

The Representation of Racism and Social Invisibility in Todd Phillips' *Joker* (2019)

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ABSTRACT: *The discourse of racism that has been per se attached to colored people is now linked to a wider circle, including whites. The essence of my article is to examine the “new racism” communicated by the Joker film by revisiting theories about modern racism. I will mainly rely on Michel Foucault’s state racism and internal racism explored in his lectures, Society Must Be Defended (1976) and his Abnormal Lectures at the College de France (1974-1975). Postmodernism proves that the notion of racism has transcended skin-color differences into distinctive forms of institutionalized discrimination. The fact that this discrimination is governmental, made the discourse of racism more complex. It has even been internalized into the mass population as the new mainstream model. This mainstream model excludes all “abnormals,” which could be the mentally ill, disabled people and criminals, or anyone who does not function properly in the capitalist society. The analysis of the film reveals that people with mitigating circumstances like disabled and clowns are otherized and ostracized on the accounts of their difference, thereby entering a pro tanto social invisibility.*

KEYWORDS: Discrimination, Internal Racism, Joker, Otherness, Social invisibility.

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Introduction

Modernity has displayed several divergent aspects in its deformation of social, political, and economic normative codes. With the rising complexity of life resulting from industrialized and urbanized infrastructures, issues like, among others, job disruption, and inflation, hide under the veil of completely shattered social contact and mute conversations. In the 2019 Oscar-winning *Joker*, Todd Phillips has touched upon several aspects of racism hunting otherized people precisely by their fellow society members. The film delves into the challenging conditions that led to Arthur Fleck's breakthrough against his disadvantaged background and serious mental illness.

The 2019 Todd Phillips's *Joker* is an American psychological thriller set in 1981 Gotham City starring Joaquin Phoenix as the Joker character and Todd Phillips as director and producer. Inspired by the deterioration of the American social body, Phillip exposes the story of the Joker prior to his conversion to the famous supervillain in the Batman series. The film foremost deals with its protagonist Arthur Fleck, a struggling clown with a neurological illness but optimistic enough to dream of being a famed stand-up comedian. In the film, Arthur is invisible to all people except those who are othered like him, the African Americans. They have been portrayed in characters like his social worker, his lover, the woman with her child on the bus, and the administrative assistant clerk at the Arkham state hospital. Indeed, Arthur has been a victim of social-ethical decadence triggering racist behaviors and thus deemed to exist as an invisible man simply because he was different.

Little has changed regarding the discourse of social equality and integration; however, what Foucault has in mind is more dramatic within the racism discourse. It follows that racism is now apt to be anchored to a wider group, including those identified as different. This, in fact, is the substituting reason to practice all sorts of discriminating social acts. In this vein, Michel Foucault's lectures *Il Faut Défendre La Société, Society Must Be Defended* (1976) and his *Les Anormaux Cours au Collège de France, Abnormal Lectures at the College de France 1974-1975* argue the narcissistic view of society members to other individuals who do not fit with the social standards.

Foucault introduces the concept of racism in *Society Must Be Defended* (1976) as "a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what we must live and what must die. [...] It is a way of separating out the groups that exist within a population" (2003, pp. 254-255). The point here, however, is not to deny the existence of racial discrimination against African Americans but to prove that the conceptualization of racism is structurally narrow that it cannot detect the infinite intolerance beneath society's behavior, whereby racism against people of color does not accord with numerous incidents in the film.

Theoretical Framework: Representation

Based on theories of cultural studies, The article examines how the *Joker* represents Americans' resistance to social and cultural hierarchal reality. I will rely on Stuart Hall's representation theory which considers popular culture as a representation of real culture. Hollywood film industry suggests that their products have a representational relation to real life as Hall claims that the mediated popular culture productions have meaning only through a representational system that links cultural meanings with visual images by saying that "It is not that the image has a meaning. It is, as it were, in the relations of looking at the image, which the image constructs for us that that meaning is completed" (Hall, 2015, pp. 16-17).

However, the filmic approach that I am discussing is not a memetic one but often takes the form of an oppositional movement to the mainstream political and social paradigm. Here, I will draw upon John Fiske's thought that popular culture is a ground for resistance. John Fiske (1991) defines films, records, and other products as the "culture of the people, and the people's interests are not those of the industry" (p. 23). This means they tend to show the reality of people, or at least lay people can identify themselves through the visual characters they see on big screens. For Fiske (1991), popular culture (including films)

has to be, above all, relevant to the immediate social situation of the people. In this regard, I render the *Joker* a symbol of the overall resistance to masculine norms, creating a completely new model.

I will analyze *Joker* (2019) through the cultural and historical film analysis method in line with regarding films as cultural products. I aim to examine how the *Joker* film represents, challenge, and subvert different social, cultural, or even theoretical assumptions concerning the discourse of racism. In this context, I am not interested in the commercial production of the film or the involvement of the directors as auteurs; I tend to analyze the narratives (actions or words of the characters) and the implications of the specific bodily performances in each film to measure how the *Joker* character is manifesting against the mainstream model of equality and representing all factions that have been victims to this new racism.

Racism in the 1980s American Society

Before beginning with my analysis of the American community, I shall start with conceptualizing two key notions that help our understanding of the American context and the film *per se*: racism and discrimination. Racism is undeniably a relative notion that alters from one context to another, but there is one thing about it that never changes: it is a social construct. Each society creates its own cultural babble through which anyone whose setting is by its outer circle is considered the other and thus apt to be subject to discrimination. Racial taxonomies such as the African race, Asian race, Caucasian race, and Arab race that focus on geographical ethnic belonging exclude any racial body that does not conform to its norms. Hence, it is mutually performed but still contested in the words of Leonard Harris, in his article "The Concept of Racism: An Essentially Contested Concept?" issued in 1998, where he argues for the multifaceted nature of racism as a concept whereby the racially based discrimination is a social responsibility that is historically inherited by the white supremacy myths and therefore it is engraved in the mainstream social narrative. Instead, Harris preferred to use "racialism" as a substitute for racism that encompasses all ethnic groups, women, classes, aboriginal people ... etc., as an indicator of all of us together responsibility in believing in the existence of races and acknowledging the widespread prejudices that categorize social entities (1998, p. 280). In this regard, there are "racism(s)" instead of a single concept "because all such terms are necessarily indeterminate, visceral, or essentially contested" by the existence of a wide range of cultural differences and beliefs (Harris, 1991, p. 218). I may use discrimination and racism interchangeably though they never hold the same connotation; nevertheless, all racist acts execute discriminatory performances.

Dr. Fermin Roland Schramm, a teacher and Senior Researcher of Applied Ethics and Bioethics at the National School of Health public of the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, divided the concept of discrimination into three stages. The first one makes the "discrimination" identical to "distinguishing," which he asserts as this phase it is a normally moral operation that all humans perform not to confuse with other things, "relating to the quality of human interactions, which may be affected by conflicts with consequences, including suffering that is in principle avoidable and so morally open to question" (Schramm, 2015, p. 4). The second is apt to be anchored with the term "separating," "excluding," and "stigmatizing" individuals or groups and, "particularly, considering them a "different" because of their classification by some characteristic, such as sex, species, ethnicity or social class (...) as is the case with sexism, homophobia, speciesism, racism, and classism" (Schramm, 2015, p. 4). The third and last one culminates in modernized reconciliations with differences and tolerance with the other. Within this third stage, the terminology of "discrimination" develops a positive connotation since being discriminated against often, Schramm argues, having a "characteristic that is necessary to defining new identities and establishing bonds between 'moral strangers'" (2015, p. 4).

Furthermore, we reach the tacit implication of discrimination in defining racism that holds the patterns of exclusion and stigmatization of groups, although it is a more complex term. In her *Race and Racism* (1940), Ruth Benedict defines racism as "the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital superiority" (qtd. in Harris, 1991, p. 217). Michael Banton, on the other hand, claims that the

concept of racism is “the doctrine that a man’s behavior is determined by stably inherited characters deriving from separate racial stocks having distinctive attributes and usually considered to stand to one another in relations of superiority and inferiority” (qtd. in Harris, 1991, p. 217). Both definitions agree that racism is an ideological dogma that maintains to differentiate one from another by inherited, congenital, and biological features. I intend to use these narratives to establish a counternarrative -Foucault’s narratives particularly- that the finest stratification of people based on their cultural, ethnic, and skin color is also socially constructed as it is politically enhanced.

Thoroughly shifting to the American context in which the film under discussion takes place, it is worth pointing out that postmodern American culture manifested a multifaceted social crisis that mobilized all states, genders, and even races under the dome of societal and governmental oppression that needed to be revolted against. In 1965, Malcolm X provided lucid accounts that accentuated the allotted social racism between all American factions,

We are living today in an era of revolution, and the revolt of the American Negro is part of the rebellion against the oppression and the colonialism which has characterized this era... It is incorrect to classify the revolt of the Negro as simply a racial conflict of black against white or as a purely American problem. Rather, we are today seeing a global rebellion of the oppressed against the oppressor, the exploited against the exploiter. (qtd. in Marable, 1984, p. 86)

Malcolm X, in light of the aforementioned quote, attributes the persistence of racism and segregation in the United States to unequal power dynamics. Hence, racial discrimination is regularly vindicated post hoc. He claims that the struggle against racism and for the rights of black Americans is a fight against structural injustice and exploitation that affects individuals of all colors and nationalities. This viewpoint is significant because it counters the common assumption that civil rights issues are localized to a single country or ethnic group. It recognizes the universal experiences of oppression and stresses the importance of international cooperation in the struggle against injustice.

The 1980s United States of America marked an ambivalent vision toward racial inequities. It becomes evident that by the emergence of capitalist aspirations, the African American struggle has been assuaged and dismantled via the altered focus targeting economic capital, whereby cultural and ethnic ones are neglected African Americans have risen as a political power with an increasing number of elected officials, intellectuals, college or university students, and business owners. Politically, they were elected mayors of the nation’s largest cities: Harold Washington in Chicago, David Dinkins in New York, Andrew Young in Atlanta, and Kurt Schmoke in Baltimore (Marable, 1984, p. 185).

None of this means that racism has come to an end in the U.S. The social identification of “the other” nevertheless incarnates the deeply embedded racist sentiments in the American social arena, even if popular culture has accepted the existence of the black race. This “racial paradox,” as Marable (1984) described it, resulted in racially motivated harassment, intimidation, and physical abuse where the victims were black subjects (p. 186). By the same token, Coleman Hughes states his concern that racist behaviors, although lessened, the concept of racism is still prevalent, “It seems as if every reduction in racist behavior is met with a commensurate expansion in our definition of the concept. Thus, racism has become a conserved quantity akin to mass or energy: transformable but irreducible” (qtd. in Kaufmann, 2009, p. 13). His claim underscores the tenacious vector that racism performs in American society, which appears unlikely to have a solution. Thus, it becomes urgent to understand that racism is socially constructed rather than an institutionalized act akin to Stuart Hall’s view that:

Racism is always historically specific. Though it may draw on the cultural traces deposited by previous historical phases, it always takes on specific forms. It arises out of present—not past—conditions. Its effects are specific to the present organization of society, to the present unfolding of its dynamic political and cultural processes—not simply its repressed past. (qtd. in Harris, 1991, p. 218)

This implies that the 1980s United States has been turning into a widening gyre that did not only affect the blacks but all othered people, including the whites that received their twisted story of marginalization and racism. Alexis de Tocqueville, in his *Democracy in America* (1850), calls for serious awareness of the shared responsibility of Americans in performing racism.

The hatred that men bear to privilege increases in proportion as privileges become fewer and less considerable so that democratic passions would seem to burn most fiercely just when they have the least fuel ... When all conditions are unequal, no inequality is so great as to offend the eye, whereas the slightest dissimilarity is odious in the midst of general uniformity; the more complete this uniformity is, the more insupportable the sight of such a difference becomes. (qtd. in Kaufmann, 2009, p. 13)

Here, Foucault has been following the path of almost two centuries of existing study by another French scholar. Foucault (2003) argues that “we all have these biological-racist discourses of degeneracy” that make us behave violently toward people we regard as abnormal, new characters, or simply different from our conventional perceptions of the normal (p. 254). Therefore, power relations qua intra-social degradation of individuals *per se* implies accountability responsibility between the state and its subjects.

Foucault's State Racism

The genesis of this issue lies in the significance of postmodernism as a theory. Leigh Gilmore (1994) offers a definition of postmodernism as “a stable and grounded entity that is an antifoundational practice that nonetheless possesses a foundation” and reduces it to solely a single word; “questioning” (pp. 1-8). In a similar vein, Stuart Sim (2011) claimed the “best” conceptualization of postmodernism as a philosophical movement stands on “skepticism” as a core; “skepticism about authority received wisdom, cultural and political norms and so on” (p. 3). This antifoundational skepticism was indeed governed by several theories that stand for a purpose. Postmodernism believes in pluralism, the variation of identities, and social and cultural diversity. However, thoroughly, it tolerates differences and newness, accepts minorities, and tries to integrate them into the normal social organism, thereby sustaining the re-consideration of the self that has been previously considered *a persona non grata*. In the context of this research, poststructuralism “emphasized disparities, irremediable differences, fragmentation, and un-selfsame heterogeneities” (Van Den, 2011, p. 15). To this end, from a postmodernist point of view, there is an attempt to question racism and how postmodernist scholars, mainly Michel Foucault, claim that racism is ingrained within societies, regardless of African Americans. It is grounded on othering abnormal social characters.

Becoming part of the reconceptualization of race and racism, Michel Foucault, in his *Society Must Be Defended* (1976), argues that the state of “racism” is a social behavior conducted to serve political causes. His narrative stems strictly from his peculiar political philosophy. Mark Kelly (2009) asserts that Foucault's philosophy -located in a collection of essays, *Power/knowledge* (1980)- revived Nietzsche's epistemology of knowledge that constrained itself to the effects of power relations as merely political praxis. Therefore, it becomes evident that Foucault's discourse recognizes that “the other race is basically not the race that came from elsewhere or that was, for a time, triumphant or dominant, but that is a race that is permanently, ceaselessly infiltrating the social body, or which is, rather, constantly being re-created in and by the social fabric” (Foucault, 2003, p. 61). To this point, it is worth heeding the fact that Foucault disregarded the

Darwinist white biological supremacy in his lecture. Instead, he rebukes the social organism where indoctrinated humans are responsible for othering some members of the same society as belonging to the other race. For the French philosopher (2003), these new politics emerged from the 19th century as a “biopolitics of the human race” where there “is no longer an anatomo-politics of the human body” (p. 242).

From a Foucauldian perspective, racism “is a way of separating groups within society” based on what he called the “State Racism,” which stands not only for the exclusion of all abnormal social strata counting people with biological disabilities, madmen, and other minorities but for most severely, it encourages internal violence towards them (Foucault, 2003, p. 255). It intersects with the biopolitical and disciplinary technologies of society. To this end, the notion of racism that I will be referring to in this article transcends the boundaries of skin and thus repudiates the statement “racism” in its old sense. Hence, it is apparent that Foucault’s theory which I am referring to as “new racism,” gives a *prima facie* indication pertaining to any genre of discrimination and otherizing behaviors toward minority groups.

Racism and Clowns

In 2009, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie discussed “The Danger of a Single Story”. In her Ted Talk speech, the Nigerian author illuminated the dark shadows we construct upon people’s actual stories by identifying them from a “single story” that leads to misconceptions and false interpretations of “the other”. I may not generalize this phenomenon, though I assume that a great number of people have fallen into the danger of identifying clowns from a similar single story or even other occult narratives. Evidently, Lucile Charles (1945) provided a clear-cut metonymic explanation for the identification of a clown in the following passage:

Here then is the reason for the clown’s many names and guises and close psychological cousins. He is Devil and Vice, as well as Demon, Goblin, and Knave. He often merges into a Churl, Boor, Rustic, Dupe, Dolt, Booby, Simpleton, Noodle, or Nut. He may function as a Fool, Jester, Buffoon, Comic, or Harlequin or Pierrot with a more romantic touch. He may be a Parasite, Scape-goat, Old Man or Old Woman; or an animal; or he may be the “Fool of Nature,” and so complete the cycle back again to the Holy Grail and man’s perennial quest. I see no reason for sharp lines of classification: humorous story, folktale, literature, joking relationship, cartoon, clown, all stem from the same basic human need; and the clown ritual function moves among these many forms with their infinite number of variations, taking shape and impetus from particular human beings, in a particular culture, with their particular expression of the universal need. (p. 34)

In this definition, Charles (1945) highlights the multifaceted nature of clowns and the many roles they embody in human culture. From the demonic and malicious to the naive and simple, the clown figure can symbolize many facets of the human psyche. Humans have a basic desire for laughter which is shown in the many ways in which the clown ritual function is expressed around the world. Indeed, there is no simple definition of what clowns represent. They are attached to the implication of humor pertaining to society of spectacle and idiosyncratic charisma. Still, these identifications are confined to carnivalesque cultural attributes that regard clowns as public entertainers. What is missing is the identification of the human psyche contained within painted bodies. Several scholars classified clowns as “liminal or threshold” figures. (Turner ctd. in Kerman, 1992, p. 9).

Similarly, Stefanova discussed the clown’s paradox of being “described as clever, funny and poetic, but as being neglected and excluded from the real society” (ctd. in Meyer, 2019, p. 240). Being a clown in this sense is simply qualified as a *persona non grata* in the social law and order. Based upon these premises, it is noteworthy to mention that clowns are never to be qualified as professional comedians, while the only recognition they could maintain is being idiosyncratic during their shows as well as in their real lives.

Correspondingly, Bakhtin elucidated that they are viewed solely as fools in every orbit they could belong to:

Clowns and fools, which often figure in Rabelais' novel, are characteristic of the medieval culture of humor. They were the constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season. Like Triboulet at the time of Francis I, they were not actors playing their parts on a stage, as did the comic actors of a later period, impersonating Harlequin, Hanswurst, etc., but remained fools and clowns always and wherever they made their appearance. As such, they represented a certain form of life, which was real and ideal at the same time. They stood on the borderline between life and art, in a peculiar midzone as it were; they were neither eccentrics nor dolts, neither were they comic. (qtd. in Bársony, 2016, p. 53)

This quote exemplifies the importance of medieval clowns and fools who embodied the carnival atmosphere into daily life. These people were not only actors; however, they personified a way of life that was both achievable and admirable. Clowns and fools were significant figures in medieval civilization, and this quote demonstrates their enduring relevance in modern times.

In *Joker*, the very first scenes of the film encapsulate clowns' ways of co-existing as society members. At the outset, Arthur Flick performs his job as a billboard-carrying clown when a group of youngsters steal his advertising board and try to make of him. They beat him severely and then abandon him. Their brutality stems from the underlying belief that clowns are helpless creatures. After publicly shaming an innocent guy, the kids in this scene laughed it off, feeling superior to Arthur. In their view, being a clown justify their humiliating actions. Ending this prologue with a lengthy shot of Arthur trembling in fear and sorrow, we hear youngsters laughing as they rush to the end of the street in the distance. Suppose we analyze this scene to find out why they mocked him, putting the blame on their adolescence and whatever juvenile acts it could generate is tangible. Be that as it may, adults who also saw how he was robbed and humiliated in the middle of the day still did not react. In *Society Must Be Defended* (1976), Foucault deeply probes into the matter and asked; "How, when, and in what way did people begin to imagine that it is a war that functions in power relations, that an uninterrupted conflict undermines peace, and that the civil order is basically an order of battle?" (Foucault, 2003, p. 266). The answer I would say "not in the near future." Still, even if Foucault was addressing French society, this cannot weaken my argument that the American society portrayed in *Joker* stirs no difference. Most individuals have been indoctrinated with the belief that the role of the powerful is to set the rules. If the oppressed people are willing to manifest their opposition, they would regard themselves as agents of anarchy.

In a Foucauldian sense, these youngsters have the "biological-racist discourses of degeneracy" as a major motive for their racist, humiliating acts (p. 254). The comments of Thomas Wayne on *Joker's* first crime on the train summed up the dehumanization of clowns and the emptiness of their existence; he said:

What kind of coward would do something that cold-blooded? Someone who hides behind a mask. Someone who is envious of those more fortunate than themselves, yet they're too scared to show their own face. And until those kinds of people change for the better, those of us who made something of our lives will always look at those who haven't as nothing but clowns. (*Joker*, 2019).

Thomas Wayne's comment draws an obvious parallel between the characteristics of clowns and those of persons who deliberately harm others but refuse to take responsibility for their actions. This signification exceeds the boundaries of a fun maker; it embodied a pejorative connotation that essentially refers to "criminals". If this argument under discussion is defending the side of clowns, Marcelo Beré's (2020) vantage point is based upon opposing speculation. Beré (2020) bears the undertaking that clowns are responsible for their "misfits in the social context" because they "comprehend the world in different,

sometimes in the opposite, ways to that which the members of the audience are used to" (p. 4). Although such stereotypical views encourage the estrangement process towards clowns, in the great majority of cases, I strongly defend the side of clowns that experienced extremely severe physical and emotional harassment that resulted in suicidal thoughts and depression. Regardless of his tribulation with his mental condition, Arthur writes in his journal, "I just hope my death makes more cents than my life" (*Joker*, 2019). His desire for attachment and acceptance generated a sense of guilt for existing without the consent of others. The scene described above reflects similar issues *inter alia*, loneliness, silenced melancholy, and invisibility that embody the state of being under the threat of racist gaze.

Invisibility and otherness

Social theorists have focused on the concept of "othering," which is placing a specific group of people outside the dominant group for a variety of reasons. Patriarchal societies, like the one described by Simone de Beauvoir (1997), view women as the "other" sex because of the way they are positioned in relation to men. Othering people implies excluding their belonging, alienating them from the social group, and subsequently regarding them as invisible bodies. It involves "the use of stereotypes and representations about the other when meeting her/him and talking about him/her [...] for example, ethnocentrism, (Hidden) racism, and (Hidden) xenophobia" (Dervin, 2015, p.43). Staszak (2009) argues that this division constructs two groups. The person who embodies the norms is thus deemed to be normal and the othered "is defined by its faults, devalued and susceptible to discrimination" (p. 1). To this point in the discussion, I assume that we already agreed that clowns and mental ill had been socially othered and, therefore, invisible. This end might not be different from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), a story of an unnamed African American man who is left alone to ponder the racism and social invisibility it was forced on his character by the Jim Crow segregation laws that denied equal treatment with the white Americans. In this context, the invisible is not an African American but whoever falls in the category of abnormals that can only be seen by their fellow alienated or abnormals. The counternarrative here combines the notion of racism and refutes the classical representation of whiteness in popular culture; the masculinized white figure who is always in a power position. In *Joker* (2019), the traditional asymmetrical relationship between black people and white people has been altered to companionship rather than master/slave or superior/inferior dichotomies. Perhaps this point calls for further inquiry about racism against whites, which would undoubtedly be leading the European setting rendering the Holocaust and all the antisemitic ideology, but such an examination is outside the scope of my essay, which is an American contextualized study.

Joker represents a revealing cinematographic piece of the solidarity that appears between African Americans and Arthur Fleck. They are portrayed in characters like his social worker, his lover, the woman with her child on the bus, the administrative assistant clerk at the Arkham state hospital, and in the last scene with the psychiatrist. Thomas Sowell (1983) argues that "the black world was ultimately the only world in which slaves could find emotional fulfillment and close attachments, and to become a pariah there meant personal devastation" (p. 187). This rapprochement is strictly romanticized beneath Arthur and his love relationship. In fact, she is the only person who laughs at his jokes, identifies him as a viral man, and accepts his love, thereby worth companionship. Based on how she engages with Arthur, one can infer that the director sees them as collective representatives of humanity that are otherwise absent in the characters who inhabit his very small world. Another example is the social worker who did not try to show her privilege over a mentally ill man but tried to show him that he is not the only citizen neglected by the government, saying that "they don't give a shit about people like you, Arthur. And they really don't give a shit about people like me either." (*Joker*, 2019). Other characters in the film berate, ridicule, or even assault him when faced with his affliction; Arthur said, "For my whole life, I didn't know if I even really existed. But I do, and people are starting to notice" (*Joker*, 2019). There is a continuity in presenting otherness

concerning state organisms in 1980s U.S. society. Arthur's debate with the talk show Murray unveiled that civilization in the sense of kindness no longer exists. He outrages,

Have you seen what it's like out there, Murray? Do you ever actually leave the studio? Everybody just yells and screams at each other. Nobody's civil anymore. Nobody thinks what it's like to be the other guy. Do you think men like Thomas Wayne ever think what it's like to be someone like me? To be somebody but themselves? They don't. They think that we'll just sit there and take it, like good little boys! That we won't be a werewolf and go wild! (Joker, 2019).

In the above quoted passage, Arthur moves from the terrible life of an individual arbitrated by the humiliation of others into the realm of resistance against oppression, even if his reaction means anarchy. That "the civil order is basically an order of battle?" (Foucault, 2003, p. 266) is something his character seems to grasp is significant. From now on, he is part of the rebel group and must endure the racist system that has been imposed on him.

The social stigmatization of mental illnesses

As already mentioned, postmodern racism relates to abnormal social characters who are presupposed to endanger social security. Foucault invented the genealogy of abnormality theory, which is grounded on the principle that the abnormal individual is an "individual to be corrected." (Foucault, 1988, p. 83). Primarily, abnormality is the new categorization of racism associated with madness, insanity, and psychiatry as social protection. When eliminating race as a criterion of distinction, Reid (2008) argues that:

An era of biopolitical wars ensues in which populations are constituted via their orientation around racialized norms, enemies are distinguished by their racial differentiation from the norm and wars are waged in which populations are mobilized in defense of racial norms against rival populations defined by a perception of racial abnormality. (34)

As a postmodernist, Foucault speaks up for voices that a postmodern society tried to silence. He believes that "madness borrowed its face from the mask of the beast" (Foucault, 1988, p. 72). In "The Civilization and Madness," he discusses the madmen's position within a society and how they are treated; he believes that:

The racism that psychiatry gave birth to in this period is racism against the abnormal, against individuals who, as carriers of a condition, stigmata, or any defect whatsoever, may more or less randomly transmit to their heirs the unpredictable consequences of the evil or rather of the non-normal, that they carry within them. (Foucault, 2003, pp. 316-317)

For Foucault, psychiatry is just another form of discrimination against the different. It takes the form of internal racism where the population must be defended against various forms of degeneration (Foucault, 1999, p. 300). Indeed, madmen are considered to be gentle beasts but under the obligation of social alienation. *Joker's* Arthur suffers from a "sudden frequent and uncontrollable laughter" as a symptom of his neurological condition, a case that nobody felt empathy towards. In fact, even the black woman with her son on the bus that visibly recognizes him as a person does not accept his mental condition. Nonetheless, the lady thinks that he is bothering her son while he is trying to make him laugh. This scene exemplifies what Michel Foucault called "internal racism", the act of excluding people from our comfort zone grounded on the personal fear of positioning ourselves in danger. Foucault (2003) previously termed internal racism operates as a 'biological caesura within a population "between worthy and unworthy life (p 255).

Ladelle McWhorter argues that within this internal racism, the mentally ill and criminals were not only “bad apples” in the social structure but rather “degenerates.” She claims that “[t]heir condition was both mental and moral and physiological and heritable, and it was progressive in that it would likely worsen through the course of their lives and would likely be inherited in a more virulent form in their offspring” (qtd. in Holder, 2019, p. 84). Eventually, the real threat is the social incomprehensiveness and their lack of awareness of how to behave towards people with neurological disorders, which is one of the essences of postmodern racism. Again, in his journal, Arthur writes that “the worst part about having a mental illness is that people expect you to behave as if don’t”. Arthur accepts his incurable condition, yet he only needs people to understand and agree to take him back to their belonging. In part of the final segments of the film’s closure, The Joker expresses his shattered sentiments towards Murray, mocking how society ostracizes him:

Joker: I know! How about another joke, Murray?

Murray: No, I think we’ve had enough of your jokes.

Joker: What do you get...

Murray: I don’t think so.

Joker: ...when you cross a mentally ill loner with a society that abandons him and treats him like trash!? (Joker, 2019)

When Arthur repeatedly experiences marginalization and humiliation, comedy is one thing, and his reality is another. He constructs a sense of resilience, eventually realizing that it was not his fault that people marginalized him.

The film depicts the dominance of corrupt political men over local social and economic difficulties brought up by cultural materialism. Similarly, Deeksha Yadav (2022) highlights the film’s core problem: class struggle, which is represented in the city’s physical separations. Cinematically, scenes depicting government agencies like hospitals, clinics, and other administrative companies are almost always lit with ominous, low-key lighting that suggests the institutions’ dismal state. Thomas Wayne’s palace and workplace, however, are screened with brighter lights to emphasize the social divide. As a reaction to this inequality, the Joker revolts against his own society becoming the symbol of revolution against injustice. This is seen in the terrifying scene towards the climax of the film, when the Joker is perched atop a police car and everyone in the crowd turns to stare at him. Unfortunately, his epiphany went quite destructive and detrimental. He transforms into a social anarchist who can kill people once under threat.

Conclusions

In association with this counteractive rebel, Robert Bono, in his interview with Michel Foucault in 1983, deduces from the latter’s discourse that there is a great distinction between “marginality that has been chosen and marginality that is imposed” (Kritzman, 1990, p. 165). Here, Arthur refuses the marginality imposed on him and makes a new pro-tanto solitary persona. His feeling of homelessness and psychological damage was aggravated when he discovered that even the woman, he considers his mother deceived him also.

Though the end of the film represents the Joker franchise in D.C. comics, it makes urgent the call to a full awareness of the danger of marginalizing individuals without their consent. It becomes evident also that racism is a conveniently “internal” trait manipulated by policymakers to decide who can be sidelined. Effectively, the battle against it begins with constructing a collective consciousness that accepts people’s differences, thereby protecting them from malevolent comportments.

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