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Literature and Civilization

Unveiling Institutional Racism, Trauma, and Hope in

Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam's *Punching the Air*

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Abstract

Punching the Air displays certain aspects that African Americans are currently experiencing in the American society. Black people have a long history of inequality and racism in America. Slavery is part and parcel from this history. Its impact is lasting forever in the minds of African Americans and Black people generally. The experiences of the authors Yusef Salaam and Ibi Zoboi with the US institutions are demonstrated in the novel. Further, this research explores the institutional racism and its traumatic effects on Amal, the main character. The applied methodological theories are: Critical Race Theory, Race-Based Traumatic Stress Theory, and Psychoanalysis Theory. The findings of the study should draw similarities between Yusef Salaam and the main character. They need to show the discrimination towards African Americans. One of the main findings is to depict the protagonist's psychological trauma and his fight for overcoming it through art.

Key words: racial inequality, racism, slavery, trauma

Résumé

Punching the Air montre certains aspects que les Afro-Américains vivent actuellement dans la société américaine. Les Noirs ont une longue histoire d'inégalité et de racisme en Amérique. L'esclavage fait partie intégrante de cette histoire. Son impact est durable à jamais dans l'esprit des Afro-Américains et des Noirs en général. Les expériences des auteurs Yusef Salaam et Ibi Zoboi avec les institutions américaines sont démontrées dans le roman. De plus, cette recherche explore le racisme institutionnel et ses effets traumatisants sur Amal, le personnage principal. Les théories méthodologiques appliquées sont : Critical Race Theory, Race-Based Traumatic Stress Theory et Psychoanalysis Theory. Les résultats de l'étude devraient établir des similitudes entre Yusef Salaam et le personnage principal. Ils doivent montrer la discrimination envers les Afro-Américains. L'un des principaux résultats est de décrire le traumatisme psychologique du protagoniste et sa lutte pour le surmonter par l'art.

Mots clés : esclavage, inégalité raciale, racisme, traumatisme

الملخص

يعرض لكلمات الهواء جوانب معينة يعاني منها الأمريكيون الأفارقة حاليًا في المجتمع الأمريكي. للسود تاريخ طويل من عدم المساواة والعنصرية في أمريكا. العبودية جزء لا يتجزأ من هذا التاريخ. يدوم تأثيره إلى الأبد في أذهان الأمريكيين الأفارقة والسود بشكل عام. تظهر تجارب المؤلفين يوسف سلام وإيبي زوبوي مع المؤسسات الأمريكية في الرواية. علاوة على ذلك، يستكشف هذا البحث العنصرية المؤسسية وأثارها المؤلمة على أمل، Ibi الشخصية الرئيسية. موضوع البحث تحت عنوان الكشف عن الأمل والصدمة والعنصرية المؤسسية في النظريات المنهجية التطبيقية هي: نظرية العرق النقدي، Yusef Salaam's Punching the Air و Zobi نظرية الإجهاد الرضحي القائم على العرق، ونظرية التحليل النفسي. يجب أن ترسم نتائج الدراسة أوجه تشابه بين يوسف سلام والشخصية الرئيسية. إنهم بحاجة إلى إظهار التمييز ضد الأمريكيين الأفارقة. تتمثل إحدى النتائج الرئيسية في تصوير الصدمة النفسية لبطل الرواية وكفاحه من أجل التغلب عليها من خلال الفن.

الكلمات الرئيسية: عدم المساواة العرقية والعنصرية والعبودية والصدمات

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General Introduction

In the evening of April 19th, 1989, a white female jogger, Trisha Meili, was sexually assaulted and severely injured in Manhattan's Central Park, New York. During that night, the Central Park's precinct received many reports from people in the park that were attacked and robbed. According to these reports, the assailants were African Americans and Hispanics. Subsequently, the police men started to arrest the suspects from the park. Ten teens, particularly, were arrested.

Among these teens, there were, namely, Kevin Richardson, Raymond Santana, Antron McCray, Yusef Salaam, and Kharey Wise. The suspects' ages were around 14 and 15; however, Wise was 16. The teenagers were interrogated coercively; accordingly, Wise, McCray, Richardson, and Santana made written and videotaped confessions. In the latter, they depicted their involvement, and of people they did not know, in raping the jogger. Unlikely, Salaam did not give any videotaped or written statements.

The main eight suspects were tried in December and August 1990, respectively. Wise was accused of attempt murder, rape, and assault. He was charged from 5 to 10 years in an adult facility since he was sixteen. Richardson was proven to be guilty. He was accused of attempted murder and rape. Hence, Salaam, McCray, and Santana were guilty of rape, assault, riot, and robbery. They were sentenced to five to ten years in a detention facility.

In the trial, they ignored the fact that there was no DNA evidence linking the teens to the jogger's assault. They relied, only, on the statements provided by the youths. However, Salaam was accused according to the testimony provided by detective McKenna. The testimony included Salaam's confessions while he was interrogated. To move on, the defendants spent from 5 to 8 years at juvenile. Wise

served twelve years in prison. They were wrongly accused of a crime they never committed.

After thirteen years, a serial rapist named Matias Reyes confessed that he was the one who raped Trisha in the early of 2002. His statements were accurate. Reyes's DNA matched with the one that was left in the crime scene. Therefore, the Supreme Court exonerated the five defendants of their convictions. The media had a major role before and after the exoneration of the teenagers. In some newspapers like the Post, the suspects were marked as animals, pack of wolves, and monsters.

Each of the five defendants went on in their lives; however, what they had been through would be marked in their minds. Yusef Salaam's experience was embodied in his latest novel *Punching the Air* that was published in 2020. The novel is co-written by Ibi Zoboi. *Punching the Air* is about a teen poet and artist, Amal Shahid, who was incarcerated of a crime he did not commit. Through the novel, we detect the institutional racism and discrimination experienced by Amal and its traumatic impacts on him.

In the end, this study would unveil the institutional racism and racial discrimination experienced by the protagonist, Amal. Thus, it will examine the US Criminal Justice System and the US Judiciary System's violations towards African Americans. Also, certain American institutions did promote to racial biased treatment towards African Americans. Immediately, they cause a racial inequality between the American communities. Besides, this study intends to display the protagonist's unwillingness to surrender to trauma.

In the light of the above-mentioned research contextualization, the research will probe the following primary research question:

- How are trauma and resentment towards the US Judiciary System depicted in Zobei and Salam's *Punching the Air*?

This primary question shall be investigated through the following sub-questions:

- What is the Central Park Jogger Case and how is institutional racism embodied in it?
- How Does *Punching the Air* portray the US Criminal Justice System and the US Judiciary System towards African Americans?
- How does *Punching the Air* reflect Amal's psychological trauma after experiencing and resisting institutional racism, and how far does Yusef's experience resemble Amal's one?

The study is conducted within a qualitative interpretive research framework. The objectives of the research aim to investigating the institutional racism, racial discrimination, and the Criminal System injustice directed towards the main character of the novel, Amal. It examines, too, its consequence on the protagonist's psyche. Also, the role of art, in this case literature, in resisting or facing the oppression imposed on him. It discovers the impact of Amal's friends and family support on his psyche.

This thesis relies on interpretive research methodology encompassing three contemporary research theories. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the theory adopted to examine institutional racism and racial inequality depicted in the novel. Race-Based Traumatic Stress Theory is employed to display the traumatic effects institutionalized racism has on Amal's psyche and behavior. Finally, Psychoanalysis Theory is engaged to detect the protagonists' relief through literature and artistic commitment.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter provides a historical background that contextualizes Yusef Salaam/ Amal's experience. In that sense, the chapter gives an overview of the Central Park Jogger incident and how that tragic event

triggered an oppressive institutional racial prejudice (law enforcement and the judicial system) towards a group of African American youths and especially Yusef Salaam.

The second chapter tackles the topic through the lens of the three theories abovementioned. This chapter thus paves the way for a critical analysis of *Punching the Air* in chapter three.

The third and last chapter relies on the two preceding chapters to undertake an analysis of Salaam and Zoboi's *Punching the Air*. It tackles the themes of institutional racism as it was experienced by the character of Amal (the young Yusef Salaam) and its effects on the young African American. The analysis of *Punching the Air* also reveals how Amal is able to translate his experience and emotions through his creative writing, and how he finds psychological relief and hope through art and literary production. However, before exploring Yusef Salaam and Ibi Zoboi's masterpiece, a contextualization of Salaam's bitter experience in the Central Park Jogger Case is needed, and that is carried out in Chapter One.

Chapter One

Historical Background:

The Central Park Jogger Case and Institutional Racial Disparities

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to historical background. It reveals the story of the Central Park Jogger Case of 1989. It also addresses how this case shifted from the Central Park jogger Case to the Central Park five, and then to the Exonerated Five. Through this, the notable reactions to the case are to be highlighted. The chapter shows that the case was subjected to poor investigation and to police malpractices. The chapter sheds light on institutional racial prejudice in the US law enforcement and the judicial system.

1.2 Contextualizing the Problem: the Story of the 1989 Central Park Jogger

In the evening of April 19th, 1989, a group of more than twenty five African Americans and Hispanic youths, around the ages of 14 to 16 years old, entered New York's Central Park (Burns et al. 00:14:20). A series of attacks took place in the park during that night (Morgenthau 03). A couple, a biker, a male jogger, and a homeless drunk man were harassed and assaulted by a group of youths. Also, a taxi man whose car's cab was thrown by rocks (Burns 28). Accordingly, ten youths were convicted and arrested (Morgenthau 3).

The 102nd Cross Drive Street connects the main road on the east and west sides of the park. This street was frequently visited by joggers and bicyclists, and so it was to Trisha Meili. In 1989, crime rates, assaults, and rape cases increased in the city. Few of these incidents happened in the Central Park; however, women were warned not to go to the park at night (Burns 14-25). At 1:30 in the morning, a woman was discovered by

passers under the bush in the northern reaches of the park. They called the police (Burns et al. 00:20:40).

The woman was dressed only in a jogging bra. She was extremely hypothermic due to mud and water all over her body and head. There was an apparent left skull fracture with multiple deep lacerations, edema in the left eye, contusions and abrasions. She was intubated and taken to the hospital (Meili 40). The investigations showed that the victim was dragged a hundred feet away to a grassy area. She was sexually assaulted, and some of her belongings such as the radio headset and the keys were missing (Morgenthau 4). The woman's identity was not identified till one of Trisha's colleagues, Peter Vermynen, heard the news and had a contact with one of the detectives. She could not be recognized, only, by her golden ring (Burns 40-41).

Patricia Ellen Meili, the so called Trisha, was 28 years old. Trisha worked at an investment bank, Salomon Brothers, in downtown, Manhattan, since she had finished her studies at Yale University (Meili 35). At the same week, there were 28 rape cases; 24 of them were Black and Latina women, 2 Asians, and 3 white women (Burns 69). Trisha, in her book *I'm the Central Park Jogger*, said "It was my park...it was my city. Running alone in the park, I was taking a risk few others would dare, though I doubt I realized this so concretely" (Meili 39). New York's Daily News Newspaper published that the jogger could come out of coma after 12 days, On May 4, 1989. She was unconscious since that night's attack (P. Byfield and Marques 1989). The jogger's identity was not revealed to the mass or the press during the investigations. All they knew was a white female jogger was brutally beaten and sexually assaulted.

Among the ten arrested teens were Raymond Santana, and Kevin Richardson. Kharey Wise, Yusef Salaam, and Antron McCray for their part were gathered when the police rounded up to question more teenagers on April 20, 1989 (Morgenthau 5). Wise

was taken in order to accompany his friend, Yucef, yet he was interrogated as a suspect with the other boys (Burns et al. 00:27:39). Although there were many rape and assault cases during the same week, yet that case was different. Trisha had severe injuries; detectives believed that she might die. As a result, high ranked detectives began to come to the Central Park Precinct from Manhattan North Homicide Squad to solve the case. Its detectives were often called in important cases (Burns 42).

On the one hand, there was a pressure on the detectives to get this case as quickly as possible solved. During that time, this case gained much attention, mainly, from the media. The letter could transmit their concerns to the mass, and in return the case turned to be a Public Issue. Additionally, since the teens were all under the legal age to be interrogated alone, their parents were informed and invited to the CP's precinct. Some of teenagers' parents came while others arrived late like Santana's father and grandmother. Kevin and Raymond waited in the precinct for long hours without any food, drink, or sleep, in addition to other boys (Burns et al. 00:29:25).

The detectives proposed questions about the assaults that occurred in the CP that night and about the jogger's rape. Kevin and Raymond admitted that they were in the park that night, and they hung around all together. Though, they did not take part in any of the assaults that night nor saw any female jogger. Except the woman that was on the bike with her fellow. They were watching from a distance (Burns et al. 00:16:20, 00:23:32). However, other boys admitted that they were involved in these crimes which occurred in the park that night but rapping the jogger (Burns et al. 00:53:26). Some of these teenagers were from Harlem. Yet, no one knew the other, except, Kharey and Yusef name were friends.

On the other hand, detectives put pressure on the arrested teens. They had to select the suspects. In order to reach that, the detectives made up a story. No matter

what, they believed that the suspect was among them. As much pressure as they put on them; the suspect would helplessly confess. They mentioned some of the boys' names to the teens claiming that they had seen them raping, dragging, or assaulting the jogger (Burns et al. 00:30:22). The teens believed that. They had to include the names of these guys, too. None of them depicted the other physically, for they did not know each other. All they wanted them to do was to include their names. Helplessly, they did (Burns et al 00:31:05). Kevin had a scratch on his face when a police officer caught him in the park. That ran against him. Detectives did not believe that the officer who caused it (Burns 32-45).

There were eight main suspects of raping and attacking Trisha. In the first trial, Yusef Salaam, Antron McCray, and Raymond Santana were accused of rape, assault, riot, and robbery (Remer 5). The three teenagers received the maximum sentence for juveniles of 5 to 10 years in a youth correctional facility, in August 1990 (Remer 5). Kevin Richardson was found guilty of attempted murder and rape in a separate trial that was in December 1990. Kevin was sentenced to 5 to 10 years. Hence, Kharey Wise was convicted of riot, sexual abuse, and assault in the same trial. Wise was charged from 5 to 15 years in prison. Since Kharey was sixteen, he was sent to an Adult Facility (Remer 5). The left teens were guilty to the incidents that took place in the park in April 19th, 1989. They received short prison sentences (Burns et al. 00:53:22).

1.3 Were the Boys Guilty? Notable Reactions to the Case

After the five defendants were declared guilty, each of Kevin, Yusef, Antron, and Raymond spent several years in juvenile correctional institutions. Kevin served five years and six months of his sentence. Yusef spent six years and eight months. Antron was released after six years, and Raymond served five years of his sentence. Hence, twelve years were served by Kharey Wise of his sentence (Siclait). During the

trial, there was a public call for the death penalty to these teens. No one questioned whether these teens might not have been involved in that event. Everyone, mainly in the black community, turned against them (Burns et al. 00:58:58, 1:01:40).

The teenagers, then, publicly denied the written and videotaped confessions, for they were coerced by police. There was no physical evidence linking the young men to the crime. Neither the semen belonged to none of them nor their DNA matched with the one existed in the crime scene (Prentice 1). However, the victim, Trisha was dragged in a trail of 18 inch wide to a grassy spot. The possibility that five boys can drag a woman in such trail was questioned. Thus, there were no traces that indicate the involvement of more than one assailant. From the very beginning, the trail indicated that there was Trisha's body and its assailant, only (Burns et al. 01:07:09, 01:07:45).

In the pursuit of maintaining law and order, the five defendants paid the price of someone else's deeds. In the early 2002, a serial rapist confessed that he was the one who attacked and raped Trisha. Matias Reyes was serving sentences of various rapes, robberies, and a murder (B. Johnson 6). The semen taken from the victim matched with Reyes's (Prentice 1). On April 17th, 1989, he raped a woman on Central Park. Yet, he was never thought to be the jogger's assailant (Burns et al. 01:08:59). It is at this point that the narrative change from crime to unjust conviction begins to take shape. Continuing this trend where publications that went beyond Reyes's guilt to confirm the potential of an untrustworthy conviction. The findings of which had shaken veteran law enforcement authorities' confidence in the original convictions (Stratton 290). Additionally, undercover detectives from the 23rd Precinct responded to reports of an unruly group of teenagers in the Central Park on April 19, 1989. They stopped Matias Reyes who was wearing Trisha's radio headsets. He was asked about the teens. Since he knew nothing; Reyes was left to go (Burns 33).

Paradoxically, none of these detectives could be skeptical about him. Nor they could include this during the interrogations. The Supreme Court of New York annulled the convictions of the Central Park five in a motion by Justice Charles J. Tejada on December 19, 2002 (“Conviction and Exoneration”). In spite of this, the five are still seen, in the mean time, guilty by the police (Remer 7). The exonerated five submitted lawsuits against New York City for 250 million dollar, for they had been wrongfully accused. Kharey Wise said in a documentary that no money could bring that time back nor the lost life (Burns et al. 1:54:05). After almost 10 years, they could settle for 40 million dollar with New York City (Dibdin). In the US history, their restitution was the largest payment for a wrongful conviction (Stratton 286).

The sexual exploitation of an affluent, educated white female by poor, illiterate nonwhite males—the crime appeared to be planned to poke the usual societal hot buttons of race, class, and gender (Mexal 101). The case could reveal the inherited racism towards African Americans in the USA. There had been multiple reactions towards the Central Park Case; therefore, few of them are well renowned. At that time, businessman Donald Trump was triggered for the perpetrators of Trisha. He openly expressed his views about the case. Nevertheless, he indirectly argued that he hated the teens that brutally attacked Trisha (MSNBC 00:00:01). Trump never named any of them but referred to them indirectly. In spite of this, Trump spent 85,000 dollar for an ad that was published on four daily newspapers of New York City (Burns 73). The ad entitled “Bring Back the Death Penalty, Bring Back Our Police” (Trump). Yusef Salaam, one of the exonerated five, blamed Trump for outraging the people at that time. Accordingly, that caused some kind of bounty on their heads (BBC News).

Amongst the outcry of the case, the media’s coverage of the news could play a major role on multiple sides. Since the main suspects were Hispanics and African

Americans, a racial intercourse occurred. The noun ‘wilding’ had associated with the Central Park case news. It had the meaning of committing aggressive crimes against innocent bystanders. The arrested teens were described in animal images as wolves pack, Negro brutes, marauders, gang, and herd (Burns et al. 00:49:53, 00:49:56, 00:57:06, 1:00:32; Daily News). Trisha Meili, for her part, was depicted as an upper-class virtuous white woman without a questionable or criminal past (qtd. in Van Hemelrijck 15).

At the Union of American Civil Rights Liberties event Yusef Salaam stated that he was horrified when New York’s newspapers shared the suspects’ addresses, and phone numbers (BBC News). Subsequently, the media’s coverage caused a moral panic. The media conducted a strategy that was to represent violence in order to shock the audience. People would sympathize with the victim and would develop a sense of entwining her experience. Specifically, the runners who regularly ran in the park would feel vulnerable after what happened to Trisha (Stratton 287,288).

The documentary of “The Central Park Five,” which was directed and produced by Sarah Burns et al, tackled the case since the interrogations, the trials, and the teens’ exoneration. Among these, the directors displayed some newspapers’ articles and statements towards the case (Burns et al. 00:49:53, 00:49:56, 00:57:06, 01:00:32, 01:51:10). Hence, after the exoneration of the teens The Post was not convinced with their innocence. Under an article entitled “Morgenthau Should Keep the ‘Wilding 5’ Behind Bars”, its writers opposed the clearing of the Five’s charges by the district attorney, Robert Morgenthau. They depicted the five as animals (Burns et al 01:50:12). In addition, in an article written by Andy Geller on November 25, 2002, he quoted what Linda Fairstein, the prosecutor who was in charge of the case, said. Linda

believed that Matias Reyes was among the “pack”. When the other kids left, he maintained and continued the attack (Geller).

Elizabeth Lederer, the lead prosecutor of the case against the five, and Linda Fairstein were two of the top prosecutors involved in the Central Park Five case. Both played major roles in the prosecution of the five young men accused of raping and murdering Trisha Meili. There was no DNA evidence linking any of the boys to the crime scene (Buckwheat 6). When Lederer knew that the DNA did not match with any of the suspects, she felt disappointed while preparing for the trial in August (Burns 95). To move on, Netflix has produced a miniseries entitled “When They See Us.” That series is based on the Central Park Five case. It was aired in 2019. The series depicts how the teens went to the park on April 19, 1989, the interrogations, the life aftermath prison, and their exoneration. It also showed how the five were forced to provide false statements and videotapes. Since Lederer was a lead prosecutor, much blame was on her of accusing innocent teens. Demands were raised requesting firing Ms. Lederer from her teaching position in Colombia Law School. As a result, Elizabeth decided to not renew her teaching application (Jacobs).

Additionally, the former prosecutor and crime writer Linda Fairstein was the chief of the Sex Crimes Prosecution Unit. Linda Fairstein sued Netflix, Ava DuVernay, and the series’ writer, for depicting her dehumanizing the people of color. She claimed that the series defamed her as a racist, immoral monster hell-bent on imprisoning innocent teenagers of color at any cost (qtd. in Van Hemelrijck 5). On August 8, 2021, Judge Castel approved her case when five scenes of the series matched with her claims (Klasfeld). She released an article on the Wall Street Journal. She claimed that the series was misleading (Fairstein). In its first episode, the series displayed that Salaam

and Wise were randomly picked up from the street while they were picked up from Yusef's apartment (Burns 50; DuVernay).

1.4 African Americans and the US Institutions

African Americans have been subjected to discriminatory legislation and racial enforcement from the dawn of policing (Jack et al. 1). They have witnessed a long-scale history of discrimination since the slavery era. This might still exist in the twenty first century.

In the United States, there are over 17,000 state and municipal law enforcement agencies ranging in size from one officer to more than 30,000 ("Bureau of Justice Statistics"). Law enforcement's core responsibilities include investigating, apprehending, and detaining individuals accused of criminal activities. Many of these agencies are municipal police departments run by local governments. There are various types of law enforcement agencies which are local police, state police, special jurisdiction police agencies, and deputy sheriffs. Each of these agencies has its specific duties ("Discover Policing").

The government has placed much authority at the police disposal. Additionally, it has delegated the right to wield that authority to a degree that no other individual, official, or organization lawfully holds. Not only are police supposed to ask, observe, and detain, but they are also expected to utilize violence and force, even lethal force, if necessary. No other occupation can legally claim this level of official endorsement (qtd. in Pierce 49). Subsequently, community members' desire to trust the police is determined by whether they believe police activities reflect community values and embrace procedural fairness and legitimacy principles. In the aftermath of recent occurrences involving police use of force, many communities have questioned the

legitimacy of the police (“Policing 101” 1). Minorities, mainly people of color, are more likely to distrust the police legitimacy.

African Americans believe that authoritative officials may be a source of causing harm to them. Many have lost respect to authority figures. Law enforcement is seen as a threat. They hold the perception that authority is oppressive, prejudiced, and racist (A. Brown 9). As argued in A. Brown (1997) police could be suspicious about others in terms of their race. Accordingly, Whenever African Americans confront law enforcement and they exhibit physiological response to it, they are thought to have a racist reaction. Law enforcement might then be a chronic stressor (11).

The renowned tragic encounters of police brutality experienced by African Americans such as Rodney King, Eric Harris, and George Floyd reinforce the perception that the police system is inequitable to African Americans. The relationship between police officers and members of the African American community remains strained. Further, despite the fact that many strategies to address police violence against African Americans have been proposed and implemented, there are few useful insights into their success. They are ineffective in dealing with the issue. Furthermore, racism is a significant component of police violence that has been, historically, unaddressed (Horn 22).

Changes in technology, laws, professional standards development and implementation, and societal norms have, undoubtedly, improved many aspects of American policing. Despite all of the changes and advances in policing, African Americans maintain to face disparities in enforcement because some police officers continue to act in ways that reinforce economic and racial segregation and injustice (Brown 190). Seemingly, law enforcement, courts, and corrections are core elements in the Criminal Justice System. The Criminal Justice System is meant to enforce laws,

ensure public safety, and provide justice to those who have committed crimes. It attentively works to maintain law and order to keep the American communities safe.

As argued beforehand, the issue is always with minority communities, especially, African Americans. The criminalization of African Americans is deeply rooted in America. Since the last thirty years, the criminal justice activities were dramatic but hard to assess. Adolescents in minority communities have been accustomed to aggressive surveillance by law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Researchers have reported frequent police harassment, verbal abuse, and arbitrary stops and searches in many minority neighborhoods. It resulted in distrust, suspicion, and hatred. Eventually, African Americans strongly believe that they are severely treated by the Criminal Justice System much more than white Americans (Rosich 7, 13).

Since the law enforcement is associated with the Criminal Justice System, its violations towards minorities would weaken the relationship between the system and the people. The fairness in the criminal justice system is crucial to exist in a democratic society (Nellis et al. 2-3). The false overrepresentation of the people of color as criminals provided tough sentencing calls for them (Nembhard and Robin 2). Yet, so as to highlight the concern that African Americans receive harsh convictions; it seems that it refer to their long former criminal records (Mitchell and Mackenzie 32).

Statistics about the incarcerations of African Americans reveals that 35% of them are sentenced while African Americans constitute of 13% of the US population (Hinton et al. 1). The FBI's Uniform Crime Report is a widely used source for crime data in the United States. It has failed to monitor criminal justice outcomes beyond the point of arrest. However, it does not account if they are suspects or convicted (Hinton

et al. 2, 3). Yet, it is claimed that the police, purposefully, fudge the crime statistics and exaggerate in the drug crimes so as to have much military munitions (Thompson 229).

Racial inequities in the criminal justice system are strongly founded in historical racism. It presents itself now in structural inequalities (Hinton et al. 8, 9, 10). Major racial disparities and overrepresentation of minorities exist at all decision points in the criminal justice system, with important social implications, although they may not always reflect race biases (Rosich 21). In the meantime, people are highly aware of the racial inequality and discrimination directed towards people of color. Specifically, this awareness could be the result of the widespread of the experiences of Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Stephon Clarck, George Floyd and so on. The way they were treated by the justice system proves the existence of racial inequality in the US.

A correlation might exist between race, minorities, and sentencing. However, multiple controversial studies were published. Many researches reveal that racial minorities usually receive sentencing more severe than Whites for the same type of offences. Conversely, other researches indicate that Whites are more harshly convicted than minorities (Michell and Mackenzie 12). Michell and Mackenzie (2004) conducted analyses to some studies which concluded that the relationship between race and convictions is, absolutely, weak. Indeed, the results are controversial and, simply, assume that there is no enough evidence that prove a relationship does exist between sentencing and race (12, 14, 15, 22, 25).

Two crucial factors that any defendant must be sentenced according to are, undoubtedly, their previous criminal records and the offense's earnestness. Before they reach the bench of the judges, Cases follow certain procedures. Cases go through bail judges, prosecutors, and criminal defense lawyers. Importantly, their judgments might have a strong impact in the judges' decisions (Mocan 4). So, if all these participants in

the decision making might have a racial bias towards minorities or people of color, indeed, cases' sentencing would take a racial dimension. Mocan argues that there might be other factors that influence the judges' decisions such as in-group favoritism (8, 9, 10). For example a black judge would give a sentence of favor to a defendant of his/her same race and so is with any race. In contrast, this cannot be statistically proven.

A study carried out by Abrams et al (2012) investigated if the race of a defendant has an influence on sentencing. It differs depending on the judges. The Judicial adjudications vary as a result of differences in judges themselves but not variations in the case or the defendants' features. African Americans might have long-term sentences as a result of serious offences and criminal records (352). However, the fact that there is racial heterogeneity among judges in sentencing shows that courtroom results would not be race blind. This probable absence of bias might be one reason for the significant overrepresentation of African Americans in the jail population. Therefore, Understanding the roots of variance in the criminal justice system is a crucial first step toward decreasing inequities of all types (Abrams et al. 362, 364, 366, 374, 377).

Racial disparity might be analyzed in the selection of the jury members. Legally, the exclusion of jurors is forbidden due to their race. However, jurors are selected in a process known as voir dire. If attorneys discover that the jurors are racially biased, they are more likely to be removed. To elaborate, the suppression of African Americans from participating in the jury falls in the disenfranchisement method that excludes any person who committed a felony (Kovera 11-12). Accordingly, the more African Americans are excluded from the jury pool the more it has its impacts in the distribution of verdicts for Blacks and whites. Blacks are more

likely to receive harsh convictions whenever a Black or Black jury members are missing in the jury pool (Kovera 13).

Concerning the selection of judges, in the US court system judges are either appointed or elected. Each state adopts its own system of choosing judges. Further, a query should be raised of whether the selection system does have an impact in the selection of minorities or not. Subsequently, the agreement about this concern might not be reached, for there were few studies tackling it (Sill 2). African American judges tend to be much more selected than appointed. No change was recognized in the appointment of judges but in the selection of African American justices. Only 45 of the justices appointed to the United States Supreme Court in the 20th century were African Americans. Only 25 states have at least one black judge appointed to the bench. (Sill 9-10). In short, minorities do face obstacles when to office. The inability to succeed in gaining a seat on the highest courts in a statewide judicial election; it resulted in a "glass ceiling" for minority judges ("Answering the Call" 5).

"The arrival of the term 'diversity' involves the departure of other (perhaps more critical) terms, including 'equality,' 'equal opportunities,' and 'social justice.' "(Ahmed 1). When there are diverse races in the US institutions; in particular, police departments, criminal justice system, and the courts' judges and justices, this could, surely, pave the way for a more diverse decision making and a decrease in the racial discriminated cases. Their future depends on social capital which can be obtained through a stable job and a supportive relationship (qtd. in Mauer and Huling 18).

1.5 Conclusion

To sum up, the incident of the Central Park Case and its development were put in the front. The police coercion could lead Yusef Salaam, Kevin Richardson, Kharey Wise, Antron McCray, and Raymond Santana to be imprisoned for years for a crime no

one of them committed. It was fundamental to highlight their exoneration, and the racist statements and articles that were published before and after their imprisonment and exoneration. It could reveal the instances of institutional racism in the US Criminal Justice System, and how the racial inequality may exist in the American institutions. The following chapter would contextualize the thesis' topic. It would, too, tackle the theories to be used in the analysis.

Chapter Two

Conceptual and Theoretical Background of *Punching the Air*

2.1 Introduction

This chapter asserts Salaam and Zobei's convergence. Their meeting results in the birth of *Punching the Air*. Conversely, *Punching the Air*'s protagonist, Amal Dawud Shahid, is inspired by Salaam as a 16-year-old teen. So, this chapter highlights the similar characteristics between the character and Salaam. To move on, it tackles as well an overview of the following theories and their use in the analysis: Critical Race Theory, Race-Based Traumatic Stress Theory, and Psychoanalysis theory.

2.2 Salaam and Zobei's Convergence: The Inception of *Punching the Air*

Punching the Air was the outcome of the collaboration that Ibi Zobei wanted long time ago with Yusef Salaam. Both authors shared identical perspectives. Salaam and Zobei could integrate their ideas of how it is like to be a black skin boy in America. Accordingly, the authors formed Amal's character (McNab).

Yusef Salaam is one of the exonerated five. The Central Park Jogger Case had a huge outcry back then in 1989, and much blame was on the Five Defendants. To move on, while Salaam was in prison, he has obtained his GED and an associate's degree from Dutchess Community College. The former is a test of four subjects to test someone's high school academic knowledge. Salaam pursued his study at Hunter College. He was awarded an honorary PhD degree by Anointed by God Ministries Alliance & Seminary in 2014. Meanwhile, the President Barack Obama rewarded him a lifelong Achievement Award in 2016 (Davies; W&M; Meet Salaam; Salaam 21).

Undoubtedly, Salaam would speak his experience, for he, strongly, believes in Maya Angelo's words in dealing with anger. She proposes speaking that anger instead of internalizing it since it would harm one's self (Simon). Salaam did write outstanding

books and novels. He wrote “*the Devil and Elijah Muhammad*”. Thus, “*WORDS of a MAN: My Right to Be*” is a collection of poems which Salaam has put forth subjects such as justice system, love, and Black life (“Words of a Man”). “*Better Not Bitter*” is Salaam’s memoir about himself. Meanwhile, “*Punching the Air*” is the novel which Salaam and Zoboi collaborated to write. Recently, Yusef turns into a poet, a prison reform activist and a justice seeker, and an inspirational speaker (Meet Salaam).

Ibi Zoboi has been born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and raised in New York City. She immigrated to the USA with her mother when she was four. Additionally, Zoboi is an MFA graduate of Vermont College of Fine Arts. She is a young adult fiction author. Zoboi dedicates some of her free time to teaching and writing-a-residence at a variety of arts organizations throughout New York City's public schools. Conversely, she puts much more efforts on teen females in both Brooklyn and Haiti. Her ultimate aim is to develop their critical reading and writing abilities. Zoboi ;furthermore, is the editor of the Collection Black Enough: Stories of Being Young and Black in America (Ibi Zoboi; Book Browse; Moving Fictions; “ A Blog Tour”).

At a tender age, Zoboi noticed the media’s outrage of the Central Park Five and sympathized with the young teens. Often time, Blacks and Latinas were portrayed on TV either as victims or as defendants. Zoboi was impacted by the US’s, significantly, complicated history of oppression towards these teens while, themselves, this oppression could affect their lives (“Ibi Zoboi Author Interview”). Further, Zoboi has renowned works of Young Adult Literature. Her novels are: *American Street*, *Pride*, *Black Enough*, *My Life as an Ice Cream Sandwich*, *Punching the Air*, *the People Remember*, *Star Child*, and *Okoye to the People*.

Inevitably, it is noteworthy to mention how the authors’ collaboration took place and when. It dates back to the spring of 1999. After Salaam was released and

before he was exonerated, he began to attend some classes at college. So, Zoboï and Salaam met for the first time in the African Civilization session at Manhattan's Hunter College. Neither Zoboï nor her classmates knew who he was because Salaam grew up. It was until the professor did introduce him. Further, Zoboï claimed that her classmates believed the Central Park Five were guiltless. Apart from this, Zoboï was the editor of the newspaper of her college. She aimed to interview Salaam. They had a long conversation while walking from Hunter College to Harlem. Salaam talked about his experience and much more about Trump (CBS 8 San Diego 00:01:47; Talks at Google 00:01:51; McNab; Scottish Book Trust 00:02:51).

Zoboï intended to investigate the Central Park Jogger case. She felt sure the five defendants were innocent (Book Browse). Her passion to tell Salaam's story went on. In 2017, the authors met again at a book festival. Zoboï was promoting for her novel "*American Street*", and Salaam was offering to sell his self-published poetry book "*Words of a Man: My Right to Be*". Additionally, Zoboï realized since a long time that Yusef's story matters to be widely known. Also, Salaam did show his willingness to share his experience. Finally, Zoboï, the Young Adult Literature author, and Salaam's meet-cute resulted in publishing "*Punching the Air*" in September 2020 (McNab; Talks at Google 00:01:51; Nicolaou, Scottish book Trust 00:04:18).

2.3 Amal as a New Version of 16-Year-Old Salaam

Punching the Air is a Young Adult novel. It is written in-verse. It was firstly published in 2020. PA is a story of hope. PA's protagonist, Amal Dawud Shahid, is an African American 16-year-old teen. Amal is a 2020 version of Yusef Salaam. Amal's story is fundamentally inspired by Salaam's experience. Yet, Amal is not Salaam as one of the exonerated Five. The authors made a character that has Salaam's worldviews, perspectives, awareness, artistry and faith.

In an interview with Scott Simon, Salaam stated that Amal's story is about creativity, finding meaning, and the ability to recover. Also, it sheds light on how a person can be a better version of himself/herself in a community that assesses people by their skin color and not their personalities (Simon). Further, similarities can be drawn between Salaam and Amal. Salaam and Amal are Muslims. Both Salaam and Amal's fathers died when they were young. Each of them was raised by their mothers. Salaam did have a sister while Amal did not. The support of Salaam's family is, absolutely, embodied in Amal's character. Each of Salaam and Amal went to music and art high schools. They both sought to reach the truth.

Amal is a teen poet and an artist. He is a well-read boy as was Yusef. On one night, when the protagonist was hanging out with his mates, they have a trouble with some white teens. Amal is accused of punching and comatosing a white boy. Accordingly, he has been arrested. He goes to a trial and ends up to be sentenced of aggravated assault and battery (Zoboi and Salaam 48). While in the juvenile detention facility, the main character encounters racism and violence when the system forces him to be obedient and submissive. He is psychologically traumatized. The protagonist implicitly explores the racial injustice of the Criminal Justice System. Therefore, Amal's artistic side provides him with hope in resisting the biased system.

2.4 Critical Race Theory: an Overview

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical and interpretative paradigm that investigates the existence of race and racism across dominant cultural ways of expression. CRT academics utilize this technique to try to comprehend how cultural perceptions of race impact victims of systematic racism. Scholars also seek to understand how these victims would represent themselves to resist prejudice ("Critical Race Theory").

The theory emerged during the late 1960's and the early 1970's. CRT was born out of the belief that individuals are treated unequally due to race. Racism has become so embedded in the American culture that people fail to notice it (Klupchak 7, 8). It existed as a response to Critical Legal Studies (CLS). The latter is a predominantly white legal academic movement. CLS scholars seek to reveal the ideological origins of American law. Conversely, CRT scholars believe that CLS failed to connect constructively with the realities of racism by reductively portraying it as merely akin to class-based prejudice. CRT researchers often focus on examining both the evidence and the roots of racism in the American culture. It also intends to uproot it from its basis. Further, Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Alan Freeman are the pioneers of CRT. The recent figures are Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Cheryl Harris and others (Curry 167; Parker and Lynn 4; Rollock and Gillborn 2; Delgado and Stefancic 19; "Critical Race Theory").

The American civil rights movement, represented by people such as Martin Luther King Jr. and W.E.B. Du Bois, prompted critical race theory. Nationalists and philosophers like as Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, and the Black Panthers had a significant impact on the movement (Delgado and Stefancic 2). Many race experts strongly argue that race is socially constructed. They also believe that it fulfills the interests of the whites who created it (Curry 166). CRT sheds light and addresses the problems of individuals impacted by racism. In addition, it shows those who conduct racism and appear unaffected by it ("Critical Race Theory"). Curry (2009) stated that racial disparity is caused by the social, economic, and legal distinctions that white people establish between races (166).

The main ideas of CRT were laid out by Delgado and Stefancic. They are that: Racism is normal and not strange. It is everywhere in the American society. Race and

racism are socially made and constructed. There is something called "differential racism". It is when the dominant society treats different minority groups differently based on economic and political trends. In the American society, there is a confluence of interests. Racism represents the needs of most White people, regardless of their wealth or poverty, thus they have no intention to improve (Klupchak 8). CRT wants to re-examine how race and racism have been handled in the past. It is a call to reclaim a radical heritage among African Americans and other people of color, which was disregarded when integration, assimilation, and the principle of colorblindness turned to be the authorized standards of racial enlightenment (Crenshaw, et al xiv).

CRT researchers demanded a full reconsideration to the civil rights law in the light of its inefficiency in tackling racial inequality, specifically, institutional racism and structural racism (Parker and Lynn 4). Moreover, So as to assert the function of race and racism in education, CRT builds its analysis on legal theory, ethnic studies, feminism, sociology, history, philosophy, economics, and other subjects (Stovall 9). Generally, in literature CRT does not, solely, expose characters who encountered racism. But rather, it highlights the significance of seeking to comprehend the socio-cultural factors. These factors affect how racism is perceived, encountered, and reacted to by everyone ("Critical Race Theory").

In short, this study aims at investigating the racism experienced by Amal the protagonist of *Punching the Air*. Through the lenses of CRT, this research is going to trace Amal's awareness of the encountered racism by the Criminal Justice System. Further, it is, also, essential to trail how the protagonist could overcome the experienced racism.

2.5 Race Based-Traumatic Stress Theory

African Americans or people of color, in general, are labeled as criminals because they are persecuted by the daily stereotypes, the courts, and the police (Curry 167). Inevitably, African Americans are more likely to be psychologically traumatized as a result of the maltreatment they are endured to. Further, it is believed that the term trauma is taken from the Greek word "traumatikos" which describes a severe wound to the body. Trauma is any emotional wound that results in psychological harm or any occurrence that produces extreme discomfort. The American Psychological Association defines trauma as an emotional reaction to a horrible experience (Abubakar 119).

Race-based traumatic stress (RBTS) is indeed a psychological damage prompted by hatred or fear of a person or group of people because of their race. It should be a significant interpersonal or institutional stressor brought by confrontations with racial prejudice, ethnic discrimination, racism, and hate crimes. Racism and racial discrimination are referred to as race-based experiences. Conversely, a race-based encounter is not often linked to racism. Further, anyone has endured an unexpected, harmful racial interaction; she/he is more likely to suffer from a race-based traumatic stress disorder. When compared to the overall population, scholars report that people of color have higher rates of traumatic events (qtd in. Bryant-Davis 135; Mental Health America; qtd. in Carter et al 2-4).

Psychological and emotional discomfort that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) experience because of racism and prejudice is known as race-based traumatic stress (RBTS). Macro, meso, and micro levels are all possible ranges for these encounters. African Americans are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, police violence. The murder of African Americans like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor are examples of macro-aggressions. In the case of the Flint water crisis, which

began in 2014, meso-level aggressions include race-based traumas on the scale of a single town. Meso-level stresses are now having an influence on macro-level hostility as a result of changes in the news cycle and social media. Racism, sexism, heterosexism, and nationalism are micro-aggressions which pertain to direct encounters and experiences between individuals. For example, some individuals may clutch their bags as they walk by young African-American guys or inquire about the ethnicity of someone they pass on the street who looks different from themselves. It is possible for a seemingly innocuous deed to have a long-lasting detrimental effect. The impacts of various kinds of trauma and hardship do not differ much from race-based trauma. As a result, these encounters have a cumulative effect (“Race-Based Traumatic Stress”).

Hurtful race-based confrontations could indeed lead to tremendous stress levels and, or rather, traumatic effects. (Carter et al. 3). According to research, subtle racist actions do have a substantial psychological effect on recipients. For example, a study revealed that subtle racial discrimination had a stronger detrimental effect than overt prejudice (Carter and Forsyth 30). So as to categorize a confrontation as traumatic, symptoms avoidance and intrusion would occur emotionally, physically, cognitively, or behaviorally. It includes as well reactions of rage, anxiety, melancholy, and guilt (Carter and Forsyth 36).

Adolescence is commonly used to describe the period of time between the onset of puberty and the early adulthood. This stage of development is marked by, for instance, physical growth and the emergence of sexual attraction,. These alterations, as well as the influence they have on relationships with friends and family, can be stressful and difficult to manage. Discrimination, racism, and other forms of micro-aggression can exacerbate the anxiety and, in some cases, result in long-term damage for the victim. The cumulative consequences of racism on a person's emotional and

mental health are referred to as racial trauma. Regardless of age, racial trauma may have an impact on everyone, including children, adolescents and adults. Forms of racial discrimination such as personal, institutional, and even internal racism; It can lead to racial trauma. The latter can manifest itself in various ways (Psych Central).

In several interviews, Salaam often quotes Maya Angelou's words about anger and how anyone should deal with it. Additionally, Salaam highly believes in Nelson Mandela's wisdom. Mandela left his rage in prison. If he did not do so, then his anger would have destroyed him (Simon). "To change our future, these stories and lived experiences need to be told, listened to, and analyzed" (Bowman et al. 3). Salaam's traumatic experience as an African American, not as a member of the CP5, is embodied in Amal's story. Salaam was traumatized (Salaam 57, 67, 71, 78). Accordingly, since Amal's story is fully inspired by Salaam's experience; undoubtedly, Amal would endure psychological trauma as Salaam did.

Dr. Martin Luther King envisioned that his children would not be evaluated by their skin color, but rather by the content of their character (Bowman et al. 4). In the light of ascertaining Amal's truth, Race-based traumatic stress theory would be used to highlight the effects of the encountered trauma. However, Amal did not surrender. He could have hope, despite his situation, and overcome it through art, the support of his family members, and his friends.

2.6 Psychoanalysis theory: Sublimation Defense Mechanism

Sigmund Freud is the founder of the Contemporary Psychoanalytic Theory. There were other major contributors to Psychoanalysis such as Franz Anton Mesmer, Liebau and Bernheim, Jean Martin Charcot, and Josef Breuer. Freud was keen on the Physical Science; accordingly, he conducted many clinical researches. Freud published a lot of papers in this concern. Conversely, his interests shifted to detecting the brain

damages; especially, the impact of specific traumas such as Hysteria (Fancher 31, 32; Sibi 75; Ahmad Sajid 3).

One of Freud's vital contributions was his model of the human mind. The model splits the mind into three principal sections: the conscious, the preconscious (also renowned as the subconscious), and the unconscious. Therefore, Freud has theorized a detailed model of the mind. It consists of the id, the ego, and the superego. They are the mental components of the human mind. According to Freud, the id is the primary process of thought which represents the human need to ease nervous feelings. It is the source of the human physical desires. Concerning the ego, Freud considers it as the second process of thought. The ego makes sense of anything. The id and the ego are strongly interrelated. However, the superego upholds the individual's moral values. It urges individuals to act in accordance with the norms of society (Sibi 75, 77; Boulegroune 1; Zhang 229).

The unconscious mind is the source of one's own personality. Through dreams the subconscious mind communicates with the conscious one. To elaborate, psychoanalysis strongly relies on dreams to reach a patient's unconscious mind. Freud's approach examines both human instincts of life and death. Subsequently, Psychoanalysis is an investigative instrument, a theory, as well as a sort of therapy. Thus, Psychoanalysis is an essential method for investigating and comprehending art and literature. Freud exploited these three aspects of psychoanalysis to advance our understanding of human mental functioning. Freud strongly agrees on the notion that humans are motivated by inappropriate and suppressed violent and sexual urges. Additionally, the civilized self is often in a struggle with these urges (Sibi 75; Kenny 1-2; Borch-Jacobsen and Shamdasani 16).

Defense Mechanisms are one of the foreground concepts in psychoanalysis. Since each of the id, the ego, and the superego has a definite object to achieve; accordingly, a conflict is caused. Therefore, not every person might handle this inner conflict. A person's ego constantly must react in one or more defense mechanisms so as to protect the individual. Further, the defense mechanisms are repression, denial, projection, regression, rationalization, displacement, and sublimation. In repression, the ego drives the unwanted and threatening thoughts to the unconscious mind. It helps individuals "forget" terrible experiences. Thus, a person's ego prevents unpleasant feelings from consciousness. A person definitely denies what occurs in one's life. That is how the denial defense mechanism works (Boulegrone 2; Zhang 229, 230).

Projection is the act of blaming another person for one's own ideas, intentions, and deeds in order to ease someone's discomfort. Also, regression is a form of self defense in which a person dissociates from reality. As a result, one would perform actions out of his character. Rationalization includes defending a threatening idea and convincing one's self that there is a logical interpretation for it. For displacement, it is the redirection of rage from the person who caused to someone else. Therefore, sublimation is the transformation of the id urges, particularly sexual ones, into something else. These impulses would be transmitted into more socially approved pursuits like art or science. If these feelings were suppressed, it would result in mental illnesses (Boulegrone 2; "Defence Mechanism" 42, 44, 48; Ahmad Sajid 13).

Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism makes use of the psychoanalytical methods to analyze works of literature. Psychoanalysis is a treatment that focuses on the mind's interplay between conscious and unconscious parts in order to treat psychological illness. It's common practice for therapists to persuade their patients to open up in order to uncover the suppressed anxieties and conflicts that are creating the patient's

difficulties, rather than keeping them hidden in the subconscious (P. Barry) . Subsequently, art therapy is a method of nonverbal communication of ideas and feelings that is founded on the belief that the expressive act of creating art is therapeutic and life enriching (qtd. in Nguyen 29). Drawing, painting, collage, and sculpture are common techniques in art therapy for expressing one's emotions, ideas, and experiences in a structured way. Art therapy differs from other types of treatment. It involves active participation with art materials, a process that is both visible and physical, and the creation of art as a final product (A. Schouten 1-2).

When a person's inner worries and anxieties are depicted in art, they are able to release tensions and stresses that are accumulated. In short, artistic works deliver messages, and so does painting (Ghazvini et al. 1811, 1812). Amal's artistic skills lead him to express his inner speeches and wishes via painting, drawing and singing. Through sublimation, this paper would investigate how art is therapeutic, as well, the art's value of transmitting Amal's psyche.

2.7 Conclusion

The second chapter has clarified Salaam and Zobo's meeting. *Punching the Air* is created and inspired by Salaam's personal features and experiences. Since race and racism are core themes in the novel, Critical Race Theory is of great use in analyzing the novel. Thus, it is inevitable that the racism encountered would cause a psychological trauma. Race-Based Traumatic Stress Theory traces the resulted trauma and its consequences. Furthermore, Amal successfully refuses to surrender to this trauma. He, rather, finds a way to heal himself. Through Psychoanalysis Theory mainly sublimation defense mechanism, the study would reveal the way the protagonist heals himself by making art. The next chapter is devoted to the analysis of *Punching the Air*.

Chapter Three

The Analytical Process of *Punching the Air*

3.1 Introduction

The Third chapter is devoted to analyzing the novel. In the characterization, three characters would be analyzed. The Characters are the protagonist, Amal, Ms. Rinaldi, and Amal's attorney Clyde. The first theme to be traced is "Slavery and the Negro Concept". This theme would trace ongoing impact of slavery and "nigga" labeling to African Americans in the modern time. Besides, African Americans have a lifelong history of discrimination and racial prejudice. This study digs in this issue through the lenses of Amal. The protagonist has been traumatized as a result from the experienced racism. So, the theme of trauma would be highlighted. Yet, Amal tries to find a way through art and the support of his close people. Finally, art and hope restoration is the fourth theme to provide an overview of Amal's resistance.

3.2 About the Novel

Punching the Air is an open-ending novel. It is partitioned into three parts. The novel is written in verse in a form of poems. Each part consists of numerous poems. They are written and illustrated in different shapes such as: a triangle and a vertical line. Further, the novel opens up by the poem of Birth and the trial day. The authors assert that it was essential to note that Amal was born free like anyone (q on cbc 00:07:02, 00:07:34). Amal Dawud Shahid is a 16 years old. He is an African American Muslim. Amal is an art student at the East Hills High School.

One evening day, Amal has been with his friend Omari. Antwon, Omari's friend, joins them. Lucas and his girlfriend are present too. Later on, Amal, Omari, and Antwon decide to go to the basketball courts although Amal is not basketball player. He prefers to go the skate park over basketball courts. Yet, he does not want to leave

Omari. Eventually, the place is not mentioned in the novel. While in the basketball courts Amal feels threatened by the East Hills white boys. He decides to leave. Amal heads to the Skating Park (Zoboi and Salaam 98, 99, 237).

Amal feels secured and safe in the skating park. In there, everyone knows him. So, Amal has been skating with a group of black teens who are accustomed to the hood. Conversely, a group of white teens have followed Amal's group. Yet, Amal asserts: "they were following us. No, chasing us". The stories climax happens when a fight is launched between the groups. Amal and his fellow want to defend themselves. One of the white boys faces Amal and shouts on him "get the f**k out of our hood, nigga". Consequently, Amal punches the white boy, Jeremy Mathis. Amal repeatedly confirms that he punches him only the first punch. He is not the one who caused Jeremy's severe injuries (Zoboi and Salaam 237, 238, 265, 266, 267, 295).

Jeremy, according to Amal, has not fallen but went back to him to fight. The police start to incarcerate the teens. Amal is one of them. Jeremy has gone into coma. In that night, a college student recorded the fight and went live on social media. Five teens have been accused of comatosing Jeremy. Four teenagers have got a plea deal and sent directly sent to juvenile. In the trial, the prosecutors want to prove that Amal hits Jeremy with his skateboard. Contrastingly, there is no DNA reference to Jeremy on Amal's skateboard. Amal has been accused by attempted murder with a deadly weapon, but it was reduced to aggravated assault and battery by his attorney, Clyde. Amal is carried to a juvenile (Zoboi and Salaam 24, 25, 48, 209, 210, 296, 297, 311). In short, Amal's journey to exploring systemic racism and trauma begins.

3.3 Characterization

Amal Dawud Shahid: Amal is an African American teenager. He is sixteen. Amal is an art student at East hills high School. He is fond of arts, drawing, and singing his

own rhymes. In multiple scenes in the novel, Amal recurrently relives himself through art. Further, in Amal's educational career, he has been through many issues in school. Amal has had mischievous deeds such as; causing bruises to a boy in a school fight, throwing balled-up paper on hallways monitors. Accordingly, Amal has been suspended for several times from school (Zoboi and Salaam 66, 69, 86, 87, 136, 220).

The 16-year-old teen is a highly knowledgeable teen. The main character is a well-read boy. He is a teenager who knows much about the minister Malcolm X, Luther King, and Nelson Mandela. Additionally, through the novel we explore how much is Amal aware of the history of African Americans in the US. Slavery is an important era in the US history. It has a lifelong effect in the lives of African Americans and, essentially, on Amal (Zoboi and Salaam 74, 76, 86, 87, 96, 228). Today's generations would compare the racism encountered by them as a new or modern slavery in the US.

The protagonist is conscious of the racial prejudice in America. It is always apparent for him the binary opposition between black and white people in all the fields. In schooling system, Amal notices how white students' treatment differs from black ones. According to the main character, the white supremacy is not just leading in the US, but it contains the whole world.

Ms. Rinaldi: Including Rinaldi's character refers to a personal incident happened with Ibi Zoboi's son on the seventh grade. Her son was sick refused to stay home. The boy was eager to go to study. It was in the beginning of the year, the teacher made a report to the administration about Zoboi's son. The teen was putting his hoodie on and his head down. The teacher found this disrespectful and reported it. So, Ms. Rinaldi symbolizes the author's son teacher. Further, that incident has been portrayed in the novel with Ms. Rinaldi. The latter is Amal's teacher of art. She is a witness in Amal's

case. The judge asks Ms. Rinaldi about whether Amal have ever displayed any anger feelings in class. Rinaldi argues that she always works hard to make Amal channel his rage into art. Yet, Amal is aware that his teacher has never recognized. He believes that Ms. Rinaldi assures that Amal is different from his art (Scottish Book Trust 00:16:03; Zoboï and Salaam 19, 142).

There is an incident with Ms. Rinaldi that Amal recalls. Once when they were in class; Rinaldi asks the students to see the reflection on a paper. There is a black background and a white space. Rinaldi recognizes there is a white face with a nose and eyes. Conversely, Amal realizes there is a black face, in the contrary, with eyes and a nose (Zoboï and Salaam 21). Amal asserts that the black face exists. It is a part and parcel from the paper. Yet, Rinaldi could only recognize the white one. However, Rinaldi is used to praising Amal's talent in drawing (Zoboï and Salaam 32), but Amal highly believes if she really knew him, she would not have believed that Amal has badly bruised Jeremy. Ms. Rinaldi has helped Amal with his art portfolio so as to get into a fine arts summer program. The program intends to help art students to prepare their art portfolio for college. Amal consults Ms. Rinaldi of whether he can just draw a mural and send it to the summer program. Yet, his teacher tells him keep dreaming, but permanently he should shift these dreams into art. He has been accepted in the program. Yet, Amal could not go to it (Zoboï and Salaam 140).

Clyde Richter: is Amal's defense attorney. Amal strongly believes that Clyde is part of Rinaldi and Jeremy's world. The world that is supportive to the white part of America. According to Amal, Clyde belongs to the white space of Amal's page. Amal strongly Considers Clyde to not be in his side. He is assured of that Clyde has not defended him the way he should. Subsequently, It happens when Amal personally has

asked his attorney whether he is in his side or not. Yet, Clyde responds that he works for him, but he never that he is in Amal's side (Zoboi and Salaam 28, 29, 71, 73).

Clyde is a lawyer that speaks with two mouths. One is for Amal and the other for the court, Amal asserts. Clyde would have proven, indeed, Amal's innocence. Further, the attorney has provided Amal with books to read. Clyde, on the contrary, is ignorant to Amal's background and upbringing. One of them was an autobiography of Malcolm X. Amal interprets this differently. Clyde's hidden message portrays to Amal that he is like Malcolm; a Muslim, a thug, went to jail, and was killed. Moreover, Amal is certain that Clyde has been drowning him much more than to save him (Zoboi and Salaam 73, 85, 86, 160)

3.4 Slavery and the Negro Concept: the Ongoing Heritage

Slavery laid the foundation for an emerging collective identity by creating a shared collective memory that indicated and defined a race, a people, or a community. Slavery is a sort of commemoration that shaped the identity of a people (Eyerman 2).

The novel opens up with the slavery era. The protagonist asserts that he would not call his attorney, Clyde, a mister. Amal holds the notion that his grandmother has told him. He is the master of his own self, destiny, body, and mind (Zoboi and Salaam 71). Amal's grandmother has told him she would take him to Africa, specifically, to Senegal. The church has organized this trip. Amal's grandmother states that they would visit a special place in Goré Island. The place is renowned as "the Door of No Return" (Zoboi and Salaam 74).

Goree Island has a rich and a valuable past. The Island served as a major zone for the burgeoning European slave trade in the Americas. "The Door of No Return" is known also as the House of Slaves. It has been constructed between 1780 and 1784. In 1978, the island was included on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites as a

cultural and natural treasure. It is the last remaining commemorative in Goree and in the African Diaspora generally. In this place, the African Americans' identities and homes were snatched away from them forever ("Goree Island"; BBC Reel 00:00:13; "Travel"). It is believed that roughly around ten to twenty million Africans were shipped to Europe including women, children, and men. However, the amount of the uprooted Africans is still debatable.

It's where slaves had to go through
to get on a ship sailing to America
It's where African people lost everything
and stepped out into a future they didn't know. (Zoboi and Salaam 74)

Interestingly, Amal links and compares the Door of no Return to America. Although he has not visited the House of Slaves, he has imagined that his life symbolizes Africa. In the courtroom, Amal thinks of the exit door and draws parallels as if his life is Africa. The exit door as if it is leading him to a slave ship not to prison, similarly, the prison could be, indeed, America (Zoboi and Salaam 74-75-76).

Maybe I can touch the ocean floor
and the ancestors of the Middle Passage
tug at my feet call me home (Zoboi and Salaam 82)

Amal refers to the dead African slaves in the ocean. It is believed that the ill and agony slaves were thrown in the seas (BBC Reel 00:01:24). Further, while he is going to be carried from the county jail to the juvenile detention facility, Amal is shackled by the officers. He continuously relates his situation to his ancestors and, mainly, to Slavery. The way he is shackled reminds him the way Africans were shackled when shipped to the New World. The same chains might have shackled his father and his

father's father. They are all linked through DNA. As if the African genes its fate is to be forever Shackled (Zoboi and Salaam 92). Repeatedly, Amal points out to Slavery.

The bus that carries the main character and other prisoners to the detention is uncrowded. Accordingly, Amal recalls and thinks of whether the slaves have had much space in the slave trade ships (Zoboi and Salaam 96). To some extent Amal implicitly posits as if he is enslaved. In the poetry class in prison, Ms. Dawson introduces herself that she is a poet, educator, and a prison abolitionist. The moment she has said that; Amal surprisingly asks her: "Like in slavery? So you're here to free us?"(Zoboi and Salaam 228). Ms. Dawson disagrees and assures to Amal that neither he nor any of the imprisoned guys are slaves.

The novel puts in the front the concept of "Negro" or "Nigga". When the officer Stanford has been carrying Amal, he says to him: "Let me tell you something, little nigga". The term "nigga" leads Amal to make a flashback to his mother's, Umi, warnings as a young boy. When the protagonist said "nigga" for the first time, Umi has grabbed his lips. Amal is warned not to utter that word. Yet, he was five back then and he was still young to recognize its cultural meaning (Zoboi and Salaam 110, 111). In Spanish, Negro refers to the black color. It derives from the racial categorization, Negroid. Negro is a shortcut name that White Europeans have long intended to identify persons of sub-Saharan African descent. In the late 20th Century, it has extensively indicated African Americans (Agyemang et al. 1016).

My cousins from around the way

my friends at the park

calling me

little nigga

little nigga

little nigga

like it's my name. (Zoboi and Salaam 110)

“Nigga” is recurrently said everywhere at schools, streets, and parks. It turns to be common despite its racial connotation. That word accompanies African Americans in the past, the present, and may remain in the future.

3.5 African Americans and US Perpetual Racial Prejudice

In the present American culture, institutional and structural racism still persists (Klupchak 10). America is a multicultural country and has diverse population. It is surely common that racism exists in such multicultural countries (Al Adawiyah 5).

While in the courtroom, Amal denounces the fact that African Americans are often in the spotlight. Every tiny thing is contrastingly interpreted as wrongdoing, savage, and irrational (Zoboi and Salaam 14). The protagonist poses the issue of skin color. It is a recurrent theme in the novel. A black is the criminal, illiterate, savage while the white is seen as the victim, educated, guiltless (Zoboi and Salaam 18, 30). Amal denounces the plotted story in the courtroom in order to accuse him of the crime. He states that they made up a story which differs from the real Amal (Zoboi and Salaam “movie star”). Confidently, Amal highly acknowledges his family's support and those they are the ones who believe in his innocence (Zoboi and Salaam 34).

Amal constantly refers to the notion that he is in a place that belongs to the whites. Thus, African Americans wherever they would go, they will immediately hear ‘Go home’ (Zoboi and Salaam 51). The protagonist explicitly and ironically refers to the biased justice system as a blind lady as it can see one side and disregard the other. Amal implicitly asserts the injustice that African Americans are experiencing in comparison to the Whites in the Criminal System. To elaborate, death and jail are the

only options the system provided African Americans by. While the whites, they symbolize the American Dream, and they are treated as such (Zoboi and Salaam 59).

The novel brings forth the institutional racism in schooling system. Amal denounces the fact that the advancement placement in his school is meant only to white teens. Amal has been the only boy of color in Ms. Rinaldi's class of AP Art History. Amal describes the class which consists of old, dull, sad paintings. The latter portrays sad, rich white people. Conversely, these paintings exclude the minorities of the American society. But rather, they shed light solely on white people. Amal believes that these paintings do not represent him. So, he rather prefers to draw a world that makes sense for him (Zoboi and Salaam 142).

Ms. Rinaldi has failed Amal. The latter assures that Rinaldi has never accepted or understood students of color, precisely, black students. Art students in East Hills High School are different in races and personalities. Each has his/her own interests. Amal believes that he has not fit into Rinaldi's standards. In one of the incidents with Ms. Rinaldi, She has displayed old paintings of renowned painters. Amal publically questions of whether other people around the world did paint or just white, European, old men who have renowned paintings. Amal is aware of the system's prejudice and centralization on the white, European race. Accordingly, she has reported him as disruptive and as unqualified to be in the advanced level class (Zoboi and Salaam 201, 202, 220).

Some of the prison inmates have warned Amal that they know about Jeremy. They publicly inform Amal to be alert (Zoboi and Salaam 181). On a day, when Amal is lining to have a shower, he has been dragged to a place and badly hit .Continuously, Umi reminds Amal that the point is they will try to kill him. Their aim is to make him fade away until he turns to be dust. As much as Salaam is fan of Maya Angelou, Amal

is as well. Umi asks Amal about what Maya has said about dust. He replies that it rises. Yet, Umi is unaware of the flamed ashes inside of Amal that are dust now (Zoboi and Salaam 192, 193).

The case is always about race prejudice in America. Anything refers to African Americans' skin color, face, hair, music is going to ruin things, make them ugly. Amal asserts that Black people are not free enough to cross the lines of where the white boys reside. In contrast, whites have no borders to be afraid of to cross, and the world belong to them including the Blacks hoods. Additionally, the authors have included a second part of Blind Justice poem. It argues that is because Black people are in the wrong skins, bodies, and country. They are in the wrong place, for they are judged because of their skin color. Contrastingly, when it comes to White people, they are in the right skins, place, and country (Zoboi and Salaam 208, 211, 212).

The novel is full of comparisons between black teens and white ones. African American boys are labeled by specific social calling cards. On the one hand, A black boy must be a mob, a gang, or a ghetto. If they are a group, they would be called a pack of wolves, and animals. The Central Park Five case proves this. As mentioned in chapter one, multiple newspapers and magazines have marked the five defendants as animals, thugs, and wolves. Before even the trial, these newspapers made pre-assumptions of the Black and Hispanic teenagers' guiltiness. Racial prejudice is deeply, indeed, rooted in the American society. On the other hand, the white supremacy is recurrently debatable. Yet, the authors have highlighted it in many social aspects in the US. When it refers to white teens or people in general, they are the educated, guiltless, and forever protected and supported (Zoboi and Salaam 213).

We were

a mob

They were

kids

a gang	having fun
ghetto	home
a pack of wolves	loved
animals	supported
thugs	protected
hoodlums	full of potential
men	boys. (Zoboi and Salaam 213)

A former prisoner, Dr. Kwesi Bennu has been a guest in Ms. Dawson's class (Zoboi and Salaam 273, 274). He has described his experience of being incarcerated of a crime he has not committed. At the same time, Ms. Dawson writes on the board "the 13th Amendment". It states the following: no one should be forced to work or be a slave in the United States or anywhere else under their control. Unless, it is a punishment for a crime for which the person has been found guilty. The inmates and Amal are asked to read it carefully. Eventually, Amal questions whether she intends to say that they are slaves. The guest disagrees and strongly asserts that the system treats them as a property. Besides, their life is undoubtedly owned by the state. Suddenly, Amal bursts and sings what he cannot openly say about unjust the treatment of the African Americans in the US (Zoboi and Salaam 275,279, 280, 281, 282).

3.6 Unveiling Amal's Trauma and Anger Situations

Maya Angelou states that in all kinds of art, part of you is in the trauma, and part of you is a step away from it (qtd. in Abubakar 119). Rage is a common human feeling. It emerges from moderate irritation and fury. It is a reaction to multiple circumstances including the belief that someone has harmed us (Reilly and Shopshire 9). Amal's first step in trauma is when he has been declared guilty by jurors (Zoboi and Salaam 54). Amal says:

There's a stone in my throat
 There's a brick on my chest
 The stone turns into a mountain
 The brick turns into a building
 And it feels like a giant, heavy thing
 like the whole world
 is pressing down on me. (Zoboi and Salaam 55)

“If you recognize this cycle of anger, you are on your way to controlling it” (“Struggling with Anger”). Amal is helplessly speechless. He is in a powerless situation where he could not help himself. Subsequently, Amal is fully aware that he must deal with the heavy rage that resides his body. Although the anger is, indeed, a big burden, he cannot prevent this feeling. But rather, Amal would experience the pain and try to overcome it. Amal confesses constantly that he is the first to punch Jeremy, but it is not him who caused Jeremy's severe injuries (Zoboi and Salaam 55, 56, 57, 58).

Amal's first hurtful incident is in the day of his arrival to the detention facility. Officer Stanford is the one who helps the prisoners to step off the bus. When it is Amal's turn, Stanford pulls his hand back after Amal has leaned on him. Since he is shackled, Amal falls directly on the ground. Accordingly, Amal gets injured. This event leads Amal to develop aggression feelings towards Stanford. As much as Amal wants to punch the officer; he helplessly cannot (Zoboi and Salaam 106,107,109, 110). These feelings are initially to be repressed. To a higher degree, a person's interventions and methods to handle their anger will improve whenever they are exposed to provoking situations. Dealing with anger requires certain steps. A person would stop violence or the threat of violence, develop and strengthen skills for self-control over

thoughts and actions, and most importantly to receive support and feedback from others (Reilly and Shopshire 2, 7). Thus, Amal represses himself to say to his mother that her presence, her caring words do hurt him. The words he hides from are like stones and bricks that construct cities and mountains inside of him (Zoboi and Salaam 193, 194).

While Amal is drawing, one of the inmates, Kadon, has yanked the notebook. Amal feels himself to be under test. So, one of the white officers asks Amal whether he wants to react to that. The officer comes closer to Amal and leans in order to make him notice his tattoo. The tattoo portrays a black baby with a rope around his neck. The baby's eyes are closed and filled with tears. The tears are coming down its cheeks. Amal stares so long in the tattoo's details. It could describe what the officer wants Amal to recognize that he is not safe there. Amal reacts to that and pushes hardly the table. In seconds, four officers press him on the floor. Metaphorically, Amal describes the stone and brick which have been in his throat and on his chest, respectively, become mountain and a building (Zoboi and Salaam 149, 150, 151).

the stone that was in my throat

the brick that was on my chest

The mountain in my throat

the building on my chest

are now an entire country and city

in my stomach

A heavy, crowded, broken place

right there in the middle of me (Zoboi and Salaam 117)

Ms. Dawson has a suggestion that the mural in the visiting room to be painted over. The mural is a painting of a kid with smiling birds, rainbows, and hopping

bunnies. Her suggestion has been approved after a long time by the prison system. She Asks Amal to paint it himself and has provided him with all the supplies. Amal has been so happy to be free and paint something that symbolizes him and the inmates. The artistic teen is knowledgeable of Michelangelo's works and of other artists. For him now, it is his high time to be free and portray his art in the visiting room wall. He starts drawing with his fellow inmates Kadon, Amir, Smoke, and Rah. Their mural has been ready in the families' visiting day (Zoboi and Salaam 251,252,346,347,348).

The heavy thing in my throat

falls out onto the floor and disappears

The heavy thing on my chest

rises out of my body and disappears

I get applause when the guys see it

I get pats on the back, daps, handshakes. (Zoboi and Salaam 358)

Drawing the mural has made Amal express his thoughts and inner struggles. It has relieved him. All the families have taken pictures next to the mural except Amal's family. For the first time, Umi is absent in the visiting day because Jeremy is awoken. Further, Amal's happiness about his mural of is endless. Yet, it does not last forever. His mural has been painted over in white because they tell that it runs against the facility's guidelines. Amal the quiet kid turns into full rage that cannot be silenced. Whenever Amal finds hope, it is ruined unwillingly (Zoboi and Salaam 365,366,367,368).

3.7 Art as a Therapeutic Tool and Hope Restoration

Literature and art two of the mediums that are able of conveying the devastating impacts of trauma (José Rico 202). Drawing, painting, and collage are all examples of art forms that allow an individual to experiment with, test out, or practice their intended

transformation in the form of a concrete item that might be physically changed (qtd. in Boyadjis 18).

I
have a
crayon and paper
I didn't know that
I could hold this little
bit of freedom in my hands (Zoboi and Amal 148)

For Amal, to have a crayon and a paper is a sort of freedom in prison. It is the freedom that he did not expect to have inside the walls of the facility. Amal draws directly a wide-open door. Hopefully, thinking is going to lead him out of prison and to his freedom (Zoboi and Salaam 149).

I overflow
I can't hold it in
I won't hold them in
my rhymes
my words
my truth
are like a tsunami (Zoboi and Salaam 101).

Amal's artistic talent disobeys to fade away despite his situation. Amal strongly insists to tell his truth, to express himself through singing. The subjects that cannot be uttered; it would be expressed into music, songs, and paintings (Zoboi and Salaam 102).

no matter how dark	I can still be the light
it gets in here	no matter how scared

no matter how lonely	I get in here
I start to feel	I start to remember
my name is Amal	But there's no future in these
and Amal means	four walls four walls
hope means there	boxing me in boxing me in
is still a tomorrow	so I punch the air. (Zoboi and
Salaam 156,157)	

Amal begins to refuse to leave his cell. He even declines to meet his mother in Visiting Days. It is painful to Amal to see his mother each time. Eventually, the teen receives letters from Umi and his friends, Zenoubia and Lucas. These letters have an immense impact on Amal's psyche while incarcerated (Zoboi and Salaam 163, 167, 319). Umi's letter opens up by "the only way to survive hell is to walk through" (Zoboi and Salaam 170). Umi's piece of advice sums up what may Amal experience in prison. She calls him to stand still to whatsoever they would do to him. Further, Zenoubia is the girl that Amal loves. Permanently, he forgets his pain. Zenoubia's letter would fix him and put him back together. Zenoubia's support and her belief that Amal is innocent contribute to alleviate his spirits (Zoboi and Salaam 170, 172,173).

The first time I feel something
 other than stones and bricks
 on my chest
 is when I see the name
 on one of the envelopes
 I read it over and over again
 to make sure that

the arrangement of letters
 the handwriting
 the words
 are what I think they say
 are who I think it is. (Zoboi and Salaam 170)

Amal the hip-hop fan kid rhymes and sings his words. In his song, Amal notes to many subjects like black incarceration, skin color, history, and essentially hope (Zoboi and Salaam 174, 175). Amal's hope is embedded in telling his truth, in being freed, and the vital one that Jeremy wakes up and tells the truth. In the Visiting Day, Umi and Clyde, Amal's attorney, have brought him good news about Jeremy. The comatose teen is recovering. Both Umi and Clyde stimulate and persuade Amal to not give up and to have a good behavior in prison (Zoboi and Salaam 243). To always have hope is vital for Amal to survive.

Drawing art is a refuge to Amal to avoid saying or doing what could be regretted. Once, while in the free time, Amal and Kadon have had a conversation. Indirectly, Kadon has called Amal "nigga". Amal responds that he is not a nigga. In seconds, black inmates have rounded around him (Zoboi and Salaam 222, 223). They may have thought that Amal is being smart to say that he is not a "nigga". To this extent or even more, the word "nigga" is firmly and culturally embedded in the American society to be specifically associated with black people. Amal chooses to draw over and over again (Zoboi and Salaam 224). Art is his relief, refuge from the concrete, freaking world to the artistic one (Zoboi and Salaam 227). Yet, his world is going to be taken from him. One of the inmates has haphazardly yanked Amal's notebook when Amal ignored him and kept drawing. Consequently, Amal eagerly aims to punch the guy (Zoboi and Salaam 224). The inmates hold and prevent Amal to hit

the guy. Amal intentionally has prevented himself to be in trouble many times. But this time, his rage has overcome him.

Art serves Amal's thoughts. He continuously expresses his thoughts through drawing. The protagonist draws boxes in his sketchbook. These boxes' borders are drawn with a thick pencil. The curved lines are like made of steel to be impenetrable. Therefore, Amal imagines himself to be jumped in these boxes. The later would be his shelter. A shelter that is anti-cursing and anti-f**k-you-niggas for him (these are curses that he is recurrently exposed to). He imagines himself to be proofed from such disagreeable incidents while inside these boxes. (Zoboi and Salaam 259, 269).

The butterfly effect concept is represented in the novel. The concept refers to the impact of small changes which results in unpredictable changes of a certain state. Amal hopefully draws a butterfly wishing that it may alter his situation. Also, he wishes that its change would reveal the truth about his case. Conversely, Amal has been put in a solitary confinement for drawing the butterfly in his cell. He starts talk to the butterfly whether it can change his state although he is broken and hopeless. Yet, he essentially wishes that it would change the system itself. Amal finds it tiring how the whites continuous supremacy not just in the US but the world (Zoboi and Salaam 234, 295, 304, 309, 310, 312; Meriem-Webster). When Jeremy has left come in a healthy state, Amal's hopes are high that the truth would be revealed. Besides, Amal's hope has been greatly raised by having a new attorney, Tarana Hudson. An attorney that would understand African Americans as Amal's mother says. In Jeremy's day to provide a statement, Amal instantly draws more butterflies. Amal is strongly wishing that they may cause a tremendous alteration in his life (Zoboi and Salaam 375,385).

3.8 Conclusion

To sum up, each of Ms. Rinaldi and Clyde have participated to portray a certain aspect from the American society in Amal's thought. Slavery is an unforgettable, cultural foundation that will mark the lives of African Americans for good. So it is to Amal. As much as slavery has marked African Americans; the "nigga" labeling has branded them much more. Subsequently, the racial prejudice and inequality is firmly rooted in the US institutions towards minorities, namely, people of color. Undoubtedly, the experienced racism eventually caused a cultural and psychological trauma. Hopefully, Amal holds tightly on having hope and resisting the tough conditions through his artistic talents.

General Conclusion

Yusef Salaam's virtual experience with the US Criminal Justice System has been well-displayed through the character of Amal. The collaboration between Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam focused much more on reflecting Yusef's personality on the character. The novel could be considered as an autobiography to Salaam for the very close similarities between Amal and Salaam. Each of them has been wrongly accused, raised only by their mothers, their cases consist of five defendants, and essentially they are minor African Americans. However, each of the authors' perspectives about the US Criminal Justice Disparities and other institutions has been put in the front.

Zoboi and Salaam both has shown two Americas, separate and unequal, divided and disunited. The binary Black and White issues in America are well portrayed. The authors have proposed the white's supremacy in the US and its effects on the other minorities, especially, black people. Essentially, the main institutions that the authors succeeded to display the racism embodied in them are Justice System and the Education System. On the one hand, the authors prove that although the lack of evidence in accusing African Americans is not usually taken into consideration.

Besides, the novel successfully portrayed the conditions of Black prisoners inside the juvenile. It also sheds light on how media could spread outrage about certain cases, and it eventually affects the prisoners themselves. On the other hand, the novel denounces the fact that the schooling system is biased towards minorities and most importantly African Americans. The authors criticized the prejudice in the schooling system towards white students. It displays the advancement to the majority of white students over others from minorities in the advanced classes.

Along that, African Americans do share a remarkable history in America. Notably, slavery is negatively a lasting part of that history. It is always present in the

minds of Black people, so it is for the protagonist Amal. The novel has depicted the main character's awareness about this history. Although it has been abolished long time ago, but the authors aim to assert that is still existing but in other forms. The author Salaam believes that what have happened with him is slavery going on by another name that New Jim Crow (Talks at Google 00:11:14). Additionally, the authors successfully raised the awareness towards one of the outcomes of slavery that is "nigga" concept. As much as this expression has often been negatively connected to Black people, it turns to be a racist labeling to their skin color.

Inevitably, the experiences of racist labeling or racial inequality must cause a psychological trauma. Amal the protagonist has been through painful moments importantly to be wrongly accused of a crime he did not commit. Even though, the biased treatment to a certain race over the other has an immense psychological impact on the deprived minorities. The traumatic encounters inevitably immediately result in different outlets. These outlets may be in a form of anger, depression, and disappointment. Conversely, Amal chooses to express his inner thoughts and unspoken intentions through drawing and singing, art generally.

Amal resists the circumstances traumatizing him through art. Drawings could let Amal illustrate his thoughts into concrete art. It has also prevented him to carry out sudden and regretful actions. Additionally, the support of his family and friends has highly helped him to find resilience. To sum up, *Punching the Air* is a story of finding hope and healing through art although Amal's art is not given the value needed (Epic Reads 00:03:36, 00:03:56). Art is an empowering source for Amal (qtd in cbc 00:06:21).

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