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THE SOUTH, SLAVERY, AND THE BLACK FOLK'S SOUL-CRUSHING IN *MY FATHER'S NAME* BY LAWRENCE P. JACKSON

Introduction

American slavery is the most despicable institution experienced by Africans because of its excesses. The first African slaves arrived in Virginia in 1619. Indeed, deported to the Americas, Africans were the beast of burden of a system of dehumanization that reduced them to simple objects. The discovery and the exploitation of the American continent in the fifteenth century were at the origin of the slave trade. In fact, European settlers created plantations and mines on the American continent in general, but specifically in the South of the United States which includes Virginia. They needed more labor than the Indians weakened by several years of colonial war with the same Europeans. The option of black slaves was thus a response to their concern not only to get a robust and resilient workforce within their reach but also to have to manage a population accustomed to a climate similar to the American climate. In this context, the South became a place that combined the materiality, the meaning, and the practice of slavery. In other words, the South was a place combining the location and locale of the physical and cultural alienation of the black folk. In such circumstances of soul-crushing, feelings and emotions shared by Blacks were essentially related to their slave status. Thus, this paper critically examines Lawrence P. Jackson's perspective of recalling the horror of slavery and Blacks' struggle for freedom in the Postbellum South in *My Father's Name* (2012). In fact, as Jackson reconstructs sequences of Edward Jackson and Granville Hundley's lives, respectively his father's grandfather and great-grandfather, two black men who experienced slavery and Reconstruction, we will first show that American slavery was a racialized slavery based on the concept of Otherness, chiefly originated from the use of the notions of "being white" and "better" to establish differences between the white and the black races. Second, through Karl Marx's historical materialism, we will highlight how under capitalism the inhumane process of acquiring slaves came to resemble that of acquiring raw materials because Africans were dehumanized and commoditized. At last, we will evoke the cultural alienation of the black folk by presenting

the South as a nebulous which made it difficult for African descendants to construct their own identity.

A racialized American slavery originated from the concept of Otherness

American slavery is a racialized slavery in which Africans were unwillingly brought to American colonies by white colonists. Indeed, American slavery, known as the chattel slavery, is an institution in which Africans only were enslaved. Thus, in *My Father's Name* Lawrence P. Jackson traces back the genealogy of his family, a black family, which has experienced slavery like every African American family. These enslaved people were “transplanted West Africans, people such as the Wolof and the Mandingo,” (49) and Central Africans from Congo and Angola (105). To show the generic feature of black Africans' enslavement, Jackson says: “I guess it isn't really unique that my grandfather's father, not exactly a distant ancestor to me, was born enslaved” (44). The racialization of American slavery is grounded on various contrasts between Blacks and Whites. Africans were mainly dark skinned people, they had different cultures and beliefs, and had a world vision different from that of the white colonists. These evident contrasts have sufficed to conceptualize a structural inequality between Blacks and Whites. Accordingly, the development of this race-based slavery sharpens our comprehension of the ideological racial construction of black bestiality and inferiority which has impaired African Americans' life for centuries. The ideological difference between Blacks and Whites originated from the concept of Otherness. In the Foreword of *The Origin of Others* by Toni Morrison, Ta-Nehisi Coates states that to live as an Other is to exist beyond the border of a great belonging (Morrison, 2017, XV). Thus, to be an Other is to be identified as an outsider, a stranger or an alien in order to define one self. And Lajos Brons defines othering in these terms:

Othering is the simultaneous construction of the self or in-group and the other or out-group in mutual and unequal opposition through identification of some desirable characteristic that the self/in-group has and the other/out-group lacks and/or some undesirable characteristic that the other/out-group has and the self/in-group lacks. Othering thus sets up a superior self/in-group in contrast to an inferior other/out-group, but this superiority/inferiority is nearly always left implicit. (70)

Othering expresses the attitude or the action of treating the other as different. Thus, it represents the practices of the dominant group to which everyone who does not conform is modelled as an Other. As to Otherness, it denotes the state of being different. Othering is associated with an invented perception of difference. The inherent difference between Blacks and Whites is simply biological: the skin color. The black skin color is the category employed to justify Blacks' inferiority, and it is on the basis

of that biological difference that Whites, the dominant in-group, have constructed the dominated out-group of slaves. In this respect, Blacks are the victims of the white civilization which admits that blackness equals sin, ugliness and immorality. Blacks' identity is built up and forced upon them by the white power structure. As such, they appear as cultural subjects whose history, memory and authentic values are denied.

Otherness and othering make clear the issues of racialization as an ideological process and the uniqueness of the origin or the monogenesis of the human species. All human beings belong to the human race. On the one hand, it is indicated that Africa is the birth place of the human species, and on the other hand, one African woman is known to be the common ancestor of all humans (black, white, yellow, mixed-race, etc.). In this case, race derives from a folk idea. And the ideology about human differences is a social construction, but it does not result from a scientific process. "Race is a concept devised by one group of people to provide advantages and privileges to themselves at the expense of others" (Turner-Sadler 7).

To be an Other in America matters and the above definitions of Othering and Otherness highlight the opposition between Whites (the Self) and African Americans (the Other) in American society. One of the outcomes of the construction of the African as an Other is the concepts of "Being White" and "Better" instituted by white colonists who viewed race-based slavery as a normal abnormality. This led to stereotyping Blacks by sustaining for instance that "Whites belong to a higher species"; (189) "black Americans were really animals disguised as men" (207). "[...] Africans had been savages in need of some element of European enlightenment to become human beings ... (213) So to speak, they are suitable to enslavement. So, between 1700 and 1775, Virginia imported roughly 75,000 Africans and enslaved them" (103).

The stereotypes developed are the barriers erected between Blacks and Whites and prevented them from any harmonious cohabitation. As racial stereotypes are presented as truthful facts, Whites did not feel any remorse vis-à-vis Blacks' enslavement. Owing to the darkness of their skin, Africans were subjected to one of the cruelest forms of servitude ever known.

Chattel slavery did not exist in the early moment of the British colonies of America but the colonists made use of it in the seventeenth century. The option of black slaves was a response to white settlers' concern not only to get a robust and resilient workforce within their reach, but also to have to manage a population accustomed to a climate similar to American climate in their imperial expansion. In fact, the attempt to enslave Native Americans failed. That failure of enslaving Native Americans can be explained by the fact that "frequently, the Native Americans, who were not accustomed to forced labor, either became ill and died or simply ran away" (Turner-Sadler 32). In addition, enslaved Europeans, those who broke the law, or who were debtors, could not sup-

port harsh labor conditions, the heat, and the tropical diseases, and felt sick and died. Another reason is the fact that black Africans were accustomed to the climate and the heat of the south of the United States, and were resistant to tropical diseases and to the harsh conditions on plantations.

The so-called physical inferiority was associated with the psychological inferiority of Africans. The black skin color, the external sign, a signifier of fatality, is paired with the internal inferiority which entails the cultural traits and mental inability or ability of slaves. The interconnection of external and internal characteristics was established just to strengthen the ideological superiority of Whites. Sustaining that chattel slavery was a divine fact and consecrated by God, American enslavers made recurrent references to the biblical passages on the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt and the curse of “Blacks”.¹ For example, Jackson informs the reader that “the colonists had mythic New World dreams of extraordinary fecundity and the end of restraint. Educated and propertied white men saw themselves as biblical patriarchs and Roman gods, and they acted with that sense of cosmic entitlement (and paranoia) from a young age” (56). That is the reason why it was difficult for Southerners to get rid of slavery.

In *My Father's Name*, behind the genealogy of his family that he traces back, Lawrence Jackson recounts the history of slavery in a chronological way. He starts from the beginning to the end and finishes by adding the history of the life of the ex-slaves in the post-bellum south. Indeed, American Slavery began when the first African slaves were brought to the North American colony of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. After centuries of enslavement, the Emancipation Proclamation issued on January 1, 1863, during the American Civil War (1861–1865). The thirteenth Amendment of American constitution gave a legal content to it. But, As the Freedmen's Bureau was underfunded and understaffed, it failed to help ex-slaves by supplying them social facilities. Southern Blacks were subjected to violence from white supremacists, including terrorist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan. On the whole, they wanted to re-enslave Blacks. “Perhaps, one kind of slavery ended only for a new but similarly strict order to take its place” (76). Racial segregation, another form of slavery, replaced slavery itself.

To finish, American chattel slavery was a racialized slavery which was grounded on the concept of Otherness. American colonists succeeded in creating an ideological difference between Blacks and Whites, which served to justify the enslavement of their fellow human beings. The only sin Africans committed is to have been born

¹ To give a moral legitimacy to slavery, southerners referred to the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt to sustain the Peculiar Institution because for them, if slavery existed in the Bible, it was a divine fact. Indeed, according to the Old Testament, the Israelites had been in Egypt for generations, and as they had become so numerous, Pharaoh feared their presence and he enslaved them. In addition, the story of the so-called “Curse of Ham” in the Bible, Genesis 9, was interpreted and used as a biblical justification of the slave system.

black. Thus, nothing could justify the Peculiar Institution because human beings are biologically identical and the monogenesis implies the uniqueness of the human species. Unfortunately, the skin colors were regarded as signifiers of the categorization of humans. Then, Being white meant to be better, and being black meant to belong to sub-humanity or to a commoditized being.

African slaves, commoditized laborers in the South

In his historical materialism, Marx distinguishes five main types of relations of production: primitive communal, slave, feudal, capitalist and socialist. In the slave system, the relations of production is essentially featured by the fact that the slave-owner owns the means of production, he also owns the worker in production, the slave, whom he can sell, purchase, or kill as though he were an animal (Stalin 29). That is to say, American slavery was an institution in which the enslaved Africans were regarded as items of property, like houses or oxen, and had no rights as human beings. As well, they were commoditized beings who were regarded as simple objects that had mercantile values and were distinguishable from other goods in terms of their attributes or their uniqueness. American slavery was centered in the South of the United States of America and became the main feature of its economy formation.

The Antebellum South was a rural area whose economy was based on agriculture. In fact, European settlers created cotton fields, sugar cane plantations, and mines on the American continent in general, and in the South of the United States in particular. In this regard, the option of black slaves thus responded to the concern of Europeans to have more labor. Therefore, The South was a place which combined the location and the locale of the physical, mental, psychological, and cultural alienation of the black folk. According to T. Cresswell,

Location refers to an absolute point in space with a specific set of coordinates and measurable distances from other locations. Location refers to the 'where' of place. Locale refers to the material setting for social relations – the way a place looks. Locale includes the buildings, streets, parks, and other visible and tangible aspects of a place. Sense of place refers to the more nebulous meanings associated with a place: the feelings and emotions a place evokes. These meanings can be individual and based on personal biography or they can be shared. (1)

On the one hand, as a location, the South of the United States comprised the Chesapeake colonies of Virginia and Maryland, the colonies of Georgia, and the Carolinas during the Revolutionary War. On the other hand, the South was the locale, the place which refers to the material setting of the relationship between Whites and Blacks, white enslavers and enslaved Blacks, and regulated with the Slave Codes². On

2 The Slave Codes are any of several laws that regulated slavery.

the whole, it is viewed as a nebulous but a place which combined the materiality, the meaning, and the practice of slavery both as a system and a way of life. It had its distinctive features shared by Virginia.

In American history, the particularity of Virginia lies in the fact that the Virginia Company, a joint-stock enterprise chartered by King James I of Britain, planted the first permanent colonies in Jamestown, Virginia in 1606. And the first black Africans were brought to Virginia in 1619, just twelve years after the founding of Jamestown. Virginia is made up of Richmond, Pittsylvania County, Danville, Virginia Midland, Blue Ridge Mountains, the Piedmont, etc. In *My Father's Name*, Lawrence Jackson evokes Pittsylvania, Virginia as the place where his great-grandparents were enslaved. Virginia was a world in which death and despair were great parts of black Virginians' lives. "For the 189 planters in Pittsylvania, people who concentrated wealth in their hands and owned twenty or more African Americans, the night life of the enslaved was another kind of gold mine, a crop beyond the tobacco field" (54).

Through the last quotation Lawrence Jackson insists on the construction of black bestiality and the way owning slaves remarkably became a synonym of being wealthy. To be clear, the Old South differed from the other sections of the country in its high proportion of native-born Americans, both whites and blacks. The white society consisted of three white social classes. Respectively, there were the rich or the planters. And to be called a planter, one had to own twenty slaves and every 1/30 whites was a planter in 1860 (Shi and Tindall 477). In the middle class are small farmers and overseers on large plantations. And poor Whites were those whose wealth was cattle and pigs; they spent their time fishing, hunting and drinking whiskey. So to speak, the real engine behind the Peculiar Institution was economics. This idea is supported by Karl Marx's historical materialism which sustains:

Under capitalism, the inhumane process of acquiring slaves came to resemble that of acquiring raw materials and livestock as free people were dehumanized and commoditized. The slave status became immutable and marked by birth. Like a commodity market, "the slave market itself maintains a constant supply of its labor-power. (Lee 2)

For Marx, American economy was "a commodity-producing economy, depending on trade with industrial capitalist economies which overwhelmed it; and the slaves were acquired for cash from the slave-traders who played so big a part in the primitive accumulation of capital" (Cornforth 50).

Accordingly, slaves were bought like simple animals and were transmuted by the perverted canons of mercantile capitalism into property. Slaves' death was a loss of capital by their owners because slaves were regarded as a capital which generated profit. Therefore, slave labor was given a new meaning as planters bought slaves less for their social status, but more as a commodity-producing labor. In this sense, slave labor was

transformed into a value-producing labor and slaves were given mercantile values like simple goods and were advertised on the market. That is the reason why it is revealed in *My Father's Name* that slavery itself was placed at the center of the taxonomic logic of the American government in the nineteenth century. All these things considered, American slavery was a fundamental aspect of rising capitalism.

Besides, the acquisition of slaves resulted in the infamous Triangular Trade that occurred between Europe, Africa, and the Americas. During that trade, Africans were transported in inhuman conditions. And the widespread development of large-scale farming in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries involved owning more slaves, and the number of black people would expand. "By 1840 Pittsylvania County contained the thousand mostly African-descended people" (47). This was related to the industrial revolution which implies the change in social and economic organization resulting from the replacement of hand tools by machine and power tools and the development of factories and large-scale industrial production.

In the United States of America, the industrial revolution prompted an emergence of a market economy. Especially, textile production was mechanized and with the invention of the Cotton Gin in 1793 by Eli Whitney, cotton became a "king." It emerged as quite a money-maker for the Southern states. Together, king cotton, sugar cane, and tobacco favored a tremendous expansion of the national economy and a driving force behind the expansion of slavery in the South. Slavery was as much the corn-stone of the bourgeois industry. Without slavery, there were no cotton, no tobacco, and no sugar cane; without cotton, tobacco, and sugar cane, there was no modern industry. Then, it is no longer surprising when Lawrence indicates that tobacco formed the saga of several generations of his family in America (47). Moreover, he views slavery as a "cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty" (191). Evidently, "slavery is the simplest and most direct form of exploitation of man by man" (Cornforth 50).

On the whole, American slavery was an institution in which the relationship between master and slave inevitably entailed Africans as natively alienated or socially dead persons. This idea is borrowed from Orlando Patterson who defines a slave as a "socially dead, alienated from all 'rights' or claims of birth, who ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order" (279). He makes clear, "all slaves experienced, at the very least, a secular excommunication" (177). He concludes: "The slave was socially alienated and ceased to belong to any formally recognized community" (280). In other words, the slave life was at the stake of trauma and it was so well understood that it needed no explanation.

The traumatic condition of the black folk

Chattel slavery, which implied the capture, transportation, harboring of Africans by force, conditioned them in a position of vulnerability and all kinds of abuse. As they were reduced to the status of beasts of burden, they were exposed to all sorts of horrors. The term “trauma” originates from the Greek *trauma* which means “wound.” The term “wound” can be viewed as both physical and psychic wounds. As physical trauma always leaves a deep psychological effects, they are intertwined.

Indeed, like the other African American families, Lawrence Jackson’s father’s grandfather, Edward Jackson, and great-grandfather, Granville Hundley, had experienced the horror of slavery. His “grandfather’s father, Edward Jackson, was born into American chattel slavery around 1855” (43). That is to say, two generations of his family had been enslaved. As slavery ended with the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, his father and his grandfather were born out of slavery. Although Lawrence Jackson indicates that his grandfather was born in 1918, he does not mention his grandfather’s birth date. But the reader is informed that his father’s great-grandfather originated from Guinea on the first page of the book because his father himself has visited that African country as the origin of their family perhaps after tracing back the genealogy of their family. Thus, the first generation of his family was a slave captive and was sold. And to insist on the cruelty of slave trade, Jackson quotes Thomas Jefferson by defining it in these terms: “a cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation hither...” (191).

If Lawrence Jackson does not deeply depict the conditions of his great-great-fathers’ enslavement because he has less information, sometimes he makes a detailed description of the slave conditions in general. That description shows that slaves were physically and biologically subjected to the barbarity and brutality of their masters; which resulted in disabilities and even death. As evidence, the overseers regularly inflicted punishment universally known as “correction and chastisement” (63). That is the reason why when talking about the physical and psychological effects of slavery, Lawrence Jackson supports that “enslavement appears to have been quite stressful and was capable of causing premature aging” (98). This quotation justifies David Spiegel’s description of the essence of traumatic stress as a loss of control over one’s body when he states: “The mental imprint of such frightening experiences sometimes takes the form of loss of control over parts of one’s mind – identity, memory, and consciousness – just as physical control is regained” (1). Having no control over their selves, slaves were not able to construct their own identities.

The first trauma we are going to deal with is the naming and renaming of slaves. Thus, Slave names were assigned to them all. In any case, from the first slaves transported from Africa to the young slaves born in America, the slave masters assigned them new names as soon as they were acquired. The purpose of this practice corresponded to the idea of reducing the Negro to a domestic animal. The white master deprived the Black of the elementary identity marks that are the name and the first name. As a matter of fact, Lawrence Jackson's father's great-grandfather and his grandfather don't bear the same names: Granville Hundley is his father's great-grandfather's name and Edward Jackson is his father's grandfather's name. Normally, their family name should be Hundley instead of Jackson. From the first generation to the second, their family name had changed. But neither Hundley nor Jackson are African names. Jackson remains a popular name so that it is difficult to distinguish between several black families by this English name. In this sense, the title of the book itself, *My Father's Name*, is meaningful. Moreover, if after the Emancipation Proclamation, newly freed slaves renamed themselves, they did not recover their African names or identity.

Another thing is the fact that slaves did not enjoy any family life because breakup families were commonplace. The so-called marriages for Blacks tended to take place at a distance, and the relation flourished during the seasonal breaks of the intense labor system. Slave masters arrogated the term family to include people they owned, which perhaps made the "family" of a white slave master, a black woman, and her children a symbolical complete unit. This explains the fact that Lawrence Jackson had felt obliged to do research before knowing about his great great-grandparents.

As far as culture is concerned, Africans separated from the African continent have suffered cultural alienation. They had been separated from their respective cultures and had lost the control and mastery of African cultural values. As a result, they had succeeded to keep a very small part of the cultural heritage of Africa. Therefore, if African music had resisted their uprooting through the practice of the Blues, Jazz, and the Gospel not only in America but all over the world, English for example has become the only language they speak. Then, although Lawrence Jackson himself has always prided himself on his ability to speak Southern vernacular, or at least to understand it, he has lost forever the African language he should speak.

As we notice, the black folk's soul crushing started in the seventeenth century since the beginning of the chattel slavery and it continued after the American Civil War when the Freedmen's Bureau failed to help former slaves integrate American society. Lawrence Jackson even indicates that white supremacists wanted to re-enslave African Americans during the Reconstruction era. If they partially failed, some events demonstrated an "extraordinary value that white men and women born after the Civil War put on creating "negroes" who completely lacked valor"(84). As a result, another form of

slavery called racial segregation, was instituted with the Jim Crow laws³. And Whites continued to abuse African Americans. On the one hand, such a trauma, experienced by African Americans in general, is referred to as a historical trauma by Brandon Jones M. A., a psychotherapist and behavioral health consultant. For him, “a historical trauma is an example of intergenerational trauma. It’s caused by events that target a group of people. Thus, even family members who have not directly experienced the trauma can feel the effects of the event generations later” (16).

On the other hand, the trauma experienced by the new generations of African Americans such as Lawrence Jackson due to racism and their slave background can also be qualified as a Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome⁴, a theory coined by Dr. Joy DeGruy. (510) Brandon Jones M. A. paraphrases her by supporting that the “Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome is a “condition that exists as a consequence of centuries of chattel slavery followed by institutionalized racism and oppression have resulted in multigenerational adaptive behavior, some positive reflecting resilience, and others that are harmful and destructive” (17). Finally, the trauma experienced by them appears to be like an indelible sore which is part of their identity. Then, slavery has always been the founding of a trans-generational trauma, which will affect their life forever.

Conclusion

To end, the American chattel slavery was a racialized slavery, which was grounded on the concept of Otherness. Its justification was possible thanks to the conception of an ideological difference between Blacks and Whites. Therefore, being white meant to be better, and being black meant to belong to sub-humanity or to a commoditized being. As the South was a rural area whose economy was based on agriculture, it was the place where slavery was more materialized. Undoubtedly, slavery has physically, mentally, and culturally affected African Americans. The trauma experienced by them appears to be like an indelible sore which is part of their identity. It is also a trans-generational trauma which will affect their life forever. Thus, the south of the United States of America and slavery have caused the crushing of the black folk’s soul. It is in this context

3 Jim Crow was a set of laws and social customs requiring racial segregation. From 1881 to 1964, Jim Crow laws separated Americans by race in 26 states. From Delaware to California, and from North Dakota to Texas, many states (and cities, too) could impose legal punishments on people for consorting with members of another race. The most common types of laws forbade intermarriage and ordered business owners and public institutions to keep their black and white clientele separated. However, Jim Crow laws covered almost every possible area of human contact.

4 In her *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, Dr. Joy DeGruy defines the Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome in these terms: “Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome is a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today.” (510)

W. E. B. Dubois has coined the “Double Consciousness”, a term describing the internal conflict experienced by African Americans in an oppressive society (2).

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Abstract: The objective of this paper is to examine the particular oppressive experiences of Blacks who became the beast of burden of the peculiar institution, a system of dehumanization that reduced them to simple objects in the South. In *My Father's Name*, through the study of a black Virginia family and its neighborhood, Lawrence P. Jackson makes a recall of the horror of slavery and Blacks' struggle for freedom in the Postbellum South. Indeed, Jackson reconstructs sequences of Edward Jackson and Granville Hundley's lives, respectively his father's grandfather and great-grandfather, two black men who experienced slavery and Reconstruction. As the South was a place that combined the materiality, the meaning, and the practice of slavery, it is viewed as a nebulous which made it difficult for African descents to construct their own identity. Thus, it was a place combining the location and locale of the physical and cultural alienation of the black folk. This idea is supported by Karl Marx's historical materialism which sustains that under capitalism the inhumane process of acquiring slaves came to resemble that of acquiring raw materials because Africans were dehumanized and commoditized. In such circumstances of soul-crushing, feelings, and emotions shared by Blacks were essentially related to their slave

status. Openly, American slavery was a racialized slavery based on the concept of Otherness chiefly originated from the use of the notions of “being white” and “better” to establish differences between human races and to consequently view the white as a superior being. This explains the option of black slaves as a response to white settlers’ concern not only to get a robust and resilient workforce within their reach but also to have to manage a population accustomed to a climate similar to the American climate in their imperial expansion.

Keywords: soul-crushing, slavery, otherness, dehumanization, alienation.