



Injured Psychological Personalities And Their Abnormal Behavior: A Study Of Jazz As A Continuous Suffocating Journey

Rahat Bashir, Principal Lecturer, English Department, University of Central Punjab, Pakistan.

Dr. Kanwal Zahra, Assistant Professor, English Department, University of Gujrat, Pakistan.

Dr. Behzad Anwar, Assistant Professor, English Department, University of Gujrat, Pakistan.

Abstract

The study aims to highlight the continuous postcolonial psychological violence inflicted on the proletariat class, and their perpetual struggle to cope up with their new and past traumatic histories, which shape their current positions, behavior, and relationships. Jazz is a novel about the fractured psyche of all main characters, who are suffering at two ends, one because of their pre-migration violent violence, and secondly, their post-migration miserable struggle as second class citizens. It exposes their useless struggles to lift up their status and ultimately self-respect, which all go in vain, due to the White hegemony. Past memories haunt these characters and propel them to destroy their relationships, and behave abnormally in their new lives. The study is studied under the theory of Karl Marx's theory of capitalism and Cathy Crauth theory of trauma in migrated second class citizens. It is concluded that Black's abnormal behavior is the trace of White's violence and their past traumas are transgenerational due to their untiring permanent sufferings. Moreover, the label of the second class citizen can never be easily tagged off. The working class lives in the same ditch. For them, freedom means, replacement of old masters with new ones.

Keywords: post-colonial violence, psychological issues, abnormal behavior, complex relations, suppression.

I. INTRODUCTION

The study attempts to highlight the psychological issues of black people in Toni Morrison's "Jazz" in America, due to their past traumatic history, which includes migration, loss of identity, a quest for motherhood, suppression of desires, which altogether create violence and incompleteness not in their personalities but their relationships also. All the characters in Morrison's novel are self-afflicted due to their own psychological injuries of their past and are unable to recover, due to the constant social pressure, where they are inferior and are perpetually in a struggle to stabilize their selves. The novel will be analysed with the help of the excerpts from the text, as the transgenerational trauma of slavery and oppression, where both genders are minced differently and suffer in their own spheres as exploited workers. Close reading will be used as a strategy for the psychological interpretations of the characters.

The article will first explain the background of the novel, then theories of migration and migrations' psychological impact in causing cycles of violence on the repressed class. The oppressed and repressed class (black people, who are the victims of social discrimination) will be further scrutinized under the theory of Karl Marx. Overall this paper will envelop the philosophy of Frantz Fanon about black people that is explained in Black Skin White Mask.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Jazz is written in the 1920s after World War 1, where both black and white Americans fought together to get liberation from German imperialism. It was called the “age of prosperity”, but sadly a new gloomy chapter was waiting for Afro-Americans to remind them that they were not totally free. Though at the document level, they were free, yet they were still underpaid, with no provision of food, shelter, education, and medicine. Slavery was, but they didn’t gain freedom in its true sense. They were made dependent on white Americans. They starved and died due to maltreatment. Lynching was another life- threat given to the Afro -Americans. It was usual for the White Americana to put the house on fire and dragged the male or the head of the family out of the home, and hung him with the tree till death. Women and children were no exception to this. This all leads to the formation of The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). Owing to this all treacherous life in South America, the blacks started shifting their selves stealthily, from South to North, in the city of Harlem (Jazz takes place here). This movement was called “The Great Migration” from 1915-1940 (Eichenlaub et al., 2010; Tolnay, 2003). There, they did face another kind of racial discrimination, but they were free to make their livelihoods. This period was also called the Harlem Renaissance and it paved the way to make their destiny towards prosperity and identity. Jazz music was invented there to release their anxiety and frustration, which soon got fame in the whole of America. But they suffered loneliness and identity crises due to the loss of their roots; rural life and found it difficult to get adjusted to urban life. Many southern-born Afro- American felt strongly uncomfortable with the rhythm of urban life. Jazz is the experience of this all phase, framed in the story of two main characters; Joe Trace and Violet, who happened to be husband and wife and are migrated from rural life to Harlem. Joe psychologically throughout the narrative traces his “wild” mother, who was once lost in jungles and feels incomplete without her, and finally falls in love with an eighteen years old Dorcas, who appeared to be “Wild” and Violet turned “violent” as the narrator narrates with this love affair. She sliced the dead face of Dorcas, whose murderer was Joe, and Dorcas did not ask the police to arrest him, and bleeds till she died. Violet’s mother committed suicide due to poverty and Violet planned never to have babies, due to the past sufferings, but puts Dorcas picture in her home, as something alive, portrays some inner suppressed desires of her for motherhood. “but she wonders if she isn’t falling in love with her too” (15). So, the whole story is beautifully crafted in psychological implications, where all characters favour each other, cheat each other, yet never leave each other, become the cause of the suffering of each other and at the same time heal each other.

III. MIGRATION AND ITS IMPACT

People migrate due to push and pull factors. In the novel, the Great Migration is due to both factors. Apart from the pull factors, there are dominant push factors that have caused psychological issues in the main characters. There is a positive relationship between stress and communication in married couples. Infertile couples end in no communication or unhealthy communication due to stress and their vague attempts to manage it (Randall & Bodenmann, 2016). Resultantly, stress creates psychological implications also (Antonovsky, 1985; Pearlin, 1999; Scheid & Brown, 2010). The female characters Dorcas and Violet have seen pre-migration traumas and are inflicted mentally. Stress is highly correlated with gender and emotional well-being (Ritsner et al., 2001). The very first encounter with Violet on the first page is abnormal, where she cuts the face of dead Dorcas, “they threw her to the floor and out of the church. (Morrison:3). “The woman people called Violent now because she had tried to kill what lay in a coffin” (Morrison: 79) . Throughout the novel, violet has been observed as violent and aggressive in her behavior, either it’s the case of cutting the face of his husband mistress, or bringing the picture of Dorcas at home and developing motherly feeling for her, or to console her cheating husband after his mistress death or kidnapping a child in the market. She has done all these acts after the migration, but at the backdrop of her life, there is a threshold of past traumatic memories which do not let her go smoothly. Crauth (1996) in his trauma theory of past violence explains that the effects of trauma are not always immediate. It may

happen that at the traumatic appearance, the survivor behaves normally and endures as nothing has happened, but later on, after few weeks that traumatic incident starts haunting his mind and oscillates in the daily routine. This affects his physical, motor, and mental skills. He develops “traumatic neurosis” and it is quite incomprehensible why this lapse occurs. It occurs against the will of the sufferer, unconsciously, and the more painful part according to Freud (1961), is that the sufferer is oblivious of the relation between his past event and current traumatic situation. Gabriele (2010) explains that victims of racial discrimination, genocide, slavery, and wars, are transgenerational victims. They keep on passing the legacy of violence and trauma to their next generations. Past memories haunt the victims and made them suffer and thus the violence is unconsciously transferred and re-enacted (Schwab, 2010).

Textual references explain that Joe and Violet apparent movement towards the north was due to certain economic reasons, which includes better living condition, better working conditions and the attraction of the city. “city can’t hurt you” (Morrison: 8). I like that way, the city makes people think...they can do, what they want” (Morrison: 8). “there were streets where colored people owned all the stores; all block of handsome colored men and women laughing all night and making money all day.” (Morrison: 106). It seems that their only reason was to pull factor to migrate to earn money, as Violet was an unlicensed hairdresser and Joe could have sold the beauty items/cosmetics. But deep analysis reveals different facts that compel us to think that their post-migration traumas and psychological issues were not only due to the settlement, rather their past unconscious wounds disturb them to behave abnormally in their later lives. Dorcas's parents were lynched and slaughtered during the East St. Louis riot. She saw them flamed and burnt and she being a child kept on shouting for a doll in her hand. She was ultimately sent to her Aunt, Alice in Harlem.

Her migration was a forced migration, as she turned out to be an “untamed”, “wild” and “indocile” girl. Her shifting was not planned, but rather unprepared that made her vulnerable towards crime. When one is forced to migrate, coupled with traumas, one is likely to have more risks to develop mental health issues (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Dorcas’ mind and body fought against the unrealistic rules of her aunt. The behavioral and emotional problems were caused because of suppressed psychosexual childhood. She eagerly sought the very things her aunt was hiding from. At this point, she felt a fire inside her body which needed to be satisfied. She offered herself like a “candy” to others; a direct reflection of self-hatred. She wanted to do things that were more than her age. Again it reflects psycho-social pressures of her life, which snatches away the basic innocence of her childhood and she behaved boldly, as a reaction to her past life. She made links with Joe and then to a young boy, Acton. From Joe, she wants money and gifts and from Acton the satisfaction of her desires. She didn’t want to betray anyone and choose death. In the same way, Violet has been into a traumatic childhood. Her father left them for an unknown place and seldom visited them. He dispossessed his family and property. Her mother attempted suicide by plunging into a well, as she was unable to see the starvation, hunger, and poverty of her children and family and Morrison claims in the novel, “the children of suicide are hard to please” (4). They are easy to get victimized by the thought that no one loves them. Her violent reaction after Joe's affairs is the evidence of this vicious problem. Secondly, the couple plans not to have babies and one significant reason for not planning the babies, despite having a strong urge for children, is their problematic past. So, we can see that how this discrimination has led these black people to encounter severe psychological problems. The characters are multiples times stung by traumas and they made futile efforts to forget them. As in the case of Violet, she was first assaulted by an irresponsible father, then a mother who committed suicide, leaving behind five daughters. This episode has created a never-ending mystery and repugnant feeling for parents. She never wanted to have a “hungry moth, said mama” (102). And she “she didn’t want to be like that. Her mother” (97). She tackled it by deciding never to be a mother, but her hunger for motherhood was awakened up in her late forties when she couldn’t conceive. She was further emotionally stabbed by his husband, because, “he is married to a woman, who speaks mainly to her birds. One of whom answers back: “I love you.” (24). This defines her personality and her hunger and thirst for love and to be loved back. In the first paragraph of the

novel, it is narrated that Violets opens the cage of her birds to “freeze or fly”, including the parrots that said it loved her. Freeing the birds to die and bringing the picture of the dead girl as a substitute, which was sickening for the homely environment, yet at the same time, she calls her at midnight to talk to. This is paradoxically self-torturing, which she herself is unaware of. In fact, the constant shocks accelerate her and toxicate her past memories, indirectly and made her behave violently. So, all her reactions were actually the revenge-taking action, either it was to have a boyfriend in the beginning to teach Joe a lesson, or the decision to remain barren and finally to bring her rival back home. None of her actions was healthy to recover from her past. It is important to note, that if the Harlem conditions were safe as like for whites, perhaps the sufferings of Violet’s have been lessened, as the wounds might not have been scratched, anew.

Traumatized people often come to feel that they have lost an important measure of control over the circumstances of their own lives and are thus very vulnerable (Caruth, 1996). Joe, like violet, was an orphan and was abandoned by his parents. They both are trauma survivors and are suffering against their own will. And these unknown haunting memories created hurdles to develop a romantic love between them. Joe couldn’t tell her, what she has told Dorcas, and Violet was shown busy with birds and customers. Over the period of time, her silence annoyed him and in the end depressed him and led him to fall for an eighteen-year-old girl, for a “spooky love”.

Joe and violet’s every attempt was to escape from the past, instead of facing it, and that has caused all tragedy. Like Derrida, what is absent is actually present in their lives. They left Virginia and moved to Harlem to get rid of their repressed memories, but humanly it is not possible, to lose your connections. Joe soon started missing his true self “an inside nothing”. His childhood pal was not there to confide in things and he started changing himself. He said that he had been changed multiple times, but every time a new negro (129). So, the very attempt of changing himself is the weakest point of his personality, where he ran away to face the truth with his true identity. Later on, he changed his name to Joe Trace, because he wanted to trace his mother, which was the cause of shame and tears, but he was so frail that he wanted a slight hint from an insane wild woman in the jungle as her son. He pines for his identity and he feels incomplete and that is the reason he couldn’t tell his true self to Violet but to Dorcas, who was not only wild and bold like her mother, but also, careless, clueless, and inaccessible. “I told her things I hadn’t told myself. With her I was fresh, new again” (123). So, the desire of Dorcas was not a desire of sex and beauty but the desire to ventilate the deeply hidden emotions to complete himself. As Violet cuts Dorcas’s face at the cheating of his husband, Joe directly attacks the cheater (Dorcas) and murders her, because they both don’t know, how to love anybody. So, the black violence in their personal behavior is the injected violence of white in their lives, which cannot be otherwise repressed and controlled. Its absence is the verdict of its presence, which goes into their generation after generation, till it (consciousness) is fully freed.

IV. SOCIO-FINANCIAL TRAUMATIC CONDITIONS

Another drastic reason for their psychological complexities that leads the characters not to behave properly were black Afro-Americans living conditions. There was a large clear distance and difference between bourgeoisie and proletariat families. It is quite apparent that black African even after fighting for their freedom was never able to sense and feel the feeling of an independent citizen. Either they were living in the south or north, whites were there to rein them with their new strategies, which never let the blacks to unbridle the shackles of slavery. Thus the poor living conditions were one radical reason for their sufferings. Whites exploited their identity to serve their means and to maintain their superior hegemony. Marx (1932) states that Jazz is about the sufferings of the underprivileged class, who are working day and night to maintain their physical being, and we will see how this physical weakness has been exploited by whites under the Karl Marx theory. The very opening of the novel with the word “sth” is highly substantial in the building

up of the next arguments that blacks were oppressed and suppressed due to their low financial status. “sth” can be interpreted as “something”, “south” or “shhh”. All the interpretation tell that the novel begins with gossip like style in whispering mode as Blacks stories were not allowed to be told publically. The first paragraph tells the complete story and then in the whole novel the writer keeps on fluctuating in between present and past to tell the reasons of three major events and brisk plot movements happened in the story. Joe murdered her teenaged mistress, Dorcas. Dorcas died and did not call the police. Violet cut the dead face and freed the birds from the cage. All these actions are pregnant with their past histories. The writer takes us to their childhood traumatic and violent memories which were replete with financial and economical sufferings that lead to their fractured psyche. Violet became violent. Joe became a murderer and Dorcas became dead. Marx believes that capitalist society suffers when there exists a sharp contrast between the profit which is earned by the capitalists and the wages earned by the wage earners. He strongly believes that the economic conditions of humans determined their quality of life. Jazz, very comprehensively narrates the stories of the working-class and the lives they make, because of their economic conditions. Violet’s mother used to take a sip from an empty cup as she was drinking hot coffee. Her children were underfed, which led violet to go to the cotton fields and earn money for their sisters. Her mother was forced to leave the home, where they lived because they were unable to pay the rent, despite working day and night. His father was a quite irresponsible man, who seldom visited them and paid no money to lighten their burden. That all consequently compelled Rose Dear to die in a well. Morrison (1992,101) writes, “a place so narrow, so dark it was pure”.

Toni Morrison portrays “naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation” (Marx, 1848, 659) going on in the

United States in the following words:

Everybody with fingers in a twenty-mile radius showed up and was hired on the spot. Nine dollars a bale, some said, if you grew your own; eleven dollars if you had a white friend to carry it up for pricing. And for pickers, ten cents a day for the women and a case quarter for the men. (102-103).

Despite working on the land, the family was unable to make both hands meet. “the worker sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities” (Marx, 1932, 652). The couple decided to move to Harlem to test their destiny, but whatever activities, they had learned in the south were found useless as there was a new kind of exploitation. There were new ways to earn money. “new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones” (Marx, 1848, 657) . Joe, who worked in cotton grounds and with woods, has to sell beauty products. Again the beauty products which he can sell were the fairness beauty creams, which are locally manufactured and whose customers are again the black women, who are racially subjugated by the whites. So, interestingly, they have found new ways of earning, but do not have the ways to get connected with their masters. They are limited within their circles and resultantly no exposure and no genuine progress and change in their lifestyles. Violet injured her fetus while working in the fields and sacrificed her babies to survive, as her own childhood was nothing but a story of hunger and pain. Violet started working as a hairdresser, but she was an unlicensed hairdresser, so she couldn’t charge rightly, thus charged her customers less. She knew that she cannot charge according to her work, because if she charges high then there is a high chance of opening her own parlor, which will never be allowed by the bourgeois class. So, she understands the difference and let herself be exploited in the hands of their masters, and does not become a threat to the business class. The jobs which are offered to them are physically less tiring but mentally more humiliating and that causes the catastrophe. Dorcas got engaged with the man double her age, because she knew that a boy of her age could not let her take to the parties and could not give financially what she wanted. The brutal nature of the class is further observed when Felice (Violet’s friend) called the police, to save Dorcas, but police didn’t arrive, because it was a call

from a black girl about the black girl and her aunt did not file a case against the murderer, because she knew that it would never proceed.

V. CONCLUSION

It is concluded that Jazz is the story about suppressed unconscious desires; resultantly atypical, that seep deep into each character and corrode away the natural awakening of desires. The unnatural behavior is the product of long lasting violence happened to the characters, physically, emotionally, psychologically and financially. Thus, the suppressed emotions are not accurately ventilated and resultantly burst out abnormally, effecting their own selves and their relationships. The story is not the story of Blacks, but the story of every working class, working under capitalism, after liberation. So, the postcolonial war continues for the poor class people. Dominant class maintains their hegemony over them to exercise their power and the cultural training does not allow them to question the established discourse, which is actually purely deceptive. Sufferings and traumas instead of poisoning their thoughts against the discriminators killed their right consciousness and develop the falseconsciousness of their fragile and powerless roles. Clutches of capitalism will keep on getting stronger and stronger, unless the people are not educated about their rights and suppression. A century is gone, but the war of racial discrimination is still going on, which can be stopped only, if the slogan of "uncle Tom is dead" is accepted by Whites/Colonizers in its true sense and the others are identified as people of dignity, intellect and self-respect.

REFERENCES:

1. Abraham, Nicholas, and Maria Torok. *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. and Trans. Nicholas T. Rand. Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1994. Print.
2. Berger, James. "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History by Cathy Caruth; Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma by Dominick LaCapra; Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma by Kalí Tal||. *Contemporary Literature* 38. 3 (Autumn, 1997): 569-82. JSTOR.org. Web. 9 June. 2014.
3. Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins U P, 1996. Print.
4. Chu, T., Keller, A. S., & Rasmussen, A. (2012). Effects of Post-migration Factors on PTSD Outcomes Among Immigrant Survivors of Political Violence. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health / Center for Minority Public Health*. doi:10.1007/s10903-012-9696-1
5. Eichenlaub, S. C., Tolnay, S. E., & Alexander, J. T. (2010). Moving Out but Not Up: Economic Outcomes in the Great Migration. *American Sociological Review*, 75(1), 101-125. doi:10.1177/0003122409357047
6. Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961, Print.
7. Marx, K. (1932). *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844*. In Peter Simon *The norton anthology of theory and criticism* (2nd ed.). New York: Norton.
8. --- . (1848). *The communist manifesto*. In Peter Simon *The norton anthology of theory and criticism* (Ed.), (2nd ed.). New York: Norton.
9. --- . (1859). *Preface to A contribution to the critique of political economy*. In Peter Simon *The norton anthology of theory and criticism* (Ed.), (2nd ed.). New York: Norton.
10. --- . (2011). *Capital volume I: A critique of political economy*. (S. Moore & E. Aveling, Trans.) (F. Engels, Ed.). New York: Dover Publications
11. Morrison, T. (1981). *Tar Baby*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
12. Morrison, T. *Jazz*. New York: Knopf, 1992. Print.

13. Peterson, J. *Against Amnesia: Contemporary Women Writers and the Crisis of Historical Memory*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2001. Print.
14. Raussert, W. (2000). Jazz, time and narrativity. *American Studies*, 45(4), 519-34.
15. Rice, A. J. (1994). Jazzing it up a storm: The execution and meaning of Toni Morrison's jazzy prose style. *Journal of American Studies*, 28(3), 423-32.
16. Ritsner, M., Ponizovsky, A., Nechamkin, Y., & Modai, I. (2001). Gender Differences in Psychosocial Risk Factors for Psychological Distress Among Immigrants. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 42(2), 151-60. doi:10.1053/comp.2001.19750
17. Schwab, Gabriele. *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*. New York: Columbia UP, 2010. Print.