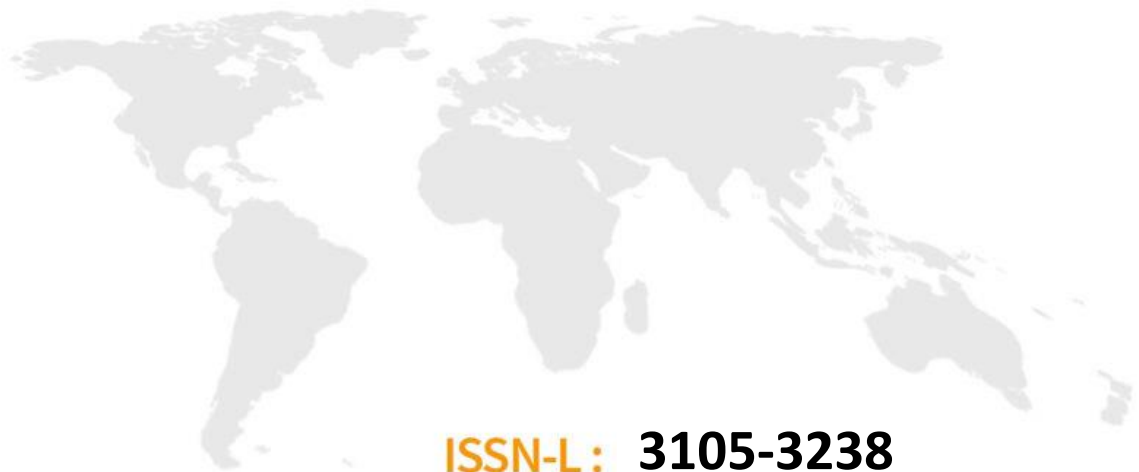




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BEYRA est l'appellation en langue baoulé (Centre de la Côte d'Ivoire) du Touraco vert. Il s'agit d'un bel oiseau des savanes qui se caractérise par sa grande beauté. En outre, cet oiseau au chant mélodieux et au beau plumage multicolore se présente comme le symbole de la beauté et du brassage. L'harmonie des couleurs que renferme son plumage constitue une source d'inspiration intarissable. Elle invite à s'inscrire dans une dynamique interculturelle et interdisciplinaire au bénéfice de la science.

Ainsi à l'image de ce bel oiseau, la Revue interdisciplinaire BEYRA ambitionne de publier des articles scientifiques inédits au confluent des Sciences de la Communication, du Langage, des Lettres et des Langues. Logée au sein de l'UFR des Lettres et des Arts de l'Université Peleforo GON COULIBALY, la Revue interdisciplinaire BEYRA publie des contributions théoriques ou des résultats de recherches de terrain des Chercheurs, Enseignants-Chercheurs et Étudiants des champs disciplinaires ci-dessus énumérés.

La Revue scientifique interdisciplinaire BEYRA transcende les frontières pour donner la possibilité aux Chercheurs, Enseignants-Chercheurs et Etudiants de tous les horizons de soumettre des travaux originaux et inédits. Dans cette dynamique, la Revue interdisciplinaire BEYRA lance pour chaque numéro des appels à contributions à travers les canaux de diffusion existants.

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- deux résumés en français et en anglais (250 mots maximum, interligne simple) ;
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Exemples :

– En effet, le but poursuivi par M. Ascher (1998, p. 223), est « d’élargir l’histoire des mathématiques de telle sorte qu’elle acquière une perspective multiculturelle et globale (...), d’accroître le domaine des mathématiques : alors qu’elle s’est pour l’essentiel occupée du groupe professionnel occidental que l’on appelle les mathématiciens (...) ».

– Pour dire plus amplement ce qu’est cette capacité de la société civile, qui dans son déploiement effectif, atteste qu’elle peut porter le développement et l’histoire, S. B. Diagne (1991, p. 2) écrit :

Qu’on ne s’y trompe pas : de toute manière, les populations ont toujours su opposer à la philosophie de l’encadrement et à son volontarisme leurs propres stratégies de contournements. Celles-là, par exemple, sont lisibles dans le dynamisme, ou à tout le moins, dans la créativité dont sait preuve ce que l’on désigne sous le nom de secteur informel et à qui il faudra donner l’appellation positive d’économie populaire.

- Le philosophe ivoirien a raison, dans une certaine mesure, de lire, dans ce choc déstabilisateur, le processus du sous-développement. Ainsi qu’il le dit :

le processus du sous-développement résultant de ce choc est vécu concrètement par les populations concernées comme une crise globale : crise socio-économique (exploitation brutale, chômage permanent, exode accéléré et douloureux), mais aussi crise socio-culturelle et de civilisation traduisant une impréparation sociohistorique et une inadaptation des cultures et des comportements humains aux formes de vie imposées par les technologies étrangères. (S. Diakité, 1985, p. 105).

Les sources historiques, les références d’informations orales et les notes explicatives sont numérotées en série continue et présentées en bas de page.

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THE MEANING OF MAYA ANGELOU'S *I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS*

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Abstract

In Stamps, a small town in Arkansas, the population is divided between whites and blacks. Living in different parts of town and frequenting different places of leisure, these individuals have little contact with each other. It is in this segregationist environment that Margaret and Baley Jr., the main characters in Maya Angelou's novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (IKWCBS), were born. However, despite the hardships, they survive, graduate from school, and find work. Margaret even has a son. IKWCBS is an expression of sorrow, a call for sympathy, and a prayer for African American freedom. In fact, this article discusses the features of the social “cage” in IKWCBS, the impact of these social features on Black people, factors of resilience, and offers a perspective for their future. By seeking to draw meaning from the text through the characters' experiences, it aims to reveal the realities of society in IKWCBS, show its impact on the characters, and demonstrate how they can free themselves from the social “cage” in which they are trapped. To achieve this, we use New Criticism and structuralism, theories that create meaning through a deep reading of the text.

Key words : Meaning, Racism, Society, Resilience, Quest of identity.

LA SIGNIFICATION DE « JE SAIS POURQUOI CHANTE L'OISEAU EN CAGE » DE MAYA ANGELOU

Résumé

À Stamps une petite ville de l'Arkansas, la population est divisée entre Blancs et Noirs. Vivant en différents endroits de la ville, et fréquentant différents lieux de loisir, ces individus ont peu de contact. C'est dans cet environnement ségrégationniste que sont nés Margaret et Baley Jr., les personnages principaux du roman *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (IKWCBS) de Maya Angelou. Toutefois, malgré les épreuves, ils survivent, obtiennent des diplômes et du travail. Margaret, elle, a même un fils. IKWCBS est l'expression de la peine, appelle à la sympathie, et est une prière pour la liberté des Africain-Américains. En fait, cet article traite des traits de la « cage » sociale dans IKWCBS, de l'impact de ces traits sociaux sur les Noirs, des facteurs de résilience, et propose une perspective pour l'avenir de ces derniers. En visant à tirer du sens du texte à travers les expériences des personnages, il se propose de révéler les réalités de la société dans IKWCBS, d'en montrer l'impact sur les personnages et de montrer comment ces derniers peuvent se libérer de la « cage » sociale dans laquelle ils sont enfermés. Pour y parvenir, nous avons recours à la théorie de la Nouvelle Critique et le structuralisme ; des théories créatrices de sens par une lecture profonde du texte.

Mots clés : Sens, Racisme, Société, Résilience, Quête d'identité.

Introduction

Stamps is a small town in Arkansas, in the United States. There, the population is divided between Blacks and Whites. There is little contact between the two races who live in different parts of town, and who go to different schools, stores and places of entertainment. Margaret and Bailey Jr., the main characters in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, were born in that atmosphere. There, their parents parted, and she and her brother Bailey Jr. were sent south to live in Arkansas, where they meet with extreme racism. Despite difficult situations, she survives, graduates from college, and has a son following a desired sexual relation with an anonymous boy. Maya's novel, IKWCBS, expresses grief, calls for sympathy, and far from being a song of joy, is a prayer for African Americans' freedom. It is the story of a Black girl's victory over racism.

This work intends to derive meaning from characters' experiences, to identify the cultural or societal construction of meaning, to explore the relationship between meaning and survival, and to give a prospect for characters' survival and future. In other terms, it aims at revealing the features of the society in IKWCBS, at showing the impact of the features of the society in IKWCBS on characters, and at showing how the characters can free themselves from the social "cage" in which they are trapped and mistreated.

The literary theories which guide this work include the reader-response theory which centers meaning in the reader's experience. It emphasizes the reader's role in creating meaning from a text through his or her experiences, emotions, and context. It argues that meaning is not fixed or solely contained within the text, but is created in a dynamic transaction between the reader and the text. Its key idea is that meaning is shaped by a "dialogue" between the reader and the text. This theory is associated with the New Criticism, a literary theory focusing on the text; using close reading to analyze how a text's internal language creates meaning. Then, Structuralism, which analyzes underlying patterns of the text to create meaning, posits that a work's meaning comes from the relationships between its elements like the plot, characters, and themes. The first part of this work deals with the features of the social "cage" or society in IKWCBS. The second one shows the impact of the features of society on Black characters. Then, the third one deals with the factors of resilience, and gives a prospect for characters' future.

I. The Features of the Social Cage in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (IKWCBS)

Though formal slavery no longer existed at the time Maya Angelou published her novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), Blacks continued to suffer from its effects. As by osmosis, slavery poisoned interracial relations and psychological outlooks. American race relations, at that time, were different from those in the past centuries when racist attitudes were freely expressed, and White supremacy was systematically met by violence. In that circumstance, Blacks' social change required actions like sit-ins, demonstrations, boycotts, marches and rallies (John B. McConahay, 1983, 551- 58). Though overt racism might be on the decline in the 1970s, racial stereotypes and sentiments have not necessarily disappeared.

White racial stereotyping is associated with discriminatory actions in a variety of domains. Most Black families lived below the poverty line (Abigail Thernstrom, 1998, P. 5). Their

employment rate remained far below that of Whites. Because race relations and Blacks' quality of life have not much bettered, there was a sharp decline in optimism. Equality appeared as an unattainable ideal (Abigail Thernstrom, 1998, P. 9). Racism has noxious forms pervasively and deeply embedded in systems, laws, policies, practices and beliefs that produce, condone and perpetuate the unfair treatment of Blacks. It permeates all sectors and reflects both ongoing and historical injustices (Bonilla-Silva E. 1997, 465-80). Racism is a social phenomenon which is conscious, intentional, systemic and structural. Structural racism emphasizes the policies, laws and institutions that form the system's scaffolding the underlying framework that enables racism to occur. It implies the mechanisms that create and sustain social inequities.

The institutionalization of racial discrimination penetrates sectors such as the labor market, the education system and bureaucracy (Massey Douglas, Denton Nancy. 1993, P. 8). It includes anti-Black practices, the unjustly-gained political and economic power of Whites, and other resource inequalities along racial lines. It implies racist facts manifested in each of society's economic, political, educational, religious sectors (Feagin Joe, Ducey Kimberley. 2018, P. 6). Some instances of anti-Black racism include political disempowerment, segregation, economic practices, and environmental injustice. Racial segregation is associated with economic disadvantage and limited opportunities for Blacks' upward mobility such as good employment and schools. It makes Blacks more likely than Whites to live in neighborhoods with concentrated disadvantage. Schools in segregated areas are poorly resourced; making it difficult for Blacks to escape from poverty (Owens A. 2017; 91).

Blacks' lack of political power produces a lack of access to key resources like clean water, pollution-free neighborhoods, well-resourced schools, affordable housing, good jobs, good incomes and access to medical care. It constrains their employment and economic opportunities through poorly resourced schools. Lower levels of income and education among Blacks contribute to racial disparities (Williams D., 2016, 407-11).

The society in IKWCBS defines Blacks through prejudices as people of low human and social status. For Whites, Blacks deserve neither respect nor honorable social or professional positions. Accused for having hidden a Black man who was accused of assaulting a White woman, at the court, Whites mock at Momma for having associated her name with the respectful title of address "Mrs":

[W]hen Momma arrived [in court] and said she was Mrs. Henderson, the judge and other Whites in the audience laughed. The judge had really made a mistake calling a Negro woman "Mrs.," but he was from Pine Bluff and couldn't (...) know that a woman who owned a store in the village would also be colored. (pp. 17-18).

Racism is practised in Stamps where "Whites (...) were so prejudiced that a Negro couldn't buy [W]hite ice cream. Except on July Fourth. Other days he had to be satisfied with chocolate. A curtain had been drawn between the Black community and all things [W]hite" (p. 18). Blacks then are neither free nor autonomous. In St. Louis also, racism, discrimination and segregation prevail. There is, for example, a "Negro section of St. Louis" (IKWCBS, p. 24). The educational sector is also discriminated. Mr. Donleavy, a White speaker on Margaret's graduation day, revealed the difference between White education and Black education as follows:



The Central School (naturally, the White school was Central) had already been granted improvements (...). A well-known artist was coming from Little Rock to teach art to them. They were going to have the newest equipment in their science laboratory. Mr. Donleavy (...) said that (...) one of the first-line football players at Arkansas Agricultural and Mechanical College had graduated from Lafayette County Training School (...), that one of the best basketball players at Fisk University sank his first ball right here at Lafayette County Training School. The White kids were going to have a chance to become Galileos and Madame Curies and Edisons and Gauguins, and our [Black] boys (the girls weren't even included) would try to be Jesse Owens and Joe Louises (IKWCBS, p. 61).

Whites give themselves all privileges. Their schools are well equipped, and have the best teachers. The future of White children is bright and guaranteed. They are intended to be philosophers, astronomers, mathematicians, doctors, physicists, chemists, inventors, famous artists, etc., while Black children are constrained to be nothing else but farmers, mechanics, football and basketball players, athletes, boxers, woodworkers, cooks, etc.; activities which guarantee neither a bright future, a good life nor a tolerable social condition.

Mr. Donleavy's frustrating speech arouses questions. Is it not a waste of time for Blacks, to go to school, and work hard? Getting out of her innocence, Margaret became aware of what being Black implies as follows:

Donleavy had shown us [Blacks] who we were. We were servants, farmers, and wash-women. Anything higher that we dreamed about was ridiculous. It was terrible to be young and sit quietly and listen (...) with no chance of defense (...). It was awful to be Negro and have no control over my life. Donleavy was running for election, and assured our parents that if he won we would have the only cement playing field for colored people in that part of Arkansas. Also, we were sure to get new equipment for cooking, sewing, and woodworking classes (IKWCBS, pp.61-62).

Whites afford to plan and control the life and destiny of Blacks. Having no choice, Blacks are constrained to constitute and perpetuate the proletariat at the service of Whites. Margaret sums up the bitter condition of Blacks in these terms: "We couldn't *be* (...). The world [Whites] didn't think we [Blacks] had minds, and they let us know it" (IKWCBS, p. 62-63).

Society in IKWCBS is unequal. Bailey sees Whites' anti-Blacks hatred as a predicament, "a mystery" that Blacks have not yet succeeded in solving, "from the time they're seven years old until their death" (p. 66). Without the help of Momma, Margaret and Bailey Jr., he would have been probably killed by the "the boys", that is the members of a White racist and anti-Black criminals, similar to the Ku Klux Klan, a hate organization that employed terror in pursuit of its White supremacist agenda after the American Civil War, in the south of the USA:

We [Margaret and Bailey] were told to take the potatoes and onions out of their containers (...). Then, (...) Uncle bent down to get into the empty space. (...) [H]e lay down flat, and then we covered him with potatoes and onions, layer upon layer. Gandmother [Momma] knelt praying (...). It was fortunate that the 'boys' didn't ride into our yard that evening (...). They would have surely found Uncle Willie and just as surely killed him. He cried the whole night (p. 9).

The powerful White majority is used to smashing Blacks. In front of Whites' violence, Blacks had to hide, to lay down flat, and expect to be lucky enough to survive.

In San Francisco also, there was segregation in residential areas and education. Margaret attended George Washington High School; a school in the White residential district; which was an exception. There, most teachers “ignored me [Margaret] completely, (...) [because] I was Black and therefore different” (p. 72). The schools Margaret attended, before George Washington High School, were with very low level of efficiency.

II. Impact of the Social Cage on Blacks in *IKWCBS*

Race-related violence has physical and mental impacts on Blacks. Having bitter emotional implications, it is a leading cause of death among Blacks. It places Blacks at economic disadvantage, and limits their incomes through lack of access to good jobs. It constrains their employment, and hence their economic opportunities. Lower levels of income and education among Blacks contribute to racial disparities.

The fact that Blacks are hated, bullied and maintained in poverty by the White majority traumatizes Blacks and makes them admire their bullies:

[O]ne could see through it [Whites’ anti-Black racism] enough to develop fear, admiration, and contempt for the Whites’ ‘things’(...) [cars, houses, children and women]. But above all, their wealth that allowed them to waste was the most enviable. They had so many clothes that they were able to give away perfectly good dresses, faded just under the arms (...). Of course, I knew God was [W]hite too, but no one could have made me believe he was prejudiced (*IKWCBS*, p. 18).

Blacks are victims of the Stockholm Syndrom, a psychological phenomenon in which the Black victims develop feelings of empathy, sympathy, and sometimes affection towards their abusers or bullies, as a coping mechanism to survive Whites’ anti-Black contempt.

On Margaret’s graduation day, Mr. Donleavy, a White man, shocked his Black audience emotionally through his speech. His words took the joy from the students away. It brought silence, disappointment, affliction, frustration, powerlessness and despair among them:

The proud graduating class (...) had dropped their heads (...). Graduation, the magic time of gifts and congratulations and diplomas, was finished for me [Margaret] before my name was called. The achievement was for nothing. All our learning was for nothing. Donleavy had shown us who we were. We were servants, farmers, and wash-women. Anything higher that we dreamed about was ridiculous. It was awful to be Negro and have no control over my life. It was terrible to be (...) trained to sit quietly and listen to charges brought against my color with no chance of defense (pp. 61-62).

Whites plan Blacks’ life at their convenience. They determine what Blacks should do and become. The latter, who do not have any control over their life, are reduced to jobs with low income, and are powerless.

Bailey Jr. was so traumatized by Whites’ anti-Blacks contempt that he could not help asking Uncle Willie “[w]hat colored people had done to White people to make them hate us [Blacks so much]?” (p. 64). He added that Mr. Jim, a White man, asked some Blacks, including Bailey himself, to carry the dead man to prison:

I picked up a side of the sheet and walked in the prison with the men. (...) carrying a rotten dead Negro (...). The (...) prisoners screaming that they



didn't want any dead nigger in there with them. That he'd make the place smell bad. They called the White man 'Boss'. They said, 'Boss, surely we ain't done nothing bad enough for you to put another nigger in here with us, and a dead one, too.' Then they laughed. They all laughed like there was something funny (p. 65).

Bailey's question is understandable, for instead of sending the rotten corpse to a mortuary or cemetery, the White man demanded to send it to prison, which can be seen as hell, and Blacks as shit. This act dishonors Blacks, whether dead or alive. Another pathetic fact is that Blacks themselves do not have any pride in themselves. They call Mr. Jim, "Boss", and are sick of "niggers" as they told Mr. Jim: "Boss, surely we ain't done nothing bad enough for you to put another nigger in here with us, and a dead one, too." Blacks have been so "inferiorized" that they do not take themselves seriously: they dare to joke and laugh.

Blacks have developed an anti-Black contempt. They see Blackness as an anti-model, and Whiteness as what is acceptable, desirable and praised. However, among the people she knew, no one was interested in her. She justifies that disinterest as follows: "Understandably the boys of my age and social group were interested in the yellow- or light-brown-skinned girls, with hairy legs, smooth little lips, and long straight hair. What could an unattractive female do?" (p. 94). Margaret was distressed. Then, musing on her desperate condition, Margaret would like to be a White girl:

I'd look like one of the sweet little White girls who were everyone's dream of what was right with the world (...). When people saw me wearing it [an imaginary dress], they were going to run up to me and say, 'Margaret (sometimes it was 'dear Margaret'), forgive us, please, we didn't know who you were,' and I would answer generously, 'No, you couldn't have known. Of course, I forgive you' (p. 1).

Whiteness guarantees worth, wealth, reverence and happiness. Just thinking about it made Margaret feel heavenly for days (p. 1). Convinced that whiteness is felicity, Blacks parents unconsciously tend to transmit White culture to their children. Thus, Margaret's mother offered her "a doll with blue eyes and rosy cheeks and yellow hair" (p. 19). In so doing, they unconsciously praise and promote whiteness.

Whites' "inferiorization" of Blacks disowns the latter of their identity. They are renamed for Whites' convenience. Margaret was renamed by Mrs. Cullinan, her White employer as "Mary": "She's Mary now" (p. 47). Margaret felt hurt with that dishonor. Trying to comfort Margaret who was hurt by her boss' disrespectful attitude. Glory also is a victim of such renaming and dispossession of identity: "You know, (...) [m]y name used to be Hallelujah. That's what my momma named me, but my boss gave me 'Glory', and it stuck" (p. 47). Margaret's complaint can be justified, for a person's name represents his or her personal and cultural identity or background; his or her family history, and a sense of belonging. Names can hold hopes, expectations, potential, and influence personality and have psychological effects on individuals.

Racism and segregation are traumatizing. In San Francisco, whenever Margaret went to school, which is situated in the White residential district, she always felt an uneasiness and fear. In evenings, as soon as she gets to the Black area, feeling the sense of belonging, she recovers joy and relief:



In the mornings as the streetcar left my neighborhood I experienced a mixture of fear and anxiety. (...) In the evenings on the way home, I felt joy, anticipation, and relief (...). The White kids had (...) less fear in the classrooms (...) while I had to be certain about all my facts before I dared to call attention to myself. George Washington High School was the first real school I attended (...). While some of the teachers (...) ignored me completely, Miss Kirwin never seemed to notice that I was Black and therefore different (pp. 71-72).

Such a Whites' anti-Black contempt makes Blacks feel as if they were socially shut up in a cage. It has a negative impact on Blacks' psychology; leading the latter to self-hatred and rejection of their blackness. Racist socialization manifests in the idealization of White norms and values by African Americans. It is the case of Margaret who hates her life, as a Black girl. She wished to be wrapped in felicity and beauty like a beautiful White girl:

Wouldn't they [the other Blacks] be surprised when one day I [Margaret] woke out of my black ugly dream, and my real hair, which was long and blonde, would take the place of the kinky mass that Momma wouldn't let me straighten? When they saw my light-blue eyes, they would understand why I had never picked up a Southern accent, or spoken the language like they did, and why I had to be forced to eat pigs' tails. Because I was really White and a cruel magician had turned me into a too-big Negro girl, with kinky black hair, broad feet, and a space between her teeth that would hold a pencil (p. 2).

The race issue is so worrying that even at church, instead of following the mass, Margaret was musing (p. 2). In her "dream", being Black is being ugly, primitive, with a worthless culture. She secretly hates her physical traits. The fact that her self-awareness is painful made the author state that "[i]f growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her difference is worse" (p. 2).

Whites' anti-Black contempt sometimes turns into a tracking down of Blacks. That has been the case of Willie who felt obliged to hide to avoid being killed by the "boys", a group of White supremacists, similar to the Ku Klux Klan of the 1870s. Momma, Willie, Margaret and Bailey Jr. were all traumatized by such hatred and violence. They had to hide Willie to save his life:

[W]ith a fearful slowness, Uncle [Willie] (...) lay down flat, and then we covered him with potatoes and onions, layer upon layer. Gandmother knelt praying (...). They would have surely found Uncle Willie and just as surely killed him. He cried the whole night as if he had (...) been guilty of some awful crime (p. 9).

As if a bird shut up in a cage, traumatized and defenceless, Willie cried.

In interracial relations, Whites are so condescending toward Blacks, that the latter reject them. "[W]hitefolks talk to Blacks, unembarrassed and never apologizing" (p. 23). That enmity induces Blacks, like Momma, to be hostile to Whites and White culture:

I [Margaret] met and fell in love with William Shakespeare. He was my first White love. (...) I accepted his whiteness by telling myself that he had been dead for so long it couldn't matter to anyone anymore. Bailey and I decided to memorize a scene from *The Merchant of Venice*, but



we realized that Momma would question us about the author and that we'd have to tell her that Shakespeare was White, and it wouldn't matter to her whether he was dead or not. So we chose 'The Creation' by James Weldon Johnson instead (p. 6).

In the society of IKWCBS, whiteness is synonymous to beauty, opportunity, refinement, prosperity and respect, while blackness is associated with worthlessness, ugliness, poverty, primitivism, dishonor, pain, limitation, etc., that is negativity. As a "colored woman", Mrs. Baxter's light complexion "brought her a great deal of respect" (p. 25). Margaret perceives Blacks' life as a predicament, a life which operates in a cage; an overt prison. That prison can also be emotional. Then, she met Mrs. Bertha Flowers, an upper-class woman of Black Stamps; the lady who threw her her first lifeline: "[Mrs. Bertha] made me proud to be Negro, just by being herself. She acted just as well-mannered and civilized as whitefolks in the movies and books, and she was (...) beautiful" (p. 42).

Whites are so powerful, feared, hostile, and traumatizing that they have become a mystery to Blacks.

In Stamps, the segregation was so complete that most Black children didn't really (...) know what Whites look like. We knew only that they were different, to be feared, and in that fear was included the hostility of the powerless against the powerful, the poor against the rich, the worker against the employer, and the poorly dressed against the well dressed (p. 12).

Whites' anti-Blacks contempt is so noxious, so ununderstandable and traumatizing to Blacks that the latter qualify them as mysterious. Unable to understand Whites in their mistreatment of Blacks, Margaret concludes: "[o]f course, I knew God was [W]hite too, but no one could have made me believe he was prejudiced" (p. 18). Because they have been constraint to poverty, Blacks have developed a technic to make their life tolerable, and survive: limiting wants, and using what they have with modesty. Momma had always reminded Margaret and Baley: "Waste not, want not" (p. 18).

"Growing up" in the social "cage" of IKWCBS is, for Blacks, progressing from childhood to adulthood. This involves both physical and mental maturity. It refers to a journey during which Margaret and her brother, Bailey Jr., suffer from Whites' anti-Black contempt, neglect, oppression, trauma, and Blacks' self-doubt and even denial of identity. It is a quest for self-discovery where Margaret learns resilience through the hardships of racism and tragedy. It is about transforming from traumatized children, exemplified by Margaret and Bailey Jr., into confident people who fight to achieve freedom and create their own meaning.

That separation gave rise to Margaret's anger against her parents. The bitter feeling she had against their father for having abandoned them gave rise to a hatred of the latter: "Our father left (...) and I was neither glad nor sorry. He was a stranger, and if he chose to leave us with a stranger, it made no difference" (p. 24). In St. Louis, Mr. Freeman, her mother's boyfriend, raped Margaret who was just eight years old (p. 33). Later, Margaret's silence, as a post-rape trauma, made Mrs Cullinan qualify her as being "quiet as a little mouse" (p. 46). Racism has made Blacks so materially and financially poor that they wear Whites' "throwaways". Life in the anti-Blacks social cage arouses the question of Blacks' survival approaches which require resilience.

III. Resilience and Prospect for Blacks' future

Auto-determination is the psychological concept of individuals or groups having control over their own lives and destinies without outside influence. For characters like Margaret and Bailey Jr., this self-determination means making decisions, solving problems, setting and achieving goals; feeling a sense of autonomy. It implies making one's own way, one's own choices, learning to solve problems, and taking control and responsibility for their life. Self-determined people make things happen in their lives. They know what they want and look for ways to get it. They choose and set goals, then work to reach them. Margaret and Bailey Jr. are characters who exemplify that concept.

Self-awareness is understood here as the recognition, understanding, and management of characters' thoughts, feelings, behaviors, values, goals, and the way these elements influence their interactions with others. Donleavy's discriminatory speech (pp. 61-62), Maya, the narrator, reviewing the condition of her race, became aware of the pride of being Black:

We couldn't *be* (...). The world didn't think we [Blacks] had minds, and they let us know it. (...) I looked up and saw Henry Reed, (...) turn to us and sing, (...) 'Lift every voice and sing'. It was the poem written by James Weldon Johnson. It was the music written by J. Rosamond Johnson. It was the Negro national anthem. We were singing it out of habit. Our mothers and fathers stood (...) and joined the song of encouragement. Every child I knew had learned that song with the alphabet. But I personally had never heard it before. Never heard the words, despite the thousands of times I had sung them. Never thought they had anything to do with me. Now I heard, really heard it, for the first time. (...). The tears that slipped down many faces were not wiped away in shame. (...) I was no longer only a member of the proud graduating class of 1940; I was a proud member of the wonderful, beautiful Negro race (pp. 62-63).

From their dishonourable condition of invisibility, and strengthened by their anthem, Blacks decided to exist, that is "to survive". The tears they shed express emotions, including sadness and pain, relief and awareness. Referred to as the "Negro national anthem", "Lift Every Voice and Sing" was a hymn written by James Weldon Johnson, whose brother, John Rosamond Johnson, composed the music for the lyrics. That anthem has served as a powerful symbol for African-Americans' struggle for civil rights and equality. The song was adopted as a rallying cry for Blacks' freedom and resilience.

The solution to Blacks' condition had always existed, but they had so far not realized it. Margaret's awareness of this fact is shown through her say:

I personally had never heard it [the song] before. Never heard the words, despite the thousands of times I had sung them. Never thought they had anything to do with me (...). Now I heard, really heard it, for the first time. While echoes of the song hung in the air, (...) [t]he tears that slipped down many faces were not wiped away in shame. We were on top again (...). I was no longer only a member of the proud graduating class of 1940; I was a proud member of the wonderful, beautiful Negro race (pp. 62-63).

Blacks were then on the way to regain their dignity; a feeling of honour and self-respect, their sense of personal worth, self-esteem, confidence in themselves and racial worth or abilities.



They have realized their ego, that is their sense of self-esteem. That ego mediates between their previous mental states of unconsciousness to consciousness. This awakes their sense of identity.

Language is another tool which motivates characters, and permits them to overcome difficult and traumatic situations like the one Margaret was suffering from after her rape. To overcome her post-rape trauma, Mrs. Flowers advises her to talk, and talk loudly:

The teachers report that they have trouble getting you to talk in class. (...) [R]emember, language is man's way of communication with other people and it is language alone which separates him from the lower animals (...). Your grandmother says you read a lot. That's good, but not good enough. Words mean more than what is written on paper. They need the human voice to give them deeper meaning (...). 'She said she was going to give me some books and that I not only must read them, I must read them aloud. She suggested that I try to make a sentence sound in as many different ways as possible (p. 43).

Language, that is words and sounds penetrate minds, sensitize, motivate and lead characters to take actions that are likely to alleviate their individual and social pains.

The sense or search for belonging refers to characters' drive to form and maintain meaningful social bonds, to feel a sense of connection with others. It implies a need to be accepted, valued, and feel "at home" within a family or group, rather than being isolated. As a place of safety, joy and relief, families give companionship, a feeling of belonging, and mutual aid. Bailey Jr. and Margaret cultivate an excellent brotherhood. Margaret offers support to Bailey, and Bailey is her defender and advisor (p. 96). He also receives the support of their mother who decided to arrange with a friend of hers to get Bailey a job on the trains (p. 89). She also did good to Margaret. She gave her money everyday to satisfy her needs (p. 92). Most important is the advice she gives her:

Every morning she made breakfast, and gave me [Margaret] carfare and lunch money, as if I were going to work. She understood that I had to try every possibility before giving up. (...) [O]ne morning she said, 'Life is going to give you [me] what you [I] put in it. Put your whole heart in everything you do, pray, then you can wait. Another time she reminded me that 'God helps those who help themselves' (...). Then on one happy day I was hired as the first Negro on the San Francisco streetcars (pp. 91-92).

Family membership is here a place of transmission of knowledge, wisdom, values against ignorance and destruction, for in many situations and ways, people perish for lack of knowledge.

Family membership is a tool against ignorance, loneliness and despair. When Margaret was left to herself, she was welcomed by a group which shared everything with her. Everyone in that group worked at something, and all the money was shared by the whole community, as a family. Margaret no longer felt lonely. "She never again felt so completely separated from the rest of society" (p. 86). Her membership in that community influenced her, and made her tolerant of life.

Daddy Clidell is a good example of acceptance of others, of inclusivity, success, humility and honor. His character encouraged admiration according to Margaret:

[W]hen he, Mother, and I walked down the street, his friends often said, 'Clidell, that's sure your daughter. Ain't no way you can deny her'. Proud laughter followed those declarations, since he had never had



children. Because of his (...) strong sense of fatherhood, I was introduced to the most colorful characters in the Black community. Daddy Clidell explained to me that (...) they were going to tell me about some games so that I would never be 'anybody's mark.' (pp. 73-74).

Mr. Clidell's attitude of humility and honor contrasts with Daddy Bailey's lack of the sense of responsibility, and indignity. "My father [Daddy Bailey] had not shown any particular pride in me [Margaret] and very little love" (p. 75). Besides, the sense of acceptance of Mr. Clidell is opposed to Dolores' rejection of Margaret. Dolores chased Margaret from Daddy Bailey's house (p. 83).

The sense of community cultivated by that group implies the feeling of belonging, and the support that members share. This includes the belief that members matter to one another and to the group. It emphasizes cooperation to address shared challenges like poverty and the injustice in the anti-Blacks social cage. For children, belonging to a family is getting education. Margaret and Bailey Jr. benefited from it, as testified by Margaret: "Momma made sure we learned the importance of cleanliness. Politeness was also important. (...) All adults had to be addressed as Mister, Missus, or Miss" (p. 14).

Empowerment refers here to the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights. Margaret's empowerment process involves her help to Momma to serve customers at the Store (p. 6). She retraces some of the key moments of that process as follows: "The people I was loyal to at this time in my life were a strange combination: Momma with her determination, Mrs. Flowers and her books, Bailey with his love, my mother and her happiness, Miss Kirwin and her information, my evening classes of drama and dance" (p. 73).

Through reading, formal education is a powerful tool of resilience. Books are a compilation of knowledge and wisdom acquired through centuries in different domains. The importance of knowledge is even revealed by God, the Creator as he says: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Bible, Hosea, 4-7). Mrs. Bertha Flowers helped Margaret to overcome her post-rape trauma by means of books, through reading:

Your grandmother says you read a lot. That's good, but not good enough. Words mean more than what is written on paper. They need the human voice to give them deeper meaning (...). 'She said she was going to give me some books and that I not only must read them, I must read them aloud. She suggested that I try to make a sentence sound in as many different ways as possible (p. 43).

Mrs. Flowers' first "lesson of living" to Margaret consisted in fighting ignorance or the lack of knowledge, listening to country people's sayings, for they gather wisdom collected through years. To Margaret, she even loudly read Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (p. 44). That novel illustrates the contrasting fates of individuals influenced by the historical turmoil of their times; making it a compelling exploration of love, sacrifice and justice. Mrs Flowers also lent Margaret a book of poems, and asked her to memorize one that she would recite on her next visit (p. 45). That made Margaret happy, for she felt liked and respected.

Impregnated with Black culture, Margaret points out that "[n]obody (...) [traditionally speaking] would look right in a grown person's face" (p. 14). Though Whites think Blacks do

not deserve respect, Blacks respect Whites. That is shown by Momma with Helen, Ruth, and Eloise. While these little White girls impudently call Momma by the name "Annie", Momma, an old woman, respectfully addresses them with the valorizing title "Miss" (p. 16). She remains upright and respectful. To have control of herself, she sang, murmuring: "Glory, glory, praise the Lord, when I lay my burden down" (p. 17). As a witness, Margaret is angry, and qualifies these girls as dirty and impudent: "I burst. How could Momma call them Miss? The mean nasty things. (...). [W]hy did Momma have to call them Miss?" (p. 17). Despite the difficulties encountered by Blacks, there is a glimmer of hope.

Conclusion

Blacks' history in the U.S.A. is a saga, a predicament. Their experience includes centuries of enslavement, oppression, violence, degradation, contempt and misery. That condition is filled with humiliation and trauma. Blacks are alienated and isolated from the mainstream of American life. All these having physical, economic, cultural, political, judiciary, sanitary and social consequences. Despite their resilience and the progress they have made in their quest for dignity, challenges still remain. They will not live a life of dignity without an indispensable intervention of Africa, their continent of origin. These realities remain an indelible mark on the lives of all Black people in the United States. Maya Angelou, reflecting on her own life, calls these realities a cage and Black people birds. Her novel "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" is therefore symbolic of the racism, segregation, and humiliation in which America imprisons Black people. However, the bird in its cage sings. It sings not only to be heard, but also to draw attention to its existence. Like the bird, Angelou seeks, through literature, to exist by overcoming the realities imposed on her by American society. In the work, the author begins by depicting the characteristics of American society, which she describes as a "cage" for African Americans in the 1960s, when racist and discriminatory behavior was rampant. Angelou, while looking back on her own life, does not fail to emphasize in her work how ruthless America has been toward its black community. However, she, like her community, remains hopeful.

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