REPRESENTATIONS OF THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE IN SELECTED CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES

A thesis submitted by

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DECLARATION

I, Oluyomi Oduwobi, hereby declare that this thesis for the PhD degree at the University of Venda, hereby submitted by me, has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university, and that it is my own work in design and execution and that all reference material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

Signature: _____ Date: 28/04/2016

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to those who experienced the trans-Atlantic slave trade first-hand, as well as my ancestors:

Liwu

Senjo

Oduwobi

Odunuti Ezekiel and Eunice Idowu Oduwobi

Michael Foluwasho and Florence Oluyemi Oduwobi

Oluyomi Abiodun and Victoria Bisola Oduwobi

ABSTRACT

The trans-Atlantic slave trade refers to the forced transportation of African people as slaves from Africa to the Americas across the Atlantic Ocean between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. Therefore, using the theoretical frameworks of postcolonialism, postcolonial feminism and postmodern historiographic metafiction, this thesis evaluates the theoretical and practical importance of reconstructing a historical past as well as counter-hegemonic proclivities in contemporary literary narratives. It sets an analytic focus on the extensive representations of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in selected contemporary literary narratives such as: Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* (1990); David Pesci's *Amistad* (1997); Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997); Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound* (2000); Manu Herbstein's *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (2000); Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* (2007); Prince Justice's *Tutuoba: Salem's Black Shango Slave Queen* (2007); and Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007). This study evinces the diverse approaches the selected writers of African descent employ to interrogate and destabilise the official history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in an attempt to reconceptualise it. As a result, this study examines how the selected writers deviate from the normative form of writing slave narratives to make the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its engendered discourses on racism, identity, gender, politics, socio-economic realities and the African diaspora relevant to the twenty-first century reader. An examination of the selected narratives for this thesis contributes to the knowledge on literary scholarship and exposes aspects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade that have been previously unexplored. The conscious efforts of the writers to interrogate the canonical slave narratives and subvert the hegemonic history through their imaginative techniques direct attention to the contemporary discourses of appraising the interdisciplinary links between literature and other subject areas such as history, law, as well as cultural and diasporic studies.

Keywords: African diaspora, contemporary literary narratives, D'Aguiar, Hartman, Herbstein, Hill, Johnson, Justice, Pesci, Phillips, postcolonial, trans-Atlantic slave trade, writers of African descent.

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Before attempting a brief survey of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, it may be worthwhile to warn the reader against developing unduly hostile passion towards those who participated in the harmful trade. In other words, he would be well advised not to fall into the common temptation of judging the men who bought and sold slaves outside the moral standards and circumstances of their times.

Osae and Nwabara (1968:163)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The trans-Atlantic slave trade has been a dominant thematic preoccupation in Black literature from the early nineteenth century to the present. A majority of the most celebrated African-American writers like Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Alex Haley, Langston Hughes, Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison have written canonical works that reverberate with the themes of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its resultant slavery and racism. While slavery is regarded as the site of black victimisation, racism is considered to be an instrument for the denial of black artistic "historicity and cultural integrity" (Gilroy, 1993:188). However, in spite of the cruel nature of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, writers and readers remain irresistibly attracted to it in an attempt to "search for some kind of meaning in its vicious exploitation, senseless cruelty, incomprehensible suffering, and massive hypocrisy" (Ryan, 2008:2). Hence, the trans-Atlantic slave trade forms an iconic part of literary scholarship because it gave birth to Black literature in the African diaspora as well as provoking themes relating to slavery, racial segregation, identity, double consciousness and cultural valorisation.

The mounting rate of oppression and racial segregation which African-Americans experienced in the United States of America encouraged African-American writers to produce a distinct form of literature that would shape Black literary practice. African-American writers therefore formulated Black literature as a tool to effect a change to the hegemonic configuration of discrimination prevalent in American society. Black literature has, however, been extended to currently refer to literary works produced by Africans in the diaspora. Hence, Black literature is an imaginative conveyance of the totality of experiences of Africans in the diaspora from the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to this present day. Coupled with the trans-Atlantic slave trade as its classic subject of discourse, Black literature became the inspiration for many struggles for recognition such as the Harlem Renaissance,

Black Arts Movement, Pan-Africanism and Afrocentricism in the Americas, Africa and Europe, as well as the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa.

This research examines the literary representations of the trans-Atlantic slave trade as viewed through the lens of contemporary fictional writers of African descent who are regarded as being "black" in spite of their racial mixture or skin pigmentation. The term "black" became a substitute for "Negro" in the United States of America from the Black Power Movement era in the late 1960s till the present because "Negro" was considered to have a negative connotation that was used to denigrate the slaves and their descendants. On the one hand, Anyidoho (1989:2) expresses his displeasure at the application of the term "black" to define the whole Negroid race because a great majority of those referred to as being black, especially in the United States of America, are of mixed parentage. On the other hand, Anyidoho acknowledges that the term "black" remains valid since it represents a concept and an attitude for people of African descent worldwide. It therefore means that the word "black" is acceptable to describe Africans in the homeland and in the diaspora because regardless of a black man's nationality in Europe, Asia, Australia, the Caribbean or the Americas, he is still a black man of African descent. While the term "Negro" seems inappropriate due to its historical connection to racial vilification, the adoption of "black" or "African" enables people of African descent to be conscious of their peculiar identity, their collective past, and their cultural heritage.

This research is a revisionist study which complements the Black literary discourse on the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As a revisionist study, it focuses on how contemporary writers of African descent fictionalise and reconstruct received ideas on the trans-Atlantic slave trade to demystify and debunk "the orthodox version of the past" (McHale, 1987:90). This is achieved by examining contemporary black neo-slave narratives published between the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (1990 – 2007), through the theoretical lens of postcolonialism, postcolonial feminism and postmodern historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction is examined within the theoretical framework of postmodernism because postmodernist writing employs elements of alteration and inquiry to explore the "boundaries between fact and fiction" as well as "the world and the text" (Burgass, 2000:177). Hence, the texts

to be examined are reconstructions of history rather than historical constructions, with emphasis on the narrative techniques employed and the images portrayed.

Utilising the literary theories of postcolonialism, postcolonial feminism and postmodern historiographic metafiction is considered a "fruitful strategy" (Gradinaru, 2013:431) for our contemporary world. Such academic endeavour reveals how the selected writers seek to install and subvert the long-established general knowledge of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and present other possibilities to the event. It also shows how contemporary literary theories are applicable to the reading of African, African-American and Caribbean literary works. As a result, eight novels, the authors of which are representative of African, African-American, Caribbean and diasporic literary traditions are examined for this study. These are: Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* (1990); David Pesci's *Amistad* (1997); Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997); Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound* (2000); Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* (2007); Manu Herbstein's *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (2000); Prince Justice's *Tutuoba: Salem's Black Shango Slave Queen* (2007); and Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007). These narratives are considered appropriate for this study because they creatively transpose the trans-Atlantic slave trade history from the past to the present and shift the reader's focus from the slave trade as an institution to the individual subaltern slave's experiences.

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1.2 Background to the Study

This research is predicated on the trans-Atlantic slave trade which is otherwise known as the Atlantic slave trade or Triangular trade. The trans-Atlantic slave trade refers to the forced transportation of men, women and children from the western and central parts of Africa across the Atlantic Ocean between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries to work as slaves in the Americas (New World), before its eventual abolition in 1888. African middlemen sold captured African slaves to European merchants who in turn shipped them to the European colonies in South and North America. Hence, "the slave-trade was the very life of the colonies" (Du Bois, 2007:10). The trans-Atlantic slave trade was triangular in nature because "it involved three principal stages or legs and three different continental regions" (Postma,

1990:149). In the first phase, the ships left Europe for Africa with goods such as weapons and gun powder, textiles, pearls, rum and other cheap manufactured goods to be traded for African captives. The second phase involved the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean (Middle Passage) to the Americas by ships loaded with African captives in order for the African captives to be sold as slaves to work in colonies and plantations. The third phase was the transportation of agricultural products like sugar, cotton, coffee, tobacco, rice and so on, produced by the plantation slaves in the Americas, to Europe.

At the outset, the Europeans attempted to kidnap Africans from their homes by raiding the African communities but the resistance they faced made it apparent to them that the only realistic approach to getting slaves and other merchandise was to entice African rulers and trade with middlemen in the commodities the Africans wanted (Lee & Chu, 2014:1152). Commodities exchanged for the slaves included cloth, metals, firearms, gunpowder, alcohol, umbrellas, cutlery, coins, decorative wear like garments and apparel, horses, salt, mirrors, paper, and so on. Fadipe (2010:6) opines that in the 1440s, "one horse was traded for 25 to 30 slaves". Therefore, the low cost of slaves encouraged the boom in the inhuman trade. This was combined with the fact that between the sixteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, many Europeans were convinced that it was "cheaper to buy slaves than to breed them" (Robinson, 1983:146).

Once captured, the Africans were forced to march a long distance to the coast where the European traders at the slave factories awaited them. These captives were yoked together to such an extent that many died from hunger and exhaustion. While many captives killed themselves rather than submit to an unknown fate, the captors also killed those who resisted them. This point marked the gradual destruction of the African self-respect and self-identity. On arriving at the slave factories, the captured men, women and children were stripped naked in order for the whites, especially the ships's doctors, to examine every part of their bodies. Stripping the slaves naked made them, particularly the female slaves, susceptible to sexual assaults. Those certified as being good and sound were separated from those rejected. The slaves rejected were called "Mackrons" (Davidson, 1980:111) and they included those above 35 years of age with grey hair, as well as those

regarded as defective by virtue of physical defects like loss of fingers, toes or teeth, and any other imperfections such as albinism, perceived ugliness, bandy legs, or venereal diseases.

The defective ones were afterwards killed while the sound and healthy ones were haggled over, purchased and branded with hot irons on various parts of their bodies, especially on their chests, breasts, thighs, backs or buttocks, in order to identify the individual traders or companies that owned them. The captives were also imprinted in order to avoid the native sellers substituting the good ones for the defective ones. The slaves were kept in cells and dungeons, otherwise called barracoons, and castles (coastal warehouses) of the slave factories, in their hundreds and thousands, for weeks and months awaiting the slave ships that would transport them for enslavement in the New World.

It is against this backdrop that this research centres on the assumption that contemporary writers on the trans-Atlantic slave trade, especially those of African descent, prefer to reconstruct the story of the African past themselves instead of having it narrated by the Europeans. More importantly, they depict the trans-Atlantic slave trade event through the lens of postcolonialism and postmodern historiographic metafictions rather than simple historical fiction. These writers produce counter-discursive works in an attempt to install, subvert and interrogate the official history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Historiographic metafiction is a term Linda Hutcheon (1988:20) uses to define the postmodern novel, especially the novels set in the past. Hutcheon (1988:5) conceives historiographic metafictions as the popular narratives which are self-reflexive but also "paradoxically lay claim to historical events and personages". The postcolonial and postmodern historiographic metafictional works for this study are regarded as hybrid novels which seek to question and subvert any disintegration through their pluralising resort to the fields of history, semiotics, law, economics, philosophy, political science, theology, literary studies and many more.

This study utilises a fusion of postcolonial and postmodern literary theories because postcolonialism and postmodernism intersect in their preoccupations with counter-hegemony and both express scepticism about master narratives. While postcolonialism is against the cultural hegemony established by Western

imperialism, postmodernism is against modernism's assumptions of sign, truth, order and subjectivity. However, in establishing the nexus between postcolonialism and postmodernism, postcolonialism is regarded as a progeny of postmodernism and it is indebted to postmodernism with regard to its advanced conceptual language (Dirlik, 1994:352). Additionally, postcolonialism and postmodernism are voiced from different discursive locations and theorise issues relating to "subject positions, gender assignations, racial and ethnic alignments, and class identifications" (Dayal, 1996:114) in different ways.

For this study, postmodern narratives and historiographic metafictions share several similarities so that it becomes essential to combine the two concepts to form the neologism "postmodern historiographic metafictions" in addition to using the concepts interchangeably. This is because postmodern discourses also "tend to use but also abuse, install but also subvert conventions, and they usually negotiate these contradictions through irony and parody" (Enriquez, 2009:80). Such postmodern contradictions work to challenge the entire concept of "historical and literary knowledge" (Hutcheon, 1988:x). However, these selected works are not postmodern merely because they are contemporary, rather, they are postmodern because they are "fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical and inescapably political" (Hutcheon, 1988:4).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The literary discourse on the trans-Atlantic slave trade has, over the centuries, been primarily concerned with accounts of the event by Europeans, Anglo-Americans and subsequently, African-American writers. Owing to this, literary representations of the trans-Atlantic slave trade by African and Caribbean writers have been neglected in spite of the significant roles they play in the fields of history, anthropology as well as other genres of literature. The major problem investigated in this thesis, therefore, is to examine how contemporary writers of African descent employ diverse creative postcolonial and postmodern techniques to reconstruct the trans-Atlantic slave trade and make it relevant to readers in the twenty-first century.

1.4 Research Questions

- Are postcolonialism and postmodernism apposite theoretical constructs in the examination of contemporary literary writings on the trans-Atlantic slave trade?
- How do the selected literary narratives address the issues of imperialism, race, gender, diaspora and the African identity and make them relevant to the twenty-first century reader?
- What distinguishes the selected contemporary narratives from one another despite their thematic preoccupation on the trans-Atlantic slave trade?

1.5 Aims and Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to critically examine the literary representations of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in eight novels published between 1990 and 2007 by writers of African descent. The aim is to appraise their postcolonial and postmodern preoccupations, and other innovative techniques that are employed in their narratives. Attention is directed to contemporary neo-slave narratives by writers of African descent in order to generate an extensive critical scholarship on this literary genre. This will also help in probing the older literary representations of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The objectives of this study include the following:

- To examine the appositeness of employing postcolonialism and postmodernism as theoretic constructs in appraising Black literature;
- To examine a selection of contemporary literary narratives and demonstrate how the notions of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, imperialism, race, gender and the African reality are constructed for the twenty-first century reader; and
- To appraise how neo-slave narratives differ from one another in spite of their analogous focus on the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

1.6 Research Design and Methodology

As the nature of literary studies belongs to the epistemology of qualitative research, this thesis is a text-based appraisal of the selected primary texts. Secondary texts are also consulted in an attempt to evaluate how postcolonialism and postmodernism are used to problematize and interrogate what is regarded as the historical knowledge on the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As a consequence, this thesis critically examines the selected novels aided by various literary theories that have a bearing on the study. References are also made to historical documents and factual accounts in an attempt to consolidate the generated arguments and observations. This thesis employs eclectic strands of postcolonialism and postmodernism with an intention to study the current literary phenomenon that exists in contemporary narrative discourse. These theories help to critically analyse the significant techniques and representations that propel the interrogation of the official history of global events like the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

1.7 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Black literary tradition on the trans-Atlantic slave trade did not begin as postcolonial works or postmodern historiographic metafictions. Rather, its evolution began with the genre "captivity literature" which was a term for slave narratives in the antebellum period of the United States of America. This was the period before the American Civil War which was fought between 1861 and 1865. The central themes of these narratives focused on the trans-Atlantic slave trade, slavery in America, escape or manumission, and the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. These canonical slave narratives were mostly written by the slaves who had experienced slavery first-hand. The first known literary work by an African-American writer is a ballad that is entitled "Bars Fight" by Lucy Terry. It was composed in 1746 following an Indian attack that occurred in Deerfield, Massachusetts, that same year. Terry's ballad was passed orally from one generation to the next "until it was published in the *Springfield Republican* in 1854" (Adams & Pleck, 2010:63). The publication of "Bars Fight" marked the commencement of an era which Jackson (1989) categorises as the "age of apprenticeship" in Black literature because at that time, Black literature was still in its formative stage. Other seminal works include Phillis Wheatley's poem "An Elegiac Poem on George Whitfield" (1770) and her poetry anthology, *Poems on*

Various Subjects, Religious and Moral (1773), as well as Jupiter Hammon's poem "An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries" (1760). These works were replete with Christian themes rather than the injustices of slavery.

Iconic black writers also existed in Britain during the critical period when the controversy over the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade reached its zenith. These prominent figures wrote their slave narratives as autobiographies, like their counterparts on the other side of the Atlantic. These include Ukawsaw Gronniosaw's *A Narrative of the Most Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince* (1772), Quobna Ottobah Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Humbly Submitted to the Inhabitants of Great-Britain, By Ottobah Cugoano, A Native of Africa* (1787), and Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789). As a demonstration of the claim that the eighteenth century slave narratives are more inclined towards the conventions of Christian religion than protest against the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Echeruo (1992:54) observes that Gronniosaw's narrative concerns itself more with the celebration and explanation of salvation and miracles as well as "the existence of a Supreme God".

Even though Cugoano also assimilates the traditional form of writing about Christian salvation and deliverance, he is more regarded as a "radical" writer (Carretta, 1998:83). Gunn (2010:629) affirms that Cugoano's narrative was rejected by the London reviewers because it was considered too radical as it was written by "a former African slave who was the first African to write his own abolitionist narrative in the English language". Cugoano's narrative calls for the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the emancipation of slaves and the condemnation of British imperialism. On the contrary, Equiano's work was regarded as the most influential black narrative in English prior to the publication of Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) but it is equally criticised as being a "genre of spiritual autobiography" (Potkay, 1994:681) like the black American and British autobiographies of the eighteenth century. This is because Equiano re-enacts the narrative pattern of the Bible through his experiences of captivity, liberation and conversion. However, Equiano's work succeeds as an amalgam of "slave narrative,

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sea yarn, military adventure, ethnographic reportage, historical fiction, travelogue ... and abolitionist tract" (Davidson, 2007:19).

Slave narratives developed in the middle of the nineteenth century as a protest against (white) man's inhumanity to (black) man and to expose the brutality of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. These narratives were the diverse accounts of the personal experiences of African-Americans who had escaped slavery especially from the South to the North during the antebellum period of the United States of America. The narratives, which drew on biblical allusion and imagery, enabled African-Americans to immerse themselves in the American culture with a revelation of how slavery was ravaging the fabric of the American society. Notable works published by such African-Americans include Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) as well as *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855); and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861).

Following the publication of Douglass's first autobiography in 1845, the press in the South of the United States condemned it as a "catalogue of lies" (Fenton, 2014:28) but the North commended it as an extremely thrilling and important work. According to Ramsey (2007:19), Douglass's 1845 narrative is a classic text which reinforces the "myth of the reborn American self, the freely invented new man". The narrative portrays Douglass as a hero who resists slavery and devises ways of manipulating the whites to get himself educated and to escape. Douglass meets William Lloyd Garrison, an abolitionist, who encourages him to travel and give anti-slavery lectures. Inasmuch as Douglass tries to convince his audiences by showing the stripes on his back, quite a number of people doubt him because he "spoke too well and too learnedly" (Broxill, 2009:302). Gates (1989:124) however argues against Douglass's depiction of his "always complete heroic self" and calls him a "Rhetorical Man" who "exists as a rhetorical strategy primarily, as an open-ended system of rhetorical figures and tropes" (Gates, 1989:108).

Douglass's second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, is described as a retelling "of the same facts as the first autobiography" (McCoy, 2006:160). However, while his 1845 narrative is a story of his life as a slave to a freedman, his 1855 narrative is revised and extended to explicate his evolution from

a slave to an orator and a writer advocating against slavery. For instance, Douglass begins his first autobiography with a brief introduction "I was born in Tuckahoe" but describes elaborately and links his birthplace with the institution of slavery in his second autobiography. Brawley (1996:106), however, criticises Douglass's 1855 narrative for using "speculative anecdote" and conforming to Harriet Beecher Stowe's disparaged description of the landscape of slavery in her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Douglass describes his place of birth, Tuckahoe, Maryland, as a place of despondency and destitution yet the town has ironically become significant for being his place of birth.

Harriet Jacobs's narrative exposes the sexual oppression of female slaves by the white slave masters. She employs her personal experiences as a slave girl as a "public testimony against the tyrannical system" (Yellin, 2004:157). Rather than conform to the portrayal of the institution of slavery as being benign, Jacobs depicts it as a pathological and peculiar institution in an effort to counter the master narratives on slavery and race. For many years, the authorship of Jacob's narrative became the subject of controversies by critics such as Bontemps (1969) and Blassingame (1972) mainly because the narrative was edited by Lydia Maria Child and "was published under the pseudonym, Linda Brent" (Braxton, 1986:382). However, Yellin (1981) successfully employs historical evidence resulting from the correspondences between Harriet Jacobs and Lydia Maria Child to authenticate Jacobs's authorship.

On the one hand, the eighteenth and nineteenth century literature by black writers in the New World is regarded as "apprentice literature" (Gakwandi, 1977:2) in their effort to imitate the European models of the period. On the other hand, Kerr (2006:362) views the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the period that initiated the discourses on identity that linked the concepts of race, nation and ethnic community with the concept of race playing a central role in the construction of the idea of national character. In spite of the differing views of these scholars, this period marked the beginning of the protest against the injustice of the whites as well as the ambivalent attitude in black writing. Race became a biological and culturally determined construct and a legitimate and concrete focus for critical, cultural and literary studies.

Slavery became the representational platform upon which the whole Black literary tradition is erected. This means, in the aftermath of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, it was the peculiar institution of slavery that was represented in a majority of the literary works by African-Americans, not the trans-Atlantic slave trade era itself. In spite of this, some writers remained preoccupied with the theme of the trans-Atlantic slave trade thereby acting as forerunners of postcolonial writings and postmodern historiographic metafictions on the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Such works include Julius Lester's *To Be a Slave* (1968) which explores the experiences of slaves through the documented personal accounts of former slaves. Lester weaves different testimonies of antebellum slaves as factual narrative accounts on the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the institution of slavery. Hall (1973:650) opines that the purpose of Lester's narrative is to offer the reader insights on the slave experience that have been "often overlooked or ignored by many writers". This is one of the reasons Van Deburg (1976:231) regards Lester as a writer who presents accounts that "modify previously held beliefs" on slavery and credits "blacks with intellectual awareness, creativity, or self-assertion".

Other notable writers who joined the writers exploring the trans-Atlantic slave trade as their preoccupation to pave the way for postcolonial works and postmodern historiographic metafictions on the trans-Atlantic slave trade include Alex Haley (1976) and Ishmael Reed (1976). Alex Haley's novel, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976), is a historical novel which "traces the story of a black family through seven generations from the eighteenth century" to the twentieth century (Law, 1978:128). It chronicles the lives of an American family which begins with the capture and enslavement of their African progenitor, Kunta Kinte, in The Gambia and the United States respectively. It describes the lives of the alleged descendants of Kunta Kinte in the United States, from Kizzy Waller to Alex Haley. Arnez (1977:367) opines that Haley wrote *Roots* from a black perspective in an attempt to "correct the distortions and fill the void left by the omissions of 'objective' white historians" who were the "winners in the war of human degradation – slavery". Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976) narrates the experiences of three runaway slaves and a master who is determined to recapture them by any means possible during the American Civil War. Reed employs the history of slavery in the United States of America, in

addition to the genre of slave narrative, to carve his "vision of race" (Levecq, 2002: 281) and the African-American identity. The peculiar interest of *Flight to Canada* is Reed's "return to the subject matter of the archetype of Afro-American fiction, the slave narrative" (Walsh, 1993:58).

Haley and Reed respectively employ strands of postcolonialism and postmodern historiographic metafiction to subvert the historical knowledge on the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Reed's novel reveals how the representations of the trans-Atlantic slave trade have evolved greatly between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century in utilising postmodern historiographic metafiction as an approach to reconstruct history. Postmodern historiographic metafictionists raise issues not "previously addressed in nineteenth century fiction" (Tebbutt, 1993:50) in an attempt to subvert conventions. For instance, the characters in postmodern historiographic metafictions sometimes "question the origin or impetus of their actions" such that they "draw attention to the fact that they are created" (Tebbutt, 1993:52). This is also portrayed in *Middle Passage* through the character of Rutherford Calhoun who confesses that during his days as a slave, he has developed a penchant for lying for amusement which eventually leads to his predicaments.

It has become apparent that over the centuries, every generation develops the need to reread and reconstruct the trans-Atlantic slave trade in accordance with its own perceptions. The trans-Atlantic slave trade archive is constantly revised as a result of generational needs so that any contemporary literary work on slavery is in conversation with "a narrative, autobiography or poem from the slave-past" (Frías & D'Aguiar, 2002:424). Heckard (1976:212) notes that, in writing fiction, an individual speaks through an "unreliable narrator" because a reliable narrator's work would be autobiographical. This is not necessarily a hard and fast rule because there are many works of fiction which have reliable narrators but are not autobiographical, and not all autobiographical writings have reliable narrators. Even though this distinguishes the postcolonial and postmodern narratives on the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the earlier written slave narratives, the fact that the "unreliable" narrators are capable of conveying subjective truth cannot be denied. Such postmodern inquiry challenges the traditional notions of history, narration, representation and subjectivity not like Manu Herbstein's *Ama* and Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts*

which have multiple narrators. The novelistic discourse on the trans-Atlantic slave trade fills in the details lost to history as writers continually rewrite the event to interrogate and give other representations about the past with the aid of literary theories.

Western literary theory is dominated by foreign names like Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Shoshana Felman, Judith Butler and many more. Against a theoretical backdrop that is replete with conflicts and ambivalence, Black literary scholars have often opposed the use of Western literary theory to analyse Black literature. In effect, this poses the questions: (a) Can Western literary theories be applied to the reading of African, African-American and Caribbean literary traditions?; (b) Are black writers and critics better equipped to judge their own works since they have a peculiar history of slavery and colonialism that serves to edge them out?

There is a significant desire in allowing the "black tradition to speak for itself in terms of its nature and various functions" (Gates, 1988:xix) rather than being subjected to critical readings and analyses using Western literary theories. According to Echeruo (1999:7), however, "we have yet to develop adequate theoretical tools by which to read our own writing". It therefore means that there is a need for literary theorists of African descent to formulate a theory that is appropriate to the analysis of Black literature such as Amuta's (1989:77) proposition for an "anti-imperialist poetics of African literature". This is of utmost importance because a white critic is differently disposed towards Black literary works than a black critic due to "racial privilege" (Awkward, 1990:583) which is characterised by the lack of experience in terms of racial oppression. Thus, on the one hand, it becomes debatable when Black literature is subjected to a white yardstick because Black literature has its intellectual roots in African traditions. Amuta (1989:77) argues that:

> From the oral chants and narratives of ancient Africa to the most contemporary literary expressions of our modern writers, the challenges and artistic limits of African [Black] literature have always been set by experiences and problems of a fundamentally socio-historical nature.

Black literary critics, on the other hand, who follow the historical line in their belief that theory is alien to the Black literary discourse run the risk of being relegated within the hegemonic discourse instituted by the Western culture in a literary milieu. While arguing the inescapability of theory in a literary environment, Baker (1991:1) agrees that we are always embroiled with theory and it is an illusion to presume that a non-theoretical subject position is possible. As a consequence, diverse critical and theoretical approaches are applied to the analyses of contemporary Black literature. These range from feminism to new historicism, postcolonialism and postmodernism, among others. Gates (1984:4) claims that critics of Black literary traditions owe an obligation to apply any literary tool for the elucidation of the complex literature peculiar to Black literary traditions. Therefore, the application of contemporary literary theories to the reading of black texts involves a fusion of the concepts of Western critical theories and the precepts of Black literary traditions. As a result, the literary theories of postcolonialism, postcolonial feminism and postmodern historiographic metafiction are considered for this study.

Postcolonial literary theory largely refers to the manner by which race, identity, gender, culture and ethnicity are presented in the present epoch. It is a late-twentieth century development which entails repossessing the colonised past and interrogating the colonialist's ideology. It emerged from the discourses of minorities such as African-Americans and Third World countries in their effort to offer "a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, race, communities, [and] peoples" (Bhabha, 1994:171). Postcolonialism is often associated with the notion of resistance and counter-hegemony. It began with an "activist agenda" (Matsikidze, 1996:267) to challenge and destabilise the socio-economic structures of the colonialists, and emphasises that the West should renounce its exclusive control on knowledge to equally accept the knowledge from other cultures.

Postcolonial theory has ancestral links to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) where it is respectively argued that the colonised people should reclaim the past by finding a voice and an identity and also reject the erroneous beliefs on Western universalism. The concept of universalism stipulates that "to be considered a great work, a literary text had to have

'universal' characters and themes" (Tyson, 1999:367), and is to be judged based on the European and American cultural standards. In other words, the concept of universalism promotes white, Eurocentric norms and practices thereby marginalising the rest as inferior, black, Third World and "the Other". Owing to its perceived superiority, Western universalism is unable to acknowledge other cultures and examine their representations in literary works. It disavows cultural diversity and hybridity as the perceived "Other" is not considered to have a voice.

Postcolonial writings have encouraged a paradigm shift in the way that the West and developing nations, usually referred to as the Third world, view each other. The Third World has since begun to see and think beyond the yardsticks of Western conventions through the ideology of postcoloniality. Boehmer (2005:3) defines postcoloniality as the "condition in which colonized peoples seek to take their place, forcibly or otherwise, as historical agents in an increasingly globalized world". Postcolonial writings reject the claims to Western universalism by exposing its flaws and highlighting issues relating to cultural differences and hybridity in literary works (Barry, 1995:196). In an attempt to reconstruct Western historical and fictional records, postcolonial writings subvert the Empire's discourses from a subaltern point of view to expose their hegemony. As Boehmer (2005:3) puts it, postcolonial literature subversively resists colonialist discourses which include the "myths of power, race classifications" and "the imagery of subordination". Postcolonial writings attempt to dismantle Eurocentric codes, acknowledge indigenous voices and recognise the postcolonial culture as being hybrid and dialectic.

Some postcolonial scholars prefer to use the term postcolonialism to define their subaltern consciousness and challenge the Western dominance in literature. This is achieved by a reconstruction of the past in the present with a focus on the use of localised language to displace the hegemonic norm of writing as well as repositioning the subaltern culture and identity from the periphery to the centre in an effort "to give the 'margin' its own true voice and identity" (Bamgbose, 2013:35). In *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, Herbstein weaves in the *Nkyinkyin* symbol and proverbs from the Akan oral culture into his writing. The metaphors employed indicate Herbstein's identification with the African culture and his use of proverbs affirm Achebe's famous quote in *Things Fall Apart* (1958:6) that "proverbs are the

palmoil with which words are eaten", thereby establishing Herbstein as a postcolonial writer. Similarly in *The Book of Negroes*, Hill employs the native African ways of depicting time. For instance it is by her "eight rainy season" that Aminata begins to hear stories about people in other villages being kidnapped (26), and the sun is used to depict days (48) while the moon is used to describe months (462).

The novelistic genre of literature is applauded as being fundamental to postcolonialism as "it combines analyses of objective historical processes with the subjective experience of those who undergo them" (Young, 2009:16). Writers like Manu Herbstein, Lawrence Hill, Prince Justice and David Pesci structure their novels on the trans-Atlantic slave trade to foreground the experiences of African slaves especially their protagonists, Ama, Aminata, Tutuoba and Singbe respectively. Drawing on the words of Childs and Williams (1997:14), these postcolonial novelists confront the past to "recover 'lost' pre-colonial identities" and recreate an independent local identity in their works. These representational strategies highlight their preoccupations with white supremacy and black inferiority.

Postcolonial criticism has theoretical assumptions and political concerns because it is a field that "focuses on the experience and literary production of peoples whose history is characterised by extreme political, social, and psychological oppression" (Tyson, 1999:364). According to Nagarajan (2006:190), the themes in postcolonial discourse can be summarised to include colonial oppression and the disruption of indigenous culture, imitation (mimicry), exile, post-independent disillusionment, struggle for an identity, alienation, hybridity, double consciousness and unhomeliness. Additionally, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006:2) affirm:

> Post-colonial theory involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. None of these is 'essentially' post-colonial, but together they form a complex fabric of the field.

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Postcolonialism has been subjected to diverse criticisms over the years. While Appiah (1991:353) calls the notion of postcoloniality "a condition of pessimism", Ahmad (1992:2) opines that one of the failures of postcolonialism is its eagerness to foreground questions on cultural domination, colonial subjects and the history of modernity. Oyegoke (2003:7) also criticises postcolonialism for adopting a culturally homogeneous definition of writing rather than proffering cultural solutions to the unworkability of postcolonial nations. It should however be noted that postcolonialism counters Western cultural hegemony over the Third World, and seeks to "undermine the imperial subject" (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker, 2005:219) in order to address the incoherence in postcolonial nations and the disintegration of their identity and culture.

Writing about the past in the postcolonial discourse is important and yields results because postcolonial writers engage in history rather than reincarnating the colonial texts. Postcolonial writers re-evaluate and reconstruct history "against the inadequacy of the terms and conceptual frames invented by the West" (Xie, 1997:10) through the refutation of all master narratives which are products of Eurocentrism. Postcolonial writers acknowledge the past but revise its historical and narrative representations. It is not their aim to "replace white with black" (Boehmer, 2005:222) but to highlight a form of hybridity. Hence, postcolonial texts interrogate the previous colonial texts and what they perceive to be truths thereby creating a link of crucial discourses such as postcolonial feminism.

Postcolonial feminism is a recent development in the literary theoretical discourse. Schurr and Segebart (2012:147) trace its beginning to Chandra Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes" (1986) and Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). Postcolonial feminism evolved because women in the postcolonial world are believed to be marginalised than their Western counterparts. Postcolonial women are silenced and relegated to the "third fiddle position" (Mogu, 2002:128) for their colonised status, black skin and female gender. Boehmer (2005:215-216) attests:

> European women more often than not formed part of the same race and social group as their male consorts and counterparts. By contrast, native or subaltern women

> were, as it is called, *doubly* or *triply marginalized.* That is to say, they were disadvantaged on the grounds not only of gender but also race, social class, and, in some cases, religion, caste, sexuality, and regional status.

By virtue of their gender, race and class, women of colour and Third World women are victims of multiple oppressions and exploitation. Mohanty (2003:64) as well as Barfi, Kohzadi and Azizmohammadi (2015:28) regard Third World women as being "subject to domination and exploitation". Inasmuch as black women align with black men to fight against racism, they struggle "against black men over sexism" (McEwan, 2001:98). Black female writers like Alice Walker and bell hooks and more especially Third World female writers like Chandra Talapade Mohanty therefore react to the subjugation of the black female gender by white people (male and female) and the male gender (white and black).

Postcolonial feminism seeks to foreground the myriad problems associated with imperialism, race, class, gender and religion that are considered as being unique to women in the Third World. On the one hand, scholars such as Mishra (2013:129) refer to postcolonial feminism as "Third World feminism" because it counters the Eurocentric and ethnocentric nature of Western feminism. It also seeks to homogenise the female experiences across the globe thereby ignoring the distinct experiences of women in postcolonial countries. On the other hand, Barfi, Kohzadi and Azizmohammadi (2015:27) assert that it is erroneous to consider women, especially Third World women as a homogeneous group or as a monolithic entity because they possess a "different identity, history and struggle in their everyday lives". The assumption that women are a homogeneous group makes them susceptible to being labelled as "powerless, exploited, sexually harassed, and so on" (Mohanty, 2003:23).

Postcolonial feminists attempt to "racialise mainstream feminist theory" and incorporate "feminist concerns into conceptualisations of colonialism and postcolonialism" (Lewis & Mills, 2003:3). As a consequence, postcolonial feminist theory examines the representations of women in colonial and postcolonial literature and interrogates the canonical Western feminist approaches. The notion of white feminism has been criticised to generalise the problems of women from the

perspective of white Western societies. It employs the experiences of the white bourgeois women in Europe and North America as the norm and universal yardstick for feminist issues thereby overlooking the peculiar challenges of black African women. The preoccupation of white Western feminism is gender-centred which results in the "hatred of men, penis envy, nonacceptance of African traditions, a fundamental rejection of marriage and motherhood, [and] a favouring of lesbian love" (Arndt, 2000:710). In an attempt to formulate alternative notions to white Western feminism, the gender issues that concern many blacks and Africans have been expanded to accommodate socioeconomic matters that include racial discrimination, poverty, capitalism, political oppression, religious fundamentalism, patriarchal culture, neo-colonialism, capitalism and corruption.

The foremost alternative notion to feminism can be credited to Alice Walker's "womanism" which concentrates on the identity of black women in relation to gender issues. Walker (1983:xi) considers a womanist as a "black feminist or feminist of color [who is] committed to [the] survival and wholeness of [an] entire people, male *and* female" and fights against racial discrimination as well as socioeconomic oppression. This lends credence to Omolade's (1994:xx) belief that "black feminism is sometimes referred to as womanism because both are concerned with the struggles against sexism and racism by black women who are themselves part of the black community's efforts to achieve equity and liberty". In spite of this, many African-American women prefer to be identified as womanists not black feminists because, as Walker (1983:xii) postulates, "womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender". It therefore means that "black women are 'womanist' while white women remain merely 'feminist'" (Collins, 1996:11). Similar to Walker's womanist ideology are Clenora Hudson-Weem's (1993) "Africana womanism" and Chikwenye Ogunyemi's (1996) "African womanism" which are created to deal with the issues that are relevant to women of African descent.

Over the years, scholars have centred on the male-orientated notion of heroism at the expense of the embodiment of the heroines (Mbele, 2006:62). Postcolonial feminist theory therefore becomes an effective tool in analysing the social constructs of gender such as gender based violence which is embedded in the power relations between male and female as well as the victimiser and the victim.

Even though most of the writers considered for this study are male, postcolonial feminism can be employed for the examination of their novels because they use their female protagonists to narrate feminist issues and portray female heroism. In concomitance, contemporary male neo-slave narrative writers of African descent like Manu Herbstein, Lawrence Hill, Fred D'Aguiar and Prince Justice, subvert the patriarchal order to foreground the heroic roles played by female slaves.

Herbstein, Hill, D'Aguiar and Justice transcend the issue of gender from a neutral standpoint by portraying their female protagonists as being intuitive and ingenious. This helps the readers to pay close attention to the exploits of the female characters and listen to the voices of the female narrators. These authors also promote feminist consciousness in their narratives through matriarchal motifs. For instance, Herbstein and Hill depict how problematic and painful motherhood is to the female slaves as many of them have their children taken away from them and sold off. Herbstein and Hill try not to alienate the female identity of their protagonists and refuse to bestow pseudo-male identities on their female characters. The female protagonists do not need to disguise themselves as men or fight battles like the Amazons of Dahomey but ironically, in many respects, it is the male characters like Tomba and Chekura who end up depending on the female heroines.

Postmodern historiographic metafiction is another technique contemporary writers of African descent employ to portray their consciousness of literary and historical heritage in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This is with the intention to stimulate the present generation to challenge but not deny the past, especially since postmodern historiographic metafiction incorporates the three fields of history, literature and theory. Using the notional self-awareness of literature and history as human concepts, postmodern historiographic metafiction creates a foundation for the reconstruction of the past through contradiction and subversion. However, postmodern historiographic metafiction "refutes the natural methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction" (Hutcheon, 1988:93). It does not accord history with the sole claim to truth but avows that literature and history are discourses, signifying systems and human constructs that employ identity to derive the truth. In other words, "Hutcheon calls attention to the construction of historical knowledge as

a form of discourse similar to that of the writing of fiction" (Lazano, 2008:42). This is also a notion that is strongly articulated by Michel Foucault who is credited with the idea of "discourse". According to Wheedon (1987:108), the Foucauldian discourse refers to:

> [The] ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern.

In an attempt to challenge the universal accounts of the trans-Atlantic history, contemporary black writers therefore resort to postmodern historiographic metafiction to underscore the Eurocentric and subjective nature of the official trans-Atlantic history.

Postmodern historiographic metafictional writers do not revert to pretence in an attempt to create the illusion of reality. Rather, they continually expose themselves through the acknowledgment of their craft as well as the images they construct in their fictional works. The self-conscious emphasis of the text as artifice is an element of postmodern historiographic metafiction. Since an illusion is employed to mask the narrative as a figment of the writer's imagination, postmodern historiographic metafictional writers usually seek to demystify the illusion but also avoid delusion to produce an undisguised invention. This is achieved by exposing the fictionality (relative constructed reality) outside the text through the use of meta-literary devices such as "textual self-consciousness, memorialist fiction, self-referential narrators, self-reflexive irony, meta-language and intertextuality" (Vieira, 1991: 585).

The concepts of postmodern historiographic plurality and vague generic boundaries are widely applicable to the selected novelists for this study because, as Chorba (1995:302) affirms, they frolic with the "nuances between history and fiction". Hutcheon (1988:113) suggests that the characteristics of historiographic metafiction include the continuing relevance of the binary oppositions of fact and fiction. Yet, historiographic metafiction installs and blurs the lines between fiction and history in

order for us to fully explore the diverse literary texts on a specific historical event. For instance, Herbstein employs his novel, *Ama*, as a prototype of what happened to millions of Africans who endured the trans-Atlantic slave trade that he convincingly and successfully weaves the true life figure of Philip Quaque into his narrative account. This indicates that "metafiction is a by-product of the contemporary writer's dialogue with literary predecessors" (Jablon, 1997:5).

Contrary to the classic historical fiction which seeks to disguise the ridge between historical reality and fantasy, as McHale (1987:90) observes, postmodernism highlights the ridge that links both modes through the visible contradiction of the 'official' history, grand anachronisms, and the integration of history and fantasy. The historical novel does not need the accuracy or truth of detail in order to achieve historical fidelity but it assimilates the data to offer a sense of verifiability to the fictional world. However, historiographic metafiction contests this in two ways: it plays on the accuracy and falsities of historical documents; and it uses data but rarely assimilates it. In postmodern historiographic metafictions like *Middle Passage* and *Feeding the Ghosts* many historical facts are intentionally altered to foreground the probable deficiencies in the recorded history. These postmodern historiographic metafictional novels comment on the process of writing fiction. They also pose the ontological link as being problematic by questioning the knowledge we think we possess of the past and what can be known about the past in the present.

Additionally, McHale (2003:151) posits that Hutcheon's great contribution was to identify and describe a characteristic genre of postmodernism which she coins "historiographic metafiction". In considering the concepts of history, postmodernism and fiction, Hutcheon conceives historiographic metafiction as "the postmodern answer to the historical novel" (McHale, 2003:152). On the one hand, McHale criticises Hutcheon's genre categorisation for being somewhat monolithic in practice and, to an extent, in theory. This is because she classifies quite a number of heterogeneous texts as being uniform under historiographic metafiction thereby flattening out all the rich diversity into a single entity (McHale, 2003:153). She, in addition, problematizes the issues of reference, subjectivity, gender, power and the like, without resolving them, yet they all exhibit Lyotard's theory that postmodernism marks an "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv).

On the other hand, McHale applauds Hutcheon for naming her genre "historiographic metafiction" which foregrounds the written-ness of history and the reflection on textuality (McHale, 2003:156). Inasmuch as Hutcheon (1988:186) regards power as a dominant theme in historiographic metafiction when relating art to ideology, she underscores the notion that postmodernist fiction employs the registration of diverging ideological perspectives as a conduit for empowering writers to manipulate their creative discourses and "challenge traditionally-accepted discourses" (Mazquiaran de Rodriguez, 2001:102).

Not only do postmodern historiographic metafictions interrogate and exploit historical knowledge, they also combine historical content with the metafictional mode of writing to question the relationship between fiction and reality as it "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact" (Waugh, 1984:2). The self-conscious references to writing in the novel, which is its metafictional approach, convey the questioning of what is fictional and what is real in history. Therefore, the selected writers for this study are not merely rewriting history like their precursors, they are interrogating the ostensible official knowledge that we think we possess of the trans-Atlantic slave trade through their use of the techniques of postmodernism like parody, intertextuality, strategies of representation, use of language, narrative forms and irony in order to challenge and problematize history.

Postmodern historiographic metafiction is regarded as an oxymoronic endeavour (Engler, 1994:33) because historical narratives cannot be composed from *a priori* constructive imagination. Postmodern historiographic metafictions are the literary texts that assert and interpret the past with self-reflection such that even though they create their own versions of the truth, they consequently criticise such versions of the truth as being partial, biased and incomplete. This helps us not only to accept but also question the objectivity of the historian's past without leaving us in a state of total quandary. Therefore, the victory of relativism and pure fiction over mere fact terminates objectivity.

Owing to the fact that postmodernism installs and subverts the "traditional concepts of subjectivity" (Hutcheon, 1988:118), we cannot find characters who are confident of their abilities to know the past with all certainty. However, the intertextual

nature of the past involves using parody as a postmodern technique to incorporate the textualised past into the text of the present. Postmodern intertextuality seeks to bridge the past and the present of the reader and recreate the past in a new framework. Hence, postmodern novels instil the knowledge that fiction and history refer to other texts because the past is known only "through its textualized remains" (Hutcheon, 1988:119).

African critics are believed to have three major arguments against postmodernism. According to Olaniyan (2007:637), these include : Its decentring of the subject, that is, making Europe the centre (subject) and others the periphery; its privileging of culture in the sense that postmodernism focuses on the instruments used by culture such as narrative, discourse and other institutional regulators of symbolic transactions to produce meanings; and its abstruse language which has to do with the elitist class character of postmodernism as well as its disconnection with the lives of the masses. Yet, the postmodern demystification of the West as a universal norm has given rise to relativism. Postmodernism focuses on the relative truths of individuals rather than stating claims or explanations for groups, cultures or communities. In other words, postmodernism relies on the relative principles and experiences of individuals which are bound to be fallible rather than universal principles. This enables postmodernism to advocate pluralism and an attack on hegemonic discourses. Therefore, through postmodern historiographic metafiction, the selected neo-slave narratives have found an alternative route to reject the hegemonic restrictions and narrow representations that inhibit the literary works on the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

1.8 Conclusion

This research is an interpretative analysis of the contemporary literary representations of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in an effort to contribute to the knowledge on the academic niche area of the African heritage and bridge the gap in literary scholarship. It employs an eclectic theoretical approach of postcolonialism and postmodernism to explore the depictions of slavery, dislocation, racism, diaspora, identity, migration, gender, and socio-economic realities. Re-examining this event through the lens of contemporary writers of African descent provides an

impetus and expands the pathway for Africans to study, in the literary discourse, other global historical and current events that are analogous to the African reality.

In addition to postcolonialism and postcolonial feminism, this study examines a particular form of the postmodern novel genre which Hutcheon (1988:5) calls historiographic metafiction. This is with an intention to study the current literary phenomenon which exists in postmodern historiographic metafictional discourse in order to critically analyse the significant techniques and representations that propel the interrogation of the official history of global events like the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Reliance on postcolonialism and postmodernism by the selected writers is a manifestation of their dissatisfaction with Eurocentric history. They, therefore, use the instruments of irony, parody and satire to reconstruct the trans-Atlantic slave trade and provide other possible alternative narrative accounts.

The literary craftsmanship of the writers discussed in this study is revealed in their efforts to balance historical experiences with literary artistry. This is reflected in the postcolonial and postmodern paradigm by which they articulate their narrative techniques, theme, plot, setting, characterisation, style and structure to validate their paradigmatic shift for the exploration and reconstruction of the past. These writers reconstruct a great historical event through an imaginative creation of well developed characters, dialogue, and evocative themes in order to challenge and subvert the older texts and the knowledge on the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In addition, they explore the psychological effects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade on the characters which are archetypes of the black people in the diaspora, thereby contributing to the literary knowledge on the African diasporic discourse.

Recitation by the Sold Slaves

I am leaving this land
My spirit leave[s] with me
I shall not come back now
My shackles do not break
It is the shackles that holds [sic]
the ship down
My ancestors bear me witness
I shall not return
This land shall depart
My soul do[es] not revolt
My spirit go[es] along with me
I depart to that land unknown
I shall not return

Epigraph at the
Slaves's Spirit
Attenuation Well,
Badagry, Nigeria.

CHAPTER 2

A BILATERAL OUTLOOK ON AFRICAN CAPTIVITY, ATLANTIC COMMODIFICATION AND AMERICAN ENSLAVEMENT

2.1 Introduction

The experiences of the Africans who were captured and sold during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era have been recognised in postcolonial discourse. Owing to this, this chapter examines Manu Herbstein's *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (2000) and Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* (2007) as female Bildungsromane and postcolonial neo-slave narratives written from both sides of the Atlantic. Herbstein and Hill engage in revising European historical and fictional records, a task that is considered "vital and inescapable" (Tiffin, 2006:99) for postcolonial writers. They reconstruct the trans-Atlantic slave trade by fictionalising the historical event and focusing on the female child-slaves whose experiences had been ignored in hegemonic historiography. They provide the voiceless African subalterns with the opportunities to universalise their values and make Africa a central point of reference.

Even though this chapter draws heavily on postcolonial theory and by extension postcolonial feminism, it is aware that the novels also highlight Hutcheon's (1988:5) ideas on historiographic metafiction as they self-reflexively lay claim to historical events and personages. The novels are primarily examined from a postcolonial perspective because postcolonialism endeavours to rewrite hegemonic history by attempting to "recover the lost historical and contemporary voices of the marginalized, the oppressed and the dominated" (McEwan, 2001:95). By utilising postcolonial representative strategies, Herbstein and Hill validate and humanise what they perceive as the experiences of the enslaved Africans against Eurocentric and Negritude accounts.

Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade chronicles the horrifying experiences of the eponymous protagonist, Ama (Nandzi), across various kingdoms and continents in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The novel stems from Herbstein's attempt to conjure up the spirits of the

enslaved Africans that perished during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, "give them back their names and listen to their voices" (Musiitwa, 2011:3). To achieve this, Herbstein spent four years embarking on what the African Book Centre in London, on Herbstein's (2006) website, calls an extensive research resulting in a skilfully woven "enchanting narrative". Herbstein captures the story of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in its totality by laying out its tragic implications and knitting its "scattered details" (Anyidoho, 2001) into a complete narrative. Herbstein acknowledges that the written evidence of the trans-Atlantic slave trade is largely recorded by Europeans yet he creates Ama as a fictional character whose life is sketched out of questions interrogating how she would have reacted to the real circumstances of slavery.

The Book of Negroes is a fictional work that is inspired by an actual historical document also called "The Book of Negroes". Similar to the historical document, the novel chronicles the evacuation of 3,000 loyal African-American slaves who are able to fight for the British during the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) and are rewarded with a safe passage to Nova Scotia (Canada). More importantly, the novel centres on the experiences of the protagonist, Aminata Diallo, over six decades and across the continents of Africa, North America and Europe. Aminata is a slave who eventually matures into a notable personality that registers the Black Loyalists on their passage to Canada; assists in the resettlement of the Loyalists in Sierra Leone; and testifies in London on behalf of the abolitionists against the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Hill's novel fits into what Tiffin (2006:100) classifies as "canonical counter-discourse" because he selects a number of characters from the British canonical texts and subverts them for postcolonial purposes. Hill's intention is not to supplant the historical "Book of Negroes" but to subvert and reconstruct it within a counter-discursive postcolonial discourse. *The Book of Negroes* approximates a fictional autobiography because it is a narrative that Aminata writes while in London during the process of testifying against the evils of the trans-Atlantic slave trade before the abolitionists and the British Parliament. Aminata refuses to have a ghost-writer write the narrative on her behalf but insists on narrating her story in her own words. What Hill achieves, in other words, is to make Aminata own her story as the narrator and the focaliser.

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Hill uses his title as a strategy of counter-discourse to resonate the postcolonial concept of writing back with self-perception. Taking a cue from Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's (1989) *The Empire Writes Back*, Hill's work engages in a relocation of the periphery to the centre. The novel not only addresses the thematic preoccupation of imperialism as in Third World literatures but also foregrounds how Canada and the United States of America are the results of colonialism and the forerunners of post-colonialism. *The Book of Negroes* is published under this title in Canada and the United Kingdom but in the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand it is published under the title *Someone Knows My Name*, a statement Chekura makes to Aminata in the slave hold after she mentions his name at his request (81). The Canadian title, *The Book of Negroes,* echoes Langston Hughes's *The First Book of Negroes* (1952) which Parker (1953:496) describes as a "saga of black folk" depicting the positive side of the Negro life, as well as Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps's *The Book of Negro Folklore* (1958). From the American title *Someone Knows My Name*, Hill is able to subvert James Baldwin's collection of essays that is entitled *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961) and to humanise the African slaves with names as against mere numbers that were used to identify them in historical documents and Eurocentric novels. In 2011 the novel was published in French under the eponymous title, *Aminata*.

Inasmuch as this study contends with Hill's literary imagination which is a fictional universe that he creates through his play on the title, *The Book of Negroes*, it is pertinent to note that the historical text by the same name is equally significant. The historical "Book of Negroes" is a military ledger of about 150 pages that was written in ink by the British officers. It chronicles the particulars of the 3000 Black Loyalists who fought on the side of the British during the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) and were granted a safe passage from New York to Nova Scotia in 1783. Hence, those whose names were not recorded in the "Book of Negroes" could not escape to Canada. The Black Loyalists were transported from New York to Nova Scotia between April and November 1783 thereby becoming the first settlement of black Canadians. Therefore, the historical "Book of Negroes" is an original document

that helps African-Canadians to understand the origins of the black people in Canada and, in addition, enables them to trace their ancestors's names on the ledger.

The actual "Book of Negroes", a part of which is photographically reproduced on the inside of the novel's cover, documents the names and brief descriptions of the slaves including the names of their former masters. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (JBHE) Foundation, Inc.* (2009:28) considers the entries in the actual "Book of Negroes" offensive as they include: "Bill, 25, stout ugly fellow, property of William Douglass... James Rea, 24, ordinary fellow without legs". In the novel, Colonel Baker informs Aminata:

> These ledgers were to form part of a registration book listing all Negroes carried to the British colonies at the end of the war. If the Americans chose later to press for compensation ... the Book of Negroes would show who had left New York. (307)

Two original versions of the original "Book of Negroes" were created simultaneously by the British and the Americans as they registered the refugees. While the British version is kept in the Public Records office in Kew, England, the American version can be found at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., United States of America. Other copies of the "Book of Negroes" which are known to exist are kept in Nova Scotia Public Archives in Halifax, Canada and the National Archives of Canada, as well as the New York Public Library and the Rockefeller Library at Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, United States of America.

Herbstein's *Ama* won the 2002 Commonwealth Writers's Prize for the Best First Book while Hill's *The Book of Negroes* was regarded as a No. 1 bestseller in Canada, and won the 2008 Commonwealth Writers's Prize for Overall Best Book. It had also won the 2007 Rogers Writers's Trust Fiction Prize, 2008 Ontario Library Association's Evergreen Award and 2009 CBC Radio's Canada Reads. In spite of these prestigious awards, the novels are not canonised in universities's curricula like Olaudah Equiano's *The Adventures of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa* (1789) and Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976). Although this elicits the question as to whether academics do not consider them as canonical representations of the trans-Atlantic

slave trade, it is significant to note that the awards themselves constitute the first steps in the process of canonisation.

Hebstein and Hill fall into the category of novelists who interpose their narratives with their immigrant and ethnic backgrounds to seek the "representations of themselves in the literature of their new homeland" (Teleky, 2001:210). Not only do they explore subaltern consciousness and reconstruct retrospective accounts, but they also establish their own identities and lived experiences as immigrant writers of African descent. Herbstein is a South African of Jewish European descent (Russia, Litvak and Romania) but like a majority of white South Africans, his family has been resident in South Africa since the 1890s. Herbstein migrated from South Africa to Ghana in 1970 and currently holds a dual-citizenship status of both countries. He infuses his homeland, South Africa, into his novel, *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade,* through the character of Pieter De Bruyn, who works for the United Dutch West India Company as the Director-General of the Elmina Castle. While dictating his will to Van Schalkwyk, De Bruyn bequeaths his estate to his son who is resident in Cape Town (240).

Hill is the son of American immigrants – a black father and a white mother – Daniel and Donna Hill, who migrated to Canada from the United States of America after their wedding in 1953. Hill grew up in a predominantly white suburb of Ontario and was greatly influenced by his parents's human rights movement. While Donna Hill became a civil rights activist in Washington D.C. after her graduation from Oberlin College, Daniel Hill became the Chair of the Ontario Human Rights Commission in 1971. On Lawrence Hill's (2014) website, Daniel Hill is described as "a prominent writer and community activist with a sustained interest in the history of Blacks in Canada, [and] a business person who created Canada's first human rights consulting firm". The miscegenation and activism of Hill's parents have an impact on his thematic preoccupations which range from identity to a sense of belonging. In *The Book of Negroes,* Georgia tells Aminata that Mamed, the mulatto overseer of Robinson Appleby's indigo plantation, had an African mother and a European father. As a result, he is considered as a "nigger" and a slave (151). This attests to the one-drop rule of racial identification that was prevalent in the United States during the era

2014) means that anybody with one drop of "Negro" blood (one black ancestor) should be classified as possessing an African ancestry and should therefore be considered black.

The notion of blackness became associated with negative connotations in the era preceding the one-drop rule of racial identity. Hall (2010:4) posits that to many Euro-Americans, "the color black symbolizes lust, sin, evil, dirt, feces, death, and so on". Scholars such as Patricia Williams (1991), Toni Morrison (1992), Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001) as well as Richard Schur (2004) employ critical race theory to explicate how blackness was purposefully repackaged as being undesirable through legal systems, executed policies and social practices. Such were used to relegate blacks to the second fiddle position, restrict their access to social facilities and governmental institutions as well as regulate interracial relationships. According to Modiri (2012:232), critical race theory "allows us to examine racial issues more critically and directly in the context of their social, economic and political implications for law and legal rules". The negative connotation associated with blackness was codified into law under The Racial Integrity Act of 1924 that was enacted in Virginia to prohibit miscegenation and categorise the mulattoes as blacks. Jones (2000:1512) attests that:

> From 1785 until at least 1910, mulatto was defined as a person with at least "one-fourth part or more of negro blood." Many Virginians feared that one-fourth was too generous a percentage, and in 1910, the Virginia legislature broadened the definition of "a colored person" to include any person who possessed at least one-sixteenth Black blood. Subsequently, in 1924, as paranoia about Whites being contaminated with Black blood grew, the Virginia legislature determined that a "white person" was a person with "no trace whatsoever" of Black blood. Similarly, in 1930, the legislature defined "colored" as "every person in whom there is ascertainable any negro blood." Hence, the legislature codified the one-drop rule.

The Racial Integrity Act was eventually overturned in 1967 by the United States Supreme Court's judgement in the legal case *Loving v. Virginia* which declared the one-drop rule and The Racial Integrity Act as being unconstitutional. However, the need to maintain control over the enslaved black population and retain white

supremacy in the United States led the Euro-Americans to institute the policies that rendered the blacks as being inferior.

Over the years, the concept of race has been discovered to be a social construction, not a biological one. Morrison (1992:63) demonstrates that 'Race has become metaphorical—a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological "race" ever was'. In her novel entitled *Paradise* (1997), Morrison portrays the effects of racism and sexism in the United States and constructs blackness as a reality in the world. By foregrounding the challenges faced by the townspeople of "Convent", "Haven" and "Ruby" between the 1960s and the 1970s, "*Paradise* thus testifies to the difficulties of building a real home within the racialized soil of the United States" (Schur, 2004:277). This confirms the observation of Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995: 48) that "The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social inequity". The black race in the United States is therefore less likely to own good homes, as the black people struggle with low educational and occupational opportunities when compared to their white counterparts.

Considering the ancestry of Herbstein and Hill, the question therefore arises: Do Herbstein and Hill possess the moral authority to speak on behalf of Africans in representing the trans-Atlantic slave trade? Spivak (1988:271) postulates that "calling the place of the investigator into question remains a meaningless piety". This is because what gives an individual moral grounds to speak on behalf of another should largely be measured by his or her level of empathy and sympathy for the subaltern. However, it cannot be denied that the "Africanness" of an author of neo-slave narratives influences the reception by his readers. Hill easily qualifies as having an African heritage because the majority of those referred to as African-Americans in the United States of America and Canada are of mixed parentage and also the descendants of slaves.

The fact that Herbstein is a white South African problematizes his African heritage such that we are forced to ask whether white South Africans are considered Africans. Categorising people as "white" in South Africa is a mere racial construct

established "under the political and social conditions created by apartheid" (Griffiths & Prozesky, 2010:25). Such classification has nothing to do with the various cultural, historical, linguistic or religious affiliations existing among white South Africans. In essence, people of African descent are, in fact, black, white, Indian and coloured. Additionally, Herbstein's dual citizenship in two African countries shows that the African heritage which gives him the moral authority to speak on behalf of African slaves is not a product of the black race but of the African culture he possesses.

Herbstein however problematizes his link to the African ancestry as he prefaces *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* with an epigram that causes a black reader to ponder before reading the novel: "This tale concerns a few lives amongst many millions. Might one of your ancestors have lived through such events? Or one of mine, perhaps?" The latter question is rather ambiguous. Is Herbstein speculating that his ancestors may have been victims of the trans-Atlantic slave trade because he is married to a Ghanaian thereby rendering his children probable descendants of slaves? Is he suggesting that his ancestors may have been part of the European slave masters? Whatever the answer may be, Herbstein does not seem to be laying any claim to the slave heritage. Rather, he highlights how the trans-Atlantic slave trade damaged the humanity of the slave masters the way it damaged the humanity of the slaves.

This chapter is based on the assumption that in spite of the cruel nature of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, quite a number of female slaves were able to retain their African identity and were also instrumental in the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The questions that guide this chapter are: (a) How do Manu Herbstein and Lawrence Hill reconstruct the trans-Atlantic slave trade's hegemonic history from a postcolonial perspective? (b) How do *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* and *The Book of Negroes* represent the notion of female slave development? (c) How is the nexus of the female gender and the African identity foregrounded in the two narratives?

2.2 Reading *Ama* and *The Book of Negroes* as Postcolonial Female Bildungsromane

The term 'Bildungsroman' was first coined by Karl Simon Morgenstern in his text *Über das Wesen des Bildungsromans* which was originally published in 1820. It is a neologism of the German 'bildung' which means 'education' or 'formation' and 'roman' which means 'novel'. The origin of the Bildungsroman as a novelistic genre can be traced to Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-1796) which was translated as *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* in 1824. The novel depicts the experiences of the protagonist and how they contribute to his growth and assimilation into his society. Similar to this are Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). However, in recent years, the Bildungsroman has expanded its definition to accommodate postcolonial, feminist, minority, multicultural and immigrant literatures that resemble the "nineteenth-century European models" (Boes, 2006:231). It is against this background that *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* and *The Book of Negroes* fall within the purview of a Bildungsroman which Marianne Hirsch (1979:296) brands as the novel of formation. Hirsch (1979: 297-298) outlines the characteristics of a novel of formation as the following:

i. The novel of formation focuses on one character... It is the story of a representative individual's growth and development within the context of a defined social order (296);
ii. Its concern is both biographical and social. Society is the novel's antagonist and is viewed as a school of life, a locus for experience (297);
iii. The novel of formation's plot is a version of the quest story (297);
iv. It is the development of selfhood that is the novel's primary concern... Its projected resolution is an accommodation to the existing society. While each protagonist has a choice of accepting or rejecting this projected resolution, each novel ends with a precise stand on his part, with his assessment of himself and his place in society (298); and
v. The novel of formation is conceived as a didactic novel, one which educates the reader by portraying the education of the protagonist (298).

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As a corollary, even though the above characteristics are associated with 'male Bildungsromane', they are employed to appraise *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* and *The Book of Negroes* as postcolonial female Bildungsromane. This is mainly because these characteristics structure *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* and *The Book of Negroes* by foregrounding the developments of Ama and Aminata, respectively, in relation to their societies. The characteristics of the Bildungsroman also present the lives of the female protagonists as didactic experiences for the characters in the narratives and for the readers who are unaware of some aspects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

A Bildungsroman portrays the development and education of the protagonist, which are situated in "a community within which the story of development unfolded" (Amigoni, 2000:54). Accordingly, Herbstein and Hill's novels locate the formative years of their heroines, Ama and Aminata, respectively, in their childhood villages in Africa. The story of Ama, then called Nandzi, begins in Bekpokpam hamlet at the age of seventeen when she is left alone to take care of her sick brother, Nowu, because her parents, Tigen and Tabitsha, have gone to bury her paternal grandfather in another hamlet. Before leaving, Tabitsha tells Nandzi that "You are the eldest... It is time that you learned to take responsibility" (2). This reflects the African custom that requires the female child to be trained in homemaking.

Aminata's tale reveals that she is born in 1745 in a village called Bayo, near Segu in the present day Mali. Aminata describes Bayo as being "three moons [months] by foot from the Grain Coast" [present day Sierra Leone] in West Africa (16). As a young girl, Aminata accompanies her mother everywhere and learns how to "catch babies" (28) from her mother who works as a midwife. She later informs Chekura, "I have helped at births. My mother and I bring babies to the light. It is our trade. Our work. Our way of life" (61). The training Ama and Aminata receive from their mothers contributes immensely to their growth and is therefore significant in the analysis of their development. While Ama is able to easily take care of the people she encounters as she matures, Aminata is also able to assist women as they are giving birth to their babies and she is able to make a career out of it.

As typical of a Bildungsroman, the protagonist is displaced from her society by an established social order which becomes her "locus for experience" (Hirsch, 1979:297), in this case the institution of slavery. After laying Nowu down to sleep, Nandzi observes the ground vibrating at the arrival of twenty Bedagbam horsemen under the command of Abdulai. The Bedagbam army are slave raiders who kidnap other African tribes as part of their annual tribute to the Asante Confederacy. They discover Nandzi hiding in her mother's room, assault and kidnap her while Nowu is left behind. Kidnapping is a major means of capturing slaves, especially women and children. It dislocates them from their families and displaces them from their communities thereby setting them on an unimaginable course of life. While Olaudah Equiano is kidnapped around the age of ten, Ottobah Cugoano is kidnapped around the age of twelve. At age eleven, Aminata is captured while returning from a neighbouring village where she and her mother have gone for their midwifery duties. In an attempt to save Aminata from her captors, Aminata's parents lose their lives. This loss, therefore, becomes the Bildungsroman trope that displaces Aminata from her homeland and spurs her on her trans-Atlantic journey.

The plot of a Bildungsroman partly involves an account of a journey. However, while Aminata's trans-Atlantic journey begins in the aftermath of her capture, Nandzi is initially enslaved within Sub-Saharan Africa before getting transported across the Atlantic Ocean. Nandzi is first taken to Yendi and later presented as a gift to Konadu Yaadom, the Asantehemaa (Queen Mother of Asante), in Kumase. It is at the point of their first meeting that the Queen Mother renames her "Ama" because "It is Saturday" and Ama is "a good Asante name" given to a girl born on Saturday (86). In Kumase, Ama is given the responsibility of taking care of the Asantehemaa's children alongside Kwame Panin, the future king of Asante, thereby highlighting her earlier training of taking care of children. Soon after the adolescent Osei Kwame Panin is crowned as the Asantehene, he and Ama engage in a sexual relationship. By the time Korante Péte and Konadu Yaadom discover the sexual trysts, they decide not to handover Ama for execution as their custom demands but to accuse her of stealing. Her punishment is thereafter commuted to an exile in the form of a sale to the Europeans at the Elmina Castle.

Because the actions of the protagonist of a Bildungsroman often conflict with the judgments enforced by her society, Ama becomes a victim of the Asante state terror. Before embarking on the slave walk to the Elmina Castle, Korante Péte discloses to Ama that she is "being transported to the coast for reasons of state" (131). Like any nation, the Asante Confederacy takes precedence over any individual which is why someone else is punished for the King's indiscretions while the culpability of the King is concealed. Osei Kwame confesses his sexual relationship with Ama to Korante Péte and expresses his desire to make Ama not only his first wife but his only wife. As a consequence, the council of elders decide to make Ama the scapegoat. It is however obvious to them that ordering a summary execution on Ama for her role will backfire because Osei Kwame is in love with her. They resort to accusing her of theft as it will hinder the King's involvement in the proceedings thereby severing the relationship that exists between them.

The development of a Bildungsroman heroine is predicated on political, psychological and socio-cultural factors that make her a round character. These are enhanced as she comes in contact with other characters that perform constructive and destructive roles in the process of her maturation. On arriving at the Elmina Castle, Ama catches the fancy of Director-General Pieter De Bruyn at the point of inspection and soon afterwards becomes his mistress. Becoming De Bruyn's mistress, on the one hand, places Ama at an advantage over the other slaves. She is granted the opportunity to sleep in De Bruyn's bed and dine with him, unlike her counterparts in the slave dungeons. She also becomes educated in English and Dutch languages, and ostensibly gets manumitted by De Bruyn in his will. Ama is mentored by Augusta, a Fanti trader in Elmina town and former wife of De Bruyn, thereby attesting to the fact that it is important for the protagonist of a Bildungsroman to have a mentor who advises her and directs her activities. On the other hand, Ama's relationship with De Bruyn creates enmity between her and Sven Jensen who, at the demise of De Bruyn, rapes Ama. Jensen revokes Ama's manumission and orders her to be put on the slave ship, *The Love of Liberty*, to South America.

Socio-cultural, political and psychological factors are also at play in the events surrounding Aminata's trans-Atlantic life. The social conditions that Aminata initially

experiences as a slave on the slave ship are favourable to her when compared with the circumstances of other slaves:

> A series of coincidences saved my life during the ocean crossing. It helped to be among the last persons from my homeland to be loaded onto that vessel. It also helped to be a child. A child had certain advantages on a ship vessel. Nobody rushed to kill a child. (71)

Aminata's luck increases as she also gets preferential treatment from Tom, the surgeon, on the slave ship; is mentored by Georgia on Appleby's plantation in South Carolina; and is secretly educated by Mamed, the mulatto plantation overseer. Unfortunately for her, she is raped by her plantation master, Robinson Appleby, who sells her son a few years later. While Georgia and Mamed epitomise the helpers in the course of Aminata's character development, Appleby is the antagonist who creates obstacles for the protagonist.

Many of the problems the heroines of the bildungromans face are usually different from those of men and the "society has different expectations of women" (Marrone, 1997:336). This is true in Aminata's case as her experiences reveal how the female problems include rape and the sale of their children. The latter echoes Sojourner Truth's (1851) grief that she has "borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery". Unfortunately for Aminata, it is the same Appleby who rapes her that eventually sells her son to become a slave on another plantation. At this point Hill underscores the tenets of postcolonial feminism in his novel. Postcolonial feminism rejects the Western stereotypical delineations of women as being homogeneously oppressed based on their gender and foregrounds their diverse experiences ranging from slavery and colonialism to forced migration and genocide which are predicated on their "ethnicity, class, culture and religion" (Gunjate, 2012:286). Owing to Aminata's grief-stricken state at the loss of her son, she is sold by Appleby to a Jewish indigo trader named Solomon Lindo in Charles Town. Aminata becomes a midwife in Charles Town but a percentage of her proceeds is forcefully collected by Lindo who in turn teaches her arithmetic and accounting while his wife grants Aminata the liberty to read and write openly.

As part of having contact with other characters who perform important roles in the life of the protagonist of a Bildungsroman, it is characteristic for her development to be intertwined with that of her lover. Herbstein infuses the plot of *Ama* with the story of Tomba whom Ama meets on the slave ship and eventually marries after arriving in Brazil. Tomba is named after his paternal grandfather, "a revered Baga Chief who had fought the slave trade until he himself had been captured and sold across the sea" (253). At this point Herbstein fictionalises history by merging his descriptions of Tomba's grandfather and Tomba himself to resemble the real life Captain Tomba documented by the historian Rediker (2007:14-16). According to Rediker's historical account, Tomba was the headman of Baga village around Rio Nunez who led his fellow villagers to terrorise the inhabitants of other villages known to supply slaves to the Europeans. Tomba was eventually captured and put on a slave ship at Bance Island, Sierra Leone, where he tried to instigate a slave insurrection with his countrymen and "an enslaved woman who had freer range about the ship" (Rediker, 2007:15). While the fictional "Cappin Tomba" (266) also terrorises the African villages involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, he is captured and put on *The Love of Liberty* where he and Ama, who equally has free access around the ship like the historical enslaved woman, execute an unsuccessful slave insurrection.

The lover whom Aminata's development is intertwined with is Chekura. They first meet as Aminata walks in the slave coffle soon after her capture because "the abductors had used him to help march captives to the big water" (50). On arriving at the coast with Aminata's slave coffle, Chekura is betrayed by the African slave abductors and put on the same slave ship as Aminata. Chekura eventually moves from being Aminata's captor to becoming her companion and later her husband. The relationship Aminata develops with Chekura becomes fundamental in the course of her growth into adulthood. Following the death of Mrs. Lindo, Solomon Lindo takes Aminata to New York. Aminata avails herself of the American Revolutionary War to escape from Lindo in New York after Chekura informs her that Lindo had conspired with Appleby to sell their son Mamadu.

A protagonist of a Bildungsroman is usually presented with an offer that involves her becoming a part of a projected resolution to societal problems or be

accommodated into an existing society. Every protagonist therefore has the choice to either accept or reject the proposed resolution (Hirsch, 1979:298). As a result of her education, Aminata is offered a job as a scribe for the British Army during the Revolutionary War to register loyalist slaves seeking asylum in the British colonies in Canada in the "Book of Negroes". Aminata is subsequently permitted a safe passage in the form of expatriation to Nova Scotia after being granted her freedom along with several other slaves in 1783. Unfortunately, on arriving in Nova Scotia, the Africans become disillusioned as they grapple with racism and poverty while their new society becomes their antagonist. After residing in Canada for a few years, Aminata meets John Clarkson, a British naval officer vested with the responsibility of recruiting African-Canadians to the colony of Sierra Leone in Africa. In 1792, Aminata along with about 1,200 freed black slaves who have been exiled in Nova Scotia migrate to Sierra Leone under the auspices of the Sierra Leone Company to establish the colony of freedmen in Africa thereby becoming the original settlers in Freetown. Apart from the fact that Aminata's migration to Canada enables the reader to explore the origins of black people in Canada, her subsequent migration to Sierra Leone brings into focus her representational leadership role in nation building.

A Bildungsroman usually ends with the protagonist making an assessment of herself and her society. As a mature person, she evaluates her past "in terms of conscious cause-effect relationships" of her own behaviour (Garasym, 2012:186). This is depicted in *Ama* as we find the protagonist writing an epistle to her dead parents in anticipation of her death at an old age. She narrates how Tomba is executed for killing Senhor Jesus Vasconcellos who had raped her, and how her son, Kwame, is taken away to live in Salvador before becoming a free man. Since Ama is awaiting Kwame's visit, she intends telling him all about her life during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era and her relationship with Itsho, De Bruyn and Tomba. Even though she intends telling her son about Osei Kwame, whom he is named after, Ama plans omitting their love affair because a mother does not tell her son everything (453). Ama's narrative shows that the female protagonist of a Bildungsroman is equally capable of "travels, amorous conquests and tests of courage" which "are often impossible trajectories for heroines in the nineteenth century" (Marrone, 1997:336). Ama employs her intelligence and power of sex to

control men in authority like the Ashantehene and De Bruyn. Inasmuch as most of the travels of Ama and Aminata are forced rather than voluntary, the courage both protagonists exhibit during their enslavement and oppression makes them notable members of their respective societies.

The narrator of a Bildungsroman is usually an adult with some accomplishments that make her reflect on her past experiences and evaluate her "development of selfhood" (Hirsch, 1979:298). As a typical example, *The Book of Negroes* begins in London in 1802 where Aminata is expected to meet King George at the request of the abolitionists like John Clarkson to testify against the cruel nature of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. While waiting, she commences her tale by tracing her development from childhood to old age. By employing a first-person retrospection, the narration of her experiences from memory form the pages of the novel. The elderly Aminata describes how John Clarkson once again convinces her to relocate from Freetown to London, a place she eventually calls home. John Clarkson informs Aminata in London that the British abolitionists hope to abolish the trade in slaves but not slavery. Therefore, her help is needed to narrate her ordeal. Borrowing the words of Bakhtin (1986:23), Aminata "is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point of one to the other". This historical transition becomes accomplished through her because Aminata is able to testify against the injustices and cruel nature of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and lives long enough to witness the British Parliament pass a bill to abolish the trans-Atlantic slave trade in 1807.

The characteristics of the Bildungsroman structure *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* and *The Book of Negroes* in ways that foreground the development and experiences of Ama and Aminata, respectively. These in turn render the novels realist narratives that enable us to explore the representational contexts of postcolonial forms. Realism permeates through the experiences of the heroines as female slaves who are commodified in the hands of men. Herbstein and Hill therefore succeed in representing a convergence of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's (2006:2) notion of postcolonialism – "slavery, migration, suppression and resistance, difference, race, gender, place, and the responses to the discourse of imperial

Europe". By employing their narratives to depict the development of their female protagonists as they grow from childhood to adolescence and motherhood, Herbstein and Hill detail, as postcolonial and realist works, the tragedies of the lives of female slaves during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era.

Additionally, as postcolonial migrant writers, Herbstein and Hill accentuate the feminist concept of positionality to reveal the effects their subject positions have on their novels. From their writings, we can assess how their subjectivities as migrant writers of African descent are implicated in their novels. This is because the situation of migrant and diasporic writers is "regarded as representative, if not iconic, of postcolonial writing" (Boehmer, 2005:215). Herbstein and Hill's respective identities reflect in the backgrounds of their literary works and their positions become helpful in the construction of their plots. To a large extent, they employ the feminist technique of merging the self as actual biographical referent and the self as narrator. Hence, they use their positional locations to construct meanings and infuse their positional self in their postcolonial novels.

2.3 Foregrounding the Female Voice and Sexual Violence against Female Slaves

Herbstein and Hill's fundamental thematic preoccupation focuses on a nexus of race and gender. They direct us to the interplay of race and gender, along with other identity markers such as age, status, language and imperialism as being representative of their subaltern perspectives. After Ama reveals her identity to Captain Williams on *The Love of Liberty* that she is the Pamela he dined with when he visited the late De Bruyn, he orders Ama to sit down. Ama is offended at Williams's refusal to say please: "*Is it his general lack of manners,* she wondered, *or is it because I am black, a woman and a slave?*" (287). At this point, Herbstein heightens the three indicators of race, gender and status that position the enslaved African women in a third-fiddle position thereby creating a need to examine his novel from a postcolonial feminist perspective. Postcolonial feminists attempt to "racialise mainstream feminist theory" and incorporate "feminist concerns into conceptualisations of colonialism and postcolonialism" (Lewis & Mills, 2003:3). Postcolonial feminist theory is considered as an effective tool in analysing the social

constructs of gender such as gender based violence which are embedded in power relations between male and female as well as the victimiser and the victim.

In an attempt at reconstructing the trans-Atlantic slave trade from below, Herbstein and Hill portray the event from the viewpoints of those who have, over the years, been traditionally excluded in slave narratives – female children. They foreground the potentialities of the enslaved African female children during the trans-Atlantic slave trade as the adult protagonists switch from the adult point of view to that of the girl child to reveal the age characteristics that occur through language and the conception of reality. Hill, for instance, gives the doubly silenced female-child's voice a crucial part to play in *The Book of Negroes*. At the beginning of the novel, the old Aminata uses her retrospective first-person adult female voice to introduce her tale with a warning for her African readers to distrust the seas and the colour pink because of their involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade:

> Let me begin with a caveat to any and all who find these pages. Do not trust large bodies of water, and do not cross them. If you, dear reader, have an African hue and find yourself led toward water with vanishing shores, seize your freedom by any means necessary. And cultivate distrust for the colour pink. Pink is taken as the colour of innocence, the colour of childhood, but as it spills across the water in the light of the dying sun, do not fall into its pretty path. There, right underneath, lies a bottomless graveyard of children, mothers and men. (19)

Afterwards, Aminata switches to her girl voice to narrate how she is born and captured in Bayo before crossing the Atlantic Ocean to the New World. Aminata employs her girl voice to narrate her childhood struggles as she seeks to understand and escape her experiences and how these experiences shape her identity and self-development. In *Ama*, Herbstein uses the teenage girl as the focaliser to narrate many of the events surrounding Ama's birth, childhood betrothal, capture, and her episodes of rape. The adult Ama becomes the focaliser of her enslavement in Brazil and the rape she suffers from Senhor Jesus. At the end of the novel, the adult female voice of Ama assesses the highlights of her experiences.

Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* shares some similarities with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* which was originally published in 1847. Apart from the fact that

both novels are written in a first-person narrative point of view, Aminata's self-introduction employs a Victorian performative English that is deeply intertextual with Jane's confessional mode. Jane confesses her fears through emotionally-laden metaphors that reveal her inherent abilities and innermost thoughts, especially those related to her fear of pregnancy and motherhood. Additionally, Jane constantly has nightmares of children who seem to run away from her. She explains:

> Superstition was with me at that moment; but it was not yet her hour for complete victory: my blood was still warm; the mood of the revolted slave was still bracing me with its bitter vigour; I had to stem a rapid rush of retrospective thought before I quailed to the dismal present. (2001:11)

> It was a wailing child this night, and a laughing one the next: now it nestled close to me, and now it ran from me; but whatever mood the apparition evinced, whatever aspect it wore, it failed not for seven successive nights to meet me the moment I entered the land of slumber. (2001:188)

Jane Eyre's experiences begin as a child like Aminata, and she grows up to engage in a romantic relationship with Rochester while Aminata's relationship is with Chekura. In the midst of diverse challenges and oppositions, Jane exhibits maturity and emotional stability that can been seen in Aminata's character. The effect of such mirroring is to "move us from an impression of lucky irony, tinged by melancholy, to the different valence of arch commentary" (Skopik, 2003:269). In effect, Hill's novel exposes Victorian literature to an analysis in Postcolonial Studies with regard to issues relating to race, gender, identity and social class. Hill's novel therefore shows "that there exist multiple points of thematic interface and historical overlapping between the Victorian period and the postcolonial era" (Cheng, 2006:1).

Herbstein's novel is a reflection of what bell hooks (1991:352) defines as "a politics of pleasure and danger" because it focuses on the racial and sexual politics that inform the construction and expression of desire within black heterosexual couples, as well as interracial sexual relationships. Ama develops a sexual bond with a white Governor in the Elmina slave castle but the chaplain sees this as an abominable act and treachery to the white race, even though the chaplain himself tries to rape Ama. By foregrounding sexual liaisons between the Europeans and the slaves in *Ama*, Herbstein employs rape as a central trope in his novel and constructs

it as an inevitable part of the patriarchal characteristic of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Rape is a pervasive component of the trans-Atlantic slave trade history. It was used as a powerful instrument by many slave merchants and masters to punish the female slaves and force them into submission. According to bell hooks (1981:18):

> Rape was a common method of torture slavers used to subdue recalcitrant black women. The threat of rape or other physical brutalization inspired terror in the psyches of displaced African females.

The prevalence of rape during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era therefore means that rape ought to be a central theme in slave narratives. Hence, no story is complete without alluding, implicitly or explicitly, to the rapes of female slaves that occurred from their points of capture in their respective villages to their deaths across the Middle Passage or in the New World. While Graham (2003:439) observes that rape is considered as being "unspeakable" and "severed from articulation" in Western canonical literary narratives, it is also noted that the subject of rape is yet to be critically exhausted in the African literary slave discourse. A typical example is Olaudah Equiano's *The Astonishing Story of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789) which is a canonical slave narrative that conceals sexual violence in an aesthetic manner. Equiano employs what McVay (2009) refers to as "elision" in narrating the rape of female slaves. McVay (2009:3), who traces the term "elision" to Diane Wolfthal (1999), notes:

> A term used in linguistics to indicate a suppression or omission of a vowel, "elision" can also describe the portions omitted from abridged versions of books; Wolfthal uses it to designate omission or suppression of the violence of rape and the harm to its victims.

In spite of the elision that dominated the discourse of rape in canonical slave literature, it is worthwhile to state that rape is being foregrounded in contemporary narratives. Postcolonial neo-slave narratives such as Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997), Manu Herbstein's *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (2000), Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* (2007) and Prince Justice's *Tutuoba: Salem's Black Shango Slave Queen* (2007) depict different forms of rape prevalent during the

trans-Atlantic slave trade era in an attempt to address the sexual violence against women in the present times. Critics like Higgins and Silver (1991:11) however posit that there are differences in the manner male and female authors narrate rape because male-authored narratives either omit rape scenes or portray rape with "representations of masculinity and subjectivity". Herbstein and Hill, in contrast, not only narrate rape explicitly but also narrate it objectively from the viewpoint of the female victims.

Herbstein foregrounds what Plaatje (1996:283) refers to as "the white peril" which is the "hidden sexual exploitation of black women by white men" (Graham, 2003:437). Even though the sexual exploitation of black women by white men (white peril) was not totally concealed during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era, Herbstein balances the white peril with the sexual violence of African men against African women of different tribes. By employing rape as a central trope in his narrative, Herbstein constructs it as an inevitable part of the patriarchal characteristic of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. However, he recounts rape to show that it was not exclusive to the Western culture because the African middlemen equally perpetrated it with brute force. This is exemplified in the first rape Nandzi (Ama) endures:

> He (Abdulai) forced Nandzi down. With his left arm he pinned her shoulders to the ground. With his right hand he took his penis and guided it into her vagina, sighing as he perpetrated into the depths of her body... Then he began to drive into her. In and out he drove, just as he had often driven his spear repeatedly into the body of a prone victim, relishing the fountain of blood, thrusting the spear in again long after his adversary was dead. (7)

The above illustrates that slavery as an institution, whether practised in Africa or any other continent, is an institution steeped in violence. It is a practice of unequal power relations that renders the female as being vulnerable. The slave is at the mercy of the enslaver. This is especially so for the female slaves whose bodies were not just subjected to physical pain associated with forced labour but also with inhumane sexual violence which gratified the perverse sexual desires of the male slave drivers. Herbstein's novel shows that where the woman is in a position of lesser power in relation to the man, sexual violence is often the inevitable end game. The identities of the victimisers cut across races, class and religion but the common denominator is

the presence of male sexual aggression. The perpetrators are all men of different races and cultures who use various power dynamics to oppress women.

While the focalisation on Nandzi's rape begins with the victim, Herbstein shifts it midway to the victimiser, Abdulai, who is characterised as a blood-thirsty individual that enjoys thrusting his penis like a spear. We are therefore forced to ask why the shift to the victimiser's perspective? Herbstein appears to want his reader to engage with the mental processes of the torturer who derives pleasure in inflicting absolute pain. The reader cannot fully grasp the magnitude of Nandzi's pain unless the reader is confronted with the torturer's perspective through language. While pain cannot be represented adequately because it "shatters language" (Scarry, 1985:5), lacks literary representation, has no referential content and resists objectification in language, experiencing pain from the torturer's perspective results in certainty. Therefore, portraying Nandzi's rape from Abdulai's focalisation enables Herbstein to present Nandzi's torture and pain in a realistic manner.

Nandzi loses consciousness but Abdulai is oblivious of it. This is because the infliction of pain results in the "destruction of the subject's ability to perceive the objects of his or her consciousness" (Price, 2006:24). Additionally, as presented through fictional language, the torturer inflicts pain on his victim with the aim of making "his victim believe in the absoluteness" of his power (Harpham, 2001:211). What is paramount in Abdulai's mind is to exercise the power of control over Nandzi and to deprive her of sentience - any form of way to narrate the torture. With Nandzi losing consciousness and being unable to narrate her rape from her own perspective, Herbstein exemplifies how silence results from individual traumatic experiences like rape and violence. However, rather than portray Nandzi as what Hirsch (1994:1029) calls a "fallen angel" or an "ideal rape victim" - an innocent virgin who is defiled by a vicious stranger-rapist - Herbstein portrays her as a sexually immoral girl. She has been sexually active with her lover, Itsho, at a tender age which is a deviation from the African normative culture that requires girls to remain virgins until their wedding night.

The sexual torture of female slaves are overtly depicted in *Ama* to range from various forms of sexual battery to perversion. Following the arrival of Ama's slave

caravan to the Elmina slave castle, Ama sees Jensen for the first time and is fascinated by the white man. She nudges her friend Esi who immediately recognises Jensen as the man who, at the previous night, had her "from behind, without ceremony. She could still feel the pain in her loins and the humiliation and degradation of being taken like a dog" (145). Herbstein utilises his fictional language in a way that is concomitant to Jensen's infliction of pain, torture and sadism. Ama also suffers a similar fate from Jensen after De Bruyn's death. Herbstein uses Jensen's act of sodomising Ama to shock the reader and conjure up disturbing images that we question whether such violation actually took place in history:

> He [Jensen] grabbed her [Ama]. She felt at once his overpowering physical strength. In a moment he had stripped her mourning cloth from her and then her beads. He threw her face down over the bed. She felt his trousers slip to the floor and heard him kick them aside... Then he entered her, not her vagina but her anus. "Shit-arse, eh? Pig, eh?" he said again and again keeping time with his driving. When he had finished he rested in her for a moment. "Rose, my darling," he commanded his wife, "fetch me something to wipe my shit-arse prick with." (243)

By portraying the various sexual assaults Ama suffers, Herbstein premises his novel on the notion that the abuse of girls and women thrives under masculine hegemonic circumstances like the trans-Atlantic slave trade and war situations. This is because such events are fertile grounds for the manifestations of male aggression and violence. Rape as a form of "phallocratic violence" (Asaah, 2007:336) thrives in environments replete with economic oppression, gender inequality, racial discrimination, male domination, misogyny and sexual myths. Prior to the death of De Bruyn, there have been some undercurrents of male-female gendered power relations between Jensen and Ama. Jensen despises Ama for being elevated to the status that makes her to constantly challenge him. Raping Ama in front of Rose, the wife he is forced to marry, is Jensen's own masculine way of maintaining control over women and keeping women in constant fear.

Even though Rose remains indifferent to Jensen's perversion, it must not be misconstrued that women are not capable of such violence. Recent examples of the violence by women on men are the varying involvements of Lynndie England,

Sabrina Harman and Megan Ambuhl in the 2003 sexual torture of the male prisoners in Abu Ghraib, Iraq, which render the women as co-conspirators of sexual crimes. These women interrupt "gender stereotypes about war" because they "are the enemy from whom the [male] prisoners need protection" (Sjoberg, 2006:195). While Herbstein, in his novel, locates girls and women as predominant victims of sexual violence and men as the predominant perpetrators during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, there are accounts of African male slaves as victims and European female mistresses as agents. Even though cases in which the male slaves are victims are usually isolated, Prince Justice depicts such in *Tutuoba: Salem's Black Shango Slave Queen* as Martin, an African slave, is seduced by his mistress, Pamela Porter:

> [S]he swiftly got on to her knees on the bed, letting the sheets fall off to reveal her nakedness. She grabbed him by the shoulder and caressed his chest muscles down to the stomach ones, "Relax boy, ma'am likes you." (265)
>
> With her hands in his trousers bringing him out, he lost resistance and although he kept repeating, "No ma'am," his voice lost its conviction. Eventually, he lost control and he had sex with her. (266)

Herbstein acknowledges history by affirming that rape was an integral part of the institution of slavery as the sailors and the slave masters employed it as a means to oppress their female slaves in gratifying their sexual urges. Herbstein however portrays the gang rape of female slaves. On board the slave ship, Ama observes Knaggs, Knox and three other slave crew members go to the female deck to drag out one of the women to the main mast. The terrified slave is gaged and assaulted by Knox:

> Knox fumbled with his trouser cord for a moment and then he was inside her. But she twisted to one side and in that movement expelled his organ. He took a step back and slapped her face so violently that her head struck the mast. She stopped resisting. Joe re-entered her. His mates cheered... Then Joe made his final triumphant thrust. He withdrew and his accomplice released his hold on the woman. She slumped to the deck and the man dragged her to one side. (284)

The gang rape of African female slaves is parallel to the public gang-rape of women like the Muslim women of Bosnia and Croatia during the conflict in the former

Yugoslavia (1991-1995). According to Tompkins (1995:850), the Muslim women were "gang raped, forced into rape camps, and then forced to become pregnant and carry their rapists's children to term". Similarly, thousands of Tutsi women were gang-raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Hence, the gang-rape of female slaves during the trans-Atlantic slave trade can be employed as a model to speak against the sexual violence of women in contemporary times. This is also highlighted in Justice's *Tutuoba* as Adam, a European sailor, rapes Wura, the eponymous protagonist's mother, in the aftermath of the women's capture:

> With Wura held down by two other guards as she struggled despite her injuries, Adam raped her in front of her daughter. Tutu cried and tried to wrestle free as her mother was sexually assaulted, but was held firmly down by another guard.
>
> After Adam was finished and got up, he gestured to the other guard, Tim, "Come on! It's you (sic) turn. Have some of the African whore!" He told the other guards who were a bit reluctant to participate, although they overcame their inhibitions with little persuasion from him. (100).

The trans-Atlantic slave trade gave European men the perfect excuse to rape African women and express their frustrations on them. Since the sailors had unrestricted access to African women for the duration of two to ten months, at the slave factories and across the Atlantic Ocean, the women were compelled to succumb to the libidinous terror of the crew and were repeatedly raped and beaten. In Haley's *Roots* (1976:118) the female captives reveal how the European sailors "had taken every woman into the dark corners of the canoe each night and used them like dogs". The sailors used the unavailability of European women on the African coast and on the slave ships as a justification to rape the female captives while the plantation slave masters raped their female slaves on the pretext that they were deprived of sexual intercourse by their "honourable" wives. On board *The Love of Liberty* David Williams asks after Ama from his uncle, Captain Williams, who retorts whether David wants Ama as "your own chattel, to fuck or to beat according to your fancy. Your own very personal maid-servant in Barbados, your private piece of black arse" (332). Regarding the female slaves as chattel turns them into objects for the slave master's sexual gratification. This also provides the masters with the liberty to pander out the

slaves as prostitutes or compel them to give birth to children that end up working as slaves on the plantations.

Hill also employs rape as a thematic preoccupation in his novel. In *The Book of Negroes* Aminata is transported across the Atlantic Ocean to South Carolina where she is enslaved on an indigo plantation owned by Robinson Appleby who rapes and deflowers her:

> He [Appleby] clamped one hand on my mouth, pinned me down with his chest and began unbuttoning his trousers with his other hand. His skin pressed down on mine. I could feel his wet skin, sweating. And he stank... the pain was terrible as he plunged deep inside my body where nobody belonged but me... His breath quickened, he gave out a wild squeal and he was finished. When he slid out of me, I felt like everything inside me was draining out. (178-179)

Hill constructs sexual violence as an inevitable part of the patriarchal representation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As Aminata reflects on her life, she describes herself as being beautiful but considers it a curse for a slave because a beautiful slave will constantly be a victim of sexual attacks. Aminata is enslaved at the age of eleven but this does not stop Tom, the slave ship's surgeon, from trying to violate her sexually. Apart from forcing Aminata to sleep his room, Tom insists that she should sleep beside him on his bed even though she refuses to have sexual intercourse with him. As a form of psychological rape, Tom compels Aminata to remain on the bed each time he has intercourse with other female captives. Aminata is relieved that the "misfortune of those women was my good luck, their misery my escape" (254). Even though she is not sexually violated by Tom, she is unable to escape rape from Appleby on his indigo plantation.

Herbstein and Hill present various traumatising images of rape to metaphorically portray the European subjugation and exploitation of Africa in diverse forms ranging from the trans-Atlantic slave trade to colonialism and neo-colonialism. As Tyson (1999:370) puts it, "patriarchal subjugation of women is analogous to colonial subjugation of indigenous populations". By elevating the sadism of Jensen and Appleby to European imperialism, Herbstein and Hill respectively make them

part of the instruments used to annihilate the "Other" and destroy the African consciousness.

2.4 African Identity and the Trans-Atlantic Experience

Ama is prefaced with the *Nkyinkyin* pictogram which is an Adinkra "twisting" symbol of the Asante people of Ghana, as well as a corresponding proverb, "*Obra kwan ye nkyinkyin yimiie*", which means "the path of life is full of twists and turns". The *Nkyinkyin* pictogram, which Herbstein utilises to introduce each chapter of *Ama*, indicates toughness, adaptability, determination and service to others especially because the Asante people believe everyone can change self, play multiple roles, and survive hardships. These metaphors constitute Herbstein's identification with the precolonial African identities, symbols and proverbs similar to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) where the postcolonial tenets of citing proverbs and setting the story in Africa are used to speak back to the European canons.

The Book of Negroes is prefaced with a biblical passage, Deuteronomy 30:19 and a famous quatrain from Jonathan Swift's poem, "On Poetry: A Rhapsody" (1733) where Swift observes how early European geographers drew maps depicting Africa as being uninhabitable and replete with savages and beasts. Aminata reads the same quote as she visits Governor Wentworth's house with John Clarkson in Halifax for dinner. While looking at the maps, Aminata discovers the poem copied on a piece of paper from Jonathan Swift's 1733 poetry. She expresses her frustrations at the ill-conceived notions and prejudices against Africans, especially since the maps of Africa show the stereotypical paintings of naked Africans with proximate wild animals. She reflects on how "Swift had expressed the very thing I was feeling now... every stroke of paint told me that the mapmakers had little to say about my land" (384). By relying on the Swiftian observation, Hill affirms Ashcroft *et al.*'s (1989:22) denunciation of "privileging European perspective" in areas like Africa.

Hill addresses the negative and erroneous notions early European explorers had on Africa as they carved the image of Africa from their own biased cartographic perspectives. Cartography is a technique of representing the world and locating indigenous people within a "grid of intelligibility" (Wainwright & Bryan, 2009:155).

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However, the Eurocentric representation of non-Western people in Western cartography is considered to be "a falsely essentialist view of the world which negates or suppresses alternative views which might endanger the privileged position of its Western perceiver" (Huggan, 1989:116). In other words, colonial cartographers produced maps that represented their prejudiced perception and myopic imagination of the world but also designed them to empower the colonialists to exercise control over the "Other". In other words, the cartographic engraving of the colonised by the coloniser ends up creating a force that makes the colonised "see himself as other" (Spivak, 2005:133). Postcolonial writers therefore employ counter-discursive strategies to deconstruct the colonial map and challenge the tools that reinforce the hegemonic colonial power by resisting the Eurocentric cartography and revising the map in different postcolonial compositions.

As a counter-discursive strategy that is typical of postcolonial writings, Herbstein and Hill proactively represent the phenomena from their own viewpoints. Young (2009:15) attests:

> Postcolonialism, therefore begins from its own counter-knowledges, and from the diversity of its cultural experiences, and starts from the premise that those in the West, particularly, both within and outside the academy, should relinquish their monopoly on knowledge, and take other knowledges, other perspectives, as seriously as those of the West.

Herbstein and Hill write from a former colonised perspective. They represent Africa by relocating it from the margin to the centre. Herbstein, for instance, dwells extensively on the African life of Ama before and during her sojourn in the Elmina slave castle. He divides his narrative into four parts and devotes two parts to representing Africa. It is not until Chapter 24 out of 36 chapters that Ama is taken aboard a ship to be transported to the New World. Calculating by the number of pages, the African setting takes sixty-three per cent of the novel's length. Hill also does the same as he devotes two books, out of the four in which he stratifies his novel, to substantially portray Aminata's life and capture in Africa before the New World and later in the founding of Sierra Leone.

Hill makes Aminata retain her African identity as an ultimate act of resistance to hegemony. She asserts, "I am Aminata Diallo, daughter of Mamadu Diallo and Sira Kulibali, born in the village of Bayo, three moons by foot from the Grain Coast in West Africa" (16). This is to assert the subjectivity of the slaves who were portrayed as objects in history. On the slave ship Tom, the ship surgeon, names her Mary but she secretly refuses to accept the name. Aminata later observes that European men called African women "'Mary' when they did not know their names" (186). This is a usual practice because right from the point of sale at the slave castles in Africa and across the Middle Passage to the New World, the African captives were identified with numbers not names. This affirms Benston's (1982:4) assertion that the African identity "was usurped during Middle Passage". The instant renaming of the Africans at the point of boarding the slave ships and arriving in the New World was a way to efface the memory of the slaves and sever their contact with Africa.

Renaming slaves was also an act of immense power and violence on the part of the slavers. By insisting on her African name, Aminata resists the attempts of the slave masters to violently impose a new identity on her. Aminata lays claim to her African name to assert her African identity in the New World but merely permits its variant, Meena Dee, because some find it difficult to pronounce Aminata Diallo. Despite this, she asserts her identity and refuses to accept any other renaming. When Lindo puts Aminata on a self-hire system he places an advertisement in a gazette advertising Aminata as a Guinea wench. Aminata reactively retorts, "I'm not from Guinea... And I'm not a wench... I am a wife. I am a mother. Aren't I a woman?" (217). This echoes the title of bell hooks's work *Ain't I a Woman* (1981) but more importantly alludes to Sojourner Truth's famous speech "Ain't I a Woman?" which she made at a convention on women's rights in 1851 in Akron, Ohio, to debunk the claim by male Protestant ministers that men were superior and should be accorded greater privileges.

Sojourner Truth employs her 1851 speech at a Women's Convention to address the peculiar conditions that women are subjected to, ranging from racism to sexism and classism. Truth speaks against the injustices against women, especially black women. She indicates the valuation of a white woman as the proper subject of

an oppressed victim while the black woman is seen as neither woman nor person. Truth utilises her personal experiences and scriptural references against the stereotypes that men have about women and retorts with a rhetorical question, "Ain't I a woman?" In the middle of her speech, Truth points to a man in the audience and exclaims:

> That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? ... I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Truth reveals the intellectual capacity and strength that women possess in performing diverse tasks the way men do. To an extent, she is stating equality with men even though women are perceived to be weaker than men. Furthermore, she reveals how strong women can be when faced with the grief that comes from the sale of their children.

Aminata's success in retaining her African name instead of adopting the name given to her by the slave masters makes her different from most slaves portrayed in non-fictional and fictional narratives. For instance, Olaudah Equiano is renamed Gustavus Vassa (71); Alex Haley's Kunta Kinte is renamed Toby (232), and even Manu Herbstein's Ama is renamed Pamela (156). Aminata, therefore, indicates that some slaves were able to retain their African names and cultural heritage as a result of obstinacy or favour with their masters. It soon becomes clear to Aminata, however, that regardless of how much she tries to affirm her African identity, her trans-Atlantic slave trade experiences have given her multiple identities which are not accepted in the New World or in Africa. Additionally, the fact that Aminata fails to find her village of birth despite her quest shows the complications attendant on identity in essentialist terms.

Hill complicates the question of identity when Aminata returns to Africa and realises that although she is black, she is no longer accepted as an African. On

arriving in Freetown, the African natives of the Temne tribe trade with the African settlers prohibit them from getting beyond the limits of Freetown into their villages because they see them as "toubabs" (whites). Aminata expresses her frustrations at such hostility because it hinders her from reclaiming her African identity. She observes that:

> In South Carolina, I had been an African. In Nova Scotia, I had become known as a Loyalist, or a Negro, or both. And now, finally back in Africa, I was seen as a Nova Scotian... they [Temne women] seemed to think that I was just as foreign as the British. (401-402)

Hill shows that identity is a social construct rather than a biological or geographic one. The rejection of diasporic Africans in the homeland and in the diaspora has become an issue to be addressed. After Aminata acquaints herself with Fatima, a Temne trader in Freetown, she solicits Fatima's assistance as a guide to her native land, Bayo. As soon as Aminata informs Fatima that she (Aminata) is a native of Africa, Fatima bluntly responds, "You are a toubab with a black face" (411). Therefore, Hill employs his novel to address the identity crises of many diasporic Africans in general and contemporary African-Americans in particular. They are not regarded as Americans or Canadians in North America (the same with those in Europe) and in Africa, they are also not regarded as Africans but as foreigners. Hence, their lives and developments are repeatedly affected by race, migration and their trans-Atlantic slave trade ancestry.

2.5 African Division as Ruse for Euro-Christian Enslavement

As a form of protest, Hill employs Aminata's character to comment against the early European church teachings that used the doctrine of the Curse of Noah on his black son, Ham, to validate and justify the trans-Atlantic slave trade. According to *The Holy Bible*, Noah cursed Ham, the father of Canaan, that "Cursed *be* Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren" (Genesis 9:25). Soon after Aminata arrives in London on the request of the abolitionists, she accepts Sir Stanley Hastings's invitation to attend church with him. Realising that she is the only person of colour in the whole church that has more than a thousand members in attendance, Aminata

begins to ponder on how the "people of Great Britain and other seafaring nations have devised unspeakable punishments for the children of Ham" (250).

Many historical scholars like Hall (2009) avow that the trans-Atlantic slave trade was built on the Christian religion through the action of Bartolomé de Las Casas, a Spanish priest, who opposed the slavery of Native Americans and "proposed to the Spanish monarch Charles V that African labor replace Indian labor" (Hall, 2009:43) on the plantations of South America. This is a broad generalisation because in actual sense, the trans-Atlantic slave trade was based on the misinterpretation of early Christianity. Additionally, at the inception of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the Moors informed the Portuguese that the black skinned people were "a race cursed of God and predestined as slaves" (Dow, 2002:1). This, along with the misinterpreted biblical injunction, introduced the belief in the concept of the black man being created by God to labour for the white man and bear his burdens, especially if the particular black man was a pagan.

Trans-Atlantic slaves were treated inhumanely. This was different from the way ancient slaves in Africa and Asia were treated. While a number of those enslaved in precolonial Africa and Asia rose beyond servitude to become prominent members of the societies in which they have been enslaved, enacted laws prohibited trans-Atlantic slaves from rising beyond their inferior status. Clarke (2003:52) affirms that inasmuch as the Europeans used the slavery that "existed in West Africa prior to contact with Europeans" as an excuse for the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the trans-Atlantic slave trade was "tragic" because the Europeans "totally dehumanized" the slaves. On board the *The Love of Liberty*, an African slave overseer exclaims angrily to Ama and the ship's surgeon, "The white devil brands us with his iron, strips us of our cloth, imprisons us in that wooden coffin, without air, without water... Would you treat a dog the way he treats us? What have we done to him to deserve this?" (297). Inasmuch as this sums up the mentality of a majority of the African captives towards the Europeans (victimisers) involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the same questions have been reiterated by the prisoners of the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and the Guantánamo Bay detention camp in Cuba as the soldiers of the United States of America subject them to various degrading forms of torture for their perceived involvement in terrorist activities.

Cannon (2008:127) traces the factors that motivated Europe's initiation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to Christian religion, as the early Europeans misinterpreted it, and the acts of Prince Henry of Portugal (1394-1460), otherwise called Henry "the Navigator" - a governor and "the administrator of the Order of Christ". Henry's main motive for exploring West Africa in the fifteenth century was to terminate the Islamisation of West Africa and replace it with Christianity. Even though Prince Henry financed fourteen expeditions along the West African coast to advance Portugal's economic interests in Africa, his ambition was to establish a "Euro-African Catholic alliance against Islam" (Bassil, 2005:29). In Brazil, Olukoya and Ama discuss the effects of the Christian religion on the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery in general. Olukoya tells her, "Christian religion is one of the weapons they use to divide us" (397). This affirms the general belief that the Europeans arrived in Africa with a Bible in one hand and guns and shackles in the other hand.

The insatiable demands Europeans had for African slaves led to situations that incited numerous African wars which resulted in the prisoners of war becoming captives for exportation. This was so that there "was scarcely a village, kin group, or family that did not lose a relative to the trade" (Brown, 2003:220). As Captain David William dines with De Bruyn and Ama at the Elmina Castle, De Bruyn tells Williams that:

> Warfare is endemic on this part of the coast. Most of the slaves who come to us are prisoners of war. If we did not sell arms and ammunition, there would certainly be less warfare and the supply of slaves might dry up. (215)

Many of the slaves sold by the African kingdoms like the Asante (Ghana), Oyo (Nigeria) and Dahomey (Republic of Benin) in the eighteenth century were either captured as prisoners of the wars prevalent in West Africa or received as tributes from the lesser kingdoms. Since the African kingdoms were constantly supplied with European arms and ammunitions, it was easy to instigate more wars in furthering the supply of slaves. Precolonial African wars therefore accelerated the forced transportation and commodification of Africans across the trans-Atlantic Ocean for enslavement on the plantations established in South America. A typical example is one of Ama's acquaintances, Gregório, an Ewe man enslaved in Brazil:

> Gregório had fought for the Anlo in a war against the Ge. He had been captured and sold. Now, too late, he brooded on the futility of Ewe fighting Ewe, African fighting African. Only the white man benefited from those wars. (390)

Herbstein, however, emphasises that African civil wars and slavery were not instituted by the Europeans but by the Africans themselves. Apart from the fact that Africans were involved in the trans-Saharan slave trade prior to the advent of the Europeans, the lack of African unity became the faultline entry point for the European exploitation of Africa. Olukoya tells Ama, "Our greatest enemy is not the whites. It is our own disunity" (397). Tomba also affirms that even though the blacks are larger in population when compared to the whites, the whites are able to control the blacks easily "because we are divided amongst ourselves. We are suspicious of one another, Akan of Angolan, Yoruba of Hausa" (418). In Africa, the African societies that received ammunition from the Europeans aligned themselves with their European benefactors to capture and trade their fellow Africans. In the New World, the Africans remained divided along tribal and religious lines. To worsen their situation, many slaves became divided because they were either plantation slaves (field Negroes) who despised the domestic slaves (house Negroes) or Ladinos (Latinised slaves) who despised the bozales (African born slaves).

Herbstein exposes the involvement of the African middlemen in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. He foregrounds the battle between the Dagomba tribe and the Asante Confederacy which leads to the Dagomba paying an annual tribute of slaves to the Asante who in turn sell them to the Europeans at the slave castles. The visit of Captain Williams to Elmina Castle to meet with De Bruyn coincides with the arrival of another consignment of slaves to the Elmina Castle. Ama observes them from De Bruyn's telescope and sees the despondent faces of the shackled slaves. Ama expresses her objections to Augusta (Efua Kabrabaa), a Fante slave trader, "Maame, is it not wicked to treat human beings like that? I mean to chain them as if they were animals and then sell them to the Europeans? Are they not our own people, our own brothers and sisters?" (217). Ama's disgust for the inhumane actions of the African middlemen represents the same issue Herbstein tries to accentuate.

African kingdoms and merchants engaged in the trans-Atlantic slave trade in spite of its devastation to Africa because the concept of the African unity was nonexistent. Loyalty was based on kinship to and membership of a particular kingdom rather than to the African continent as a whole. Hence, African societies involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade believed they were selling outsiders, not their own. Rather than the Africans to identify with themselves on racial lines, they based their African identity on lineage lines. As a consequence, a degree of the "ethnic fragmentation" (Whatley & Gilleszeau, 2011:571) existing in Africa today is traceable to the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Hill also brings to the fore a lack of African unity and the involvement of the African slave merchants in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. After Aminata's capture, her slave coffle passes through many villages but the villagers merely watch without raising any objection or attempting to rescue the slaves. Rather, the village chiefs demand payment for a free passage through their villages. The predicaments of the slaves grow worse as some boys in a village taunt and throw stones and several objects at the naked and exhausted captives to the point that Aminata sustains injuries. By the time the slaves are put on the slave ship, Aminata "watched the working homelanders leave the ship, climb into the canoes below and row away. They were allowed to come and go, but we, the captives, were to be taken away" (78). When Aminata migrates to Sierra Leone, she realises that she is equally unable to save the slaves who pass in coffles through Freetown to Bance Island.

Tributes to the rulers of powerful African kingdoms were not only supplied by lesser kingdoms in return for peace but also by Europeans for the exchange of unrestricted slave trading. In Freetown, Aminata strikes up a friendship with Anna Maria Falconbridge and discusses the effects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, especially how the Europeans pay tributes of grandiose gifts and barrels of rum to King Jimmy of Temne to ensure the continuous supply of slaves. Anna Maria reminds Aminata that "theft begins right on this continent with the Africans, stealing and plundering each other... Africans were dealing in slaves long before the first ones were sent to the Americas" (426). With this, Hill also exposes the involvement of the African middlemen in the sale of their fellow Africans and traces their deeds to

the trans-Saharan slave trade. Hill shows that the African merchants are as equally blameworthy as the Europeans.

Many African communities objected to the enslavement of their countrymen but regarded it as a custom that slaves ought to be men and women captured from villages outside their own ethnic group or clan. According to Richardson (2001:87) the Muslims were also "involved in enslavement activity" as they "typically sought victims from outside their own ethnic group". After Itsho's failed attempt to rescue Nandzi (Ama) from the hold of Abdulai, Abdulai performs ablution and "settled down to pray" (18) thereby indicating that he is a Muslim. The Muslims were involved in the trans-Saharan slave trade and the trans-Atlantic slave trade because they regarded non-Muslim Africans as infidels. Infidels are considered inferior beings who are to be captured and sold as slaves. After Nandzi shows Damba, Abdulai's henchman, gratitude for letting her bury Itsho, it occurs to Damba that the captured Africans are human beings like himself but he "had been led to believe otherwise" (22). Because Herbstein portrays Abdulai and Damba as Muslims, he presents his reader with the way religion can be used to indoctrinate human beings into believing in the inferiority of their fellow human beings.

The manner in which Hill portrays the involvement of Muslims in his narrative is slightly different from Herbstein. Hill's Aminata is captured by a group of African slave traders in spite of the fact that she is a Muslim. When Aminata meets Biton, the captured Bamana chief, on the slave ship, she informs Biton, "I was not supposed to be stolen" and blurts out, "I am a freeborn Muslim" (80). Inasmuch as Hill does not reveal the religion of Aminata's captors, he uses Chekura to reveal that Amainata's capture has nothing to do with her religion but her tribe. Chekura helps the African captors to capture his fellow Africans like Aminata because he is from another "village of Kinta" (49). Unfortunately for him, he gets double-crossed and is sold like the other slaves to the Europeans.

Hill, however, is able to characterise some of the slave dealers in his novel as Muslims. On Bance Island, Aminata meets Alassane, a Fula slave trader, who agrees to take her to her village at the cost of three barrels of rum. On their way, Aminata observes that Alassane and his men pray in the Muslim way before eating.

Aminata "wondered for a time how a person who considered himself a good Muslim could treat other humans in such a way, but it occurred to me that the same question could be asked of Christians and Jews" (450). After walking for more than thirty days, Aminata wakes up in the middle of the night to hear Alassane telling his associates in Fulfulde, Aminata's paternal language, that he intends selling her back into slavery in a couple of days. Aminata is shocked to hear their plan of betrayal and eventually escapes the next day.

Hill employs Aminata's thoughts to condemn the brutal nature of capitalism that still persists today. Aminata reminisces on all of her experiences and she concludes that "the trading in men would continue for as long as some people were free to take others as their property" (440). In other words, slavery cannot be said to have been eliminated in the nineteenth century because contemporary slavery continues to thrive to the point that men, women and children are "forced into servitude through violence and deprivation" (Kapstein, 2006:103). Men are forced into labour bondage with a promise of a better life outside their countries while women and children are trafficked for sexual and economic services. Even though the trans-Atlantic slave trade was officially abolished in 1888, modern day slavery remains very much in practice.

2.6 Reconceptualising History via a Postcolonial-Postmodern Conflation

Herbstein and Hill reconceptualise history by elucidating their postcolonial narratives with basic strands of postmodernism. Intersecting the postcolonial with postmodern discourse results in preoccupations with intertextuality, parody and irony which are utilised to assert the "identities of the formerly colonized" (Xie, 1997:9). In order to establish Ama's identity as an African woman who can capture the attention of an European slave master (De Bruyn) for a number of years, Herbstein incorporates narrative intertextuality by engaging Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel, *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded* which was first published in 1740. *Pamela* tells the story of a young maidservant named Pamela who ends up getting a proposal of marriage from Mr. B. her employer. After the first night De Bruyn has with Ama, he begins to lust after her. He removes her from the slave dungeon permanently into his room. He gives her his late wife's clothes to wear, dines with her and solicits the help of Van

Schalkwyk, the Chaplain, to teach her how to read and write. Ironically, Ama's story does not end like that of Richardson's Pamela because De Bruyn succumbs to death and Ama is put back in the dungeon by Jensen and eventually gets sold across the Atlantic Ocean as already argued.

Combining realism with postmodernist intertextuality becomes necessary when engaging with the trans-Atlantic slave trade "both as contested historical reality and as a tradition of conflicting cultural representations" (Ryan, 2008:149). Herbstein foregrounds this when he incorporates the real historical personage of Philip Quaque, as a form of intertextuality. Quaque is a Fanti ex-slave who returns to Ghana to serve as the priest of the Cape Coast Castle under the control of the English. While history presents Quaque as the epitome of an ideal African who was transformed from savagery to salvation, Herbstein parodies Quaque's character to interrogate historical truths and assumptions as well as to underscore the fictionality of history.

Quaque is characterised as an archetype of what Fanon (1991:25) calls a product of dislocation and separation because he is "the newly returned Negro [who] adopts a language different from that of the group into which he was born". Quaque despises his own people and calls them heathen. He refuses to converse in his native Fanti language but in the English language which he regards as being heaven ordained as the medium of religion and civilisation. At the wedding ceremony of Jensen and Rose, Ama welcomes Quaque to Elmina Castle speaking Fanti. Quaque reprimands her, "Speak to me in English, child... I neither speak nor understand that heathenish tongue" (228). Quaque's impudence makes Richard Brew, the governor of the slave Castle Brew at Anomabu, describe him as being "no more than a converted pagan, clothed in a thin veneer of civilisation" (205). At the end of the novel, Ama reminisces on everyone she has made contact with over the years and concludes that Philip Quaque "*couldn't decide whether he was African or English*" (454). This addresses the identity crisis many people of African descent continually battle with.

As a form of intertextuality, Hill infuses his narrative with real names and characters of notable historical personalities. These include: John Clarkson, an

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English abolitionist who was actively involved in the founding of Freetown (Sierra Leone); Thomas Peters who was taken as a slave from the Yoruba tribe (Nigeria) and became one of the Black Loyalists that founded Freetown; Thomas Clarkson, the elder brother of John Clarkson and one of the founders of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade that saw to the enactment of the Slave Trade Act of 1807 which abolished the British involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade; Alexander Falconbridge, the English slave ship surgeon who eventually became an abolitionist and the author of *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (1788); Anna Maria Falconbridge who accompanied her husband, Alexander Falconbridge, to Sierra Leone and became the first English woman to narrate her experiences in Africa; William Wilberforce, an English activist who led the movement for the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade; King George III who was the king of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (1760-1820); Queen Charlotte, King George's wife and Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland; John Wentworth who served as the Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia; Sam Fraunces, the owner of Fraunces Tavern in New York City who catered to prisoners during the Revolutionary War; as well as Moses Lindo, an indigo merchant, even though his name in the novel is Solomon Lindo. Through these characters, Hill adheres to many historical facts thereby counteracting his claim that the novel "is a work of my imagination" (489). However, inasmuch as a writer will have to fill in the "gaps in his information on inferential or speculative grounds" (White, 1986:51) in an effort to reconstruct a historical event, the dialogues Hill manufactures for his historical characters are plausible. In other words, Hill invents actions and conversations for the characters which are different from what the historical figures really performed and uttered in their times.

Hill parodies Olaudah Equiano's narrative when Anna Maria Falconbridge suggests to Aminata that she writes a memoir of her experiences as a slave like Olaudah Equiano who has turned his trans-Atlantic slave trade experiences into a great personal gain. Anna Maria reveals to Aminata, "I have no idea if his account is entirely true. But no matter. His book has sold everywhere in England" (425). As a form of self-reflexivity on Hill's part, he casts doubt on the 1789 narrative accounts of Equiano. Hill also employs intertextuality as he makes Aminata encounter historical

figures and subverts history by making King George III invite Aminata to Buckingham Palace for tea. Delighted at the invitation, John Clarkson informs Aminata that "The King would never meet Olaudah Equiano" (478) in spite of Equiano's popularity and the success of his narrative. Creating such dialogue between a fictional character and real historical personages accentuates Hill's creativity and deconstruction of history.

The parodic nature of Hill's intertextuality foregrounds his "encoded intentionality" (Hutcheon, 1983:34) as he employs his intertextual relations to interact and explore the historical dimension of his novel's "constitutive reality" (Van Alphen 1989:826). Hill incorporates the character of Alexander Falconbridge, an abolitionist who was a former slave ship surgeon, to provide Aminata with a copy of his book, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa, by Alexander Falconbridge. Late Surgeon in the African Trade. London, 1788.* During the course of their debate on the conditions of the slave ships, Aminata rejects Falconbridge's claim that on board the slave ships many of the female captives "become raving mad" and "die in that state" (424). Rather, the men are the ones who grow mad owing to their state of powerlessness, not the women. Hill adds to the ongoing debate on the hypothetical African ancestry of Queen Charlotte by suggesting, through the character of Lindo's servant, Dolly, that Queen Charlotte is of African descent. Dolly tells Aminata, "They call her the Black Queen... Got some African in her" (211). The idea of having a Queen of African descent on the British throne gives Africans in the diaspora a sense of hope that is similar to the one felt when Barak Obama was inaugurated as the first black president of the United States of America on 20 January 2009.

To reveal how Hill fictionalises history, he admits that he has "knowingly bent facts to suit the purposes of the novel" (491). First, while acknowledging that the actual "Book of Negroes" was recorded by British officers, not private scribes, he subverts historical fact by characterising Aminata as a private scribe hired by the British government to record the names of the blacks in the "Book of Negroes". Second, he manipulates the year the first race riot in Canada occurred as 1787 instead of 1783. Third, Hill makes the character of Thomas Peters, a Loyalist who was outspoken about the ill treatment of the blacks in Nova Scotia and facilitates the

settlement of the blacks in Sierra Leone, to die in the hands of slave traders even though the real cause of the death of Thomas Peters was malaria. Fourth, Hill elongates the sojourn of John Clarkson in Sierra Leone beyond the short period he really stayed.

2.7 Conclusion

Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade and *The Book of Negroes* blend elements of Bildungsroman, myth, folklore, female-child view and the trans-Atlantic slave trade historical discourse to engage in the same contemporary discourses about Africa's relationship with the West and the rest of the world. In their respective novels, Herbstein and Hill accentuate the female African voice to foreground the postcolonial feminist ideas relating to gender issues, race and ethnicity. In the two novels, we see how the plot develops and the narrative perspectives alternate between the child and adult points of view to depict loss of freedom and childhood innocence. Both authors employ narrators who reject the silent role that has characterised African women for so many years.

Herbstein and Hill portray the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the viewpoints of a narrative tradition and historical reality. Both novels combine the conventions of realism with history to explore the dimension of textually constitutive reality to such an extent that their descriptions are absorbing and shocking at the same time. Their cross-fertilisation of ideas and cross-representations of constitutive elements make one to ponder whether Hill had ever read Herbstein's *Ama* before he published *The Book of Negroes.* The electronic mails this researcher exchanged with Lawrence Hill during the course of this research reveal that Hill met Herbstein after he published *The Book of Negroes.* Hill claims that even though Herbstein gave him a copy of *Ama* to read, he has not had the opportunity to read it at the time of correspondence with this researcher.

I own I am shocked at the purchase of slaves,
And fear those who buy them and sell them are knaves;
What I hear of their hardships. Their tortures and groans,
Is almost enough to draw pity from stones.
I pity them greatly, but I must be mum,
For how could we do without sugar and rum?

William Cowper (1788)

CHAPTER 3

DECONSTRUCTING THE MIDDLE PASSAGE FROM HISTORICAL FICTION TO HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION

3.1 Introduction

The Middle Passage refers to the 'middle' phase of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and is a metaphor for dispossession and death. It signifies the cruel journey across the Atlantic Ocean where millions of African captives were bound, packed and transported in slave ships like cargo from Africa to the Americas for a life of slavery. The journey across the Middle Passage conjures up the terrifying images of forced dislocation of Africans from their homes, and the hapless crossing to bondage. As a result, it symbolises an absolute severance from Africa and the irretrievable loss of identity for the descendants of African slaves in the New World. It is against this backdrop that Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* (1990) and Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) deconstruct the Middle Passage through broad postmodernist lenses to create crossing narratives from historical fiction to historiographic metafiction.

The earliest recorded narrative on the Middle Passage by a writer of African descent is Olaudah Equaino's *The Astonishing Story of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789). In spite of its Anglo-African heritage, the narrative is regarded as a prototype for subsequently published African-American slave narratives. It is also applauded as one of the early influential slave narratives that "provided grim evidence of the inhumanity of the trade and insight into the effect that physical displacement and psychological disorientation had on Africans who endured the middle passage" (Pedersen, 1993:229). Since such traditional slave narratives and other Eurocentric historical writings "opened new seams of possibility for exploration" (Frías & D'Aguiar, 2002:419), Johnson and D'Aguiar rewrite the Middle Passage to reconstruct probable scenes and creatively fill the gaps on what might have occurred as the slave ships transported the slaves from Africa to the New World.

As writers of African descent, Johnson and D'Aguiar subvert and deconstruct the historical Middle Passage to demonstrate how jaundiced written history can be with regard to what we perceive as historical truths. For instance, Johnson, who was born and raised in the United States of America, "overwrites the tradition of slave narratives and historical writing" (Steinberg, 2003:375) on the trans-Atlantic slave trade that claim to be true the way Rutherford Calhoun overwrites Captain Falcon's log book. In the same vein, D'Aguiar, who was born in England, raised in Guyana and resident in the United States of America, narrates how Mintah tries to use her journal to expose the cruel acts of the slavers and debunk the testimonies of Captain Cunningham and the crew of the *Zong* slave ship.

Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* (1990) revolves around the narrative of Rutherford Calhoun. Rutherford is an educated and recently manumitted slave who stows away aboard a slave ship, the *Republic*, from New Orleans to Africa in 1830. Rutherford stows away in order to elude his creditors, avoid a possibility of imprisonment, and evade a forced marriage to Isadora Bailey. Apart from the fact that Rutherford is not convinced that he loves Isadora, he believes that "Life is too short for me to shackle myself to a mortgage and marriage" (10). Rutherford hopes to escape from his problems but Peter Cringle, the first mate on the *Republic*, informs him that "Being on a ship is being in jail with the chance of being drowned" (25). On the *Republic* Rutherford encounters a despotic and morally bankrupt Captain Falcon and his crew who succeed in capturing a group of Africans from the Allmuseri tribe. Owing to his education, Rutherford is able to succeed Captain Falcon in documenting the Middle Passage event in the ship's log. This is why Johnson considers his novel as a "philosophical novel structured along the lines of a ship's log" (Rowell & Johnson, 1997:539). The Allmuseri successfully execute a revolt before the crew's planned mutiny but they are unable to navigate the ship back to Africa as they end up shipwrecked. Rutherford is rescued and after much reflection decides to marry Isadora Bailey.

Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) is a fictional account of what happened on the historical *Zong* slave ship transporting 408 African slaves across the Middle Passage in 1781. One hundred and twenty-two sick captives were thrown overboard on the orders of Captain Luke Collingwood (whom D'Aguiar subverts into

Cunningham) and "another 10 jumped of their own accord" (Rediker, 2007:290). In the novel, Captain Cunningham considers the slaves as "cargo" (13) and orders the sick slaves to be thrown overboard with the intention of claiming the insurance profit on the loss. Captain Cunningham orders an educated black female slave, Mintah, to be thrown overboard with the sick slaves. Even though Mintah "is not sick" Captain Cunningham believes "Insolence was a sickness... Behaviour liable to fuel discontent and promote insurrection among the slaves was the worst sickness of all" (48). Mintah survives and secretly climbs back on to the ship to instigate a rebellion by the African captives. On the brink of Captain Cunningham being awarded insurance profit for the loss of 131 slaves by the court, Mintah's secret journal is produced to reveal the brutality of the crew and contradict the crew's account of what happened on the slave ship and led to the deaths of the African slaves.

Johnson's and D'Aguair's representations of the horrors of the Middle Passage which include rape, forced feeding, whipping, killing and throwing overboard, are selective. They choose a few indicators to characterise and portray the experiences of their protagonists. While Johnson characterises Rutherford as an unusual former slave who stows away on a slave ship and overwrites the ship's log, D'Aguiar develops the character of Mintah to create a fictional account of the sole slave that survived after being thrown overboard the *Zong.* What is evident is that Johnson and D'Aguiar do not intend to deny the harsh historical realities of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in their representations. Rather, they shift their focus to the imaginary dimension of exploring new creative frontiers embedded in postmodern literary consciousness as against writing with the purpose of truth and accuracy. Since postmodernist fiction seeks to "question *whose* truth gets told" (Hutcheon, 1988:123) in historical and fictional narratives, *Middle Passage* and *Feeding the Ghosts* interrogate conventional historical accounts and question their reliability in relation to subverted contemporary narrative constructions.

Johnson and D'Aguiar respectively immerse *Middle Passage* and *Feeding the Ghosts* in the subverted representations of the real but also premise their narratives on what De Kock (2012:9) calls the "what if" speculation. This involves casting doubt on historical accounts to interrogate historical truths. Casting doubt alerts readers and literary analysts to become sceptical of unexamined claims and scrutinise "the

implications and consequences of such claims" (Bloland, 2005:124). Johnson and D'Aguiar utilise the "what if" speculation through narrative claims that run counter to historical facts in an attempt to subvert historical knowledge. They offer readers a glimpse of historical plausibility generated through historicist research, postmodernist speculation and literary imagination. Their counterfactual assertions therefore form the main questions guiding this chapter which are: How do these works reconceptualise and reconstruct the Middle Passage within the framework of historiographic metafiction? How do these narratives problematize the ideology of capitalism?

3.2 Reconceptualising the Middle Passage within the Framework of Historiographic Metafiction

Historiographic metafiction is a postmodern form of fiction which emphasises the narration of the past through a self-conscious reconstruction of history. It reconceptualises a historical event by asserting its distinctive nature and rejecting the general knowledge predicated on it. Historiographic metafiction, according to Hutcheon (1988:106), "keeps distinct its formal auto-representation and its historical context, and in so doing problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge, because there is no reconciliation, no dialectic here-just unresolved contradiction". Even though a historical event actually occurred, the existing historical knowledge, transmuted as facts, is usually transmitted through semiotics. History can, therefore, be employed as a tool in the composition of fiction but it is to be considered as an ideological construct that is subject to interrogation, interpretation, alteration and reconstruction. Both history and fiction "constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past" (Hutcheon, 1988:89). In other words, they are "cultural sign systems, ideological constructions whose ideology includes their appearance of being autonomous and self-contained" (Hutcheon, 1988:112). In spite of this shared cultural ideology, history and fiction, on the one hand, remain different in their discourses as well as in their respective notions of verification and veracity. On the other hand, while there is a need for separation, there also exists the "danger of separating fiction and history as narrative genres" (Hutcheon, 1988:111).

Historiographic metafiction is similar to postmodern art works in its ambivalent association with the world events like the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This is simply because it "inscribes and then only subverts its mimetic engagement with world" (Hutcheon, 1988:20), without rejecting nor accepting it. It irreversibly alters the regular ideas of realism by openly challenging the literary discourse with the historical discourse. Historiographic metafiction rejects the notions of mimesis that are associated with social realism. This is achieved through the use of self-reflexivity to "raise questions about how the truth-claims of both historical and novelistic texts are organized and legitimatized" (Dubey, 2002:163) without severing the link between fiction and reality. Historiographic metafiction opposes the use of the terms 'truth' and 'falsity' to describe the status of fiction because fiction is neither true nor false and postmodernist fiction asserts the multiplicity of truths. However, employing historiographic metafiction assists in asking questions such as: "How do we know the past? What is the ontological status of the past? Of its documents? Of our narratives?" (Rashid, 2015:50). Historiographic metafiction expects the knowledge of the historical past to be from a variety of sources, especially those written in the present. Therefore a rewriting of history in contemporary fiction makes the past open-ended and inconclusive.

Reconstructing history through the notion of historiographic metafiction means that it is different from a historical novel. In the first instance, a historical novel presents the generalised and concentrated microcosm of a historical event (Lukács, 1962:39). Taking the trans-Atlantic slave trade as an example, it is believed to be one of the greatest tragedies in the history of humanity owing to its magnitude and duration, and its victims being mainly African people. In effect, a majority of the Africans in the diaspora trace their ancestry to Africa and concretise the notion that their progenitors were African slaves. This is exemplified in *Roots* as Haley (1976:722) reveals:

> Flying homeward from Dakar, I decided to write a book. My own ancestors' would automatically also be a symbolic saga of all African-descent people–who are without exception the seeds of someone like Kunta who was born and grew up in some black African village, someone who was captured and chained down in one of those slave ships that sailed them across the same

> ocean into some succession of plantations, and since then a struggle for freedom.

Haley applies the techniques of novelised history to depict *Roots* as a historical novel and Kunta Kinte as the archetype of an African slave. This shows that *Roots* is basically motivated by the generalised notion of the trans-Atlantic slave trade history. A historiographic metafiction, on the contrary, does not generalise but shows how history manifests itself in different ways and "plays a great number of distinctly different roles, at different levels of generality" (Hutcheon, 1988:113). Johnson and D'Aguiar, for instance, rely on the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a base for their novels but do not follow the typical plot sequence of a historical narrative on the trans-Atlantic slave trade or make the plot of their novels to begin in Africa. In this sense, Johnson and D'Aguiar reconstruct the trans-Atlantic slave trade "in order to display the questionable objectivity of the history" (Eşberk, 2015:269). This enables the authors to problematize the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the Middle Passage as well as to install and blur the line between history and fiction.

While the historical novel does not totally consider the relevance of accuracy or truth, it generally integrates the historical data for the purposes of credibility. Alex Haley's *Roots*, for instance, has been discredited for plagiarising Harold Courlander's *The African* (1967). Even though Haley claims that Kunta Kinte is an ancestor of his, Kinte's story is not accurate but a mere assimilation of historical details. Rather than assimilate such historical data, historiographic metafiction simply uses it and plays on the truth and falsity of historical records. Onega (1999:1) acknowledges how "historiographic metafictions differ from traditional historical novels in that the former do not seek historical accuracy and realistic verisimilitude but, on the contrary, challenge the reparability of the two discourses". Inasmuch as Charles Johnson employs *Middle Passage* to narrate his own reconstruction of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, there is no record of an Allmuseri tribe or of an African ex-slave being put in charge of writing the ship's log. In the same vein, there is no historical record proving that any slave survived being thrown overboard from the *Zong* and eventually producing a journal. This shows how historiographic metafiction relies on self-reference rather than an external truth for verification. Such referent is utilised to depict the discursive nature of history and fiction.

Additionally, the protagonist of a traditional historical novel is a fusion of the general and the specific type but the protagonist of a historiographic metafiction is an otherwise eccentric and relegated character. As evident in their respective novels, *Middle Passage* and *Feeding the Ghosts*, Johnson centres his novel on the narrative experiences of a rogue called Rutherford while D'Aguiar focuses on a marginalised female slave, Mintah, who "was not like the other slaves" and "was difficult to subjugate" (31). Rutherford is not a typical protagonist of a trans-Atlantic slave trade narrative. He describes himself as a "colored mate" (75) which means that he is characterised as a "Creolian Negro", an American-born slave, rather than a "Salt-Water Negro" (Smallwood, 2007:7), that is, an African slave transported across the Middle Passage to the New World. The fact that the protagonists of historiographic metafictions "are anything but proper types" (Hutcheon, 1988:114) shows how a postmodernist narrative is indebted to a few strands of the picaresque novel. Tomoiagă (2012:21) defines a picaresque novel as:

> [T]he story of a picaroon, or a rogue, who is in a way at the margins of society, either by birth, or by social-economic-political accident, and who undergoes a number of adventures and situations that help him understand society, sometimes bringing him to a high social ranking (where he knows he has worked his way to by deceit and cunning), or to total despair and misfortune, when society discovers his amoral activities.

In *Middle Passage* Johnson links the slave narrative tradition to the picaresque novel. As Rutherford chronicles his experiences, he reveals that he was a slave with a low background in Makanda, Southern Illinois. He is a twenty-three year old ex-slave who is born into slavery to a father that "ran from slavery when I was three... selfishly enjoying his individual liberty after our mother, Ruby, died, thus leaving me in the care of a brother like a negative of myself" (112). Rutherford obtains manumission from his master, Reverend Peleg Chandler, in 1829 following Chandler's illness and subsequent death. Rutherford migrates to New Orleans, a place he calls heaven because he is able to indulge in "whoring and card games" (7) and also get drunk without restrictions. In order to survive, Rutherford decides to become a petty thief and a social parasite who pilfers food and picks the pockets of tourists.

Rutherford is characterised as a typical picaro because he is an "unprincipled, resilient, solitary figure who just manages to survive his chaotic landscape" (Wicks, 1989:60). His roguish nature, therefore, becomes a significant motif of the picaresque novel. He initiates a relationship with Isadora but refuses to marry her. In an attempt to run away from Isadora and his creditors, he steals the documents of Josiah Squibb, a cook on the slave ship, the *Republic*, and stows aboard erroneously believing that it is a riverboat. Rutherford is discovered by the first mate, Peter Cringle who takes him to meet Captain Ebenezer Falcon. Rutherford concocts a series of lies to convince the Captain to permit him to remain on the slave ship. Rutherford tells Falcon "about my mother's death from overwork in the fields when I was three. (She died in bed, actually, but I could trade on this version and liked it better)" (28). Rutherford is constantly scolded by Cringle "for being slow, or asleep during my watch" (45). While sneaking into Captain Falcon's cabin, Rutherford reflects on how "I felt the change come over me, a familiar sensual tingle that came whenever I broke into someone's home" (46). Falcon catches Rutherford rummaging through his things and Rutherford lies that he is searching for a lantern in the captain's cabin. Rutherford reveals to his reader that he "always lied" as his "mode of operation" (90) and "Stealing was a nervous habit for me sometimes, a way to shake off stress and occupy my hands" (103).

The experiences of a picaro usually change him from being unprincipled to being responsible. As the *Republic* sails back to the United States, Falcon puts Rutherford in charge of feeding the Allmuseri captives "in messes of ten at nine in the morning and four" (67). Rutherford becomes acquainted with Ngonyama, one of the Allmuseri overseers, who solicits his assistance in "teaching him a smattering of English and explaining how the steerage worked, in exchange for his teaching me Allmuseri" (75). Another slave puts her daughter, Baleka, in Rutherford's care "having decided her child's survival might depend on staying close to the one crew member who looked most African" (79). In the aftermath of the slave insurrection on board, Falcon vests Rutherford with the responsibility of writing the ship's log. Falcon tells Rutherford to "Include everything you remember, and... things I told you when we met alone in secret" (146). As the ship succumbs to diseases and more deaths, Rutherford begins to take responsibility by taking care of the sick, a transformation

which surprises him himself as he remembers Isadora and his life before the Middle Passage.

Writing in the context of the slave narrative pattern, Johnson portrays a protagonist who struggles to achieve change through his escape from captivity. However, as emblematic of a picaresque novel, Rutherford writes his autobiography in a first-person narrative point of view and in an episodic plot. He begins his narrative by reflecting on his life and tracing the circumstances that lead him to become a cook on a slave ship sailing to Africa:

> Of all the things that drive men to sea, the most common disaster, I've come to learn, is women. In my case, it was a spirited Boston schoolteacher named Isadora Bailey who led me to become a cook aboard the *Republic*. Both Isadora and my creditors, I should add, who entered into a conspiracy, a trap, a scheme so cunning that my only choices were prison, a brief stay in the stony oubliette of the Spanish Calabozo (or a long one at the bottom of the Mississippi), or marriage, which was, for a man of my temperament, worse than imprisonment–especially if you knew Isadora. So I went to sea, sailing from Louisiana on April 14, 1830, hoping a quarter year aboard a slave clipper would give this relentless woman time to reconsider, and my bill collectors time to forget they'd ever heard the name Rutherford Calhoun. But what lay ahead in Africa, then later on the open endless sea, was, as I shall tell you, far worse than the fortune I'd fled in New Orleans. (1)

Using an I-narrator is fundamental to the representation of an eccentric protagonist of the picaresque novel. Wanner (2005:597) postulates that, "The choice of a first-person perspective is crucial for the peculiar character of the picaresque worldview". This enables the author to depict the narrator as a charlatan and also helps the reader to understand that the novel is not a Bildungsroman that focuses on the self-development of the protagonist. As a historiographic metafiction, the first-person narrative point of view problematizes the notion of subjectivity. Rutherford is, therefore, what Hutcheon (1988:117) describes as an "overtly controlling narrator". After being vested with the responsibility of writing the ship's log, Rutherford reveals that "I promised myself that even though I'd tell the story... it would be, first and foremost, as I saw it since my escape from New Orleans" (146). In spite of this, a

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reader can easily question the reliability of Rutherford's narration because Rutherford plays many tricks and often lies to survive his circumstances as already noted. Rutherford reveals, "As a general principle and mode of operation during my days as a slave, I always lied, and sometimes just to see the comic results when a listener based his beliefs and behaviour on things that were Not" (90). However, as a way to problematize the inscription of Rutherford's subjectivity into history, Rutherford is unable to confidently narrate his past with certainty, for example, the fate of his father, Riley Calhoun.

In *Feeding the Ghosts* Fred D'Aguiar's Mintah is a totally different character from Charles Johnson's Rutherford. Rather than being an eccentric like Rutherford, Mintah can be described as being a part of what Hutcheon (1988:114) labels as "the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history". Mintah, who is between 18 and 20 years of age, grows up in the home of her parents in the Fetu tribe of Africa (Fanti tribe of Cape Coast, Ghana) but unlike many neo-slave protagonists, Mintah is not kidnapped from her village. Mintah "was captured by slavers after the Dutch destroyed the Danish mission" (30). During Mintah's childhood years, her mother gets converted by the Danish missionaries against her father's objections. Mintah's mother deserts her father, taking Mintah along to the Danish mission house close to the coast. A few years later, Mintah meets Kelsal, who is "marooned on the coast for a considerable spell, nearly a year, and spent time with the natives" (68). Mintah assists in nursing Kelsal back to health and is soon forgotten by Kelsal until they meet again on the slave ship *Zong* across the Middle Passage, following the destruction of the Danish fort.

Unlike the historical fiction which incorporates the rape of trans-Atlantic female slaves for the purpose of truth, a historiographic metafiction may borrow such historical data as a thematic preoccupation, but it rarely makes it the central focus of the narrative. A historiographic metafiction rather engages in the "manipulation and caprice behind any story presented as 'truth'" (Marshall, 1992:155). Mintah escapes sexual violence, unlike many other female slaves, yet she is subjected to other forms of degradation, like being forced to dance on the slave ship. Africans regard dance as an expression of celebration and a sacred ritual. Therefore compelling slaves to dance for the entertainment of the slave ship sailors "is a physically devastating form

of subjection" (Kellett, 2008:50) and ridicule. Even though Mintah complies, she decides to "dance the death of fertility dance... to transfer the pain of the whip around her legs to that of her womb" (31). This is Mintah's indirect way of subverting her role as a woman. With such dance she sacrifices her womb to the gods in order for her to be barren and avoid procreating new slaves to work on slave plantations and boost the slave system.

Mintah exhibits what Huggins (1990:47) calls the three styles of response to the trans-Atlantic slave trade – "resistance, adaptation and opportunism". After being thrown overboard for her rebelliousness she survives by floating on a piece of wood. She climbs back on the ship by using the ropes fastening the boats to the ship. D'Aguiar's destabilises the traditional notions of history and fiction by conceiving the survivor who climbed back on board the historical *Zong* to be "very healthy and for my purposes, female" (Frías & D'Aguiar, 2002:421). This metafictional trope characterises Mintah as being different from the ordinary slave woman aboard the slave ship thereby propelling the plot of the story. D'Aguiar's characterisation acknowledges the occurrence of the trans-Atlantic slave trade but he reconstitutes the historical event by sifting and locating his narrative in a configuration for readers to know about the past event through its discursive inscription in the textual present.

D'Aguiar achieves an artistic breakthrough like Manu Herbstein and Lawrence Hill by cross-representing the subtleties of the female character. Cross-representation here refers to a writer of one gender representing the other. D'Aguiar employs the actions and survival of Mintah to astonish the captain:

> The captain ordered an immediate search of the vessel. 'Feed them below. And no rum.' He paced back and forth, peered over the side and saw the ropes for himself, but still couldn't see how a woman could have fallen into the sea and managed to get hold of one. He reminded himself that she was not sick like the rest of them. Nevertheless he opened his ledger to the entry he had made for one sick woman thrown overboard and crossed it out. He cursed aloud, still doubting the evidence of his ears, 'She was a woman, damn it!' (92)

A historiographic metafictional reconstruction of a tragic historical event entails the incorporation of scenes that make readers question their knowledge of the past and

what can be learnt about the past in the present. This is brought to the fore as *Feeding the Ghosts* skips the last phase of the *Zong*'s voyage across the Middle Passage to the court under the judge, Lord Chief Justice Mansfield, in "a conventional hearing: a party of avaricious investors pitted against a parsimonious insurer" (137). The investors and owners of the *Zong* institute an insurance claim against the underwriters for the 131 slaves thrown overboard including the ten slaves who jumped overboard out of despair. Captain Cunningham, Kelsal, the second mate and the boatswain are called as witnesses to justify the captain's orders for the disposal of the sick slaves as a necessary measure. Simon, the cook's assistant, is sighted in the court as he approaches Mr Wilkes, the counsel for the insurer. Simon hands Mr Wilkes a journal written by Mintah to expose the atrocities committed by the sailors across the Middle Passage.

D'Aguiar's metafictional technique of justifying the non-existence of Mintah's journal in historical accounts on the *Zong* is evinced when Lord Mansfield admits Mintah's journal into evidence and expresses his disappointment at the omission of Mintah in the crew's testimonies. Kelsal is called as a rebuttal witness. He denies knowing Mintah at the Danish fort and claims that "she was not physically sick like the others, but her sanity was questionable... She roused the others into acts of near rebellion" (158-159). Kelsal reveals that Mintah "fetched a good price in Maryland" (159) because the markets in Jamaica have been besieged with many slave vessels from Africa. Lord Mansfield eventually rules in favour of the investors on the ground that Mintah's "account is a fabrication by the insurers and as such it should not have been admitted as evidence because a slave could not have written it" (168). Simon becomes appalled by the judge's decision. He "grabbed the book and ran from Chancery Lane. He jogged towards the docks intent on finding somewhere to hide, not so much himself as Mintah's journal" (176).

Incorporating Mintah's journal to the plot of the novel suggests multiple narrative points of view which Hutcheon (1988:117) equally believes is to "problematize the entire notion of subjectivity". In the first part of the novel, it is an omniscient narrator that brings to life the *Zong* slave ship across the Middle Passage whereby 132 slaves are thrown overboard "as a necessary measure to preserve the remainder of the cargo" (13), as well as Mintah's survival. The second part of the

both modes through the noticeable subversion of the official history, use of anachronisms, and "by integrating history and the fantastic" (McHale, 1987:90). Employing social constructs and fantasy strengthen an author's objective in producing a narrative that signifies the consequences of historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction plays upon the truth and lies of a historical record by using historical data without assimilating it. In the historiographic metafictions like *Middle Passage* and *Feeding the Ghosts*, many historical details are deliberately altered in order to foreground the probable deficiencies in the documented history. Fantasy is, therefore, employed to destabilise and deconstruct history in order for the reader to re-evaluate the authenticity and dependability of history.

In *Middle Passage*, Johnson portrays Rutherford's character in a manner that deviates from the techniques of conventional slave narratives. The manner in which Johnson problematizes Rutherford's character makes his novel to fall within the purview of what Appiah (1991:350) calls "postrealist" because it "allows its author to borrow... the techniques of modernism, which... are often also the techniques of postmodernism". Rutherford is a manumitted slave who travels from the North of the United States (Illinois) to the South (New Orleans), and afterwards to West Africa that Ngonyama asks Rutherford, "We were forced onto this ship. Why have you wandered so far from your home?" (163). Johnson employs Rutherford's itinerary to reverse "the conventional course of the passage to freedom for fugitive slaves and also recreating the transnational course of enslavement in the Atlantic world system" (Rushdy, 1999:203). Rutherford's voyage becomes Johnson's stratagem for subverting the historical slave route because the trans-Atlantic slaves travelled in the opposite direction - from West Africa to the South of the United States and later to the North through the Underground Railroad made famous by fugitive slaves like Harriet Tubman.

Johnson challenges history by creating the social constructs and anachronisms that were highly improbable in the 1830s. Enacted slave laws prohibited the blacks from acquiring an education and visiting white pubs, and having intimate relationships with the whites. Yet, it is in a pub that Squibb meets Rutherford and invites him to travel along with him and his mates. On board the *Republic* Captain Falcon gets familiar with Rutherford when he goes to inform Falcon of the

sailors's planned mutiny. Such familiarity intensifies that Falcon, as Rutherford narrates, "stood before me naked except for his gunbelt and steel-toed boots" (94). Falcon's interest in Rutherford grows that Rutherford wonders "if I had become Captain Ebenezer Falcon's shipboard bride" (46). The favourable relationship Rutherford enjoys with Squibb and Falcon is Johnson's way of representing benevolent slave masters as people who "had slaveholding thrust upon them against their wishes and better judgment, and who had a real fondness and maybe even familial feelings toward their slaves" (Jordan, 2004:167-168). Rutherford becomes the black crew member who succeeds Captain Rutherford in journaling the ship's log yet a black ex-slave cannot be given the task of writing the ship's log when there is a white educated senior crew member like Cringle on the ship Thus, what is ostensibly a journal of the slave ship on the voyage and the cargo, but in reality is a record of slave trafficking, gets overwritten and transformed into an autobiographical slave narrative. Rewriting a ship's log into a memoir "illegitimizes history as a grand narrative and shows instead that history, like the past, is always subject to manipulation" (Aróstegui, 2000:17).

Evolving from the historical to the historiographical entails moving from mere examination and analysis of the records of the past to the imaginative reconstruction of the past in the present writings. Imaginative reconstruction therefore forms the core objective of historiographic metafiction. Through his historiographic metafictional representation, Johnson tries to reconstruct the black experience by challenging the stereotypes of the black slaves installed by history over centuries and across generations. In spite of the servitude and oppression the blacks are subjected to, Johnson tries to carve a positive image to counteract the racist ideology by expanding the constricted images of the slaves in historical fiction thereby asserting that the black experience is not monolithic but diverse and complex.

Middle Passage depicts how African-American characters struggle to define themselves in a quest for "spiritual and metaphysical happiness in the face of difficult odds" (Little & Johnson, 1993:159). Rutherford is an archetype of a disadvantaged African-American in the 1830s. Rutherford turns to a life of crime before stowing away on a slave ship. Rutherford, however, he eventually becomes responsible for

writing the ship's log and taking care of Baleka. Rutherford, like many other characters in the novel, evolves from a state of ignorance and victimisation to an epiphany of greater knowledge and self-actualisation. After his manumission, Rutherford runs away from his brother, Jackson. Rutherford regards Jackson as "a proper Negro" (114) because of his subservience to the whites. Rutherford tells Squibb, "Hell, Squibb, he [Jackson] could be from their [Allmuseri] tribe" and Squibb ironically responds, "That'd make you one of 'em too, wouldn't it?" (109). Rutherford fails to understand that, like the eponymous Uncle Tom in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, Jackson's subservient behaviour is traceable to the social realities of the African-Americans in the early nineteenth century. Rutherford is equally bitter at his father for abandoning them when he was young but as the Allmuseri god later reveals to Rutherford, his father did not abandon his family for years "since he had never ventured more than ten miles from home, wherefore lost his way, was quickly captured by padderolls and quietly put to death" (170).

As a figurative personage of the title of Johnson's novel and a phase of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Rutherford is positioned in the middle space between the slave ship crew and the captives. The circumstance that places him as the main character in the narrative based on the trans-Atlantic voyage between America and Africa "personifies" him as "the "middle" of the Middle Passage" (Fagel, 1996:625). While Captain Falcon chooses him as his spy and the author of the ship's log, Rutherford believes that Ngonyama selects him as his tutor because he is the only African-American aboard the *Republic*:

> I suppose he selected me because I was the only Negro on board, though the distance between his people and black America was vast–his people saw whites as Raw Barbarians and me (being a colored mate) as a Cooked one. (75)

Johnson constructs his characters and the situations in his novel in "fantastical and humorous" forms in order to "challenge and ultimately destroy [the] erroneous assumptions about race" (Jordan, 2004:154). Such strategy enables his novel to match the characteristics of a historiographic metafiction. Johnson approaches the serious discourses of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the Middle Passage with humour, especially through his narrator, Calhoun Rutherford, who uses humour to

narrate the voyage. It is however ironic that neither the slaves on the *Republic* nor any real life trans-Atlantic slave found humour in the events across the Middle Passage. Nonetheless, it is not as if Johnson's intention is to trivialise the trans-Atlantic slave trade in general or the Middle Passage in particular. Evidently, his aim is to destabilise and blur the boundaries between history and fiction.

To install and subvert the historical account of the trans-Atlantic slave trade reality, historiographic metafictional novels like *Middle Passage* and *Feeding the Ghosts* comment on the process of writing fiction. These novels explicitly reveal the fusion of historicity and fictionality that is developed by narrative self-consciousness. Through the tropes of self-reflexivity and self-consciousness, the authors draw the attention of their readers to the fictional status of the neo-slave narratives. As a result, Muther (1996:650) labels *Middle Passage* as a "novel of self-conscious anachronism and hybridization". This is so because Johnson utilises fantastic elements, supernaturalism and "eighteenth-century modalities of romance" to represent his own visualisation of "the black experience" (Smith, 1996:659) and demonstrate the results of employing self-consciousness as a metafictional device.

As typified in the novel, Rutherford's position as the author of the logbook requires a self-consciousness which he employs as "a lever to transcend the boundaries of self and connect with [the] ancestors" (Jablon, 1997:52), in this case the Allmuseri god and his father, Riley Calhoun. *Middle Passage* therefore engages the consciousness and wide imagination of the reader which is equated with what Jablon (1997:26) describes as "audience participation". This refers to a call-and-response technique of black metafiction in which the novel encourages the reader to participate in the reconstruction of the Middle Passage. As Rutherford describes himself as a thief, he imagines his reader judging him and responds, "Shamelessly, you say? Perhaps so... I don't know if you've ever farmed in the Midwest but if you have, you'll know that southern Illinois has a scale" (4). Rutherford's technique of addressing his reader directly and commenting on his narrative foregrounds the metafictional aspect of the novel. D'Aguiar employs the same technique in *Feeding the Ghosts*. After Mintah is clubbed by Kelsal, she ponders on Kelsal's dual personality. The narrator asks, "Was she thinking too hard on these matters? How could her assessment of Kelsal have been so wrong?" (37). Similarly, as the boy and

girl are to be thrown overboard after the 20 slaves who have been herded together, the narrator asks, "What does death mean to a child of eight or nine?" (46). Questions like these make the readers ponder on what they know about the trans-Atlantic slave trade and how the past gets reincarnated in the present.

The traditional view of readers on the horrors of the Middle Passage includes the rape of female slaves, forced feeding as well as forced dancing in the guise of exercising the slaves. However, through the self-reflexive mode of representation, Johnson and D'Aguiar create different visualisations of the horrors of the Middle Passage to enable their readers rethink what they feel they know about the middle phase of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. O'Keefe (1996:635) describes this technique as an act of "decalcifying" the perceptions of the readers in order to liberate them from the fixed way they have been conditioned to visualise events. Johnson decalcifies the perceptions of his readers by presenting them with the round character of Rutherford and a chronological plot. However, the exhaustive details provided in the novel as well as Rutherford's journal entry techniques have been criticised as rendering the readers passive and "unattached" (O'Keefe, 1996:642).

Conversely, historiographic metafictional neo-slave narratives do not make their readers detached but more involved in a discursive affiliation whereby "the narrator and reader are interlocutors" (Travis, 1994:190). Rutherford's log, for example, makes the novel dialogical and performative because his thoughts are expressed as if they form an actor's aside in a play: "Please don't think poorly of me if I confess" (95); "Do I sound like a patriot? Brother, I put it to you: What Negro, in his heart (if he's not a hypocrite), is not?" (179). Metafiction is employed as Rutherford comments on his own narratives by asking rhetorical questions and engaging his reader in a discussion. *Middle Passage* therefore illuminates the role of the reader in constructing the intrinsic and extrinsic worlds of the historiographic metafiction because the aural narrative devices employed interact humorously with the readers and position them as interlocutors.

To reengage with the past, novelists employ myths to create their own realism. According to Donovan (2005:5), "Realism has long been the central precept of the Novel's unique variety of myth-making". In other words, a myth is a distinct

variation of the novel which possesses a crucial relationship with realism. This is evident in Johnson's novel as he employs his own mythic construction of the Allmuseri to problematize and challenge historical knowledge. As an outcome, Johnson rewrites African myths and employs his mythic Allmuseri and ordinary characters like Rutherford to blur the lines of myth, history and fiction through what Mali (2003:2) calls "mythistory". Johnson's technique of infusing myth in his narrative follows the classical literary technique delineated by Anderson (2008:121) whereby playwrights of classical tragedies like *Orestes* and *Oedipus Rex* blend tradition with contemporary innovation to reshape their myths, modify plots and create new characters. Adopting this technique makes Johnson's fictional representations of the Middle Passage seem real.

Furthermore, by introducing mythical characters and modifying the plot of the historical Middle Passage, Johnson fuses the ordinary (history) with the fantastic (fiction). The result is the transmutation (demystification and dehistoricization) of history into fiction through literary representation. Brown (2011:168) considers blending the supernatural, mythical and scientific to produce fantastic fiction like *Middle Passage* as a weird reinvention. Johnson creates the Allmuseri tribe as a fictional product of his "fertile imagination" (Rushdy, 1992:373) that Hagen (1991:707) rhetorically asks if the tribe was "all misery?" especially because the Allmuseri are characterised as a synthesis of many ancient tribes. Walby (1995:658) also observes:

> Far from not existing in the real world, then, the Allmuseri, as "the Ur-tribe of humanity itself" in *Middle Passage* (61), is an amalgamation of Bambara, Dogon, and Egyptian religion and mythology. The Bambara initiation rite, the Dogon creation myth, and the Egyptian Osiris-Horus-Seth myth all employ the ritual sacrifice, death, and resurrection of the god-king through which, in many African cosmologies, the unity of the kingdom and the universe were established and continue to be sustained.

The Allmuseri also have a god which becomes the mysterious cargo Falcon orders to be put in the ship's storeroom hoping to fetch a lot of money for him. When it is time for Rutherford to feed the Allmuseri god, the creature appears to him in the form

of his father, Riley Calhoun, and reveals the circumstances surrounding Riley's death.

In *Feeding the Ghosts*, Mintah becomes a mythical character because she does not drown like the other slaves thrown overboard the slave ship. She succeeds in climbing back onto the vessel "to challenge the existing power structures even in spiritual and psychic realms" (Kellett, 2008:52). Mintah's survival is regarded as a resurrection but it also leads to her being considered as a witch by Simon (58), a ghost by the male slaves (87), and a god among the female slaves (93). The "men touched her for some of her magic to rub off on them and to check that she wasn't an apparition" (88) while the women "felt her head, her face, [and] her body" (89) as she speaks with them. This alludes to the resurrection of Jesus in the Bible where he dispels Thomas's doubts by asking him to feel his bruised body.

Historiographic metafiction utilises irony to problematize and deny history as the "transparent record" of truth (Hutcheon, 1988:129); to contest an "author's right to inscribe timeless or universal values" (Shirvani, 1994:295); and to satirise ongoing contemporary social issues, in this case being the plight of black people across the globe. The Allmuseri, for instance, evolve from being an embodiment of a mysterious and romanticised tribe of a timeless era to being displaced, enslaved and corrupted. Johnson makes the Allmuseri the "most spiritual tribe in the world" by characterising them as paragons like the "Mother Theresas and Ghandis" (Rowell & Johnson, 1997:545) but the Middle Passage changes them into malevolent beings. The Allmuseri are incorporated as an identity construct not to deny the past but to extend the knowledge and possibility of the past.

The Allmuseri are initially portrayed as an unstained and mysterious tribe. This is because they possess palms that are blank with no lines or fingerprints (61). They are also depicted as people who dislike property and "could not steal" (78). Ironically, the Allmuseri end up degenerating from grace. They throw their babies overboard and commit suicide; execute an insurrection that resonates the historical 1839 slave mutiny aboard the *Amistad*; kill the white crew members; start having dark spots on their bodies (107); are suspected of having venereal disease (108); are feared by their fellow tribesmen (137); and become enslaved by racial outrage

(153). To Calhoun, they "were not wholly Allmuseri anymore. We had changed them" (124). In other words, the horrors of the slave ship across the Middle Passage change everyone on board, the slaves and the sailors alike. Hence, the sailors are also characterised as victims of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The Allmuseri are portrayed as having lost their integrity and moral compass as they advance from lying to committing murder. While under captivity, Ngonyama tells Rutherford that if the Allmuseri are to take control of the ship they will make sailing to Africa their paramount objective. He assures Rutherford that the crew will not be harmed but will be handed back the control of the ship as soon as they reach Africa. This convinces Rutherford to give Ngonyama the key he stole from Falcon's room to unshackle himself and his people. At the point of mutiny, the Allmuseri become "bloodthirsty" (140) as they kill most of the crew members, imprison Captain Falcon who has imprisoned them over the weeks, and abolish the English language as the lingua franca on the *Republic,* substituting it with the Allmuseri language.

Ironically, subordinated nations defy the power of the dominant ones by employing the same instruments used to oppress them. As a subterfuge of resistance, they end up reincarnating the exact method by which they have been oppressed. This echoes George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) where the animals rebel against their owners because they desire a utopia of equality but end up adopting the same fascist system they ousted. Inasmuch as Sewlall (2002:82) recommends that *Animal Farm* may be read as "a metonym of a utopian vision that has gone horribly wrong", he suggests that the animals are "archetypical of tyrants, bigots and sycophants in all dictatorial regimes". In *Middle* Passage, Diamelo, an Allmuseri slave, proposes his own African nationalist agenda so that "the master's house must be dismantled. Only Allmuseri was to be spoken by the crew when in contact with the newly empowered bondmen" (154). While the Europeans seek to dominate the Allmuseri, the Allmuseri also seek to dominate the Europeans. This is similar to the postcolonial acts of African dictators who deceitfully instituted the system of governance that they had initially fought against.

D'Aguiar utilises irony in foregrounding Kelsal's hypocritical character in *Feeding the Ghosts.* When Captain Falcon initially proposes the idea of disposing

the sick slaves for profit, Kelsal is shocked at such disregard for human life. He objects to the idea discreetly and becomes hesitant when Captain Falcon orders him to begin disposing the sick stock. Kelsal finds it difficult to distinguish between the infirm and the healthy slaves because all of them qualify as severe cases. Following what he perceives as a disrespect to him when Mintah shouts his name repeatedly before the captives and the crew, Kelsal changes his demeanour towards the slaves and enthusiastically throws the selected ones overboard. After successfully throwing the healthy but insolent Mintah overboard, Kelsal chuckles and pretends to be remorseful (50). Nevertheless, he continues his actions and taunts the reappeared Mintah, after her failed mutiny, with the names of the slaves he had thrown overboard like Tunde (125) and Ama (127).

The paradox of historiographic metafiction foregrounds fiction's dependence on contextual forces. These contextual elements enable the genres of fiction and nonfiction to conflate and create a new metafictional variation which disrupts the binary opposition existing in selected relationships. The insurrection and subsequent survival of Mintah is paradoxically a disruption of the uneven symbiotic relationship and binary oppositions such as white/black, European/African, superior/inferior, male/female, captain/captive, master/slave, which have always existed in the practices and discourses on the trans-Atlantic slave trade. D'Aguiar destabilises this natural order of the trans-Atlantic slave system and subverts it with a switch in the roles of the characters in his novel. This destabilisation is similar to Johnson's use of the "trope of intersubjectivity in order to highlight the interchangeablity of roles and masks" (Lock, 2003:59). Johnson highlights the inversion in the roles of the sailors and slaves to depict how the Allmuseri slaves rebel and become masters of the slave ship using the same violence previously meted out against them at the expense of their identity; and telling how a black ex-slave becomes the author of the ship's log at the expense of the white crewmembers.

Parody is used by historiographic metafictional writers to express their scepticism about the truth and objectivity of history, signal how present representations emanate from past ones, and to incorporate a textualised past into a present text. According to Vieira (1991:589), "parody defamiliarizes conventions by shattering illusion, by exposing the frame, frequently via inversion, but always

unmasking the provisional nature of literary forms, and of course, by extension, the shape of life or history". The use of parody within the framework of historiographic metafiction distinguishes postmodern black narratives from their Western and early African-American novelistic conventions. By using this technique, Johnson emulates Ishmael Reed's technique in *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) and *Flight to Canada* (1976) as he parodies the "established tropes and conventions of the African-American novelistic tradition" (Dubey, 2002:153). Johnson, however, employs an overuse of parody in his novel. *Middle Passage* begins like a parody of a typical American story with Rutherford narrating how his dilemma of choosing between a forced marriage and imprisonment leads him to stow away aboard the *Republic* sailing to Africa for slaves.

The trans-Atlantic slave trade history of African-Americans has situated black writers in a peculiar position to interrogate and parody canonical narratives. Rutherford's first-hand experiences under enslavement, freedom and during the trans-Atlantic voyage across the Middle Passage are used to parody early slave narratives, such as Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845). Like Frederick Douglass, Rutherford is born into slavery but he obtains his manumission before the beginning of the novel. Rutherford nevertheless degenerates into a life of crime, alcohol, debauchery and vagabondage. Rutherford becomes a thief and a kleptomaniac. However, after encountering the Allumuseri, who at that point are portrayed as disliking property and lacking the ability to steal, Rutherford discovers that dispossessing people of their belongings is not the solution to striking a balance between the bourgeois and the proletariat. Additionally, Rutherford Calhoun's surname echoes that of the real life John Caldwell Calhoun (1872-1850), a native of South Carolina who became a defender of the institution of slavery and functioned as the seventh Vice-President of the United States in the administrations of John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson.

Middle Passage is a novel that fits perfectly as a historiographic metafiction because it paradoxically lays "claim to historical events and personages" (Hutcheon, 1988:5). Apart from the fact that the title resonates the Middle Passage of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the novel is a parody of American historical personages. Smith (1996:664) observes how Captain Falcon shares the traits of being "quick-tempered,

cantankerous, ruthless, and combative" with Andrew Jackson the seventh president of the United States between 1829 and 1837. Captain Ebenezer Falcon is an infamous dwarf who is known for exploiting and oppressing Africans and West Indians (29). Although Falcon and Jackson share different physical features, the fact that Johnson sets his novel in the 1830s when Jackson was the President of the United States and adopts his character traits foreground the techniques of parody and satire. Falcon is also compared with Benjamin Franklin as he originally writes the ship's log in an effort to "immortalise himself and his own glorious deeds" (Jablon, 1997:37). Like Franklin, Falcon attempts to write an autobiography for the benefit of future generations. He also invents what he needs like garters for his shirt, as he studies foreign languages as well as oriental philosophy.

Johnson employs Falcon's character to depict how historiographic metafiction "does not pretend to reproduce events, but to direct us, instead, to facts, or to new directions in which to think about events" (Rashid, 2015:51). Falcon is first introduced as a pederast and a cannibal who derives pleasure in sexually abusing Tom the cabin boy (27) and has participated in cannibalism many years earlier to survive a shipwreck (33). He is described as an explorer and an imperialist who is able to speak seven African languages and has the ability to learn a new language within two weeks. In addition, he is a patriot of the United States with the sole aim of Americanising the whole planet (30). This depicts Johnson's philosophical mind and satirises the New World Order that is emanating from the United States of America in contemporary times. Falcon is constantly paranoid about his crew's plan to revolt against him. As a result, he documents every offence against him, conceals knives and guns in his cabin, and enlists Rutherford as his spy. This is why Hagen (1991:707) describes him as "a dwarf captain who has consciously made himself into a Nietzschean supraman". Johnson employs Falcon's dwarfishness to parody the diminutive ethics and integrities of the leaders of the American republic with regard to their uninhibited self-centredness and avarice. In the aftermath of the slave insurrection, Falcon commits suicide rather than face his greedy financiers, thus portraying the self-destruction that results from a materialistic culture.

Similar to Johnson's novel, D'Aguiar also lays claim to the Middle Passage phase of the historical trans-Atlantic slave trade as well as historical personages like

the victims of the *Zong* slave ship and Captain Cunningham who is the historical Captain Luke Collingwood. Even though some incidents and characters on the *Zong* are verifiable, D'Aguiar succeeds in recreating and reconstructing his account as a historiographic metafiction. He reconstructs the plot and creates new characters alongside the subverted historical characters to show how history is constantly revised. D'Aguiar employs the character of Captain Cunningham to parody greedy and deceitful plutocrats in a capitalist society. Cunningham orders his crew to "rid this vessel of its sick and infirm to protect ourselves and guarantee our profit" (17). Such loss is usually borne by the insurers of the voyage. D'Aguiar parodies the Christian religion through the Danish missionaries who successfully convince the Africans in Mintah's village to go with them and work in their fort in the name of God and a promise of paradise. In response, the Africans abandon their unbelieving relatives and desert their village the way it would have seemed if slave raiders had besieged their village (193). D'Aguiar employs this to portray how religion can be utilised in indoctrinating human beings to act irrationally.

Historiographic metafiction amalgamates fiction, history and other significant intertexts to produce postmodernist writings. Even though postmodernism seeks to separate history from fiction, both are equally intertextual in "deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality" (Hutcheon, 1988:105). Johnson's *Middle Passage* employs an intertexuality of sea adventures, slave narratives as well as other cultural sources and African folklore. These include Homer's *The Odyssey*, *The Adventures of Sinbad*, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and *Benito Cereno*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*; the narratives of Frederick Douglass, Olaudah Equiano, Joseph Conrad; and the philosophical writings of Thomas Aquinas and Plato's *Republic*.

While Johnson borrows Plato's *Republic* to name the slave vessel, Rutherford compares himself to Odysseus (207) and employs metaphors that allude to classical literature and Renaissance philosophy. He likens Isadora to the "hag in the Wife of Bath's Tale" (17) because of her unconditional love for him; the teeth of the crew aboard the *Republic* to those of "the monocular witches outwitted by Perseus" (22); and Cringle as having a tendency to "Leibnizian logic or Ptolemaic astronomy" (25) if he had been a female. In the same vein, Rutherford likens the

moans emanating from Captain Falcon's cabin as he sodomises Tommy to "Venusian groans" (26) and Squibb's fixation on his late wife as being "Sisyphean" and "Parmenidean" (39). These reflect Johnson's fascination with classical literature as well as Eastern religion and philosophy.

D'Aguiar employs an intertextuality of the traditional slave narratives like those of Frederick Douglass, Olaudah Equiano and Harriet Jacobs. He also refers to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* "as a precursor and guide" (Frías, 2002:680), Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose* as well as Ernest Gaines's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. Johnson admits to reading the works of Sojourner Truth, Phyllis Wheatley, Linda Brent and the like in order "to get a feel for the time, tone and place that black women faced" (Frías & D'Aguiar, 2002:421). Intertextuality is often employed to "close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context" (Hutcheon, 1988:118). Therefore, by employing the intertexts of early narratives, Johnson and D'Aguiar are able to locate their postmodern historiographic metafictional narratives within Western and black novelistic conventions. Combining intertextuality with the fusion of historical and fictional personages as well as the "rewriting of the narrator and the characters's identities all point to how reality and history are not fixed notions and they are rewritten and created continuously" (Farca, 2013:1).

Postmodernism adopts Black literary theory and feminist practice to thematically refocus on historicity. However, in *Middle Passage*, Johnson reconstructs a slave narrative that foregrounds race and social class at the expense of repressing the female gender. Johnson's work may therefore be considered as comprising misogynistic elements especially because "he faults Walker and other women writers for generalized, unrealistic, negative portrayals of black men" (Robbins, 1997:560). On the one hand, Johnson relegates the character of Isadora Bailey to a second fiddle position instead of projecting her as a heroine like Ama, Aminata and Mintah in *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, *The Book of Negroes* and *Feeding the Ghosts* respectively. On the other hand, D'Aguiar extols Mintah's virtues as the female protagonist who is strong enough to climb back on board and expose the atrocities committed across the Middle Passage through her journal. Thus Mintah serves as an archetype of millions of slaves who travelled

across the Middle Passage but were silenced by history yet her journal is representational of her courage and experiences.

Johnson's historiographic metafiction reveals him as a postmodern writer whose instincts make him disregard historical facts and write from the periphery (Donovan, 2005:97). Johnson's intention is not to negate history but rather reconstruct and exaggerate it in the context of writing fiction (which Aristotle calls poetry). Aristotle (1998:48) regards a historian as one who "narrates events that have actually happened" but a literary writer "writes about things as they might possibly occur". For instance, Johnson characterises Falcon as a pederast who sodomises Tommy the cabin boy so that Tommy is seen "standing bowlegged as if his bum was cemented shut by dried semen" (26-27). D'Aguiar also portrays a crude image: "The women would return to the slave hold and wriggle into a space between other women... Semen from the crew would seep from them on to the deck" (75).

By portraying the crude image of homosexual rape, Johnson exaggerates the series of grotesquery and perversions reflective of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This is so that we question whether some slave ship captains or sailors equally raped their male captives, especially the boys, the way the female slaves were raped. Johnson's characterisation of Captain Falcon as a pederast contradicts bell hooks's (1981:24) erroneous assertion that "The sexism of colonial white male patriarchs spared black male slaves the humiliation of homosexual rape and other forms of sexual assault". Randall-Tsuruta (1983:47) sarcastically responds to hooks's presumptive assertion that black male slaves were not raped homosexually by stating that such contention by hooks "suggests [that] she [hooks] is reincarnated with a clear memory and omnipresent". In other words, hooks erroneously concluded that men fared better than women during the trans-Atlantic slave trade yet she did not experience the trans-Atlantic slave trade first-hand to write from her memory nor did she possess the documented evidence that revealed all the atrocities committed against the slaves. The daring representations by Johnson and D'Aguiar, in addition to Rutherford writing the ship's log as well as Mintah's survival and journal, help to deconstruct the traditional historical viewpoints and create a new perception and what we may consider as the alternative history of the Middle Passage that is embedded in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

3.3 Problematizing the Ideology of Capitalism

In order to achieve ideological and political oppositional effects, contemporary historiographic metafictional writers use postmodernist techniques to probe, challenge and experiment with the past. Johnson goes beyond interrogating the veracity of the narrated past to inscribe the past such that it speaks to our current social and moral problems with a voice that not only asks pertinent questions, but also "offers some answers" to our current "social and personal ills" (Thaden, 1997:754). This lends credence to Hutcheon's (1988:137) claim that historiographic metafiction reshapes the past in the light of contemporary issues. Inasmuch as we obtain knowledge of the past through its texts, the past can always be reinterpreted to proffer answers to present-day problems.

Middle Passage and *Feeding the Ghosts* are not merely stories of the trans-Atlantic slave trade but also reflections of the human condition. The novels satirise human nature and human society thereby revealing how Johnson and D'Aguiar lampoon the political and capitalist systems of the West and the African middlemen during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era. The slave merchant who sells the Allmuseri to Falcon is an Arab man called Ahman-de-Bellah who is described as a notorious man who is capable of extracting the brains of his adversaries with an iron hook (61). Johnson deliberately situates the Arab merchant in Africa to satirise the capitalist involvement of the Arabs, not only in the trans-Saharan slave trade but also in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

In problematizing the ideology of capitalism, Johnson foregrounds how slavery and servitude cut across social classes and races. He depicts the capitalist predatory inclinations and the miseries experienced by European slaveholders, sailors and African slaves alike. While the African slaves are oppressed by the African middlemen and the white slaveholders, the white slaveholders are in turn enslaved by their investors. The slaves are arranged in the slave hold of the *Republic* like sardines. They are considered as "livestock" (120) and branded with the initials of the financiers. Their perceived subhuman status is demonstrated when Falcon orders the ears of a dead African captive be "sliced off and preserved below

in oil to prove to the ship's investors that he had in fact purchased in Bangalang as many slaves as promised" (121).

Captain Ebenezer Falcon is emblematic of the Western capitalist culture. He is a puppet of the capitalists who finance his voyages for great financial rewards. He exerts his cruelty over the slaves and the crew in a manner that parallels Captain Cunningham in *Feeding the Ghosts.* Apart from being a pederast, Falcon is equally bigoted in his overt disgust for black people. According to him, "I don't like Negroes either... [They] don't think well too often" (30). Falcon believes blacks are inherently inferior and Johnson utilises his character to explicate the infamous effects of a "nineteenth-century version of affirmative action" (Byerman, 2005:111).

The white sailors are similarly degraded by the capitalist system they labour for. Rutherford observes that the sailors labour for financiers who are oblivious of the hazards across the Middle Passage the same way plantation masters seldom visit the cotton fields where the slaves work. He therefore concludes that "No less than the blacks in the hold these sea-toughened killbucks were chattel" (87). In the aftermath of the slave insurrection, Falcon reveals to Rutherford that he is the captain of the slave vessel only because he condescends himself and grovels before the financiers. At this point Rutherford wonders, "But was Ebenezer Falcon telling me that he, at bottom, was no freer than the Africans?" (147). Falcon refuses to assist the Allmuseri in steering the ship back to Senegambia. He realises that his voyage has not only failed but he will be expected to render an account to the financiers in America. Terribly injured and despondent, Falcon points his gun at his head and pulls the trigger.

Johnson transforms the Middle Passage phase of the trans-Atlantic slave trade into an allegorical miniature version of global history. From the title, Johnson uses the *Middle Passage* as a metaphor for the historical Middle Passage and an allegory of a capitalist system. Johnson also uses the slave ship, the *Republic*, as a metaphor for the American society, especially her socio-political system. Calhoun observes that the ship is a "floating Black Maria, a wooden sepulcher whose timbers moaned with the memory of too many runs of black gold between the New World and the Old" (21). Calhoun likens the ship to a prison and a floating tomb.

Additionally, the filth and disease that ravage the *Republic* are metaphorical for the diseased American society with regard to the corruption and capitalism inherent in the institution of slavery.

The economic system of capitalism is foregrounded as a determinant of the social relationships and the identities of the slaveholders and the slaves. Rutherford becomes aware of how the capitalist system operates to destroy the slaveholders and the enslaved. This enables him to transform the ship's log, a metaphorical instrument of capitalist oppression, into a slave narrative. Rutherford becomes a writer who recognises the effect of capitalism on social relationships and condemns the capitalist trans-Atlantic slave trade. This theme stems from Johnson being a novelist with a vague "Marxist agenda" that he embraced "in the early seventies" (Rushdy, 1999:204).

Johnson's Marxist philosophy is represented in Rutherford's attempt to construct an identity and overthrow "the capitalism which commodified him" (Thaden, 1997:753). Rutherford seeks to achieve this by stealing, showing love and writing. He evolves from being a criminal to one who actively condemns the criminal nature of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the institution of slavery as a whole. Rutherford is motivated to protect the slaves as he rescues a girl from being raped by Captain Falcon and eventually experiences an epiphany that Isadora Bailey may just be the one for him. By overwriting the ship's log, Rutherford reclaims the narrative voice from the whites for black self-actualisation.

The Allmuseri god which remains a mysterious creature in the hold of the *Republic* is also a metaphor for the unknown. After it is brought on board, the sailors become curious about the creature and draw lots to nominate the first person to check what the creature is. Tommy picks the shortest string and goes below deck. By the time he returns, his countenance has changed and he begins to blabber in a string of African languages including "Bantu patois, Bushman, Cushitic, and Sudanic tongues" (68). Even though Tommy does not see the creature, he believes it is a crab-like creature whose excretion slithers with bugs and worms emanating from its stomach.

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Johnson employs the capture of the Allmuseri god to represent how Western imperialism seeks to attain an irrational hegemony over Third World nations. The Allmuseri tribe however shares a familial link and also mirrors the American society. Calhoun confirms this when he discovers how the Allmuseri mythology recounts that the "Europeans had once been members of their tribe–rulers, even, for a time–but fell into what was for these people the blackest of sins" (65). Reminiscent of the American and French revolutions, Johnson also uses the insurrection of the enslaved Allmuseri to exemplify the inevitable result when social wrongs and oppression are neglected. Although it is easy to blame the Allmuseri ruin on Falcon because he is responsible for capturing and dislocating the tribe from their homeland, it is ironically worthy of note that the Allmuseri tribe is inclined towards violence and class systems. Prior to their encounters with the Americans, the Allmuseri have had a power structure and class system that debunk the fantasy of equality such as Diamelo who is born into wealth while Ngonyama "was a poor man" (137). Hence, their inevitable ruin has been inherently awaiting a change of circumstance to manifest.

Feeding the Ghosts also has a metaphorical title which denotes Mintah's appeasement of the spirits of the 131 slaves who perished when thrown overboard by the capitalist vices of Captain Cunningham. Cunningham's capitalist proposition to throw the sick slaves overboard is predicated on the main goal of the sailors which is "availing ourselves of a decent profit margin" (67). Cunningham makes his crewmen understand that their interests are in constant conflict with those of the insurers in the sense that the loss resulting from the death of a slave is borne by them not the insurers. To safeguard the rest of his stock he proposes the disposal of every sick and infirm slave. He calls his idea a solution of "manifest economic sense" (23). This is because the loss of slaves who are thrown into the sea alive is borne by the insurers of the slave vessel. In court, Mr Wilkes, counsel for the insurer, calculates the *Zong*'s claim as "For each head £39. At 131 heads that was a staggering £5,109" (139).

3.4 Conclusion

The attempts by Johnson and D'Aguiar to reconstruct the Middle Passage of the trans-Atlantic slave trade through meta-literary devices such as intertextuality, irony, self-consciousness, self-reflexivity and parody qualify *Middle Passage* and *Feeding the Ghosts* as historiographic metafictions. This shows that the past is known "only through its textualized remains" (Hutcheon, 1988:119). Johnson and D'Aguiar employ their historiographic metafictions to interrogate and exploit historical knowledge but also combine historical content with the metafictional mode of writing. As a result, they question the relationship between fiction and reality as their narratives self-consciously and methodically project themselves as imaginative works of art. The self-conscious references in these historiographic metafictional narratives convey the interrogation of what is fictional and what is real in history, such as the existence of the Allmuseri tribe and Mintah's survival. Therefore, Johnson and D'Aguiar, in their historiographic metafictions, deviate from the norm of reconstructing history like their precursors to destabilise the ostensible official knowledge that we think we possess on the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Johnson and D'Aguiar engage with the paradox of the African identity, imperialism, capitalism and the clash between the African and the European worlds on the trans-Atlantic slave ships. In the light of these, they successfully problematize the trans-Atlantic past; use the plot structures and characterisation techniques of popular fiction, yet they also use parody and irony to challenge the historical facts within the texts. The characters are archetypes of the sailors and slaves, especially the possibilities that were not recorded as historical facts. The narratives also satirically subvert the capitalist nature of the antebellum slavers commonly exploited by historical slave narrative writers. While Johnson employs the unconventional mimetic representations to subvert history, D'Aguiar challenges the past by combining elements of feminism and postmodernism. Both however succeed in reconstructing the Middle Passage within the framework of historiographic metafiction.

My eyes touch, my fingers trace
The griot chants, clicks, songs of the
Ancestors
The warrior words stretched taut across
the soul
Drum words whispering the name of God
They say that beyond the blood-tide cries
there is triumph
They say that beyond the blues-moan
there is continuance
Triumph and continuance
A reaching back and a forward surge
A place where Black dreams swell
consciousness
Even as the Niger swells old seasons into
new life

Walter Dean Myers (1993)

CHAPTER 4

NEXUS OF LAW AND LITERATURE IN CONTEMPORARY TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE NARRATIVES

4.1 Introduction

For many years the subject of law has attracted the interest of canonical and contemporary literary writers. From the plays of William Shakespeare (*Merchant of Venice)* and poems of Percy Shelley (*Defence of Poetry*) to the novels of Charles Dickens (*Bleak House*), Herman Melville (*Billy Budd, Sailor*), Franz Kafka (*The Trial*), Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*) John Grisham (*A Time to Kill*) and Fred D'Aguiar (*Feeding the Ghosts*), different aspects of the law practice are depicted including the experiences of minorities under the legal justice system. Joining this literary movement are David Pesci and Prince Justice who, in their respective novels *Amistad* (1997) and *Tutuoba: Salem's Black Shango Slave Queen* (2007), thematise the legal ideology of the antebellum period of the United States of America by fictionalising the events that surround two prominent legal cases involving trans-Atlantic slaves – the Amistad Case (1839-1841) and the Salem Witch Trials (1692-1693) – to reconstruct the historical legal trials in contemporary literary consciousness.

The novels *Amistad* and *Tutuoba* are selected to affirm Witteveen's (1998:156) postulation that much effort in the scholarship of law and literature "is focused on the novel". Inasmuch as legal history assists in measuring how literary productions depict legal matters, the selected authors delineate specific legal ethics within the law-and-literature scholarship in an attempt to dismantle the frontiers of legal and literary discourses. As a result, the interpretative strategies of postcolonialism and postmodernism are employed to analyse the texts and explore different perceptions on the convergence of law and literature as well as to ascertain the possibilities of them stimulating new interests in the traditionally affiliated intellectual discourses.

Amistad (1997) is a reconstruction of an actual historical event that is central to American law and literature. Even though the historical event occurred in the

nineteenth century, literary practitioners continually re-enact the event and make its literary reincarnation relevant to contemporary times. These include William A. Owens's novel *Slave Mutiny: The Revolt on the Schooner Amistad* (1953) which was republished as *Black Mutiny* (1968), Barbara Chase-Riboud's novel *Echo of Lions* (1989), John Thorpe's play *Chap Am so: The Amistad Victory* (1997), and Steven Spielberg's film *Amistad* (1997). In a similar fashion, David Pesci's *Amistad* (1997) narrates the compelling story of Singbe Pieh (historically known as Sengbe Pieh or Joseph Cinqué) and his fellow Mende tribesmen who were captured in West Africa in 1839 and transported across the Middle Passage to Cuba on the Portuguese ship, *Tecora*. On arriving in Havana, the captives are kept in barracoons for ten days before getting sold to Spanish planters, Jose Pepe Ruiz and Pedro Montes. Fifty-three captives, including four children, are put on "the ship called *Amistad*, which means 'friendship' in Spanish" (*Amistad,* 48) as it sails from Havana to Puerto Principe. After being threatened with cannibalism upon arrival in Puerto Principe, the captives execute a mutiny that leads to the death of the ship's captain and other crew members. However, two sailors are able to escape on a boat while Ruiz, Montes and a slave cabin boy named Antonio are spared by the Africans. Montes is forced to navigate the ship to Africa which he slowly does during the day but at night navigates the ship to the north with the hope of landing in southern United States. After six weeks, the *Amistad* arrives on the coast of Long Island in New York and is recovered by the United States Navy thereby leading to law suits ranging from salvage claim rights to trials for mutiny, piracy and murder.

The illegal act of transporting the slaves on the *Amistad* ship by Ruiz and Montes contravenes the 1817 treaty signed between Spain and Britain which banned the importation of slaves to any Spanish colony like Cuba from 30 May 1820. However, in an attempt to elude the British ships that often patrolled the sea, slave merchants like Senor Shaw and Captain Alonzo of the *Tecora* ensure that the slave ships arriving from Africa come into dock at the Spanish colonies at night and they bribe the port officials to falsify the passports of the slaves indicating that they are ladinos, "slaves of African descent who were either born on the island or brought there from Africa before 1820" (*Amistad,* 34), rather than bozales which are "the ones born in Africa or the 'saltwater' blacks" (Hartman, 2007:97). It is by virtue

of this that Ruiz changes Singbe's name to Joseph Cinqué "to give the false impression that he had been born and given a Spanish name in Cuba" (Adjaye, 1999:456). In spite of Ruiz's deceit in falsifying the names of the Africans, the Captain of the *Amistad* and his crew, prior to the mutiny, run a risk in carrying bozales. This is because if the British sea patrol officers had stopped them to question the slaves and eventually discovered that the slaves were unable to communicate in Spanish, the slaves would have been declared as contraband.

The legal case that emanates from the *Amistad* episode in the trans-Atlantic slave trade history exhibits what Suggs (2008:154) highlights as the:

> relationships that are also scrutinized by American law: property, contract, identity, citizenship, crime, tort, regulation, federalism, constitutional law and civil rights, taxation, commerce, environment, family relations and estates, military law, petit and high treason, and corporations.

The legal suit hinges on the treaty to be applied in the case whether it is the 1795 Pinckney Treaty that establishes friendship between the United States and Spain, and the 1821 ratified treaty which provides for the restoration of property recovered from the sea pirates on the high seas to the true owner, or the 1817 treaty signed between Spain and Britain that prohibits the importation of slaves to Spanish colonies by 30 May 1820. It therefore becomes ironic that the *Amistad* becomes the pivotal cause to test the friendship that exists between the United States and Spain in the aftermath of the treaty. Additionally, the case exposes the conflict between an incumbent president of the United States (President Van Buren) and a former president (President John Quincy Adams), as well as the opposition between the proslavery South and the antislavery North of the United States. At the end of a series of legal battles, thirty-six surviving Mende people are transported back to Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 1842.

Tutuoba: Salem's Black Shango Slave Queen (2007) narrates the story of Tutuoba (1670-1692), a slave captured from Ijebu-Ode, a Yoruba community in West Africa, and transported to the New World. The narrative begins with an aeroplane flight of Tutu Barbara Oba on 29 June 2010 from Lagos, Nigeria, to New York, United States of America, where Tutu is to commence her Master's degree

programme in Intellectual Property Law. Tutu possesses spiritual powers which she initially has no knowledge of. As Tutu's aeroplane approaches New York, a coven in New York, fearing that Tutu marks the return of the notorious seventeenth century Salem witch – Tutuoba, gathers to ensure that the aeroplane crashes. Tutu arrives in New York safely and is taken to New Hampshire by her supervisor, Professor Samuel Parris, whom Tutu feels she has met before. After returning inebriated from a night club Tutu collapses and goes into a trance where an old woman reveals her previous life in the seventeenth century to her. As revealed in Tutu's vision, her former life entails her being born as Tutuoba in January 1670 and captured as a slave around 1686. Tutuoba is bought by Reverend Parris whom she had met when he was a missionary in Africa and later on the slave ship to Jamaica. Following a slave revolt in Jamaica, Reverend Parris relocates his family to Boston and later to Salem where Tutuoba and many others are accused of witchcraft and endure rigorous court proceedings. After Tutuoba's acquittal, Judith, Reverend Parris's wife conspires with Theresa, Reverend Parris's sister, to get Tutuoba drunk and unleash spiritual powers on her. Tutuoba is eventually pushed down the stairs and breaks her neck. On 07 July 2010, the present day Tutu wakes up on her hospital bed to discover that she has been dreaming. She becomes convinced that she is a reincarnation of Salem's Tutuoba when the x-ray results reveal that she had broken her neck sometime in the past. Tutu survives an assassination attempt on her life in the hospital and begins a mission to exact revenge on the cabal behind her attempted murder.

Tutuoba: Salem's Black Shango Slave Queen is a reconstruction of the past in relation to the present. The novel adopts a tele-portative narration of history as the reincarnated protagonist, Tutuoba (historically known as Tituba), is positioned in the present (2010) as Tutu and teleports to her past (1670-1692) to explain the mystery behind the Salem Witch Trials and how the historical Tutuoba seems to disappear from history in the aftermath of the trials. In an interview granted to Udeze (2010), the author, Prince Justice Faloye, reveals that:

> It is not really the story of Tutuoba and what she was tried for. It is the story of how the story of such a great woman was suffused in secrecy. The information on her are [sic] so scanty. In history books she is known as Titiba [sic] which is

> adulterated. In her story you see the true picture of Kunta Kinte in the Roots. So in other words, this is the female Kunta Kinte, well noted in African story.

Tutuoba forms a part of what Sargent (2010:288) regards to as "scholarly work investigating the ways in which changes in the method of establishing facts and validating knowledge claims... in the seventeenth century became integral to the canons of proof and evidence in disciplines such as law, literature, theology, and history". It is therefore worthwhile to note that in modern times the Salem Witch Trials have been re-enacted in diverse literary forms which include Marion L. Starkey's novel *The Devil in Massachusetts* (1950), Ann Petry's novel *Tituba of Salem Village* (1964), Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière ... Noir de Salem* (1986) that was translated into English as *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (1992), Elaine Breslaw's *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem* (1996), Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* (1953), William Carlos William's play "Tituba's Children" in *Many Loves and Other Plays* (1965), and Joseph Sargent's directed film *Salem Witch Trials* (2002).

Prince Justice subverts history in *Tutuoba* with regard to the racial identity of his eponymous heroine thereby creating the possibility that "Contrary to official reports and historical records that she was an Indian slave from Barbados in the Caribbean Islands... she was from the heart of Africa, from the Yoruba" (*Tutuoba,* 9). As a result, Justice reconstructs the official history of the Salem Witch Trials (1692-1693) which regards the historical character of Tituba as a Carib Indian woman whose "race has been changed from Indian, to half-Indian and half-Negro, to Negro" (Hansen, 1974:3). In an attempt to provide linguistic evidence that confirms that the historical Tituba originated from the Yoruba tribe of the present day Nigeria, Hoffer (1996:3) postulates that "the precise meaning of Tituba's name cannot be recovered from a European language because Yoruba is an inflected language, a tonal language". Justice conversely characterises how Tutuoba "was definitely a dreadlocked Yoruba woman" (*Tutuoba,* 9) who was kidnapped and transported across the Middle Passage to the New World during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era.

In response to Hansen's (1974) observation, Morsberger (1974:456) predicts what Justice (2007) does many years later that "The next logical step in historical

revisionism is for Blacks to adopt Tituba and turn her into a heroine of their race". Rosenthal (1998:195) acknowledges the postcolonial reconstruction of Tutuoba's character because there is a "current propensity to refashion Tituba from a passive Indian unleashing forces she could not control into a woman of African descent actively shaping events". Justice characterises the eponymous heroine, Tutuoba, as "the favourite child of Shango" (57), the god of thunder in Yoruba mythology, and as such she possesses powers "through electrical currents, either through thunder or electricity" (48). While the Europeans regard her as a force that "has been known to come every 160 years, bringing along with it great disruption whenever it appears" (7), the Africans consider her as "a reincarnation that came every seven generations to help the poor and oppressed" (31). Despite the numerous speculations surrounding the ethnicity of the historical Tituba it important to note that a majority of the slaves in Barbados in the seventeenth century were of African ancestry. Justice's subversion of history in characterising Tutuoba as being of Yoruba heritage is therefore plausible.

As a form of a revisionist historical fiction, Prince Justice employs the strands of postmodernism to destabilise the other narrative accounts on Tutuoba and the official records on the Salem Witch Trials. Justice fictionalises the popular historical personages of the Salem Witch Trials in a fashion that deliberately contradicts official historical accounts to create what McHale (1987:90) considers as "the postmodernist strategy of apocryphal or alternative history". Justice achieves this by displacing the official history, on the one hand, and supplementing it to unmask what has been suppressed, on the other hand. Similar to Johnson's *Middle Passage* (1990) *Tutuoba* fits within the purview of historiographic metafiction as it subverts historical accounts, employs myth and magic, and also lays "claim to historical events and personages" (Hutcheon, 1988:5) such as the Reverend Parris, the alleged witches who are executed in Salem like Sarah Good, and "the judge, Samuel Sewall, who sat at her trial, [and] shortly afterwards became one of the first white abolitionists" (*Tutuoba,* 11).

Similar to the technique D'Aguiar (1997) employs to focus on the life of his female protagonist, Mintah, amidst the historical omission of her, Justice centres his narrative on Tutuoba's life because even though she plays a major role in the Salem

Witch Trials, "official histories pay little attention to her" and the story of her "life is not recorded in histories of the Salem witch trials" (Tucker, 2000:624). Justice utilises his literary resourcefulness to construct an African childhood for Tutuoba in addition to making her the female protagonist with mystical powers in the novel. This enables Justice to situate his novel within the scope of contemporary black, feminist, postcolonial and postmodernist literary traditions. Although historical judicial records fail to provide concrete evidence on Tutuoba's race or ancestry, her confession is properly documented in the seventeenth century Puritan court's transcripts. Justice, however, weaves a detailed contemporary narrative account of her life around historical judicial extracts, as she is kidnapped from Africa and transported across the Middle Passage to Jamaica before moving to Salem. The Salem witch hunt begins with suspicions of witchcraft cast on Tutuoba but the witch trials eventually become "a travesty of justice" (*Tutuoba,* 7) that almost destroys the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

A remarkable feature of Justice's *Tutuoba* is its refutation of the views of certain scholars that African novels developed amnesia towards the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe (1993:1) contend that "African historiography was more sensitive to the politics of Western academia than to the social and political challenges faced by African societies" like the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Attesting to this, Opoku-Agyemang (1996:219) brands modern African literature a "literature of forgetfulness" in its neglect of Africa's four hundred year long trans-Atlantic slave trade history. Mbembe (2002:259) agrees that there is "no African memory of slavery" as a result of the political and cultural controversies surrounding the discourse on the African participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Murphy (2007:142) agrees that "West African writers appear to turn away from the traumatic history of the slave trade to focus on either the history of Africa before the European invasion, the more recent colonial drama, or present-day concerns". Even though it seems that many African literary writers have indeed been silent about writing on the trans-Atlantic slave trade in comparison to their African-American, Anglo-American and British counterparts, a critical look at some African fictional works reveals that African authors like Amos Tutuola, Ben Okri and Ayi Kwei Armah have made references to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Correspondingly, contemporary African

authors like Manu Herbstein and Prince Justice fully explore the trans-Atlantic slave trade in their novels to assert that the trans-Atlantic history has not been forgotten in the novelistic discourse.

Quite a number of West African novelists, directly or indirectly, try to link the trans-Atlantic slave trade to many contemporary preoccupations ranging from colonialism and neo-colonialism to government dictatorship and maladministration. Murphy (2007:144) cites Amos Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1997) as a leading example of the way an African novel on Africa's mythic past "reveals the traces of the slave trade era and brings those repressed memories to the forefront of conscious recollection". This is because the narrator in Tutuola's work reveals the preponderance of slave wars such that "if one is captured, he or she would be sold into slavery for foreigners who would carry him or her to unknown destinations to be killed for the buyer's god or to be working for him" (Tutuola, 1997:18). Traces of the trans-Atlantic slave trade are also identified in other West African literary canons like Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991:112) and D.O. Fagunwa's *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (1982:61) as they both employ the tropes of persons bound in bags made popular by Olaudah Equiano (1789) who describes how children were kidnapped and put in bags to be sold at the coast during the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Equiano, 2007:44). Equally, in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments* (1969:30) the author indirectly alludes to the trans-Atlantic slave trade as Efua and Juana stand beside the Christianborg Castle to discuss Baako's problems. The Christianborg Castle was built in the Gold Coast (Ghana) by the Danes in 1661 to trade in gold and slaves. It eventually became the seat of Ghana's government after attaining independence in 1957.

This chapter however poses the following questions in relation to law and literature: What are the intersections of law and literature in *Amistad* (1997) and *Tutuoba: Salem's Black Shango Slave Queen* (2007)? How are the travesties of justice against trans-Atlantic slaves represented in the novels?

4.2 Intersections of Law and Literature

The role of literature in legal practice falls within two broad categories – law in literature and law as literature. Ward (1995:15) defines "law in literature" as an examination of "the possible relevance of literary texts, particularly those which present themselves as telling a legal story" while "law as literature" involves the application of "the techniques of literary criticism to legal texts". Law in literature centres on the representation of legal motifs in literary works and aims to promote literature as an equally intellectual field like law. It also argues for the use of literary texts to complement legal texts in order to achieve a greater knowledge of jurisprudence. Law as literature focuses on the interpretation of legal texts, as a peculiar genre of literature, and aims to expand the possible alternatives of legal practice to include literary and cultural theories as well as language and discourse theories. Hence, it argues for the application of literary theories and techniques to interpret legal texts. Asserting the role of the coordinating conjunction 'and' between the two disciplines, Grahn-Farley (2005:270-271) argues that "The AND is what connects the Law and Literature as a discipline with Women and the Law and with Race and the Law. It is in the AND that Law and Literature takes a stand". What is fundamental to both discourses is that the understanding of law and literature is predicated on the canonical works of both discourses as well was their contemporary theoretical approaches.

During the antebellum era of the United States, a lawyer had a great influence on literature. Ferguson (1984:5) illustrates how lawyers "controlled many of the important journals" and "also wrote many of the country's first important novels, plays, and poems" between the 1770s and the 1840s. Hence, it was widely believed that the success of any law practice was dependent on the fusion of legal tutelage and literary scholarship. Unfortunately, by the 1850s law and literature became divergent as law gradually shifted to become a specialised profession. Hursh (2013:8) addresses Ferguson's (1984) position and acknowledges that after the American Civil War (1861-1865), "the increasingly technical practice of law, and the outlook of major writers within the American Renaissance (1876-1917)" also contributed to the divergence between law and literature. As legal practitioners such as Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. eliminated literature from the daily practice of law,

literary writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, simultaneously eliminated law from literature.

The divergence of law and literature became more evident as the legal practice entailed the elimination of reasonable doubt while the literary practice entailed the interrogation and subversion of societal rules. In spite of the departure of the fields of law and literature from each other, it is noteworthy that the two fields intermittently maintain contact and overlap as a result of the "sustained interest of scholars from academic backgrounds" (Hursh, 2013:10) as well as the establishment of the law and literature jurisprudential movements in countries like the United States of America and Australia. Minda (1997:245) attests:

> Beginning in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, a diverse breed of Law and Literary scholarship appeared on the legal scene which has altered the landscape of the movement. Law and Literature practitioners in America were no longer just reading and studying the Great classics of Western literature; they were reading and studying law as if it were a special "genre" of literature to be interpreted like any story. As it turned out, Dickens, Kafka and Melville were being edged-out by authors like Derrida, Foucault, Heidegger and Wittgenstein as Law and Literature scholars explored the meaning of law's language as a cultural and literary artefact.

The literary approach to legal studies takes to the fore the importance of the educative purpose of law and literature. In many citadels of higher learning, an understanding of literature is regarded as a prerequisite to an appropriate legal training because engaging in the study of literature enhances the production of excellent lawyers. In spite of the discursive views of the advocates of law and literature like James Boyd White (1973) and Richard Weisberg (1992) as well as the antagonists such as Richard Posner (1988) and Julie Stone Peters (2005), literature is not a marginal subject but an intellectually important and complementary teaching tool for law students and lawyers. A literary minded legal practitioner is able to successfully exemplify a synthesis of critical and analytical skills, creative thinking, rhetoric, logical reasoning and persuasive argumentation. It is however unfortunate that despite the kinship that exists between law and literature, legal "practitioners have not taken part in the Movement to any appreciable degree" (Kornstein,

1998:118) in recent times. A majority of the scholars involved in writing and reading books or articles on law and literature, as well as those who present and attend conferences on law and literature are academics not legal practitioners.

Law and literature employ analogous systematic narrative structures in the representation of what they present as ideas, suppositions and facts. According to Suggs (2008:154), "each privileges some speech and some speakers while excluding others; each drives toward closure; each is self-referential; each must manage, through some authorized process of editing, the narrative elements of character, setting and action". In arguing the intersections of law and literature, Binder (2008:80) also posits:

> Like much imaginative literature, law represents subjectivities and their desires. But, also like these types of literature, law's relationship to what it represents is figurative and performative rather than straightforwardly mimetic. Law constructs subjectivities in the process of representing them. In this way it composes and portrays the characters on which it relies for its authority.

Stories are often used in the legal culture in the same way that narrative representations of the law improve an individual's understanding of the novel. While attempting to provide case laws and judicial precedents to persuade the court and establish the facts, lawyers narrate previous cases. However, similar to literary narratives, sometimes the legal narratives are often exaggerated or falsified. A typical example is the *Antelope* case cited by William Holabird in *Amistad.* In that historical case, a Spanish slave ship called *La Plata* was captured by the U.S. Coast Guard off the coast of Florida. Since the Coast Guard suspected that the slaves on board had been sold illegally, they demanded prosecution under the Treaty of 1819 and salvage of the ship as well as the slaves. However, the slaves were handed over to the Spanish government under Article VIII of the Pinckney's Treaty mainly because the slaves were discovered bound on the ship. Holabird tries to forcefully fit the facts of the *Antelope* case in the Amistad suit by omitting salient principles of the case.

The legal briefs presented by the legal counsel and the opinion of judges have narrative structures and possess literary merits. Parallel to the legal procedure of the

lawyer paying attention to the legal statutes and judicial precedents as well as the judge and jury paying attention to the facts of a case and the presented arguments, a reader also pays attention to the narrative details especially when the narrative witness tells the story from a first-person narrative viewpoint. Similar to the lawyer pleading a case before a judge, an author of a legal fiction employs diverse linguistic and literary techniques to persuade and convince his reader. The reader of a legal fiction therefore performs the role of the judge as he reads the factum and draws conclusions from the narrated case, the characters and the dispensation of justice. Biet (2008:403) defines a factum as "a literary genre between judicial writing and fiction, on the border between law and literature". In the real sense, a factum refers to the summarised report that a lawyer files before a case is heard in a court of competent jurisdiction. Unlike the judge, the reader of a legal or judicial fiction does not need to possess the jurisdiction to preside over (read) the case and draw his own conclusions or comment on the depictions of law, justice and the society in the text, especially when they are satirised.

When combining the legal setting with reconstructed history, "writers of imaginative literature are likely to alter the character of any real persons whom they incorporate into their work as fictional characters" (Posner, 2009:545). Examples include the actions of Roger Baldwin, Singbe Pieh, John Quincy Adams, Judge Samuel Sewall, Samuel Parris, Tutuoba and many more. Before becoming the President of the United States and later a member of the House of Representatives, John Quincy Adams was an American Minister to England and helped to draft the British treaty "that prohibited the taking of slaves from the African continent or taking part in their importation to English, American, or Spanish colonies" (*Amistad*, 24). By virtue of Adams's knowledge on the Anglo-Spanish Treaty (1819), Pesci characterises him as "*A Friend*" (160) who assists Roger Baldwin by giving him helpful suggestions on the provisions of the Treaty of 1819 to aid his defence of "the Amistads" (126) at the Circuit Court.

The discourses of law and literature have become very dominant in the construction of social reality. This is owing to the fact that the law acquaints itself with literature in an effort to formally construct social reality through language. On the basis of such grounds, language evolves into an instrument of legal practice as legal

interpretations become a premise and referent for literary scholarship. Even though a novelist will be unable to draft a contract of hire purchase the way a property lawyer will be unable to critically appraise Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965), law and literature remain unified by the common language existing in diverse societies. Both disciplines employ language as a medium of transmitting knowledge, stating facts and narrating events. Language, therefore, remains the fundamental conduit of interpretative preoccupation in law and literature. Intentions and actions are sometimes communicated through language the way legal contracts, statutes, case laws and judicial precedents are constructed, expressed and recorded with the use of language.

It becomes unfortunate that meanings may sometimes be lost owing to the misappropriation of words and poor legal drafting or translation, thereby affecting the outcome of legal cases. In *Amistad* John Quincy Adams is able to notice how language errors can weaken his case:

> [A] few weeks after the transcripts, jointly labelled "Document 185," reached Congress, Adams discovered a serious discrepancy. On the Cubans' original bills of sale, on the trespassos, and on other identity documents, the word *landinos* appeared in each referring to the disposition of the blacks. However, in all the documents prepared for the Document 185, the word *landinos* had been translated to "sound negroes." In the eyes of the law, and especially the Supreme Court, this translation would greatly weaken the claims of the defense. Adams was a savvy enough politician to know that this type of "error" was too convenient to be a product of coincidence. (247)

If Adams had not exercised his critical eye and mind, injustice would have been meted to the Amistads as a result of the problem of translation. The fact that legal documents are usually translated from one language to another sometimes leads to the loss of the original and intended meanings. This is mainly because there are many phrases (and figurative expressions) in other languages that cannot be replicated in English and vice versa. Such consequences also apply to the discipline of literature whereby the language of the translator may end up being erroneously analysed rather than the language use or style of the author.

Theorists such as Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben emphasise the importance of law and literature in societal spheres and academic discourses. Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) is regarded as the "most fertile source of studies of the dialectic between law and fiction" owing to its "ground-breaking argument about the extent to which disciplinary techniques associated with the criminal law have [been] ramified throughout modern society" (Dolin, 1999:6-7). Foucault examines the evolution of the European historical penal system to what is practised in modern times. He highlights the historical transformation of physical punishment (torture, public execution and corporal punishment) to gentle punishment which is evident in the actions of the executioner of the past who deals with the body to the roles of psychiatrists and psychologists in the present who deal with the mind. However, as represented in Foucault and Agamben's postmodernist writings, on the one hand, the society employs the law to exercise its sovereignty and protect the fundamental rights of the people but on the other hand it employs the law and the judicial structures to punish people and carry out death sentences.

4.3 Travesty of Justice through Torture and the Abuse of Judicial Authority

Amistad reveals the complex legal questions that perplexed the United States's courts in the nineteenth century especially on questions relating to the jurisdiction of a court to hear the cases involving slaves as well as the legal status of slaves. After Montes and Ruiz institute an action against the Amistads on the grounds of mutiny, murder and piracy Judge Andrew Judson refers the case to the Circuit Court where, at that time in 1839, trials of any criminal nature were held. At the Circuit Court, Judge Smith Thompson, a justice of the United States Supreme Court, rules that his court lacks the jurisdiction to hear the Amistad case because the alleged crimes were committed on international waters (Spanish ship and waters) without them affecting any citizen of the United States. The fact that such crimes are not punishable under the law of the United States means that the United States government cannot prosecute the Amistads for murder. The United States is therefore unable to claim any public policy justification for exercising jurisdiction over the crimes committed on international waters, especially since no crime is committed against the interests of the United States government or any citizen of the United States.

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When deciding cases in a court of competent jurisdiction, legal precedents are applied to ensure fairness and efficiency in the application of the law. At the Circuit Court of Connecticut, the case of the Amistads becomes challenging for Roger Baldwin and his fellow defence lawyers, Seth Staples and Theodore Sedgwick. The reason is that "they were facing the prospects of defending a politically charged case that was devoid of any established legal precedents which would work in their favour" (153). The advantage of having legal and judicial precedents is that if the facts of the current case are totally similar to the precedents, the judges are persuaded to maintain the same judgement as the judgement given in the earlier case. As the prosecutor, William Holabird, who also acts as the lawyer of Ruiz and Montes, cites the *Antelope* case as a legal precedent to the *Amistad* case, Baldwin objects to it by revealing that "The negroes on the *Antelope* were bound and chained when the ship was taken... the men on the *Amistad* were not. They were free when found" (169). The judicial decision of the *Antelope* case, therefore, can only be persuasively taken into consideration by the court but it cannot be a binding precedent on the court.

Slaves have always had a dual status as 'persons' and 'property' in the legal system. As depicted in *Amistad*, one of the reasons Judge Thompson refers the *Amistad* case back to the District Court, where civil trials are presided over, is to determine the status of the Africans as to whether they are "property". The civil trial at the District Court ends with Judge Andrew Judson ruling that the Amistad captives are not property but freeborn Africans who had been illegally kidnapped and transported across the Middle Passage in violation of the treaty. Even though Judge Judson grants the Amistads their freedom and rules that they should "be safely returned to their homeland" (233), he fails to grant them "rights as persons under the U.S. Constitution" (237). Inasmuch as the judgement does not affect the rights of the Amistads as African citizens, it denies them the inalienable natural rights provided to all persons under the Constitution of the United States.

The *Amistad* case, however, becomes notable in the judicial history of the United States as it marks the first time a court acknowledges openly that black people are not property but persons. At the Supreme Court, Justice Joseph Story and the other justices rule that the Africans are entitled to freedom and may decide

to remain in the United States or return to Africa. What remains striking about the decision of the Supreme Court is that it fails to denounce the trans-Atlantic slave trade but implies that if the Amistad captives had arrived in the Spanish colony before 1820, the year the treaty prohibiting the importation of slave was signed, the *Amistad* captives would have been regarded as the property of Ruiz and Montes and be repatriated to Cuba.

During the antebellum period of the United States, the legal status of slaves was determined by the nature of the crime committed by them or against them. In other words, slaves were regarded as property when they were victims of crimes or torts in order to justify or mitigate the crime against them but they became persons when they themselves were victimisers or perpetrators of crimes in order to receive harsher punishments than their white counterparts. In *Tutuoba* the eponymous protagonist, Tutuoba, is brought before Justice Sewall to enter a plea to the charges of witchcraft. She vehemently refuses because "those that accuse me of being a witch don't even accept that I am a human being like them. So how can they say that I am a witch?" (338). Tutuoba's response reveals her understanding on how a slave is regarded as a chattel rather than a person yet it is a person who can become a witch, not a chattel. As portrayed in the novel, chattel slaves lack rights and legal standing in the Antebellum American Courts but they become persons in the eyes of the law in order to subject them to torture, incarceration, public prosecution, and capital punishments.

One of the common denominators depicted in *Amistad* and *Tutuoba* is the fact that the protagonists become a state of exception in their respective cases. A state of exception which is known as "*Ausnahmezustand*" in German is a concept that is predicated on the political power of the government of a state to supersede the rule of law in order to achieve some form of public good during a state of emergency. This concept which was initiated by Carl Schmitt, a jurist and political theorist, was developed by Giorgio Agamben in his book *State of Exception* (2005). Agamben (2005:40) explicates:

> In this sense, the state of exception is the opening of a space in which application and norm reveal their separation and a pure force-of-law realizes (that is, applies by ceasing

> to apply [*dis-applicando*]) a norm whose application has been suspended. In this way, the impossible task of welding norm and reality together, and thereby constituting the normal sphere, is carried out in the form of the exception, that is to say, by presupposing their nexus. This means that in order to apply a norm it is ultimately necessary to suspend its application, to produce an exception. In every case, the state of exception marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without *logos* claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference.

The case of Singbe and the tribesmen on the *Amistad* becomes a state of exception that is foregrounded in the novel. A close look at the defence arguments presented by Baldwin and Adams in the District Court and Supreme Courts, respectively, reveal how the "self-defence" action of the Amistads constitutes an exception to the crime of murder. For a person to be convicted of murder, the onus is on the prosecutor to show that the suspect had the intention to kill the deceased with malice and aforethought. As portrayed in the novel, the uprising and homicide committed by the Amistads are as a result of their self-defence and fear of being slaughtered as food for the cannibals upon arriving in Puerto Principe. It therefore becomes a kill or be killed situation. The self-defensive nature inherent in human beings to protect their right to life, regardless of their skin colour and nationality, takes effect. On the *Amistad* ship, the actions of self-defence and rebellion by the Amistads show how the Africans resist enslavement from their arrival in the New World till their departure from it. They refuse to surrender passively to fate but object to circumstances that include legal travesties. Tutuoba's confession also helps her to become a state of exception to the law in existence during the Salem Witch Trials which prescribes torture and death on any person condemned by the court for being involved in witchcraft.

Inasmuch as the government of a state may supplant the laws for the good of the people, the same laws may be suspended to the detriment of the people. According to Agamben (1998:83), "This sphere is that of the sovereign decision, which suspends the law in the state of exception and thus implicates bare life within it". Bare life in this sense "marks the constantly shifting boundary between what and who is included in political life, and its protections and opportunities, and who is not" (Murav, 2008:2). In *Amistad*, the Africans are not considered to be citizens of the

United States and therefore remain incarcerated during their civil trial and even after their acquittal by the Supreme Court. This shows that while the Constitution of the United States embodies universal principles of natural justice and liberty for everyone, it can be manipulated for the perpetration of injustice in certain quarters. In addition, during the imprisonment of the Amistads, the judicial system is shown to be less concerned about the welfare of the prisoners, as they are deprived of their freedom, and more about the execution of power, discipline as well as punishment.

The antithetic nature of the American law is represented in the drafted laws that are exclusively applicable to African-Americans. Suggs (2008:155) contends that "Laws have been passed to control the African American and to free him and then her from control, to enfranchise and to disenfranchise; laws have been repealed for the same reasons, precedents set and overturned". Examples of such laws include: the Fugitive Slave Laws of 1793 and 1850 which required alleged fugitive slaves to be recaptured in any state by slave hunters and be returned to their owners; the Gag Rule which was "a parliamentary order passed in 1836 by the House that forbade discussion of slavery on the House floor" (*Amistad*, 254); and the Jim Crow laws (1876) which mandated separate facilities for the blacks and the whites in public places such as hotels, restaurants, trains, buses, schools, courts, churches, parks and so on. The Southern states, however, extended the Jim Crow laws to prohibit blacks and whites from playing games together as well as interracial marriages (miscegenation).

Historical legal cases such as the *Negro Plot Trials* (1741); the *Antelope Case* (1825); *Nat Turner's case* (1831); *State of Missouri v. Celia* (1855); *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857); *Salem Witch Trials,* (1692-1693) and the *Amistad Case* (1839-1841) also reflect the injustices that black people faced under the American justice system. In the *Negro Plot Trials* (1741), many black slaves were imprisoned and thirty-four people were executed following a series of arson attacks that was committed in New York between March and April 1741. Out of those executed, "thirteen black men were burned at the stake and seventeen more were hanged" (Linder, 2009). In the *Antelope Case* (1819), the United States Supreme Court ruled that the African slaves who were captured on the Spanish slave ships were to be surrendered to the Spaniards while the African slaves captured on the American and

the Portuguese slave ships were to be repatriated to Africa. At that time, "the United States was obliged to recognize the rights of other nations to participate in the slave trade" (Hatfield, 2014). In *Nat Turner's case* (1831), Turner "was charged with making insurrection and plotting to take away the lives of diverse free white persons" (O'Kelly, 1999). Turner was found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging for leading a slave insurrection that killed more than 55 white people in Virginia.

Missouri v. Celia (1855) involved a case where Celia had murdered her master for continually raping her and had burnt his body. The Missouri law of 1850 prohibited the rape of women and justified any homicide committed by women in the self-defence of such a crime. However Celia, being a black slave, was not considered a woman but a chattel and was not permitted to testify at her own trial. The court found her guilty of murder and sentenced her to be hanged "by the neck until dead on the sixteenth day of November 1855" (Cullen-DuPont, 2002). In *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), Chief Justice Roger Taney stated that Dred Scott lacked the *locus standi* (right to bring an action before a court) to sue for his freedom because he was black and, in addition, the court held that all black people, whether enslaved or manumitted, could not be regarded as citizens of the United States. In other words, "this opinion declared that slaves were not citizens of the United States and could not sue in Federal Courts" (The Library Congress, 2015). In the *Amistad* case, as portrayed in the novel, a similar sentiment is formed by public opinion in their belief that "it would be very difficult for blacks of any nationality to defeat whites in a court of law" (256).

The *Amistad* case, which is believed by the abolitionists to create a national controversy on the evils of slavery, brings the issue of racism to the fore. The abolitionists opine that if the Africans had been white, they would not have been incarcerated or tried the way they were. Rather, they would have been celebrated as heroes for killing their captors. As described in the novel, on 03 September 1839, Lewis Tappan, an abolitionist, stands outside the jail and addresses the crowd by eliciting questions on racism:

> What if these black men were white!? What if they were Americans or Englishmen or Spaniards, held by native Algerians or Arabs? Certainly those cultures still ascribe to

> the practice of slaveholding. What, then, would be their fate, my friends, if an American brig waylaid them at sea and boarded? Would they be here, behind bars in a jail with the most vile of criminals? I think not. They would be heroes, honored in parades, wined and dined by politicians and society's elite. But in our great wisdom we have not judged them by the virtue of their actions or the purity of their souls, but rather by the color of their skin. Their skin is black. So naturally, they are immediately treated as criminals. (134)

Tappan's words are resonated by Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in his "I Have a Dream" speech that was delivered on 28 August 1963, especially King's famous quote: "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character". Pesci employs his novel to emphasise how, throughout the series of trials the Africans are subjected to, they are judged simply by the colour of their skin. They are presumed to be criminals, murderers, chattels and slaves which amounts to the perversion of justice and nothing short of prejudice. Ruiz and Montes are also charged for assault, battery and false imprisonment on the claims made by Cinqué and Grabeau. However, Ruiz and Montes are treated with courtesy and offered legal assistance by the Federal District Attorney of New York on the instruction of the U.S. Secretary of State. Ruiz and Montes are given lenient forms of incarceration but the blacks are subjected to severe forms of incarceration as they are bound and tortured while in jail. By the time John Quincy Adams stands to present his case before the Supreme Court in defence of the Amistads, he expresses his observation that the United States government "from the outset acted with pronounced sympathy toward one party and antipathy toward my clients–antipathy, I might add, that was solely inspired by nothing more than the color of their skin" (261).

Tutuoba also raises pertinent questions regarding skin colour: Why is Tutuoba the first person to be accused of witchcraft? Is it because her African ancestry and spiritual inclinations automatically label her as a pagan with involvement in voodoo? These speak against the racist and sexist actions of the Puritan Americans in the seventeenth century and how they remain prevalent in the present age as seen in the twenty-first century portrayals in the novel. Commenting on how historical witchcraft trials such as the Salem Witch Trials are being narrated, Krueger (2010:39) observes that "witch-hunting" is also synonymous to "woman-

hunting" within the discourse of "radical feminist jurisprudence". Feminist jurisprudence is a legal theory that advocates the socio-political equality of the sexes, especially in the American society. Condé (1992:203) who also reconstructs her own version of the Salem Witch Trials, reveals that "Writing *Tituba* was an opportunity to express my feelings about present-day America. I wanted to imply that in terms of narrow-mindedness, hypocrisy, and racism, little has changed since the days of the Puritans". The racism and prejudice against African-Americans and the citizens of Third World countries that have consumed the fabric of the American society are depicted in Justice's *Tutuoba*. In 2010 Tutu is subjected to a difficult time at the immigration point of Logan International Airport, Boston:

> The immigration official [Martin O'Brien] looked at her [Tutu] disdainfully as she rushed awkwardly to the booth... he didn't like the influx of recent immigrants, especially the dodgy ones. High on his list were Nigerians and Jamaicans... There had been a memo circulated to watch out for Nigerian travelers and over the time he had stopped many from entering. (27)

The form of racism against African-Americans in the United States differs from the type that immigrants are subjected to. This becomes more unfortunate when African-Americans consider African immigrants as primitive people from the Dark Continent, thereby repeating the rift that existed between the ladino slaves and the bozale slaves during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era. African immigrants are discriminated against as second-class citizen owing to the ignorance and lack of objectivity of the Americans. Diverse push and pull factors are responsible for the high percentage of immigration to the United States. The fact that the United States is a world power, more often than not attracts students from Third World countries like Nigeria and Jamaica. However, as depicted in *Tutuoba*, there is a general ill-conceived notion that any young person from either of those countries is a potential drug trafficker, internet fraudster, terrorist or prostitute who will "be sleeping with the professor from the word, go!" (*Tutuoba,* 28). Even though Tutu's psychic powers enable her to incapacitate O'Brien as he intends to fill her exclusion papers and send her back to Nigeria, many other immigrants are unfortunately deported at the point of entry into the United States based on unsubstantiated prejudice thereby denying them the freedom of movement and migration.

Human rights abuses are often committed within the confines of the legal system. *Amistad* and *Tutuoba* reveal how the basic rights of human beings are routinely violated in the United States from the antebellum era to the present era. As portrayed in the novels, many of the people who are unable to defend themselves in the court of law as a result of their race, sex or status as slaves or immigrants are easily susceptible to various forms of abuses within the criminal justice system. In *Tutuoba* and *Amistad*, the suspects are routinely shackled and presented as hardened criminals in the courts's docks and in the prisons. While in jail, Tutuoba and the "prisoners were shackled to a round pillar... Tutu was shackled to the last pillar against the wall" (*Tutuoba,* 298). Singbe was "placed with the prison's general population and remained in wrist and leg irons" (*Amistad,* 127) while "The three girls were in the cell next to Singbe" (*Amistad,* 162). Many forms of abuse and torture are also meted to the prisoners by prison guards under the orders of the prison wardens. In *Amistad* Colonel Pendelton and the prison guards torture the Amistads:

> Pendelton pushed Singbe out of the cell and led him down the corridor past the common prisoners' cells, down a small stairway and into a musty, windowless room rancid with the stench of urine and vomit. It was a part of the jail Singbe had never visited. As the lantern light filled the room he could see Grabeau and Burnah standing in a corner, naked from the waist up. Their hands were chained to a pole that ran floor to ceiling. (235)

Pendelton violates the legal rule that stipulates that accused persons are to be presumed innocent until proven guilty. He flogs the tribesmen because they are "tryin' to escape proper justice" (236). Pendelton takes the law into his hands and justifies his action of assaulting the tribesmen with his conviction that the tribesmen are guilty of murder. In addition, Pendelton and his wife also turn the three African girls put in their custody into "house slaves" (267). According to Phelps (2008:134), "the law and its interpretation can be manipulated at will. It can justify exterminations, disappearances and torture". Hence, Pendelton who is meant to be a custodian of the penal system manipulates the law to execute diverse forms of illegal torture and punishment. In *Tutuoba*, Emeka is tortured and meted with jungle justice by the locals "after little resistance by the police" (221) after he accidentally kills one of the white drunks who were trying to rape Tutuoba. Emeka "had been beaten beyond

recognition, before being hanged. His genitals had been cut and removed as a souvenir by one of his torturers, a common practice in lynching" (221). Emeka is therefore denied the fundamental human rights to life, protection and fair hearing at a trial. This shows how the torture and public punishment that the Africans are subjected to sometimes exceed the magnitude of the crime committed in order to serve as a spectacle for the whites and a deterrence to blacks.

Justice employs his novel to denounce the legal pitfalls that are found in the Salem Witch Trials. As represented in *Tutuoba*, the Salem Witch Trials rely greatly on hearsay evidence and this can be regarded as a legal pitfall. Hearsay evidence in this sense refers to the oral statement of an individual who is not a primary witness but is narrated to the court as the truth of an assertion. The hearsay evidence tendered at the trials ought to have been inadmissible because it (the evidence) is mere gossip and unsubstantiated assumption. In addition, *Tutuoba* depicts how the legal protections that are provided to modern defendants seem to be unavailable to the accused witches during the Salem Witch Trials. The accused witches are not provided with any legal defence counsel, witnesses to testify on their behalf or formal avenues to appeal their convictions. Hence, inasmuch as there are prosecutors to the case against them, there are no defence lawyers to help in the defence or appeal of the accused women:

> Judge Sewall called for a recess to deliberate over the strange hearings he had just sat through. He was faced with a dilemma over how to rule on the case. On one side were the prosecutors that were convinced beyond doubt, who the tormentors were and made a good case. On the other side were the accused women that raised significant doubts in his mind over their charges. (340)

In *Tutuoba* all "the women were called to stand to defend themselves" (346). They are denied the right to defence lawyers who may have made objections to the court proceedings that are constantly interrupted by the fits of hallucinations. Judge Sewall sentences many of them such as Sarah Good, Mrs Porter, Mrs O'Connor and Mrs Lewis to "death by hanging" (347). The death sentence that Judge Sewall places on the accused women confirms Agamben's (1998:8) postulation that the life of a sacred human being (*homo sacer*) is a "bare life" because he or she is a person who "*may be killed and yet not sacrificed*" and "whose essential function in modern

politics" ought to be asserted. The accused women are unable to assert their innocence and similar to the victims of the trans-Atlantic slave ships and the Nazi concentration camps, the women are stripped of their rights and are sentenced to death.

Some of the actions of Judge Sewall exemplify what Foucault (1977) documents as the imperial acts of torture and punishment. The crime of witchcraft in Puritan Massachusetts colony cannot be mitigated by lesser punishments. It therefore means that the punishment meted out has to conform to the European imperial penal system which is the death sentence by public execution. The practitioners of witchcraft like Pamela Porter and the members of her coven "all knew the laws of the Puritan colony regarding witchcraft, which was punishable by death" (264). That renders the act of witchcraft a sin and a crime. Public execution is to serve as a deterrent to the witnesses and inflict terror in them. After Andrews gets accused of witchcraft, Judge Sewall rules that, "I sentence you to the most severe of deaths. I order you to be placed under weight of stones until it squeezes the evil life out of you" (349). At the point of his torture and public execution Andrews fails to confess to witchcraft. His defiance reveals his innocence and his contempt for the injustice dispensed by the judiciary. This affirms Foucault's (1977:49) observation that:

> The public execution did not re-establish justice: it reactivated power. In the seventeenth century, and even in the early eighteenth century, it was not, therefore, with all its theatre of terror, a lingering hang-over from an earlier age. Its ruthlessness, its spectacle, its physical violence, its unbalanced play of forces, its meticulous ceremonial, its entire apparatus were inscribed in the political functioning of the penal system.

Many of the accused are tortured in an attempt to obtain evidence or confession from them. As a direct result, it backfires and generates unintended consequences as the Governor's wife is also implicated and "some other people were using the occasion to settle old scores by accusing their antagonists of witchcraft' (326) till the "number of those accused now stood at over 500 and was still growing" (331). This form of inducement is a travesty of justice which *Tutuoba* tries to expose.

As stated earlier, even though Tutuoba pleads guilty she is not convicted or sentenced to death like the other accused witches. This is a contravention of the general rule of pleading guilty. When an accused person pleads guilty to a charge the court is expected to convict him or her on the plea. Foucault (1977:38) observes that "the criminal who confessed came to play the role of living truth". In *Tutuoba*, Governor Phips announces that "according to our Christian traditions, we are willing to forgive those who show penance and change their ways" (331). Tutuoba confesses, "Yes I am a witch, only if a witch is someone who communicates with their creator and gods" (338) and she escapes public execution. Tutuoba is eventually released on 05 September 1692 after spending six months in jail. Following the advice of Tutuoba to plead guilty, Theresa Putnam, Reverend Parris's sister, also pleads guilty to witchcraft. She is released with a stern rebuke, a heavy fine and an order to seek the church's help.

The confessions of Tutuoba and Theresa are as a result of what Foucault (1977:41) refers to as "judicial torture" which is a means of obtaining evidence or extracting a confession by inflicting torture and pain on a suspect. The physical and mental ordeal that the women experience makes them confess to witchcraft with the hope of escaping execution. Their actions therefore reveal how innocent victims confess to crimes that they did not commit in an attempt to avoid execution. On the contrary, the case against innocent people like Sarah Osborne who claims "I am innocent and don't know anything about witchcraft" (339), Sarah Good who pleads "Not guilty" (340) owing to her bedridden state, and the like, is meant to be a submission of no case to be answered. This is because there is no evidence substantiating the alleged crime of witchcraft that the women are charged with. The evidence the witnesses adduce is not credible enough to convict the accused women yet they are convicted and sentenced to death by hanging.

4.4 Conclusion

An examination of *Amistad* and *Tutuoba: Salem's Black Shango Queen* reveals how a legal approach to literary writings can assist in redefining the notion of kinship and equity. It helps in developing a plethora of social mores that broaden our imagination, enrich our narrative accounts, and provide us with innovative concepts that are essential in improving our outlook of the law. By considering a literary

dimension to the examination of historical legal cases, there is a focus on the style and language structure, the interpretation of legal codes, the representation of facts, the organisation of the plot of narrated cases, as well as the alternative thinking to the pitfalls in the dispensation of law and justice. According to Biet (2008:404), "Literature says what the law does not say, says the unsaid of the law, and shows its failures. Literature shows, using the structural weapons of the law, the shortcomings, the cracks of the system". Therefore, appraising the selected novels from the points of contact and departure between law and literature creates new concepts that enhance but also transcend earlier academic speculation.

Pesci and Justice employ the novelistic genre of literature as a counter-discourse for readers to interrogate the judicial systems, empathise with the fictional characters and historical personages, expand their own moral compasses and utilise their creative imaginations to create a fair and humane society. *Amistad* and *Tutuoba* encourage readers to participate in a discourse that interrogates the historical knowledge on the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Since readers are citizens of sovereign states, they can always employ literary elements to evaluate the legal and judicial systems in their societies and reconstruct their own convictions on salient social issues.

The works of David Pesci and Prince Justice reveal the significant perceptions of law-in-literature authors who employ narrative discourse to expose the innovative knowledge on the interdisciplinary connection between law and literature. This places them in the company of the literary writers who write skilfully on legal history to unite the disciplines of law and literature. The conflation of postcolonialism and postmodernism also interrogates and subverts official historical accounts and the traditional boundaries of law and literature for the development of new perspectives. *Amistad* and *Tutuoba* offer rich prospects for engaging the critical perspective of law in literature. By representing the law and legal processes in their literary works, the authors, Pesci and Justice, expand the conjunction between law and literature from the perspective of the marginalised groups and other cultures – African-American, Caribbean and African – to strengthen the law and literature scholarship.

Don't care where you come from
As long as you're a black man, you're an African
No mind your nationality
You have got the identity of an African
'Cause if you come from Trinidad
And if you come from Nassau
And if you come from Cuba, you're an African

Peter Tosh (1977)

CHAPTER 5

DELINEATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN DIASPORACENTRIC REALITIES

5.1 Introduction

The African diaspora originated from the forced migration of Africans across the Middle Passage from Africa to the New World over the duration of four centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. African slaves were expropriated from their "cradle continent" (Okpeh, 2011:105) and dispersed throughout North and South America as well the Caribbean to work mainly on the plantations and the mines. As a consequence, Africans "who shared the same cultural and linguistic affinity" were scattered and also lumped "together in identifiable regional patterns" (Korieh, 2006:91). This led to recognisable racial and social configurations in the diaspora. It therefore means that studies on the African diaspora cannot be complete without reference to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the Middle Passage, and the enslavement of the people of African descent in the New World from the fifteenth century to the nineteenth century.

Over the centuries, scholars of African descent such as Edward Blyden, W.E.B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, Martin Delany, Frantz Fanon, Henry Highland Garnet, Angela Davis, Anna Julia Cooper, Henry Sylvester Williams, George Padmore, Henry Louis Gates Jr, Maya Angelou, and many more have tried to define the concept of the African diaspora and seek ways to return to Africa. Accordingly, a relationship between history and cultural identity has been created to enable Africans in the diaspora to retrace their trans-Atlantic past in the diasporic present. The current trend, therefore, has taken on a Pan-Africanist dimension where Africans in the diaspora embark on annual pilgrimages to Africa and pass through what has been renamed the "Gate of Return" as against the "Gate of No Return" in the slave castles located along the West African Coast.

Pan-Africanism is a concept "which involves the solidarity and cohesion of all Africans and people of African descent" (Phillips, 2000:144). It was created as a political movement to correspond "to the needs and requirement of all those whose

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exile from the African continent was as [sic] [a] consequence of the impact of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, modern colonialism and imperialism" (Adi, 2002:241). Hartman (2007:35-37) identifies those she calls "architects and laborers of the Pan-Africanist dream" to include W.E.B Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Richard Wright, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Bunche, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., A. Philip Randolph, Horace Mann, George Padmore, Robert Lee, Sara Lee, Carlos Allston, Anna Livia Corderia, Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, Maryse Condé, Tom Feelings, Ted Pointiflet, Frank Lacey, John Ray and Sylvia Boone.

Apart from the "Gate of Return", scientific innovations of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have created other avenues for Africans in the diaspora to trace their biological ancestries from the diaspora to the exact African countries or hamlets. This is achieved through deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) tests, otherwise called "genetic diasporas" which involves "linking dispersed Africans to the genes and blood groups of their ancestors on the African continent" (Essien, 2013:149). Hartman (2007:90) observes that "By matching Y chromosomes and mitochondrial DNA with that of contemporary Africans, they [African-Americans] had hoped to get closer to an African home than a slave dungeon". According to the internet source focusing on the African ancestry, a number of notable African-Americans have traced their ancestral roots to modern day countries in West and Central Africa. These include: the award-winning poet and author, Maya Angelou (Sierra Leone); the television talk show hostess and producer, Oprah Winfrey (Liberia); the singer and songwriter, Roberta Flack (Cameroon); as well as the Hollywood stars, Chris Rock (Nigeria), Kimberly Elise (Mali), Morgan Freeman (Niger), and Forrest Whitaker (Ghana).

In spite of the diverse innovative ways contemporary Africans in the diaspora seek to connect with Africa, the reconstruction of the trans-Atlantic slave trade through various literary representations remains a conduit for them to express their feelings of rootlessness and transfer their outlook of the slave trade to the new generation of diasporic Africans. Eckstein (2006:x) agrees that:

> While the trauma of the African diaspora had hitherto been treated only hesitantly in imaginative writing, the past twenty years have brought to the fore a number of writers with

> renewed and wide-ranging interest in the African slave trade, the Middle Passage, and plantation slavery. This trend has resulted in a considerable and growing number of challenging literary works by authors in all parts of the diaspora, ranging from Toni Morrison, Charles Johnson and Sherley Anne Williams in the USA, to Dionne Brand in Canada and Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Fred D'Aguiar in the Caribbean and Britain.

African diasporic literature encapsulates diverse literary genres, representations and nationalities. Consequently, contemporary writers of African descent such as Caryl Phillips and Saidiya Hartman employ their respective non-fictional narratives, *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) and *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007), to expose the complexities involved in the recovery of the trans-Atlantic past from the diasporic present. The selected writers form a new generation of literary scholarship on the African diaspora and offer a glimpse of the expansion of the African diasporic perspectives in the twenty-first century. Their narratives, therefore, fall within the purview of what Goyal (2010:8) calls "a black Atlantic canon" as they "take up the conceptual core of the idea of diaspora: the loss of home, the meaning of memory, and the struggle to find a usable past".

Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound* is a postcolonial travel narrative which chronicles his journey across the Atlantic Ocean as he explores the involvements of three historical cities in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The narrative "retraces in reverse the route of the ships from Europe to Africa to the New World" (King, 2000:797). Phillips narrates the trajectory of his triangular trip from Liverpool, England to Elmina, Ghana and later to Charleston, United States of America, with the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe and the nation of Israel forming the respective prologue and epilogue of his travel itinerary. Phillips chooses Elmina in Ghana because it is "a small town which contains one of the best preserved of the many West African slave forts" (*The Atlantic Sound,* 98). He observes that "of the forty-seven forts on the west coast of Africa, twenty-nine of them were in Ghana" (205). Liverpool and Charleston are also selected because "Like Liverpool, the city of Charleston also possesses a hidden history that is centred on the slave trade. While eighteenth-century Liverpool was the most important slave port in Europe, Charleston occupied the same position in North America" (109).

Phillips (2000) infuses his narrative experiences with those of historical personages such as John Emmanuel Ocansey who travels from Ghana to Britain in 1881 to confront the Englishman who cheated his father in a palm oil transaction. Phillips employs *The Atlantic Sound* to affirm that "there will always be a continual engagement with the past" (Clingman & Phillips, 2004:124) which is a part of what the Africans in the diaspora and in the cradle continent cannot escape. It therefore becomes imperative to examine the past from different perspectives in order to achieve a richer and multifaceted synthesis of the lives and experiences of those who existed in the past with those of the present.

The Atlantic Sound focuses on the theme of the black diaspora in contemporary literature as it is informed by the intertextuality of Paul Gilroy's theory of the African diaspora and identity. Gilroy (1993:15) propounds the Atlantic "as one single, complex unit of analysis" that deviates from "nationalist and ethnically absolute approaches" towards an "explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective". This remains a standard that focuses on the construction of the African diaspora in Europe and the Americas. Phillips endorses this in *The Atlantic Sound* as he concerns himself with interrogating the British colonial involvement with the rest of the world. He portrays the multiple ironies that can be found in the history of the British on the subject of colonial expansion and imperialism. Additionally, the narrative preoccupies itself with questioning the role of African-Americans vis-à-vis the Africans in relation to European history, especially the trans-Atlantic slave trade and African migration to the diaspora.

Saidiya Hartman employs *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007) as a postcolonial travelogue to narrate her journey to Ghana which "possessed more dungeons, prisons, and slave pens than any other country in West Africa" (7). Her work can be considered as a black woman's personal narrative as it makes socio-political contributions to the fields of literature and history. Hartman's narrative falls under the purview of what Stover (2003:133) considers as "a social discourse that applies a unique black woman's voice to the interpretation and recording of her life experiences within a historical context". In Hartman's previous narrative, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997:4), she states that she intends "to look elsewhere

and consider those scenes in which terror can hardly be discerned–slaves dancing in the quarters,... the constitution of humanity in slave law, and the fashioning of the self possessed individual". These enable her "to explain the position of the enslaved" (Hartman & Wilderson, 2003:185) as well as to explore how racial oppression is employed to construct the black identity during and in the aftermath of slavery.

In *Lose Your Mother* Hartman deviates from the view of the older generation of writers who closed their eyes to how slavery was in Africa in order to create an African-American past they could be proud of. Considered in Ghana "as the daughter of slaves" (154), Hartman rewrites her own version of the trans-Atlantic slave trade history which begins in slave pens and barracoons in Africa before culminating in the African diasporic future. Hartman's journey to Africa is to follow "the trail of the captives from the hinterland to the Atlantic coast, as I intended to retrace the process by which lives were destroyed and slaves born" (6). This empowers her to envision the ordeal of the African captives who endured the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In an attempt to explain what motivates her to embark on such a quest, Hartman (2007:17) declares:

> I wanted to bring the past closer. I wanted to understand how the ordeal of slavery began. I wanted to comprehend how a boy came to be worth three yards of cotton cloth and a bottle of rum or a woman equivalent to a basketful of cowries. I wanted to cross the boundary that separated kin from stranger. I wanted to tell the story of the commoners– the people made the fodder of the slave trade and pushed into remote and desolate regions to escape captivity.

Hartman narrates her own version of the cruelties and the aftermath of the trans-Atlantic slave trade through the hybridity of historical records and the imaginative complexities surrounding her African identity and personal history. This is why Pope (2007:176) considers her narrative as "a supreme act of imagination and intelligence, the restoration of lost stories". Downs (2007:505) however criticises Hartman's narrative "for not following the methods employed by mainstream historians: that is, for not conducting a systematic evaluation of the surviving archival material and placing her study within the historiography of the field". Contingent upon this, this chapter seeks to examine the conceptualisation of the African diaspora as well as the representations of the African "diasporacentric" consciousness in the selected

contemporary narratives – *The Atlantic Sound* and *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*.

5.2 The Notion of the African Diaspora

The term "diaspora" refers to any group of people which migrates from its main territory to other continents owing to socio-economic, political or religious factors that Okpewho (1999:xiv) labels as "the unkind forces of history". "Diaspora" is a Greek word which means "to disperse" or "spread" and "has been adopted by researchers studying the African Diaspora because people of African descent have experienced a similar history of migration – forced and voluntary, enslavement, and persecution in various parts of the world" (Weik, 1997:81). Preliminary discourses on the diaspora "were firmly rooted in a conceptual 'homeland'" which focused on the archetypal case of the "Jewish diaspora" (Brubaker, 2005:2) as well as the dispersion of the Greeks and the Armenians.

In recent years, the notion of the diaspora has been extended to accommodate other models such as the African diaspora, Palestinian diaspora and the Chinese diaspora to denote migration, expatriation and a sense of ethnic community. Palmer (2000:57) defines the African diaspora as "the existence of communities of peoples of African descent across the globe who experienced and continue to experience broadly similar problems and who share broadly similar cultural characteristics". It can therefore be said that upon their arrival in the New World during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era, Africans resorted to the invention of another "Africa" in the diaspora. Smallwood (2007:187) affirms:

> Unable to reverse the course of their commodification, Africans faced the realization that if there was to be life after the slave ship, it would be within the confines of American slavery. Just as the Atlantic market had pulled Africans to the Americas, the market set the ethnic and cultural boundaries of life after the slave ship, in determining how saltwater slaves fit into the great diaspora of captive people of which every cargo was but a small part.

In making a distinction between migration and diaspora, Palmer (2000:57) describes migration as "the movement of a particular people from one point to another inside a polity or outside of it" while diaspora refers to "the movement of a people to several

destinations at once or over time". Migration can therefore refer to the movement of Zimbabweans to South Africa owing to economic factors while diaspora is the forced migration of Yoruba people (of modern day Nigeria) to Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, Barbados and the United States during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era. Hence, it means that for a community of people to qualify as being diasporic they must have their origin in a homeland that is different from their country of residence. Their diasporic existence should be a product of many involuntary migratory streams, over a long distance, at the same time or over a period of time. They must also possess the population and socio-political awareness that span across diverse continents.

The African diaspora has become a nebulous concept because its theorisation is not necessarily monolithic and its periodization is not restricted to the trans-Atlantic slave trade era and its aftermath. The African diaspora historically refers to the descendants of the enslaved Africans in the Americas. This is the major reason that the "the American branch of the African diaspora" is privileged and considered the most important out of "the four dominant dimensions of the global African diasporas, namely, the intra-African, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, and Atlantic diasporas" (Zeleza, 2005:35). However, the fact that Africans can be found across the globe shows that the trans-Atlantic slave trade is not the only source of the African diaspora. Harris (1996:7) contends:

> It would be a mistake, however, to attempt to understand the history of the African Diaspora solely through the prism of the slave trade and enslavement. In the first place, Africans have migrated and settled abroad voluntarily and as free persons since ancient times as merchants, sailors, artists, soldiers, entertainers, missionaries for Christianity and Islam, and adventurers, and many of them became permanent settlers abroad. That voluntary dispersion continued over the centuries, even as the slave trade flourished; and during the colonial period, Africans migrated to western Europe as civil servants, students, traders, missionaries, and in search of employment. Studies of the slave trade and enslavement omit this important dimension of the African dispersion abroad.

Ashimolowo (2007:116) acknowledges:

> [W]e must mention that Blacks were carried to other places that have not been given much attention. Blacks were

> carried as slaves as early as the 12th century to China to work. They were called wild men and were described as being, "Black as ink with teeth white and their hair curly." Their language was described as unintelligible, and people described them as "devil slaves."

What began as the forced migration of the African people during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, in recent history, eventually led to a mass migration of people owing to political and economic factors. However, despite the elements that contributed to the definition of the African diaspora, the term still currently refers to the black communities around the world especially black people in the Americas, Europe and Asia in their struggle against racial injustice and displacement. Hence, the African diaspora includes not only the geographical displacement of Africans but also the cultural alienation experienced over the centuries. The cultural alienation of Africans in the diaspora is reflected in various forms which include the Western denunciation of African names, African religions, African history and African languages. While Jackson (1996:50) suggests that "today, the African diaspora is defined not only by a world geography of color but also by a cultural geography", Afolabi (1999:315) submits that "The African Diaspora has been nothing less than a laboratory of dispossession, dehumanization, and alienation". Inasmuch as it seems that Africans in the diaspora share the same roots and race, the cultural differences they possess make African-Americans different from those in South America or the Caribbean. This diversity creates further complexities in the exploration of the African diaspora.

In spite of the several attempts by the European hegemonic forces to sever the African slaves from Africa, physically and psychologically, African customs and traditions survived the journey across the Middle Passage in the form of folk songs, myths and legends. Additionally, slaves of African origin in the New World renamed themselves at their emancipation as a symbol of the "the long-unacknowledged, nascent selfhood that had survived and transcended slavery" (Benston, 1984:153). This lifelong tradition is still evident in the existing culture and lives of the Africans in the diaspora. In *Lose Your Mother*, for instance, Hartman narrates how she changes her first name from Valerie to Saidiya:

> So in my sophomore year in college, I adopted the name Saidiya. I asserted my African heritage... My name

> established my solidarity with the people, extirpated all evidence of upstanding Negroes and their striving bastard heirs, and confirmed my place in the company of poor black girls–Tamikas, Roqueshas, and Shanequas. Most of all, it dashed my mother's hopes. I had found it in an African names book; it means "helper." (8)

The notion of the African diaspora creates a need for an inquiry into the identity, experiences and cultures of the people of African descent in different parts of the world. Byfield (2000:6) believes that "the construction of an African diasporic identity does not occur in isolation. It is nuanced by broader socioeconomic, cultural, and political developments of a given historical moment". A diasporic literary framework, therefore, reveals the interconnection of identity, race, culture and history that is expressed in several works of literature in this present epoch. Since every member of a diaspora must identify with a community of people who traces their ancestry to a particular location, Africans in the diaspora like Alex Haley, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Caryl Phillips and Saidiya Hartman employ different means to trace their roots and reconnect their pedigrees. These help them to answer questions like "Who am I?" and "Where am I from?" through the works of history, anthropology, linguistics and literature. On the flight to Ghana, Ben, a Ghanaian businessman, attempts to initiate a phatic communion with Phillips by asking him, "Where are you from?" (*The Atlantic Sound*, 124). Phillips (2000) muses:

> *The* question. The problem question for those of us who have grown up in societies which define themselves by excluding others. Usually us. A coded question. Are you one of us? Are you one of ours? Where are you from? Where are you really from? And now, here on a plane flying to Africa, the same clumsy question. Does he mean, who am I? Does he mean, do I belong? Why does this man not understand the complexity of his question? I make the familiar flustered attempt to answer *the* question. He listens, and then spoils it all. 'So, my friend, you are going home to Africa. To Ghana.' *I say nothing.* No, I am not going home. (124-125)

After talking to Ben for a while, Phillips expresses how the Africans in the diaspora perceive the Africans in the homeland:

> Like me, he [Ben] is the product of British imperial adventures. Unlike me, he is an African. A Ghanaian. A whole man. A man of one place. A man who will never flinch

> at *the* question, 'Where are you from?' A man going home. Stupefied with drink and despair, Ben is returning home. And, in spite of his present predicament, I envy his rootedness. (126)

Hartman (2007) expresses similar sentiments about feeling rootless in North America and in Africa. Upon her arrival in Elmina, Ghana, she is quickly labelled "*Obruni*. A stranger. A foreigner from across the sea" (3). By virtue of her clothes, shoes and hairstyle, it becomes obvious to the Ghanaians that Hartman is a diasporic African who has come on a pilgrimage of tracing her roots. Unfortunately, Hartman also experiences the displacement that has become a characterised feeling of the Africans in the diaspora:

> Old and new worlds stamped my face, a blend of peoples and nations and masters and slaves long forgotten. In the jumble of my features, no certain line of origin could be traced. Clearly, I was not Fanti, or Ashanti, or Ewe, or Ga... (3-4)

> *Obruni* forced me to acknowledge that I didn't belong to anyplace. The domain of the stranger is always an elusive *elsewhere*. I was born in another country, where I also felt like an alien which in part determined why I had come to Ghana. I had grown weary of being stateless. Secretly I wanted to belong somewhere or, at least, I wanted a convenient explanation of why I felt like a stranger. (4)

Africans in the diaspora are products of cultural cross-fertilisation. The fact that slaves were taken from disparate African societies suggests that many of the slaves arrived in the New World with different cultural elements. However, their race and skin colour as well as their communal voyage across the Middle Passage and their enslavement in the New World unified the Africans into a community. As a result, they carved a new identity for themselves which enables them to survive in their new societies. As Sterling (2007:37) observes, "issues surrounding identity formation are often foregrounded by an experience of rupture, displacement from home and migration". This ingenious mechanism is transmuted into the Black literary discourse as the Africa diasporic consciousness. Scholars like Gomez (2004:176) avow that the "disorientation" of the black experience as a result of American racism is "the defining feature of the African diasporic experience in North America". While such assertion is debatable to a certain extent, it must be noted that the African diasporic

consciousness remains an understanding created by the Africans in the diaspora to articulate their experiences and define their identity, especially through their writings.

African diasporic writing goes further as it reacts to racism and Eurocentric writing by placing emphasis on black identity and the celebration of Africanness which writers like Molefi Asante christen as "Afrocentricity". Asante (1998:2) conceives Afrocentricity as "placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior". Asante (2003:2) relates Afrocentricity with the African diaspora in his postulation that:

> Afrocentricity... challenges and takes to task the perpetuation of white racial supremacist ideas in the imagination of the American world, and by extension, the entire world. To the degree that it is incorporated into the lives of the millions of Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora, it has become revolutionary, attacking the very falsifications of truth and attitudes of self-hatred that have oppressed a great many of us.

Afrocentricity is subject to the belief in the centrality of Africans in postcolonial history because it deals with the cultural representation and social relevance of the people of African descent, whether in Africa or in the diaspora. However, in Asante's opinion, Africans should abandon everything Western including African-American names which are relics of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and adopt everything African. This is what Joyce (1999: 539) describes as "African-centeredness".

In an attempt to refute Asante's (1998) Afrocentric ideology, certain scholars proffer that Africans in the diaspora should rather be diasporacentric. Fox (1999:369) regards diasporacentrism as a Middle Passage itself because it is "situated between the excess of Eurocentrism on the one hand and the excess of Afrocentrism on the other". Although Africans in the diaspora are not Europeans, they have an ancestry that can be traced to a geographical space known as Africa. Hence, diasporacentrism cannot succumb to the excesses of Afrocentricity because of the peculiarity of the African experience in the diaspora. The African diasporic experience exposes Africans to Anglo socio-cultural climes thereby making them victims of double consciousness which is the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" and possessing "two warring ideals in one dark body"

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(Du Bois, 2006:9). The African diasporacentric realities therefore involve a scattering of people which results in sowing the dispersed people in a new world with a new culture consequential to a hybridised culture.

The dispersion and implanting of Afrocentric cultures in a Eurocentric world yielded the fruits that can be categorised as the African diasporacentric works and experiences. African diasporacentric works "are rooted in a myriad of cultures and traditions of Africa and the Americas which transform and transfigure them" (McFarland, 2006:940). African diasporacentric experiences are defined by "the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity" as well as a "conception of 'identity' which lives through" difference and hybridity (Hall, 1994:401). The footprints of the African diasporacentric experience, evident in the thematic thrusts of identity, difference, othering and marginalisation, are being relocated from the margin to the centre as well as from defensive positions to postures of generally accepted validity. This validates the suggestion by bell hooks (1994:427) that "black intellectuals must proceed with the understanding that we are not condemned to the margins", and brings the African diaspora within the purview of postcolonialism. According to Boehmer (2006:340):

> [T]he term *postcolonialism* addresses itself to the historical, political, cultural, and textual ramifications of the colonial encounter between the West and the non-West, dating from the sixteenth century to the present day. It considers how this encounter shaped all those who were party to it: the colonizers as well as the colonized. In particular, studies of postcolonial cultures, texts, and politics are interested in responses to colonial oppression which were (and are) oppositional or contestatory, and not only openly so, but those which were subtle, sly, oblique, and apparently underhand in their protests.

While evincing an intersection of diaspora and postcolonialism, Dirlik (2007:8) argues that:

> The emergence of postcolonialism to the forefront of consciousness has coincided over the last decade with the increasing visibility of the term "diaspora", which may well be the immediate social condition for a postcolonial consciousness. Diasporas have become a highly visible component of a global social landscape. Diasporic

> populations, however, contain a complex range of social groups, from political refugees to those driven to emigration out of economic necessity to highly educated and wealthy professionals who are cosmopolitan by education, outlook and their ability to function across cultural spaces.

Examining the representations of the African diaspora from the lens of postcolonial theory offers readers an opportunity to discover the multicultural ideologies of the African diaspora as depicted in the selected narratives. Phillips and Hartman, for instance, infuse their own travel experiences in their respective diasporacentric narratives in order for their readers to understand how they employ their postcolonial revisionist framework to reconstruct the trans-Atlantic slave trade and stimulate the African diasporic consciousness.

5.3 Contemporary African Diasporacentric Narratives

The African diasporic condition, from the inception of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to date, is usually reflected in African-American literature. The African diasporic condition is "a phenomenon which recurs, and can be theorized and re-imagined" rather than being "precipitated by an epochal event in remote history" (Echeruo, 1999:8). Whereas, "African American literature is a testament of how people of African descent have [translated] and continue to translate their culture's identity, experiences, communal aspirations, challenges, and hopes into a creative narrative" (Temple, 2012:132). Literary narratives play important roles in the formation of the identity of a nation or a group of people. They embody the historic tales of the homeland, displacement, struggles and the achievements of the people. By virtue of these, narratives are used to preserve and transfer the history, myths and culture of a group of people. However, inasmuch as narratives expose the universality in the common history of the Africans in the diaspora, they also serve as the formidable vehicles of difference which reveal the cultural differences of the Africans in the various parts of the New World.

The historical experiences and contemporary attitudes of the African diaspora are often reflected, in varying degrees, in African diasporacentric literature. African diasporacentric literature possesses a peculiar identity and assertion in the face of severe racial discrimination and Eurocentric universalism. Eurocentric universalism

is nothing short of the illusion that literary works which "have been defined as great art" are universal and "included in the canon only when they reflect European experience and conform to the style and subject matter of the European literary tradition" (Tyson, 2006:361). African diasporacentric writers therefore believe in the "voice of color" which is the notion "that minority writers and thinkers are generally in a better position than white writers and thinkers to write and speak about race and racism because they experience racism" (Tyson, 2006:377) and marginalisation first-hand. Hence, the African diasporacentric legacy is often represented in African-American narratives as Byerman (2005:19) concedes:

> What we see in contemporary African American narrative is precisely the recreation of history as a tale of endless black suffering, and it is in fact this sense of history that serves as the meaning of "race" in these fictions. Blackness in America "means," in these texts, living and dying in and through a traumatic reality.

African-American writers have a leading position in foregrounding the significances of the black identity, the African diasporic experience, as well as the past, present and future of the people of African descent. They "assume the position of storytellers in an effort to develop a sense of the collective history that... they feel has been denied to people of African descent in the Western hemisphere" (Castro-Borrego, 2011:8). This has led to the emergence of African Diaspora Studies which Franklin (2010:151) describes as "a distinct area of research and analysis". As a field of scholarly examination, Zeleza (2010:3) attributes the evolution of African Diaspora Studies to "the rise of cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and globalization studies, which collectively recast the questions of culture, identity and transnationalism". Subsuming African-American writings as well as Caribbean writings under African Diaspora Studies furnishes the world with a rich literary content that enhances a rediscovery of the innovative significance of the Humanities to regional and global changes. Among other creative feats, such endeavour underscores the importance of confronting the past in order to find solutions to the challenges facing Africans in the diaspora.

The continent of Africa has always exercised a strong influence on the narrative imagination of the black writers in the diaspora as it serves as a source of

many thematic preoccupations in Black literature. Echeruo (1999:11) professes that the black diasporic history teaches us "that black identity must always be predicated on black experience" and by extension, "the experience of those others touched enough by black blood to identify themselves with it". More often than not, black writers continually envision and reconstruct the past, articulate their experiences and express their cultural ties to Africa. This is achieved in their efforts to acknowledge the dreadful enslavement endured by their ancestors, as well as their struggle to fight the racial oppression experienced even in contemporary times. These writers reconstruct their own understanding of the past and fill the lacunae left behind by previous writers. Black contemporary writers who write about the past unite to fight against Eurocentric stereotypes of Africans and their history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Contemporary African diasporacentric writers are returning to Africa via the literary route to narrate the displacement of Africans during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era as well as the resultant diasporic experience. This is predicated on the fact that the New World "gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to 'lost origins', to be one again with the mother" (Hall, 1994:402), which is Africa. This, however, poses a question: Why a preoccupation with the past? The answer is that writers recreate the past in order for us to learn from it. They interrogate and confront the past to achieve a present and future devoid of past mistakes. Cobley (2014:157) proposes that instead of "consigning the past to the realm of oblivion", there must be a "revisiting of the past, this time avoiding the 'mistakes' that the past has made". Hamilton (2006:386) suggests that "the aptness of literary skills to the evocation or re-creation of the past has helped to distinguish historical explanations from scientific ones". Seyhan (2001:4) notes that "our understanding of the present is invariably predicated on actual or imagined links to, or ruptures from, a recalled past". Revisiting history therefore serves as a design for the acquisition of knowledge about the mistakes and achievements of the past.

It is pertinent to note that a literary study of the contemporary African diasporacentric narratives is not for the benefit of the past but for the present. Contemporary African diasporacentric writers take a glance at the African diasporic

past with a focus on the African diasporic future. This indicates the role of the narratives in borrowing historical facts and subverting them with fictional techniques in order to reveal the connection between historical discourse and imaginative writing. Since "narration is the quintessential form of customary knowledge" (Lyotard, 1984:19), contemporary diasporacentric narratives assist us to forcibly redress the forgotten experiences and enable the silent voices of the past to be heard.

Contemporary diasporic writers of African descent such as Caryl Phillips, Lawrence Hill, Fred D'Aguiar, Prince Justice and many more, have over the years migrated from one country to another, which also reflects in their narratives. Caryl Phillips was born in St. Kitts in 1958. He writes, "My parents travelled by ship from the Caribbean to England with me, their four-month-old son, as hand luggage" (*The Atlantic Sound*, 4). Phillips spent his youthful years travelling between St. Kitts and London and has, as an adult, lived in Ghana and the United States of America. He considers his early years as being "riddled with the cultural confusions of being black and British" (Eckstein, 2006:64). This form of confusion is exemplary of the realities of the Africans in the diaspora who do not fit into a particular culture. It is therefore not totally shocking that Phillips (2001:304) hopes that at his demise, he wishes his "ashes to be scattered at the middle of the Atlantic Ocean at a point equidistant between Britain, Africa and North America".

Phillips's thematic preoccupation includes the trans-Atlantic slave trade, slavery and migration as well as the black diasporic struggles of dislocation and displacement. He, however, expands his thematic preoccupation to incorporate the persecution of the Jews and the oppression of women in his narratives. His narrative works which are based on the trans-Atlantic slave trade include *Higher Ground* (1989), *Cambridge* (1991), *Crossing the River* (1993), and *The Atlantic Sound* (2000). King (2003:87) attests that:

> Phillips's methods... change from the autobiographical realism of the earlier work to a more complex narrative in which there are multiple stories and multiple narrators, while thematic significance is implied through parallels, images, allusions, and intertextuality to other works. Such writing focuses on several main characters and their stories in each "novel" and cuts across periods and places to suggest the universality of exile, diasporas, guilt, and hope of renewal.

Higher Ground invokes the notion of the disruption of the family base and the destruction of the family dynamics of the Africans who eventually became slaves. It is a tripartite novel that combines three different stories. The first story "Heartland" focuses on a West African man who becomes an agent of slave traders. The second story "The Cargo Rap" narrates the experiences of an African-American man who is incarcerated in a Southern prison. The third story "Higher Ground" recounts the experiences of a young Jewish woman who escapes the Nazi regime in her native Poland to England only to be faced with alienation and loneliness. It is for this reason that Phillips employs the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a parallel to the Holocaust which he regards as "the great twentieth-century crime against the Jews" (Bell, 1991:601). In accordance with Phillips's thematic preoccupation, Ryan (2008:189) opines that "while comparisons of American slavery with the Nazi Holocaust are potentially problematic, the peculiar institution does resemble the Final Solution".

Higher Ground revolves around geography and time. The novel focuses on the continents of Africa, North America and Europe and travels in time from the trans-Atlantic slave trade era to the 1960s and back to the World War II era (1939-1945). Regarding *Higher Ground* as a "novel–not short stories", Sarvan and Marhama (1991:40) believe it is to "urge readers to see the stories as a unity" and "a triptych". The novel reflects how Phillips addresses the thematic preoccupation of oppression in the diaspora from three different narrative points of view. The main characters – the nameless West African interpreter, Rudolf Williams the African-American prisoner, and Irina the Polish refugee – experience several forms of degradation and alienation in Africa, North America and Europe. The narrator of the "Heartland" is derided by the British slave traders and also detested his fellow Africans who consider him a traitor for collaborating with the European slave traders. He reveals, "I have cut myself off from these villagers to such an extent that I have actually become their enemy; perhaps my life is in danger?" (*Higher Ground*, 27). Similar to the way Chekura is betrayed by the slave traders in *The Book of Negroes*, the young African man is eventually sold as a slave and transported across the Middle Passage to the United States.

"The Cargo Rap" can be labelled as a collection of prison narratives which the writer, Rudolph Williams, sends to different recipients, including his parents, sister

and two female lawyers between January 1967 and August 1968. This is the reason Sarvan and Marhama (1991:38) parallel Rudolph's fifty letters as being "the direct descendants of the prison letters of George Jackson, published in 1970 as *Soledad Brother*". Similar to Jackson's frustrations, Rudolph, in his solitary confinement, expresses his bitterness against the misfortunes of African-Americans in a white dominated society:

> That you assume black people to be 'the trouble-makers' is evidence of your slave mentality. The 'trouble-makers' are those who set dogs upon unarmed men and women, who shoot and bomb children in a church or in our home town, who turn firehoses on black people to prevent them [from] marching peaceably on the sidewalk. The people lynch, kill, terrorize, and maim our people and you call brothers 'trouble-makers'! These people are the inventors of the American sport of 'nigger-lynching'. (64)

Rudolph Williams employs his black consciousness to express disgust at the realities of African-Americans in the diaspora such that he also advocates for the return of Africans to the cradle continent. In one of the letters he writes to his father, he states: "I think we should settle in Ghana, the mother-country of African independence. They have made it clear that there is plenty of land for us all" (70). Rudolph possesses a romantic vision of Africa to be the utopia of all Africans in the diaspora. By referring to Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Patrice Lumumba of the Congo as "great African leaders" (70), Rudolph reveals his sense of idealism. Yet, the fact remains that these leaders exploited their respective countries thereby resulting in the economic wreckages that the countries have become today.

Unlike the young West African man and Rudolph who struggle against white domination, Irina (Irene) struggles against male oppression as a Polish Jewess in Britain which is evident in the manner she is constantly called a "crazy Polish bitch" (*Higher Ground*, 177&218). Depicted as the archetype of the poor Jewish immigrants who were dislocated from their countries to the diaspora during the Nazi regime, Irina struggles with violence from men and the fear of not knowing what has happened to her family in Poland:

> When Irene first worked in England there was a man at the munitions factory who used to stare at her with violence. Mrs McKenzie said that 'up there' there were not many of Irina's

> 'people', and Irina tried to smile and forget at the same time. The Germans had invaded her country and the war had now come officially to this new place, England. The other young people who had arrived at Liverpool Street Station in London, they were now scattered throughout the country in places as far away as Scotland... As for home, nobody answered her letters and Irina wondered if they arrived at all. (182)

The trauma Irina suffers as well as the resultant loneliness in Britain makes her a victim of a failed marriage, a miscarriage, depression and an attempted suicide. Phillips therefore incorporates the experiences of the Jews to pluralise and create a clearer depiction of the oppression of the Africans in the diaspora.

Cambridge is also divided into three narrative fragments and an epilogue. The first part of the novel is composed of the journal of Emily Cartwright who travels from England to her father's plantation on a Caribbean island (similar to St. Kitts) during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Emily meets an educated slave, Cambridge, who murders Arnold Brown, the plantation overseer and father of her child. The second part is Cambridge's narrative account prior to his hanging for murder. The third part entails the version of an anonymous narrator based on the specifics indicated by Emily and Cambridge. According to Birat (1997:29), Phillips's *Cambridge* can be used "to investigate the discursive nature of history and challenge the historical texts which created the discourse on slavery". In the second part of the novel, the eponymous protagonist, Cambridge, reveals his childhood in West Africa as "Olumide" before he is kidnapped and forcefully transported across the Middle Passage to the New World where he becomes a slave:

> No longer was I to tarry in Africa, where my father and mother loved me with a sincere warmth. A storm broke about our dark heads and I, who can remember only my true Guinea name, Olumide, from amongst the many words of youth, was washed towards the coast and away from my rich and fertile soil by *Christian* Providence, whose unlikely agents were those who drink deep of strong liquors, which serve only to inflame their national madness, the slave trade. (134)

Cambridge goes through the process of renaming like many slaves during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era. From Olumide, he is renamed "Thomas" (140) the way Alex Haley's Kunta Kinte is renamed Toby. Beyond that, Cambridge is later renamed

"David Henderson" (154) before finally bearing the name "Cambridge" (157) after he is resold into slavery. This is also similar to the renaming process Manu Herbstein's Ama (Pamela) experiences. What remains distinct is Phillips's style and his foregrounding of the theme of the displacement of the Africans in the New World. However, while he depicts Emily Cartwright's narration as a colonialist's journal entry detailing her visit to the West Indian slave plantation, Cambridge's narration is autobiographical in nature as it is portrayed as a slave narrative and a confession to the murder of Arnold Brown.

Cambridge's wife, Christiana, is regarded as the "most enigmatic presence" (Bewes, 2006:42) in the novel. Even though Christiana does not speak in the novel, she is characterised as a victim of several forms of abuse at the hands of men. This makes Bewes (2006:42) conclude that the female characters in most of Phillips's novels "frequently seem to suffer the fate of those in Auschwitz... characters so destroyed by their suffering, or by the shame that results from it, that even if they live through it they are unable to speak of it". This is similar to what Hartman (2007) adduces about her maternal great-grandfather and female family members with regard to the silence that results from the traumatic effect of slavery:

> If poppa's mother or grandmother shared any details about their lives in slavery, he didn't share them with my brother and me. No doubt he was unwilling to disclose what he considered unspeakable. (12)

> Big Momma had never spoken of her life in slavery, nor had Ellen or Ella. Poppa could fill in only the bare outlines of their lives. The gaps and silences of my family were not unusual: slavery made the past a mystery, unknown and unspeakable. (13-14)

Crossing the River is an attempt by Phillips to denounce the plight of the blacks as a result of their forced migration from Africa to America. The novel "locates the beginnings of the African diaspora in the Atlantic slave trade" (Phillips & Sharpe, 1995:156). Ilona (1995:3) refers to the novel as "a neglected if not forgotten voice" from the American side of the Atlantic which African diasporic writers still need to make us hear. Unlike the previous novels, *Crossing the River* is made up of four stories: "The Pagan Coast", "West", "Crossing the River" and "Somewhere in England". "The Pagan Coast" begins with the lamentation of a father who foolishly

sells his three children, Nash, Martha and Travis, into slavery in a desperate attempt to survive the famine that has plagued his land:

> A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children. I remember. I led them (two boys and a girl) along weary paths, until we reached the place where the mud flats are populated with crabs and gulls... I watched as they huddled together and stared up at the fort, above which flew a foreign flag... In the distance stood the ship into whose keep I would soon condemn them... I soiled my hands with cold goods in exchange for their warm flesh. A shameful intercourse (1).

Phillips employs a range of narrative techniques, imaginative and meta-fictional elements, fragmented plot, as well as allusions to recount the struggles of Nash, Martha and Travis, in different epochs across different continents. Nash travels from the United States to Liberia as a missionary in the 1830s; Martha attempts to escape slavery in Virginia and goes to California in the late 18th century; while Travis, a member of the United States military force, travels to England during World War II. *Crossing the River* is therefore an evocative representation of the realities associated with Africans in the diaspora as it refracts the struggles of Africans as a result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Phillips reconstructs the historical events of the slave trade and World War II as a testament to the imaginative writings by historical fictional writers of African heritage.

The different novels by Caryl Phillips on the trans-Atlantic slave trade foreground the different angles to the imaginative reconstruction of the slave narrative discourse. He approaches the discourse from the angles that include the Holocaust, World War II, postcolonialism, diaspora and so on. Inasmuch as Phillips continues to deal with the preoccupation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and displacement in *Crossing the River*, he foregrounds two points that remain obvious to literary scholars. Major (1997:173) notes that the "subtext of *Crossing [the River]* is the idea that all black people in the diaspora have the same troubled ancestral roots in Africa". This is the first point and the second point is that the reason the ancestral roots are regarded as being troubled is "because many of those taken to the New World were sold by their forefathers to European slave traders" (Major, 1997:173). The aforementioned points, therefore, form the basis of the anxiety that creeps into the minds of African-Americans on their pilgrimage to Africa. They ask

themselves if Africans would accept them back to the homeland upon their return or whether they should remain where they are and continue to replant the displaced roots in the diaspora. Considering the experiences of the Africans in the diaspora, the question arises: Can the trans-Atlantic slave trade be equated with the Holocaust?

5.4 The African Holocaust

The cruel nature of the trans-Atlantic slave trade has made writers like André Schwarz-Bart (1973), John Edgar Wideman (1989) and Caryl Phillips (1997) juxtapose it with the Jewish Holocaust (1933-1945) and make comparisons between the African diaspora and the Jewish diaspora. Gyssels (2011:246) observes that:

> John Edgar Wideman (a close friend of Phillips; the two might have shared during their conversations their admiration for Schwarz-Bart) invites the reader to think about the Shoah and the transatlantic slave trade as two catastrophes in Europe's history, two bleak pages of Western imperialism and its by-products: religious fanaticism and racism. Through their interweaving of the Jewish and black diasporas, Phillips and Wideman oblige us to confront both tragedies, which, though occurring in different times and places, have much in common.

The Holocaust, which is otherwise known as "Shoah" in the Hebrew language, was on "the policy of total physical annihilation of a nation or of a people" which in this case was "the Jews under Naziism" (Bauer 1978:38). In an attempt to make an exegetical difference between the forms of prejudice suffered by the blacks and the Jews, Brustein and King (2004:38) reveal that the "Jews were disliked and feared for their religious beliefs and attitudes, their so-called racial characteristics, perceived economic behaviour and power, and their assumed leadership or support of subversive political and social movements".

As a writer of postcolonial literature, Caryl Phillips "incorporates and juxtaposes multiple diasporic voices" and seeks "both to connect and to tell the ghosts of racial violence that haunt both blacks and Jews, through acts of hallucinatory remembering" (Scharfman, 2010:94). This is depicted in *The Atlantic Sound* where the trans-Atlantic slave trade is referred to as the "African Holocaust" (174) while the slave forts are considered to be the "holocaust sites for those in the

diaspora" (148). Such categorisations fit into what Kaba (2001:1) documents as Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s supposition that "Africans committed a Holocaust-type crime by selling other blacks to whites". However in refuting such labels, Kaba (2001:2) profoundly argues that:

> The notion of a black "Holocaust" perpetrated by Africans in the era of the slave trade is a flawed and objectionable analogy which tends to "relativize" the Holocaust and to sow discord in the relationship between Africans and black people in the diaspora.

The crime of the trans-Atlantic slave trade has, over the decades, created tensions between the descendants of the slaves in the New World and the descendants of the Africans left behind. It is therefore important that Africans in the diaspora do not become indoctrinated with the theory that African middlemen sold black slaves to the white slave masters in an attempt to achieve ethnic cleansing. Hartman (2007:5) insists that:

> Contrary to popular belief, Africans did not sell their brothers and sisters into slavery. They sold strangers: those outside the web of kin and clan relationships, non-members of the polity, foreigners and barbarians at the outskirts of their country, and lawbreakers expelled from society.

There are basic similarities between the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the Holocaust with regard to capture, discrimination, oppression, forced migration, torture, enslavement, incarceration, the death of millions of people and both ending in notable wars (American Civil War and World War II, respectively). In agreement, Schiffrin (2002:309) maintains that "the Nazi extermination of 75 percent of European Jewry in World War II has become a centralizing symbol of American Jewish life as well as a potent and pervasive reference point for... the enslavement of African Americans". Conversely, while a number of Jewish merchants were involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade some blacks also formed a part of the other groups that "were persecuted during the Holocaust" (Schweber, 2008:172). Phillips (2000:102), however, considers it "a fallacious argument that the Jews were somehow largely responsible for the slave trade".

Another notable factor in connecting the Holocaust to the trans-Atlantic slave trade is the involvement of the Germans. While the Germans were greatly involved in the Holocaust, some Germans, otherwise known as "Brandenburgers" were part of the Europeans who "built fifty permanent outposts, forts, and castles designed to ensure their place in the Africa trade" (Hartman, 2007:7). The Germans played a minor role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade between the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century. Weindl (2008:250) notes that "The ending of the Brandenburg slave trade came quite abruptly after 1700, not only because of financial constraints but also because the English and French chose to stop buying slaves from the Germans".

The major difference between the Holocaust and the trans-Atlantic slave trade is that while the driving force behind the Holocaust was predicated on the Nazi ideology of ethnic and racial purity, the trans-Atlantic slave trade was dependent on European economic expansion (capitalism) and hegemony. This is why Abodunrin (2008:4) proposes that the trans-Atlantic slave trade should be seen "in its class/economic perspectives and not in racial terms". Hartman (2007), who claims that her paternal great-grandfather "had been a prosperous Jewish merchant" (81), acknowledges that:

> Unlike the concentration camp, the gulag, and the killing field, which had as their intended end the extermination of a population, the Atlantic trade created millions of corpses, but as a corollary to the making of commodities. To my eyes this lack of intention didn't diminish the crime of slavery. (31)

Caryl Phillips and Saidiya Hartman employ their narratives to depict the impact of dislocation and migration on the Africans and the Jews. The challenges that the Africans and Jews continually face confirm that "it is the immigrant, the one who has elected to move, who comes off worse than the people who stayed" (D'Aguiar, 1989:287). Writing from an autobiographical perspective, Phillips and Hartman focus on the trans-Atlantic slave trade experiences of Africa and the New World, the Jewish Holocaust as well as the current realities of the people of African descent in the diaspora. Similar to the Jewish Zionist movement of returning to the homeland, Phillips and Hartman reveal how Africans in the diaspora have been attempting an

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African movement. The authors however caution against this large scale migration to Africa from the diaspora. According to Phillips (2000:215&216):

> People in the diaspora who expect the continent to solve whatever psychological problems they possess. People of the diaspora who dress the part, have their hair done, buy beads, and fill their spiritual 'fuel tank' in preparation for the return journey to 'Babylon'. They have deep wounds that need to be healed, but if 'their' Africa fails them in any way, if 'their' Africa disappoints, then they will immediately accuse 'these Africans' of catering to the white man. The same white man that they work for in New York, or Toronto, or even Jamaica. Do they not understand? Africa cannot cure. Africa cannot make anybody feel whole. Africa is not a psychiatrist.

Hartman (2007:40) employs her personal story to express disillusionment:

> I knew that no matter how far from home I traveled, I would never be able to leave my past behind, I would never be able to imagine being the kind of person who had not been made and marked by slavery. I was black and a history of terror had produced that identity. Terror was "captivity without the possibility of flight," inescapable violence, precarious life. There was no going back to a time or place before slavery, and going beyond it no doubt would entail nothing less momentous than yet another revolution.

Phillips and Hartman address the realities of the Africans in the diaspora by making an intersection between the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the Holocaust. Hence, a comparative study on the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the Holocaust reveals the patterns that serve as a prognosis for racial discrimination and bigotry thereby providing a valuable basis for the themes on historical literature, especially those based on racial and ethnic representations.

5.5 Conclusion

Caryl Phillips and Saidiya Hartman employ their postcolonial travel narratives to affirm how African cultural identities are embedded in the African diasporacentric consciousness. By embarking on a journey to Africa in search of their African identity, they infuse their narratives with their personal tales and attempt to live a glimpse of the trans-Atlantic past in the present. According to Ropero (2003:51), "contemporary travel writers are more subject-oriented, their need to travel and

record their experiences often stemming from a personal urge to solve some inner conflict". The conflicts Phillips and Hartman are faced with include the preoccupations that range from a sense of identity and belonging to a search for a place to call home. Phillips, for instance, experiences multiple identities as he is considered black, Caribbean, West Indian and British. Similar to the technique of subjective positionality employed by Manu Herbstein and Lawrence Hill in *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (2000) and *The Book of Negroes* (2007) respectively, Phillips and Hartman position themselves as the subjects in their narratives to identify with the trauma experienced by the victims of dispersion and act as witnesses in the recovery of the lost African identity. The narratives of Phillips and Hartman, therefore, reveal the complexities involved in the study of the African diaspora as they interrogate the African past, present and future in the homeland and in the diaspora.

Massa sleeps in the feather bed,
Nigger sleeps on the floor;
When we get to heaven
There'll be no slaves no more.

Millie Williams (1937)

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This research has focused on how a selected group of writers of African descent, in the homeland and in the diaspora, reconstruct the trans-Atlantic slave trade in their narratives published between 1990 and 2007. While limiting the scope of the study to seven male authors and one female author, the selected narratives are representative of the authors's different continents and shades of African ancestry. What is evident in this selection of writers is the varying perspectives and literary strategies employed to reconstruct the experiences of many slaves who were transported from Africa to the New World between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. By capturing their reconstructions through the lens of postcolonial and postmodern literary techniques and analytical tools, the selected authors delineate a general focus and their diverse thematic preoccupations on the phases of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. While the specific focus of the selected writers for this study is on the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the recurring thematic preoccupations found in their narratives are principally on dislocation, displacement, exploitation, slavery, subjugation, race, identity, gender and the diaspora. They also employ literary elements of myth, magic realism, irony, parody, scepticism, allusion, mimetic representation and intertextuality to interrogate the orthodox notions about the past and assert the specific nature of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Chapter 1 contextualises the historiography of slave narratives by writers of African descent within the theoretical framework of postcolonialism, postcolonial feminism and postmodernism. It explores the arguments presented by scholars such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr (1988) and Houston Baker, Jr (1991) on the interaction that exists between the Western theoretical discourse and Black literature. It addresses the crucial role of the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a thematic preoccupation in Black literature. It traces the evolution of the slave narrative genre from the antebellum period of the United States of America to the present era by focusing solely on the works of writers of African descent which are premised on the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It affirms that "the classic slave narrative, as it was shaped in the decades immediately prior to the Civil War, provided a popular template for articulating the

horrors of slavery, countenancing resistance, and supporting the campaign for abolition" (Hamilton, 1996:432). This chapter therefore confirms that many of the early slave narratives, such as the ones written by Olaudah Equiano, Ottobah Cugoano, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs are autobiographical in nature. While some are replete with themes that highlight the salvation and miracles which are rooted in Christianity, the others seek to expose the cruelty of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and call for its abolition.

Chapter 2 juxtaposes the imaginative reconstructions of the trans-Atlantic slave trade by two authors from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean who have different linkages to African ancestry. It evaluates Manu Herbstein's *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (2000) and Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* (2007) as they employ the constructs of the Bildungsroman and postcolonialism to give the historically suppressed female slaves voices. This enables their protagonists to narrate their traumatic experiences across diverse geographical locations and assert their African identity. Reading *Ama* and *The Book of Negroes* within the theoretical framework of postcolonialism and postcolonial feminism by theorists such as Elleke Boehmer (2005) and Chandra Talapade Mohanty (2003) shows how the protagonists define themselves outside the colonial constructs that regard them as commodified and inferior beings. In other words, the "imposed perception" of Ama and Aminata "as commodified beings, when internalized, results in their continued struggle to develop an empowered, agentive sense of self" (Elliott, 2000:181). In essence, Herbstein and Hill utilise the resistance of radical figures like Ama and Aminata to speak to the resistance of the commodified, exploited and brutalised bodies of the slaves.

Chapter 3 examines postmodernism's recourse to history to create parody and irony in contemporary literature. It focuses on how Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* (1990) and Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) subvert the events of the historical Middle Passage through the elements of self-consciousness, fantasy, myth, irony and parody to produce a twist in literature that is conceptualised as historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction, as propounded by Linda Hutcheon (1988), suggests that a large part of postmodern fiction is predicated on history. It therefore addresses "topics such as the 'fictionality' of history, the blurring

of past and present, and the questioning of grand historical narratives" (Davis, 1998:242). As counter-narratives, Johnson's and D'Aguiar's novels deconstruct and fictionalise the trans-Atlantic slave trade history. They engage in what Rody (1995:93) calls a "historiographic intervention" which involves "a strategic recentering" of the trans-Atlantic slave trade history in the lives of the "historically dispossessed". The novels destabilise and interrogate the master narratives about the historical Middle Passage in an effort to contribute renewed perspectives to the re-evaluation of the discourse on the experiences of the slaves across the Atlantic Ocean.

Chapter 4 situates the neo-slave narrative discourse in a broader context. It relates the present-day injustices associated with the legal trials of blacks as well as the high black incarceration rate in the United States of America and around the globe, with the past trials of African slaves during the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It assesses the role of literature in legal practice and compares the various arguments postulated on the intersections of the subject of law and literary studies. Therefore, David Pesci's *Amistad* (1997) and Prince Justice's *Tutuoba: Salem's Black Shango Slave Queen* (2007) are evaluated to explore the conflation of postcolonialism and postmodernism with the convergence of law and literature. Using the theoretical paradigms of Michel Foucault (1977) and Giorgio Agamben (2005), the chapter highlights how the travesty of justice may result from torture and the abuse of judicial authority. It therefore shows that the narratives can be read "as positing postcolonial and socio-cultural issues, thanks to Euro-Western theoretic lenses" (Chukwumah, 2015:25).

Chapter 5 discusses the consciousness of African diasporic writers who deal with the precarious realities of the Africans in the diaspora. It analyses the autobiographical travel narratives, Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) and Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007), as the authors retrace the trans-Atlantic route back to Africa. It also explores how Phillips makes direct and tangential juxtapositions of the trans-Atlantic slave trade with other noteworthy events like the Holocaust and the Second World War and how Hartman envisions the past from the present reality. The two authors highlight the experiences of Africans in the diaspora and the challenges they face in

tracing their roots and laying claims to the black identity. In addition, the chapter points out how the African diasporic writing can be subsumed under Molefi Asante's (1998) ideology of Afrocentricity and Robert Fox's (1999) notion of diasporacentricity.

Finally, the present chapter (Chapter 6) offers a summation to the fundamental preoccupations that have been uncovered in the study as well as the recommendations for further research. It explains how the narratives selected for this study have been able to utilise diverse literary strategies to reconstruct the trans-Atlantic slave trade within the neo-slave narrative discourse. It also considers the debates put forward by Gayatri Spivak (1988), Toni Morrison (1995) and William Du Bois (2006), which was originally postulated in 1903, that were on gender, identity and race.

In spite of the fact that the selected contemporary writers of African descent draw from the same pool of historical occurrence like their white and early black counterparts, they attempt to deviate from previous literary works in articulating their own vision of the past and present realities. Manu Herbstein and Lawrence Hill reconstruct the trans-Atlantic slave trade through the polyphonic voices of female child-slaves who were ignored in hegemonic historiography; Charles Johnson and Fred D'Aguiar destabilise and deconstruct the probable scenes of the Middle Passage and creatively fill the gaps on what might have occurred as the slave ships transported slaves from Africa to the New World; David Pesci and Prince Justice draw upon the disciplines of law and literature to foreground the experiences of the trans-Atlantic slaves under the legal justice system of the United States during the antebellum period; while Caryl Phillips and Saidiya Hartman use their autobiographical travel narratives to unravel the complications involved in retracing the trans-Atlantic past from the diasporic present as the Africans in the diaspora seek to reconnect with the cradle continent.

The selected writers for this study employ innovative theoretical approaches to reconstruct the past and make their literary works distinct. In spite of the aesthetic and stylistic transformation made, these writers still maintain the authenticity of the historical event that shaped black consciousness by engaging directly in the discourse of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. They adopt various literary conventions in

their explorations of the themes that touch on postcolonial and postmodernist inclinations, gender issues, Western counter-hegemony, ideological orientation and cultural reconstruction. Using the trans-Atlantic slave trade as the foundation of the challenges faced by the Africans in the diaspora, the writers suggest the reality of the current epoch. In effect, they introduce the components of race, gender, historiography, postcolonialism and postmodernism to enrich the rewriting of hegemonic history and the reshaping of identity as a social construct. The question, however, arises: Why are these preoccupations the focus of the selected contemporary writers of African descent?

Generally, contemporary writers of African descent employ the neo-slave narrative genre as a tool to explore preoccupations ranging from race to gender and other identity markers which include status, age, language and oppression. As a consequence, the selected writers for this study reconstruct the trans-Atlantic slave trade and re-evaluate early texts to reveal how the challenges faced by Africans in the diaspora are rooted in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. They engage with the spectre of history to explain its influence on the existing social realities and create an insight into the past and the present. For instance, the feelings of rootlessness and devaluation that Caryl Phillips and Saidiya Hartman observe in the diasporic Africans of the present epoch can be traced to the dislocation and commodification of their ancestors from the cradle continent as demonstrated by Manu Herbstein and Lawrence Hill. In addition, David Pesci and Prince Justice employ the restrictive laws and incarceration of African slaves during the antebellum as the pervasive reference points for the high rate of black incarceration in the United States of America.

Similar to the preoccupations of Manu Herbstein, Caryl Phillips and Saidiya Hartman, Lawrence Hill addresses the problems of racism and identity crises that many Africans in the diaspora struggle with. In the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, Aminata and her companions are not accepted in Canada neither are they accepted in Africa where they are called "toubabs" (white people) with black faces. The racial problems encountered by the ex-slaves in North America and Africa show that "races are categories that [a] society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001:7). This is the reality of many Africans in the diaspora as Du Bois (2006:16) observes:

> THE PROBLEM of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line,–the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea. It was a phase of this problem that caused the Civil War; and however much they who marched South and North in 1861 may have fixed on the technical points, of union and local autonomy as a shibboleth, all nevertheless knew, as we know, that the question of Negro slavery was the real cause of the conflict.

In order for the blacks to be regarded as Canadians or Americans, authenticity becomes the opaque parameter against which black lives are measured to establish an internal discursive order that remains deterministic and entrenched in suffering as well as in crossing borders. Rather than measure contemporary black people with preconceived notions of blackness which Eurocentric prejudices conceive to include crime, poverty, poor grades, inferiority and civil rights activism, black people continually show that the notion of an authentic black identity is multifaceted, behaviourally and linguistically, the way black people and black cultures are different. Blacks do not need to rely on any affirmative action to get educated, nor do they need to act or pass off as being white. In the same vein, black people do not need to engage in rap music or athletics in order to be accepted as being black. As a consequence, black people continually aim to increase the social consciousness on the intricacies of blackness as an identity and an existing reality.

Literary narratives on the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the early 1990s till present have gone beyond mere historical representations of the event to subversion and interrogation of early narratives as well as blurring the line between history and fiction. Writers such as Charles Johnson, Fred D'Aguiar and Prince Justice address the question of myth and history by employing historiographic metafictional techniques to blur the lines of myth, history and fiction. They employ magic realism, irony and parody to demystify the myth surrounding the way their protagonists are characterised in historical documents. Apart from writing back to the canonical slave narratives and Eurocentric texts, such neo-slave narratives link the experiences of the African slaves of the past to the realities of the Africans in the diasporic present. Considered in totality, therefore, contemporary narratives on the trans-Atlantic slave trade "constitute critical reassessments of a previous generation's historical explorations of slavery" (Rushdy, 1999:238). The selected neo-slave narratives trace

the roots of the trans-Atlantic hegemony and reassess the African identity in the diaspora by engaging with postcolonial and postmodernist theoretical constructs. They acknowledge the humanity in the enslaved Africans and give voices to the ones silenced in history.

Falling under the purview of what McHale (1987:91) categorises as "postmodernist revisionist historical novelists", many of the selected writers, especially Lawrence Hill, Charles Johnson, Fred D'Aguiar and Prince Justice, methodically contravene the normative forms of historical fiction. They fictionalise popular historical personages and aspects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in "ways that blatantly contradict the historical record" (Dubey, 2002:164): Hill employs scepticism to indicate that a female slave was part of those responsible for documenting the names of the Loyalists in the historical "Book of Negroes" and was part of those who founded Sierra Leone and assisted in the abolition of slave trade; Johnson utilises parody to imply that some of the European sailors might have been pederasts thereby raping the boys the way the girls and women were raped; D'Aguiar uses irony to suggest that there was a female survivor among those thrown overboard the *Zong* slave ship who eventually documented the "truth" of what happened on the ship in her journal; and Justice embraces magic realism to reveal that the alleged black witch of the historical Salem Witch Trials was of a Yoruba origin who disappeared in history because she was murdered. Such subversions of history cast doubt on what has over the years been accepted as the official historiography of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The insights generated in this research verify that even though both history and literature mirror human experiences, literature differs significantly from history as it fictionalises events that are immortalised by history. Waugh (2006:10) concurs:

> Literature has traditionally been seen as that mode of writing which seems, completely, to allow us to converse with the past and to enter imaginatively and sympathetically the minds of others... In more fashionable intellectual terms, it is the problem of how to speak with and represent the 'other' whilst respecting and acknowledging their 'otherness'.

Literature employs imagination to recreate historical events as the fictional imaginative quality of literary artistry distinguishes it from historical currents. Hence,

the imaginative representations of the trans-Atlantic slave trade examined for this study continuously add to the knowledge on the literary scale. The depictive approaches remain significant because the selected authors engage in a discourse with canonical texts as well as historical personages to create a contemporary representation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in conjunction with the subject of the African identity.

This thesis reveals the different ways by which the selected authors deal with the question of the African identity. By examining the selected narratives in the chronological order of the vectors of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, it has become feasible to reconstruct a fictive history of the ensuing challenges the Africans in the diaspora have regarding their roots and identity. Herbstein and Hill foreground the origin, culture, language and identity of the African slaves in the Old World before getting transported to the New World; Johnson and D'Aguiar describe the experiences of the captives across the Atlantic Ocean (Middle Passage); Pesci and Justice address the challenges encountered by the slaves in the justice system of the New World; while Phillips and Hartman expose the current realities of Africans in the diaspora in relation to the trans-Atlantic slave trade past.

Contemporary writers of African descent are no longer ashamed to discuss their heritage as being rooted in the historical trans-Atlantic slave trade. This is the reason they are engaging in creating a union between the memory of the slave trade and a reconstructed African consciousness. There is a significant tripartite miscegenation of memory, history and literary imagination in the collective consciousness of the contemporary writers of African descent. This is because the past continues to communicate with us as "it is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" (Hall, 1994:395). This is foregrounded in *Tutuoba* as Justice's narrative blends fantasy with reality through the mythic figure of Tutuoba in the historical Salem Witch Trials. As validated in the novel, inasmuch as the memory and history of a group of people are significant, the reconstruction of unrecorded events can only be achieved through literature. Therefore, connecting the memory of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to African diasporic writing "articulates a real or imagined past of a community in all its symbolic transformations" (Seyhan, 2001:13).

The desire to challenge the Eurocentric notion of the trans-Atlantic slave trade increases the rate at which contemporary writers of African descent, especially African-Americans, resort to the African presence as the muse for their works. Over the past few decades, African-American writers like Charles Johnson and Toni Morrison have continued to deconstruct and reconstruct the past through mythology and re-memory. Castro-Borrego (2011:2) defines re-memory as "taking apart or deconstructing the past" in order to identify the gaps and "reconstructing the understanding of the past and the present by filling in those gaps". Contemporary African-American writers, therefore, envision the past in a variety of ways and collectively use it in order recreate the untold stories of their ancestors. This is achieved by collating "the memories within" in conjunction with the "recollections of others" and applying their imagination for a re-enactment (Morrison, 1995:91&92). Morrison (1995:112) explains what she labels "literary archeology" which is how the past is unearthed and reconstructed in the slave narrative genre: "[Y]ou journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply". Thus, imagination is used to reconstruct the missing aspects of the African-American experience in order to communicate the event in an evocative manner that will suit contemporary critical literary analyses.

The idea of re-memory, which Rushdy (1990:304) regards as "the concept of mental recollection" is alluded to in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1997). *Beloved* is a fictional reconstruction that is inspired by the lived experiences of Margaret Garner, a slave woman, who is characterised as Sethe in the novel. Sethe escapes slavery in Kentucky to Ohio with her children in 1856. As soon as she realises they are about to be recaptured by a posse, Sethe kills her daughter, Beloved, who returns some years later to haunt Sethe's home. "Rememory" is mentioned in the novel as Sethe tells her youngest daughter, Denver, "I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory" (35-36). Morrison's *Beloved* is described as "a novel about the traumas and healing powers of memory, or "rememory" (Davis, 1998:250). This affirms Rody's (1995:102) postulation that re-memory "transforms memory into a property of consciousness with the heightened imaginative power sufficient to the ethnic historical novel's claim to represent the past". The idea of re-memory enables

scholars to examine the connection that still exists between the trans-Atlantic slave trade and other vectors such as colour, identity, gender and racial injustice in the United States of America. Elliott (2000:183) contends:

> Reading slavery explicitly as a colonial institution forces a certain kind of rememory: slavery is a historical reality for every U.S. citizen, not just for contemporary African Americans. Importantly, Morrison's historical revisioning, which calls for collective rememory, defines the U.S. as an oppressive colonialist nation, thus challenging official historical narratives of democratic benevolence. It also places the U.S. as a nation in a parallel position to Sethe and slavery; Sethe and her relationship to slavery as a colonialist institution embodies in microcosm a specifically postcolonial facet of Morrison's historical rememory.

The selected writers for this study increase the consciousness of their readers regarding the cruel nature of the historical event and bestow humanity on the characters as being representative of all those who endured the trans-Atlantic slave trade. They employ multiple narrative perspectives to expose the common configurations of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in an attempt to "offer witness to [the] acts of inhumanity without condescending to sentimentality, closed ideological rhetoric, simplistic allegory, or postmodern relativism that subverts the quest for truth" (Byerman, 2005:180). They reconstruct the historical representations of the "Other" to give voices to the silenced ones and expose what might have been denied in history. The subaltern is now therefore able to speak as the authors write "back from the periphery to the centre, deconstructing [the] empire in the process of representation" (Sewlall, 2003:33). The question whether the subaltern can speak is attributed to Spivak (1988:294) who elaborates

> Can the subaltern speak? What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The question of "woman" seems more problematic in this context. Clearly, if you are poor, black, and female you get it in three ways. If, however, this formulation is moved from the first-world context into the postcolonial (which is not identical with the third-world) context, the description "black" or "of color" loses persuasive significance.

Spivak portrays the subaltern as a supressed indigenous woman who cannot speak. Depicted as a widow who has been muted by the practice of *sati* (killing of widows)

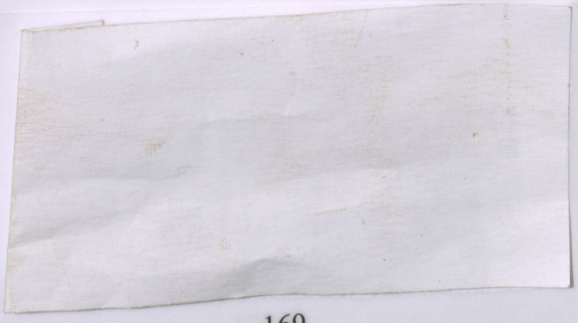
in the British-colonised India, she "is the farthest down on the colonial hierarchy" (Peeterse, 2002:279). However, the subalterns are portrayed in the selected narratives to include the African slaves as well as black men and women who have been re-characterised to be made visible and offered the voices to speak. Maggio (2007:421) posits that "the title of Spivak's essay might be more accurately stated as 'Can the Subaltern Be Heard?'". A response to this question is provided in *The Book of Negroes* as Chekura announces that, "Someone knows my name" (81), after Aminata utters his name in the hold of the slave ship. This is a clear indication that a subaltern speaks and he is heard. Also, the fact that Aminata is able to stand before King George III at Buckingham Palace to testify against the trans-Atlantic slave trade is another textual exemplification that the subaltern can speak and be heard. Additionally, the ability of Rutherford Calhoun and Mintah to write the ship's log and a journal, respectively, in *Middle Passage* and *Feeding the Ghosts*, also demonstrates that the subaltern can and does speak.

Readers are able to access the voices of the subalterns in the novels of Herbstein, Hill, Johnson and D'Aguiar as the authors employ a first-person narrative point of view in their reconstructions. Rather than permit white authors to speak for the protagonists, the selected postcolonial authors of African descent show their resistance by putting discursive power into the hands of the slaves and making them the subjects in the colonial history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The Eurocentric and phallocentric violence that Ama, Aminata, Mintah and Tutuoba experience is enough to silence them into oblivion in the historical documents. However, their voices have been recovered in postcolonial texts. This is why, as postcolonial writers, Herbstein attempts to "listen to their voices" (Musiitwa, 2011:3) and D'Aguiar proposes that the slave who survives being thrown overboard the *Zong* should be a "female" (Frías & D'Aguiar, 2002:421).

The fictive reconstructions of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the lenses of African, African-American and Caribbean writers selected for this study complement many resources that have been expanding the knowledge on the trans-Atlantic slave trade over the centuries. What differentiates this study from other studies is that the selected texts subvert and interrogate the official history thereby providing interactive opportunities for the twenty-first century readers to evaluate the emblematic role that

the trans-Atlantic slave trade plays in the current existence of the Africans in the diaspora. It also contributes to the extensive educational objectives of teaching about the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its relevance to the twenty-first century. When examined together with the same theoretical frameworks, it can be concluded that the selected texts for this study provide the data that capture the depth and intricate nature of contemporary Black literature. Such a task facilitates the exploration of the issues that have a bearing on the social identities and racial constructs acquired over the course of history. It inspires a nuanced consideration of the importance of the genre as it currently adds value to academic scholarship that addresses the social, political and cultural studies on the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Future studies arising from this thesis could explore the additional narratives of female writers of African descent like Toni Morrison, Saidiya Hartman and Sherley Anne Williams. The focus could be on the intricate techniques in which race, gender and other investigative classifications have traversed in the growth of the neo-slave narrative accounts within the framework of postcolonial discourse. Literary narratives whereby female writers of African descent re-enact the experiences of male characters and reconfigure the female gender to fill the lacunae in Black literature could also be examined. In addition, the narratives that confront the problems of women from the female writers's standpoints could be appraised. Hence, further studies could engage in the analysis of the overlaps in the preoccupations prevalent in the interdisciplinary nature of the Black experience in literature and history. This is mainly because Black neo-slave narratives continually explore the trans-Atlantic slave trade history to emphasise its influence on the past and its effects on the present and the future. In essence, scholars of Black literature use the literary narratives by writers of African descent to connect the past with the present and address the issues of race, gender and identity.



In everlasting memory
of the anguish of our ancestors
May those who died rest in peace
May those who return find their roots
May humanity never again perpetrate
Such injustice against humanity
We, the living, vow to uphold this.

Epigraph at the Elimina
Castle and the Cape
Coast Castle, Ghana.

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