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Zobrazování otroctví v britské černošské literatuře

Representing Slavery in Black British Literature

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Poděkování

Především bych chtěla poděkovat PhDr. Soně Novákové, CSc., M.A. za její ochotu a pomoc při výběru práce, za pomoc s literaturou nebo jakýmkoli dotazem a v neposlední řadě za její trpělivost a podporu, kterou mi během psaní práce poskytla.

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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Abstrakt

Tato práce se zabývá černošskou britskou literaturou která se zaobírá problematikou otroctví. Vybraní autoři jsou buďto karibského nebo afro-indického (ačkoli byla použita jedna americká prozaička pro potřebu srovnání) původu a patří do černošské diaspory v Británii. Otázka otroctví v Karibiku je ústřední pro formování a vytváření identity a definování pojmu domova v diskutovaných pracích. Cílem této práce je zjistit dopad minulosti otroctví na identitu lidí v černošské britské diaspoře, jakož i určit postoj a estetický výběr nejvhodnější pro reprezentaci této traumatické minulosti.

První část této práce se zaměřuje na teoretické pozadí tématu otroctví v Karibiku s cílem definovat pojmy jako diaspora, kulturní identita, paměť a potíže nejen umělecké reprezentace otroctví, ale i jeho zapamatování. Tato část obsahuje také historické pozadí otroctví a obchodu s otroky v Británii a Karibiku v osmnáctém a devatenáctém století, aby se dala posoudit přesnost děl a byla chápána krutá realita otroctví.

V následujících kapitolách jsou autoři jednotlivě představeni a základní informace o nich slouží k určení jejich stanoviska a často dopomohou vysvětlit výběr témat a použité výpravné techniky. Jednotlivé romány či poezie jsou analyzovány a porovnány. Analýza je založena na jejich zpracování reprezentace otroctví, výběru výpravných technik a cestě jejich postav přes Atlantik, ať už z Afriky do Karibiku nebo z Karibiku do Británie, a jejich vytváření identity a pojetí domova.

Tato práce ukazuje velkou složitost problematiky a mnohonásobné vrstvy, které zahrnuje. Ačkoli několik metafor či tropů se ve zkoumaných uměleckých dílech opakuje, každý autor má jedinečný a specifický přístup, společné rysy ukazují kolektivní postoj a motivaci pro pocit, že je třeba vytvořit umění o minulosti otroctví. Ta většinou spočívá právě v nedostatku paměti a svědectví. Rozmanitost vyprávění a estetických možností a voleb odhaluje mnoho tváří otroctví a obtížnost tématu.

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with black British literature which deals with the issue of slavery. The chosen authors are of a Caribbean or an Afro-Indian (though, an American novelist was used for needs of comparison) origin and belong to the black diaspora in Britain. The issue of slavery in the Caribbean is central to the forming of and creating an identity and defining the concept of home in the works debated. The aim of this thesis is to determine the impact of the past of slavery on the identity of people in the black British diaspora as well as to determine the approach and aesthetic choice most appropriate for representation of such traumatic past.

The first part of this thesis concentrates on theoretical background of the topic of slavery in the Caribbean in order to define terms such as diaspora, cultural identity, memory and the difficulty of not only artistic representation of slavery but also its remembering. It also includes the historical background of slavery and slave trade in Britain and the Caribbean in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century in order to be able to judge the accuracy of the works and to comprehend the cruel reality of slavery.

In the following chapters, the authors are introduced individually and their background information serves to determine their standpoint and often to help explain the topics chosen and the narrative techniques applied. The individual novels or pieces of poetry are analysed and compared. The analysis is based on their treatment of representation of slavery, choice of narrative techniques and their character's journey across the Atlantic, whether from Africa to the Caribbean or from the Caribbean to Britain, and their creating an identity and their concept of home.

The thesis shows the great complexity of this topic and the multiple layers it contains. Though several metaphors or tropes re-occur in the works of art examined, each author has a unique and specific approach; the common features indicate a collective attitude and motivation for feeling the need to create art about the past of slavery, which mostly lies in the lack of memorials and testimonies. The multiplicity of narrative and aesthetic choices reveal the many faces of slavery and the difficulty of the topic.

Klíčová slova

Otroctví, britská černošská literatura, historický román, post-koloniální identita, diaspora

Key Words

Slavery, Black British Literature, historical novel, post-colonial identity, diaspora

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1. Introduction

“Slavery may be buried, / but it's not dead, its offspring, Racism, still breeds.”¹ This is a line taken from Fred D’Aguiar’s long poem *Bloodlines* that is concerned with the issue of slavery in the Caribbean as well as the individual search for an identity in a diasporic environment.

Slavery is a recurrent theme in the works of Caryl Philips, Fred D’Aguiar, David Dabydeen and Grace Nichols, whose works will be the centrepieces of this study. These authors are considered to be representatives of Black British Writing. The term itself is very problematic. Do we consider these authors to be of British descent or of British nationality? This is further complicated by the fact that nationality is a term defined by law which has a strict definition and concrete rules. Except for David Dabydeen, who is of Indo-Caribbean origin, the authors are of Afro-Caribbean origin, though their productive years were spent in Britain. For us to be able to analyze their works in terms of diasporic space, representation of slavery, memory, re-telling of their history and forming a cultural identity, we need to define and comprehend these terms to be able to apply them.

1.1. Diaspora and Cultural Identity

Diaspora is a term that is connected to space, time and movement. The experience of diaspora is communal; there is a sense of collectivity, of a shared experience. Avtar Brah defines *diaspora* in her seminal work *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* as “dispersion from”; therefore the term *diaspora* embodies a notion of a centre, a locus, and certain “home” from which the dispersion begins. It is always connected with the imagery of multiple journeys.² The image of journey is the very heart of the diasporic image. This journey is often represented by a *ship*. The symbolic value of the ship was ascribed later; it was the actual vehicle of slavery as such. Paul Gilroy in his work *Black Atlantic* concentrates on the symbol of the ship and its role in the Caribbean diaspora and cultural identity.³ The Caribbean identity has been formed by several ruptures and many of those have been constituted by slavery and that is symbolised by the *slave ship*. Gilroy uses the image of the ship to evoke the memory of the descendants of slaves in the Caribbean. The image of sailors

¹ Fred D’Aguiar, *Bloodlines* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), p. 150.

² Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 181.

³ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

can be easily manifested to symbolise the constant movement to and from some place, the crossing of borders and of always being in-between nations and territories.⁴

Defining diaspora is not that simple as each diaspora was formed under different circumstance. As Avtar Brah argues, all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous, contested spaces.⁵ Diasporas are often based on the opposition of “native” and “other”. Often, the so called native is identified in opposition to the so called other, by identifying those who do not belong. Regularly, there is a construction of a common “we” for both those who belong into the native community and those who do not. This is often problematised by establishing the relationship between the “we” and the “other” as well as establishing who actually *belongs* to the diasporic “we”. For example, in the Caribbean a great percentage of people are *creole* and have difficulty establishing where they belong. One of the key aspects of the collective “we” is transformed through what could be called *collective memory*. The identity of the imagined diasporic community can be manifested through such confluence.⁶

Diasporas can be identified as places of long-term, in many cases permanent, community formations. With such formation is connected the imagery of the trauma of separation, dislocation and migration. One concept that cannot be overlooked, though it is inherent in the concept of diaspora, is the concept of “home”. Avtar Brah applies a double perspective when discussing the topic of “home”. On the one hand, “home” can be understood in the everyday life sense, the everyday lived experience. As a “discourse of locality which symbolizes social and psychic geography of space”. It is the sense of “feeling at home”, it is a certain “homing desire”.⁷ On the other hand, “home” can be understood as a mythic place, a place of desire, a place of imagination. In this sense it has to be understood that it is a place of no return, it is a geographical place of “origin” which can be entered only geographically, the past is not there anymore.⁸

Establishing what diaspora is and how it is represented through the works of writers of Caribbean origin is slightly more complicated by the fact that we have to apply a “double diaspora” perspective to the authors discussed, who live in Britain, have Caribbean (in the case of David Dabydeen an Indo-Caribbean) origins, yet the roots of their characters, and in analogy theirs, go back to Africa. In respect to this, we need to see the formation of cultural

⁴ See further Kwesi Owusu, *Black British Culture and Society* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.446-448.

⁵ Avtar Brah, 184.

⁶ Avtar Brah, 183.

⁷ Avtar Brah, 4 – 16.

⁸ Avtar Brah, 192.

identity in this double diasporic sense and the layers it contains. In such manner, we need to imagine their identity not as a one-dimensional concept, but as constructed and contextual.

Stuart Hall makes clear that a “cultural identity” is always positioned, it is in context. Its is a production, one that is never complete, one that is always in process and one that is always constituted within representation. According to Hall, this production might very well be based on narration, the *re-telling* of the past.⁹

Usefully for the argument of this thesis Hall comments on possible approaches to identity formation. There are two basic views on cultural identity. The first is that cultural identity is a sense of “one true self”, one, shared culture which hides many other imposed identities, that people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. A sense of “oneness” is the essence of what Hall calls “Caribbeanness”. This view searches for the similarities and commonalities in the diasporic space.¹⁰

The second view on cultural identity does the very opposite and identifies the significant *differences* which constitute what the subjects in the diasporic space have become. In this sense it is a matter “becoming as well as being”. There is constant transformation from the past to the future, it is not something which already exists, yet it has its history, time and culture that transcends place. With this view in mind one can imagine the traumatic character of the colonial experience because such a view represents the exercise of cultural power and normalisation and the power to make the black people in the Caribbean feel as the “other”.¹¹

According to Hall, the idea of “otherness” fundamentally changes the conception of cultural identity; it is not a fixed term, an outside concept, it is not a transcendental spirit, it does have its histories and its past, but there is “factual” past. It is a past constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. It is made within discourse of history and culture.¹²

Thus, we can identify two directions in the formation of black Caribbean identities – the one of similarity and continuity; and the one of difference and rupture. The first one gives us continuity with the past while the latter one reminds people of the black Caribbean origin that:

What we share is precisely the experience of a profound discontinuity: the peoples dragged into slavery, transportation, colonisation, migration, came predominantly from Africa – and when that supply ended, it was temporarily refreshed by indentured labour from the Asian subcontinent.¹³

⁹ Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990), 222, 224.

¹⁰ Stuart Hall, 223.

¹¹ Stuart Hall, 224 – 225.

¹² Stuart Hall, 226.

¹³ Stuart Hall, 227.

This play of difference in cultural identity constitutes common history (of transportation, slavery, and colonisation) but it does not constitute a common *origin*.¹⁴

Hall identifies three layers, three *presences* that are a key aspect to understanding the black Caribbean cultural identity – *Presence Africaine*, *Presence Europeane* and *Presence Americaine (Terra Incognita)*.

Presence Africaine is the site of the repressed. Africa was in the everyday life even though it seemed to have been erased from memories. It lived through the customs, the languages, names and words. Africa remained the unspoken; it was the great aporia, which lies at the centre of the black Caribbean cultural identity. It is an unspeakable presence in Caribbean culture.¹⁵

Hall entitles it “Africa of the diaspora” as it was not until the late 1970s that the *Afro-Caribbean* identity became available. Jamaicans discovered themselves to be part of the black Caribbean as well as: “they discovered themselves to be the sons and daughters of slavery.”¹⁶ Its presence and its absence have enabled it to be a privileged aspect of the Caribbean identity. However, to return to Brahm, it is “a place of no return”. The original “Africa is no longer there. It too has been transformed.”¹⁷

The second one, *Presence Europeane* introduced the question of power; it belongs to the lines of force and consent, to the role of the dominant in the Caribbean culture. The *Europeane* presence has positioned the black subjects in the colonial discourse, the literatures of adventure and exploration, the romance of the exotic etc. *Presence Europeane* is about:

[...] Exclusion, imposition and expropriation [we] are often tempted to locate that power as wholly external to us – an extrinsic force, whose influence can be thrown off like the serpent sheds its skin.¹⁸

The third, *Presence Americaine*, “New World” is a place, a territory. It is a point where many cultural tributaries meet, an “empty” land in a sense where strangers from all over where world collide. It stands for the endless ways in which Caribbean people have been destinies to “migrate”. It is a symbol of migration itself. The “New World” presence – *Terra Incognita* is hence itself the beginning of diaspora, of diversity, hybridity and difference. Of what makes Afro-Caribbean people already people of diaspora.¹⁹ These three presences are constituent parts of the cultural identity of the authors debated and very often play a

¹⁴ Stuart Hall, 228.

¹⁵ Stuart Hall, 224, 230.

¹⁶ Stuart Hall, 231.

¹⁷ Stuart Hall, 231.

¹⁸ Stuart Hall, 233.

¹⁹ Stuart Hall, 234 - 235.

significant role in the works considered. Hall's definitions of the presences indicate the multiplicity and complexity of the Black British literature.

1.2. Memory

In terms of literary memory we can see memory as a reconstruction that is always problematic and incomplete because it recollects what no longer exists. Literature as such not only challenges social dimensions of memory (by preserving cultural meaning, commenting or dispersing it), it also must be considered a special form of cultural memory: “with its very own forms and strategies of observation and writing from older memories and their diverse representations.”²⁰

Eckstein uses the findings of Aleida Assmann in his study. She discovered the following:

It is apparent [...] that the arts turn towards memory precisely in the moment when society is in danger of losing it or tries to get rid of it. [...] Today, it is mainly the arts that have discovered the crisis of memory as their particular theme and try to come up with new forms in which the dynamics of cultural memory and forgetting manifests themselves.”²¹

Such an opinion can be easily applied to the situation in the black Caribbean and the recall of the slave trade which has emerged in Anglophone literatures in the 20th century.

The importance of *re-telling* the histories of Africa and the role of the past in the formation of cultural identity in the black Caribbean has been established before. That explains the importance of the role of memory in the search for cultural identity. Paul Gilroy states that:

That rapport with death emerges continually in the literature and expressive cultures of the black Atlantic. It is integral [...] to the narratives of loss, exile, and journeying which [...] serve a mnemonic function: directing the consciousness of the group back to significant, nodal points in its common history and social memory.²²

²⁰ Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*. (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1999) quoted in Lars Eckstein, *Cross-Cultures – Readings in the Post-Colonial Literatures in English, Volume 84: Re-Membering the Black Atlantic: On the Poetics and Politics of Literary Memory* (2006), ix.

²¹ Lars Eckstein, x.

²² Paul Gilroy quoted in Lars Eckstein, xi.

This quote indicates a link between the creative force of death and memory. While the creativity is fuelled by the obsession with death, memory is the material from which is created. Remembering the past of slavery is the outcome of the creative force of death.

What further complicates memory in the case of the Caribbean, Africa and the slave trade, is the problem of memorialising it adequately, to comprehend the difficulty of its legacy and representation.²³ The American novelist Toni Morrison also addresses the issue of memory in her novels and she has stated the following on the matter: “There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there’s a necessity for remembering it in a manner that can be digested, in a manner in which memory is not destructive.”²⁴ As we will see in chapter 2, in which her novel *Beloved* is used for comparison with Fred D’Aguiar’s *The Longest Memory*, such an attempt does not always become successful and remembering slavery and carrying its memory proves to be destructive rather than not.

Morrison’s continual search for a constructive and non-damaging way for remembering slavery comes from a lack of, at least from her point of view in the United States, a memorial which would carry a torch, a testimony that would be told. She addressed the issue of so few memorial sites in the US during an interview, saying:

There is no place you or I can go, to think about, or not think about, to summon the presence of, or recollect the absences of slaves; nothing that reminds us of the ones who made the journey and of those who did not make it. There is no suitable memorial or plaque or wreath or wall or park or skyscraper lobby. There is no 300-foot tower. There’s no small bench by the road. There is not even a tree scored, an initial I can visit, or you can visit in Charleston or Savannah or New York or Providence, or better still on the banks of the Mississippi.²⁵

There is certain amnesia, in Britain as well as the United States about this past, and the novels of slavery work as a counter-remembrance. Douglass’ autobiography for example is set against the official amnesia about his presence, in analogy his memory.²⁶

Two phenomena that should be distinguished are history and memory. Theorist Petchovsky highlights their interface by saying: “Memory is an essential attribute of the human psyche and is therefore more personal than historical or material knowledge. History

²³ Alan Rice, *Creating Memorials Building Identities, The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic* (Liverpool:, Liverpool University Press, 2010), 1.

²⁴ Quoted in *Creating Memorials Building Identities*, 1.

²⁵ Quoted in *Creating Memorials Building Identities*, 7.

²⁶ *Creating Memorials, Building Identities*, 11.

alone cannot enrich memory, because it is systematic.”²⁷ In other words, memory is essential to make history more human and to reflect it more accurately, however, history is set, and memory is not.

I would like to return briefly to the importance of memory and memorialisation of the slave trade, whether it is connected with the Caribbean, Britain or America, because all these countries are linked by their shared history in the transatlantic slave trade, and how their legacies continue to have resonance. I believe what leads to a desperation for a memorial is a constant dream of a return to “Mother Africa”.²⁸ The concept of a memorial is further complicated by its scopophilic character, addressed by David Dabydeen in *Turner*. He condemns visual representation for this very reason, slavery should not be gazed at because such a traumatic and horror past cannot be associated with pleasure.

The matter of “Mother Africa” is also a very difficult one, because the Africa that the slaves were taken from does not exist anymore. Exactly as a character called Mintah in *Feeding the Ghosts* by D’Aguiar comments: “But even Africa is not Africa anymore.”²⁹ The theorist Dionne Brand addressed the phenomenon of the “Door of No Return”, which makes the final point from Africa, the following:

There are no maps to the Door of No Return. [...] But to the Door of No Return which is illuminated in the consciousness of black in the diaspora there are no maps. This door is not mere physicality. It is a spiritual location. It is perhaps a psychic destination- since leaving was never voluntary, return was, and still may be, an intention, however deeply buried. There is as it says no way in; no return.³⁰

However, we need to be careful about the construct of “Mother Africa”, because it seems lately that while the interest in roots of identities of African Americans and others is well-meant, the search for ancestry begins to appear as a fabricated commodity for a consumer audience, it promotes an essentialist idea of an almost mythic and one-dimensional Mother Africa.³¹ Another author discussed in this thesis, Caryl Phillips, also commented on the appropriation of African space by western-educated black tourists: “People of the diaspora who expect the continent to solve whatever psychological problems they possess.”³²

²⁷ Quoted in *Creating Memorials Building Identities*, 13.

²⁸ *Creating Memorials Building Identities*, 5.

²⁹ Fred D’Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts* (London: Vintage, 1998), 207.

³⁰ *Creating Memorials Building Identities*, 2.

³¹ *Creating Memorials Building Identities*, 5.

³² *Creating Memorials Building Identities*, 3.

1.3. Slavery in the Caribbean

Slavery in any part of the world was usually connected to goods and products the colonising country could obtain. In the Caribbean it was largely sugar cane plantations. The transformation this economy created was immense. One of the first islands that experienced an enormous dramatic change was Barbados. But not long after all the islands experienced a dramatic change.³³

Taking a look at history and some statistics, by the year 1645 there were approximately 5 680 slaves in the islands. Once tobacco was added to the primary goods, sugar and tobacco resulted in the number of 37 000 slaves by the year 1680. Society was of course dominated by the plantation owners.³⁴

A moment in history that really opened the Caribbean to the English settlers was Cromwell's decision in 1655 to seize Santo Domingo from the Spanish. During this fight, the English did not quite manage to obtain Santo Domingo, but they began to settle in Jamaica.³⁵ One of the reasons why the topic of slavery in the Caribbean has not been largely discussed in the past is because Britain is usually associated with slave emancipation and the ending of slavery, but not many British historians, politicians, and the British society in general, wanted to admit that they were the ones who transported thousands of Africans into the Caribbean in the slave trade.³⁶ By the end of the 17th century there were more than half a million slaves in the Caribbean from Africa. By the 1740s there were in average 100 slaves on an estate, despite the desire to build even larger plantations, smaller units proved to be more practical. That number of slaves doubled in the next 30 years.³⁷

To examine the plantation organisation and the organisation of labour itself, it was one of the most efficient systems ever imagined. There was a total absence of any sexual difference, whether the labour was connected with planting, cultivation, labouring or harvesting of crops, all men and women, at all ages in life, had to take part in labour. Women did almost the same physical labour as men in this time. From small children to people of age, everybody had an assigned task. Old men and women took care of the infants and tended to the cattle. Once a child reached the age of eight he or she started with simple weeding tasks and gradually obtained more work as they grew. In this way, the planters were guaranteed a high level of

³³ Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (USA: Oxford University Press), p.64.

³⁴ Herbert S. Klein, 69 – 70.

³⁵ Herbert S. Klein, 71.

³⁶ Abigail Ward, *Caryl Philips, David Dabydeen and Fred D'Aguiar, Representations of Slavery* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 1- 4.

³⁷ Herbert S. Klein, 71 – 74.

economically active population in relation to the population on the islands altogether. Of course, this was not an ideal state. There was heavy supervision, corporal punishments and this may have been more important or may have had larger effect than an opportunity of extra food or clothing.³⁸

Such absence of sexual difference did not only affect the labour on the plantations, but also the prices and the rents planters were willing to pay for a slave. Slave prices of unskilled but healthy male and female slaves were equal until early adulthood, but male fieldhand price was approximately 10 to 20 percent higher than female prices. This distinction, however, has declined. The state of health was the dominant factor of the price.³⁹

This historical outline is to be relied on when the literary works concerned in this study are being discussed, in order to visualise the environment the stories are narrated in and have a factual ground to fully understand the situations depicted, discussed or to be able to fill in the gaps that might not be explicitly mentioned, however lie in between the lines of the life and time of slavery in the Caribbean.

³⁸ Herbert S. Klein, 78 – 80.

³⁹ Herbert S. Klein, 83.

2. Fred D'Aguiar

The attitude and choices of narrative strategies and also the position from which Fred D'Aguiar addresses the issues of diaspora and slavery past are predetermined by his own background.

Fred D'Aguiar was born in London in 1960, however, he was raised in Guyana and returned to the United Kingdom by the time he was twelve years old. He studied African and Caribbean Studies at the University of Kent and nowadays resides in the United States of America where he is Professor of English and Professor of Africana Studies at Virginia Tech State University. He began his literary career by publishing poems in the UK and his first collection was published in 1985 and it was called *Mama Dot*. It was followed by *Airy Hall* (1989), *British Subjects* (1993) and *Continental Shelf* (2009). He also wrote long poems *Bill of Rights* (1998) and *Bloodlines* (2000). D'Aguiar addressed his youth in Guyana and Britain of the late twentieth century in his poems. *The Longest Memory* was his first novel published in 1994. It was followed by *Dear Future* in 1994 and *Feeding the Ghosts* in 1997.

In his novels and poems D'Aguiar is primarily interested in the memory of slavery, moreover with the question of how we are to remember slavery and how the experience can be grasped in and through narration nearly two hundred years after slavery's abolition. D'Aguiar also addresses the legacy of belonging; nevertheless, he rejects the idea of fixed "borders" of identity in favour of investigating different areas of identification and their overlaps.⁴⁰

2.1. The Longest Memory

The Longest Memory is concerned with an American plantation which makes it an exception from the other books this thesis is concerned with, whose plot is based in the Caribbean or Britain. Nevertheless, its use of narrative strategies and dealing with remembering the past of slavery makes the novel a great example of a type of strategy an author can adopt.

What is "the longest memory" in the title of the novel? According to a critic Abigail Ward "the longest memory" is the one of slavery and the novel is about the vagaries of memory, not

⁴⁰ Abigail Ward, p. 20 – 24.

a singular imagined slave narrative per se, we have the portrayal of the many voices of slavery, of the different “memories”, a collection of memories we could say.⁴¹

In her reading of the novel, Ward works with two concepts of Derrida's terms, and those are *mneme* which stands for memory itself and *hypomensis* which is the act of remembering.⁴² They differentiate between the memory of slavery as such, *mneme*, and the element of remembering, re-awakening, re-narrating this past, *hypomensis*. The novel is concerned with both as well as representing a space between the two movements, as they are closely connected. D'Aguiar's main concern is with the literary remembrance of slavery and its contexts. He views writing as an act of memorialisation. He does not attempt to sound “historical” per se nor does he attempt to write a story that would be a memory of a moment of slavery, but an imagined remembering of the slave past, with many of its voices and generations.

D'Aguiar addressed the issue of slavery several times during his writing, he also commented on the slave past and its memory in *Last Essay*:

Each generation inherits an anxiety about slavery, but the more problematic the present, the higher the anxiety and the more urgent their need to attend to the past. What the anxiety says is quite simple that the past is our only hope for getting through this present. So we return to memory, imagined and real, fanciful and mythical, psychological and genetic.⁴³

D'Aguiar was aware of society's necessity to remember slavery. In his opinion, memory is important to help get over a past trauma, to articulate it in order to define it and live with it. However, just as for Whitechapel, in order to survive on a day-to-day basis, there is a necessity to forget. Nevertheless, Fred D'Aguiar is conscious of the fact that the past of slavery itself is not available to him, as well as to his readers. It is not something we can return to. Therefore, he explores the means of how to attempt to remember the past of slavery.⁴⁴

The opening and closing chapters in the novel are entitled *Remembering* and *Forgetting*. Are they to be viewed as simple opposites? Not particularly, because “remembering” slavery, despite the importance, is not easily conducted, the act of remembering can appear to only re-awake past trauma, as Whitechapel states at the end of the novel: “Memory is pain trying to resurrect itself.”⁴⁵ And yet, memory, and the pain it brings, remains vital in the novel.

⁴¹ Abigail Ward, p. 137 – 140.

⁴² Abigail Ward, p. 134.

⁴³ D'Aguiar, *Last Essay*, p. 132. quoted in Ward.

⁴⁴ Abigail Ward, p. 139 – 140.

⁴⁵ Fred D'Aguiar, *The Longest Memory* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 138.

However, D'Aguiar also understands that there is only an understanding of the slave past available, no resolution: "Too much has happened to put right. I would need another life. No, several lives. Another hundred years. No, more, to unravel this knotted mess. [...] It cannot be undone, only understood."⁴⁶ The issue of trying to understand the slave past is a key aspect in *The Longest Memory*.

How are we, then, to remember and encounter the past of slavery and in respect to that, how are we to understand it? For D'Aguiar, literature seems the most appropriate medium. That does not entail that the novel should be viewed or understood as "slave narrative" as such. D'Aguiar is not interested in replicating slave registers; he uses different genres and also applies different narrative points of view. He gathers together imaginary received remembrance, which is represented by the fictional newspaper clippings from *The Virginian* and counter-remembrance of slavery. Or, as Ward concludes, by dealing with multiple forms of narration and by creating a range of voices and perspectives, D'Aguiar may indicate a critique of established history. In this manner, the official, colonial remembrance of the slave past is challenged by the accounts that are normally left out from history.⁴⁷ By remembering slavery from different viewpoints, the reader is enabled to understand the complexity of the history and also the difficulty of understanding slavery.

The problematic role of writing as documentation, and as means of empowerment, is shown in *The Longest Memory* through Lydia and Chapel. Chapel recalls a conversation between Lydia and himself:

I asked her to what use I could put reading and
Writing.

She said I was the son of slaves and it was forbidden

For a slave to know how to write and read.

I said it was a mighty waste of a good head.⁴⁸

Lydia is also the author of letters sent to *The Virginian* and in one of these letters she proposes that "Pages should carry stories about slaves told by the slaves themselves."⁴⁹ Lydia is desperate for the slave testimonies that are missing from the official history. The reason for the lack of the testimonies lies in illiteracy to a certain point, however, the matter of writing

⁴⁶ *The Longest Memory*, p. 136- 137.

⁴⁷ Abigail Ward, p. 146.

⁴⁸ *The Longest Memory*, p. 60.

⁴⁹ *The Longest Memory*, p. 116.

the slave testimonies is further complicated by the instant deprecation that the stories would be met with in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

We have two generations colliding, exemplified by Whitechapel and his son Chapel, and Mister Whitechapel and his daughter Lydia. Lydia's father is open to suggestion that there might come a day when slaves are free, but he knows it will not be possible in his time, maybe not even during her lifetime. He tells her that "By teaching little Whitechapel to read and write when he can never use it you have done him the gravest injustice."⁵⁰ The significance of writing is for the slaves to create a voice, a memory as well as a memorial. To have a representation of slavery. Nevertheless, one of the reasons for the small number of slave narratives is inability to write and the attitude the stories would have been received by publishers.

There, in a way, is no blueprint of a slave story for D'Aguiar to copy exactly because of the matter that none exist. There is no recorded chronicle of the slave past from the slave point of view. Or to be more specific, the slave autobiographies are very scarce, due to illiteracy and the fact that such stories would have been often destroyed. Slavery was kept silent as much as possible. As Mr Whitechapel comments:

You see, no one was to talk about it. And with time it sank to the bottom of everyone's minds. [...] It seemed all the people who were directly involved to whom it was important and painful were dead along with the shame, with the exception of Whitechapel.⁵¹

Whitechapel is a living memory of the slave past; he embodies the living memory of slave experience. As Whitechapel himself says: "My face says life is sour,"⁵² and "The bags under my eyes are sacks of worries, witnesses of dreams, nightmares and sleep from which a man should not be allowed to wake."⁵³ It is as if he was the recorded chronicle, he knew the before, he knows the now and has no hope for the upcoming future. He literally wears slavery on his body; it is forever engraved in his physical features. Slavery leaves a permanent scar on his body. Such connection between slavery and body and physical suffering and is common in most writing on the topic. We shall see later that indeed body language is a common feature in the works concerning the subject matter of slavery analysed in this thesis.

⁵⁰ *The Longest Memory*, p. 88.

⁵¹ *The Longest Memory*, p. 34.

⁵² *The Longest Memory*, p. 8.

⁵³ *The Longest Memory*, 3.

Whitechapel is a transcendent figure throughout this novel, he is a presence that holds the story together and is an exceptional person because of his embodiment of slavery, because of his accepting that the only freedom he is granted is death. He was:

A master of his own slavery. Slave and enslaver. Model slave. Self-governing slave. Thinks freedom is death. Thinks paradise is afterlife. Has practised death in life for years but death will not come. Has a body bereft of laughter, sleep, love, purpose. Bestower of death.⁵⁴

What this quote also displays is that slavery is also in the mind. Whitechapel has become his own master because he was able to accept the role of the victim. Whitechapel's character shows the self annihilation, suffering and eternal subjection of slavery. He is an excellent example of the obsession with death that Gilroy talks about. This narrative includes all that Gilroy mentions in his study, the exile on the plantation in America, the loss of Whitechapel's son, and the weight of the social memory that Whitechapel carries, leads him to turn to death as a solution, as a freedom.

Whitechapel is the central consciousness of the novel, he is the memory, he carries its scarring on his body and soul, and yet he is the one who does not want to remember:

I don't want to remember. Memory hurts. [...] Memory rises to the skin then I can't be touched. I hurt all over, my bones ache, my teeth loosen in their gums, my nose bleeds. Don't make me remember. I forget as hard as I can.⁵⁵

It is the impacts that slavery made on his body and life that are the constant memory present in this story, even if he himself wants to erase the memory and forget. The problem lies in Whitechapel's acceptance of the slave mentality. His body is scarred, it hurts. Yet, his mind accepts the state he is in and does not want to go through the process of remembering because it does not want to go through the pain of remembering again. That, however, is what is asked for by the official discourse, to forget and accept. Slavery, though, needs to be remembered, not forgotten. People have tried to forget, just like Whitechapel wants to forget. But the only way to deal with the past of slavery is through pain. And only then, once slavery is remembered appropriately and in its entirety, the past is surpassed.

If we were to apply Stuart Hall's terminology of *presence*, we clearly have *Presence Americaine* in the sense of a territory where the story is taking place. *The Presence Africaine* is present in the slaves' past, however, as well as D'Aguiar; it is not always available to them. This is demonstrated by Whitechapel and his son. Chapel states that:

⁵⁴ *The Longest Memory*, 27.

⁵⁵ *The Longest Memory*, 2.

I told him I had a dream about Africa. [...] I fly through the air and land in a place I know is Africa. The first thing I do is kiss the ground. I get down on all fours and kiss the soil or sand which feels like something I could eat and not a get a belly ache. [...] I know I am where I belong.⁵⁶

While Chapel might have had a sense of belonging, and Africa might have run through his blood, he had never visited the place. That is the reason why Whitechapel reacted with “You dream about something you don’t know.”⁵⁷ And Chapel recalls that “He said Africa was his past and not ours.”⁵⁸

Fred D’Aguiar uses a very specific narrative strategy in this novel. He does not attempt to write a slave narrative or a colonial recording, he combines many voices and pasts and memories of slavery and uses Africa as an undertone and a combining aspect the slaves share, even if it is not available to all of them, it is something to return to, something to remember, despite how hard you try to forget.

2.2. *The Longest Memory* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*

This thesis is first and foremost concerned with British authors, however, the past of slavery is so deeply connected with the United States of America, an overlap between British and American authors cannot be altogether avoided. *The Longest Memory* is the only novel of the authors of a Caribbean descent which is concerned with an American plantation; therefore, an American point of view about slavery might contrast well and enhance the experience of slavery in the US.

Toni Morrison is an American novelist who has dealt with the issues of slavery, memory, African-American identity in the US during slavery and after its abolishment in 1865 in the entire United States.

Morrison’s novel *Beloved* is probably her best known work. Despite the fact that she does not necessarily place the plots of her novels on the waves of the Atlantic Ocean and Africa is not as obviously present as it is in the other novels discussed in this thesis, she dedicates this novel to the “sixty million and more” who died during the slave trade, who never lived to see

⁵⁶ *The Longest Memory*, p. 123.

⁵⁷ *The Longest Memory*, p. 125.

⁵⁸ *The Longest Memory*, p. 125.

America and experience slavery.⁵⁹ Going back to the quote in the introductory chapter, Morrison wants to discover a way of remembering this past as a memorial:

There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there's a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. The act of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember.⁶⁰

In other words, Morrison argues that overcoming the trauma of slavery entails remembering rather than forgetting, as also seems to be the argument underlying *The Longest Memory*. In contemporary American culture the institution of slavery has been largely forgotten. But Morrison tries to show that the past never leaves.⁶¹

As far as her description of slavery is concerned, in comparison with D'Aguiar's, there are more differences than similarities. D'Aguiar's narrative and description of the plantation might appear more pleasant at first sight, the harsh reality is not as explicit from page one, though it is to be expected. Despite the plantation being entitled *Sweet Home*, the reality of life was nothing but sweet, Sethe was raped by the overseer and decided to escape while she was still pregnant, so that her children would not have to live the same way. The trauma she encountered scarred her both literally and symbolically. Unlike in D'Aguiar, the readers actually get to see the slaves "free", although as we can see the past of slavery haunts them till their very death. Just as Paul D observes:

Very few had died in bed, like Baby Suggs, and none that he knew of, including Baby, had lived a liveable life. Even the educated coloured: the long-school people, the doctors, the teachers, the paper-writers and businessmen had a hard row to hoe. In addition to having to use their heads to get ahead, they had the weight of the whole race sitting there. You needed two heads for that. White people believed that whatever the manner, under every dark skin was jungle. Swift unnavigable water, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood. In a way, he thought, they were right. The more coloured people spent their strength trying to convince them how gentle they were, how clever and loving, how human, the more they used themselves up to persuade whites of something Negroes believed could not be questioned, the deeper and more tangled the jungle grew inside. But it wasn't the jungle blacks

⁵⁹ Heerak Christian Kim, *Toni Morrison's Beloved as African-American Scripture & Other Articles on History and Canon* (New Jersey: Hermit Kingdom Press, 2006), 35.

⁶⁰ Quoted in *Creating Memorials Building Identities*, 1.

⁶¹ Faye Kegley, *Remembering Slavery Through Toni Morrison's 'Beloved'*, (2012) 4.

brought with to this place from the other (liveable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than even they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own.⁶²

Morrison shows the difficulty of life even after the abolition of slavery and the ongoing racism that is its undeniable legacy. Slavery was deeply rooted not only in the history of the African Americans, but also in the history of the white Americans. Morrison wants to show how the two histories combined.

Toni Morrison's treatment of memory and memorialisation is very specific. If we were to speak generally, memories in her work have great scarring potential, symbolical as well as literal, which can also be said about Fred D'Aguiar. She seems uncertain of how to balance remembering and reflecting in a healthy non-damaging way⁶³, because for Toni Morrison memory is an unavoidable part of the human condition⁶⁴. One of the reasons Morrison's treatment of memory is damaging is because she concerns her novels with those aspects in history that have been covered over for decades. Or as For Morrison, black history is not about Conrad's unspeaking but rather a complete denial of the right to tell her "ghostly tale".⁶⁵ This is also a theme in Fred D'Aguiar's work. He also concentrated on the official discourse and what it represented and the empowerment that writing provides; writing that was not accessible to the slaves. Toni Morrison appears to be more radical in her argument, as it is more about the unofficial history that re-appears as a ghost presence and it gains power by destruction.

The main character in *Beloved*, Sethe, has an insatiable obsession with her memories and the novel illustrates how dangerous and debilitating faculty of human consciousness memory can be.⁶⁶ Her attitude to memory is different, it is not perceived as a means of overcoming trauma, but as an instrument of torment. In the novel, Sethe will forever carry a tree of scars on her back in memory of the nightmare life as a slave. The skin around Seethe's tree of

⁶² *Beloved*, 198-199.

⁶³ Cathy Ceagan, "Memory in Toni Morrison's 'Beloved', 'Jazz' and 'Paradise'", June 2013, February 15 2010, <<http://cathygeagan.wordpress.com/2010/02/15/memory-in-toni-morrison-beloved-jazz-and-paradise/>>

⁶⁴ Stephen Conway, *Memory in Beloved* (1995).

⁶⁵ Cathy Ceagan

⁶⁶ *Memory in Beloved*

scars is numb which can signal her attempt to dissociate herself from her previous life.⁶⁷ In Sethe's tree of scars can be seen the greatest resemblance between Morrison and D'Aguiar, both of their characters' bodies become the manifestation of their memory, Whitechapel's face becomes the chronicle of his memories and Sethe's scars are her reminder of her past. For writers of slavery, the body and its language appear to be a great tool, the slave's body is his history, and a slave had no opportunity to write his story to be passed on, to be remembered or to record what he has encountered.

It seems a rather unsuccessful effort because Sethe is plagued by memories and they become manifested in the title character of the novel, *Beloved*. The character of *Beloved* becomes a physical manifestation of these memories and Sethe endures the tyranny of the self-imposed prison of memory.⁶⁸ Similarly, in David Dabydeen's *Turner*, we have a figure of a still-born child who becomes the ghost presence of the poem, a reminder that cannot be avoided; the child is the materialisation of the trauma. And *Beloved* is an indictment that the past has to be openly dealt with now that is physically materialised. Sethe's identity and personality is very complicated and shaped and consulted by all that she has experienced, but she becomes nearly consumed by her memory.⁶⁹

The ever-present character of *Beloved* demonstrates how persisting memories can be, always lurking in places such as the house 124 or Sweet Home to remind Sethe that the punishment she suffers is self-inflicted and self-perpetuating.⁷⁰ Just as Whitechapel's acceptance of slave mentality that seems to perpetuate his being and how powerful the past is. Sethe is illustrative of the totalising power of the past. However, without Sethe and her presence, *Beloved* ultimately loses her power and is left "crouching in a dark, dark place, forgetting to smile"⁷¹.

While Sethe's tree of scars is a visible manifestation of memories, Paul D's scars are internal and he has to fight his battles alone, he has none of the physical markings of trauma for someone to kiss better like he kisses Sethe's scars better.⁷² He has to conquer his repression and his tendency to keep his painful remembering "where it belonged: in a tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut."⁷³ There is no way to think that Paul D's tin of heart is a constructive means of coping with the past. Denial, for Morrison, is not an option, she does not want to draw a veil over the horrors of

⁶⁷ Cathy Geagan

⁶⁸ *Memory in Beloved*

⁶⁹ Cathy Geagan

⁷⁰ *Memory in Beloved*

⁷¹ Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: New American Library, 1989), 252.

⁷² Cathy Geagan

⁷³ *Beloved*, 72.

the past, and yet she wants to avoid an obsession with the past that will make the future predetermined.⁷⁴

A character in the novel that never let her past control her present is Ella, or Baby Suggs as she is called in the novel: “Ella didn’t like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present [...] Daily life took as much as she had. The future was sunset; the past something to leave behind [...] every day was a test and a trial.”⁷⁵ We can see that she dealt with life on a day-to-day basis, as a former slave she knew future was uncertain and the past could not be altered or changed. She appears to be the only character with a healthy non-consuming or damaging attitude to memory and the past. Although she manages to reach this state of mind but not remembering, similarly to Whitechapel, who desperately wants to forget. But the authors seem to argue against ignoring the past, they argue for the importance of memory and remembering. The past still haunts the characters, because they attempted to forget, but they need to suffer through the pain so that the pain and the past can be laid to rest and not haunt them.

The reader is left with a sense that some experiences should be altogether forgotten or ignored, because their memory is greatly damaging. “Remembering seemed unwise.”⁷⁶ Toni Morrison uses the recounting of painful memories and the horrific consequences of a life in denial of them to show the reading public that the past cannot be abused, that we cannot simply enter into a different stage in life without a shadow of the previous ones.⁷⁷

2.3. Feeding the Ghosts

Toni Morrison described the black history as a “ghostly tale” she felt the need to remember and tell. Ghostly tales and presences seem to be frequent tropes in novels concerned with slavery. In *Feeding the Ghosts*, we have the trope present in a ghost ship, a ghost book, and the ghost of the history it depicts.

Feeding the Ghosts deals with and examines the traumatic tale of the slave ship *Zong*, for D’Aguiar a true “ghost ship” of mythic proportions.⁷⁸ The real ship *Zong* set sail on September 6th 1781 and its captain was Luke Collingwood. As was common practice, the crew took on board more slaves than there was room for and, as a result of such behaviour, disease and malnutrition was ever present and by November 29th claimed approximately lives

⁷⁴ Cathy Geagan

⁷⁵ *Beloved*, 256.

⁷⁶ *Beloved*, 274.

⁷⁷ Cathy Geagan

⁷⁸ Abigail Ward, 155.

of sixty African slaves and seven lives of the crewmen. This is supposed to be the date that Luke Colingwood decided that all the remaining sick should be thrown overboard,⁷⁹ an event depicted by William Turner in his painting “The Slave Ship”, formally known as “Slave Ship – Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and the Dying – Typhoon Coming On.”⁸⁰ The event of the *Zong* did not only have great impact in the process of abolition, it has also inspired painters such as Turner, writers like D’Aguiar and David Dabydeen in his poem *Turner*; furthermore, it inspired many postcolonial critics, such as Paul Gilroy, who analyses not only the event but also the historical circumstances and the painting and its fate.

Despite the fact that the novel is built on a real historical event and the novel is undoubtedly a historical novel, it is not to be confused with a chronicle of the event. D’Aguiar does not intend to limit his novel by conforming to historical accuracy. Though the tale is inspired by historical records and based facts, his alteration of the captain’s surname from Collingwood to Cunningham is an illustration of his refusal to adhere to historical records and facts.⁸¹ He sees the importance of the *Zong* for the future treatment of slaves. However, it is important to remember and state that the case was not concerned with the throwing of slaves overboard, but with the number of slaves, whether the captain had right to jettison his property, it was not a murder case. That is not meant to dismantle its importance; the case became notorious in the 19th century and became a significant part in the cause of abolition.⁸²

Examining D’Aguiar’s work, it seems as if he felt a moral obligation, a necessity to create art from the past of slavery and determine its effects on people’s identity and history, despite how aesthetically troubling the writing is. His desire to create about the past of slavery and its memory is to expose slavery’s continuing legacies into the 20th century; for D’ Aguiar this would particularly mean the perpetual evolution of racism.⁸³

Although the Atlantic Ocean plays a great role in all the works considered,⁸⁴ for obvious reasons, D’Aguiar explicitly links the Atlantic with slavery declaring “The sea is slavery. [...] Sea receives a body as if that body has come to rest on a cushion, one that gives way to the body’s weight and folds around it like an envelope. Over three days 131 such bodies, no,

⁷⁹ “Slave Ship Zong”, June 2013, <<http://www.hullwebs.co.uk/content/j-georgians/people/william-wilberforce/slaveship-zong.htm>>

⁸⁰ “Slave Ship”, June 2013, <<http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/slave-ship-slavers-throwing-overboard-the-dead-and-dying-typhoon-coming-on-31102>>

⁸¹ Abigail Ward, 156.

⁸² Abigail Ward, 155-156.

⁸³ Abigail Ward, 154-155.

⁸⁴ For more on the Atlantic space as a communication space for blacks see *Black Atlantic* by Gilroy.

132, are flung at this sea.”⁸⁵ Their entire identity and memory was swallowed whole by the sea:

Sea does not stop at death. Salt wants to consume every morsel of those bodies until the sea becomes them, becomes their memory. [...] Those bodies have their life written on salt water. The sea current turns pages of memory. [...] The sea therefore becomes their home.⁸⁶

The moment the slaves were thrown overboard they entered into history; however, their own personal memory is washed by the sea. Memory is consumed by history, memory indeed feeds history. D’Aguiar uses the sea as a symbol for the official history, the history that is guilty of concealing the past of slavery – historical amnesia in the case of involvement of Britain in slave trade and slavery. D’Aguiar seems to suggest that history is a type or form of enslavement. By excluding the voice of slaves from historical records, Britain’s received historical remembrance of this particular part of the past ensures that the slaves retain a ghostly presence that in the novel is represented by Mintah.⁸⁷ Building on D’Aguiar’s claim that “the sea...heals over each body without the evidence of a scar” is the notion that, despite Britain’s emphasis on its prominence in slavery’s abolition, the ship *Zong* can also function as a symbol of concealment of Britain’s role in the early stages of the transatlantic slave trade.⁸⁸ Official history focuses mainly on Britain's involvement in abolition of slavery, however, their involvement in the slave trade and slavery in the Caribbean is generally overlooked. In *Feeding the Ghosts* D’Aguiar writes against the “ghost” of the British past, the silenced slave-trading. His imaginative recounting of the slave ship *Zong* works against this historical ignorance.⁸⁹

If we were to look at narrative strategies and aesthetic choice D’Aguiar makes in this novel, there is a great difference between *The Longest Memory* and *Feeding the Ghosts*. In *The Longest Memory* the story evolved around a life on a plantation, *Feeding the Ghosts* concerns itself with a topic a writer has very little access to, the middle passage. What the two novels have in common is that its protagonists stand out in some way, Whitechapel’s longevity and devotion was remarkable, Mintah is as well characterised against the rest of the slaves: “She was not like other slaves.”⁹⁰ What the two have in common as well is a

⁸⁵ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 3.

⁸⁶ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 4.

⁸⁷ Abigail Ward, 153.

⁸⁸ Abigail Ward, 156.

⁸⁹ Abigail Ward, 158.

⁹⁰ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 31.

character that stands out from the side of enslavers. Like Chapel found a companion in Lydia, for Mintah, the cook's assistant Simon becomes a protector.

A significant aesthetic choice common in both novels, as well as in Morrison, is body language and its significance. In *Feeding the Ghost* there are several instances of such narrative strategy: "A face doesn't lie about things like death"⁹¹ or "Eyes in pain"⁹² or when Mintah and Kelsal come face to face "His name burst out of her eyes and ears and nose and mouth. Her pores sweated his name."⁹³ Again, the body becomes the tool of expressing and recording memories and emotions. The scars act as means of engrafted pain of slavery, as reminders of the unrecorded past.

As was already stated, this novel is specific in its addressing the middle passage, the Caribbean in the novel is present towards the end with Mintah's later life as a free woman. The ship has a life of its own it is a powerful symbol, investigated especially by Gilroy, the ship as the trope of excellence that comes to embody diaspora and the trafficking and communication of discourses and cultures, all the presences it embodies and it is a place where, paradoxically, both the slaves and the sailors enter a similar diaspora space, where both parties can say "We are on water far from home."⁹⁴ Their feelings are also in the novel expressed with a poem/song

We have been on water forever
It seems we are all alone
We are not and water isn't home,
Can never be home; not now or ever.⁹⁵

The slaves have been uprooted from Africa, their home, the place where their identity was created and ancestral. Now, they will enter the place of in-between, away from home that cannot return to, and a place that will never become their home. They will need to create a new "we". They have sailed through the Door of No Return.

The difference in their experience of course is the fact, that the sailors have the possibility to return to the physical location of their home, while the slaves have no certainty whatsoever. However, their feelings about being on the ship are fairly alike. The slaves' first diaspora experience is described as

The voice above deck knew Africa and how this sea was nowhere and their destination was not a beginning but an end without ending. That if the sea came

⁹¹ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 22.

⁹² *Feeding the Ghosts*, 23.

⁹³ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 38.

⁹⁴ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 114.

⁹⁵ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 114.

to an end and another land suggested itself to them they would be lost forever, but not dead, lost but never to be found.⁹⁶

The sailors were not treated as horribly as the slaves and were not taken from their homes by force and could return to their homeland, nevertheless their experience of the long sailing is similar:

Each of them conjured up a picture of home, images they had tried over the weeks to bury inside since all they had felt was misery when they'd dug them up. Now they wish they could cherish them again.⁹⁷

Mental images of home is all the people have, however, a physical home cannot be reached. They try to reach peace by imagining home, but their identity is too uprooted by the sea that they need to create a new identity, just as Hall says. They need to create a new identity for the new context they find themselves in, they cannot rely on roots.

Both parties are in the stage of being in-between because "Water promised nothing. A life on water was no life to live, just an *in-between life* (italics mine), a suspended life, a life in abeyance, until land presented itself and enabled that life to resume."⁹⁸ The difference is that the slaves are destined to stay in the place of in-between forever; they had no life to resume; life as they knew it was lost. Even if they had a possibility to return to Africa, it would not be their home anymore. Mintah writes in her narrative the following observation about Africa as her home. "If it was a sound then it would not be Africa exactly, but even Africa is not Africa exactly. [...] To Africa? [...] But the sea between me and Africa would always seem too wide to cross."⁹⁹

Who are the ghosts in the title? Are the slaves who were thrown overboard denied a quiet grave the only ghosts in the story? D'Aguiar seems to suggest that slaves like Mintah who "by rights should have been killed", yet who escaped death and are forever followed by dreams are ghosts held by the force and the horror of their memories. Mintah is frequently described as a ghost in the novel and her diary is considered a "ghost book". What D'Aguiar could possibly be suggesting is the ghost of the entire history, the legacy of the ship that haunts people until this day, him included. The absence of slave testimonies or narratives about this part of history ensure that the slaves remain, like Mintah, a ghostly presence forever in between.¹⁰⁰ Yet this state of in-betweenness, the troubled liminal existence, which is unofficial and unsanctioned, is the very source of their force. Their presence that should

⁹⁶ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 27.

⁹⁷ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 93.

⁹⁸ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 61.

⁹⁹ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 207-208.

¹⁰⁰ Abigail Ward, 159.

not exist, troubles official history, official accounts of rooted identity, of given homes and form of existence. Their presence is fluid like the waters of the sea they inhabit.

Writing *Feeding the Ghosts* appears to be D'Aguiar's attempt to tell the story so that it can be "laid to rest". The problem is the novel proves that this is an unrealistic aim, the problem of remembering slavery and representing in an appropriate aesthetic form preoccupies the novel and the conclusion appears to be that the ghost of the story is still on the high seas along with the *Zong*.

"I am Mintah. I was thrown into the sea and the god of wood held out his hand to me and I took it and climbed out of the sea."¹⁰¹ This is the introduction of Mintah's first person narrative in the story, a character that is undoubtedly central to the novel. Her status in the court case of a ghost unfortunately renders her unreal or unbelievable.¹⁰² She is a perfect example of a character who resides in-between places, even as a free woman she cannot find peace "I remain between my life that is over and my life to come. The sea keeps me *between* my life. Time runs on the spot neither backwards nor forwards."¹⁰³ She has completely dissociated herself with the Mintah who climbed back on the boards of the *Zong*; that Mintah died at sea.

My body already belongs to the sea. [...] They have made me a stranger in my body. My name does not match my body anymore. Where is Mintah? She is somewhere at sea. [...] Who is Mintah without her body? She is at sea. She is landless. I am at sea. I have no land. My body is not mine. My name is without a home.¹⁰⁴

Her dissociation from her body is expressed earlier in her narrative when she states that "I don't think Mintah, that's me. I think that girl is Mintah."¹⁰⁵ And "The girl that is Mintah, who is me and not me."¹⁰⁶ She uses this dissociation as a coping strategy with the trauma she endeavoured; she essentially becomes a ghost of herself. She becomes a ghost of the past. Just as *Beloved* was a ghost, a materialised past. There is a tension between the images of bodily and physical scarring with the dissociation and ghostly presence in both *Beloved* and Fred D'Aguiar's work. It appears that despite the physical evidence of slavery, not being

¹⁰¹ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 134.

¹⁰² Abigail Ward, 160.

¹⁰³ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 199.

¹⁰⁴ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 200-201.

¹⁰⁵ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 183.

¹⁰⁶ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 184.

dealt with has left the past of slavery waiting to re-appear and present itself. It seeks a remembrance, a closure.

Writing her books is part of Mintah's attempt to ease her guilt of having survived the middle passage as well as a coping strategy to deal with the memories, she views it as a release: "So I forget on paper."¹⁰⁷ Obviously for Mintah, remembering and articulating, narrating her past, furthermore even writing, is a way of resolving the trauma. She seems desperate for a memorial rather than any remembrance, desperate for something she can create and leave behind. Unfortunately, her book is dismissed as "ghost-book" and therefore the testimony remains unheard, which leaves Mintah unable to forget, to jettison what she had seen on the ship behind.¹⁰⁸

Mintah opts for counter-remembrance by carving the 131 wooden figures in memory of those thrown overboard, the figures act as a form of remembering, it is a repeated monument to the memory of the past, rather than a flash of memory. Mintah's desperation to forget the past of the *Zong* is mirrored in her carvings, however they fail to arrest the pain for her to let go.¹⁰⁹ What this phenomenon of the novel may represent is the aesthetical difficulty of how to represent the past of slavery; it proves difficult for D'Aguiar as well as Mintah, who is trying to represent an event which is un-representable. The un-representable nature of the figures is also manifested through the unease the figures carry with them: "The shape of each piece is pulled from the sea of my mind and has been shaped by water, with water's contours. People say they see a figure of some kind, man, woman or child reaching up out of depths. [...] They cannot keep such a shape in their homes. Such shapes do not quench a thirst. They unsettle a stomach. Fill the eyes with unease."¹¹⁰ The idea of slavery as a phenomenon, a general historical fact, as opposed to the millions of individual faces and fates which inhabited that space, gave it the specific shape.

Feeding the Ghosts is in several ways a contradictory novel. It appears to suggest that the past is let go of, to be "laid to rest when told", and yet, it acknowledges the fact that the *Zong* is still on "high-seas". The novel elevates the difficulty of what to do with the historical legacies of slavery whose ghosts feed on "stories of themselves" not of history as such.¹¹¹ It indicates the difficulty of representation and need for new idioms with which one might formulate and re-tell its past.

¹⁰⁷ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 196.

¹⁰⁸ Abigail Ward, 161.

¹⁰⁹ Abigail Ward, 162.

¹¹⁰ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 208-209.

¹¹¹ Abigail Ward, 164.

2.4. *Feeding the Ghosts* and David Dabydeen's *Turner*

Fred D'Aguiar is not the only fiction writer inspired by the terrible event of the *Zong* who felt the need to narrate this past. However, David Dabydeen also questions appropriateness of representation of such an event in his poem *Turner*. David Dabydeen was born in Guyana in 1955 and joined his father and elder sister in Britain in 1969. He is of Indian origin, however, his poems deal with the subject matter of slavery, memory and diaspora in such a specific way he deserves to be included in this thesis. He was extremely determined to go either the Oxford University or Cambridge University and he succeeded in this ambition and was awarded his doctorate on 18th-century literature and art from University College London in 1982. He has been a Professor and Acting Director at the Centre for British Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Warwick.

His collections of poetry include *Slave Song* (1984), *Coolie Odyssey* (1988) and *Turner* (1994), and novels span in themes from twentieth-century Britain in *The Intended* (1991), viewed from a Guyanese immigrant's perspective, to the eighteenth-century Hogarthian world in *A Harlot's Progress* (1999). He has also been working as an editor for theoretical works concerned with the black British literature and diaspora.

Dabydeen has a completely different approach from any other writer or poet concerned in this thesis. He moves away from the historical archive in order to remember slavery. He seems to instead exhibit a vandalisation of received history, which is common for all the authors considered, yet he is more confrontational. In his return to the history of slavery, he is aware of the literary and historical gaps surrounding this past and the sensitivity of the subject matter.¹¹²

Dabydeen's long poem *Turner* is inspired by the historical event of the *Zong* jettisoning of slaves that is also the inspiration behind the "Slave Ship" painting by J.M.W. Turner. However, while Ruskin thought that the painting represented "the noblest that Turner ever painted...the noblest certainly ever painted by man,"¹¹³ Dabydeen definitely does not share his opinion on the painting, on the contrary, his reason for writing the poem is to question the visual representation as such, using the metaphor of blindness in several lines such as "Until it broke the water, close/ To my face, salt splash burning my eyes/ Awake."¹¹⁴ And even more

¹¹² Abigail Ward, 16-20.

¹¹³ David Dabydeen, *Turner* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1994), preface.

¹¹⁴ *Turner*, VII.

explicitly “Words are all I have left of my eyes.”¹¹⁵ In order to suggest that a textual approach might be more appropriate, because non-verbal communication is not accessible.¹¹⁶ Also, we cannot ignore the notion that visual memorials are fairly scopophilic, there is a link between pleasure and pain and for Dabydeen any kind of pleasure from gazing at something created from such a horrific past is unacceptable.

Why did Dabydeen name both the poem and the slave ship captain “Turner”? Furthermore, the stillborn baby in the poem is also named “Turner”. This is to indicate that Turner’s painting is not only an inadequate representation of the slave past, but rather than a condemn action of the horrors of slavery, also a continuation of the slave trade in a way, because JWM Turner the painter was turning the horrors of slavery into an object for aesthetic appreciation, he is making art and, consequently also therefore making money of this horror past. He is re-creating a past that he has no access to. The captain’s sexual abuse of the little boys in the poem indicates Turner’s abuse, physical and linguistic, of the slave history.

The poem’s narrator is a slave drowned by the slave ship captain and he is joined by the stillborn child thrown overboard some time later. We have death since the very beginning of the poem, the first word is “stillborn” where birth becomes death and then death, it would seem, becomes the creative force. Death as a strong creative force is an important aspect of the past of slavery as Gilroy shows by revealing that in the literature of slavery, death emerges constantly, it serves a mnemonic function.¹¹⁷ The narrator is creating his own personal history, he invents his past, he creates names, but his African roots are lost to him. Descriptions of the underwater world are interspersed with memories, words of an imagined and imaginary idyllic pre-slavery Africa such as “brumplak” or “impala”. Through the narrator's story we can see that the rupture from his home was followed by a linguistic reformation, the true colonial instrument is language, but this comes later, with the little boys, the slave by inventing new words attempt to reclaim language for his own purposes. Again, just as in Fred D’Aguiar’s *The Longest Memory* we have the notion of the force of language and writing, it all about who and how articulates history. They no longer had their own words, they had Turner’s:

Turner crammed our boy’s mouths too with riches,
His tongue spurting strange potions upon ours
Which left us dazed, which made us forget
The very sound of our speech. Each night

¹¹⁵ *Turner*, IX.

¹¹⁶ Abigail Ward, 99.

¹¹⁷ Paul Gilroy quoted in Lars Eckstein, xi.

Aboard ship he gave selflessly the nipple
Of his tongue until we learnt to say profitably
In his own language, *we desire you, we love
You, we forgive you.* He whispered eloquently
Into our ears even as we wriggled beneath him,
Breathless with pain, wanting to remove his hook
Implanted in our flesh. The more we struggled
Ungratefully, the more steadfast his resolve
To teach us words. He fished us patiently,
Obsessively, until our stubbornness gave way
To an exhaustion more complete than Manu's
Sleep after the sword bore into him
And we repeated in a trance the words
That shuddered from him: *blessed, angelic,
Sublime*; words that seemed to flow endlessly
From him, filling our mouths and bellies
Endlessly.¹¹⁸

The real power lies in linguistics; moreover, Dabydeen makes a link between power, sex and language. The linguistic colonisation seems to be a heavenly pursuit for him “blessed, angelic, sublime”; he is trying to implant Christianity as well. Thus, it can be deduced that there is a link not only between history, colonisation and language, but also history that formulated the new identity that was imposed on the slaves via language.

Criticising the artist Turner is not the only motivation behind this poem. Dabydeen returns to this traumatic past to debate the continued invisibility of slavery in Britain's history, similarly to Morrison in the case of the United States, in “Turner” he also raised the question of the absence of a memorial to this past:

What sleep will leave me restless when I awake?
What mindfulness that nothing has remained
Original? There could have been some small
And monumental faith. Even the leper
Conserves each grain of skin, the aged
Grin to display a tooth sensuously
Preserved in gum, memorial to festivity

¹¹⁸ *Turner*, XXIV.

And speech that mocks the present and the time
To come.¹¹⁹

The problem of memorialisation appears to be common for all the authors discussed with the topic of slavery. Has anything original remained or does everything have to be invented? The lack of testimonies and original language render the representation inadequate. Dabydeen continually highlights the ineffectiveness of visual art as a memorial for the slave past and its exploration.¹²⁰ If we said that visual art is a way of looking at certain phenomena in the world, then it would seem that Dabydeen suggests that the past of slavery should not be looked at as a sight of pleasure as that narrator records:

simple deities of stone
And wattle, which Turner vandalized
With a great sweep of his sword in search
Of his own fables [...] ¹²¹

The artist vandalised slavery in searching for his own fables of black powerlessness and victimhood.

The captain Turner has “Pictures on his wall. He held a lamp/ Up to his country, which I never saw,”¹²² he carries these pictures of England around the world to get a sense of home, something the slaves taken from Africa will never feel again. But with Dabydeen’s critique of visual art, we need to look a step further. The invisible past of slavery is taken even further in this image, because it should not be avoided and denied, that the money to fund art in Britain from mid-sixteenth to mid-nineteenth century was very often from slave trade.¹²³

Do the slaves have a place, a home to return to in search of their identity? From the previous parts we already know that the narrator has to create his past, it has to be invented, because he does not have access to ancestral memory. The rupture with the past is metaphorised by a broken necklace in the poem:

Two sisters I will make in Manu’s memory,
Lead both to riches and to barrenness,
One and the same pathway Manu prophesied,
His voice lowered to a mysterious whisper
As he told that time future was neither time past
Nor time present, but a rupture so complete

¹¹⁹ *Turner*, X.

¹²⁰ Abigail Ward, 106 – 109.

¹²¹ *Turner*, XIX.

¹²² *Turner*, XVI.

¹²³ Abigail Ward, 109.

That pain and happiness will become one, death
And freedom, barrenness and riches. He
Ripped away his jouti necklace without warning,
The beads rolled from the thread, scattered like coloured
Marbles and we scrambled to gather them,
Each child clutching an accidental handful
Where before they hung in a sequence of hues
Around his neck, the pattern of which only he
Knew – from his father and before – to preserve.
The jouti lay in different hands, in different
Colours. We stared bleakly at them and looked
To Manu for guidance, but he gave no instruction
Except – and his voice gathered rage and unhappiness –
That in the future time each must learn to live
Beadless in a foreign land; or perish.
Or each must learn to make new jouti,
Arrange them by instinct, imagination, study
And arbitrary choice into a pattern
Pleasing to the self and to others
Of the scattered tribe; or perish. Each
Will be barren of ancestral memory
But each endowed richly with such emptiness
From which to dream, surmise, invent, immortalise.¹²⁴

Just like the beads, cultures, families and villages have been torn apart and torn away from Africa.¹²⁵ We can see the breaking of the past in the broken necklace. However, there is also an indication that even if someone mastered the art, invented his own necklace, it would not be the same, and nothing will ever be the same again. Or to be more specific, the original necklace cannot be recreated, as only Manu and his ancestors knew how to create it. From now on, people need to invent, create a new one, but it will inevitably be imagined one. The new imagined necklace is created similarly to cultural identity as it is defined by Stuart Hall in the introductory chapter. It is not a complete set of definitions; it is a complex production, one that is placed in context. The necklace symbolises a collective memory that has been torn apart. A memory of a past that cannot be returned. Just as Mintah says in *Feeding of the*

¹²⁴ Turner, XXI.

¹²⁵ Abigail Ward, 110.

Ghosts, “But even Africa is not Africa anymore.”¹²⁶ There is no place to return and there is no memory to save in its original form.

For Dabydeen, finding an identity or a home in the diaspora through slavery seems impossible, because the remembrance of slavery is impossible. His eyeless narrator cannot see, we could say remember, the past. The past of slavery is characterised by death. Remembering and memorialising slavery always carries with it a certain masochistic and annihilating element. Like we in *Beloved* and *The Longest Memory*, there is no return to the past of slavery without pain. In *Turner*, the creative force of death is immense. It is in fact the only creative force. It creates a new identity for the stillborn child and the slave. However, their pain is too great to overcome. In *Feeding the Sea*, the sea had a vast symbolic value, as a metaphor for fluidity and a place of in-between. In *Turner*, the sea salt actually burns out the eyes; it swells all the bodies and eliminates genders. This links back to Dabydeen’s argument against a visual representation of the past of slavery. It symbolises that the past of slavery as collective, the individual aspects get erased by the sea, the sea does not differentiate; it needs to be addressed as a collective past and a collective defining of a new identity in a diaspora. He is searching for a forward-facing remembering for a black British future.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ *Feeding the Ghosts*, 208.

¹²⁷ Abigail Ward, 106
Abigail Ward, 112.

3. Caryl Phillips

The former narratives had a strong ghostly presence in common. Phillips' work stands apart in this particular case, yet it deals with something Toni Morrison indicated, the interference of the white and black people in the history of slavery. Caryl Phillips was born on the small Caribbean island of St Kitts in 1958. He was brought to Britain as an infant and was raised in Leeds. He attended Oxford University and initially, he began his literary career as a playwright. Phillips' work includes fiction, non-fiction and plays in the range from sixteenth-century Venice in his novel *The Nature of Blood* (1997) to twentieth-century Britain in novels such as *The Final Passage* (1985), *A Distant Shore* (2003) or *In the Falling Snow* (2009). His works reflect his interest in tracing connections that seem unlikely to have anything in common and his work has been awarded several prestigious awards. Having previously taught at Amherst College and Columbia University, he is now Professor of English at Yale University.

Compared to other authors considered in this thesis, Phillips engages closely with the historical archive; and close reading of his work reveals a web of intertextual relationships with older sources. His main focus is on exploring voices that are absent from historical accounts of slavery, whether a voice of a slave, or a voice of a daughter of the plantation owner such as Emily in *Cambridge* (1991). His works also raise the question of twenty-first-century Britain and its concern with belonging and the coalition of race and national identity.

Phillips' novels in great magnitude concern themselves with the intertwined histories of diaspora, histories of people from multiple (and racial) positions as they are, or have been, shaped by the fact of slavery or by its heritage in racism and discrimination.

In Phillips' work it appears as if the concept of diaspora refuses to rest on a false binary between home and exile, and his work repeatedly mines the complicated archives of both black and white histories of slavery, exposing their endlessly interrelated natures.¹²⁸

First-person fictional narratives compose a large part of Caryl Phillips' novelistic work as he aims to tell specific local stories about a global phenomenon. Many of his novels enact a restless travel back and forth across the Atlantic and across centuries as he places before us local stories that complicate a global understanding of the diaspora. Wendy Walter finds that Phillips presents characters that are paradoxically in exile at home, and his texts can be read as literary examples of what Avtar Brah means when she describes "diaspora space" as a

¹²⁸ Wendy W. Walter, *At Home in Diaspora: Black International Writing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 111.

concept that “foregrounds the entanglements and genealogies of dispersion with those of staying put.”¹²⁹ Lars Eckstein describes Phillips’ fiction as “the human experience, uprooting and displacement, and the ensuing sense of intense loneliness.”¹³⁰

Where is home for Caryl Phillips? When asked by his lawyer where his body should be buried, he answered: “I wish my ashes to be scattered at the middle of the Atlantic Ocean at a point equidistant between Britain, Africa and North America. A place I have come to refer to as my Atlantic home.”¹³¹ His Atlantic home represents Hall's three presences - *Presence Africaine, Presence Europeane and Presence Americaine (Terra Incognita)*, the constituents of identity in the case of the black diaspora in Britain as it is defined in this thesis. It symbolises Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, the sea between the three locations of narrating the past of slavery.

3.1 *Cambridge*

Cambridge is set on a fictive island which bears a strong resemblance to the author's native St. Kitts, and focuses on the cultural tensions between the Caribbean and Britain. Though there is no specific date stated we can deduce that the novel is set sometime between the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the abolition of slavery in the English colonies in 1834.¹³² According to Ward, the Caribbean he portrays in his novel is a terrifying, unstable and creolised space.¹³³

Before analysing the different parts and characters of the novel and their treatment of home and memory and identity, an important aspect of the novel is its character of a *pastiche*. A pastiche is a patchwork of words, sentences, or complete passages from various authors.¹³⁴ The traces are often easily traceable, sometimes they are completely undisguised. Creating this patchwork for Phillips is of vital importance. Phillips wrote the following as an answer to a critic friend of his who was not positive about such narrative strategy: “The novel is an attempt to dramatically re-write material which is largely (though by no means totally)

¹²⁹ Quoted in *At Home in Diaspora*, 1.

¹³⁰ Lars Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic, On the Poetics and Politics of Literary Memory* (2003), 63.

¹³¹ Quoted in Lars Eckstein, 63.

¹³² *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 67-68.

¹³³ Abigail Ward, 28.

¹³⁴ *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 73.

inaccessible to the general reading public.”¹³⁵ He also stated that he was “trying to make something new out of something old.”¹³⁶

The novel is broken into three parts with a prologue and an epilogue. The first part is Emily’s narrative, her attempt at a travel journey, telling the story of the voyage to the Caribbean and what she encountered there, the plantation’s life, the overseer Brown, who she has a relationship with. The second part of the novel is much shorter than Emily’s narrative and gives us Cambridge’s journey from Africa to Britain and to the Caribbean. It is his testimony before he is to be hanged. The third section is very brief and it supplements the perspective of Emily as well as Cambridge with another report of Brown’s murder. The individual parts evoke different generic contexts, different memories of the past. Emily’s narrative fits in with the tradition of travelogues written by British visitors, mostly men, to the colonies during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Cambridge’s narrative, however, writes back to the early slave narratives of the eighteenth century.¹³⁷

As was already said the novel is framed by a prologue and an epilogue, both are narrated by an omniscient narrator and also by a twentieth-century narrator. It provides Emily with a more compassionate portrayal than her condescending and self-censored narrative.¹³⁸

Why is the novel entitled “Cambridge”? Firstly, it signals the connection between Britain and the Caribbean through slavery. It also indicates a typical narrative strategy of Phillips’, one of “flawed expectation”. Cambridge is an anglicised African; he has no access to an authentic African voice. Emily does not conform to the social rules either by being a woman who travels to a plantation, she is in her early 30s, unmarried and the most obvious subversion of a standard expectation is her becoming pregnant with Brown’s child.¹³⁹ Furthermore, Phillips also indicates that his male protagonist is no longer African Olumide, Black Tom, English David, he is Caribbean Cambridge, and he is a creole.

This novel is exceptional for the fact that while its main topic is slavery, its central character is a white British woman. In the end, she becomes related to the poor whites in the Caribbean, yet, she does not conform to rules since the very beginning. Her strong presence within the novel shows the integration of Britain and the Caribbean, the relationship between the protagonists symbolises such a link.¹⁴⁰ However, we cannot think that Cambridge’s narrative is a missing piece from Emily’s narrative or vice versa. We only have both sides of

¹³⁵ *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 72.

¹³⁶ Abigail Ward, 28.

¹³⁷ *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 68-69.

¹³⁸ Abigail Ward, 29.

Re-Membering the Black Atlantic, 97-98.

¹³⁹ Abigail Ward, 29.

¹⁴⁰ Abigail Ward, 29.

the coin, the story of the slave and the story of the slave owner.¹⁴¹ The narratives overlap, they are fragments of a collective past, and they should be read alongside one another.

Emily decided to use a literary style of a travel journal for her narrative. The travel journal is typically a male dominion and it is the first signal that she is on search for an identity, she tries to wear the identity of the male imperial adventurer. That, of course does not come easily to her.¹⁴² Such genre does not fit her; it is inadequate for her representation. She states in her narrative: “I wished to go beyond the commonplace memoirs of previous travellers, which find nought worthy of record but the most bizarre features of this tropical life.”¹⁴³ Her narrative is unfortunately full of contradictions and self-delusions.¹⁴⁴ She began her journey to “go beyond” with fairly liberal notions which she abandoned the minute she stepped off the ship, she is constantly anticipating to be attacked. “For once these *gentry* smell the blood of an English arrivant they are quick to strike.”¹⁴⁵ She believed the plantation’s physician Mr. McDonald every one of his remarks and undeniably feels superior to the blacks and defines herself against them, their otherness. One of her contradictions is in the use of the English language by the blacks. While she wants Stella to “abandon her comical jargon and adopt English,”¹⁴⁶ she is offended by Cambridge’s “highly fanciful English.”¹⁴⁷ Colonial power lies in language, we have seen that time and again throughout the other novels discussed. Emily seems uncertain about her colonial power, it seems. She wants to keep the English colonial language to herself. For Emily, Cambridge’s usage of the English language is a threat, the natural superiority of her race and breeding, and being a lady, is being denied and racism renders their meeting fruitless.¹⁴⁸

Is Emily in control? Is she the colonial power in the novel? Why did she go on a trip she was not suited for? She wanted to escape an arranged engagement and maybe in analogy the patriarchal Britain that is in control over her. Her identity of an English woman, once removed from England, does not restrain her anymore.¹⁴⁹ Ward describes Emily to be cast as a Britannia figure, a role she fits as imperfectly as her writing fits a travel journal, this is another of Phillips’ flawed expectations. Emily’s English identity is made evident at several points in the novel and it is linked mainly to clothing. She feels uncomfortable in items that represent her English identity, they are location inappropriate. The English identity is

¹⁴¹ Abigail Ward, 32.

¹⁴² Abigail Ward, 32.

¹⁴³ Caryl Phillips, *Cambridge* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1991), 97.

¹⁴⁴ *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 83.

¹⁴⁵ *Cambridge*, 28.

¹⁴⁶ *Cambridge*, 29.

¹⁴⁷ *Cambridge*, 92.

¹⁴⁸ *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 92.

¹⁴⁹ Abigail Ward, 34.

repressive, just as her dress is suffocating her in the hot weather.¹⁵⁰ She actually envies the slaves for being able to dress accordingly to the climate and “without concern for conventional morality.”¹⁵¹

Emily appears to be caught between the two worlds, like a true creole. She cannot let go of her English identity, which does not benefit her in any way, nevertheless, she cannot accept the morals of the Caribbean. She might be aware that her identity is coming undone and it is followed by another journey, though not on a ship, but the passage for her continues.

The white people on the island carry the burden of English clothing; Emily does not dare to break the social construct. Not even despite the fact that the maintenance of an English identity leads to deformity, because while the slaves are “erect and well formed, their quality is attributed...directly to their lack of tight clothing, which in infancy and childhood can lead to deformities among white and civilised people.”¹⁵²

Over time, Emily is capable of shedding her English identity, although it leaves her torn and fragmented, a creole:

“And when will you be returning to our country?”

“Our country?”

“England, of course.”

England. Emily smiled to herself. The doctor delivered the phrase as though this England was a dependable garment that one simply slipped into or out of according to one's whim. Did he not understand that people grow and change? Did he not understand that one day a discovery might be made that this country-garb is no longer of a correct measure?¹⁵³

Her English identity does not fit her mind anymore. Her attitude and character appear to have grown; her questioning her national identity leads her to question where her “home” is. She became a diasporic misfit. She is in-between her English identity and the poor whites she associates herself with now. This creolised space grants her a certain freedom she would not be granted in early nineteenth-century England; she escaped the enslavement of restraint. There is no protocol to dictate her behaviour.¹⁵⁴

Cambridge's account is in a form of a slave testimony. The catalogue of his identities in the novel is extraordinary. He was captured in what he calls “my true Guinea”¹⁵⁵ where he

¹⁵⁰ Abigail Ward, 35.

¹⁵¹ *Cambridge*, 21.

¹⁵² *Cambridge*, 35.

¹⁵³ *Cambridge*, 177.

¹⁵⁴ Abigail Ward, 38-39.

¹⁵⁵ *Cambridge*, 134.

was Olumide. Here was the first rupture in his individual history, and by expansion the collective history of the slave trade, the tearing away from their home. A home they will never be able to return to:

We fellow captives fixed our watery eyes upon the land in a state of mortal grief. Whether affection for one's country is real or imagined, it is not an exaggeration to proclaim that at this moment instinct of nature suffused our being with an overwhelming love for our land and family, whom we did not expect to see again. Our history was truly broken.

When he was on the ship, during the middle passage, he was linguistically colonised by “these paragons of virtue who had possession of my body, if not in my soul, soon divested me of these trappings, thus breaking off my tenderly formed links with my parents.”¹⁵⁶ The native conversation was forbidden, the loss of vocabulary naturally followed and Cambridge learns a new language, English, and becomes black Tom. Once in England he discovers Christianity and he entails “full and proper instruction in Christian knowledge”¹⁵⁷ and “banished was black Tom”¹⁵⁸ and Cambridge became David Henderson. His transition has led him to believe that “Truly I was now an Englishman...Africa spoke to me only in a history I had cast aside.”¹⁵⁹ This is an identity he is satisfied with. However, he was captured on a missionary trip to Africa and taken as a slave to the Caribbean where he learnt that his “title was to be Cambridge.”¹⁶⁰

Cambridge sees himself as the English David Henderson, however, he is judged by his skin colour and such a permanent marker is what differentiates him from other Englishmen. He believes in his superiority as he argues that “I, a virtual Englishman, was to be treated as base African cargo.”¹⁶¹ Phillips introduced a very important aspect of Cambridge’s English identity – he was a *virtual* Englishman. His race prevents him from being a true Englishman. He has entered the creole space just like Emily and for him, it appears to be even more difficult to define the concept of “home”.¹⁶²

It seems as if “home” changed for Cambridge with his changing location and his multiple identities. Identity appears to be easily removed like a coat. Stuart Hall defines identity in his study *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* as a phenomenon that is never stable. Hall sees identity

¹⁵⁶ *Cambridge*, 135.

¹⁵⁷ *Cambridge*, 143.

¹⁵⁸ *Cambridge*, 144.

¹⁵⁹ *Cambridge*, 147.

¹⁶⁰ *Cambridge*, 157.

¹⁶¹ *Cambridge*, 156.

¹⁶² Abigail Ward, 42.

as a production, which is never complete and is always in process.¹⁶³ Cambridge's anglicised self impersonates what he believes to be attributes of a true Englishman and completely denied his African past as he declares that "Africa spoke only to me of a barbarity I had fortunately fled."¹⁶⁴

Phillips addresses yet another of slavery's legacies in this novel, that of mixed-race relationships. Disparate people have been entwined by the process of slavery, however, not all were granted the same attitude. Cambridge and his wife, Anna, were met by being "rudely set upon by a swarm of *gallants* with epithets of *black devil*, while she that was under my protection received considerably worse for being in company with a man of colour."¹⁶⁵ Their relationship was met with racism. While his master also maintained a relationship with a servant, what was tolerated and daresay a common business. Though it has to be said that Cambridge's and Anna's relationship was on a public scale, therefore the scrutiny was maybe to be anticipated; while no one else apart from the servants of the house knew about the affair between his master and the servant, Mahogany Nell.¹⁶⁶

This novel may not be as obviously haunted by ghosts like Sethe in *Beloved* or Mintah's ghostly dissociation from her past. What it has in common with all the works debated already is that the main creative force is death. Emily begins to write her journal to capture her travels, yes, but it seems as if her writing is triggered by the death of her servant, Isabella. Emily no longer has a companion. As well, similarly to Dabydeen, the voyage across the Atlantic, the middle passage though not necessarily being involved in slave trade, ends in death. Cambridge's narrative is a testimony before he is to be hanged for killing the overseer Brown. Brown's death and his own awaiting him motivate him to write down his memory to articulate the past in his own words.

Overall, Phillips' pastiche novel exhibits to his readers different scopes of enslavement. Emily and Cambridge both experience a form of slavery, the former on grounds of gender, and the latter on race. Emily is partially enslaved by her English identity and yet is denied full access to it. Cambridge aspires to be English, but is also impossible because of his skin colour. Both protagonists work in some way with the exclusivity and constraint of English national identity, yet neither is entirely successful in constructing a stable alternative identities and both of them end up in a creole in-between world.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Stuart Hall, 222.

¹⁶⁴ *Cambridge*, 143.

¹⁶⁵ *Cambridge*, 145.

¹⁶⁶ Abigail Ward, 44-45.

¹⁶⁷ Abigail Ward, 46.

4. Grace Nichols

Grace Nichols is a central figure when it comes to poetry in the context of the Caribbean and Britain. From her first collection, *I Is a Long Memored Woman* (1983), to her recent work such as *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* (2009), she uncovers lyricism and humour at the various facets of life as a woman and as an immigrant living in the UK. Nichols composed her poetry at a time when immigration was at the centre of the political debate under Margaret Thatcher's government. Her poems are concerned with Africa, The Caribbean, and Britain, memory, history and home.

Nichols was born in Guyana in 1950 and moved to the UK in 1977. Her work is influenced by the history and the culture of her homeland; she carries her heritage deep inside. In "To My Coral Bone" from *Startling the Flying Fish* (2006) she suggests:

Deep
I Cariwoma
have always
carried deep
these islands,
this piece
of Atlantic coastland
inside me¹⁶⁸.

Her poetry pays acute attention to language which carries the poem and what it symbolises in the diasporic world. She mixes creole with Standard English, which enables her to create new rhythms and rhymes.¹⁶⁹

Grace Nichols addresses the issues discussed in the thesis in a seemingly simple way, and yet, the depth behind her words is immense. We already saw how deeply her Caribbean heritage is rooted in her and it seems as if she manages to find a way to remember in a non-damaging and constructive way. Being a female poet, understandably, she deals with an individual memory of women who experienced slave trade and immigration; however, the poems form a collective memory of the past of slavery as well as the Windrush Generation migration period.

Examining the first paragraph of "One Continent to Another" from her collection *I Is a Long Memored Woman*:

¹⁶⁸ Grace Nichols, *I Have Crossed an Ocean (Selected Poems)* (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2010), 131.

¹⁶⁹ "Grace Nichols" August 2013 <<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoet.do?poetId=15609>>

Child of the middle passage womb
push
daughter of a vengeful Chi
she came
into the new world
birth aching her pain
from one continent to another¹⁷⁰

The “child” in the “middle passage” is used here as a metaphor to show that despite and because of the brutality of the middle passage, there might be something created. Something might be born out of the miserable situation and it would make the tragedy and horror worth it. The last two lines of the paragraph make a link between painful childbirth and the painful journey from Africa. The difference from the rest of the works lies in the fact that for Nichols the middle passage results in a new beginning. This is a rather different conception of the middle passage of Dabydeen, who starts with the middle passage but immediately associates it with death with the symbol of the stillborn baby.

Such perseverance about the past of slavery might be coming from Nichols position of representing a female power. In the same poem, Nichols writes:

But being born a woman
she moved again
knew it was the Black Beginning
though everything said it was
the end.¹⁷¹

Women could not afford to see only the end; women had to continue, to find the light at the end of the tunnel. For Nichols, as a female poet, childbirth is a metaphor of progeny and continuation. It is a new beginning, perhaps even a sense of hope, though a bit insecure.

That is not to say that Nichols lets go of her African or Caribbean past like Cambridge does for example, there is a constant memory, a connection, however ruptured, to the concept of Mother Africa. The poem “Like a Beacon” is from her collection entitled *The Fat Black Woman's Poems* (1984) and she expresses the following: “I need this link/ /I need this touch/ of home”¹⁷². In these few lines lies the pain of the memories of the past and how vital and important it is to remember “home” and to attempt to return. It is fascinating that Nichols and Dabydeen have chosen the same symbol for the rupture of the connection between their

¹⁷⁰ *I Have Crossed an Ocean*, 13.

¹⁷¹ *I Have Crossed an Ocean*, 14.

¹⁷² *I Have Crossed an Ocean*, 55.

“home” and their upcoming future. Both of them chose the symbol of a bead necklace. Nichols mentions the beads in “One Continent to Another”: “But O she grieved for them/ walking beadless/ in another land.”¹⁷³ as well as another poem from her *I Is a Long Memoried Woman* collection entitled “Holding My Beads”, in which the beads are not joined, but the narrator has them in her hand, it represents a past to hold onto. A collection of memories and a reminder of what the slave trade destroyed. It is also a metaphor of a created individual identity, the woman has the potential to create a new necklace of the beads, and she can create a new identity for herself.

The return home may not be possible in the material world, instead, Nichols aspires for a spiritual return in her poem “The People Could Fly” from a yet different collection entitled *Startling the Flying Fish* (2006), in which she expresses the desire to return to Africa and be free from slavery:

Hear them singing: One bright morning
when my work is over I will fly away home.

The people could fly.
Look! Look, how they coming, Africa!
‘Goodbye, plantation, goodbye’¹⁷⁴

While home and Africa is something that is to be remembered, with remembering comes forgetting. Unfortunately, as Nichols’ poem “Taint” shows:

No it isn’t easy to forget
what we refuse to remember –
daily I rinse the taint
of treachery from my mouth.¹⁷⁵

Most of the authors debated in this thesis have grieved for the lack of memorialisation, argued how important it is to remember the past of slavery and represent it correctly. It seems as if one of the reasons why the past of slavery has not been represented as fully as it should have is that the people who did have direct access and experience, wanted to forget.

What linguistic strategy does Nichols employ when writing about the past slavery? I believe that the apparent simplicity in her use of creole. However, her poem “In My Name”, also from *I Is a Long Memoried Woman* collection, shows how important the choice of

¹⁷³ *I Have Crossed an Ocean*, 14.

¹⁷⁴ *I Have Crossed an Ocean*, 141.

¹⁷⁵ *I Have Crossed an Ocean*, 17.

vocabulary is for the meaning of the poem. The woman of the poem is “heavy with child,”¹⁷⁶ she is pregnant with the overseer’s baby; and the child is characterised as mulatto in the poem. The child’s mixed-race is a reason why Nichols uses “white” language, because creole is not the child’s language.

The final poem of the collection is strategically called “Epilogue” and it is not only an epilogue to the collection, I believe it to be an epilogue for the entire past and memory. Grace Nichols managed to say everything in the four lines of the poem, how people were taken from their homes by force and across the Atlantic Ocean, how they lost their native tongues and had to create new representations and linguistic identities, how they became a part of the diaspora.

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
From the root of the old one
A new one has sprung.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ *I Have Crossed an Ocean*, 32.

¹⁷⁷ *I Have Crossed an Ocean*, 44.

5. Conclusion

When I began writing this thesis I could not imagine the difficulty and complexity of the subject of slavery and its representation in Black British Literature. It is an area of history that is not clear-cut, definite and it cannot be pigeonholed. The theoretical background gives the readers great tools, but there is no definite pattern. Each author has his own specific background, approach and motivation for returning to the past of slavery; whether it is the absence from historical records, search for one's identity or manifestation of survivor guilt of those who survived the middle passage.¹⁷⁸ Each novel or poem has its ghost, its memory, what the authors share is a conviction that the past of slavery and its memory need an appropriate representation.

Throughout the novels and poems, there is a common thread of search for identity, the slave trade uprooted people from their homes and their culture, and a place they could never return to. They were to forever live an in-between life. And for a long time, not many people attempted to try and repair the broken necklace from Dabydeen's *Turner*, granted no one knew how, just as no one knew how to write about and represent the past of slavery so that people would get a decent memorial and closure.

Each of the authors has a particular struggle with creating art about this past. Phillips concerned himself mostly with the pasts and testimonies missing from the historical records. Dabydeen is troubled by the very act of representing slavery without exploiting this past, D'Aguiar seems to struggle with re-traumatising, re-awakening the past that already rests.

The problem lies in the fact that there is no straightforward answer as to how to represent the past of slavery. What the authors share is a conviction that awareness about this past is needed. D'Aguiar is perhaps the most persistent about this by saying that slavery might be in the past, but its legacy is perpetuated in the present. Phillips is slightly more optimistic, though there is utopia, but he sees a brighter future for black and white people. Grace Nichols shows how the women suffered and had to fight their own battles because without women, no one could go on. Dabydeen appears to be one at a crossroads. He is very sceptical about creating works on slavery as he views it as another form of consumption; yet, he senses the importance to create an appropriate representation.

Phillips wanted to enable his reader access to material that is not easily accessible using a pastiche method when writing *Cambridge*. In fact, what all these authors do is enable the readers to remember this past, learn about it, explore the past of slavery from several points of

¹⁷⁸ Abigail Ward, 187.

view, with different strategies and narrative techniques. The examination of this past will help us stop slavery's legacy, racism, by acknowledging this past and hopefully, the ghosts will be able to rest once their story is properly told. I would like to end with a quotation from Grace Nichols' *Sunris* (1996) that I believe contains everything discussed in this work, home, identity, the sea, memory and the ghost of slavery.

History is a river
That flow to the sea
Laced with the bone of memory
I riding high her choreography
I paying homage in ceremony

Yes, I rippling to the music
I slipping pass the ghosts ships
Watch old mast turn flowering tree
Even in the heart of all this bacchanal
The Sea returns to haunt this carnival.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ *I Have Crossed an Ocean*, 103.

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