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Literary Testimonials of Racism and Oppression In

Maya Angelou's

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

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Civilization and Literature

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Dedications

*This thesis is dedicated to my father **Lakhder**, who taught me that the best kind of knowledge to have is that which is learned for its own sake. It is also dedicated to my mother **Zineb**, who taught me that even the largest task can be accomplished if it is done one step at a time. I dedicate it to my sister **Salima** and her little girl **Marwa** and for all Benkouider family members, all my friends and my colleagues , i dedicate it to all my teachers who taught me from my attendance to the primary school until my graduation from university.*

Benkouider Abderrahmane

Dedications :

I first dedicate this humble work to my beloved parents, to my brothers Anoir and Achref.

I would like to express my endless thank to my dear uncle Sami and to all my family and friends who supported me with their pure love and encouragements and to all whom I love.

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Abstract

I Know Why the Cage Bird Sings is the first volume of Maya Angelou's autobiographies and the most successful one, it is a personal narration of her childhood traumatic events. The autobiography portrays the life of a black girl who suffers from displacement, poverty, racism and sexual abuse. The aim of this thesis is to analyze those events lived by the main character " Maya " and to show how she comes up at the end with her recovery and self identity. This Autobiography was selected because it holds very important themes and changed many stereotypes about Black Americans. Literature plays its significant role in Maya Angelou's life as it helped her to overcome trauma, insecurity and feeling of shamefulness to self-confidence, race pride and speech recovery. This research includes two chapters; the first one consists of a theoretical presentation of the African-American literature from early times to the 20th century, as well as a general overview of Black American autobiography from its beginning as slave narratives to the modern neo slave narratives. The second chapter is the analysis of the autobiography and how a little black girl faced different racist events and she could overcome and resist creating her self- identity and even influenced many youth generations. The conclusions that are reached from this research are the importance and power of literature and reading books in Maya's life, how they could do miracles in changing her situation from the worse to the better, and her survival after all what she went through.

Key words: Autobiography, Trauma, Displacement, Slave narratives, Self- identity, Racism.

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Introduction :

African American literature traces its beginnings to the latter half of the 18th century when the African American population was still an enslaved one. Slaves were viewed as subhuman and incapable of mastering “the arts and sciences.” Their inferiority was even reinforced by prominent white philosophers of the time, like David Hume and Immanuel Kant. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie McKay note in their introduction to *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, Hume suspected ““negroes ‘to be naturally inferior to the whites’” with no “ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences” (xl). However, as Gates and McKay further note, “African American slaves, remarkably, sought to write themselves out of slavery by mastering the Anglo-American belletristic tradition” (xxxvii). The main goal of early African American writing was to demonstrate that they could create literature that rivaled or surpassed that of the white community, proving African Americans to be “full and equal members” of society (xxxviii).

African American literature developed and reached to an early high point with the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s was a movement that attempts to re-create a unique African-American identity and explore the Black voices in the arts. Langston Hughes, Richard Wright and other writers created a New Black identity to change racial stereotypes in the community. The contemporary African American literature emerged after the abolition of slavery. Black American writers like Tony Morrison, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and others stand out prominently during the present times.

African American literature in the 18th century was consisting of oral tales, while during the 19th century developed to become written with the slave Narratives, which are the accounts and the experiences of the former slaves describing the way they lived during that crucial period. The genre became an essential element in creating controversies about slavery

and freedom between black and white Americans. Slave Narratives generally took the form of an autobiography where the writer describes his life from bondage to freedom. It discusses how slaves were captured and treated during the time of slavery. American slaves had to write those autobiographies in order to show to the readers that they are humans and they are able to write their experiences in a reliable way .

During the 20th century a new form of the slave narrative genre emerged called contemporary Black autobiography or neo-slave narratives , writers such as Zora Neale Hurston , Ralph Ellison assumed the form of the novels , adopted the conventions, and took on the first-person voice which made Black autobiographies more influential. In another hand Black women were inspired by the idea of writing autobiography to correct the image of black women and to create a self-identity. Indeed, autobiography allowed them to think about their life and develop a new identity without prejudices .

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou is a real example that states all the characteristics and aspects of the African American Autobiographies. It is Angelou's real childhood story that states the sequential tough events that happened to her as a little girl and the psychological outcomes on her. Little Maya found herself between the love of her grandmother and the segregated American southern society. Literature and books were her refuge and true friends beside her brother Bailey.

The main purpose of this research is to explore the theme of racism and racial oppression that had been subject to many studies and which affected many generations. Its causes and effects differ from one person to another and even the degree of the harm as well as the possibility to overcome it or managing to survive through it. Following an analytical approach, this work focuses on Maya Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are the obstacles, Maya as a young black girl faced in the segregated American South?
- To what extent did Maya Angelou manage to overcome racism and gain her self-confidence?
- How was her love for literature very influential and powerful in her life?

To answer these research questions, we shall rely on different literary theories such as Psychoanalytic theory, feminist theory and Critical race literary theory. The work is divided into two chapters:

The first chapter is entitled “ Background to African American literature ”and it is a general overview about African American literature, tackling the main historical events that developed Black American Literature. This chapter also traces the significance of black autobiography in its historical and literal context. It tries to establish how the black writing tradition, from the slave narratives to the contemporary autobiographies emerged. The difference between female autobiographies from male autobiography will also be taken into consideration in terms of form and content. We shall conclude with the importance of black women autobiography in raising the voice of African Americans, not far from their male counterpart.

The second chapter is devoted to the study of Maya Angelou’s life, by focusing on the analysis of the narrative with its main themes. Moreover, we will discuss the traumatic events lived by Maya Angelou during her childhood from displacement to sexual abuse, and how the abused girl changed her awful past and built her self-identity, to become a powerful woman and renowned writer over the world, who influenced youth generations by her different literary works.

Chapter One: African American Literature and Black Autobiography

African American literature is the body of literature produced in the United States by writers of African descent; black authors used literature to express their ideas, to defend their philosophy, to describe their lives, culture, religion and the way they perceive the world. Among the themes and issues explored in African American literature are their roles in the American society, racism, slavery, and equality. Both Black male and female writers used literature as a weapon to fight against racism and search for identity, however, black women writers linked feminism with racism to show its impact on the black community

This chapter is divided into two parts , in the first part we will present an overview of the development of the African American literature from the oral traditions of slaves in the United States to the abolition of slavery. The second part is devoted to discuss one of the most important literary genres in African American literature which is Black Autobiography, starting from slave narratives to contemporary Black Autobiography or neo slave narratives , concluding with Black women autobiographies and it's role within the African American literature .

I. 1. Historical Background of African American Literature

We have always been imagining ourselves . . . we are the subjects of our own narratives, witnesses to and participants in our own experience. . . . We are not, in fact, “other.” We are Choices. (Morrison 133)

Starting from the above quotation of the famous African American female writer Toni Morrison in which she is proudly talking about her race and her experience as African American, one can understand that African American literature is the body of works written by American authors from African decent expressing their experience as oppressed people in an artistic way. During the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, ‘ black American writers recount the

slavery days using different literary genres and describe the dehumanization of black slaves. Oral tales, poetry and autobiographies are works which offered lessons of morality and showed that the black tongue is not broken'' (Samuels 04).

. For the African Americans, literature was a means to resist slavery and institutional racism. They also fought to gain freedom and recognition as full citizens of the United States. African-Americans used literature as a vehicle for social analysis and direct confrontation with the discriminations and racial traditions. According to Gene A Jarrette, African-American Literature has incorporated forms such as orature, the written word, song, dance and film etc. to demonstrate its versatility as a medium of African-American cultural expression. Gene A, Jarrette writes:

The literature has constantly documented the struggles of African-Americans with race and (anti-black) racism, African heritage and Euro-American influence, slavery and freedom, constitutional enfranchisement and educational progress, political agency and social assimilation, as well as the specters of history and modernity. (01)

To understand the origins of African American literature, it is important to know the main issues of that period. The issue of race and tensions of color pushed African Americans to use writing to establish a place for themselves in that community. English adventurers and traders who visited the African Continent contributed to the issue of segregation. In fact, they had developed ideas of inferiority and distinction by drawing on preconceptions rooted in images of blackness and physical differences between the two peoples. (Bruce 02) The literature read at that time in England offered a negative portrayal of Africans and their ways of life as the Africans were described as brutal and ugly people. (02)

African American literature presents a wide range of writings from the colonial period to the present. It is related to different literary periods: Early African American

literature consists of: the colonial period (1746-1800), Antebellum period (1800-1865), the Post slavery Era: with the reconstruction period (1865-1900), The Harlem Renaissance (1900-1969) and the contemporary period (1970-present).

I. 1. A. Early African American Literature:

A. The Colonial Period

During the colonial period, African-American literature represented the divided self of Africans who were forced to go to colonial America. They were lost between their home land and their new identity. Some of them survived and the others died because of sickness and suicide. In 1700, Sewall declares that “It is likewise most lamentable to think, how in taking Negroes out of Africa, and setting them here, that which God has joined together men do boldly rend asunder; Men from their country, husbands from their wives, parents from children” (qtd. In Bruce 17). One of the captured slaves who were transported to colonial America was “ Phillis Wheatley; in her writings, she focuses on the contrast between slavery and freedom” (Jarrette 22).

Due to the issue of racism, many African-American writings were not recognized as authentic works, through poetry, sermons, letters and slave narratives, African American literature of the colonial period was a means of breaking the bonds of slavery. In New England, those slaves who were close with their masters’ families exchanged stories and experiences with the audience. They described their lives before slavery in Africa and their daily activities. They portrayed the suffering felt by husbands and wives separated from each other as well as the separations of brothers from sisters and children from parents. Those stories suggest a kind of awareness of the issues of slavery. Most slaves adopted the religion of their masters which played an important role in Early African American literature. “The

religious concerns of early African-American writers reflects life in puritan America which dictated that literature be used, it served as a means of moral instruction” (Dickson 20).

During the American revolutionary war (1775-1781), both Americans and Black soldiers participated together to fight the British. They wanted self-rule, equality and freedom. African-American writers of the period such as Wheatley Lucy Terry Prince, George Moses Horton, tackled the status of African Americans and asked for freedom from the British tyranny (Smith and Jones 07) , during this period, African-American slaves were “ prohibited from learning reading and writing. Thus, they used their creative abilities such as songs, folktales and oral storytelling to talk about slavery” (07), these works incorporate the dialect of early Black Americans.

B. The Antebellum Period

During this period, many black slaves focused on the narration of their stories such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and WilliamWell Brown. Literature at that time was an instrument for the abolition of slavery. It consists of abolitionists’ poems and slaves’ narrations which depicts the injustice of white treatment over the Black Americans. During this period, many abolitionist newspapers appeared such as *The Liberator*, which gave a chance to the slaves to tell their stories. For instance, William Lloyd Garrison, the editor of *the liberator* and Lydia Maria Child edited Harriet Jacob’s *Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl*. (Jones 37)

During the nineteenth century, the idea of revolt became more present among slaves as they decided to revolt against the situation they faced. There were strong leaders including Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner in Virginia but unfortunately many revolts failed and their leaders were executed (38). In this aspect, Jacobs notes:

I never witnessed such scenes can hardly believe what I know was inflicted at this time on innocent men, women and children against whom there was not the slightest ground for suspicion-colored people and slaves who lived in remote parts of the town suffered in an especial manner.

She adds that:

In some cases the searchers scattered powder and among their cloths, and then sent other parties to find them, and bring them forward as proof that they were plotting insurrection. Everywhere, men, women and children were whipped till the blood stood in puddles at their feet .(qtd. In Jones 45)

Jacobs claims that those blacks suffered from the white's violence and they were treated as non human. In 1861, the Civil War broke out between the North and the South over the issue of slavery. Therefore, African American writers' speeches, narratives, poetry and novels served for breaking the Civil War.

The Antebellum period witnessed the emergence of feminist writers who participated in the anti-slavery movement. Moreover, it was the period of mixture between written and oral tradition in African American literature which represented the slaves' desire for freedom (Smith and Jones 39). Indeed, many writers believed in the influence of songs in literature. In this context, Douglass states that:

They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension. They were tones loud, long and deep .They breathed the prayer and complaint the souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains (qtd. In Jones 110).

Frederick Douglass shows the importance of oral tradition in African American literature. Moreover, he illustrates the relation between the abolitionist movement and literature in the nineteenth century.

I. 1. B .The Post Slavery Era:

A. The Reconstruction Period

Despite the abolition of slavery, the United States was not able to realize the blacks' dream to be equal, therefore, African American writers continued to discuss slavery. " In the Reconstruction era, there was a great emphasis on education and literacy for the purpose of obtaining freedom " socially, economically or politically. Black slaves were illiterate, " for this reason many schools were established to teach the writing and reading skills"(Worth 05).

African American writers used their pen to defend blacks' political freedom. Moreover, African Americans continued emphasizing on many issues of the period such as equal rights for Americans under Pan Africanism. According to Smith and Jones, " Pan Africanism in the Reconstruction period gave African Americans a sense of pride in black history and culture and provided a background to the emphasis on racial identity in literature of the Harlem Renaissance"(115) . In addition, African American literature of the period includes oral traditions such as sermons, speeches, spirituals and stories whose functions were to promote equality. As an example, one can cite " Henry Mc Neal Turner's sermon" How Long? How Long? O Heaven? "(Smith and Jones 155). This sermon represents an important aspect of the oral tradition in African American literature as it addresses racial violence in Southern states.

During this period, many writers attempted to integrate black dialects in their literature. They used vernacular expressions in their works to capture the voices of the audience. For instance, Paul Laurence Dunbar is a poet who wrote *Sympathy* (1899) which focuses on the African American struggle for dignity and equality. In *Sympathy*, Dunbar says:

I know what the caged bird feels, Alas!

When the sun is bright on the up land slopes

When the wind stirs flows like a stream of glass

And the river flows like a stream of glass

When the first bird sings and the first but steals

I know what the caged bird feels! (qtd. In Smith and Jones 155)

Thus, the caged bird represents the African American artists who attempt to use art as a means of achieving freedom.

During reconstruction, African American slaves gained their freedom. As a result, they could receive education and owned land. However, by the end of the 19th century the reconstruction ended and the whites violated these civil rights. The “Jim Crow system” revealed racial segregation and functioned as a means to maintain white supremacy over the African Americans. The whites employed violence to maintain dominance over the African Americans.

I. 1. C. The Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem writers were attracted by the atmosphere of New York since the main publishing houses were situated there. However, Harlem became the cultural center of the black people as New York City was the one of white. The foundation of the Harlem Renaissance was based on the social and political thoughts of a group of young and talented individuals who were linked by a common black experience (Bloom 05) . The period of Harlem Renaissance is supposed to be the Golden Age of African American literature “It is a movement in music, art, literature and politics from the early 1900’s to 1940’s, emphasized the importance of freedom- political ,economic, social and artistic for African Americans”(Smith and Jones 163). During the period between 1900 and 1940, the demand for human rights increased. The Harlem Renaissance, therefore, constitutes a large basis for the African American community. Many young African American writers and artists emerged in

the city of Harlem and sought to prove their qualities and to reassert their identity as Black Americans.

Some of the writers of the era were Zola Neale Hurston, Dorothy West and Claude McKay. Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1925), for example, is considered as the best work that resulted from this era. Additionally, the Harlem Renaissance led to the birth of black music including blues and jazz. This kind of music spread around the world not only in the United States. It gave a new spirit to literature especially to poetry. One of the first books of poetry is *The Weary Blues*. This collection was written by Langston Hughes (1902-1967), and combined words with music (Smith and Jones P168).

During the Harlem Renaissance, African American writers such as Angelina Weld Grimke and Marita Bonner introduced new literary genre to the African American literature such as drama and fiction in which the issue of slavery was always its main theme.

The Harlem Renaissance is important because of its treatment of different issues ranging from feminism to black aesthetics. It represents the road from slavery to freedom for African American artists and left a great legacy and impacted many Black Intellectuals, such as Duke Ellington, Bessie Smith, Claude McKay, and Louis Armstrong who became internationally recognizable due to their masterpieces.

A. The Protest Era

The end of the Great Depression and the beginning of the Second World War represents the period of political protest for black Americans. The main purpose of the protest period is to eradicate racism. The era of protest was either overt or covert. These protests were for the sake of gaining freedom from slavery (468). During this period, there was a great emphasis on the economic problems. Because of the depression, African Americans experienced worse

economic situation, and had difficulties in obtaining funds to develop their writing career.

According to Smith and Jones:

Literature that had protest as a purpose was especially distasteful to white readers who were not ready to face the realities of racism. The issue of racism continued to the Second World War due to the segregation between black and white soldiers.(468)

Also, they claim that:

The protests of this period were nonviolent. Most of them were organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Other protests were made by African American publication such as The Atlanta, Daily World, The Norfolk Journal Guide and The Chicago Defender. In addition, many articles in African American press helped to end racial discrimination in the armed forces. (469)

Black authors of the period were concerned with how to live with whites rather than going to Africa to escape racism. As an example, Margaret Walter 's poem, *For my People*, expresses pride in African American culture and revealed realities of racial oppression. This poem marks the new era for black women poets who had not published poetry since 1918 (470) .

I. 1. D. Contemporary African American Literature

The period extending from 1960 to 1969 is referred to as the black aesthetics movement. This period was marked by the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Nationalist Movement and the Women's Movement. It was known as "Black Power Movement". During this period, black artists used multiple genres to make change in society. For instance, Martin Luther King and Carmichael led hundreds of demonstrations through the Mississippi to explain the relation between blacks and American society. Politics and writing were inseparable. Activists focused on community control of schools, welfare rights, jobs and justice.

During the Black aesthetic movement, Amiri Baraka (Le Roi Jones) and the Congress of African People (CAP) settled international dimensions of the black freedom struggle of the 1960's. ' Amiri Baraka helped to establish black aesthetics; most of his writings were against imperialism and colonialism '(Joseph 60) . Black students asked for education relevant to their history of racial oppression. The proponents of the Black Studies Movement of the 1960's and 1970's claimed that the American educational institution had to be transformed.

Between 1954 and 1965, non-violent protests led by Black American intellectuals such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Booker T. Washington, and Rosa Parks. This period involved marches, beating and boycotts and paved the way to many changes in American law, it was the starting point of black voting rights as represented in the heroic period of the Civil Rights movement (Paniel 25) .

Finally, from 1970 till the present time, the American society changed, but the protest aspect of American literature has remained. In this period, ' black literature became an important part of university curriculum ' (74). In addition, African American women's voices began to be heard as a result of the women's movement and Civil Right Movement. Music was another means for African Americans to express themselves. The most famous one was Rap music as it focused on realities such as drug abuse, violence and teenage .In the beginning of 1980, the most prominent writers were: Du Bois, Charles Chesnutt, Pauline Hopkins, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Sutton Griggs and James Weldon Johnson (75).

I. 2. Black American Autobiography

African-American literature has undergone a revolutionary change from Phillis Wheatley, the first African-American poet to publish her works, to Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker , and Paule Marshall, the contemporary top Black writers works gave an impetus to the beginning of Afro-American Literature. Other Afro-American early writers

also helped the Black writing to move forward , such as Fredrick Douglass . Most dominant themes at the times of slavery have been discussed were the issue of slavery and the subjects related to slaves such as adaptation to the new situation, and breaking free from captivity. Most of the writings at that time were autobiographical; consequently, these autobiographical works written by slaves were named slave narratives. These autobiographies started appearing between the year of 1760 and the end of the Civil War. After the year of 1865, when slavery was finally abolished, many of the former slaves devoted their lives to write their stories and publishing their work (Vincent 57), in this part we will tackle generically the slave narrative variety of forms and periods from 17th c. captivity narratives and 18th century, autobiography to the Neo slave narratives of the 19th century.

I. 2. A. Slave Narratives

Slave narratives are biographical and autobiographical tales of bondage and freedom either written or told by former slaves. The majority of them were "told to" accounts written with the aid of abolitionist editors between 1830 and 1865. However, a number of narratives (including the work of Frederick Douglass) were written solely by the author and are, therefore, referred to as authentic autobiographies. The first of more than six thousand existant slave narratives were published in 1703, and the auto biographical account of George Washington Carver published in 1944 is considered the last of the genre (Starling 01) .

Primarily written as propaganda, the narratives served as important weapons in the warfare against slavery. Taken as a whole, slave narratives can be considered as a literary genre for a number of reasons. They are united by the common purpose of pointing up the evils of slavery and combatting the antebellum notion of black inferiority. In the narratives, one finds a striking similarity of language, simple and often dramatic accounts of personal experience, strong revelation of the character of both ordinary and extraordinary men and

women, and ironic humor and other submerged elements of protest literature. Vernon Loggins has observed that excepting his folk songs, the black man's " most valuable contributions to American literature have been in the form of personal memoirs." (Loggins 41). Despite his deeply degrading status, the slave retained the very human desire to express himself and to communicate to others what it was like to be a slave.

According to Vincent Caretta, the originator of the slave narratives was Ukawsaw Gronniosaw (also known as James Albert), with his "*Narrative*". It was first published in London in 1772, and like most of the other slave narratives, it is an autobiography about a freedom lost and regained (Vincent P58). The narrative which was first to become a best-seller, and which was the first to tell about slave ships and trades, was "*Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself*", written in 1789. Slave narratives reveal the historical context of the US at the time of slavery they illustrate the illogical, irrational and unfair relationship between the White slaveholders and the oppressed Black slaves. "The narratives written by former, sometimes fugitive slaves, present individual and group history as well as arguments against slavery itself" (Dixon 30).

As already mentioned, slave narratives focus on the author's "journey" towards freedom; from the chains of slavery in the South to the free life in the North. Slave narratives followed a standardized form of autobiography in which personal memory played an important part. The narrator portrayed slavery as a condition of extreme physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual denial as a kind of hell on earth that is followed by the quest for freedom (Gates and Mackay 27). The search for freedom was a uniting factor among the Afro-American community members; the ways of achieving this freedom was different among the Blacks of diaspora. "From a literary standpoint, the autobiographical narratives of former slaves comprise one of the most extensive and influential traditions in African American literature

and culture. Until the Depression era slave narratives outnumbered novels written by African Americans” (Andrews 04) .

The general pattern of the slave narrative , an account of the life or a major part of the life, of a fugitive or former slave (written or orally related by the slave himself or herself) documents of the slave’s harsh conditions of life under slavery, the physical, psychological, moral, and spiritual damage that he suffered from white “Christian” slaveholders, his acquisition of literacy, a certain crisis (turning point) in his life and an eventual escape from the slavery and the South to the freedom of the North which (a journey to the North), in the words of Gates, is a leitmotif in these texts of the “evolution of consciousness within the slave from an identity as property and object to a sublime identity as human being and subject” (Spikes 48). On other hand, the vast majority of slave narratives’ titles have the subtitle of “Written by Himself or Herself”, not only to support the claims of truth but also to assert the capabilities and humanity of the slaves.

Despite their similar narrative features, the slave narratives differ from each other according to the narrator’s experience, geographical situation, public recognition etc. Toni Morrison claims that

They range from the adventure-packed life of Oloudah Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Oloudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1782) to the quiet desperation of Harriet Jacob’s (Linda Brent’s) *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861); from the political savvy of Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845) to the subtlety and modesty of Henry Bibb’s *Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1849) . (145)

A white Unitarian minister claimed that despite certain differences in slave narratives, the story that the formerly enslaved ones had to tell had a universal value , these were stories

of human struggle, stories of enslavement that actually proved to be stories of the essential importance of freedom, and they were stories “calculated to exert a very wide influence on public opinion” (Dubey 566) .

Before the Civil War had ended more than hundred Afro-American men and women had written about their experiences and documented their lives and they have created a tradition of slave narrative. This form primarily concentrates on the eye witness accounts of slavery: the author reveals his struggle, sorrows, aspirations, and triumphs. Black American writers consciously chose the autobiographical form whose one purpose was to inspire the abolitionist movement by recounting their hardships under slavery and the atrocities of the institution to a white audience , to state their positions, to leave a record of their resistance and to inspire future generations , promoting their national development .

The Slave Narratives which is published between the years 1830 to 1865 mainly described the personal accounts of physical and psychological bondage and freedom. The first person narratives were written by the slaves themselves These autobiographies give details of their life and experiences (John 31) .The two most exemplary autobiographical narratives of this type include Frederick Douglass’s (1845) *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass An American Slave, Written by Himself* and Harriet Jacob’s (1861) *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*.

Frederick Douglass’s narrative is recognized not only as the most influential narrative of all black autobiographies but also as “one of the classic texts of African American, American, and world literatures” (Cain 142). He established him as one of the leading spokespeople for the abolitionist cause. Douglass’s autobiography (mediated by white writers abolitionists – one wrote a preface, the other – a letter) belongs to the tradition of

fugitive-slave narratives popular in the North before the Civil War. Douglass's autobiography follows the conventional narrative structure of most narratives written at the time: he provides a first-person account of his life spent in slavery, his learning to read and write, a turning point in his life which strengthened his determination to escape from bondage, Douglass's text is not only historical, it also has a literary value as he shapes his characters and circumstances to communicate his ideas about slavery. His other important works include *The Heroic Slave* (1853), which is considered the first novella in African American literature; *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855); and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881).

An abolitionist speaker and reformer Harriet Jacobs' autobiography *Incidents* which was written under the pseudonym of Linda Brent gives her the reputation of the first woman to author a fugitive slave in the US. Jacobs states at the beginning of her own book: "I was born a slave" a classic opening of slave narrative genre a former slave and a fugitive, recounts her comfortable life in a "comfortable home" where she lived together with her parents and a brother, as her father was allowed to have his own trade though they were all slaves, the thing she found out after her parents' death and had to go not only through the general hardships of slavery, but also suffer sexual abuse of her white master (Daina 14).

Jacob's *Incidents* is not that different from Douglass's *Narrative*. And yet there are differences in the general meaning and tone of the two works. In *Incidents* there is more emphasis on family, blood relationships within the black community, than there is in the Douglass story. In addressing the reader, there is more appeal to sentiment, to the reader's sympathy than to some abstract principles or feelings of anger. In *Incidents* women play a more important role than men: heroic women, the tale focuses on the female experience of slavery and thus uses the techniques of the sentimental novel as well as those of the

slave narrative. However, in William L. Andrews's words, "Harriet Jacobs turned her autobiography into a unique analysis of the myths and the realities that defined the situation of the African-American woman and her relationship to 19th c. standards of womanhood. As a result, "Incidents" occupies a crucial place in the history of American women's literature in general and African-American women's literature in particular" (104).

I. 2. B. Post-bellum Black Autobiography

After the defeat of the slave states of the Confederate South (the end of Civil War in 1865), Black American authors had less need to show the horrors of slavery and gave accounts of the narrator's adjustment to the new life of freedom. The writers focused on the story of individual and racial progress rather than that of securing freedom. They were less concerned with the depiction of the evils of slavery and more interested in the adjustments of former slaves in North-America to life in freedom.

This period in African-American autobiographical literature is best represented by Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) autobiography, the founder of Tuskegee Institute, a thinker, educator, and the most prominent black leader of his day who succeeded Frederick Douglass as the chief AfricanAmerican spokesperson. He became prominent for his attempts to improve the lives of recently freed black Americans by involving them in the mainstream of American society. Washington is considered one of the most controversial of race leaders because of his often "accommodationist stance." In contrast to his famous contemporary African American sociologist, historian and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois, who had a more confrontational attitude toward ending racial strife in America, Washington believed that Blacks should first prove themselves the equals of whites before asking for an end to racism (Charles and Gates 205).

Washington's most significant published work is his autobiography *Up from Slavery* (1901) which is partly a slave narrative and partly a collection of speeches he had made in the years after the founding of Tuskegee Institute. The work gives an account of more than forty years of his life: from slave to schoolmaster to the face of southern race relations. The word "Up" in the title emphasizes Washington's firm belief that African Americans can move upward if they use advantage of the opportunities offered to them and work hard to achieve a place of substance in the world. Slavery, according to him, was that "school" which helped to prepare African Americans for the role they had to assume after the Civil War. He claims that "thanks to the school of American slavery Negroes...are in a stronger and more hopeful condition, materially, intellectually, morally, and religiously, than is true of an equal number of black people in any other portion of the globe." James Robinson notes in his Introduction to *Washington's autobiography* that, "throughout the entire book, (Washington) is conciliatory and forgiving toward southern whites and their system of racism and oppression" (qtd. In Gray 68).

Other works of note which fall into the category of post-bellum "Tales of Progress" are *The Underground Railroad Records* by William Still (1872) who is known as the Father of the Underground Railroad. Still carefully compiled and recounted the stories and methods of those who he had helped escape to freedom via the Underground Railroad and included them into the book. One of the few post-Emancipation published slave narratives is *From the Darkness Cometh the Light*, by Lucy Delaney, 1892, which is the first-person account of a successful "freedom suit." (Olney 137).

The above-mentioned writers of postbellum black autobiography paved the way for the new generation of Afro-American writers, especially Black women writers, who suffered more severe oppression. The publication of the post-bellum period, writers

became the cornerstone of Afro-American literature that gave structure to the new-born literature in the US. Although most of the notable writers of Black autobiography in post bellum era have been Black men, Afro-American women continued more seriously and it resulted in the appearance of numerous famous Afro- American women writers such as Toni Morrison, Paul Marshall, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou and others.

I. 2. C. Contemporary Black Autobiography (Neo-Slave Narratives)

The slave narratives genre ‘’ had a hopeful tone right after the Civil War, but became less optimistic after the great depression’’ (Hans 60). Nevertheless, the autobiographical genre remained the most important literary form within African-American literature. Most black writers used elements of the slave narrative when publishing their first works (Andrews, *Slave Narratives*, 667).

During the Great Depression of the 1930s roughly ‘’ 2,300 testimonies of former slaves were orally recorded by the Federal Writers Project for the Slave Narrative Collection’’ (Nash 245) , there were plenty of writers who published works concerning the legacy of slavery and its social consequences. Well-known examples are Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* from 1937 and Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* from 1952. These literary works were part of a new form of the slave narrative genre called the neo-slave narrative. Ashraf Rushdy’s book *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (1999) provides the most comprehensive study of the genre to date. Rushdy defines the neo-slave narrative as that body of ‘‘contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the ante-bellum slave narrative.’’ (177) .

The writers of neo-slave narratives, in which the characters experience slavery directly and chronologically, or a character is used in the novel as narrator or subject, or the narrator might have ancestors who were slaves. They have in common that slavery is an aspect of history of which the effects are still felt today. Rushdy distinguishes three kinds within the contemporary revisionist neo-slave narrative genre of the post-civil right era, the first is the historical novel about slavery. It follows the antebellum traditions of the slave narrative genre, or sometimes varies with the perspective of the narrator, which used to be the first-person but is sometimes the third-person perspective in the neo-slave narrative. The second subgenre is formed by the novels that deal with the aftermaths of slavery as experienced by contemporary African Americans, which Rushdy calls the pseudo-autobiographical slave narrative. The third kind of neo-slave narrative is a “relatively original form [...] of writing about slavery”(Rushdy 180) , and was formed just after the Civil Rights era. They are the genealogical narrative or a novel of remembered generations, which tells the story of a family’s experiences with slavery.

In addition to Zora Hurston and Ralph Ellison, other Black American authors of neo-slave narratives treat the serious subject of slavery with light humor. They claim that slavery, as a racial institution, also had a rich, double-edged tradition of humor. Humor was a central, creative means through which African-Americans survived and confronted centuries of oppression. As Glenda Carpio has noted, humor can at once be a strong critique of racial injustice, but at the same time “give life to the whole storehouse of fantasies produced in the hothouse of a racially divisive past and an equally, if differently divisive present” (Carpio 27). The topic of slavery continues in the 21st century. The most outstanding example is Edward P. Jones’s novel *The Known World* (2003). Although the primary focus of the book is on slavery, it is the first narrative in which an African-American writer chronicles the holding of enslaved persons by a man of African descent.

One of the major purposes of the neo-slave narrative was to show the enslaved people as agents possessing complex humanity. In this novel, however, blacks stand out as villains, and as cruel as whites.

Neo-slave narratives can offer a chance “ to redeem the wrongs towards African-American women, romance, and sexuality, since the genre can provide readers with accounts of aspects of slavery that the antebellum slave narratives could not” (Robinson 55) . Aside from that, fiction “will not give us the whole story about social justice, but it can be a bridge both to a vision of justice and to the social enactment of that vision” Telling the slave stories in neo-form provides a method to resist the injustice of maintaining errors in history, or forgetting history altogether (Jessie and Robbins 20) .

I. 3. Black Women Writing Autobiography

Black Women Autobiography is a sub-genre written by African American women in order to free her from the stereotypical, humiliating and false images that are given by the white power. The description of black women were prejudiced so the women started to write autobiography to change this image and to create a self-determined identity. As Sidonie Smith In her *Decolonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Woman Autobiography*, notes:

Nineteenth-century African American women’s autobiography can teach their readers much about the effects of intellectual colonization on oppressed people in the United States and about the role of autobiography in the efforts of oppressed people to decolonize their thinking and writing . (51)

Smith adds: “In no tradition of nineteenth-century African- American autobiography was there a more as a standard by which to judge individuals or institutions than in the first-person narratives of black women” (52) .

Black male autobiography mostly concentrates on pressures of black male in white dominated society by referring to race and class. However Black women’s autobiography suffers from “a tripple oppression” of race, class and gender. *In Feminist Theory*, Bell hooks in her article called “Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory” says,

As a group, black women are in an unusual position in this society, for not only are we collectively at the bottom of the occupational ladder, but our overall social status is lower than that of any other group. Occupying such a positon, we bear the brunt of sexist, racist and classist oppression. At the same time we’re the group that has not been socialized to assume the role of exploiter/oppressor in that we are allowed no institutionalized “other” that we can exploit or oppress. (Children do not represent an institutionalized other even though they may be oppressed by parents). White women and black men have it both ways. They can act as oppressor or be oppressed. Black men may be victimized by racism, but sexism allows them to act as exploiters and oppressors of black people (67).

Hooks thinks that being a black woman is the worst of all oppressed ones. Since black women experience tripple oppression, black women write their stories refering to oppression by both whites and black men. Therefore, black women autobiographies express this triple oppression. Richard T. Schaefer in his *Racial and Ethnic Groups* also shares the same thoughts by declaring

We have seen the historical oppression of women that limits them by tradition and law to specific roles. Many women experience differential treatment not only because of their gender but also because of race and ethnicity. These citizens face a double jeopardy: that of subordinate

status twice defined. A disproportionate share of this low-status group also is poor, so the double jeopardy becomes a triple jeopardy. The litany of social ills continues for many as we add old age, ill health, disabilities, and the like (418).

Richard T. Schaefer believes that women suffer from oppression because of their gender. However he points out that the black woman face double oppression since they are blacks and women, but worst of all the poor black woman suffers from “ a triple jeopardy” that results from her race, gender and class. Black women write autobiographies in order to express their inner thoughts of the harsh conditions they live. Black women were also thought to be stereotypical and they were described as false and negative images, the focuses on their autobiographical writing more personal since they deal with family problems, personal issues and relationships. Meta Y.Harris including her own autobiographies notes down, “Many black women including myself, give more details of surroundings when describing events than they give of self-descriptions”(qtd. In Richard 88). She points out that the physical descriptions of weight, height are not used in black women autobiographies.

Black women autobiographies show how they perceive themselves, the need to define themselves is caused from their humiliated self. They write autobiographies as much for correcting their past and to create a self-identity. The autobiographical writing permits the black writer to think about her life and develop a new identity without prejudices. Her personal feelings, her social environment and her literal ability affect the black autobiographical quality.

The other significant effects on black women autobiographies are social movements and civil right movements. In *The Influence of Social Movements on Articulations of Race and Gender in Black Women's Autobiographies*, Paula Steward Brush argues that

civil rights movement and women's movements influence the articulations of race and gender" and she illustrates that the black women autobiographies are also affected by these social movements: One of the most profound ways the available discourse influenced them was in their development of a collective identity. In terms of race inequality, the autobiographers experienced a shift in consciousness: from understanding their experiences as their personal troubles to understanding them as social issues. They developed race consciousness. Moreover, they were fully aware that their understanding of their world shifted as they confronted the discourse of orators and writers of the civil rights movement . (14)

The most significant black women autobiographies are Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), and Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes: or Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (1902). Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* in 1942 , were the pivotal works of black women autobiography. Daisy Bates's *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* and Septima Clark's *Echo in My Soul*, Martha Moore's *Unmasked: The Story of My Life on Both Sides of the Color Barrier*, were the important black women autobiographies of 1960's. Maya Angelou in her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* also defines the black women reality as "The Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power".(Angelou 277) .

Black female autobiographies as mentioned above, allow black women to express their feelings and experiences in both a white dominated society and male dominated society. These black women autobiographers share many common themes such as the importance of education as a sign of personal growth, religion and "Personal flight" are also common topics in these works.

The present chapter attempted to focus on history, culture, and accomplishments of African-American literature. The writers present the lives of the enslaved, oppressed and dehumanized Black community in America. Black Americans started their literary works with slave narratives to show the oppression they experienced and to react against racism and to change the stereotypical roles assigned to them by the society.

The Autobiographies of the slavery and reconstruction periods highlight the conflict between the blacks and whites, this inspired the African American Females to involve in writing for blacks liberation. It also forced them to confront and challenge negative stereotypes of black womanhood. African-American authors whether male or female raised questions about African-American identity. Their work retraces racism and permits to view its social, financial and political inferences. African-American society has developed over the past few decades and the voices of African-Americans are being heard. Hence, in the second chapter we will analyse a very important autobiographical work of Maya Angelou which consists of different racism testimonials, and how she could manage this situation and create her self-identity.

II. The Analysis of ‘ I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings ‘

Maya Angelou is one of the powerful women who write, risk rejection and change life through their powerful words, and through literature. Speaking aloud, writing down and discussing publicly all the hardships and experiences of her personal life enabled her to change her awful past in the segregated American South.

Many people have got to know and love Maya Angelou through her successful works and great achievements, particularly, her best-known autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, where she devoted herself to give insight to the African American life, as she goes through her journey of self-discovery, dominated by the white culture and values.

This chapter explores the effect of racism, marginalization, and alienation on the personal growth of Angelou and shows how these external factors influenced the development of the personal identity of the African American individual. Depending on psychoanalytical Approache to analyze the effect of racism, discrimination and sexual abuse on Black Americans identity, and the importance of literature which played a great role in shapin Maya's self-identity.

II.1. Biography of the author

Maya Angelou was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on April 4, 1928. ‘ She got her professional name from her brother Bailey, who was one year older, in which it was converted gradually from Mya sister to Maya’ (Kite 6). Her mother Vivian Baxter was a performer in a night club and her father Bailey Johnson was a porter in a hotel. She grew up in Stamps, Arkansas with her brother Bailey in the house of her paternal mother, after her parents divorced in 1930's. Her grandmother run a store, and Maya attended school in Arkansas. She was graduated from Lafayette County Training School in 1940 and was sent to the San Francisco Bay Area. She went to George Washington High School and she also took the

evening classes at the California Labor School. She lived a rural life in Stamps whereas she found out urban life in St. Louis when she moved to her maternal family's house.

When Maya was three years old, her parents divorced. She found herself then obliged to make a trip alone with her companion and protector, Bailey Jr., to the Stamps, Arkansas to live with their paternal grandmother Annie Henderson whom they called Momma. From the beginning, living in Stamps with the lovely grandmother and Uncle Willie, was a source of comfort. They cared for the two children as Annie Handerson (Momma) taught them good manners and how to be respectful and always encouraged them about education. They all lived in the back rooms of the Store that Momma owned and they helped her at work.

Despite the warmth of her new home, Marguerite felt abandoned by her parents and throughout all her childhood she felt so, but fortunately, she had a lovely brother and friend who was the only person who could understand her feeling. She loved him so much and he was the essence of her life as she described him "Bailey was the greatest person in my world. And the fact that he was my brother, my only brother and I had no sisters to share with him, was such good fortune that it made me want to live a Christian life just to show God I was grateful "(Angelou 22) In addition to Bailey, books were her second loyal friends.

When Marguerite was seven years old, her father, Bailey Johnson, "came to Stamps without warning" (Angelou 54) and returned them to their mother's care in St.Louis. Vivian Johnson was living with her boyfriend, Mr. Freeman and While living there, Angelou was sexually abused and raped by her mother's boyfriend. Freeman threatened the little girl to kill her brother if she would talk.

Regardless of the racial discrimination that was the legally enforced way of life in the American South, the young girl attended public schools in Arkansas and later in California. She absorbed as well the deep faith and the old-fashioned traditional African American

values. When she was 13 years old, and after being raped, she regained her voice and her confidence over again. Angelou then, returned to high school and won a scholarship to study in San Francisco, she became the first African American street-car conductor. After graduating from school, at the age of 17, she gave birth to her son Guy. Hence, she had to find a way to make money for her new family. As a young single mother, Maya had many different jobs to support her son, working as a waitress and a cook. However, she never gave up her talents for music, dance and poetry.

In 1952, she married Anastasios Angeloupulos, a Greek sailor. Despite the fact that the marriage did not last long, she took her professional name Maya Angelou, which was a combination of her childhood name by her brother Bailey and her former husband's last name. Then her performing career flourished and she toured many places all over Europe and Africa. She tried to learn the language of any country she visited: "I wanted to travel, to try to speak other languages, to see the cities I had read about all my life, but most important, I wanted to be with a large, friendly group of black people who sang so gloriously and lived with such passion"(qd in Shapiro and Cox 37). She emerged as a singer and dancer in the 1950s, for instance she recorded her first album *Miss Calypso*; then, she became a writer and editor in the 1960s and she began exploring her talents as an actress, director, poet and screenwriter in the 1970s.

Maya Angelou has received many distinctions in her life; she has many awards and achievements from writing books, poetry and acting. For instance, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Arts in 2000, as well as the Lincoln Medal in 2008. Angelou has also received 30 honorary degrees or more. Maya Angelou, a legendary writer and beloved poet passed away at the age of 86 in 2014 (Kite 89).

II.2. Maya Angelou's Autobiographies

After giving brief information about Angelou's life, we will mostly focus on her works and her literary career. Maya Angelou is one of the most important Black American writers with her serial autobiographies. Her autobiographies capture the joy, the pain, the love, the hatred, the life and the death. The themes of Maya Angelou can be specified as the search for identity, the influence of education on personal growth, the impact of religion and the struggle of black women.

The first book of her serial autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970), has become the best known work. Her first autobiography depicts Angelou's early years in Stamps and gives a portrayal of Black life in segregated South. This autobiography captures her childhood memories and her familial relationships, Angelou's next autobiography *Gather Together in My Name*, tells the story of a young mother Maya Angelou with her newly born son Guy after leaving her mother's house. Maya Angelou gets various jobs in order to survive in the harsh atmosphere of urban life. Maya, both as a mother and a worker, cannot cope with the difficulties of the city life. Her brother Bailey comes to rescue her and the book ends with gaining her innocence back.

Singing and Swinging and Getting Merry Like Christmas, her third autobiography also portrays her transition from childhood to adulthood. Angelou falls in love with a Greek man called Tosh and they get married but they divorced later on. Her artistic quality and her creativity start to be realized so she takes a role in "Porgy and Bess" which becomes a turning point in her life. She attends the tour so she ignores her child. However at the end she accepts her own quilt and promises not to leave her child again. In her next autobiography *The Heart of a Woman* also covers her life in 1950's and early 1960's that was an era of racial hostility

and black liberation. In this autobiography she becomes the northern coordinator of Martin Luther King's NAACP and supports the endowment of Southern Christian Leadership Conference. *The Heart of a Woman* explores Maya's personality both as a social activist and a mother under racism. Moreover, Maya's marriage with Vusumzi Make and her relationship with her son Guy is depicted in *The Heart of a Woman*.

In her fifth book, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* she searches for her roots in Africa and tries to make a connection between America and Africa. In addition to her autobiographies Angelou also has published three poems; *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Die* (1971), *Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well* (1975), and *Still I Rise* (1980). In her works, Maya Angelou mostly concentrates on the oppression of African-Americans, whereas in her Autobiographies, she reflects love and the search for physical and emotional satisfaction.

According to Carey and Webb, "Maya Angelou's autobiography (1970) has testimonial elements" (45). Carey-Webb defines testimonials as "Testimonials are sort of Third World 'autobiography' that brings to the center the experience of the unlettered, marginalized, and oppressed" (44). Maya Angelou as a black woman writes about the oppressed but while she is narrating the life of oppressed, she never loses; she is reborn and fights against the oppressions and limitations. Her autobiographies express her personal thoughts of life and she shares her personal life in a connected atmosphere. She shows herself as a representative of her race, as a black American woman. Maya Angelou's narratives mostly indicate "Black" experiences as Dolly Aimee Mcpherson notes:

Angelou's emphasis on Black social conditions, Black struggle, Black aspirations and Black strength makes her autobiography one of the most widely read narratives about the Black experience. Even though Angelou develops several prevailing themes in Black autobiographical writing (i.e.,

moving out and coming back, Black heritage as a source of regenerative strength, the role of elders in the Black community as mentors), the serial autobiography also contains other generally acknowledged universal themes (165).’

Maya Angelou also uses some oral traditions, African songs, sermons and the ghost story in her autobiographies in order to awaken the African soul in her autobiographies. “In Tradition within a Tradition” Joanne M. Braxton notes,

The text shows the influence of myriad folk forms including the sermon, the ghost story, the preacher tale, the tale of exaggeration, a children’s rhyme, and secular and religious songs. The use of these oral forms, together with folk language, contributes to the unique tone, texture, and style of autobiography. Their presence also helps to identify the autobiographer in a relationship with her community and culture (299).

Maya Angelou allows her readers to witness her metamorphosis through different aspects of her life experiences and using different African original songs and folk forms such as sermons , ghost story , religious songs which showed the unique tongue of Afro American literary works far from that of whites , also weaving the theme of Racism and identity into her works, Maya Angelou questions many aspects of herself , by portraying her inner conflicts of being a black woman creates a new- self which is totally free and uncaged.

II.3. Exploring Racism and Opression in Maya Angelou’s Life

Maya Angelou’s autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* depicts racist and traumatic experiences that she portrayed, starting from her childhood when she was abandoned by her parents and sent with her brother to live with their grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas. Her life was not stable and she suffered from the repeated displacement. Angelou describes also her suffering from being a black girl, living in the South, in a harsh and racist

society, where she was mistreated and rejected by society, just because of her black skin. In addition, little Maya experienced a sexual assault from her mother's boyfriend and this horrible experience had such a strong psychological impact on her, that she stopped talking and felt guilty. Here are some of racist events or factors that made little Maya psychologically sick.

II. 3. 1. Displacement

The beginning of the autobiography shows the displacement of Maya Angelou. This prologue creates an atmosphere of pain and alienation of a little girl in front of a crowd. "What you looking at me for? I didn't come to stay..."(Angelou 01) exactly illustrates the psychological despair of a little girl. Maya's displacement can also be detected when she was sent at the age of three with her brother Bailey who was one year older than her, to Arkansas, to live with their parental grandmother "Momma". She wrote: "When I was three and Bailey four, we had arrived in the musty little town; [...] we were Marguerite and Bailey Johnson Jr. from Long Beach, California, en route to Stamps, Arkansas, with Mrs. Annie Henderson." (07). She also shares her personal feelings about her being totally ugly because of her skin color. Thus, the autobiography starts with a restricted and psychologically depressed mood. Her cage is drawn in the very beginning of the autobiography as she is depicted as "little", "black" and "girl".

The protagonist Maya and her brother Bailey represent the black children who were obliged to travel alone from the North to the South. The theme of displacement is highly present in the novel. Indeed, from the age of three to sixteen Maya and Bailey lived in more than six places and their unstable life was controlled by different factors such as divorce, racism and sexism. Maya was too little to live away from her parents, so when she experienced displacements as a child, she dealt with difficult realities both in the American

South with the cruelty of its people, and "the lack of her parents tenderness" (07), Maya felt abandoned and rejected by her parents.

When she and her brother received some Christmas presents, Maya was completely convinced that her parents were dead, since she never thought that they can be alive and leave her for that long period without asking about her or visiting her: "Until that Christmas when we received the gifts, I had been confident that they were both dead" (56). Maya expressed her deepest pain for not having her mother by her side and how she dreamed of her and how she may look like. It is clear that Maya was crying for not being able to feel what other children who share and enjoy the tenderness of their parents did. It caught her like a knife that she could not even know how her mother looked like. The absences of her parents made her dive in her own imagination and draw in her little mind a picture of her mother:

I could cry anytime I wanted by picturing my mother (I didn't quite know what she looked like) lying in her coffin. Her hair, which was black, was spread out on a tiny little white pillow and her body was covered with a sheet. The face was brown, like a big O, and since I couldn't fill in the features I printed M O T H E R across the O, and tears would fall down my cheeks like warm milk (Angelou 56).

Another displacement scene is described when Maya was only eight and her father came to Stamps unexpectedly to take her and her brother with him to live with their mother in California. Once there, Maya's life was turned upside down, when she experienced a terrible sexual abuse that traumatized her. Her displacement continued, and again she was sent back to her grandmother's house in the South. There, she dealt with many racist and cruel situations that dominated the Southern American society at that time.

From the beginning of the novel until the end the writer uses different settings in order to portray, the life of the black girl who grew up aware of her displacement.

Every time she moves to a new town she whispers the same words “I did not come to stay” she was sure that her visit will never last long. The only time she felt that she is at home when she moved to live with her brother and mother in San Francisco.

In San Francisco, for the first time, I perceived myself as part of something. Not that I identified with the newcomers, nor with the rare black descendants of native San Franciscans, nor with the whites, but rather with the time and city ... to me, a thirteen-years-old black girl, stalled by the South and southern life style, the city was a state of beauty and a state of freedom.(Angelou 212-213)

The end of the novel illustrates a journey of a black soul into the waves of adulthood. Her journey into a junkyard, her work as a streetcar conductor and her experience as a mother, matured her. When she lived in a junkyard she gained a psychological maturity, a working experience brought to her a social maturity, while her giving birth to a baby served as a physical maturity. Thus, by the end of the narrative, Maya becomes totally a matured woman, free from displacement.

Maya’s displacement was caused by her alienation from the society because of her color and her motherlessness in the familial sphere, as Maya starts to discover her self and find out her place in society, she gets rid of her sense of displacement.

In her first autobiography ‘ ‘ I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRDS SING ‘ ‘ Maya Angelou has successfully described the African- Americans life throughout her point of view as child; her painful experience with displacement represents all the hopes and fears, all the struggles of the black community in order to find a safe place, she continued her story with the theme of “displacement” in the other five autobiographies.

II. 3.2. Racism, Segregation and Social Rejection

Maya Angelou presents another figure in her life that struggles with racism, which is her resistance against racism and her insistence to survive and succeed, this was an inspiration for her ancestors to struggle against slavery and to dream for freedom and success as she said in her poem *Still I rise*:

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave
I am the dream and the hope of the slave. (Angelou *Still I rise* 23)

Maya narrates her story during a period of time when racism and segregation were deeply rooted in the American society and despite efforts made by the blacks and even some whites in order to defeat racism, yet it is still at the top of the social issues. According to Angelou segregation was widespread during her childhood especially in the South; it was too easy for her as child of three years old to observe the difference between the whites and the blacks.

In Stamps the segregation was so complete that most Black children didn't really, absolutely know what whites looked like. Other than that they were different, to be dreaded, and in that dreaded was included the hostility of the powerless against the powerful, the poor against the rich, the worker against the worked for and the ragged against the well dressed (Angelou 25)

To be a Black American girl and to live in the South where society praises the white beauty was very difficult for Maya. She felt unattractive, and considered herself as an ugly girl, comparing to the white women. Thus, the feeling of inferiority played a role at shaping her psychological state and defined her in a way that is completely different from whom she is in the inside. Maya had imagination and dreamed that one day she could wake up from the ugly blackness to a white reality. It is obvious that Maya suffered from a problem of identity when she considered herself a white girl:

Wouldn't they be surprised when one day I woke out of my blackugly dream, and my real hair, which was long and blond, would take the place of the kinky mass that Momma wouldn't let me straighten? My light blue

eyes were going to hypnotize them [...] Then they would understand why I had never picked up a Southern accent, or spoke the common slang, and why I had to be forced to eat pigs' tails and snouts. Because I was really white and because a cruel fairy stepmother, who was understandably jealous of my beauty, had turned me into a too-big Negro girl, with nappy black hair, broad feet and a space between her teeth that would hold a number-two pencil. (Angelou 04-05)

Racism and segregation are detected from the beginning of the autobiography, but the direct experience of Maya with the whites prejudice was when she had ten years old and a white dentist refused to treat her teeth just because she was a black girl. This incident makes Maya realizes the real face of racism. The dentist said to her grandmother Annie

“Annie, you know I don't treat nigro, colored people”

“I know, dentist Lincoln. But this here is just my little grandbaby, and she ain't gone be no trouble to you....”

“Annie everybody has a policy. In this world you have to have a policy. Now my policy is I don't treat colored people...I'd rather stick my hand in a dog's mouth than in a nigger's” (Angelou 188)

After this conversation Maya's toothache stopped and was replaced by another pain, it was so deep she could not describe it by words. Knowing that the doctor prefers to treat a dog rather treating her causes a big shock, the cruelty of the dentist and the rest of people like him made Maya hates everything white especially the society because they dominate it. Furthermore, this autobiographical book describes how Maya endured the pain of social rejection of the “powhitetrash” who lived on her grandmother's land, and who were very annoying and encroached Momma's privacy in the store that even Maya didn't dare to do:

Some families of powhitetrash lived on Momma's farm land behind the school. Sometimes a gaggle of them came to the store, filling the whole room, chasing out the air and even changing the well-known scents. The

children crawled over the shelves and into the potato and onion bins, twanging all the time in their sharp voices like cigar-box guitars. They took liberties in my Store that I would never dare (Angelou 30).

Angelou then showed what was even worse about these powhitetrash girls who treated Maya's grandmother rudely just because of her color and race, as many African Americans who lived in the South at that time, and who were seen as a second class citizen. However, their rudeness did not affect Maya's grandmother with anything since the latter was a strong and wise lady who thought of the consequences before any reaction and avoided being in trouble, and did not want to return back the bad treatment of the powhitetrash girls. Maya had a feeling of frustration and anger, not being able to speak or react against what the rude white girls did to her dear grandmother, because the latter ordered her not to do and to stay inside the store. As a result, Maya died of rage and pain inside herself. This scene, especially when she could not interfere, swallowed her words and watched them mocking at her grandmother, frustrated her even more:

When I was around ten years old, those scruffy children caused me the most painful and confusing experience I had ever had with my grandmother [...] I wanted to throw a handful of black pepper in their faces, to throw lye on them, to scream that they were dirty, scummy peckerwoods, but I knew I was as clearly imprisoned behind the scene as the actors outside were confined to their roles (Angelou 31-33).

Furthermore, when Maya worked at Mrs. Cullinan's house, a white racist woman, even though she called her Margaret instead of Marguerite, Maya did accept it and gave her an excuse that she could not pronounce well. However, when a friend of Mrs. Cullinan suggested to her to call Maya Mary instead of Margaret to shorten it, "That's too long. She is Mary from now on" (118), Maya became irritated and felt insulted because "every person I knew had a hellish of being, called out of his name. It was a dangerous practice to call a Negro anything that could be loosely construed as insulting because of the centuries of their having been

called niggers, jigs, dinges, blackbirds, crows, boots and spook ‘ (118). The incident with Mrs. Cullinan shows how white Americans did not lose the opportunity to insult blacks. Maya who felt, insulted when Mrs. Cullinan tried to call her by another name rather than her own took a reaction and broke her favorite dishes. As Mrs. Cullinan was extremely racist, she exploded all the hatred that she had inside herself toward blacks when she said: “That clumsy nigger. Clumsy little black nigger.” (120)

Segregation is noticed with unfair schooling service provided for particularly Black women and for Blacks in general when compared with the rest of white students in America. As it is mentioned by Angelou, there are separate schools or colleges for Blacks and whites. At the time when Maya attends training, she notices that Black girls had a less privileged education than white girls. “Admittedly the training was not the same, while white girls learned waltz and sit gracefully with a tea cup balanced on their knees, we were lagging behind, learning the mid-Victorian values with very little money to indulge them” (101). When Maya attends her schooling in Lafayette County Training School, the school for Blacks, up to grade 8, she observes the school was quite inferior to the ‘White school’. The school where she graduated grade eight lacks many necessary things including teaching aid materials and qualified teachers.

Finally, like many other works by the black writers, Maya Angelou’s autobiography describes the African-Americans lives in the American society. The title “I know Why the Caged Bird Sings” includes all black people who were caged by racism, injustice and slavery, and despite everything they sing their songs were their hope for a better future.

II. 3. 3. Sexual abuse

Angelou's main purpose in writing her autobiography was to deal with the different issues in the American society during the 1930's. Women issues were debatable topics in the United States from the beginning of the twentieth century. However, Maya Angelou took another way to improve women's statue, by going further than asking for women's right and narrating her personal experience with the sexual abuse.

The worst thing that can happen to a child is rape, especially if this rape was committed by someone inside home. When Maya was in a visit to her mother's home, she had nightmares and found difficulties to sleep. Thus, Maya used to sleep with her mother Vivian and her mother's boyfriend Mr. Freeman at night, in the first time and the second night everything seemed normal, however in the third time, Mr. Freeman took advantage of Vivian's absence and he harassed her girl.

Because of a need for stability, children easily become creature of habit. After the third time in mother's bed, I thought there was nothing strange about sleeping there. One morning she got out of bed for an early errand, and I fell asleep again. But I woke up to a pressure, a strange feeling on my left leg. It was too soft to be a hand and it wasn't the touch of clothes. Whatever it was I hadn't encounter the sensation in all the years of sleeping with Momma. (Angelou 72)

The poor young girl did not know what Mr. Freeman was doing. She never encountered a situation like that, so she did not understand that it was wrong. She " thought that Mr. Freeman's touches were innocent just like the other father " (73). As the time passed, Maya was treating Mr. Freeman like her father. As a child of eight years she was happy to have for the first time a father. She was too young to understand what was going around her, till one day when they were alone at home, he raped her and threatened her that he will kill her brother if she tells anyone.

Maya wrote: ‘ I thought I was dead i woke up in a white-walled world and it had to be heaven. But Mr. Freeman was there and he was washing me. His hands shoo, but he held me upright in the tub and washed my legs.”I didn’t mean to hurt you, Ritie”. (78) The worst part for the young girl was not the sexual abuse, she did not know that she was raped, the worst was when he threatened her if she tells anyone, he will kill her brother. Maya believed him and keeps the secret, she felt guilty, because she hid the truth from Bailey.

Angelou writes her experience of rape: “ I was eight and grown. Even the nurses in the hospital had told me that now I have nothing to fear. “The worst is over for you” they said (84). In “Daughters Seduction Sexual Violence and Literary History” Christina Froula says

An adult can see that the daughters need for a father’s affection does not cancel his culpality for sexually abusing her. But the child can not resolve the conflict between her desire to tell the truth, which means acknowledging the pleasure she felt when Mr. Freeman gently held her and her awareness of the social condemnation that would greet this revelation (16).

Maya’s silence after the rape can be an example of psychological oppression. It is possible to be oppressed in ways that do involve neither physical deprivation and legal inequality nor economic exploitation. One can also be oppressed psychologically. According to Sandra Bartky speaks “To be psychologically oppressed is to weighted down in your mind, it is to have a harsh dominion exercised over your self-esteem. The psychological oppressed become their own oppressors; they come to exercised over their own self-esteem” (qtd in Hirsh 105). Maya starts to re-create a new life of silence. She finds out a new life in the books by using her fantasy and imagination. She tries to get rid of her oppression by building a secure life without speaking. She creates a world where she is totally free and where there is no voice but only words exist. She attempts to escape from real life and she tries to be invisible. It demonstrates that the act of rape which is a man power act also destroys the

victim's social relations. Indeed, Maya does not want to speak with anyone after her rape and it also ruins her relation with her mother.

Maya's rape demonstrates how as a woman, she is violated as she moves from childhood to adolescence. In general, it can be taken as a depiction of burden and a demonstration of the manner in which the Black female is violated. The writer stated her own experience to demonstrate the complexities of rape. She also wants to prevent it from happening to someone else, so that anyone who had been raped might gain understanding and not blame herself for it.

II. 3. 4. Trauma:

Life is full of ups and downs and one can be exposed to many failures and frustrations. However, s/he should never give up, but instead hold on and face these failures and defeats in order to succeed and overcome them:

You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated.
In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it. Maya Angelou. (Quoted by Baker, & Val 49)

If events are described as a traumatic, it means that they caused a deep shock in the life of a person or a community. Life of the human beings is full of good and bad surprises. People have the will to improve their lives, but they cannot control every single aspect of them. Maya Angelou's childhood is full of traumatic events, her first experience with the trauma was in after the divorce of her parents, they abandoned her in a very young age, the main problem in Maya's life was finding stability, she never felt that she belongs to any place, or trust anyone, her world was her brother Bailey. The author lived a second shock when she was eight years old and she was raped. Although she did not know the real meaning

of being raped, but she lived in fear from the abuser, who threatened to kill Bailey. The fear of hurting her brother was much bigger than thinking about the physical pain caused by the rape.

The greatest trauma in Maya Angelou's life was when she learned that Mr. Freeman died and believed that her words in the court were the cause of his death. Maya could not bear the burden of killing a person so she decided to stop speaking with the other people except Bailey. Her words were a weapon she decided to stop talking, in order to avoid killing another soul. "The only thing I could do was to stop talking to people other than Bailey. Instinctively, or somehow, I know that because I loved him so much I'd never hurt him, but if I talked to anyone else that person might die to. Just my breath, carrying my words out, might poison people and they'd curl up and die. (Angelou 87)

Maya spent her days mute, she did not speak with either her mother or her Momma, believing that if she speaks with them they will die, and the only few words she spoke were with Bailey. Momma could not let the girl in that situation so she took her back to Stamps.

In the first week my family accepted my behavior as a post-rape, post-hospital affliction. (Neither the term nor the experience was mentioned in Grandmother's house, where Bailey and I were again staying) They understood that I could talk to Bailey, but to no one else. Then came the last visit from the visiting nurse, and the doctor said I was healed. " (88) .

The trauma worsened in Stamps, because they lived another displacement far from their mother. Momma managed for a meeting with an educated black woman called Ms. Flowers, as she was sure that Ms. Flowers will know how to deal with Maya's difficult situation. After a short discussion between Mrs Flowers and Maya :

Your grandmother says you read a lot. Every chance you get. That's good, but not good enough. Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning. I memories the part about the human voice infusing words. It seemed so valid and poetic.

She said that she was going to give me some books and that I not only must read them, I must read them aloud. (98)

Maya went to the black lady house where she had a discussion about the impact of literature. Ms. Flower advised her to read the literary works very loudly; it will help her to regain her voice and told her that the human voice gives the meaning for the words, and they cannot reach their aim unless they are pronounced.

II. 4. Maya Angelou from Self hatred to Self esteem

In this Part Maya Angelou's identity formation is analysed from psychoanalytical perspective specially with her first contact with literature which was an important tool in her life, then the analysis of her evolution as a woman as it develops throughout the first volume of her autobiography and finally, how Black females who appeared in the book influenced Maya's life, to shift from worst situation to self esteem.

II.4. 1. Maya Angelou's Identity Formation:

Maya Angelou's life was not that easy to live. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, her best known and most influential memoir, portrays how she experienced many tough and traumatic events that psychologically affected her, and shaped her personality. These incidents and experiences that she faced at an early age and continued till her teenage years led her to think about her identity and to expand herself-awareness and to shift from her psychological trauma and insecurity, to self-esteem, recovery and free her imprisoned words.

In the introduction of her book, Maya imagined that she would look like one of the "sweet white girls" (Angelou 02) with a dress that Momma had sewed. Here we can appreciate the desire to "wake up out of her ugly black dream" (02) to the standards of white beauty represented in many African American women writers. Through the first chapters

there are many episodes in which she is critical of her physical appearance: “When I was described by our playmates as being shit color [...] my head was covered with black steel wool” (22). Maya is unhappy about her looks and hopes that she will be miraculously transformed into “one of the sweet little white girls who were everybody’s dream of what was right with the world.” (02)

One of the most significant episodes in Maya’s life is after being raped by Mr. Freeman is that she felt like a grown woman. As expected, this traumatic incident had consequences for her. Remaining mute for a while helped Maya learn and appreciate other things (like reading among others). Bertha Flowers (the aristocratic lady of the blacks in Stamps) helped Maya to understand that she deserved respect and attention. Mrs. Flowers created in little Maya the power and feelings of Black pride and self-esteem when she helped her to regain her voice very wisely and convinced her with gentle words; “Now no one is going to make you talk possibly no one can. But bear in mind, language is man’s way of communicating with his fellow man and it is language alone which separates him from the lower animals.” (104). It was a new idea to Maya which needed time to think about, and most importantly made Maya feel that need to express herself so she felt liked and made a huge difference in her life; she was respected for being Marguerite Johnson. At this point in her life, Maya started to build up her identity and her self-esteem again.

Maya’s identity became stronger as time went by. In chapter 23, which describes her graduation. Maya reflects how important she felt in those days. “In the store I was the person of the moment [...] The center [...] I was going to be one of the first called in the graduating ceremonies” (171) She learnt to appreciate her physical appearance: “I was going to be lovely” (171). Her academic results were among the best of the year and physically, her hair

pleased her too. She did not only feel confident about her appearance, but also appreciated beauty as a characteristic of the “wonderful, beautiful Negro race” (184).

II. 4. 1. Literature and Angelou’s Self-Identity

Anyone who goes through tough situations needs someone or something to lean on and a refuge to feel safe. Maya Angelou found her safety and home in literature and in reading books by which she could regain her self-identity:

When I look back, I am so impressed again with the life-giving power of literature. If I were a young person today, trying to gain a sense of myself in the world, I would do that again by reading, just as I did when I was young. Maya Angelou (quoted in Phillips 182)

Maya's imagination and her desire to escape from her frustrating and gloomy reality in Stamps drove her to classic literature, in particular white writers; Shakespeare, Kipling, Poe, Thackeray, and James Weldon Butler, and also black authors like; Paul Dunbar, Langston Hughes, W E. B. Du Bois, and James Weldon Johnson. Maya studied hard and dived in reading books of those authors that she fell in love with their pieces of writings:

During these years in Stamps, I met and fell in love with William Shakespeare. He was my first white love. Although I enjoyed and respected Kipling, Poe, Butler, Thackeray and Henley, I saved my young and loyal passion for Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson and W.E.B. Du Bois“ „Litany at Atlanta (Angelou 16).

Literature was Maya’s salvation especially where it is portrayed how she was interested by white stories and living with white characters inside books especially when she said: “...a sensation that made poets gush out rhyme after rhyme, that made Richard Arlen brave the Arctic wastes and Veronica Lake betray the entire free world?” (303).It was very important for her to read and without any racist thoughts she read both black writer’s books and whites. Indeed, Maya Angelou the African-American poet, writer and activist portrayed in a lecture in

1990 her love for Shakespeare. She stated that living in poverty in the Southern American society and experiencing racism, she felt Shakespeare spoke to her at a point that she knew “William Shakespeare was a black woman” (Eaglestone 11).

Literature played a significant role in building Maya’s strong personality. In a poor segregated area they had nothing to do except reading books or magazines. Ms. Flower advised her to read the literary works very loudly, it will help her to regain her voice. Ms. Flowers told Maya that the human voice gives the meaning for the words, and they cannot reach their aim unless they are pronounced “ I memories the part about the human voice infusing words. It seemed so valid and poetic. She said that she was going to give me some books and that I not only must read them, I must read them aloud.” (Angelou P98) .

Maya Angelou’s love of literature had accompanied her during all her life. Literature was a recovery and a weapon in face all struggles. Angelou’s first aim to become a writer was to portray the life of the African-Americans in the racist society.

II. 4. 2. Evolution:

The life and personality of Maya progresses over the book, as we have seen in the first section of the analysis. In order to develop this part , her evolution was divided according to the places in which she lived, from the very beginning when she and her brother are sent to Stamps until the end of the book when she has grown into her mother. As Thayer Afzal states in her article “*The Song Of The Caged Bird: Revelations Of The Self In I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*”

Angelou’s first autobiographical statement is then a carefully conceived record of a young girl’s slow and clumsy growth. It is also a record of her initiation into her world and her discovery of her interior identity. It records and recounts

the life of Maya Angelou from the age of three to the age of sixteen; the first ten years of which she lived in Stamps, Arkansas, and the last three in Los Angeles and San Francisco. (03)

The places in which Maya lived affected her and her life and gave her different points of view and also knowledge about other cultures. They tasted new food, they met people from other countries (Spain, Mexico, and Germany) , Maya also began to speak Spanish. Being launched from one family to another, moved to different corners of the country, and dealing with the abandonment of her parents, Maya is left with emotional and mental scars that she carries with her as she grows up in times of turbulence and hate. *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* delves into these issues and illustrates the real hardships of being left out to dry over and over again.

Maya starts explaining how their parents decided to sent them away after “putting and end to their calamitous marriage” (Angelou P05), they arrived to Stamps after travelling alone from California; Maya realized later that this event was done also by other “frightened Black children to their newly affluent parents in Northern cities or back to grandmothers in Southern towns” (P06). In Stamps, they met Momma and Uncle Willie, and they lived in the Store. The process of adaptation took Maya and Bailey a little bit of time, but finally Stamps, and particularly the Store, was her “favorite place to be”. However, the “South” then becomes a forceful determinant in the locus of Angelou’s text. Southern life, as Angelou demonstrates, is one of harshness and brutality. It is exemplified by the conditions under which the workers of Stamps lived, the fear engendered by the Ku Klux Klan, the wanton murder of Black folks, the racial separation of the town, and the innumerable incidents of denigration which made life in the South an abomination against God and Man. (Afzal 04)

In Stamps the segregation was so complete that most Black children didn’t really, absolutely know what whites looked like. Other than they were

different, to be dreaded, and in that dread was included the hostility of the powerless against the powerful, the poor against the rich, the worker against the worked for and the ragged against the well dressed. (Angelou 25)

Maya could not think of whites as people, she affirmed people were “those who lived in my side of town” (P26). Young Maya lives under the threats of terrifying lynch mobs and the daily realities of discrimination and humiliation. Each racist incident contributes to Maya’s self-awareness and shapes her views about injustice. This is a place where her brother witnesses white men fishing the rotting corpse of a lynched black man out of the river and then making jokes, where her grandmother is humiliated by a group of poor white girls, and where her crippled uncle spends the night in a corn crib to avoid a lynch mob. (Sickels 28)

The second place in which they lived was St. Louis, where the children met their Mother, Vivian Baxter who as Maya wrote: “To describe my mother would be to write about a hurricane in its perfect power” (Angelou 59). After living with Momma and Uncle Willie in the quiet Stamps where the Store was “the centre of her life”, in St. Louis they met her mother but also her mother’s family: grandmother and grandfather Baxter and her Uncles Tutti, Tom, Ira and Billy. St. Louis also had a Negro Section, which had “all the finesse of a gold-rush town” (61). Although St. Louis was a foreign country for Maya, she was introduced to different types of food, enrolled the school and met different people.

I would never get used to the scurrying sounds of flushing toilets, or the packaged foods, or doorbells or the noise of cars and trains and buses that crashed through the walls or slipped under the doors. In my mind I only stayed in St. Louis for a few weeks. [...] I carried the same shield that I used in Stamps: “I didn’t come to stay”. (Angelou 70)

For the young Maya, Stamps is a symbol of order; in fact, the orderliness of the Store reflects the orderliness of her life in general. In St. Louis, however, Angelou is thrown into her mother’s world of taverns, pool halls, gambling, fast living and fast loving. This is a far

looser environment than Maya has ever known and one that is devoid of the customary laws that Grandmother Henderson had taught her to respect. [...] Although Maya lives comfortably in St. Louis and is excited by many aspects of urban life, she remains a stranger among strangers, mainly because the urban community treats the individual as individual rather than as part of a group, and so is powerless to provide her the emotional security she needs. (McPherson 33)

In 1941, when Maya was thirteen, she and Bailey move to Oakland and later to San Francisco to live with their mother, whom they had not seen in six years. By this time, Vivian Baxter has married Daddy Clidell, a gambler and respected businessman, who will soon become “the first father [Maya] would know. For a while, Maya reexperiences some of the personal dislocation already felt so acutely in Stamps and in St. Louis.” (McPherson 41)

In San Francisco, for the first time I perceived myself as part of something... the city became for me the idea of what I wanted to be as grownup. Friendly but never gushing, cool but not frigid or distant, distinguished without the awful stiffness” (Angelou 212)

Later, Maya again demonstrates the strong person in which she had become when she drives her drunken father out of Mexico. She knows that something terrible could happen if she does not take control. As Sidonie Ann Smith states “for the first time, Maya finds herself in control of her fate. Such total control contrasts vividly to her earlier recognition in Stamps that she as a Negro had no control over her fate. Here she is alone with that fate. And although the drive culminates in an accident, she triumphs” (Smith 368) .

In the last part of the autobiography she came back to San Francisco, she decided to look for a job. She wanted to work as a streetcar driver, but the path to gain this job was not easy. The strong personality of Maya made her fight and thanks to her perseverance she finally got

it. At first Maya's mother rejected her proposal saying: "They don't accept colored people on the streetcars" (Angelou 265), but Maya did not give up and went several times to the office to ask for the job; Her mind also shouted: "I WOULD HAVE THE JOB. I WOULD BE A CONDUCTORETTE AND SLING A FULL MONEY CHANGER FROM MY BELT. I WOULD" (269)

Finally, this autobiography represents the growth and the evolution of Maya from a gawky "too-big Negro girl with nappy black hair, broad feet and a space between her teeth that would hold a number-two pencil" (05) to a confident young woman who has an "immaculate pregnancy" (280). From being the black girl child trapped within the cage of her own diminished self-image, around which interlock the bars of natural and social forces, the Caged Bird (Maya) emerges into the brilliant skies, soaring towards the bright light of freedom and into the realms of maternal and filial love; with this, Angelou's autobiography comes to a sense of an ending.

II. 4. 3. Motherhood and Women's Influence

The autobiography of Maya Angelou, deals with the issue of women in society, in this part the analysis will deal with women who appeared in the book and the way they influenced Maya. Though there are many, three of these women are crucial for Maya's development. According to what is said previously, the three important women in Maya's life were Momma, Vivian Baxter and Mrs. Flowers. However, in the book other women appear such as Ms. Cullinan, Ms. Kirwin (who also was important for the development of Maya's artistic abilities), and also Dolores (her father's wife) among others, which were also important. Yolanda Manora in her article "*What You Looking At Me For? I Didn't Come To Stay*':

Displacement, Disruption And Black Female Subjectivity In Maya Angelou's *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*", argues:

She is nurtured by all three women and each greatly influences her emerging subjectivity. Each bequeaths to her a particular legacy that helps the child make her way in the world and helps determine who she will be in the world. As the blank slate of the "O" is filled in by one then another woman, Angelou establishes mothering as a collaborative creative process; each woman engages the role of "MOTHER" in her own way, bringing her own inimitable colors and contours to the space, revealing mothering both as a potential form of resistance and a manner of artistry with the child Maya serving as the ultimate canvas. The book ends as Maya becomes a mother and an artist in her own right, learning from her mother, expressly Vivian, but really the hybridized mother of Momma, Vivian, and Mrs. Flowers, how to mother her own child. (15)

Different authors discuss who is the essential figure to Maya's development; Momma was the first woman to educate Maya and Bailey, Vivian Baxter was her *Mother Dear* and especially in the last part of the book gave many advices to Maya and was a strong support for her. Ms. Flowers appears only in two chapters of the book, but this episode has a strong impact in Maya's way of thinking and appreciating literature.

Francoise Lionnet holds firm to her positing of Angelou's mother, Vivian Baxter, as the critical figure in young Maya's development: "It is against [Vivian's] maternal persona and role model that Maya the narrator keeps measuring her accomplishments" (132).

On the other hand, as Amy Sickels affirms in her article: "Part of what helps Maya survive the racism around her and feel more confident in herself is her connection to the black community and to the strong role models offered by her grandmother and Mrs. Bertha Flowers, "the aristocrat of Black Stamps," who takes Maya under her wing and coaxes her out of her shell—"another important turning point in the development of the autobiographer's consciousness". (27)

As Sickels argues Mrs. Flowers instills in Maya feelings of black pride and a love for literature, and also teaches her “lessons in living” (29). Angelou recalls, “It would be safe to say that she made me proud to be Negro, just by being herself” (Angelou P95).

Together, these three women form a triad that serves as the critical matrix in which the child is nurtured and sustained during her journey through Southern Black girlhood. During the historical moment in which Maya is growing up, these women also seem to represent three images of black female identity which the young girl must negotiate in the course of her own subject formation. (Manora 17)

As it is discussed, Maya’s life was not easy but she fought for her ideals and finally she became an international icon of literature and life principles. She learnt from the beginning of her life to appreciate the important things and to be perseverant to achieve objectives. It is obvious that the support of her family and friends was crucial for her development and specially these three women, who taught her different aspects of life in order to build the person in which she finally grew.

II. 5. Maya Angelou’s Influence on the Young Generation:

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

- Maya Angelou

Starting from the above declaration of Maya Angelou during her visit to York College on February, 2013, Maya has been an influential woman throughout her life; she left her mark in history and literature, celebrated the experience of being black in the US. She was a trailblazer

for many Black actors, singers and writers who came after her. The most breathtaking of all her achievements is the construction of her own personality. As she stated once, “my mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style” (Williams 50). To remember her, it is important to highlight her commitment with equality; it was a fight not only for her own life, for women and for Afro-American people, but also for peace and justice all over the world.

Though Maya Angelou has already left the world, her thoughts live on. She might not have all the time in the world to express her thoughts, but a lot of them have already been sealed in thousands of books and imprinted in our hearts and minds. At 86, Angelou, one of the best and most influential writers in history, passed away. Throughout her lifetime, she has achieved a lot and has proven how powerful and influential women can be.

Maya Angelou is known for her poems with meanings that transcend every culture. She was loved because her way of writing not only makes the readers more critical, but they are also touched in one way or the other. Some of her works might have been considered controversial. However, these controversial works paved the way for her to effect change in the society. From social injustices, oppression, slavery, inequality, gender bias, and other social issues, Angelou has made a stand. She was an award-winning author, poet, civil rights activist, college professor and screen writer. Most recognized for her literary works, Angelou was and remains among the most influential women of her time. After passing away in 2014, Angelou still is widely remembered and honored for her hard work and perseverance over decades (Tmeir 01).

Over the years, Maya Angelou has become a household name in several countries for her massive influence. In fact, a lot of her works have been translated in various languages. Her last autobiography, *Mom & Me & Mom*, was released in 2013. After the world has seen the impact of Angelou and her work, not only were her works translated, but have become integral parts of the academic curriculum in some countries, especially for courses in Literature and Culture. As Civil Rights Icon John Lewis said : Maya Angelou "Inspired An Entire Generation" (Racoma 01)

Angelou's works have also gained the attention of political leaders around the world. She has spoken in various events, became a guest speaker for events that promote social change and other charity events. Angelou's presence in African American culture, as well as contributing to American Letters, will be a fascinating topic chronicled by historians for years to come. There are a few reasons for this, most notably two very public occasions at which Angelou spoke to a large audience. The first that comes to mind is Angelou's recital of her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" at President Bill Clinton's 1993 Inaugural. Only the second poet to recite a piece at an Inaugural (Robert Frost being the first in 1961), Angelou's reading was remembered as much for the novelty of an African American poet (or, perhaps, a poet period) having such a major presence at an Inaugural as for the poetry itself. Indeed, Maya Angelou and her memories will continue to live on. (01)

Finally, Maya Angelou is a phenomenal woman because she was: a poet, a novelist, an educator, producer, and actor, musician, and civil rights activist. Her best-selling book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* gave her this fame and legacy. It is an autobiographical novel that talks about her experiences as a child in the segregated south, and also in St. Louis and San Francisco with her mother. Maya suffered of being a little black girl at a time when the world was dominated by white people. As well as, she was raped at an early age, seven years old. However, being courageous and her

love for herself, her own strong spirit and the ideas of great authors like Shakespeare, allowed her to be free instead of imprisoned. That pioneering work influenced many people and arenas starting with politics, feminism, children and everyone who reads the book. She gives a literary voice to black women writers and became a reading list staple in America. She inspired many women all over the world who are looking to survive racism, sexism and traumatic childhoods and her work will remain an inspiration for today's youth and generations in the whole universe.

Conclusion

During a long period in history, black Americans were considered as non-human , they suffered from bad treatments under slavery, racism and discrimination. In spite of these problems, they could challenge them and prove themselves over the world as literate and as American citizens.

Racial oppression was a major issue that had an impact on the lives of many black Americans. It is, undoubtedly, a history from which the whole human kind can learn to appreciate each life equally, regardless of the color of the skin or the continent from which they arrive. The African American slaves have had a long period of agonizing battle for their freedom, and one of their weapons was their writing. They wrote their accounts on the lives in slavery, of the tortures they went through under the hands of their brutal masters, their escapes from slavery and their fight for the abolition of slavery, for human rights. The slave narratives genre developed over time and became more influential and aesthetic with the contemporary black autobiographies , new writers emerged and integrated new style of writing and new themes far from the old traditional slave narratives , this inspired black women to write autobiographies ,to improve themselves seeking for freedom and depicting the white's harsh treatment . Hence , literature was their only refugee .

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is Maya Angelou's most known autobiography which holds the story of her own life from the age of 3 years old to 16 and where she treated many important themes and traumatic incidents that marked her childhood.

This research tackled the image of a black female character in African American literature. Throughout this autobiographical work, Maya tells her life story in which she learnt to live and break the cage to fly and found out her place in this world in spite of many

obstacles that hampered her during her childhood such as, the struggles to overcome racism and rape at an early age, she could manage this situation and created a self identity .

Maya Angelou's love of the great writer's literature such as William Shakespeare played a great role to become herself a famous writer that gives voice for Blacks, women and universal concerns. She gives a proof that with cultivating one's mind, striving for self improvement and being courageous, strong and dignified, whatever the difficult circumstances and obstacles that one goes through, they will be overcome. Maya Angelou also breaks many barriers by bringing to the open such kind of abuse, rape, and shows how to survive whatever happens and still be joyful. Her incredible journey has influenced many people especially Blacks, women and even presidents. She, then, bridges the world of art to many aspects, starting with politics, women and children also.

With the influence of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, one might say that literature is a weapon in the hands of human beings to inspire, impact and predominantly, to change as its contributions were not only for Blacks and Americans but will remain an inspiration and influence for many generations to come.

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الملخص

كتاب "أعرف لماذا يغرد الطائر الحبيس" هو السيرة الذاتية الأكثر نجاحا للكاتبة الأمريكية من أصل إفريقي "مايا أنجلو" عام 1969م باعتباره سرد شخصي لأحداثها الصادمة في طفولتها حيث تعكس الرواية حياة الفتاة السوداء التي عانت كلا من النزوح والفقر والعنصرية والعنف الجنسي .

الهدف من هذه الأطروحة هو تحليل تلك الأحداث التي عاشتها الشخصية الرئيسية والروائية "مايا أنجلو"، وكيف أثبتت في النهاية شفائها وهويتها الذاتية وقد تم اختيار هذه السيرة الذاتية لأنها تحمل مواضيع مهمة للغاية والتي غيرت الصورة السيئة عن الأفارقة الأمريكيين حيث يتحدث الكتاب عن النمو العقلي للكاتبة من مرحلة طفولتها إلى مرحلة بلوغها، والكيفية التي تساعد بها كل من قوة الشخصية، وحب الأدب في التغلب على العنصرية، والألام النفسية كما يتضمن هذا البحث فصلين حيث يحتوي الفصل الأول على عرض تقديمي نظري للأدب الإفريقي الأمريكي من العصور المبكرة إلى القرن العشرين ، بالإضافة إلى نظرة عامة على السيرة الذاتية الأمريكية السوداء من بدايتها باعتبارها روايات العبيد إلى روايات العبيد المعاصرة

الاستنتاجات التي تم التوصل إليها من هذا البحث هي أهمية وقوة الأدب وقراءة الكتب في حياة مايا ، وكيف كان هذا بمثابة المعجزة التي غيرت قدرها من الأسوأ إلى الأفضل ونجاتها بعد كل ما مرت به يتحدث الكتاب عن النمو العقلي للكاتبة من مرحلة طفولتها إلى مرحلة بلوغها، والكيفية، التي تساعد بها كل من قوة الشخصية، وحب الأدب في التغلب على العنصرية، والألام النفسية