

Received : 20 March 2024, Accepted: 30 April 2024
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33282/rr.vx9i2.279>

Gyle Jones as an African American voice: A Marxist analysis

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Abstract

This research aims to study the problem of racism, violence, and female subjectivity and examine the optimistic social concerns in the selected works of Gayl Jones. Modern female writers receive a great deal of criticism, to the point that it is implied that they lack literary merit and are betraying their position. Gayl Jones was targeted for similar reasons as well. In an attempt to examine racial issues and the consequences of African Americans' fight for racial equality, this study centers on three novels: *Corregidora*, *Eva's Man*, *Mosquito*, and the poem *Song for Anninho* by Gayl Jones. The present research discusses the traumatic memory of violence in which the Afro-American people suffer. Gayl Jones advocates a strong sense of society and a harmonious and respectable relationship between black men and women, which can be used to strengthen the bond between African American communities and to fight against racism.

Keywords: *African American, Racism, Violence, Female oppression*

Introduction

Jones is one of the authors of bestselling books. She has utilized her power to influence readers by focusing attention on the current problems. The themes explored by Gayl Jones in her novels are eye-opening for contemporary evils of society. She highlights racism, sexism and poverty as a social evil in her writings. Any appreciation of African literature will remain incomplete if one overlooks the four hundred years of history of enslavement and racist prejudice that has irreversibly coloured the memories, experiences, and art of an entire race of people. Perhaps the acquisition of written literature possessed such an urgency of purpose for no other race. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. points out, the African American literary tradition, unlike almost any other, arose as a response to the eighteenth and nineteenth-century allegation that blacks did not and could not create literature. The pathological or a sign of self-hatred cannot dismiss this tradition of black culture but rather as an effective means within African – American culture to explore the absurdity of the American racial system and release "pent-up black aggression toward it" (Levine, 1977, p. 335).

For philosophers and critics like Kant, Hegel, and Jefferson, the presence of written literature was an ineluctable touchstone in ascribing intellectual superiority and innate humanity to the races. For the enslaved person, learning to read was a decisive political act, and learning to write was an irreversible step away from the cotton field towards freedom larger than physical manumission. One of the earliest expressions of black literature was the slave narrative, which became a powerful tool in the abolitionist cause. Black history is replete with accounts of enslaved people learning to read and write at tremendous risk to their lives. Free blacks who made immense sacrifices and braved death on capture to teach their illiterate brothers and sisters so that they realize their dreams

of freedom. Black's experience that found its expression in the slave narratives continued to reflect upon various upheavals in their lives. Their manifestation enriched American literature with multiple forms of novels, poetry, arts, and music.

Corregidora (1975), the first novel by Gyle Jones, anticipated the wave of stories exploring the connections between the African-American present and their past in the shackles of slavery. James Baldwin states that "*Corregidora* is the most brutally honest and painful revelation, of what has occurred, and is occurring in Black men and women".(Baldwin, 1956, p.27). The novel *Corregidora* begins with the main protagonist and narrator, Ursa *Corregidora*, a young African American woman living in Kentucky. She is a descendant of three generations of sexually oppressed and physically abused women, Mama, Gram and Great Gram. The novel's contemporary setting is notwithstanding, and the story focuses on slavery as the omnipresent metaphor of human rights violations. The Portuguese enslaver *Corregidora*, whose last name Ursa bears, had held Great Gram and Gram captive, exploiting them both physically and psychologically.

Jones' protagonists, Ursa *Corregidora* and Eva Medina Canada do not step outside sexist and racist structures to forge a pure identity; such a utopian move would do nothing to dismantle the representative social systems that enforce the hybridity of minority oppression. Instead, Ursa and Eva oscillate between inside and outside, writing in the margins of hegemonic discourses to forge a self-representation which is neither independent of nor reducible to normative representations of the black women as wholly other. This double movement inscribes identity as a process by which the Black women as subjective agents resist becoming naturalized into a singular and essential position.

By exposing the construction of black women inside hegemonic discourses as a colonialist tactic for limiting the other in a space created in accordance with the demands and desires of the hegemonic self, Jones' books challenge humanist identity politics. The humanist concept that race and gender are essences gives rise to the assumption that identity is a product rather than a process. Assume that race and gender are conceptualized in terms of existence. Then, they become essential identification facts that situate women and non-White people—that is, gendered and racial subjects—in specific relation to hegemonic ideologies. Due to their self-representations being unaffected by gender or ethnicity, the dominant social group is able to control minority subjectivity through such unique positioning.

The novel leaves no doubt about how Jones intermingles the present with the past. It also testifies to the considerable omissions permeating the narrative. It is apparent that when the recalled dialogue occurred in its original setting, Ursa could not refrain from subjecting Gram's story to additional questioning. However, the questions are no longer available to the reader in their present recreation. What remains are Gram's answers which unveil only some aspects of her personal story. The quoted passage can be a representative recollection that exemplifies the various other occasions upon which Ursa introspectively revives the past via memories, dreams and daydreaming. In the family of the Corregidora women, the past has always been debated frequently and in vivid detail. The repressed history of colonial oppression is displayed through these media for the reader to ponder.

At every turn of the novel, Jones covers three generations; all the three women, Great Gram, Gram, and Mama, have shared their past with Ursa. As Ursa observes the regularity of storytelling: "My great-grand mama told my grandmama the part she lived through that my grandmama didn't live

through, and my grandmama told my mama what they both lived through, and my mama told me what they all lived through" (Jones, 1975, p. 9). However, behind the simple accessibility of the stories, layers of repression prevent Great Gram, Gram and Mama from narrating their experiences in their complexity. Ursa realizes the presence of the repressed very early in her life: "did they Great Gram and Gram have any other children?' I'd asked Mama once when they weren't there. I'd been afraid to ask when they were there because I'd requested Great Gram once when I was small if Grandmama had any brothers or sisters, and she'd given me this authentic hateful look" (Jones, 1975, p. 61).

Therefore, from the argument that Ursa's traumatization induces a fictional meeting between the past and the present, a discussion through which Jones counters the amnesia and uncovers the repressed of contemporary American society. Ursa's traumatic hysterectomy becomes the stimulus that reveals the past injustices, the knowledge of which has been suppressed mainly in and by the general public discourse. In this sense, the novel's opening scene resembles Freud's understanding of trauma. In particular, it evokes Freud's initial perception of trauma. A later incident in an individual's life brings the event of the previous traumatization into their consciousness, hitherto unacknowledged or repressed. Judith Herman explains the fundamental principle of Freud's system thus: "Freud and his patient's uncovered major traumatic events of childhood concealed beneath the more recent, often relatively trivial experiences that had triggered the onset of hysterical symptoms" (Herman, 2001, p. 13).

It is my conviction that through its peculiar treatment of time, Jones's novel can be read as a symbolic embodiment of a traumatized human psyche and as a testimony of extensive human suffering. She believes that the entire African-American consciousness shapes her African-

American identity. In this sense, Corregidora bears witness to the oppressiveness of slavery in particular and of the colonial project in general and primarily to the uniqueness of a person's temporal perception under the circumstances affected by trauma.

Thus, Ursa is traumatized, sounding almost schizophrenic in this passage. Her whole life, men have claimed her first Corregidora through her predecessors, then Mutt, and finally Tadpole- But now what? What does sex mean anymore? She can't reproduce. The only kind of offspring Ursa can make now is one out of grounds of coffee (Jones, 1975, p. 53). It is the only way she can give witness, to stain their hands with the evidence of her coffee ground fetus. She can only make objects now, no more people, and no more Corregidora women. This coffee grounds baby is a return to the beginning when her Great Gram was a coffee bean woman. It is a rejection of the one point in the novel Ursa pronounces her identity. "I am Ursa Corregidora. I have tears in my eyes. I was made to touch my past at an early age. I found it on my mother's tiddles in her milk. Let no one pollute my music. I will dig out their temples. I will pluck out their eyes" (Jones, 1975, p. 76-77). As Barbara Christian states, an African American child cannot get their identity from the Anglo world. Similarly, Ursa cannot get her identity from a Portuguese man. She needs to find it within her community, within her definition (Christian, 1985, p. 32).

To survive in the white-dominated world, African American practices contradictions. Ursa's struggle is an internal one, trying to come to terms with the violent past of her ancestors. She struggles to deal with her past, present, and future until they share their stories and announce their identity to their fellow mixed-race women, blood, and family.

The suffering experienced by African American men and women is further explored in Jone's second book, *Eva's Man* (1976), but with an even greater sense of despondency. *Eva's Man* uses

sparse language and internal monologues, much as *Corregidora*. Eva is discovered in jail at the start of the narrative after poisoning and castrating her partner. She kills him in an attempt to rebel against the oppressive male role, but her spiral into madness suggests that she is unable to find a new identity for herself. She kills Davis, her lover, to represent the trend by keeping her captive in a place where he only spends the night with her.

Her next book, *Mosquito* (1991), is situated in Texas City, a made-up South Texas town known for its unique poverty grass terrain. Mosquito, an independent truck driver from Texas who is African American, becomes interested in the sanctuary movements. The jazz book transcends national, racial, and stylistic boundaries. Inter-racial contacts occur at the US–Mexico border. The ideas, tales, and reflections of Sojourner Nadine Jane Nzingha Johnson, a Kentucky-born Afro-American truck driver, form the basis of *Latin dad*.

In this book, stereotypes are analyzed as a cultural practice inside and between minority communities rather than mainly from the traditional viewpoint of white people objectifying non-Whites or the postcolonial focus on colonizers portraying the colonized. Jones uses characterization to highlight two diametrically opposed elements of storytelling: *Mosquito* and *monkey bread*. Delgada serves as the model, representing an aspiring writer who frequently ends up having a conversation with Mosquito at the cantina. However, like *monkey bread*, Mosquito recognizes that they are all different kinds of characters.

Song for Anninho (1981), a lengthy narrative poem, breaks new ground. The sonnet, which is set in seventeenth-century Brazil, narrates the tale of Almeyda, the narrator, and her husband Anninho, who live in Palmares, a hamlet that was once populated by runaway slaves. Almeyda can only locate her husband by art and memory once they are split off. The poem presents desire as a

positive concept and concentrates on the possibilities of love. It's also well known that Gyle Jones writes short stories. Jones highlights the sexual and racist abuse that black women endure in her first-person accounts, emphasizing the many ways in which these women have responded to their ordeals. She is renowned for being one of the first authors to write extensively about sexual assault and how it affects Black women.

Racism is a system of dominance and subordination founded on false biological theories that claim people may be classified into distinct racial categories. It is determined that racism is a natural process that follows logically from the division of people into "races." Since the idea that there are distinct "races" within the human species is not supported by solid data from the fields of natural and biological science, racism and race become social, political, ideological, and economic constructs. Put differently, "race is not a social construct that is produced, perpetuated, and contested by institutions of the financial, political, and ideological spheres."

The race is a social construct brought about by bigoted people for reasons of exercising authority over others. The so-called supremacy of one race is a passion whipped up by one group of people to dominate others. One such group, which is subject to unending oppression, is made of African Americans, whose history is a tragic epic. The Africans, who were brutally snatched away from their native lands and forced into slavery, and later into a system of apartheid, find themselves discriminated against and tormented physically and mentally. The economically weak and womenfolk continue to bear the brunt of oppression. Since the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, African American writers have made severe attempts to extricate them from the tangle of suffering by advocating self-esteem and dignity. The feminist writers of the last few decades are also as emphatic as their male counterparts in decrying racial and gender discrimination. Discrimination,

by any name, is equal to violent justice and deprives the happiness of humanity. This chapter will find the ramification of the practice of racial discrimination.

Racism is one of the major problems that made Black Americans' lives miserable. Since Gayl Jones loved humanity, she cannot overlook the problem of her community because she is the victim of racism in her life. Her writing about racism has a personal touch and firsthand experience. The study focuses here on the problem of racism by citing so many instances from her major novels, which proves how Gayl Jones rendered some strategies to improve the plight of women folk of her period.

The novel *Corregidora* (1975) follows the life of a young woman of mixed race origins with a tragic family history. *Corregidora* is the author's first novel, written and published when she was still in her mid-twenties. Despite Jones's relatively young age, her novel is a confident address of the burning problems facing many African American women in contemporary American society, as much as it is a powerful exploration of the history of slavery in both the Americas. The present chapter addresses many issues, and Jones is mainly concerned with race. Jones's conspicuous tendency to conflate the past and the present is elaborated as a re-creation of the temporal peculiarities of trauma. A vivid analysis and concrete examples of how Jones' racist aspects are discussed.

Gayl Jones's novels bring into light the various issues that African Americans face in the white-dominated world due to racial discrimination. The Racial collective as a target market inaugurates the commodity logic of racial difference itself. At the same time, the late seventies announce the declining significance of race as a model with the power to describe economic relationships of production and distribution. The same period reiterates an increase in the power of race to represent

the consumption and marketing in their genealogical structure containing racial history in a popular package and creating a mechanism for managing disparate, conflicting versions of the American experience.

In these three Afro-American novels, *Corregidora*, *Eva's Man* and *Mosquito* by Gayl Jones, often, the presence of trauma is associated with some racially-motivated actions targeting the African American characters. Hence, the three African American novels predominantly expose and examine the subtle continuity of culturally-constructed racial stereotypes.

From reading the three novels, the reader can identify a specific aspect of psychological trauma that permeates the narrative's thematic and formal planes. In *Corregidora*, the conflation of the past and present time planes, and the narrative's oscillation between them, can be interpreted as Jones's attempt to fictionally portray a subject's understanding of the temporal facet of her trauma and the posttraumatic state. Jones alternates between the past and the present in her narrative, treating the two temporal strata as undistinguished entities, through which she collapses any semblance of the novel's linear chronology. As a result, the reader repeatedly encounters difficulties when endeavouring to locate a particular scene or image on the temporal axis. Jones' amalgamation technique captures the experiential condition of a traumatized individual.

The problem of racism underscores the presence of trauma in each of the three novels. Hence, together with the Native American novels considered earlier, the examined African American novels can be positioned within the genre of trauma literature. While portraying the damaged, traumatized subject, Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*, *Eva's Man* and *Mosquito* simultaneously recorded slavery as a chapter in American history that public discourse has not adequately processed. The latter, too, presents testimony to an account that has been ridden with traumatization and injury.

The interpretations of the novels by Gayl Jones will promote a cross-disciplinary conversation between literature, criticism and psychology, and the analysis will shed some critical light on the presence of trauma in literature and the severe cultural condition from which African American trauma originates. Regardless of the legally granted civil rights, African Americans continue to suffer from a lack of acknowledgement regarding their historical oppression. The analysis stresses the narratives governed by inequality, prejudice and trauma, and Gayl Jones envisions the eventual attainment of such declaration accompanied by the introduction of tolerance and social justice.

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The novel *Corregidora* begins with the main protagonist and narrator, Ursa Corregidora, a young African American woman living in Kentucky. She is a descendant of three generations of sexually oppressed and physically abused women, Mama, Gram and Great Gram. The novel's contemporary setting is notwithstanding; the story focuses on slavery as the omnipresent metaphor of human rights violations. The Portuguese enslaver Corregidora, whose last name Ursa bears, had held Great Gram and Gram captive, exploiting them both physically and psychologically.

Jones' protagonists, Ursa Corregidora and Eva Medina Canada do not step outside sexist and racist structures to forge a pure identity; such a utopian move would do nothing to dismantle the symbolic social systems that enforced the marginality of minority suppression. Instead, Ursa and Eva oscillate between inside and outside, writing in the margins of hegemonic discourses to forge a self-representation which is neither independent of nor reducible to normative representations of the black women as wholly other. This double movement inscribes identity as a process by which the Black women as subjective agents resist becoming naturalized into a singular and essential position.

By exposing the construction of black women inside hegemonic discourses as a colonialist tactic for limiting the other in a space created in accordance with the demands and desires of the hegemonic self, Jones' books challenge humanist identity politics. The humanist concept that gender and race are essences is rooted on the idea that identity is a product rather than a process. Assume that race and gender are conceptualized in terms of existence. Then, they take on the significance of basic identification facts that situate subjects based on gender and race, specifically women and non-Whites, in relation to hegemonic ideologies. Because of this specific posture, the dominant social group, whose self-representations are unaffected by gender or ethnicity, is able to control the subjectivity of minorities.

The impact of racism on blacks had peaked, and they suffered a lot. From its inception in the seventeenth century, the discourse of colonialism has constructed Negro as the sign of difference; from slave traders' travelogues to proslavery arguments, the address on the commercial of African people and their place in the American system positions the Negro as other to white. This strategy has naturalized the exploitation and oppression of the Afro-American community during slavery

and into the twentieth century. In what follows, the present study uses the terms the black woman and the black man to describe discursive constructions, the indefinite article signifying the essentializing strategy of positive race as a visible and irreducible sign of difference.

The inhuman treatment of blacks by the whites never trusted the blacks, even when they were honest. The novel *Corregidora* also deals Brazilian experience with the specificities of slavery in that country. In the story, *Corregidora* speaks boldly about racism and sexism. Jones tries to show contemporary black American life, particularly black American women. Sexism snatches women off their freedom and keeps them under control. Racism, too, is precisely similar, but her whites are snatching black people's freedom, torturing them, exploiting them. Being tortured by the male members and living under the oppression of whites, the struggle they encounter has to come up in life.

The problem of racism is seen in the life of Ursa, and it is only spoken that her mothers are passing down an already written script, a record that transcribes *Corregidora's* desire but not their own. In *Corregidora's* narrative, black women occupy the body's position and, thus, they are spoken to by him and unable to speak themselves. The prostitution of enslaved Black women was openly encouraged in Brazil, contrary to the more covert prostitution in the United States. Degler points out that many an enslaver made his living entirely by selling the enslaved women's bodies. Still, the overall justification for and effect of these practices was the same as in the United States: to protect white women from male lust while allowing white men a constant sexual outlet. Bastide argues that miscegenation is practised in Brazil.

As Angela Davies points out, the rape of black women by white men during slavery cannot be seen simply as an effect of the cultural construction of the white woman as a figure who must

protect from male lust; the institutionalized pattern of rape, instead, can be understood as a "weapon of domination, a weapon of repression, whose covert goal was to extinguish slave women's will to resist, and in the process, to degrade their men" (Davis, 1990, p. 23). As Jones clarifies in *Corregidora*, the prostitution of enslaved women in Brazil amounts to an institutionalized practice of rape. Like the Jezebel figure in US slavery, the mulata enslaved person in Brazil was constructed as a natural and promiscuous being. And, like her sister in the antebellum South, the Brazilian mulata was functional to the politics of racial domination: all the legendary and folklore materials which can be collected concerning the asserted extraordinary qualities of the woman of colour – especially the mulata, as a sexual companion – are no more than pure justifications of the accessibility of the mulata to seduction by the white.

The racial problem is figured in all the works of Gayl Jones. Treatment of blacks by the whites and their hypocrisy, their notion that all other people are inferior to them, is depicted in the novels. The whites always thought blacks were there to serve them. The whites never treated the blacks as human beings but as some created waiting on them. So just because they were of different colour, whites treated the blacks as inferiors, exploited them and, in many cases, treated them brutally. This kind of ill-treatment of the blacks, only for being born into the black race, is known as racism.

Conclusion

A significant figure in international literature, Gayl Jones has been involved in the women's and civil rights movements. She is one of the few writers who was able to see firsthand the influence of her legacy. The problem of racism has badly impacted African- Americans. Jones believes that to overcome racism, eliminating poverty is essential. In her novels, *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man*,

Jones repeatedly suggests this through Ursa and Eva's characters. All her stories bring out the idea of financial independence and them being free from racial discrimination.

She has personally experienced and witnessed a great deal of hardship. She makes a distinction between threats coming from outside the community and threats coming from within. She thinks that fighting the adversary won't be tough if the community grows stronger from inside. Her community was facing numerous issues. However, the study focuses on the problems of racism, poverty, and violence. In this, poverty and violence are internal problems that need to be addressed before racism, which is an external threat. One issue that leads to a host of other issues is poverty. She warns the populace that if they do not wake up, it will be too late since she has a clear vision of the future for her town. Poverty will make them more reliant on White people. The young people will be denied access to healthy food and education. They will never be frightened and will always be ruled by White people.

They won't have the opportunity to learn more, and they won't acquire the strength and self-assurance to confront exploitation. The research has concentrated on the issues of racism, violence, and female subjectivity in a few of Gayl Jones's works. According to Gayl Jones, these issues regarding African Americans are related to one another and constitute a triad. Because African American women have distinct experiences as both women and African Americans, they are particularly vulnerable to this trap of racism, violence, and female subjectivity. Gayl Jones communicates her views on racism, violence, and female subjectivity through a variety of stories and characters. First of all, Gayl Jones has identified these issues by framing a triad. Her focus is on the importance of respectful relationships between African Americans' men and women. Every

African American would benefit from education and financial support for growth in order to develop and gain knowledge and establish their worth in the world.

The study creates fresh opportunities for investigation. One might conduct a research solely on the female characters that Gayl Jones has invented, such as Ursa and Eva's Man Almeyda. She has presented a variety of female personas, opening many possibilities for fascinating study. Because there isn't much research on poverty specifically, there is certainly need to expand on this area of study. Given that poverty was the main issue of the day, its context could be examined. In Jones's book, the study of silence will also make for fascinating research. There are male characters in the work, such as Mutt, Martin, Father Ray, and Anninho, who are muted by the dominant male society. Characterizing silence allows us to examine the causes of it as well as Gayl Jones's method of communicating her opinions through the creation of these characters. Making her town a better place for everyone to live is Gayl Jones's main focus. Her era's African American writers primarily addressed subjects like as poverty, violence, exploitation, racism, and so forth. Octavia Butler, Zora Neal Hurston, Toni Morrison, and Gloria Naylor are among the few notable writers of her era.

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