



## Resistance and Manipulated Aestheticism in Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk*: Harlem as Home for African Americans

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to achieve the very basic idea of home and also creates the promotion of aestheticism in which striving and struggle of blacks will be discussed. Home is a place whereby productivity is born. This paper will shed light on the productive lives of black which are surrounded by racism. When home or homeland is discussed, then the concepts of unity, peace, financial benefits and issues of identity are solved. This paper will also discuss that how the fate of black nation is changed in the home (Harlem) and the sense of having shelter manipulates art and aestheticism of blacks. The elements of resistance against white are strengthened, when the need of home is fulfilled, as in the Harlem of Renaissance. Home gives identity and that is the reason of flourishing nation. By using African American Criticism, this paper will talk about all the aspects of Harlem as home for blacks by explaining the fictitious characters of Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk* (2019) and it will explain that how the Negro's movements have been affluencing in Harlem and this paper will connect struggle and strive of blacks with the characters of novella.

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## 1. Introduction

*If Beale Street Could Talk* (2019) is the novella of James Baldwin (Jenkins & Baldwin, 2019), who is Harlem writer. He is the influential figure and epitome of Civil Rights Movement. Harlem is the central place for blacks and Harlem Renaissance is one of the bestowing phases of Negro Movement. In which art, music, paintings have been promoted. This phase begins in early 20<sup>th</sup> century and it gives the real identity to the blacks. Hence, that is the reason largest migration has been taken place from rural areas to urban areas and from South America to North America, because North America is developed area rather than South. The "Institutions building, at bridging the gap between the arts and the people, and at using the arts on catalysts to awaken black cultural pride". Harlem Renaissance is more prone towards art and literature but another key thing to remember is that by linking with literature and art, the potency of civil right movements has been endorsed. This renaissance gives prestige to such experiments which causes African American intellectuals to look into their African heritage with new eyes and in many cases with a desire to reconnect with a traditions and customs. Therefore, Harlem writers have shed light over all aspects of blacks by art. They become able to write freely on their oppression and the worst behavior of white. Hence, one can relate political aestheticism with Harlem Renaissance because with the help of art, all resisting elements can be explored in better ways. Art gives awareness. Therefore, Harlem Renaissance drifts towards this awareness and this place is as shelter for blacks whereby culture and heritage is annexed.

Hence by linking concept of home (Harlem) with the Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk* (2019) gives the indication that prosperity of any nation comes within the nation, and if one

wants to compete with the outer world then the unity is needed. In this novella, I will explore all the resisting elements of blacks against whites. I will shed light on the story of the novella with the perspective of unity of the family, and the way all characters strive for the injustice of white towards black gives the sign that if one wants to highlight these kinds of issues then the shelter or family unity is necessary. It is the beauty of Harlem whereby issues of blacks are discussed in a very artistic way. For instance; jazz, hip hop music and sculpture are all forms of art. Therefore, the way, this art represents the black is remarkable. It can be said that this particular forms of art are "home" to them.

If *Beale Street Could Talk* (Jenkins & Baldwin, 2019) revolves around the Rivers and Hunt families. Tish, a 19-year-old African American woman who lives in a Harlem housing project and works at a department store's perfume counter, serves as the narrator of this novella. Her true name is Clementine Rivers. Her father works on the docks, and her mother is from Birmingham. She is carrying the kid of her boyfriend Fonny, an imprisoned 22-year-old African American artist whose true name is Alonzo Hunt. He has falsely been charged of raping a Puerto Rican lady. While Tish's family is highly supportive of her and the pregnancy, Fonny's mother is not and believes her son is not worth anything.

Ernestine, sometimes known as Sis, the sister of Tish, selects Mr. Hayward, a white attorney, to represent Fonny. The attorney informs Tish and her mother Sharon that the person who implicated Fonny, Mrs. Rogers (maiden name Sanchez), has left Puerto Rico. Mrs. Rogers was presented with Fonny by Bell, a white police officer, and she just took Bell at his word that Fonny was the rapist and chose him from a lineup. Sharon, Tish's mother, travels to Puerto Rico in an effort to contact Mrs. Rogers, where she discovers her living in a favella, a type of slum. Sharon informs Tish that Mrs. Rogers suffered a miscarriage and sought solace in a location in the highlands when she got back to New York.

### **1.1. Research Questions**

This paper revolves around following research questions:

- How art gives awareness relating to political aestheticism?
- How Unity of Nation competes with outer world?
- What are the artistic ways of Harlem Renaissance?

## **2. Literature Review**

I will contemplate on the characters of the novella *if Beale Street Could Talk* (2019) with the characteristics of African – American Criticism. Here I will discuss textual reference of novella *If Beale Street Could Talk* (2019) which will make my point strong, Although Harlem Renaissance comprises the very struggle and striving of blacks, because if we analyze this struggle, then we come to know that America The Great Super Power has been the place for blacks. A History in Three acts, "Race is the child of Racism not Father". This quote gives the signal of bigotry and color discrimination, that how the USA policies are making institution of white hegemony and black submissiveness through the white lenses and it can be taken as child not father. Because slavery has been started in 1619, when first African slaves are brought to the North American colony of Jamestown Virginia, for aiding in the production of crops. So we can say that before 1619, slavery doesn't exist.

I figure out, although numbers of researches have been done over Harlem Renaissance, but the call paper roams around the concept of Home, so my research will discuss the very concept of Home in the novella *if Beale Street Could Talk* (2019). In this paper I will explore the elements of resistance which are disguised in the form of art and literature. Therefore, the culture and heritage of blacks are preserved in their literature. "African American criticism frequently employs binary opposition, viewing the white American as the oppressor of black art and black people" (C., 2003). Hence my paper takes it as gap, because whenever oppression is discussed then the resisting elements are needed to cope the oppression, and sense of having shelter is necessary, whereby oppressors can compete with the hegemonic entity. Thus I choose *If Beale Street Could Talk* (2019). Through which I will try to fill up the gap with textual references that how the unity and having shelter promote the resisting elements.

Hence, my stance which is based on resistance can be very much explained by following saying of Jan Muhammad "subaltern writers will resist being shaped by their oppressors and

become literary agent of change" (C., 2003). Thus Baldwin's novel *if Beale Street Could Talk* (2019) which is also based on unity, love, hope, and change just because shelter is present whereby blacks can flourish their identity. Therefore, it can be said that change comes only from inside and not from outside. "I couldn't move, All I could do was wait. Until my changes comes" (Jenkins & Baldwin, 2019). Thus these lines are very much link to the change, and these lines tell the audience about the striving and struggle of blacks. This struggle takes the black towards Harlem Renaissance. In 1920 when the industrial revolution has been taken place then a lot of new discoveries of luxurious stuff is introduced, and then the blacks figure out that they must with that new discoveries. Therefore, the art and literature of blacks comprise, sculpture, drums, etc. which give the signs of uniqueness. It is an obvious fact that resistance only comes when one have some kind of uniqueness. Thus it can be said that uniqueness is explored when you have unity and love and appreciation and it is all happened due to home. As the character of Fonny who makes sculpture whenever he is able to. Hence my stance will also explain the concept home with the very verses of Allama Iqbal. "Fard e qaim rabt e milat sy hai tanah kuch nh , Mouj hai Darya mein aur beron e darya kuch nh" (Iqbal 342). In which the concept of unity, nation, and change are highlighted. As in the novella *if Beale Street Could Talk* (2019) "don't care what else happens or don't happen, you got to do that ...can't nobody else for you. And the rest of us, we going to hold on to you" (Jenkins & Baldwin, 2019). These lines give the indication of support and unity. Hence my stance link with Iqbal verses in which he also gives the lesson of unity, single person can do nothing, and embellishment of waves can be seen only in the river, outside of the river, one can only see the direction of waves. The connotation of these verses also gives the indication of change and revolution. And concept of home can be linked with it.

### **3. Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

While discussing on resistance, the frame of paper raises the question of opposition and denies all endeavors of neutralizing opposites, which is emblematic of ideological edifice and construction either political or aesthetic. This paper explores the connotation and the motive of resistance according to a theoretical, aesthetic, and cultural point of view. As it investigates the Harlem Renaissance of blacks in USA, comes in the form art, music, paintings. Blacks resist in a very form of aesthetics. Beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century provides the identity to Blacks and they feel the notion of "Home". This paper gives the notion of home as "establishment of nation, at conduit the breach between the arts and the local folks. Thus, the theory of resistance with aestheticism is used to analyze this paper. This is qualitative exploration and explanation, having dependence for the extensive library research; search on various websites, web series, movies, meet intellectuals, and as well as online journals, books and encyclopedia, reframe methodology

### **4. Data Analysis**

#### **4.1. Concept of Home**

The story is narrated in two parts. The first, "Troubled About My Soul," begins with Tish brings the news of her pregnancy to her boyfriend, who is in jail for false accusation. Her real name is Clementine, his is Alonzo, but in the same way as she goes by a nickname, so does he: everyone close to him calls him Fonny. The element of love can be very much seen. The protagonist of the novella, doubts about his reaction, and that of both their families, but is relieved when he responds with joy and hope, and her family reacts with love and support. Fonny's father (Frank) is happy likewise but Fonny's awfully religious mother (Alice) and two sisters are pessimistic and judgmental, a confrontation between the two families ending with Frank knocking Alice the floor. The book's main narrative line continuous to follow Tish in the present – as she persistently visits to Fonny in prison, as her family (who sees Fonny as one of their own) musters to do whatever they can to get him out, and as his young white lawyer receives their trust through his apparently growing commitment. There are, however, several obstacles to Fonny's freedom from prison, including a racist police officer, a racist judge, and the woman who has put allegation on Fonny of rape. But the way whole family stands for Fonny gives the indication that that without unity nothing can be defeated. "We held each other so close that we might indeed have been one body" (Baldwin 130). So by putting this quote we can figure out that the whole family becomes body to get Fonny out of the jail. And the very resisting element can also see in the novella when the Tish 's mother (Sharon) travels to Puerto Rico in an eventually ineffective attempt to talk the petitioner into admitting the truth of what happened. So here Baldwin believes that America is in the process of being, not an arrived entity.

So in the novella, the way Fonny is accused by the white woman without knowing the real culprit gives the sign of pathetic attitude of whites towards black. Therefore, it can be said that American democracy is just for the whites. Another important thing to remember that when Fonny and Tish go for shopping outside the Harlem, then the way Tish has been harassed by the white boy gives the sign of racism, but the Fonny's reaction towards that white boy gives the indication of resistance. So he protects his girlfriend Tish without scared face. So we can say that Baldwin's act of writing is a social act that gives the change attitude for the better in the lives of blacks.

From above quotation, we can describe the very struggle of girl, who is trying to get her boyfriend out from the jail. She comes daily to meet him, just to make him realize that he will be out soon from the jail, because the family knows that he is flawless, and it is human nature when he realizes that someone having trust or faith, he becomes hopeful for the future and disappointment vanishes. So the metaphor of Sahara, a desert, is very much linked with this scenario that although Sahara is gigantic, but it is never empty, poor, riche every one crosses the desert, but intricacies of life happen with the class, the vultures which are the part of desert, roam in the desert just to get food. So the metaphor of desert actually gives the indication of racism or class differences, as the vultures of desert know that when the passers of Sahara become helpless and their confrontation with vultures become impossible, then doubtlessly they present themselves in front of that vultures. There is no resistance.

Hence in the human life the role of vultures is played by hegemonic entities. As white Americans consider themselves as superior, and in the superiority complex they even snatch the right of living from the blacks. I realize that I must go to the history, how the black submissiveness is institutionalized, and then I come to know that how the laws and acts have been made to support the slavery. The Kansas -Nebraska Act 1854, Dred Scot Case 1857, they take us to that era whereby slavery is justified, so by relating it to the above mentioned video, I get to know that Race is collective faith and daily practicing and this all make white as universal entity and everything will be judging by the white lenses. All these things drift towards resistance. I'll always love my Daddy because he didn't leave me. I always remember Fonny's face when he talked about his Daddy .... (Jenkins & Baldwin, 2019).

This quote of the novella gives the sign of love of family, the way words mother and father are being uttered, are very much linked with the perspective of endorsing family. Because whenever someone is attached to his/her family then, the linkage and association, or connections he makes to recall that attachment go towards strong relation. And it all happens just because of home. Home is a place whereby one makes a family, which is supportive and endorsing for each family member and whenever anyone gets trouble whole family becomes shelter. So the ending line of above quote gives the indication that family is like a lord, who can save you in any matter of life and without family you can't be saved or sustained in this world.

The title of the research paper roams around the resistance and aestheticism which is very much linked with the concept of home. I will analyze this art or aestheticism in the form of resistance.

Above quote describes the very title of the research paper, in which the element of resistance is obvious, the way "Fonny" gives his hand made sculpture to his mother in law (very close relation) and the shape of sculpture gives the indication of pain, the way man of the sculpture puts his hand on the forehead and other is on the sex, which he is trying to hide, the element of resistance can be seen. He is trying to hide his gratification just because he is black but the way his hand is on the forehead gives sign that God has made every single one as equal entity, and for him there is no distinction. He has bestowed wisdom to everyone. Although the sculpture is hiding his gratification because he is not free and oppressed by the whites but he can think freely, no one can snatch his dreams. So this is the element of resistance which is disguised in the sculpture. It is obvious fact that elite class always does those things which make the poor their oppressors, without knowing that their own things would go against them. As in the above quote, "Fonny" who is an artist and he goes to that school whereby such kind of art has been taught, which is made by White Americans.

## 5. Results and Discussion

Since for them art and aesthetics having no sense for the successful people, so that art schools are particular for the blacks, in this way they are able to make blacks as slaves. Because for them this is handmade work which is not for them but for slaves, without knowing that those who believe on their hands cannot be defeated. Blacks use this art as their identity and due to it; hope has born in their innervations. This is the real resistance when you cope hegemonic power with that tool which they use for making you slave. And it happens just in the art. In the Harlem Renaissance comprises of art; it is the home for blacks.

Therefore, the way his characters looking for united stuff, just to show that revolution only comes with the stuck ideas, when surrounding doesn't matter, just fulfillment of ideas matter. And Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk* (Jenkins & Baldwin, 2019) roams around this fact, because the family strong firm and stuck ideas make the "Fonny" out from the jail, although they all compete with the hegemonic culture of whites, whereby there is no laws for blacks, but because they don't give up and they stand against this prevailed oppression. And at the end they become succeeded. He portraits of what it meant, to be a black writer struggling with personal, culture and national identity.

Hence this is the mystery and chaos which evokes the man to come out with gigantic strives. Therefore, the resisting literature only comes when you have mystery. In the ending line, which depict that when you know everything then the struggle of learning more becomes dead and therefore revolutions have been not taken place in 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus Harlem Renaissance and concept of home is flourished only when there is mystery which drifts the man to actualize him.

Hence all the above references go the very topic of resistance, because Harlem Renaissance is all due to the resistance, mystery, chaos and struggle. Even African American literary criticism also roams round the resisting elements of black against white. Even in the novella Baldwin shows his resistance which is disguised in the form of literature. And concept of home is cleared with the unity and support of family.

## 6. Conclusion

In this research paper, the study tried to defend my title which is very much linked with the call of Harlem Renaissance. Home is the place whereby one can relax; apart from this shelter gives the reason to recognition of entity. Therefore, Baldwin novella *If Beale Street could Talk* (Jenkins & Baldwin, 2019) is so much associated with the concept of home. In which family, support, love, and struggle can be seen. So in my paper I have given textual references which strengthen my stance that resistance and manipulated aestheticism is upheld with the concept of Harlem as home for blacks. I tried to explore all the resisting elements in the novella which gives the indication of home and also link with the Harlem Renaissance. Harlem is the shelter for blacks, where they transform their heritage into very embellishing way. Therefore, the way all characters give support to one another go to that transformation because blacks work as nation not as single person, because they know if they want to keep their identity strong then they must work as united nation, so no one could defeat them.

Therefore, Harlem Renaissance drifts towards this awareness and this place is as shelter for blacks whereby culture and heritage is annexed. Hence by linking concept of home (Harlem) with the Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk* (Jenkins & Baldwin, 2019) gives the indication that prosperity of any nation comes within the nation, and if one wants to compete with the outer world then the unity is needed. In this novella, I explored all the resisting elements of blacks against whites. I shed light on the story of the novella with the perspective of unity of the family, and the way all characters strive for the injustice of white towards black gives the sign that if one wants to highlight these kinds of issues then the shelter or family unity is necessary. It is the beauty of Harlem whereby issues of blacks are discussed in a very artistic way. For instance; jazz, hip hop music and sculpture are all forms of art. Therefore, the way, this art represents the black is remarkable. It can be said that this particular forms of art are "home" to them.

Hence, I figured out with the African American criticism which is based on resistance can be very much explained by following saying of Jan Muhammad "subaltern writers will resist being shaped by their oppressors and become literary agent of change" (C., 2003). Thus, Baldwin's

novel *If Beale Street Could Talk* (Jenkins & Baldwin, 2019) which is also based on unity, love, hope, and change just because shelter is present whereby blacks can flourish their identity. Therefore, it can be said that change comes only from inside and not from outside. "I couldn't move; All I could do was wait. Until my changes comes" (Jenkins & Baldwin, 2019). Thus, these lines are very much link to the change, and these lines tell the audience about the striving and struggle of blacks. This struggle takes the black towards Harlem Renaissance. Thus, paper roams around these few elements which are love and support and it only comes when requirement of shelter is fulfilled. Harlem renaissance is all due to the Harlem as shelter, therefore black, culture and heritage is flourished. So, shelter is needed to promote, manipulate and preserve culture.

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