

Esch, The Lost Childhood

By Rakan Algahtani

Peoples' childhood can influence their lives after childhood. Some people have had pretty good memories about their childhood, while others have had bad memories. In this case Esch in *Salvage the Bones* novel, have not had a pleasant memories because she lost her mother at a young age and got pregnant. That influenced her to become mature even though she was still young. As a result Esch has suffered from the environment she lives in such is being born in a motherless household, and poverty. When someone like Esch goes through this rough environment, her psychological status would be influenced dramatically and because of that Esch did not have a proper childhood.

When I read *Salvage the bones*, the first thing came up to my mind is Esch situation in the story. I feel sorry for her because she is the only female in her family. It is a rough situation because girls need to do the talk, which is very hard for Esch to do the talk with her brothers or father. In the story Esch was not sure about her place in the family, she was not a sister as much as she is mother to them. As a result that have made lose a part of her childhood as a teenager. The transition from childhood to adulthood was rapid for Esch, which have made her act as an adult mother. In addition, what made this more problematic for Esch is her pregnancy at young age. So, she had to deal with her all men family and her pregnancy. There are to many things happened to Esch that I wanted to write about her struggle, I couldn't imagine how tough the situation is. Esch is the one character that stand out to me in the story I mean I have read about her brothers, but each

one of them seems to be doing something, except her, I feel like she has been left out since she is the only woman in the family.

Esch family is the main influence on her personality, one of the basic concepts of psychological theory suggest that, "Our adult personalities is the result of the emotional experience we had while growing up." (Tyson, 83) I agree with this statement because my childhood is pretty much influenced my adulthood as I grow up and understand the way my family act. Being a Middle Eastern totally has affected my personality in my adulthood. I remember the first I came to the United States. The first thing that I have had was the cultural shock because the gap between my culture and the American culture is so huge that it made me struggle to adapt life in the United States. Back home it is normal to greet someone multiple times in the same day especially parents, while in the United States it is less than that. As a result, I was greeting people multiple times on campus, which for some people a bit odd. That explains this theory very well. So, the past experiences and habits that people had, will impact their adulthood.

In addition, to the family influence, there is the impact of the unconscious mind which is usually connect to people emotional problems that people have. People want to forget their painful past by throwing their emotions back to their unconscious mind. The problem is the unconscious mind has such power that could make us feel the pain again and again. For example, when we do not like something we tend to try to forget and suddenly we see what we fear in our dreams as a nightmare. It has happened to me in the past, when I was connected emotionally with a girl couple years ago. It was more painful

that pleasant for my emotions because the unconscious mind makes me see what I want to see in my dreams that does not happen in reality. At that moment I figured the impact of my emotions towards my mind. The most bizarre thing is that I was able to feel her presence of distance, I am not exaggerating, but the way we feel can impact our mind dramatically. I believe that the unconscious mind has the power of attracting something or even someone to our lives. It is called the law of attraction, I learned this from a book called the secret where so many scientists and philosophers explain how the unconscious mind works as a magnetic machine that have a tremendous influence in our lives. So when we have painful thoughts we just attract more painful ideas.

When people have a painful past in their early childhood, they might tend to act aggressively in their future. I have met some people who have had painful childhood and because of that they act aggressively as life in their minds is tough so they have to be tougher. “Research exploring the intergenerational transmission for abuse has repeatedly found that children subjected to harsh and physically abusive parenting are more likely to become physically abusive parents” (DiLillo, et al) So what in the past has such an influence on our future behaviors. I think some people connect their childhood to life in general, the way they see life as children, does build up the way they see life. This is where Esch childhood influenced her behavior as she grows up. In the novel *Salvage the Bones*, her ideas about sex are totally different than what most girls think. Esch thinks that in sex men are usually dominant and that girls should try to be dominant. All of that happened because of her past experience in having sex. As a result she thought that all men do the same thing to other girls that same way she is being treated. So the abusive

relationship that Esch had with her partner is considered an example of a core issue in the psychoanalytic theory in Tyson's book. From what I have read in *Salvage the Bones*, Esch had couple core issues in term of the theory, which are low self-esteem, fear of abandonment. When the partner pushed Esch she stopped pushing on his chest because she did not want to upset her partner. However, for me that shows her low self-esteem and the superiority of her mal partner. I was wondering if she ever would have seen her self in the relationship as an influential partner. Maybe she thinks that her partner did is normal in relationships. Perhaps she is also afraid of being abandoned by her partner, which made her give her partner what he wants even if the sex is painful. The way I see Esch situation in the relationship is that she have never been with anyone else beside her partner. It happens usually in first dates, I have a friend of my mine who dated a guy for one semester and then her boy friend had to go back to his country. My friend wanted her relationship with him to last, but the reality of life was between them, and now she is kind of not socializing as she used to. I kind of have the sense that she thinks there would be no one better than her first boyfriend.

Esch being born in a motherless household has a tremendous impact on her personality and behaviors. [“Aside from the obvious effects of grief over the loss of mothers for those who lose them at an early age, they are numerous: Lack of a female role model, or “not having someone to give guidance on how to be a women in today’s society.”](Lloyd) by having no female model in Esch life, she does not have anyone to imitate or learn from. Moreover, her whole family is all men, which made her more clueless about how to be a woman properly. Esch in *Salvage the Bones* is the one with

the worst scenario because I feel she is left alone from her family. I feel like her situation in the story is the worst even though everyone in the family has their own share of agony. Three of my cousins lost their father who is my uncle when they were young. Their behavior have changed dramatically, I sort of sensed the feeling that their role model is gone and they have to pick a new one. Even though, their life situation is much better than Esch, they still share the same aspect of losing one of the parents at such a young age.

In addition, Esch pregnancy made her situation worse because she is still young and she does not have a female model to ask for council about what to do in terms of her pregnancy. “All participants for this study belonged to single parent households. They were either living with their mothers and siblings or fathers, grandmothers and siblings” (Akella, et al) In this study, the participants had lost on of their parents, and as a result these teens got sexually active without using protection which led into getting them pregnant at such a young age. I feel like having a single parent lays a huge pressure of the children so they tend to find happiness in something else or maybe they simply do not care anymore. When we think about it, the trauma of losing a parent influences some peoples’ personalities.

In some cases this could lead to unstable sense of self, which is, “our sense of self is insecure or unstable if we are unable to sustain a feeling of personal identity” (Tyson, 84) and that is when issues like being pregnant at a young age, because the personal identity is not stable yet after having a gap of losing a mother as for Esch situation. Instability makes choosing what is right or wrongs a blurry process. In Esch situation, she

was not aware how having sex without protection could lead to making her pregnant. Maybe she is young to make the right choice or maybe she is not sure about her personal identity, such a confusion could lead to making wrong choices. I am not putting the blame on her, but I am putting the blame on her environment that she lives in, as it is lacking her mother guidance and as a result, Esch did not have that much knowledge about sex.

Moving from her household situation to her family's poverty, which had a lot to do with the way she and her family act. Poverty can make us do things that are not humane just to get money. For example her brother Skeetah and the dogs' fight, where he takes money from bets. Even though, this is awful towards dogs, that was probably an easy way to get money especially with a furious female dog China that fights for her puppies. The problem of being born in a poor family is not that it is just fate, other factors play a tremendous role on judging who is poor or not. In the Marxist theory, classism could be the main factor of Esch family's poverty. When Esch saw the white family's she was fascinated, as she wants to have the same life as them. However, because their class level is different than the white families, Esch family could not have the same privilege.

In addition, the idea of capitalism plays a role in the story because the community that Esch lives in is very competitive. Which happens within her society and even her family. Each one of her brothers is doing something to earn money or to get a scholarship for an education. I was wondering if one or two of Esch's siblings would ever suggest a group work that would benefit the whole family. One of my favorite parts of the capitalist ideology is "Marxist theory suggests that unrestrained competition is oppressive because

it tends to ensure that the most selfish, unethical people will rise to the top, as they're the ones willing to do what ever it takes to win" (Tyson, 114). That is the problem with capitalist societies because everyone is competing even family member competition. Everyone is trying to be better than everyone. I think this makes the some distance between family members because everyone is doing their own thing to become superior, even if that is on the account of putting a dog into a deadly fight.

Esch being born in a poor family must have some influence on her personality and health. As she is living in poverty since childhood, Esch ideas about life is different that children who were born in a rich or a middle class family. In addition, being born in a poor family can increase the stress level of the children who have the same situation as Esch. "Children growing up in poverty have elevated chronic stress and worse working memory as young adults. Both of these main effects of childhood poverty fit with prior studies on elevated physiological stress"(Evans, et al 691) In this study, they studied the influence of children who were born in poor families on their health and stress level. Being born in a poor family surly is a stressful thing because the child would not have a proper childhood as they are forced to work at a young age to help out their family. When we think about it, children should have their childhood life because I think it is their right to act as their age suggests. However, being born in a poor family is not a choice for them.

Last though about poverty is the influence of the ghost of poverty on people who after a while became a middle class. These people tend to save their money even more and they also pressure their children that they should not buy anything unless they really

need it. The parents of these families know the value of the dollar because they already suffered from the pressure of poverty. My grandfather have lived through some years of starvation in Saudi Arabia, he always tells me stories how they were not able to find a peace of date to eat from the palm trees. Nowadays, my grandfather never wasted food because life taught him how hard could it be to find something to eat, so he never wasted anything and he always tells me not to waste anything.

Shifting from poverty to the race impact on Esch's life. We see racism nowadays on the media everywhere, which sometimes leads to judge some races and ethnicity. In this case, some people view African Americans as poor and less educated race that is for the United States. I think the reason for that started since the slavery and the civil war. Back then the African Americans were suffering to get their rights as citizens. Years later, the racial segregation took place in the United States where the African Americans could not access the places that white Americans can get into. Then the idea of supparate neighborhoods came in where each of these two races have their own neighborhood. As for Esch when she was watching the white family life style. Perhaps she though that race was not important to have a life with privilege.

The African American theory in Tyson's book explains the aspect of racism in a very interesting way, "Racism is the economic, political, social, or psychological oppression of individuals of groups based on their race. Racism is fueled by the myth that the oppressed race is inferior to the " dominant " race"(Tyson 211) which is in this case the white Americans. I have never though that racism could have so many types because what usually see and hear is the social racism. I think Esch's family is in the category of

economic racism, as they do not have as much privilege as the white families to get a proper education or even get help from the government at the time of Hurricane Katrina. The Supreme Court case *Brown vs. Board* in the 1950s has their impact of the education of African Americans in a positive way as it was their first chance to have a proper education. However “Prejudice is not erased by law: Invisible systems and unspoken assumptions have created a hostile education system that still denies Blacks equal access.”(Johnson-bailey, 6) The thing with racism is that it is hard to prevent it because no matter what happens there will be always someone who is prejudice towards another race. For example, when and American soldiers go to Iraq and come back after watching their friends getting shot by an Iraqi person. After that, the soldier will hate anyone one who like the person who shot his friend, which is in this case a Middle Eastern. I see a lot of American soldiers while I am travelling in the United States, and some of these soldiers sort of gaze at my face like they have seen me before. It is a situation that is not comfortable for me because I feel like I am being judged by the way I look. That is why I think racism is hard to stop for happening. My idea about racism is that is like destiny, in term of being inevitable. It happened, it is happening, and it will happen.

In the end, Esch childhood life determined her personality and actions especially being born in a motherless family. Esch childhood was not pleasant because of the factors of her position in the family as the only female, her poor family, and her race as an African American. These factors have such an impact on the person’s psychological status. Esch struggle in *Salvage the Bones* novel was the reason I wanted to study the influence of her struggle on her personality and how she acts when she is the only female

in an all men family. For that I think Esch became a strong woman because of these factors, and I admired her courage to be sort of in the position of the family mom.

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