying her adaption with the general circumstances of the living of the African Americans in the American community. In the novel Maya struggles to fight the American customs to found her identity as a black American girl (Gray).

1.4. Significance of the Title *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

In literature, authors may use various ways to convey different messages and meanings without coming right out and saying it directly and clearly; this is symbolism. Symbolism in characters, colors, and objects. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is full of symbolic images and the title itself is purely metaphoric and symbolic (Hendricks).

When Angelou chose *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, as a title for her most popular narrative autobiography, she uses a metaphor for her own life experiences based on suffering. She turned to her favorite author Paul Laurence Dunbar who wrote *Sympathy*, a poem about a free and caged bird who seeks freedom from boundaries as well as bars of the cage (Hendricks).

Laurence repeated the line I know why the caged bird sings many times. When Maya uses Laurence's line as a title for her novel, she wants to create a metaphoric scene of a tied and weak bird who struggles for freedom and liberty. This implied metaphor contains a comparison of two contradictory elements. A free bird and a caged bird, the latter is fighting for escaping his captivity. This symbolizes Angelou's struggles with different issues of that era in the US such as oppression, racial segregation, poverty, and abuse (Gray).

The bird itself symbolizes freedom and the strong wish to fly and to move freely whereas the cage represents the inability to enjoy any sort of freedom since the bird is in confinement and prison. The two birds represent two opposite racial groups of the American community. The act of singing shows Maya's ability to prosper and develop despite the troubles and ties. She has a powerful will to fight to reach liberty, equality, and self-respect as a black American female citizen. The jailed bird reflects the anguish of a divided and broken society as she compared a free bird that can do anything he pleases with a caged bird who is able only to dream of liberty and happiness (Gray).

1.5 Practical Definitions

The Oxford Dictionary defines intersectionality as the interconnected nature of social categorization such as race, class, and gender regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage". This means that the term intersectionality includes to all types of oppression (Oxford Dictionary).

Intersectionality is the complex way through which we can clearly notice the negative impacts of various forms of discrimination such as racism, gender, and classism. These forms of oppression overlapped and intersected particularly in the marginalization of individuals or social groups. Oppression is the authority that permits, through exercising the strength of norms and systems, the unfair treatments or the illegal judgments of people. Intersectionality proves that social identities work on multiple levels that lead in unique experiences, chances, and barriers for each citizen. Therefore, oppression cannot be limited to one category of an identity; each oppression is dependent on and shapes the other (Webster Dictionary).

The term of intersectionality portrays the way in which systems of injustice based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, identity, disability, and other typed of prejudice and discrimination "intersect" and interconnect so as to create unique dynamics and impacts. All forms of inequality must be discussed and to forbid one kind of injustice from empowering and supporting another (Doyin).

Kimberlé Crenshaw, the law professor at Columbia and UCLA who coined the term intersectionality to describe the way people's social identities can overlap, tells time about the politicization of her idea, its lasting relevance and why all inequality is not created equal. When we talk about not being equal, we are usually discussing issues about material inequality in different aspects of life. Take income inequality. Different statistics show that women are the

least paid for the same work. That multiplies over a lifetime and means that the problem gets worse the older women get (Crenshaw).

Intersectionality simply shows how specific aspects of who you are will support you to get the good things or your exposure to the bad things in your work and daily life. Like many other social-justice ideas, it stands because it resonates with people's lives, but because it resonates with people's lives, it is under attack (Anderson and Collins).

The origin of discrimination, or prejudice based on sex or gender against women and girls is unknown. The concept "sexism" arose from the "the second wave" feminism of the 1960s through 80s and was most likely modeled after the term racism used by the Civil Rights Movement (discrimination and prejudice based on race) (Masequesmay).

Sexism basis is the idea that one sex is better or more superior to another sex. It established boundaries for what men and boys may and should do as well as what women and girls can and should do. The term of sexism was originally coined to raise awareness about the oppression and discrimination of girls and women, although by the early 21st century it had sometimes been expanded to include the oppression of any sex, including men and boys, intersex people, and transgender people(Masequesmay).

The extreme form of sexist ideology is misogyny, the hatred of women. A society in which misogyny is prevalent has high rates of brutality against women for example, in the forms of domestic violence, rape, and the commodification of women and their bodies. Women regarded as property or as second-class citizens. Women often mistreated at the individual as well as the institutional level (Masequesmay).

In any community, sex practiced against women and girls aims at reinforcing patriarchy and male hegemony through spreading thoughts and beliefs that prove women's inferiority to legalize inequality, oppression and discrimination. This oppression can be either social

hegemony or in a form of economic exploitation. Social discrimination based on sex or gender and sexist practices contains any act that shapes or classifies one sex or gender as inferior. Sexism found in behavior, speech, writing, images, gestures, laws and policies, and practices and traditions. Sexism can work on various levels in any social and cultural group. It can be institutional, interpersonal, and internalized (Masequesmay).

Sexism, most typically practiced against women and girls in society. It serves to preserve patriarchy and to keep male dominance by the intellectual and practical behaviors of individuals, institutions, and groups that oppress women and girls. Sexist behavior and practices reinforce social prejudices based on biological sex.

Oppression is an unfair or unjust exercise of authority and power, often under the guise of governmental authority or cultural opprobrium. Oppression may be overt or covert, depending on how it is practiced. Oppression refers to discrimination when the injustice does not target and may not directly afflict everyone in the community but instead aims to disproportionately impacts specific groups of people (Raymund 2).

Oppression is a term that appeared since a long time when people experienced all types of oppression, especially societal oppression. For instance, citizens who have been enslaved, they have been exposed to cultural and social oppression. They were treated violently. Oppression also refers to when women's freedoms are restricted by patriarchal practices. Sexual and racial oppression are the most common kinds of oppression through which individuals are mistreated and are forced into oppression (Abberley).

Racial trauma or, race-based traumatic stress (RBTS), refers to the moral and emotional damage done by encounters with racial discrimination, racism, and hate crimes. Any individual that has experienced an emotional wound, sorrow, and uncontrollable racist encounter is at risk of suffering from a race-based traumatic injury (Suzette).

In the USA, Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) are most vulnerable due to living under a system of white supremacy. Racial trauma is also the ongoing result of racism and exposure to racist abuse. It can affect many aspects of a person's life including the ability to have relationships and feel safe. Racial trauma is also the cumulative effects of racism on an individual's mental and physical health. It has appeared in various BIPOC communities and people of all ages, including young children. Racial trauma can be experienced vicariously or directly. It has been linked to feelings of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation as well as other physical health issues (Villines).

Racial trauma influences many marginalized people. This is especially true among African Americans who feel they have been exposed to racism in large numbers. Racial trauma triggered by media depictions of racism, such as police violence against unarmed Black people. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) affects many oppressed groups at higher rates than white individuals. Many of these traumas are the result of encounters with racism and racist regimes. While many people who report experiencing trauma of racist abuse and racial trauma can also occur when people are not individually targeted. It can affect many marginalized or stigmatized racial or ethnic groups. In addition, it influences Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in the United States of America. Racial trauma can vary in intensity from location to region or across a person's lifetime. All Black indigenous and people of color are prone to racial trauma as long as systematic and legalized racism, abuse, and racial discrimination exist (Villines).

1.6. Synopsis

Maya Angelou was encouraged by her friend and fellow writer James Baldwin to write about her early life experiences, as a result, she wrote her great successful first narrative autobiography; *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* published in 1969. This novel established her early reputation and made her an international star. From the age of three to seventeen was

the life story of Marguerite, it starts in 1939 she is three and Bailey is four and their parents separate that is why the kids are sent to live with their paternal grandmother Momma in Stamps, Arkansas. Momma is the owner of the only shop in a Black American region in the city. She is well- respected in that area. Maya and Bailey help Momma in the store and they are very clever and quick learners. One day, the sheriff of that part of the town asks Momma to hide her handicapped son Uncle Willie to save his life because a black man messed with a white woman and her friends want revenge. Just after this incident, a group of white young girls wants to make fun of Momma, but she prefers to stay standing outside her store without moving or being afraid. During the Great Depression, Momma works hard to protect the shop from bankruptcy (Bauer).

Maya and Bailey always think that their parents are dead but later they discover that they are still alive when they receive some presents in one Christmas. A year later, Maya and Bailey taken by their father Daddy Bailey, and sent to live with their mother Vivian and her boyfriend MR Freeman. In the beginning, they receive studies while they are in Vivian's mother's house, Bailey and Maya are very clever and more advanced than the other pupils. Consequently, they moved up a grade. Vivian comes and takes them to live with her and with MR Freeman who does not hesitate to rape the eight years old; Maya. MR Freeman menaces her to murder Bailey if she tells anyone about the rape, however, Vivian and Bailey rapidly notice her stained underwear, they realize what happened to Maya but she denies it despite Vivian's insistence. After a while, Maya decides to tell Bailey who tells his uncles. Later MR Freeman is dead and Maya thinks that his murder is her responsibility. As a result, she chooses mutism. A few months later the two kids are sent back to live with Momma. Fortunately, young Maya meets the sophisticated teacher Miss Bertha Flowers who wants to help her to get rid of her isolation and silence, she tells Maya about the importance of her words. Moreover, she encourages her to read books loudly. Thus, Maya starts talking again (Bauer).

When Maya is ten years old, she begins working for a white Lady who names her Mary instead of Marguerite. At that time, Bailey attempts to return to live with his mother the beautiful Vivian, but he fails. Maya makes her first friendship with a girl from school named Louise Kendricks. Maya goes on to face racism and marginalization, one day, she has a terrible toothache, Momma takes her to a white dentist who used to borrow money from her. Despite Momma's help, the dentist refuses to treat the black girl and he says that he prefers to put his finger in the mouth of a dog rather than putting it in a black person's mouth. This racist reaction of the White dentist obliges Maya to take the bus to the nearest African American dentist.

Bailey also has lived harsh experiences where Black citizens were violently treated, that is why Momma decides to take her grandsons to live again with their mother. Vivian and her kids move to Oakland, California. Maya awarded a scholarship to California Labor School. There she studies dancing and drama and Vivian marries again MR Daddy Clidell who becomes a good father to Maya. Daddy Bailey is living with his girlfriend, Dolores, whom Maya did not like. One day, Daddy Bailey decides to take Maya on an excursion, the girl enjoys the trip, but her father drinks too much wine, as a result he loses consciousness and becomes unable to drive his car. Although his daughter has never driven a car before, she finds herself forced to drive it. Unfortunately, she hits another car. This is the first time Angelou drives a car (Carey).

One day, Daddy Bailey's girlfriend MRS Dolores insults Vivian, as a result, Maya slaps the Lady then she runs away, she spends the whole night in a junkyard where she meets Black, White and Mexican runaways who live there. Maya stays there for a month after that she returns to her mother. Maya comes back home where she has read the lesbian book written by Roclyffe Hall entitled *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). She has a strong feeling of fear of being a lesbian girl because she ignores lesbianism and misunderstands the characteristics of those girls. Despite Vivian's attempts to explain and clarify what lesbianism is to her young Maya, she fails. Marguerite has no choice except to have a sexual relationship with a boy. She does not

hesitate to do so, as a result, she becomes pregnant, when Bailey hears this, he advises his sister to keep this news a secret and to return to school (Bauer).

Maya decides to hide her pregnancy from her mother and her stepfather for eight months. However, by the end of the school year, Maya tells her mother and Daddy Clidell about her pregnancy, MR Clidell supports Maya. After Guy is born, Vivian is very happy and she promises her daughter to be a good mother for her and the baby. The story ends when Maya starts feeling confident as mother to her newborn son(Carey).

Conclusion

Today, like in the beginning of the African American movement, current literary works emphasize the issues and troubles of the Afro- American society. The Black writers reflect the current struggles of the Colored people. Maya Angelou represents the female voice of the oppressed and segregated Black community. She fights sexual abuse and oppression by the ink of her words. This author focuses on portraying the cruelty of the Whites through the dehumanization of the Colored people.

Different obstacles such as sexual assault, discrimination, poverty, and absence of parents, failed to hinder young Maya from achieving her international and national fame as a black female authoress, by contrast, those boundaries strengthened her character and gave her an extra power to go on and to prove her existence as a black woman in an abusive and cruel society. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is the mirror that reflects Maya suffering and the energy she gains from this suffering to continue and to prosper.

2. Chapter Two

Introduction

Sexual and racial traumas are major themes addressed by Black American authors like Maya Angelou who personally lived and suffered from such traumatic events. Angelou's feminist narrative autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* deals with different themes like oppression, identity, freedom, displacement, racism, sexual violence, the coming of age of the African American woman, self-remorse, family, and Motherhood. The production of this novel was contemporaneous with the political and civil Movements of the era such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Harlem Renaissance.

During her early childhood, Maya's undergoes various psychological stages of evolution. Making psychologists and scholars study the different crises and traumas that Angelou has experienced and how they affect her mental attitudes. Moreover, many feminist and psychoanalytical theories tried to explain and analyze the impact of the moral, and sexual abuse on the black American girls in addition to the social inequality of the White community.

This research paper analyzes the coming of age of the author who lacks security as an African American girl in the American South. She endures double subjugation in terms of gender and race, the protagonist makes efforts to ameliorate her position in society, to improve her creativity, and to get rid of all ties that hinder her development and independence. The study also sheds the light on the fears, anxieties, and the sorrowful memories she lived. The researcher tries to analyze and evaluate the impacts of the traumatic experiences of the black American girls exposed to racism and sexual violence.

2.1. Section One: Theoretical Framework of the Study

2.1.1. Psychoanalysis

One of the most significant theories that study literature is Psychoanalysis that is an important approach scholars and critics use in interpretive analysis to interpret, discuss, and analyze works of literature using psychoanalytical lenses. The term Psychoanalysis was coined by Sigmund Freud; the theorist who employed “reading” methods to interpret texts. It contends that literary writings like dreams and personal experiences represent the author’s hidden wants, desires, and fears. Psychanalytic reading tries to explain human behavior by conceptualizing meaning from common human experiences like fears, trauma, anxiety, sexuality, repression and dreams (McLeod).

2.1.1.2 Autobiography in Psychoanalysis

Biographical narratives and life-writings are very essential to psychoanalytical studies. That is why psychoanalysis, which develops its own style of biographical narrative, has emphasized life-writings. Patients’ dreams, memories, and recollections used in the psychoanalytic case study in order to reconstruct their history. Autobiographical consciousness also altered by psychoanalysis. While psychoanalytic ideas and therapies have given rise to new methods of thinking and writing about oneself and one’s traumas. It also draws on far older models of the mind and identity (Marcus).

2.1.1.3. Trauma Theory

Sigmund Freud, the father of Psychoanalysis, was interested in traumatic events during two periods: The years between 1892 and 1896, when he investigated the causes of hysterical attacks and the years following the First World War, when he turned his attention to the effects

of war. Very briefly, consider the aetiology of war neuroses his original hypothesis. He proposed actual sexual experiences during infancy as the cause for all trauma and the root cause of neurosis. In his later work with war veterans, he acknowledges the role of the actual experiences in the development of neuroses and on basis of whether a neurosis caused by a real or an imagined event .

Trauma theory is appeared in the twentieth-century as a psychological research into the causes and impacts of various traumatic incidents (assault, rape, war, famine, and incarceration... etc) on people leading to the official recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder in 1980s. Since the 1990s concepts derived from that work have been taken up and developed as an interdisciplinary field of study involving literature, psychology, history, and philosophy with a focus on memory, forgetting, and narrative (Oxford Dictionary).

Various publications about trauma critics include: *Exploration in Memory* (Kathy Caruth 1995) and Caruth's own study :*Unclaimed Experience*, had an impact on literary studies (1996), since then a number of specialized critical works have applied trauma theory to Holocaust's survivors and war veterans' memoirs and to themes like sexual abuse in women-writings (Azmi).

Concerning literature, the trauma novel shows how traumatic incidents create and link the relationships of an individual with individuals and individuals with other social groups by challenging and analyzing these basic assumptions about emotional relations, moral laws, and social relations, they are linked to a particular social context. Books depict this rupture between the self and the others by carefully studying the location of trauma because the physical surroundings allow the examination of both the personal experiences and the cultural histories that shape and define the identity or identities of characters in relation to their traumatic experiences. Memoires represent the best example to study an individual's traumatic incidents.

The term “Trauma Novel” means fictional writings that portray an individual’s or a group’s fears and anxieties that menace the moral and healthy state of mind, it can also be the change of self- ignited by an external event or experience usually fearful experiences such as female sexual violence and the unexpected death of someone we love (Balaev148).

Critics like Cathy Caruth and Kali Tal who articulated the literary trauma, regarded traumatic experience responses like cognitive chaos and the possible divisions of the human consciousness as an inherent feature of different traumatic events and memoirs. The literary scholars use the idea that the traumatic experience pathologically divides identity as metaphor to describe the degree of damage and the type of loss done to the individual’s coherent sense of the self and the change consciousness caused by that experience (Balaev 150).

2.1.1.4 Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Many people who lived fearful, shocking, and hazardous experiences usually develop post-traumatic stress disorder. To be afraid during and after traumatic incidents is something normal. Fear may cause many split traumatic changes in the human body in order to enable the individual to defend against or avoid any danger that may threaten his mental health, this is called “fight or flight”. This strategy is a reaction designed to save a person from danger (National Institute of Mental Health).

Post- traumatic stress disorder may happen to an individual who has been exposed to traumatic incidents and experiences that make them feel shocked. It can contain wars, accidents and unexpected death. People can develop different anxieties and fears that can last for long time. However, they can feel better through therapy (Brazier).

2.1.1.5 Complex Trauma of Children

The term complex trauma refers to both children's exposure to multiple traumatic events usually an extreme nature, intrusive, interpersonal, and the extensive longer-term effect because of this exposure. Some of these incidents and personal experiences are very dangerous and widespread in the child's society like sexual abuse, social violence, and severe neglect. Those psychological traumas usually start in early childhood. They can disturb the normal growth of the mental activities of the child and they may hinder his natural cognitive development because these adversities occur frequently in the context of the relationship that connects the child with his social and cultural environment, they can prevent the child from developing the ability to form a safe attachment bond (NCTSN).

This fundamental sense of safety can contribute to shape the healthy physical and mental stability and development of the child. Complex trauma may result in various complex post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) such as feelings of shame or guilt, losing attention and concentration (dissociation), cutting oneself from friends and relatives, and mutism.

2.1.2. Objectification

2.1.2.1 Objectification Theory

Objectification theory is a conceptual framework that attempts to provide a deep understanding and discussion to ameliorate the lives of women in a society that sexually objectifies the bodies of women. It is a perspective that deals with feminist issues and how they are psychologically studied in a multicultural society. These psychological missions of objectification theory reinforce psychologists' understanding the ways of how the contextual

elements like sexual objectification (SO) influence the experiences of women and their problems to cope and fight those sexual objectification experiences (Szymanski 7).

2.1.2.2 Self-Objectification

Objectification theory tries to explain what it means to be a woman and how to help women and girls to accept an observer's perspective as a basic reception of their physical selves, this point of view is known as self-objectification, and it causes many girls, especially colored girls, to obsess over

their bodies' outlook. As a result, feelings and sentiments of shame, worry, and contempt toward oneself increase, opportunities for peak motivational states decrease, and awareness of internal physical sensations decreases. These events contribute to a number of mental health concerns that disproportionately influence women and girls including depression, eating disorders, and sexual dysfunction. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) assumed that sexual objectification develop worries about the physical outlook of women and girls. It can also decrease women's chances for motivational states. Another impact of self- objectification is to reduce the consciousness of the female about the sensations of their bodies (Szymanski 8).

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) argue that both external and internalized SO easily related to sexual orientation and race. In addition to other issues like women's identities. They also see that SO experiences may negatively affect the mental health of women, this impact can be clearly seen in societies like the USA where the sexualization of women, especially blacks, is permitted and forgivable (Szymanski 10).

Fredrickson and Roberts argued that Women in the US often experience extreme forms of sexual objectification via actual sexual victimization such as rape, sexual assault, and sexual

harassment (Fredrickson and Roberts). They believed that self-objectification is linked to multiple psychological consequences such as disorder eating, depression, and sexual dysfunction. Sexual Objectification also leads to anxiety reduction of the internal awareness (Szymanski 11).

2.1.2.3 Sexual Objectification

Many sexually objectified women are treated as objects to be valued for their use by others. According to Sexual Objectification theory, Bartky argues that when the body or body parts of a woman or a girl singled out and isolated from her as a person, she is basically perceived as an object and an ownership of the male sexual desire.

Sexual objectification frequently intersects with women's sociocultural identities such as sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and social class in order to create unique sets of experiences for women and female children. For example, from the early history of slavery to the present day, African American women have been stereotyped as sexual aggressors, uncivilized and savages (Szymanski 14).

When theorists and scholars study the experiences of African American women and girls who have been sexually objectified, they need to mention racist, sexist, and classist ideas and principles that took part in the Sexual Objectification Experiences (SOEs) among African American women and girls using grounded theory methods of feminist beliefs and objectification theory as study lenses. There are many sociocultural perspectives that contributed to strengthen the African American female sexual objectification such as historical impact of slavery, sexualized views and images of women of color in addition to some social beliefs. Different forms of sexual objectification have been experienced by black women in a sexist society could lead to multiple physical and mental disturbances including self-objectification and physical security anxiety (Szymanski 16).

Participants also talked about how to deal with these physical and mental impacts of sexual objectification of the Colored women in America, they attempted to study and explore how racism, sexism and classicism contribute to objectify the African American female. Furthermore, these specialists are playing a big role to raise the awareness of societies to reduce the oppressions Black women experience

2.2. Section 2: Analysis of Race and Sex in the Book

2.2.1. Trauma; *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; As a Trauma Narrative

Some of the literary works of Maya Angelou classified as “trauma narratives” especially *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sing* written by a black female’s pen to portray the wounds of her race and to reflect the trauma of the society that she belongs to. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* offers a collective representation of traumatic memories conveyed through the experiences of black women and black girls, the novel also shares their trauma in a text that is related to trauma literature. ”Trauma, in my analysis, refers to a person’s emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual’s sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society” (Balaev 150). The narrative autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* was published in order to fight the racial segregation and to show the struggles of the black race in the American community (Balaev)

2.2.3 The effects of Traumatic Events on Angelou as a Child

Families that cannot offer their children safety, comfort, and protection may develop coping mechanisms that enable them to love and function on daily basis, for example, they may be highly sensitive to other people’s moods, constantly monitoring to see how the adults around them are feeling and how they will act. They may hide their feelings from others and never letting on that they are afraid, furious, or sad. A great number of children are influenced by

natural, sexual and physical calamities. Thus, children who are exposed to traumatic events suffer from different mental distress (Lubit et al).

When physical and/ or mental menaces are constant, these types of learnt adaptations make sense. These adaptations are no longer helpful as a child grows up and he experiences safe environments and relationships, in fact, they may be counterproductive and interfere with the ability to live, love, and to be loved.

The biology of the human body grows and develops from childhood until adolescence and the environment has an influence this biological function. As a result, the immune system and the body's stress response systems may not develop normally if a child grows up afraid or under constant or acute stress. When a child subjected to even a moderate amount of stress, these systems may react as though the person is under a acute stress. The individual may exhibit very powerful and dangerous reactions such as very fast breathing, heart pounding, and other emotional and mental disorders.

Children who may have been through a significant trauma may have trouble identifying, expressing, and managing emotions. They frequently internalize and externalize stress reactions, which can lead to major melancholy, anxiety, or aggression. Their reactions could be erratic or explosive. When a youngster reminded of a traumatic occurrence, he may react with trembling, rage, sorrow, and avoidance.

Maya Angelou as an African American child fights against many types of trauma and oppression like trauma caused by sexual abuse at a very early age. In addition to racial discrimination and displacement as result of parents' abandonment. The book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* shows the wounds and suffering of the main character and other members of the African American community caused by the previous kinds of traumas.

2.2.4 Gender and Racial Trauma in Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

This study examines race and gender trauma in Angelou's masterpiece *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* suggesting the anguish state of the narrator, Maya. The research studies the experiences of the African American women lacking identities based on cultural trauma. The author faces difficulties after her rape. She struggles to establish her dignified self and non-conformist attitude (Adhikari).

Maya attempts to uplift the voices and anxieties of the American Colored women in her autobiography so as to regain the identities of the black race in general and the black women in particular in the white American society that is characterized by racial segregation and social injustice (Adhikari).

The researcher exposes some of the most prominent causes of the writer's traumatic incidents she has experienced. These traumatic events influence the African American community as well. The narrator goes through a protracted period of traumatic pain during her fight against racial segregation and social injustice. Maya does efforts to maintain her dignity, identity, and unique self in the face of adversity, setbacks, and color blindness on African Americans who have frequently hampered their normal living as free American citizens (Adhikari).

Maya's coming of age described in her book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* released in 1969. During the 1930's and later, in the American South, as a precious yet insecure black girl. In the 1940's, Maya as an African American young child struggles the double discrimination: racial and gender enslavement of the black women.

Maya tries to improve her creativity, profession, self-esteem, and reputation, she runs upon unanticipated roadblocks. Her quest to develop an independent mindset and non-conformist attitude comes to a halt. The protagonist and some of her family members go to the

court and claim M.R Freeman does not rape her. .Later the rapist was dead. Maya does not expect this end for the person whom she considered as a father, she plants the seeds of guilt in her psyche. As a result, she develops psychological instability and becomes very scared by racial prejudice and masculine dominance in the African American world (Adhikari).

In the novel, the narrator traumatized by practices such as alienation, sexual violence, racial –discrimination, and dehumanization. This study emphasizes the horror, tensions, sad situations, and traumatic events not only in the protagonist’s daily life. However, in the whole community she belongs to. That is why we can see through different chapters the real situation of the black American women particularly girls who are violently treated by a racist society.

After their parents divorced, Maya Angelou and her brother, Bailey, were obliged to live with their grandmother, Momma, in St Louis. When Maya’s parents separated, she was just three years old. Both kids; Maya and her brother; had to deal with the anguish of being without parents, despite their efforts (Adhikari).

The lovely grandmother Momma, takes good care of her grandsons and nurtured them. She spends her youth in looking after them. However, Maya encounters deep-seated racism in Stamps, Arkansas and she is plagued by her conviction of not being treated equally to other children including black kids in Stamps.

Maya’s hair is kinky and curly and she has a dark complexion. As a result, the residents used to have a good time of her. Her brother, on the other hand, always stands by her and consoles her while she is crying and humiliated, he always attempts to encourage her to have self- confidence, he strongly supports her. Those who make fun of Maya, are beaten by Bailey. Thus, the mistreatment of the whites and even other blacks for Maya, she loses her previous identity. This identity loss resulted in damaging Angelou psychologically and emotionally. The black Americans’ identity is also lost when Momma takes Maya to a white American dentist in

Stamps because she has a rotten tooth. When Maya and Momma reach the dentist's office, Momma tells the girl to tell the dentist that Annie is waiting for him. Maya states "Now the humiliation of hearing Momma describes herself as if she had no last name, It was equal to the physical pain. It seemed terribly unfair to have a toothache and a headache and have to bear at the same time the heavy burden of blackness" (Angelou 187) , this scene of inferiority acknowledged by Momma left a deep negative impact in Maya's soul. The dentist, Dr Lincon declares that he cannot treat the blacks "Annie, you know I don't treat Nigra, colored people" (Angelou 188). This was a clear declaration of racism and prejudice but Momma told him that she did not hesitate to support him financially and saved him but he still refuses to treat the girl -for one reason: Maya is a black girl. The dentist added "I'd rather stick my hand in a dog's mouth than in a niger's" (Angelou 189). Here the pain is not only physical, it is much more harmful when it is related to your confusion whether you are human or not. Even the right of the blacks for basic medical care is impossible to ensure in the racist South.

Another tragic experience that young Maya has lived is when she was in the eighth grade. A white pupil begins his statement that black kids are supposed to be either athletes or serve in the whites' houses, here there is a clear distinction and racial discrimination between the white and the colored race, this was a sour and painful experience not only for Maya as an individual black girl but for the whole African American people. It was a collective trauma (Adhikari).

Maya hid her pregnancy at the age of sixteen, then she gave birth to her baby child; Guy Johnson. She graduated from school as a single mother. Throughout her life, Maya has lived racial segregation, oppression, sexual assault, loneliness, and poverty. In brief she was traumatized by all kinds of crises. She was a victim of being a black girl in the American society that politically legalized racism and social injustice.

This book is a reminiscence for the black and a revelation for the white, according to Tom Dillar, this novel, he claims, is about the individual's uniqueness of each black male and female and the about the whites who often view the African American citizens through stereotypes. However, he claims that this is not the case because Maya Angelou destroyed such stereotypical images created by the whites (Adhikari).

Throughout the novel Angelou overcomes racism and grows into an indestructible woman as she learns to reply to prejudice ignorance. She wrote her autobiography in order to address different issues of the era such as rape, racial segregation, literacy, poverty, and identity loss. She also provides the audience with a fresh viewpoint on women's life in a male dominated world, garnering her recognition as a symbolic character for every black girl growing up in America (Adhikari).

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is designed by Maya Angelou as a series of lessons that express her race and identity while also leading the reader from "helpless rage and indignation" to "subtle resistance" and finally "outright active protest" against racial oppression (Walker 93).

One of the attractive stories is included in the first few pages of the autobiography. It is Easter Sunday narrative from Stamps, Maya prepares for the Easter ceremony in the church as well as for the poem recitation. Momma has a lavender dress ready for Maya who thinks that this dress has a magical power that is able to change her into a white girl "I was going to look like the sweet white girls who were everybody's dream of what was right with the world (Angelou 2). However, the depressing and socking reality revealed on Easter morning, the sun light has shown how much ugly is the girl. The color was very bad for a black body with black fat legs as well are very horrible. Maya is depressed and the dress is no more magical. She is having a black dream.

Maya overcomes with emotions when she fails to deliver her poem and the entire church begins to laugh, and she leaves the place “peering and crying” (Arensberg 7). Marguerite Johnson is presented in the book as a self-conscious child who hates her race by feeling that beneath unattractive clothes, she is different from the white girls. The real Maya hidden behind her narrow, big feet, curly hair and dark-complexion (Mc Murry 106). Maya here feels that she does not belong to the race she dreams of, she realizes that she is not a blond hair and a blue-eyed child, she loses her identity when she refuses to acknowledge her reality as a black girl. As a result, she starts searching for a new identity for herself in order to become respected and accepted by members of a white, sexist, and racist society. She portrays the feelings of having a dead dream of being white princess wearing a beautiful dress, she says describing her dress “Like crepe paper on the back of hearses” (Angelou 2). She likens her black color to a hearse that carries her dreams and her whole identity.

Maya fails to control and acknowledge her being black. Thus, she escapes from the church crying because of the disappointment and the failure to remember the words and verses of the poem she is supposed to recite. This scene in the church tells about the basic struggles and traumas Angelou lives in her early life: Her color and her position in the racist society, “She is in a cage which conceals and denies her true nature, and she is aware of her displacement.” (Mc Murry 107).

At the end of the story, Maya says “If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust of the razor that threatens the throat. It is unnecessary insult” (Angelou 4). She argues that dreaming of being white is the most painful emotion she has lived during her early childhood.

Maya’s interest in talking about racial oppression continues to appear in the other chapters of the novel when she describes the black citizens who pick cotton and come to

Momma's store, "She talks about their caged conditions, being trapped in the cotton field without the possibility to escape "(Mc Murry 107). Maya portrays the fears of the black race from the whites' oppression and cruelty "But I had seen the fingers cut by the mean little cotton bolls, and I had witnessed the backs and shoulders and arms and legs resisting any further demands" (Angelou 8). This fear in the mind of Maya has a great impact in her.

Another fearful, painful, and racist experience in the book when a black man killed because he has a sexual relationship with a white Lady. Here Bailey asks himself why there is a powerful hatred of whites for the blacks. Angelou says that Bailey "Was away in a mystery, locked in the enigma that young Southern Black boys start to unravel, start to try to unravel from seven years old to death. The humorless puzzle of inequality and hate. His experience raised the question of worth and values, of aggressive inferiority and aggressive arrogance" (Angelou 98).

When Maya works as a servant in the house of a white Lady, Maya continues to experience racial segregation, the Lady calls Maya "Mary". Maya keeps destroying the dishes of the white woman as a kind of protest for this marginalization. She explains: "Every person I knew had a hellish horror of being called out of his name, it was a dangerous practice to call a Negro anything that could be loosely construed as insulting because of centuries of their having been called niggers, jigs, dingers, blackbirds, crows, boots and spooks" (Angelou 109). Here Maya wants to acknowledge her identity (Walker 99).

2.2.5. Trauma and the Impact of Rape on Maya Angelou

The most painful experience a child may live is being sexually assaulted especially if the rapist is considered as a member of the victim's family, this crime leaves a very strong feeling of hatred, fear of relatives, loss of self-confidence and mistrust in addition to various physical harms.

An eight-year-old black girl; Maya who lives with her brother Bailey in St Louis with their beautiful mother Vivian and her boyfriend M.R Freeman. Vivian is a nurse that is why she sometimes spends the night at work. Maya used to read lurid tales, consequently, she sees nightmares this leads her to sleep in the same bed with the couple. Angelou says” Because of the need for stability, children easily become creatures of habit. After the third time in my mother’s bed, I thought there was nothing strange about sleeping there” (Angelou72). One day while Maya is sleeping next to M.R. Freeman, she describes this feeling as enjoyable. However, the man neglects Maya for months. Once, Vivian’s lover violently rapes the girl. Maya portrays this assault as a near death experience that makes her falling sick and unable to leave her bed. All Maya’s emotions for the rapist fall apart. What is more than the violent act of rape is the painful wound he leaves in her depth.

I couldn’t say yes and tell them how he had loved me once for few minutes and how he had held me close before he thought I had peed in the bed. My uncles Would kill me and my Grandmother Baxter would stop speaking, as she often Did when she was angry. And all those people in the court would stone me as They had stoned the harlot in the bible. (Angelou 91)

Maya’s mental stability is perturbed when members of her family killed M.R Freeman for the crime he committed after she tells Bailey about the assault, she believes her words killed the man that is why she decides to keep silent for years; she chooses mutism and isolation Maya develops mixed emotions about the relationship of her mother and M.R Freeman. Both Maya and M.R Freeman are neglected by Vivian, ”The rape of her daughter can be explained as a revenge against her mother, but also as an easy access to the child who is desperate for attention and closeness”(Arensberg284). Maya’s rejection by her father pushes her to consider her mother’s boyfriend as her biological father. The black females usually raped by the whites. However, this time, a member of the same race commits the crime. “Many experts explain that the post-traumatic stress caused by a violent act can flood a child with many negative emotions.

Fear combined with threats can prolong the vulnerability of the child” (Pastourmtzi209). In this case, the mental distress Maya develops and the reaction to sexual trauma is mutism and loneliness, because she feels that she is not always the victim, she is responsible for this crime as she gives her rapist the opportunity to sexually abuse her and she considers herself as a source of violence.

2.2.6. Displacement in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Childhood is a critical era for a person’s self-image. A child begins to question him or herself and their peers about a variety of issues. Everyone can imagine the feelings of a youngster rejected and abandoned by his or her parents. This exactly what Maya Angelou has lived in her early childhood. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* as an autobiography gives the reader a detailed description showing how she was displaced, and the different trauma she lived because of continuous and repeated displacement.

When Maya’s parents separated, they sends her to live with her grandmother Momma. Maya is only three years old. She is too young to be raised away from her parents’ love and care. This is her first experience of displacement. She faces hard realities in the racist American south. Maya starts feeling rejected, abandoned and deprived from her parents’ tenderness and love. Maya believes that they are dead because she cannot be persuade that they are alive and they do not care about her, one day she receives a gift from Vivian, she is shocked and begins asking herself about what crime she committed to be left by her parents (Hendricks).

When Maya is eight, a sudden arrival of her father to Stamps to take the kids; Maya and Bailey; to live with their mother. There after she thinks that she is in a secure place with her mother, she abused. As a result, she is traumatized again. When she is back to Momma, she lives cruel and hard experiences of racism and oppression (Hendricks).

2.2.6. Recovery from Trauma in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

When children are subjected to upsetting or to emotionally traumatic circumstances, they experience childhood trauma. Actual or menaced death and sexual violence are examples of childhood trauma that can arise when a youngster is exposed to terrible situations as well as when they experience them themselves, this can involve being directly exposed to trauma or witnessing trauma. Most of traumatic events cause distress. Post stress disorder (PTSD) and post-traumatic syndrome are two mental health problems that can arise.

It seems impossible to heal from traumatic experiences, but there are multiple ways and treatment options to help individuals especially kids begging to mend emotionally and physically after an incident. These ways of dealing with trauma include acknowledging and recognizing the trauma that we, as human beings, may be exposed to at any period throughout life in addition to seeking support and avoiding being isolated, besides, learning the true meaning of self-esteem.

In the USA, every black citizen, especially women and girls, is exposed to more than one type of trauma that leads to dysregulation and symptoms like anxiety and depression. That is why a therapy is required. Lisa Curtis, a licensed clinical social worker in New York, explains: “Therapy is helpful in normalizing an individual’s responses to the trauma they experienced. It can provide them with new skills to manage their feelings and responses while also providing a context and education around the event itself”. Many evidence-based practices (EBPs) are available for trauma such as:

Narrative therapy is a new therapy for trauma and a treatment method through which the therapist helps the traumatized person to “re-author” his /her experience to make it

meaningful. This approach is helpful with different mental issues. Maria Micha, a psychotherapist and a clinical mental health counselor, explains: “I ask my clients to rewrite their narrative of the traumatic events until the trauma has no hold on them”(Interview)

This healing technique named “inner child healing”. It aims at healing from childhood trauma and it includes “getting in touch” with your inner child to feel the same trauma that you felt at different ages and working to treat it. Jessica Pederson, a clinical hypnotherapist says:” It can help people overcome any feelings of guilt or shame they may be holding onto from childhood”.

When any person experiences traumatic situations, he needs someone else to turn to in order to feel secure. In spite of all the conflicts Maya has lived: man vs man, man vs society, and man vs the self, in spite of the struggles against the laws and the norms of the white sexist American Southern community, she succeeded in escaping from the sever traumatic experiences and she could heal her psychic-turmoil. Literature for Maya was as a refuge, she could find her lost identity in the words of books and poems she read: When I look back, I am so impressed again with the life-giving power of literature. If I were a young person today. Trying to gain a sense of myself in the world, I would do that again by reading, just as I did when I was young .(Maya Angelou, quoted in Phillip 182).

Literature and reading were the solutions for Maya’s psychological wounds and mental distress. She reads for white authors like William Shakespeare as well as writers of her race like Paul Dunbar and W E B. Du Bois. In addition, Maya has met characters who supported her like Momma, Bailey, her teacher Mrs. Flowers and her mother Vivian. Maya’s success to gain the fight against her traumas and struggles is clear in the end of the novel. She appeared safe, courageous, self-confident, and responsible as a single mother for a baby child that gave her the spirit and a big emphasis to carry on her fight and to teach the American society that being a

female and black does never mean that you are inferior and every one should be proud of his race, identity, and culture.

2.2.7 A Feminist Study of Sexual Objectification in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings written by the African American author Maya Angelou is a feminist narrative autobiography in which Angelou tells her life story as a young African American girl in the 1930's and 1940's. This autobiographical novel offers multiple opportunities to explore harsh personal negative experiences in the life of Maya Angelou as a black American girl.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is hard to read for someone who refuses to acknowledge the reality and truth in an abusive, male-dominated, and segregated society. Instead, it provides a correct image of the American culture and history with all its beliefs, habits, principles and paradoxes. The book offers an opportunity to the reader to react to events of oppression in the lives of African American female characters in the United States of America during the middle of the twentieth century.

The major narrative in this novel is the feminist perspective. Angelou's gynocentric narrative rapidly highlights stereotyped sexual objectification of women particularly from the perspective of a black girl in the mid-twentieth century in the American community that we all agree that it was a period of racism, patriarchy, and sexual abuse. "I was going to look like one of the sweet little white girls who were everybody's dream of what was right with the world" (Angelou 2). At that time, Maya Angelou does not suffer only from gender inequalities that have influenced the constraints placed on black women, but she also confronted with the reality of racial discrimination and prejudices that further restrict the black women's role in the American community (Bruni).

Living in Stamps, makes Angelou realize that the life of black girls is full of patriarchal practices. Thus, the Southern black girls victimized by both racial segregation and gender inequality. That is why Angelou views that the young black girls should always be ready to the catastrophes linked to sexuality. This is the fear of the black children especially girls. "The black female is assaulted in the tender years by all those common forces of nature and at the same time she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of: masculine prejudice, whites' illogical hate, and Black lack of power" (Angelou 272). Here masculine prejudice refers to the power of male regardless of the race and their violent practices they exercise on the bodies and souls of black women and black girls. In the case of this Southern black girl, Maya herself is a victim of the crime of rape that is committed by a black man rather than the usual assault on black females by the Whites (Bruni).

Many chapters of the novel include themes of sexual objectification and gender differences. Maya becomes a victim of sexual assault although she is only eight years old. M.R Freeman who is considered as a father by Maya Angelou, rapes her at the age of eight. The act of rape is emotionally violent, and mentally traumatic. This crime leaves a sense of guilt in Maya's life, she prefers not to tell anyone about the rape except her brother Bailey, it takes many days when her mother discovers Maya's sexual assault. As a result, Maya feels alienation from her family and becomes very sensitive, she is believed to be "tender hearted", her family members do not forgive her sadness and silence but they understand it. Maya declares: "In the first weeks my family accepted my behavior as a post-rape, post-hospital affliction...They understood that I could talk to Bailey, but no one else" (Angelou 88.89).

When Vivian's boyfriend M.R Freeman rapes young Maya, her whole world is transformed upside down "Now, this ain't gonna hurt you much. You liked it before, didn't you! " I did not admit that I had in fact liked his holding me or that I liked his smell or the hard heart beating, so I said nothing(Angelou 77.78), here Maya feels very afraid and at the same

time she is very shy. This little girl has lived a cruel experience of sexual abuse and the ugly act of rape described by Maya: "His legs were squeezing my waist" (Angelou 78) "Then there was the pain. A breaking and entering when even the senses are torn apart. The act of rape on an eight-year-old is the matter of the needle giving because the camel cannot. The child gives, because the body can, and the mind of the violator cannot. I thought I had died" (Angelou 78). To illustrate the impact of rape on an eight-year-old girl, Angelou uses the powerful picture of a camel passing through the eye of a needle, she is unable to express how she feels about rape since she ignores what has really occurred, she just knows how she feels: her hips are in excruciating. Maya is also unable to realize what sexuality is but she becomes sure that it is linked to violence, aggression and pain. The needle Maya likened herself to, symbolizes her weakness and incapability to refuse the assault. While the rapist has resembled a camel who is huge in size, and fearful in shape, there is no logical link between a needle and a camel. Maya narrates the event of this ugly, painful, and violent rape on an eight-year old girl to portray the patriarchal-male-dominated society she lives in .

There are paradoxes between the victim and the rapist; age differences and the interaction between a child and a huge black violent man. This means a distinction in their physical powers. The author represents the cultural and social reality of the black community That is characterized by the hegemony of the black male who oppresses the black girls. Maya is too young to accept the bitter truth of uprooting her innocence as a child. It is a cruel kind of exploitation and oppression leaving a big impact in her. She lost confidence in people she used to trust and her little mind cannot bear the mental harm she suffered from. She is not at the age to afford it neither she is conscious of it nor she likes it.

M.R Freeman does not only rape Maya, but he menaces to kill her if she screams and asks for help and to kill her lovely brother Bailey if she tells anyone "If you ever tell anybody what we did, I will have to kill Bailey" (Angelou 74). This clear threat makes Maya thinks of

hiding the crime “The thought that he might kill Bailey stunned me” (Angelou 74). At the beginning. Angelou liked to be held by someone because she is deprived of tenderness and love. M.R Freeman leaves her alone for weeks without taking care of her as he used to do. Maya starts feeling neglected, rejected and hurt, she loses herself because she does not make any friendships and she has no one to turn to.

Maya considered Vivian’s boyfriend as her father. Unfortunately, he rapes her. The girl prefers not to say what happened. When her mother and Bailey discover, they decide to demand justice. The tragedy of young Maya does not come to an end after being raped, she is asked to go to the court to witness whether M.R. Freeman has assaulted her or not. During the trial, M.R Freeman’s lawyer attempts to protect his client, he asks young Maya some questions that make her believe that she is the criminal instead of being a victim. The lawyer asks” What was the defendant wearing? “I don’t know” “You meant to say this man raped you and you don’t know what he was wearing?” he snickered as if I had raped Freeman,” (Angelou 84). “Do you know if you were raped?” (Angelou 84).

The narrator highlights the questions she has been asked to describe how she is pushed by force to answer such questions. Maya is victimized twice; the first time by the rape and the second time by questioning her instead of questioning the criminal. She finds herself in a dilemma. She cannot defend herself because she is a young black female questioned in the court by an adult male. It is the bitterest question a girl can ever receive. Here Maya is doubly marginalized and victimized. As a result, Angelou feels guilty and deeply injured as she is blamed for this rape when she permitted the rapist to assault her, she is in chaos whether she is raped or she has raped the man. It is painful, hurting, distressing, and torturing to give answers to questions that recount the trauma. She strongly believes that if a black woman seeks justice and equality, she will be judged and blamed either in a direct or indirect way.

When the rapist was found killed, Maya started blaming herself and thinks that her words killed the man, this feeling of self-loath is a result of Maya's ignorance of her being a victim instead of being a criminal, she believes that she has sold herself to the devil. Therefore, she decided not to talk to anybody but her brother. For some time her relatives accept her mutism as a reaction to traumatic incident, but later they become angry, aggressive and violent with her (Kibin).

The bitterest and the most traumatic period in these thirteen years of Maya's early childhood is the memory of sexual objectification of this black American female child, she is molested and raped, she cannot even understand what happened to her. This sexual assault has left a scaring impact especially mentally and emotionally in her psyche. The thread goes on with racial segregation, abandonment, and a negligent father (Kibin).

2.2.8. Silencing Objectification in the Novel

The book delves into a variety of significant topics including sexuality and rape. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* demonstrates how society exploited Maya Angelou as an African American child and as a young black woman. She emphasizes the pain of sexual assault, the emotional torment of not daring to report, and her remorse and shame for having been raped in the autobiography. The horror of rape is amplified by her anxiety of telling. She had kept a self-imposed silence for many years following the rape, communicating only very occasionally. Maya says "I thought my voice killed him; I killed that man, because I told his name" (Angelou 90). She later says "And then I thought I would never speak again, because my voice would kill anyone" (Angelou 90).

Maya's voice that was silenced during her childhood becomes a means of self-defense for every black woman and girl, this voice talked to every woman of her race even if she had not been assaulted because she knows that black females always live with the fear of that

trauma. Angelou had suffered from optional mutism and anxiety illness in which a child is unable to speak. As a result, of physical, mental and psychological trauma. Maya spent about five years silent, her listening, observing, and memorizing competences increased and her love of literature grew.

2.2.9. The Catalyst Characters

The catalyst character or the catalytic character in the story is the character who pushes the main character or the protagonist to act in such a way. This character generally influences the protagonist either positively or negatively. Authors employ catalyst characters to portray the change that the main character can learn. In this novel, we have many catalytic characters, but their influence is sometimes positive and other times negative. However, before tackling those characters, let us talk first about the protagonist; Maya, the story is told from her perspective, she symbolizes heroism for every black male and every black female; adults and children. She deploys her childhood experiences to prove how she is capable of struggling and surviving and how she can get rid of her obstacles as well as traumatic memories. As a black female child who lives in a White, racist, and sexist society, she could transform her shame and complexity of her race and black color to feeling pride.

The only owner of the only store in Stamps; Annie Henderson; Momma has a great impact on the protagonist. She faces racism in a very smart and diplomatic strategy “the strategy of obedience”, she is a hard worker and a very wise successful businesswoman in addition to her physical strength. She loves Maya too much, Maya once said “A deep brooding love hung over everything she touched” (Angelou 13, 14).

Bailey Johnson, the most influential character in the life of Maya particularly in her childhood. Maya describes him as “Bright, clever, and good-spirited” (Angelou 15). He is Marguerite’s hero who strongly supports her “Bailey was the greatest person in my world”

(Angelou 21). His love, care, and support empower the little lonely girl. He is the only character who succeeds in confronting her after the trauma of her sexual abuse even when she chooses mutism. He is her voice and her words.

Vivian Baxter, the “glamorous if feckless mother” (Angelou 18) of Maya and Bailey. Maya is awestruck by her beauty, claiming that she is “too lovely to have children” (Angelou 19). Maya and her mother are emotionally estranged but she later understands her mother’s abandonment of her and her brother implying that Vivian was a poor parent “Vivian is worried about her children’s well-being, although she is neglectful of them (Angelou 19). When Maya becomes pregnant at the end of the novel; Vivian supports her daughter and her grandchild and takes care of them both.

M.R Freeman; Vivian’s lover, he serves as a father figure for Maya who is desperate to be accepted by a man. He takes advantage of this by raping her at the age of eight. His bodily contact with Maya body confuses her and she thinks that she is finally loved after being rejected and abandoned by her parents, his hug deeply influenced her. His death makes Maya feel guilty as a result, she becomes careful not to talk.

Conclusion

During the mid-twentieth century, African Americans were exposed to various types of oppression such as social inequality, Whites’ unjustified hatred, sexual violence, and racial segregation. They suffered from hurtful traumatic incidents. Maya Angelou is one of these Colored female citizens. As a young girl, she lived difficult infancy and adolescence that were characterized by racism and abandonment by her parents, marginalization by a segregated society, and cruel judgments owing to her being black female. All of these painful and bitter experiences affected Maya’s as well as African Americans’ mental balance. Thus, these struggles left a deep impact on their psyche.

In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou's most famous autobiographical novel, she portrays the obstacles and challenges the African American race had been faced with. However, it was surprising that in spite of all those traumas, the Blacks could win the fight and could heal from their mental distress caused by all types of traumatic events that have been mentioned before.

General Conclusion

The African American female author and the producer of the masterpiece *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* internalizes both racial and gender inequity since she began to grow up in the American Rural South. In addition, she experienced rape at an early age. These experiences of racism and patriarchal hegemony and sexual assault were the main reasons that caused her psychological turmoil and mental distress upon which she was unable to get rid of.

The researcher has vividly sketched the painful, harmful, and bitter experience after a careful examination, analysis, and study of the novel in which the author portrays black women's trauma in the African American community. The researcher's main finding is that when the limits of racial segregation and gender hegemony reached, Angelou depicts the restrictions that tied up women. She is in a miserable, pitiful and helpless state of her own making.

In this regard, this research has demonstrated how the narrator is doubly- marginalized when she becomes a victim of both race and sex. Working through trauma, Angelou cats out this trauma. In the novel, Angelou shares her personal experiences with the world not only to portray the bad circumstances she lives, but she represents all the African American community who suffered from the violence and the injustice of the race-based oppressors in the USA.

Through the presentation of Angelou's trauma, the narrator succeeds to gain sympathy of the readers by describing the suffering of the black race and the black women in particular

through the eyes of an innocent child. She gains our support before we give our moral judgment. Maya left behind her lessons that will be a good model for generations. In addition, she has a courageous withstanding with racism and sexism and she goes on making her own life.

Maya Angelou in her autobiography lived in a society restricted by racism and patriarchy until she develops racial self-hatred and insecurity about her shape and her personality. However, by the end of the novel, Maya gets rid of her weaknesses and insecurities and instead, she develops self-confidence and self-awareness of her own strength. Moreover, Maya constructed her dignity after she wins her struggles. After many attempts, Maya discovered the power of her words and uses them to explore and discover the world around her and to raise the consciousness of the black Americans particularly women who reveal the cynical empathy of those who were once abused and are now obliged to live with shame and weakness that come out of their suffering.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings plays a vital role in empowering Angelou through helping her to manage her psychological situation to recover from her trauma and feelings of shame. The novel includes themes that can change many lives and it enables her community to raise self-confidence, race pride, and speech recovery.

Résumé

Le présent travail étudie un roman féministe *Je Sais Pourquoi Chante l'Oiseau* écrit par l'auteure et activiste afro-américaine Maya Angelou dans lequel elle dépeint les luttes de sa communauté noire américaine, en particulier les filles. Ce roman traumatique incarne l'exposition des filles noires à l'intersectionnalité de diverses formes de discrimination comme l'oppression et la violence sexuelle. Deux approches sont appliquées pour mener cette étude; le premier est la psychanalyse utilisant la théorie du traumatisme et le féminisme utilisant la théorie de l'objectivation. La mise en œuvre des deux théories permet au lecteur de comprendre la souffrance de la femme noire dans une Amérique raciste et sexiste. L'étude vise à exposer les raisons qui causent le traumatisme sexuel et racial dans la psyché du protagoniste en raison de différents incidents basés sur le sexisme et le racisme qui éclatent dans les communautés noires américaines. En outre, il explore comment Maya réussit à se défendre et comment elle devient une modale d'une femme noire qui utilise le corpus de son écriture noire pour élever la conscience de son peuple afin qu'il soit fier de sa race.

Termes clés : intersectionnalité, oppression, violence sexuelle, sexisme, traumatisme racial

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