
'Pandemic of Racism': A Study of Racial Suppression in Child Psychology in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

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Abstract: Hegemonic confinements etiolate a child's psyche and his abilities of recognizing his true self. Imposition of a foreign culture eradicates the aboriginal true traditions of a society perplexing a child between two cultures. African American discourse in the light of Maya Angelou's autobiographical narrative *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* cultivates Negro child's psychological fixations and their representations of their self. The text cogitates a panacea for an opulent exploration of black gender conflicts among the young generation and their appeal to adopt the dominating culture. This study provides ample evidence of the influencing agents that work behind the neocolonialists to help a conformation of the blacks to their pre-conceived image of a subordinate servant. Highlighting Angelou's real life suffering as a young girl, the present study adheres to culminate a child's experience as a young developing juvenile child in the context of a recent (25th May, 2020) killing of a Black Afro-American named George Floyd, a 46 years old Black American was brutally killed by Derek Chauvin, a white police officer who kept his knee on Floyd's neck for eight minutes and forty six seconds. The study prepends racial and ethnic efferent forces working behind the victimization of Black adolescent generation and the still continuing struggle of the Afro-Americans to assert their identity.

Keywords: Race, Children, Imperialism, Marginalization, George Floyd

1. Introduction

The art of survival and cultural perpetuation of any society hinges on its children and youth. They are the custodians entrusted with the preservation of a cultural heritage and legacy. The futurity of it depends on the aegis and ammunition of the society's children since they are liable to be the most vulnerable members of a community. Black African society has combated against the death throes of their culture against the white supremacist rule. Black community have historically been marginalized and victimized by colonialism, wartime atrocities, and racism and blitzkrieg oppression in all political, social and economic domains. Africa has been imperialized by the European culture and British colonialist setup since the fifteenth century. The impacts of which were further made by slave trade to America in the continuing centuries which down casted and subjugated the black Americans. Apropos to this, the children have witnessed a tumultuous time in Africa which had a

debilitating effect on their psychological mechanism.

This paper endeavors to succinctly investigate Maya Angelou's first biographical novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* with reference to the recent freedom struggles by the Black Americans. The selected text investigates the consequences of colonial experiences on the identities of young African children. A close study of the novel brings forth a microcosmic image of African children and their dichotomous befuddled personalities. Undergoing a drastic period of transformation through imperial invasion, African children suffer contusions of fractured cultural identities. Close contact with the dominant white culture infuses an averseness and repugnance towards their own native culture. Exogenous disruptions have shattered their indigenous selves and they find themselves baffled and torn between two conflicting cultures.

Coercive imperial powers shaped into a cultural terrorism have altered the serenity of traditional African society. Socialization process and foreign structural system introduced disengagements between the African conceptions

of self-identity. Onwauchi affirms that an African child has to face many unaccustomed and unwelcomed problems due to their schematized Anglo- American school systems and their aboriginal African homely culture [31]. Surrogate western domination deprived the Negro children from a sound sense of their worth. The whites invaded their culture and instilled in them an inferiority complex. Their racist indoctrination internalized a spirit of subordination among the black society. They were marginalized and victimized by the whites who considered them as savage, brutal, backward and underdeveloped [28]. African children started to believe in their cultures' in-authenticity by clinging and responding to the values and standards of the foreign invaders. They are psychologically inherited and alienated to devalue themselves [28].

Negritude started to lose its value and significance when white vandals inculcated racial preponderance. Racial stereotyping and the impact of acculturation led to trauma, psychological dilemmas and individual dissidence among the African children. The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, defines personality disorder generally as 'an enduring pattern' of intrinsic demeanor that bodaciously deviates from the expectations of the individual's culture, causing distress and anxiety. The incident of George Floyd reflects this stress and anxiety. Minneapolis police's action towards Floyd's arrest and killing reflects the very core of racism prevailing in the U.S. The account of the events reflect that Floyd had bought cigarettes with a counterfeit bill of 20\$ and the person in charge of the store called 911 and reported his misconduct. After the arrival of the first cop squad Floyd was arrested, pushed and then pinned to the ground. He constantly asked for help and cried until he wasn't able to breathe but the police did not pay any attention towards his suffering and remained indifferent to it [5].

The white vandals standardized the values of recognition and qualification for African children which they believed were necessary to attain in order to locate their status and position in the white society. The racial strategies impelled the African children to consider themselves as submissive 'others' which tended them to reject and doubt their original identities. Consistent rejection from the white society made the Negro children question the notions of deserving and receiving [7]. These self-doubts propelled them towards a pernicious individual and collective hatred and abhorrence for their own inferior self.

The penchant for recognition and the quest of finding their true African self has been a tool used by Black aesthetic writers. To assert the black African identity, they used slave narratives or autobiographical elements to limn out the glimpses of their lived experienced beneath white oppression. Through her African American cultural specificity, Marguerite Annie Johnson popularly known as Maya Angelou, attempts to critique racism, identity and black victimization. Born in St. Louis, Missouri Angelou became an acclaimed American poet. Her broad career as an autobiographer, essayist, actress, playwright, novelist,

director, poetess and civil right activist made her a hallmark in the literary and artistic fields. Being the black women's poet laureate, her literary works are considered to be anthems of African Americans. She presents a 'liberating discourse' [9] through her artistic flare.

Following the slave narrative tradition of speaking in the first person singular, her novel stands for the 'Black Americans in Troubled Times' [32]. She delineates themes of painful loss, gender and racial discrimination, slavery and the traumatic struggle of the Negroes. She echoes her own childhood atrocities and quelling emotions in the novel by channelizing her own life history by recounting young Maya's story then known as Marguerite Johnson. Through her tumultuous journey from childhood to motherhood, she reflects her life in Stamps with her brother. Maya's parents had divorced when she was three years old. She was then sent to live with her grandmother, Annie in the rural state of Arkansas. The children then settled to live their years with Momma who ran a store and took care of their crippled uncle. Maya struggled from humiliation and shame of being a black girl. Her familial, church and school experiences all made her feel insecure.

Furthermore, when she and her brother moved to live with their mother Vivian, she was sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend. Craving for physical intimacy, she felt Mr. Freeman's touch as satisfying which later turned into guilt. After Mr. Freeman's death she was brought back to re-settle again with her grandma. Humble Mrs. Flowers, presented her with books to read. At the age of ten, Maya was sent to work in a white lady's house who anglicized her name to Mary. Being targeted for her race and ethnicity, she willingly gets fired from the job. She then spends summer in California with her father, Bailey. Her rivalry with Dolores, her father's girlfriend and her misconception about lesbianism makes her have sexual intercourse with a boy. After graduating from school, she became a young independent mother.

Choosing the title of the novel from Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem "Sympathy", Angelou stands in for all those Negro children who have been victimized on the basis of their skin color or have been targeted for their race or gender. Being an emancipated Black woman Angelou criticized the suppression that black women had to face at the hands of white and black men. Her work reveals the traumatic aftermath of colonial indoctrination in the lives of Negro women.

The prime foci of this qualitative study is to compendiously explore a colonized child's perspectives about the white community around it. This opens new avenues in black aestheticism, psycho-biographies, ethnographic and anthropological research and in black children's literature. A kaleidoscopic pattern of pacification and hegemonic control will be traced in the lives of Negro children. By employing the theoretical framework of postcolonial and race theory, the investigation ineluctably aims to answer the following questions under the light of multiple critics: how does colonization traumatize the society holistically, particularly the children? In what manner does

colonial culture disrupt the familial bonding and how does it cause relation slippage? Do postcolonial shocks cause psychological conflicts in the native children?

Additionally, this research paper is organized into four sections. The first section deals with the brief introduction of the general area of study, highlighting the relevance of the research topic. Second section musters the academic research required to foreground the stance of the paper. Third section involves a comprehensive vivid analysis of the selected primary text along with other secondary sources and critiques. The final section demonstrates the tentative outcomes and the concluding explanations of the study.

2. Literature Review

Negro Children have witnessed cultural obliteration due to the domination of white central powers. Massacre, brutal treatment, annihilation and extermination have introduced a divided concept of self in them. A rigid and oppressive white social structure has remarkably influenced African child rearing, educational and religious institutions [33]. A significant approach towards the thought of childhood is supplemented by Qvortrup. He points out that childhood is a social class in which children try to accomplish certain set rules provided by the culture which is the sum total of learned behavioral patterns. They learn and experience the customs and tradition endowed to them by their family, friends and society. He further states that the existence of a society relies upon the future generation- the youth and the children. They are the carriers of the entire crux of a community. Its survival strategies are encapsulated into the younger generation [25]. The shift and change in a society equally impacts on a child as it does to the adults. If a society undergoes unrest or turmoil, the effect is likely to come upon its children. Hughes and Sargent assigned a role of transmutation of ideas, genes and identities to a child. They contend that childhood is a 'primary site of pedagogy and cultural learning'. Children synergize a catena between the past and the present, private and the public. They embody the entire social fabric of a country.

Colonialism and Nationalism in Africa projected an urge of defining the claims of identities. Efforts to create these identities started with the process of giving education to the blacks by an English set-up in schools. This brought the issue of child personality formation and child rearing practices. Phillip Goff in his APA's journal found that black boys were bullied and maltreated by the white boys of their age. De-humanizing fixed stereotypes were associated with the young boys as a property of the whites to be owned. He argues that black boys were considered to be responsible for their actions whereas, white boys benefitted from the assumption that children are essentially innocent. Judged on the basis of their race and blackness their personal growth is hindered and their personal sense of culture is shattered.

Building on the same line of thought, Marsella has pointed out that culture shapes different psychological sides of response to traumatized situations including meaning and

implications of phenomena such as nightmares and visions, role of beliefs in destiny or fate, perception of personal responsibility for the event and response, and other vulnerabilities to trauma such as genetic make-up, social network, status and structure, patterns of coping, and religious and related belief systems. Contrary to this, the sociologist Ash Amin negates this perspective and argues that it is not only culture that re-shapes an identity but also the inherent belief systems and the stereotypical images that the colonizer perceives about the colonized. Moreover, Andreas Bieler, in his historical material analysis, states that the fall of USSR played a significant role because through it the Eastern expansion of the West turned many communities into liberal capitalistic societies. The same mentality echoes in Africa where the whites are not very fond of people belonging to African descent [6].

The preponderant influence of the white community segregates Africans on the basis of colorism and shadism. Racist ideologies shatter the personalities of Blacks all over the globe dividing them into dichotomies and differing complexes. As analyzed by Stuart Hall, the western regimes not only annihilate black identity but also re-shape and mold them according to their own profits. Apropos to the debate Mami instantiates, the process of exteriorizing causes cultural estrangement [18]. The lingering pressure of bewilderment and confusion leads an African individual into a state of culture shock, where the strangeness of the foreign imposed norms and the hesitation of the etiquettes crumples his whole existence [17].

Black writers have utilized the genre of autobiography and other self-expressive modes as a mean to articulate the devastating sufferings black community has witnessed as individuals and as a collective unit. They celebrate their experiences so that 'they may alter the conditions' of Negro lives [29]. Following the same line, Fernandes conclusively points out the triangulation between culture, race, gender and identity. According to her, the mercantile Eurocentric approach enslaved black minds which served as a critical junction for cultural lineage [16]. The 'dialectical theory of reactive identification and cultural in-betweenity' suggests three focal identification patterns amongst Negro literati; capitulation and surrender to the dominant ideology, resuscitating of their traditional African culture and a radicalization of both to formulate bicultural assimilation [25]. Akin to this, Butterfield establishes that black artists and writers have always intended to picture the blacks through a white lens. Amalgamation of the two cultures has blurred the true African image. But the tradition of self-writing and narratives provided a strong cathartic testimony that formed the basis of Black Arts.

The above mentioned academic scholarship focuses on colonial and postcolonial discourse with regard to sociopolitical and cultural impediments leading towards identity crisis. However, they provide a vacillating picture of the effects of cultural imperialism on Negro children, though the consequences of these encumbrances in the context of an African child's mental schism have not yet been

acknowledged fully. Thus, it signifies the research gap and helps the reader to explore the dimensions of black children's psychological and personality dissidence.

3. Discussion

The opening scene of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* foreshadows a three year old Maya's childhood bringing into focus the imprisoning environment for a black child who is trapped and caged in the interlocking bars of natural and societal forces. The pitiful state of the African children is vividly reflected in the way the protagonist and her brother Bailey were transported like a package of things to Stamps with tags on their wrists that instructed 'To whom it may concern' [1]. Marguerite and Bailey were forced to live with their paternal grandmother because of their parent's unfortunate marriage. Thousands of African children were forced to travel to South like luggage due to the political calamities of the country.

The harshness of the South life and the pitiful condition of black neighborhood had a dilapidated effect on the children. Maya herself puts it, 'If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat' [1]. Grandmother shared her own Negro experiences of racist dealing with them. The fear, stress and anxiety for the fact the white folks couldn't be spoken to insolently shaped the children psychology of always being inferior to the whites 'without risking one's life' [1]. Grandmother served to be the critical matrix for the children to follow. She modelled a behavior for the African children to keep standing in front of the whites no matter how much they humiliated them. Her singing is symbolic of the unflappable African struggle. Moreover, the title of this research paper is taken from Maya's remarks of perceiving the whites as gods to the black. She states, 'Of course, I knew God was white too' [1]. This was due to the fact that whites were able to spend money lavishly and by exercising their hegemonic supreme power and control upon the blacks they were forced to live in rough neighborhoods and in poor financial conditions.

The unequal distribution of wealth being only in the hands of white bourgeoisie class exasperated the blacks for they always had to fight for their fair share. Even though grandmother owned a local store and had a sound financial status, she suffered insults at the hands of poor white girls that came to dine. The children were able to find discrepancies in their African morals and ethics due to the fact that Momma always taught them to address their elders with respect whereas, the white girls called her by her first name, Annie.

Even before their first encounter with the whites, Maya and her brother were aware that there was a segregation, a boundary among the blacks and the whites. They knew that they were to be feared because they were exceptionally better and different. The children had a watchful perception that there was a remarkably visible dividing boundary between the powerful and the powerless. The dichotomies between

the rich and the poor, owner against owned, well dressed opposing ragged, and straight haired versus kinkiness taught them a series of life lesson. Grandma taught them to live a precautionary and safe life by avoiding or submitting to the whites. The racist behavior and the prejudiced attitude of the whites did not even permitted the black children to have vanilla ice-cream; they had to be 'satisfied with chocolate' [1]. Without parents, the African children's disrupted familial life instilled a sense of not belonging anywhere. Maya used to question herself with doubt that she must have done something wrong to deserve all these punishments. African children went through relatively harmful effects of uneven mental development due to the devastating collision of the two African and American cultures. They have shook the fundamental grounds of the African sensibility. Resultantly, the young African's impressionability of their self, depended upon Western mercy [15].

Due to the 'historical racial schema' [15], it is withheld that a historical racism denies the right to the black people to be seen through their body. They are identified by their 'epidermal racial schema' [15] representing their entire race and history. Their whole self is clustered into three defining traits; their skin color, their race and slave history. George Floyd's devastating murder adds to the legacy of slavery and racism as hundred plastic headstones were placed in black cemetery. Vicki Daniel documents that each headstone belonged to a victim of white police brutality. The epitaph 'Rest in Power' was engraved on many tombstones which portrays the commemorative practices in the black community. Assertion of the deceased's personhood is celebrated by the blacks and is taken as a symbol of black autonomy [8].

Moreover, it has roots in slave history as people belonging from the African community were denied burial grounds by the whites especially on rural Southern plantations. White owners relegated black cemeteries to marginal far off lands that could not be bought to cultivation. Many burials were marked only with a wooden post or by a single stone in order to recognize the location of the grave. Yet, in order to remember and to give an honorary tribute to the dead, enslaved communities had great funerals which were, in the words of historian David Roediger, "value-laden and unifying social" events that allowed for communal black expression. Slavery made Black bodies into financial and social assets. In contrast to this, Black commemoration of the deceased acknowledged their social relationships and the value and morals of their lives.

The feeling of not being part of the society implemented shame and guilt in Maya's unconscious reservoir. Her magical ideals and dreams of wearing dresses like white girls unveil the hidden psychological mimicking of the dominant culture. The revelation that the dress had been made by 'a white woman's faded purple throwaway' [1] and did not hide her legs and her skin color appeared even darker 'like mud' [1] made her feel inferior and ashamed of her black individuality. The inhuman behavior of the whites comes into the limelight when the blacks heard about the Ku Klux Klan,

who terrorized Negro communities by torturing, murdering, raping and beating them bitterly. This inclines with the recent chain of events in Floyd's case where the officer's action of pulling up his gun even when Floyd was constantly apologizing for his conduct resonates the inherent hatred of the whites towards the Blacks. The fatality of the Minneapolis police department was captured and viewed by the bystanders. The footage got viral and the state department charged Derek Chauvin with first degree murder while the rest of the involved officers were fired from their posts. Harris, a reporter for New York Times states that Floyd begged for his life. He was aware that the system was not designed for him. But when an individual puts his faith in the judicial system and is rejected for not belonging to the same race, then he starts taking law in his own hands.

According to Halbwach the framework of an individual's collective and individual memory rests on the 'constant exchanges of impressions' about family members which are strengthened through continuous social interaction. The picture of their crippled uncle hidden in the cellar, covered by vegetables further sketched a horrific picture in the eyes of the Negro children which led to a collective trauma. According to Dubois, black people sensed a national and an overtly intense personal trauma that was inescapable [13].

Bailey was considered the jewel of his family and Maya was a weak child to be protected. Both of them confronted racism differently. Maya sensed negative connotations while Bailey 'Laughed off' the bitter remarks made on them and changed his anger into cynicism. He explained to Maya that whenever he was insulted for being a black he tried to avoid it by simply putting his 'soul to sleep' [1]. This foregrounds the evidence that children can be affected by the things happening in the environment around them. The fact that the fourteen years old boy Bailey left home to live an independent life reflects that black children were viewed to be adults when they entered their teenage years whereas, white were presumed to be living their life as innocent children even at the age of nineteen or twenty. The overestimated age and the reprehension of being black skinned is linked to the dehumanizing caricatures and stereotypes that cause racial disparities and existential conflicts.

The conflict does not reside only in children but also opens for the difference between the identities of young boys and girls, both of them experience African racism differently. Maya being a potential woman was likely to experience double invisibility because of her gender. Maya defined herself in negative light, she suffered from what Freud called a 'penis envy' [30] and added in her a castration complex of not being a man, or not being as attractive and beautiful as his brother Bailey. Contrary to her brother, she feared and did not consider herself a positive gender.

Maya's likeness for Bailey's light skin tone, childhood admiration for whatever he does and also for his resemblance with her mother propelled her to a position into the 'dark continent' of her skin and subverted her enclosed black female potentialities [32]. Her contriteness made her guilty

for all the wrongs happening around her because her girlhood depended entirely on her 'unconscious lack' [30]. Her relationship with Mrs. Flowers internalizes her thinking of safety among her own people- the Negroes. As long as an individual stays in a close contact to the people of his own community, he will only have 'minor internal conflicts' and will feel unharmed and secure from the exterior schisms [15].

The account of relegation and maltreatment is viewed when Maya was sent to work under a white woman who, for her own convenience, changed her name from Marguerite to Mary. This led to an identity crisis for she was being treated as someone who she was not. The Anglicization of her name provides with the evidence that African children were bound to leave their traditions and identities and were propelled to live with a white baggage on their shoulder. Feeling annoyance at her vexation by the white ladies who treated her as slave, she broke the china pot which got her fired. She explains that when a white non-native molests a black person they should 'scream as loud as possible' so that some 'sympathetic soul' might come to save them [1]. Maya's action to rebel against the preconceived notions of the society relate to the contemporary social outburst of George Floyd's case. Several rallies and protests were made all over the country. Hundreds of people vandalized police cars with graffiti and many youngsters took initiative to rebel against the racist actions of police in the protest. The fact that the protesters were not only those belonging to the black community but a large number consisted of the young whites reflects that in the modern times many whites have started to reject racial ideologies and have become more fluid towards race and ethnicity [12].

Slogans of 'black lives matter', 'decolonize everything' and 'defund police' were raised all over the state. Many protestors wore cowboy hats in order to demonstrate the rich legacy of black cowboys in America. Akin to this, hip hop songs and rap music was also played during the protest to depict the Negritudinal value of black arts and their contribution to the world [12].

Experiencing a life-threatening event or re-experiencing chronic exposure to abuse or the reminiscent of an event can trigger psychological symptoms. Dissociative experiences, outburst of anger and emotional numbness contribute to the disturbed mental health of these African children. To defend oneself from their past experiences, many children develop a defense mechanism in the form of resilience, an ability to recover from change, misfortune and tragedy. It helps them to withstand stressful challenges and regain their normal life. The small account of aggression depicts the massive rage that was being built in African children for their treatment of being slaves.

Desire of intimacy and physical affection rooted in an eight year old child confused her and she mistook Freeman's sexual assault as paternal love. His threats of not telling anyone of their physical contact traumatized her and ripples of fear and terror of losing her brother appeared in her. This trauma developed a feeling that she has sold herself to the devil [1]. Her silence and muted attitude towards everything

made her consider herself as a bad omen whose breathe and words will be toxic for the people close to her and they will eventually die. The image of sexual assault communicates a haunting legacy through a language of symptoms. Exposure to trauma leads the individual to a shattered belief system, disengage from their activities and hinder their personal growth. A victim suffers a challenge to one's values and beliefs about safety, self-worth and meaning of existence. They encounter demoralization and disillusionment with feelings of helplessness and negative thoughts which cuts short a child's tendency to cope with challenging situations which have adverse effects on their psychological state causing neurotic anxiety. Suppressing and subduing painful events adds to the efficacy of trauma and repression.

The continence of these doleful happenings in a child's life expunge these disturbing emotions depriving them of their linguistic ability. The act of hiding her stained underwear under the sheets was a failed attempt of forgetting the horrible incident. According to Asmann, the act of remembering and forgetting are not polar opposites but are mutually linked. Forgetting can be willfully achieved through intentional actions which deviate an individual's 'reflection mediated social identity' [2]. Maya's inarticulate self provides evidence that colonized subject is silenced by the power imposed on them. This makes them unable to 'achieve self-legitimation' [35].

Additionally, Maya's desire for straight hair as that of the white girls pinpoints the issue of the repulsion towards the act of 'colonial mimicry' [36] in which the inferior nations try to adopt the imperial culture. African children felt a need to fit in the society and to be appreciated so in order to find their place they were attracted towards mirroring the dominant white culture and in doing so lost the presence of their own culture. The children's adolescent experience at the school got her disturbed as she encountered verbal abusing remarks about blacks by the guest of honor at her graduation day. This insulted and wounded her dignity and self-esteem as she thought that being a Negro was a disgusting and a hideous crime. 'As a species, we were an abomination. All of us' [1]. It was even more frustrating that they were to listen to all those insults and then bound to sit and enjoy quietly. Negro children become a 'heterogeneous product' [36], struggle between the past and the present, the archaic and the contemporary makes them feel estranged and alienated.

The most humiliating experience of racism was faced when Maya's grandmother took her to a white dentist whom she had lent money in the times of crisis. The dentist's ingratitude and detestation for the Negro children was revealed when he refused to check Maya's teeth by stating his policy as 'I'd stick rather my hand in a dog's mouth than in a nigger's' [1]. Negro children were turned into a 'partial hybrid' [30] due to the fact that they were closely linked to their familial space which practiced African traditions of child rearing and only encountered the white culture when they were out of that familial zone. Their lives were a mixture of 'presence and absence' of Africa [30].

Maya's search for her position and place in a white

supremacist society and her skepticism about her own sexuality elevated when she moved to live with her father in California. Her rivalry and wrangle with Dolores expressed a desire to stay away from home and be financially independent. Her understanding of lesbianism convinced her to find the true 'normal woman' inside her. She felt the need of having a boyfriend to experience the 'strange and exotic land of frills and femininity' [1].

Her consideration of herself as a lesbian relied on her inherent horrors of abjection. She was unable to distinguish between 'me and not me' [1]. Julia Kristeva relates this to initial development stages of an embryo where a mother is unable to identify between herself and the newly forming embryo. She considers her a foreign subject injected in her and in order to achieve a free independent identity, she must 'cease both taking in and expelling waste' [36]. Maya's willfulness to find a boyfriend and have sexual intercourse with him is a deliberate effort to identify her true self of not being a lesbian and to avoid her own alienated subjectivity. By avouching and declaring her own self she subverts the conventional set notions of the past. Women had always been judged by the virtue of the qualities they lacked or were not of men. Patriarchal subordination treats her as a domestic being or as an 'inferior male' [36]. Marking a line between sex and gender, De Beauvoir assesses the societal gender construction of womanhood. She is of the view that being woman does not imply any biological factor but it is the society or the culture which prescribes certain standardized qualities for an individual that establishes it is her gender [36].

Towards the close of the novel her work, as the first female ticket collector and her mother's firm undaunted support, made her find an optimistic picture of life that 'in the struggle lies the joy' [1]. Through her mother's deep source of inspiration, she was able to deliver a baby and was able to transform herself from a weak Negro child into a strong black woman. Her young pregnancy reassured her of doing the right thing 'without thinking' [1]. The optimistic end of the novel highlights that blackness is an abstract ontological concept but still it marks a significant thrust upon black children who continuously struggle between the shifts of their identities.

4. Conclusion

This paper establishes that the autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* provides ample evidence for the adverse effects of colonialism and marginalization on the identities of African children. Racism and imperial subjugation leads to trauma. Children suffer from confusion and inferiority complex which hampers their personal and psychological growth. The study also cogitates that individual differences between a young boy and a young girl remains to exist due to the gendered societal system which makes a young female subordinate to her young man. The narrative of Maya responds positively to the African lived experiences. Turning into a self-possessed, dignified liberal

woman, she propels Africans by hinting at their capability to respond and endure prejudice against them. She stands as a symbolic character repressing every black child that has faced atrocities in his life. The study also contributes in the contemporary crisis of racism and discrimination prevailing in United States. The connection of Angelou's childhood experiences and the bitterness she felt growing up inclines with George Floyd's murder and his victimization at the hands white imperial in charges.

The study also sensitizes the need to know black child psychology which is vital to understand the buried emotions and traumatized experiences of the black children. It also adds to the understanding of coping mechanisms and behavioral patterns located in a child's psyche through different developmental stages. This will help the readers to develop an in-depth comprehension of African dilemmas through diverse dimensions. Additionally, it also silhouettes in the field of ethnography, anthropology and culture studies. It opens new contours for black aestheticism and children's literature. The time frame provided for the study was limited due to this a comprehensive critical analysis could not be employed but the study provides plenty evidence to prove the selected area of study.

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