Racial Discrimination and Violence: A Psycho-Social Analysis of Richard Wright's *Native Son and the Long Dream*

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Abstract

Racial discrimination, the quest for freedom and the struggle for survival are the major aspects of African-American history. From the advent of the seventeenth century up to the twentieth century, African-Americans were exposed to various forms of oppression and discrimination that devastated their psyches and forced them to resort to escape mechanisms necessary for survival. Therefore, African-American writers, among whom Richard Wright (1908-1960) is a leading figure, have always been concerned with pinpointing the African-American predicament within the socio-political context of that history. The main objective of this paper is to explore Wright's portrayal of the African-American predicament in the first half of the twentieth century and to psychoanalytically examine the impact of racial oppression on African-Americans, especially in Native Son (1940) and The Long Dream (1958). Set in the North and the South during the 1930s and 1940s, Native Son and The Long Dream, respectively, strike at the exclusion of African- Americans and their futile hopes of integration. This paper demonstrates that in these two novels, the history of racial oppression produced psychologically disordered AfricanAmericans who are chained by the labyrinth of neurotic anxiety, fear, and castration complex. Based on the psychoanalytic criticism which argues that a literary text is an expression of its • author's own neuroses, the paper also refers to Wright's autobiography Black Boy (1945) in order to prove that Wright's two novels are a portrait of his own life and ideological stances; his characters' ruthless experiences and their reactions in the two novels are simply his own.

Keywords:racism, racial oppression, psychoanalysis, neurotic disorders, anxiety, fear, castration complex

Aspects of Racial Oppression

As a naturalist, Wright fictionalizes the aspects of racial oppression that crippled African-Americans in the 1930's and the 1940's and depicts their effects on them. To begin with, segregation is presented in the two novels as one of the manifestations of this theme. Both Bigger and Fish live in a segregated world that excludes them and limits their movement. During the 1930's and the 1940's, Jim Crowism[1] pervaded the South as well as the North. African-Americans were left outside of most American institutions. They were confined to the black ghettoes of large cities and they lived in a Jim Crow world. In "How Bigger Was Bom", Wright describes this segregationist policy in Dixie, Chicago as he depicts it in *NS*[2]:

"There are two worlds, the white world and the black world, and they are physically separated. There are white schools and black schools, white churches and black churches, white business and black business, white graveyards and black graveyards, and, for all I know, white God and black God." (25)

In *NS,* the South and the North are pictured as an inferno where African-Americans are kept. In Chicago, Bigger Thomas, a nineteen-year old African-American immigrant from the South, lives with his mother, brother, and sister in a rat-infested room in the South Side of Chicago. His is a restricted world of the ghetto. The novel significantly opens with a rat frightening the members of the family, indicating the physical squalor of the residence as well as the metaphorical reference to fear as an inherent feature in the poverty-stricken milieu of African-Americans. Wright shows how African- Americans' places are defined in mere spatial terms. They are confined to segregationist areas which are completely isolated from white places. Bigger's first contact with the white world comes only when he is sent by the relief agency to Mr. Dalton, a white businessman to work as a chauffeur. Otherwise, he spends his entire life within the black ghetto "behind the 'line' above which Mr. Dalton, the owner, soars like a distant god ... This is Bigger's assigned placeless place" (Baker 202).

Although Mr. Dalton is Bigger's landlord, they have never seen each other before. According to Joyce Ann Joyce, *NS* isbased on the idea that "social, economic and political practices of segregation foster demeaning, destructive psychological attitudes that imbue the personalities of both Wright's Black and white characters" (30). E. LaleDemirturk also suggests that Bigger symbolically lives in a mental slum because of the policy of segregation in Chicago where he is "pinned down to a role in life with no outlets" (268). Joyce's and Demirturk's argument also applies to the case of Fish, the African- American protagonist of *LD?*

In Fish's Mississippi, racial segregation is also widely practiced. Like Bigger, Fish suffers from segregation; although he enjoys the prosperity of a middle-class life, he lives in America like a second-class citizen. In the town of Clintonville, where he lives, there are about ten thousand African-Americans and fifteen thousand whites, but a wall of segregation keeps them apart. Joyce equates racism with slavery and considers segregation one of its major practices:

"While the system of slavery represents the most extreme division of American society into two basic subgroups, racism, its replacement, transforms the discriminatory practices of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into the cosmological order of segregation." (Joyce 30)

Writing in 1955, only three years before the publication of *LD*, James Baldwin observes that although African-Americans are finally proved not to be biologically or mentally inferior towhites, they are still segregated: "Up to today we are set at a division, so that he [the African-American] may not marry our daughters or our sisters, nor may he - for most part - eat at our tables or live in our houses." (Baldwin 6)

In *LD*, as in *NS*, segregation pervades every aspect of African-American life, like public places and means of transport. As a little boy, Fish is forced to go to the farm's fair only one day a week. When he goes with his friends, Jim Crowism faces them everywhere. At the ticket window, a sign announces "COLORED TICKETS," but even on that day, white people intrude if "they wanted to" *(LD* 41, 42). Fish and his friends sense this form of injustice with which they are treated: "But we can't come on *their* days", Tony, Fish's friend, points out. "Hell, it's a *white* folks' world", Sam says cynically. (42)

Because they are not allowed to get jobs other than in service and menial work, African-Americans lack vocational opportunities which could improve their status. Early in *NS*, as Bigger and his friend Gus are watching a plane flying, they feel the socio-economic chains placed upon them. Bigger tells his friend: "Them white boys sure can fly ... [T]hey get a chance to do everything" *(NS* 19). Frustrated by the lack of a wider range of choice, Fish also cries in despair: "But I *want* a [sic] equal chance" *(LD* 143). The italic word here emphasizes Fish's sense of deprivation and tortured psyche. Three times Bigger helplessly expresses his hope to fly a plane; he desperately cries: "I could fly one of them things if I had a chance" *(NS* 20). Gus.faces Bigger with the reason why he cannot fly a plane; it stems from the notion of racial capitalism which aims at keeping African-Americans economically in a subordinate status in order to preserve the wide gap that separates the two races: "If you wasn't black and if you had some money and if they'd let you go to that aviation school, you *could* fly a plane" (20). But since Bigger is both black and poor, he would never be allowed to fly a plane; flying planes would indicate the African-American's prosperity and economic independence. Contemplating all the "ifs" Gus mentions, Bigger realizes the scope of the social injustice and the barriers that prevent him from achieving his aspirations. He is so obsessed by this idea that his mind makes up unanswerable questions: "Why they make us live in one comer of the city? Why don't they let us fly planes and run ships ..." (23). The dots at the end of the utterance are significant because they are indicative of the endless questions in Bigger's mind about social injustice. Bigger and Gus fail to find answers for these questions, but it is obvious that the racial system deliberately seeks to keep African-Americans poor, powerless, and inferior.

Wright also resorts to imagery to show the weight of segregation on African-Americans. For example, in *NS* beast imagery is employed to reflect the inhumanity of African- Americans' conditions and the colossal gap that separates the two races. The Black Belt where Bigger lives is presented as a jungle and African-Americans as mere beasts that must beexcluded from the civilized white society: "The black ghetto is the kingdom of the beast. Its streets are long paths leading through a dense jungle, lit here and there with torches held high in invisible hands" (Felgar 103). The beast image helps identify Bigger's conditions and his dilemma. For whites, he is just a tiny beast trapped in the ghetto and will be crushed if *it* attempts to go out of *its* hole. In this context, the rat image in the opening scene is significant because it is symbolic of Bigger's own position and final fate. Bigger himself refers to his ghetto as a den of animals: "They keep us bottled up here like wild animals" *(NS* 233).

When Bigger tells his friend Jack that he would like to go to the white nightclub presented in the movie *The Gay Woman,* Jack shakes Bigger's delusion using beast imagery: "Man, if them folks saw you they'd run ... They'd think a gorilla broke loose from the zoo and put on a tuxedo (33). Through such beast images, Wright manages to convey the message that African-Americans are looked upon as beasts that should be kept isolated in black ghettoes.

Although Fish does not suffer from appalling economic conditions like Bigger, he is influenced by the humble status of his people. As a rent collector, Fish is an observer of the poverty and impecunious conditions of African-Americans in Clintonville, Mississippi. He meets women who, out of hunger and poverty, "tried to swap their bodies for rent" *(LD* 202). Several times, Fish is faced by women who try to give him sexual pleasure for little money or because they cannot pay theweekly rent. An African-American woman sums up the conditions of most African-Americans when she tells Fish: "We never have enough to eat. We just manage to pay rent. The kids ain't got enough clothes" (197). Fish's sense of deprivation is also clear as he compares the public accommodations in the black ghetto with those in white districts. Comparing the streets of white people and those where African-Americans live, Fish tells his girlfriend Gladys: "We pay the same taxes, but they don't keep our streets clean like this. They got four times as much space to live in as we got. We live in a hole; they live in the open" (204). Segregated in inferno-like black ghettoes and circumscribed by poverty and humble conditions, Wright's protagonists come to feel that they are living in an unjust environment in which they are inevitably victimized.

To implement the policies of segregation and economic exploitation, which aim at keeping the African-American in mean conditions, the white society attempts to terrorize African- American communities through mob violence, carried out by racial groups. According to Wright, the separation of the two races"was accomplished ... by the terror of the KKK which swept the newly freed Negro through arson, pillage, and death out of the United States Senate, the House of Representatives, the many state legislatures, and out of the public, social, economic life of the South." ("How Bigger..." 25)

Commenting on lynching against African-Americans in the South, where *LD* is set, Wright argues that the relations between whites and African-Americans are so "volatile and tense ... that if a Negro rebels against rule and taboo, he is lynched and the reason for the lynching is usually called 'rape'" (26). According to Margaret Walker, during the first half of the twentieth century, "lynching and mob rule become an accepted part of the social order of Adams County [Wright's birthplace], throughout j Mississippi, the South, and the rest of the United States" (15, 16).*NS* itself is based on a case of lynching.[4] In "How Bigger Was Bom", Wright explains the injustice and violence that accompany this case. When a crime occurs, the whole Black Belt is exposed to mob violence and in most cases any African- American is picked up in order to appease the public opinion:

Squad cars cruise the Black Belt and grab the first Negro boy who seems to be unattached and homeless. He is held for perhaps a week without charge or bail, without the privilege of communicating with anyone, including his own relatives. After a few days this boy 'confesses' anything that he is asked to confess, any crime that handily happens to be unsolved and on the calendar. Why does he confess? After the boy has been grilled night and day, hanged up by his thumbs, dangled by his feet out of [1] twenty-story windows, and beaten, he signs the papersbefore him. (41)

Such is the world that nurtures and circumscribes Bigger and Fish. Even as a little boy, the world of Bigger is filled with violence. While he was still in the South, Bigger lost his father who was killed by whites in a race riot *(NS* 74).

Similarly, throughout his childhood and adolescent years, Fish.becomes an eyewitness to the daily terror surrounding African-Americans in the South. Gradually, he comes to be conscious of the underlying menaces that face African-Americans. At the age of six, a white man catches him and forces him to shoot dice for him, to bring him luck, because, as he says, "[n]iggers are bom with luck" *(LD* 17). The white men who are playing torture Fish and finally order him to run, crashing a brick at his heels. At the age of twelve, Fish is introduced to the major danger that faces African-Americans which is lynching. He comes face-to-face with it through the lynching of his friend Chris Sims who has been alone with a white woman. As in *NS,* Wright here uses beast imagery to describe the process of chasing and hunting Chris. The black ghetto becomes a jungle where Chris hides and where white hunters chase him. The whole jungle is forced to turn off the light and keep still when whites "deputized three thousand men to catch him" (76). During the chase, Tyree orders his son Fish and his wife to keep quiet and never turn on the light. When Fish attempts just to stand up, his father scolds him, ordering him to lie down and lower his head.

Hiding the head, the center of reason and rationality, symbolically reduces Fish, his father, andmother to irrational animals. After Chris is finally hunted, black beasts go out of their holes: "There ain't no danger now ... Them white folks is quiet now ... They had their blood-fun", Tyree tells his son (71). After Chris is lynched and castrated, white mobs, having got "their blood-fun ... after killing a black man, they git nice and quiet and kind for a little while" (71). Castrating an African-American shows the morbid psyche not only of white men but also of white women: "To get a chance to mutilate 'im was part of why they killed 'im. And you can bet a lot of white women were watching eagerly when they did it" *(LD* 77, 78). Wright here gives a carbon copy of what actually happens in cases of lynching against African-Americans throughout their history.

In *NS*, too, mob violence accompanies Bigger's arrest and trial. Many whites go out to hunt him, and when he is caught, they try to lynch him, stamping him with filthy epithets which recall the beast imagery discussed earlier: "Lynch 'im! ... That black sonofabitch! ... Kill that black ape!" *(NS* 253). Like a hunted animal, Bigger is dragged by policemen down the stairs of the building, where he was hiding, and through the streets over the snow. The racial *Tribune* describes him as an animal: "He looks exactly like an ape! ... His lower jaw protrudes obnoxiously, reminding one of a jungle beast" (260). Moreover, many African-Americans lose their jobs and others are beaten and dismissed from their houses. This mob violence in the book shows how the race system seizes upon such individual cases toterrify African-Americans. This recalls the many cases of violence and lynching in African-American history which were done under the sponsorship of legal white authorities. These are the conditions into which African-Americans like Bigger and Fish are catapulted and nourished and they are not without negative impacts.

Bigger's and Fish's Neurotic Disorders

Bigger's and Fish's experiences with subjugation affect their psychological makeup and expose them to neurotic disorders. Psychologists believe that neuroses do not work in a vacuum; rather, they result from "complex interrelations between the individual and his environment" (Christozov et. al 64). In other words, neurotic disorders need a context to appear and grow. In her book *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* (1936), Karen Homey, a psychologist, also shows the role of cultural and environmental factors in the genesis of neurosis. She argues that negative experiences in early childhood could trigger anxiety in adulthood. A child who is brought up in a corrupting and destructive environment, full of frustration, repression, and conflict, is apt to develop a neurotic attitude in future. Homey believes that the environment of childhood is a key role in personality development. She also finds that some of the cultural causes of neurosis are discrimination, exploitation, inequality in learning and job opportunities, and social status. (Qtd in Fahmy 337 - 43) A close reading of Wright's fiction shows that his characters' world is filled with fear as one form of neurotic disorders. Fear is defined by psychologists as "an intense, primitive response to danger; a condition during which, according to the emergency theory, the body is being prepared to run, to elude detection by 'freezing*, or to fight" (Ondishko 58). According to psychologists, fears "originate in traumatic experiences of helplessness in painful situations" (58). African- Americans in Wright's works are always afraid of the white oppressor who segregates them, terrorizes them, lynches them, and keeps them in menial jobs; they are afraid of their own impotency that always fails them in decisive moments; in a word, they are afraid of their own fear which keeps them inferior and prevents them from ever facing their tormentors. In *NS*, Wright shows that the world of his characters is based on fear:

To Bigger and his kind white people were not really people; they were a sort of great natural force, like a stormy sky looming overhead, or like a deep swirling river stretching suddenly at one's feet in the dark. As long as he and his black folks did not go beyond certain limits, there was no need to fear that white force. But whether they feared it or not, each and every day of their lives they lived with it; even when words did not sound its name, they acknowledged its reality. (109)

This quotation also illustrates Wright's naturalistic representation since he views the white people as strong forces that shape and direct African-Americans.

As a rent collector, Fish, too, notices that African- Americans are anxious and afraid of whites. He says to his father: "Our folks is*sick*, Papa. All the black folks I meet's worried to death about white folks - talking about 'em all day and all night. They laugh, sing, and dance, but they worried" *(LD* 198). Fish's friend Tony sums up the impacts of racism on African-Americans, showing how fear is a major factor that dominates their relationship with whites: "They so scared to *death*\ ... They so scared they scared to say they scared" *(LD* 106, 107).

Fear here is not the fear which is part of everyone's makeup, which is natural and positive as it makes one cautious or alert, fear in *NS* and *LD* is a negative kind, a mark of a morbid psyche. Wright calls the natural kind of fear primal or first fear which, in a world of racial intimidation, like the one Bigger and Fish face in America, becomes "naked, exposed, unprotected,... opened to every trivial blast of daily or hourly circumstance." ("How Bigger..." 38)

In both novels, the existence of Wright's protagonists is dominated by fear. Near the end of *NS*, for instance, when Max, the white Communist lawyer, asks Bigger what exactly he is afraid of as an African-American, Bigger utters only one word which indicates that fear is part and parcel of his entire being:

"'Everything', he breathed and buried his face in his hands"

(328). The single-word utterance, the sigh, and the act of burying the face all show how deep Bigger's wound is and how overwhelming is the destructive impact of oppression on him. In an almost identical statement, Fish expresses the fear that looms over his narrow world: "Papa's scared. Mama's scared. They *all* scared" *(LD* 69). Bigger's and Fish's utterances give the impression that their whole existence is based on fear. This also means that Wright here depicts "a world in which all people ... are controlled by a wide variety of crippling fears" (Rugoff 52). It is a world in which, as Wright observes, "[y]ou ate, slept, breathed, and lived fear. Somewhere out there in the gray void was the ever-lurking enemy who shaped your destiny" *(LD* 289). Symbolically, Fish, Bigger and all African-Americans in the two novels are frightened because any African-American is a target for white terrorism. According to Bell Hooks, because of white racism, the term 'white' for an African-American is often a "representation of terror" (172). Hooks's words here denote that the connotations of the word 'white' are reversed; instead of symbolizing innocence, optimism, and peace, the term comes to indicate fear, compulsion, and evil.

According to psychoanalysts, fear may develop into an uncontrollable state with incalculable consequences. When a person senses a greater level of menace, his/her fear may develop into another form: "As danger increases, fear may escalate into panic. At that time thought deteriorates into distorted mental images, into complete irrationality" (Ondishko58). This is exactly what happens with Bigger in his relationship with Mary Dalton:

"Being increasingly aware of the inequality between his social and economic conditions and those of the Daltons, Bigger develops irrational hatred and fear of Whites, which leads him to accidentally suffocate Mr. Dalton's daughter (Mary) to death." (M'Baye 78-79)

In *NS* and *LD*, fear inevitably leads to neurotic anxiety. Although Sigmund Freud believes that anxiety results from internal, conscious conflicts, behavioral researchers have recently challenged this view, arguing that "most anxiety is triggered by social factors" (Bufka). In his book *Escape from Freedom*, Erich Fromm argues that '"man's nature, his passions, and anxieties are cultural products'" (Qtd in May 151). Rollo May also believes that "whether one is investigating children's fears or anxiety in psychosomatic disorders or anxiety in the various forms of individual neurosis ... one cannot avoid the realization that the cultural milieu is always part of the warp and woof of the anxiety experience" (151). Wright's characters are always anxious of a world they fear and worried about their shady existence in that world. In psychology texts, anxiety is defined as "a pervasive apprehension of a threat of danger" (Ondishko 58). Freud defines anxiety as "the fundamental phenomenon and the central problem of neurosis" (May 87). Anxiety disorders have different forms. The most common type in Wright's novels is called 'generalized anxiety disorder'. TheAmerican Psychiatric Association defines general anxiety disorder as "excessive anxiety and worry about a *number* of events or activities" (Craske 291). Among the factors for anxiety in normal people are societal problems and oppressive environment.

A close reading of *NS* and *LD* shows that the source of Bigger's and Fish's anxiety lies in the abnormal race relations in their society. For example, Bigger and Fish are anxious and confused in the presence of white people. When Bigger goes to meet Mr. Dalton, anxiety accompanies him. As he approaches the picket fence of the house, "only fear and emptiness fill him" *(NS* 45). He stands in front of the house perplexed. The mere arrival at a white neighborhood made him so anxious that he hoped that he "could have stayed among his people and escaped feeling this fear and hate. This was not his world" (46). The same sense of anxiety haunted Wright in *Black Boy*, when, as a little boy, he went to a white neighborhood to sell his dog for a dollar so that he may buy something to eat. While he waited for a white woman to fetch him the dollar, he grew tense; he wondered:

Would someone say that I was a bad nigger and try to kill me here? What was keeping the woman so long? Would she tell her people that a nigger boy had said something wrong to her? Perhaps she was getting a mob? ... My mounting anxieties drowned out my hunger. (67)

Bigger's feat of IsAr. Da\ton as a "wlniteitvatv also makes him. anxious. When Mr. Dalton asks him for the paper that the relief agency gave him, he searches for it nervously; he drops his cap in the process, and "his impulses were deadlocked; he did not know if he should pick up his cap and then find the paper, or find the paper and then pick up his cap" *(NS* 49). Bigger's anxiety is revealed in his physical and facial expressions. He does not dare to raise his eyes to the level of Mr. Dalton's face; he "stood with his knees slightly bent; his lips partly open; his shoulders stooped and his eyes held a look that went only to the surface of things" (50). All these are symptoms of anxiety and insecurity, feelings that are also evident in *LD.*

Like Bigger, Fish's anxiety stems from his being black in a white man's world. Contemplating his status as an African- American and the obstacles that hinder any normal contact with his white neighbors, Fish's mind reaches an impasse. His inability to figure out how to deal with white people intensifies his anxiety: "Sitting tensed, he stared in the dark and tried to imagine how he would talk to a white boy or girl and his mind went blank. He mused upon how close they were, the blacks and whites, and yet how far apart" *(LD* 67). Fish's anxiety is also evident after he leaves the police station and meets whites in the street. Like Bigger when he meets Mr. Dalton, the mere existence of white people makes Fish tense and confused:

[T]here were too many faces about him and their presence seemed to be prompting him to perform an act whosename he did not know. Should he bow down, run, curse, just try to act normal? And because he did not know what to do, he felt anxious, ill at ease. He longed for the haven of his Black Belt. (129, 130)

Like their fear, however, Bigger's and Fish's anxiety is mainly caused by white women.

As a white woman, Mary Dalton in *NS* is another source of Bigger's anxiety and bewilderment. Her behavior cannot be expected by Bigger. She is frank, easy-going, and unreserved, things which Bigger as an African-American does not grasp or expect. On first meeting him, Mary keeps asking Bigger if he belongs to a union and speaks to him frankly in front of her father. This confuses Bigger who feels that her words may lead him to lose his job. Sensing the menace embedded in Mary's words, "Bigger wished the girl had not said anything about unions. Maybe he would not be hired now. Or, if hired, maybe he would be fired soon if she kept acting like that" *(NS* 54). When Bigger is finally hired and given a comfortable room, he feels that this would be a good job, except for Mary: "She worried him. She might cause him to lose his job if she kept talking about unions ... Never in his life had he met anyone like her. She puzzled him. She was rich, but she didn't act like she was rich" (60). As he drives her, Mary tells Bigger her secrets; she is not going to university, as she had told her father; she is going to meet her Communist friend Jan Erlone. She talks with him freely as if he were her equal, but because Bigger is notused to this feeling, being a member of an oppressed minority and she being one who belongs to the oppressor, he does not feel safe; he grows anxious and baffled by her forwardness: "She was an odd girl, all right. He felt something in her over and above the fear she inspired in him. She responded to him as if he were human, as he lived in the same world as she ... Was this some kind of game?" (66). Blind to the many obstacles that separate her from Bigger, Mary confuses Bigger with her overly kind manner. Mary seems to be an irresponsible personality whose conduct baffles Bigger:

"Upon first meeting Bigger, she completely fails to see how her mentioning of unions and capitalists and her carefree, intimate manner frighten Bigger and make him uncomfortable. She is unable to identify with human perceptions. Like her parents, she views him as an object." (Joyce 42)

Through his intimacy and Communist ideas of social equality, Jan, Mary's friend, contributes to Bigger's feeling of anxiety. Like Mary, he represents a threat to his security, shakes his inner peace, and violates his self-confidence. Though well- intentioned, Jan's behavior increases Bigger's anxiety. The moment he sees Bigger, he extends his hand to him, contrary to white traditions, smiling as if to trap him; as a result, Bigger's "body tightened with suspense and dread" *(NS* 66). Jan insists on shaking hands with Bigger while Mary laughs softly; her laugh makes Bigger both angry and puzzled: "Was she laughingat him? Were they making fun of him? What was it that they wanted? Why didn't they leave him alone? ... He felt foolish sitting behind the steering wheel like this and letting a white man hold his hand" (67). Further, Jan and Mary ask Bigger to take them to the South Side to eat where African-Americans eat. There, they invite him to eat with them; this also confuses him and makes him feel trapped. Contrary to their intention, Jan's and Mary's actions distance them from Bigger: "He did not understand them, distrusted them, and really hated them.

He was puzzled as to why they were treating him this way" (71). Forced to eat with them, as they demanded, Bigger "picked up a piece of chicken and bit it. When he tried to chew he found his mouth dry. It seemed that the very organic function of his body had altered." (73)

The problem is that Bigger was always looked upon as an inferior being, and now two white people behave contrary to the behavior he expects from whites. Therefore, Bigger cannot but interpret Jan's and Mary's behavior as an act of hostility that tends to intensify his sense of inferiority and anxiety. Joyce argues that Jan and Mary "do not understand how the difference between their skin color and Bigger's has fostered deep, emotional differences between their and his response to the world. They do not understand why Bigger is so adamantly against eating with them" (42). In "The Meaning of Bigger Thomas", Samuel Sillen explains why Jan's behavior, though well-intentioned, confuses Bigger:His good will toward Bigger Thomas outruns his understanding of Bigger. By overwhelming Bigger with impetuous kindness, by over-reaching himself in his quite sincere demonstration of friendship, Jan manages to increase the bewilderment of the man whom he would enlighten. (Sillen 85)

Sillen's words here show that mere good intention is not enough; it should be accompanied by real understanding of the African-American's psyche, his/her emotional needs, and by practical solutions to the barriers that keep the two races apart.

In *LD,* a psychological novel, Wright analyzes Fish's growing sense of anxiety through the use of the dream device. Highlighting the significance of dreams in analyzing one's psyche, Susan Budd argues that "in a sense, psychoanalysis began with dreams" (Budd 133). For Freud, dreams are "'the royal highway to knowledge of the unconscious aspect of the mind'" (Qtd in Budd 134). According to Bufka, dreams and disturbed sleep are physical symptoms that accompany anxiety (Bufka). One has to notice that in addition to the title, the first and last sections of the novel contain the word 'dream' in their titles: the first section is entitled *Day Dreams and Night Dreams* and: the third *Waking Dream.* This alludes strongly to the significance of dreams in the novel and in understanding the psychological makeup of its protagonist. According to the psychologist Barbara Raven Lee, dreams "are [the] powerful altered state of our psyche ... The dream is specifically theutterance of the unconscious" (Lee). For Jung, dreams "are symbolic representations of the psyche" (Lee). Taken this way, Fish's dreams are not without significance; they give insight into his disturbed psyche and the inner conflict that irritates him.

Fish's fears, particularly of white women, make him restless; they find expression in his dreams and sleeping disorders. Early in the novel, Wright describes a dream Fish has at the age of six which reflects his confusion of masculine and feminine attributes, and reveals his castration fears. In the dream, he sees a huge, angry fish coming towards him with an open mouth. He tries to hit the fish with a baseball bat, but when he looks at it again, it is not the fish, but his grown-up friend Chris who asks him to play baseball with him. When Fish throws the ball, it is not Chris, but a seven-foot fish that takes the ball and throws it at him; the ball rests between his teeth and Fish knows that "the fish had done to him what his papa did to fishes catching him on a hook and the fish was coming at him with gleaming red eyes and he tried to scream but could not" *(LD* 10). The presence of Chris in the dream here seems like a significant element in Fish's life, foretelling, later on, how Chris's fate affects Fish. In addition, the dream is symbolic of Fish's confusion of values; the white fish bladders which his father teaches him to blow up into the dimension of a balloon reminds him of the belly of a pregnant woman (that is how he comes to be called Fishbelly). This connection between the white fish bladders and the white bellies of women shows how Confusion seeps into Fish's social outlook: "Because he is brought up in the American culture, Fish belly dreams the same dreams as the white world. But it is the white belly of the woman that symbolizes his castration and he must live with this terror as part of his dream" (Margolies 153). The presence of the fish also symbolizes Fish's cowardice and future impotence; he will never be able to aspire to assert himself through such violent acts as those selected by Bigger.

In psychoanalytical terms, castration complex is a form of anxiety that governs Wright's protagonists' relationship with the white world. According to Cynthia Chase, anxiety is psychoanalytically defined as an "endemic hazard like free- floating libido, or alternatively, as a specific hazard like castration" (74). At the age of twelve, Fish sees the mutilated body of Chris on an embalming table in his father's mortuary and observes how he had been castrated by a white mob. As he looks at the mutilated body, Fish sees "a dark, coagulated blot in a gaping hole between the thighs" *(LD* 77).

Realizing that Chris's genitals are gone, Fish unconsciously "with defensive reflex ... lowered his hands nervously to his groin" *(LD* 77). This is a clear proof that Fish has already developed a castration complex; the terror of lynching is no longer away from him.Therefore, the castration and lynching of Chris throw Fish into a psychological trauma. For him, Chris represented a role model and a personality that is completely different from his father's passive personality. Edward Margolies argues thatfor Fish and Wright the death of Chris has symbolic and larger social implications. He observes that the African-American "who submits to white oppression is as much castrated psychologically as the bellhop [Chris] is physically" (150). In more than one sense, the lynching of Chris distorts Fish's psyche for life.

Psychoanalytically, real incidents of castration may lead to a castration complex as a form of anxiety among individuals. For Freud, "anxiety is a mode of expectation" as well as a method of *"remembering* rather than *repeating* the past" (Bloom 189). Fish's castration anxieties are recalled in his later experiences. When he is arrested for trespassing, a policeman attempts to satisfy his sick personality by frightening him with a knife: "Nigger, I'm going to *castrate* you" *(LD* 111). Hearing the word, Fish's mind recalls the image of Chris's body and his castration complex returns afresh. Immediately, he passes out and faints: "An enormous curtain of black appeared and dashed itself against Fish's eyes. He had fainted, has passed out cold" (111). When he revives, he unconsciously touches his groin, as he did when he saw Chris's body, to make sure that he has not been castrated (113). This trauma lasts for several hours during which white sadists, taking pleasure in Fish's reaction, order him to faint again (112 - 120). Consequently, Fish gradually comes to realize that whites are capable of castrating and murdering African-Americans and their society will protectthem. Similarly, this castration image is implicitly traced in *NS* to mark the negative impact of Mary Dalton on Bigger.

If *LD* presents overtly physical castration, *NS* shows how African-Americans are psychologically castrated. Mary's sexual allusions serve to emasculate Bigger because he cannot cope with her advances. She baffles him by her insinuations. Like a forbidden fruit before a hungry man, she indirectly encourages him to approach her sexually: she is too frank with him, touches his body, drinks with him, smiles when he looks at her bare thighs, sits in the front seat with him, sprawls her legs wide apart, tells him that he is very nice, leans her head on his shoulder, and finally asks him to carry her to her room because she is drunk *(NS* 80, 81). Such behavior makes Bigger hate her because she represses him sexually. He hungers for her but cannot touch her for this is a taboo. As she sways before him, smiling, Bigger "watched her with a mingled feeling of helplessness, admiration, and hate ... she was beautiful, slender, with an air that made him feel that she did not hate him with the hate of other white people." (81). As he attempts to help her to her room, Mary's erotic incitement to him becomes explicit:

Her face was buried in his shoulder; his arms tightened about her. Her face turned slowly and he held his face still, waiting for her face to come round, in front of his. Then her head leaned backward, slowly, gently; it was as though she had given up. Her lips, faintly moist in the hazy blue light, were parted and he saw the furtive glintsof her white teeth. Her eyes were closed ... He eased his hand, the fingers spread wide, up the center of her back and her face comes toward him and her lips touched his. *(NS* 83, 84)

It is clear here that Mary is the initiating and sexually aggressive partner; this is even indicated by the linguistic aspects of the above extract; Mary and her body are the subject of most action verbs. These sexual gestures of Mary emasculate and castrate Bigger psychologically because she is a forbidden fruit. So, he has to repress his sexual desires, to erase his lust so that he can avoid physical castration. But, all in all, by erasing his desires, Bigger also, like Fish, erases his masculinity. This idea of psychological emasculation is also traced in *Black Boy* in which Wright narrates how he used to see white women naked in the rooms of the hotel in which he worked for a while. This tortured him because he could not even look at them since they were forbidden fruits. Once he unconsciously looked at a nude white woman while he served her in her room, and her lover threatened to castrate him. (193, 194)

Thus, castration in the two novels has social, economic, and political implications as well as physical ones. Anthony Dawahare argues that in Wright's Depression Era works, African- Americans suffered from feelings of powerlessness and these inevitably lead to feelings of emasculation. He argues that "Wright shows how these feelings of emasculation can be intensified for black men, since they are extra-oppressed byracism and are symbolically emasculated as "boys" in a racist discourse" (452). The castration metaphor also has other implications. In *NS*, Bigger complains that he does not have the chance to be a pilot or an officer.[5]This deprivation isconsidered a sort of castration:

"Being cut off, castrated, from white male patriarchal privileges like flying planes and not having credible access to mainstream male communities are significant impotencies that are often consequential for African American males." (Jones 47)

Physical castration in *LD* also has wider implications for it connotes the loss of African-American manhood. Castrating Chris suggests "'an ironic reversal in that there is a communal rape of the black man by the crowd which executes him. They violate him by exposing the most private parts of his body and by forcing him, finally, into ultimate submission to them'" (Qtd in Geiger 201). Felgar also believes that Chris's lynching reflects the theme of manhood which is central in almost all Wright's works. He says that in "denying manhood to Chris by slicing off his genitalia, the whites terrify the young Fish and force him to accept his social emasculation" (128). Accordingly, Chris's body has a negative lesson which "serves to deconstruct - or unmake - the evolving masculine identity of the novel's protagonist" (Geiger 197). In other words, the image of Chris's body fills Fish with fear and in turn draws out any seeds of masculinity that might have been growing within him. Thus, in both novels, Wright uses the castration metaphor to highlight the emasculation of African-Americans who are held in subjugation by whites. These forms of fear, in addition to being a sign of a distorted psyche, pave the way for the genesis of other forms of neuroses.

Another type of anxiety is 'post-traumatic' disorder which people experience after severe events. As Esther Rashkin, a psychoanalyst, puts it, "traumatic events, relationships, and environments" produce, among other things, "depression [and] anxiety" (Rashkin 18). Rashkin asserts that "the haunting presence of a phantom" is a symptom of several disorders among which is castration anxiety:

The child haunted by a phantom becomes a living tomb or repository in which an unspeakable drama, experienced as traumatic by someone else, lies buried yet alive, exerting its disruptive influence in a potentially infinite number of ways on the existence of the child or on the child grown to adulthood. (Rashkin 94)

Andrew R. Getzfeld considers posttraumatic disorder "the most fascinating" among "all the anxiety disorders in psychology" because, he believes, this type "affects about 8% of the adult population in the United States" (29). In LD_t Fish is haunted by Chris's castrated body even in his dreams. According to Daniel Pick and Lyndal Roper, the dream is a major source of anxiety. They argue that in psychoanalysis, the dream "can be interpreted so as to free the dreamer from the anxiety expressed in thedream" (Intro. 19). This anxiety is felt in Fish's dreams. For example, after Fish witnesses Chris's lynching and recognizes his father's fear and cowardice, his psychological trauma finds expression in his dreams. The night he sees Chris's mutilated body, his anxiety is worked out in a terrible dream. He dreams of a big *white* clock, with a *white* face and two *white* hands, a fish belly, and a locomotive (Italics mine). The clock and the locomotive start speaking, then the fish belly continues to swell like a big balloon. The belly becomes so large that it occupies the whole room, blocking the doors and windows. The belly pushes him against the wall, pressing hard against his face, while the clock and the locomotive continue making noisy sounds. Then, the fish belly bursts and from it flows a flood of blood. Fish sees the naked body of Chris coming out of the belly with the blood. The blood spreads in the room, and covers his feet, getting higher and higher until it engulfs his head.

The dream is symbolic of the impact of white violence on Fish's psyche. The word *white* is used four times to qualify the major objects in the dream (i.e. the clock, its face, and its two hands). The presence of the white image throughout the dream shows the extent to which fear of whites dominates Fish's life as well as his world of the unconscious. The sounds of both the clock and the locomotive speed up the rhythm of the dream and figuratively reflect Fish's anxiety and nervousness. The link between the white clock, the fish belly (a symbol of white woman) and Chris's body coming out of it, and Fish's horror isaptly portrayed to reflect the destructive impact of repression. Fish is haunted by the idea that white women are the source of the African-American's victimization. Fear of white violence haunts Fish and the dream is his device of revealing his anxiety and how he is fixated by this fear. It is worth noting that Wright himself as a boy was haunted by terrible dreams and sleeping disorders which were symptoms of his anxiety especially after traumatic experiences. In *Black Boy,* he narrates how, after he was severely beaten by his mother, he had a nightmare in which the udders of great white cows were hanging over his head, trying to drench him in some terrible liquid. (8, 9)

In Psychoanalytical terms, dreams represent one of the major devices for expressing repression and anxiety. In dreams, one's castration anxiety is revealed. According to Rashkin, "castration anxiety" is part and parcel of Freudian theory of psychoanalysis and is considered one of "its core concepts" (15).

After he is relentlessly abused and almost castrated by policemen for just looking at a white woman, Fish expresses his neurotic anxiety in dreams. That night, he has a nightmare involving a white woman as a symbol of seduction and destruction. He imagines that he is shoveling coal into the roaring firebox of a runaway locomotive. The white engineer urges him to shovel more coal. When he scoops up coal, the lumps rolled away and he sees the naked body of a white woman who is smiling at him, while the white engineer shouts at him for more coal. He tries to shovel coal without touching her, butshe seizes the shovel and smiles. Terrified, Fish stands sweating, fearing that the woman would speak or that the engineer might see her. He has one of three options: either to hit the woman, or hit the engineer, or leap into the whirling passing woods. He finally chooses the last alternative.
Psychoanalytically, Fish's sense of tension between the white woman and the white engineer shows his anxiety and fear of being castrated. The white woman here, with her dangerous smile, is a symbol of the causes of lynching against African- Americans, while the white engineer is the device with which lynching is carried out, and Fish is afraid of both. The suffering which Fish goes through in the police station because of a white woman finds its way to his unconscious mind through dreams. It is significant to notice here that Fish's decision to jump from the locomotive, rather than confront the two white people, anticipates his resorting to flight later, as his only viable option. Hartmann's work in dreams after trauma shows that the "connections made in dreaming are not random. They are guided by the dominant emotions of the dreamer." (Hartmann)

This idea is also manifest in Fish's dreams after the death of his father. Thinking of his people's passivity in the face of white people, ashamed of his dead father who had made money by dirty means as the only way allowed him by white oppressors, Fish's anxiety of a hazy future, his bitterness and sense of guilt are dreamed out. He dreams of the half white Gladys, his mistress, and Gloria, his father's mistress, who cometo him at his father's office. They give him a lot of money, telling him that they have embezzled it for him from white men. When he reluctantly takes the money, the Chief of police, Cantley, comes in, telling him that he has bitten the bait. Gladys and Gloria laugh, telling him that he is black and they are white and that he should not have trusted them. Fish runs to a rear room filled with coffins and hides in one of them, pretending that he is dead. But the Chief of police discovers him while Gladys and Gloria keep laughing. The Chief gives him two alternatives: either be buried, or come out and go to jail.

This dream unveils certain points concerning Fish's state of mind. In the first place, he is preoccupied with whites, particularly white women. He is even anxious about Gladys and Gloria and identifies them with the white oppressor because they have some white blood. This further explains why Fish is not at ease in the company of Gladys, although she is his mistress and he ostensibly loves her. The two women's laughter recalls Mary's laughter in *NS* which Bigger interprets as a sign of her deception and his entrapment. Secondly, as long as he lives in America, Fish has one of two alternatives: either to die or to live in prison. Ironically these are not alternatives to choose from, yet, the African-American's fate is circumscribed by whites; it is they who decide for an African-American where to live and when to die. The prison may be literal, anticipating Fish's unjust imprisonment later in the novel, or symbolic in the sense that the whole environment where Fish lives is a jail cell for him. He is imprisoned even within his own fears and anxieties, which are caused by racial oppression.

Thus, Wright's resorting to the dream device helps him rake towards the surface Fish's feelings of anxiety and bewilderment. When he gives us Fish's dreams Wright "is not particularly impressive, but he does manage to communicate Fish's sense that his whole life is a nightmare" (Hicks 325). It is noted that when presenting Fish's dreams, Wright omits all punctuation marks. Each dream is presented in the form of one long sentence. This has the function of speeding the action of the dream, and in so doing, the mode of representation becomes indicative of Fish's anxiety, nervousness, and his inability to deal logically with his dilemma and disorders. Fish's anxiety continues to bother him throughout his life. It does not vanish even when he is leaving America for France.

Conclusion

These are the psychological scars that haunt African- Americans like Bigger and Fish through the thorny paths of the labyrinth of racial oppression. It is a labyrinth in which only the stronger whites can survive and the weaker African-Americans are victimized. Devoid of social integration, economic independence, personal freedom, and political rights, African- Americans like Bigger and Fish become feeble preys to psychological disorders. Taking into consideration the psychological view that neurotic disorders are culturally based,there is no doubt that Bigger's and Fish's trauma and neuroses are the result of their racial culture which distorts their psychological fabric. As the argument of the present paper shows, the impacts of racial oppression are multi-faceted. That is, racial oppression does not only affect the socio-economic and political status of African-Americans.

More important is that it violates the inner structure of the African-Americans' psyches in a way that they become victims of disparate and unpredictable neuroses. As a result of the different aspects of racial oppression, African-Americans turn into psychologically crippled personalities, haunted by fear, anxiety, and castration complex.

[1] The term 'Jim Crowism' refers to a group of laws that emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with the purpose of separating the two races in all aspects of life such as public transport services, schools, restaurants, and almost all public facilities. The name 'Jim Crow' was originated in a song performed by Thomas Dartmouth, a white performer in the early nineteenth century. In this song, the name Jim Crow came to refer to a comic black character portrayed by Dartmouth (Wexler 29). The first Jim Crow law appeared in 1881 demanding that railroad companies "provide separate cars or portions of cars" for African-American passengers (Franklin 10).

Native Son, henceforth abbreviated as *NS.*

[3] *The Long Dream,* henceforth abbreviated as *LD.*

[4] In *Native Son,* Wright made use of a 1938 case involving a Chicago African-American youth called

Robert Nixon, who was arrested and accused of raping and murdering a white woman. Wright used the newspaper clippings about the Nixon case, and its coverage in the Chicago press, especially the racist *Tribune.* In "How Bigger Was Bom", Wright admits that when he was halfway through the first draft of *Native Son,* "a case paralleling Bigger's flared forth in the newspapers of Chicago. (Many of the newspaper items and some of the incidents in *Native Son* are but fictionalized versions of the Nixon case and rewrites of news stories from the *Chicago Tribune.*" (41)

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