

***Historical Metafiction and the Quest for Black Self-Authority
in Laurence Hill's Novel "Someone Knows My Name"***

Rasiah, Halu Oleo University, Indonesia
Akhmad Marhadi, Halu Oleo University, Indonesia
La Bilu, Halu Oleo University, Indonesia
Elisabeth Ngestirosa, Teknokrat University of Indonesia, Indonesia

The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2023
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Rewriting history in fiction is not a new phenomenon in literature, since historical novels engage fictional characters in a real historical context to offer a glimpse of past times. However, historical metafiction offered a different framework. It is working under postmodernism by asking “what happen” through a repetition of history. This paper sought to analyze the strategy of Laurence Hill in rewriting the history of slavery in *Someone Knows My Name* novel. He constructed the experience of slavery by framing the history of Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia, Canada, and inventing a fictional character, Aminata Diallo, who primarily attributed as Black Muslim woman from Mali, Africa. Hill seemingly nailed Hutcheon’s ideas about historiographical metafiction, that apt for “us(ing) and abus(ing)” the concepts of history and any textual traces of the past. Hill, in the novel, intentionally does not generate a nostalgia or glorification of the past, but demonstratively creates a critical distance of the past. Hill successfully dismantles; the myth of Canada as *Canaan* for blacks in the enslavement period, the abolitionist political role in blacks ’slave narrative, and racial mythologies by presenting black self-identity and authority, and struggling to be recognized as human beings.

Keywords: Historical Metafiction, Authority, Slave Narrative, Postmodernism

iafor

The International Academic Forum

www.iafor.org

Introduction

Laurence Hill, a contemporary African Canadian author, in his novel *Someone Knows My Name* (or in Canadian title *The Book of Negroes*) foregrounds topics not only on the history, but also identity. It is nothing new in literary field, since historical novels engage fictional characters in a real historical context to offer a glimpse of the past and remark national identity. However, what remarkable in Hill's novel is the strategy of historical metafiction narrative he uses to insist the issue. Although its tougher engagement of history and fiction has been widely elucidated, reviews and essays fail to detect the underlying connection between the historical metafiction and the self-definition that showed unstable identities performed by the main character, Aminata, in the novel. Oduwobi, Sewlall, & Abodunrin (2016) are those who aware that the novel features Hutcheon's ideas about historiographical metafiction as it self-reflectively lays claim to historical events and personages, but they heavily engaged on postcolonial theory and by extension postcolonial feminism. Emode (2009) also displays a profound sensitivity towards the historical 'Other' whom colonial discourse and traditional representations of tragedies in black history might obscure, but the analysis pays a special attention to the history of violence ethically by utilizing Levinas' philosophy of ethics as a methodology for interpretation. Duff (2011) used the concept of 'site of memory' from Toni Morrison's idea and Harercroft's 'paradigm of agency' in examining the various strategies of novel adopts in order to discover what they reveal about historical discourse in general and Canada's past, as well as, its experience of slavery in particular. Yorke (2010) focuses his analysis of the slave narrative tradition adopted by Hill in his novel *The Book of Negroes*. Nehl (2016) demonstrates a dynamic perspective on the meaning of 'home' for African diaspora subjects in Hill's novel by tracing the history of black refugees and self-liberators in late eighteenth-century by using postcolonial perspective. Gasztold (2020) examines Hill's narrative as rhetoric, that formed the triad author-text-reader allows exploring emotive, ethical, and political dimension of the reading process. The last, Jeslin (2019) explored the social exclusiveness by focusing on the struggle of the black woman faces in the society that upshot to her loss of freedom and self-confidence and investigates psychological changes of the doubly marginalized black woman when they live midst the white people as slaves.

This article concerns itself with the wed of history and fiction in *Someone Knows My Name* novel. It is emphasized the history of slavery and also to figure out the black character's loss and struggle for identity. The novel set its story from the history of black Loyalists documented in historical book 'The Book of Negroes' in the late eighteenth century which was enlisting three thousand back Loyalists gave passage to Nova Scotia following the American War of Independence 1775-1783. Hill invented a fictional character, Aminata Diallo, which was supposed to be a real person who registered in 'The Book of Negroes' and she was constructed to questing Black identity. Long before abducted and sent into slavery, Aminata, was primarily attributed as a freeborn Muslim woman from Mali-West Africa, mix-tribes Bamanakan and Fula, become Nova Scotian, and finally chose to be a black atheist who settled in London. Along the journeys, Aminata showed the process of re-conceptualizing identity through a series of experience in historical scenes she had had. Aminata questions "who am I?" that requires a set of images, opinions, and beliefs which she as the individual social actor who constructs when faced with the task "self-definition" and makes reference to whom she believes is and whom she hopes to be. In the process of gaining self-definition, Aminata nailed what Hutcheon's ideas about historical metafiction that "apt for using and distorting" (Hutcheon, 1989: 5) the myth of Canada as the "canaan" (Yorke, 2010; Nehl, 2016) and any textual traces of the past but also the racial mythology. Through a

historical metafiction perspective, we strived to connect the history with the challenge of finding a coherent identity of the slave, as well as the process of gaining self-authority in the novel. Aminata's transnational experience from the Middle Passage to Americas, Nova Scotia, Sierra Leone, and end up in London has accentuated both the forgotten story about slavery in Nova Scotia (Duff, 2011; Yorke, 2010) and the loss of and struggle for black self-identity and authority of black Canadian society. Hill has become one of the most important contributors to black identity and culture in Canada (Siemerling, 2013: 5), since Canada is frequently absent from "discussions of post-slavery New World societies" (Duff, 2011: 237). Elliot Clarke (cited in Duff, 2011: 237) argued that "African-Canadian history is ignored in Canada, while African-Canadian writers are forced to act as historians."

Historical metafiction is distinguished from historical novel in treating the historical facts and personages (Hutcheon, 1988). It is not purposed "to purify the past or to signify national narratives of the past," but it uses and distorts the past for politic of representation. Hill's strategies in narrating history of slavery through Aminata's autobiography is not only installing the meta-history/narrative of slavery in Canada but also subverting them to signaling the irony of history as well as correcting the racial myths by questing black self-identity and authority. As a literary scholar, we think that the paradox of the representation of history of slavery and personages in *Someone Knows My Name* should also be investigated thoroughly to explore the critical distance brought by Hill in this novel in order to figure out 'what might happen' in the past through a specific point of view. To reflect on the nature of historical metafiction strategies in Hill's oeuvre, this article focuses on two main points: intertextuality and parody of history of slavery and the their role in criticizing the politic discourse in the mainstream history of slavery, the process of the character gains self-authority by question of identity through a series of locations and cultures. It weds metafiction and historiography (Schlick, 2022: 93). Metafiction here is enhanced, from realism assumption of self-reflection to pose question about the relationship between fiction and reality. However, metafiction in Hutcheon's historiography combine a supplementary dimension to such reflection by engaging and unveiling the parallels between writing literature and historiography to reinvent and reshape the past from necessarily subjective and ideologically laden perspectives to figure out 'what happened' in the past from a distinct perspective. For this, Hutcheon (1988: 106) highlighted Aristotle's argument that the historian could speak only of 'what have happened' of the particular of the past. The poet, on the other hand, could speak of "what could or might happen" and could deal more with universals.

By figuring out Aminata Diallo, Laurence Hill leads the question of 'what could or might happen' and grants opportunity to him to do what Teresa L Elbert (Haddox, 2007: 123) would recognize as 'ludic postmodern,' the post-structuralist ideas about linguistic play, difference, and the priority discourse that "substitute politics of representations for radical social transformation." It suggests inseparable of familiar notions of performativity and identity politics, both which tend toward a strictly therapeutic politics of self-actualization through "intense self-reflexivity and overtly parodic intertextuality of history" (Hutcheon, 1989: 3). It paradoxically claimed to redefine the concepts of "reality," "history" and "truth" and blur the line between fiction and history. Toni Morrison (Duff, 2011: 239), more specifically, highlights this role that "fiction (and other creative writing) can actually be a form of memory, not necessarily a lived memory, but one that draws on the powers of human imagination to discover a truth." Truth, by this definition, is seen as the human dimension that lies beyond a historical fact, positing a notion of authenticity through identifying historical fact dates, names as the first layer in the work of uncovering a truth. Hutcheon

reinforces her ideas by emphasizing ‘politic of representation’ to allude the teleological motivation for using a specific meta-narrative and the “historical meaning may thus be seen today as unstable, contextual, relational, and provisional, in which postmodernism argued it has always been so” (Hutcheon 1989; 67).

Reconstructing Black Loyalists Experience

Historically, black Loyalists¹ were people of African descent who sided with the Loyalists² during the American Revolutionary War of 1775–1783. Specifically, the term Black Loyalist refers to men who escaped enslavement by Patriot³ overlords and served on the side of the Loyalists because of the Crown's guarantee of freedom. About 3,000 Black Loyalists were evacuated from New York to Nova Scotia; they were listed in *the Book of Negroes* because the British gave them a certificate of liberty and arranged their transportation. The Crown provided them with a grant of land and supplies to help them resettle in Nova Scotia. Particularly after the British conquest of Charleston, South Carolina, many of slaves deserted the estates and migrated to the British lines. Many former slaves traveled with the British when they were evacuated. 4,000 people were sent by the Sierra Leone Company to Freetown in Africa in 1787, and many of them ended up among the Black Poor of London. Another black Loyalists from Nova Scotia decided to immigrate to Sierra Leone five years later; these people are known as the Nova Settlers. Both waves of immigrants contributed to the creation of the Sierra Leone Creole people and the Sierra Leone country. Walker (1992) examined the experiences of the central cohort of black Loyalists in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone over several generations, though some ground-breaking work on blacks and Loyalism had already been done. Walker contends that rather than petty political allegiance to the British, freedom was the primary driving Walker also draws attention to the many ways that the British traded slaves both during and after the conflict.

In reconstructing black Loyalist experience, Hill presents four parts in his novel, in which, each part, named book one, two, three, and four, provides a part of Aminata's experience in flashback plot and uncovered myths, which were eventually corrected and to offer alternative thoughts for the history of humanity, racism, and identity Book one commenced with a recent time of Aminata in London 1802 as old woman and poor. She told the flashback story of her life in Bayo, Africa, 1745 before she kidnapped into slavery. Bayo is a village in Mali, near Niger river. Aminata illustrated that whatever the season or continent, the energizing aroma of mint tea has always reminded her of her early years in Bayo. About half of the people of Bayo were Muslims, but her father was the only one who had a copy of the Qur’an, and who knew how to read and write. Aminata's father is Mamadu Diallo (Muhammad Diallo), a fula, and her mother is Sira Kubali, a Bamana. Mamadu Diallo was a jeweler and Sira Kubali is

¹ In 1775, when war between England and her American colonies started to seem imminent, certain British circles began to pay attention to the 500,000 slaves held by the Americans who might be enlisted as priceless friends within the opposing camp. The leading British strategists initially opposed the concept of encouraging rebellion among the slaves or even admitting slaves as free people.* However, Lord Dunmore, the governor of Virginia, was hesitant to ignore any possible support when he decided it would be wise to impose martial law in his province in November 1775. Encouraged to use "his Majesty's standard" by "everyone able to bear arms," (Walker, 1992, 1, Origin of the Black Loyalists).

²Loyalists were those colonials who were loyal to the King of England. They may not have agreed with the policies and laws of the Crown, but they knew they had a duty to uphold the laws and remain loyal to the government that controlled their daily lives (<https://www.nps.gov/mocr/learn/education/upload/Lesson-1.pdf>)

³The Patriots were colonists who rejected British rule over the colonies during American revolution. They strived for freedom from a tyrannical royal government, often led by Royal Governors who suppressed any utterance of rebellion (<https://www.nps.gov/mocr/learn/education/upload/Lesson-1.pdf>)

catching babies. Aminata learned writing Arabic and reading Quran. Aminata told that: "I learned to write phrases in Arabic, such as *Allahu Akbar* (God is great) and *Laa ilaaha illa-Lah* (There is none worthy of worship except God)" (Hill, 2007: 17). Aminata figured out that Bayo and Africans have been a stable community with its cultural identities. When Aminata was kidnapped into slavery, she declared that "I am a freeborn Muslim. Let me go!" (Hill, 2007: 32).

The book two of Hill's novel is about Aminata's complicated experience as a slave in Americas. She landed in Sullivan Island, 1757. Aminata called it as Toubabu⁴ island. In this new island, Aminata is called 'African' and her new chapter of life just began. Aminata could not practice her religion, pork everywhere in the food, cold island, and she chained like a cow and walking all day to her master. Aminata finally reached ST. Helena Island, Aminata has been about twelve when she arrived on Robinson Appleby's indigo plantation the month of January, 1757, as the first place she worked as slave. In this place, Aminata truly has bitter experiences; she was raped by her master, married Chekura, but her son was stolen and sold into slavery. She moved to Solomon Lindo,⁵ a Jew, in Charles Town. Solomon Lindo represents a double standard of Jews in enslavement period; friendly face, and contributed in Aminata's skill advancement in accounting, arithmetic, and writing. However, the shocking things that Aminata found from Lindo is he has arranged the sale of her son Mamadu from Applebe, Aminata's former master in Georgia. Lindo is the representation of Jews in America, that besides they are looking for a place to take refuge in the status quo, they are actually part of the slave trade. Lindo takes Aminata's salary, a percentage of the wages as a midwife. Lindo did not openly enslave Aminata, but profiting her from slave labor. The book two uncovered not only a myth of slavery as a civilization project for Africans in Antebellum period but also the irony of Jews in enslavement period. The fact that slavery had destroyed the Africans physically, mentality, and culturally and the Jews is a part of slaveholder.

Book three of the novel exposed the experience of Aminata as black Loyalist and moved to Nova Scotia, Canada, and displayed the big irony of it. She worked for British registering black people in the book of negroes and she also got her certificate to resort to the British lines in 21st April 1783, New York (Hill, 2007: 302). It is said that the certification is a consequence of the Proclamation of Lord Dunmore, Governor of Virginia and Sir Henry Clinton, late Commander in Chief in America; and that the said Negro hereby has His Excellency Sir Guy Carleton's Permission to go to Nova Scotia, or wherever else she may think proper. Aminata sailed with George III ship off to Nova Scotia, on November 30, 1783.

Canada in Abolitionist myth is a *canaan*⁶ (Yorke, 2010: 142), a "paradise" (Nehl, 2016: 137), or a promised land (Walker, 1992: 190) to insist that slavery and ruthless forms of racism did

⁴ Toubabu or Toubab simply refers to white people who comes from Europe or Western descent. It is often used informally and can carry different connotations, ranging from a neutral description to a term of endearment or even a slight derogatory term depending on the context and tone used (<https://www.definitions.net/definition/toubab>)

⁵ Hill alludes the real life personage of Moses Lindo, a Sephardic Jew from London, who arrived in South Carolina in 1756 (Hill, 2007: 468). In historical record, Lindo in Charles Town became a member of the Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim—one of the oldest Jewish congregations in the United States. Hill convinced that he borrowed Lindo's last name and his interest in indigo, but then everything loosens based on the purpose of the novel.

⁶ In the Antebellum Slave narrative, the arrival of the American fugitive slave in Canada West is a climactic moment that represents the end of their 'teleological journey from slavery to freedom' (Lucy Bird, 2018)

not happen in Canada.⁷ As a freedom seeker, Aminata had similar hopes for Nova Scotia as the land of freedom as promised and coveted by the British government before they decided to leave for the country. The big question that alighted in Aminata's mind was "Was this the promised land?" (Hill, 2007: 310). Aminata remarked when she reached out Shelburne: "Nova Scotia was colder than Charles Town and even colder than New York"⁸ (Hill, 2007: 310). Aminata found that the first time in Nova Scotia. White woman in a cap and a long coat approached her on Water Street showing her antipathy and unfriendly sense when Aminata asked a question: "Is this Port Roseway?" I asked, but she walked right by without stopping to look at me" (Hill, 2007: 312). Another scene showed inside the Merchant's Coee House, Aminata asked for information about lodgings and work, but a big man took her by the arm and pulled her to the door. "We don't serve niggers," he said. "I'm not asking to be served," I said. "All I want—" "Move along," he said. "Birchtown is the place for your kind." (Hill, 2007: 313). The next scene, Aminata met Theo McArdle, a friendly Nova Scotian, even though Theo hints that there is no guarantee of a paid job to Aminata: "I could use help of all kinds, but I can't pay you anything... "some people will give you the cold shoulder in Shelburne, but I believe in treating each person on his merits" (Hill, 2007: 314). From this conversation, it can be captured that Canada is not really a happy land, but at least black fugitive can exist and survive with their faculties.

In the fundamental to the realization of the black Loyalist ideal was the acquisition of land, for without it no true independence was believed possible (Walker, 1992: 18). On that first day Aminata met an Old Negro, Dady Moses, who disclosed the irony of the Promised Land begins to unfold. Daddy Moses said Nova Scotia had more land than God could sneeze at, but hardly any of it was being parceled out to black folks. Aminata insisted the Promised Land from the British: "Get good and comfortable at the back of the line," he said. "There are a thousand colored folks waiting before you. And, ahead of them, a few thousand white people. They call this place Nova Scotia, but folks in Birchtown have another name for it: "Nova Scarcity." (Hill, 2007: 316). Aminata thought of Chekura warning to be realistic about the Promised Land: "I wondered where he was at that moment, and if he had food and shelter" (Hill, 2007: 317).

The irony of Nova Scotia turns to be clear in the first month Aminata settled in Birtown, read the ads for: "For Five Dollars Reward" who could find and bring back Dinah to her Master is one of the prove (Hill, 2007: 321). Aminata heard about Dinah's life in Birchtown, that Dinah had indeed been caught and returned to her owner, who then whipped her. She also witnessed the Shelburne court; black people from Birchtown were sentenced once a month to a variety of punishments: "one negro who stole a loaf of bread and punched the store owner who tried to stop him was lashed twenty times at each three intersections along Water Street. ...A woman was hanged at the gallows at the foot of Charlotte Street for stealing silver were from a man to whom she had been apprenticed" (Hill, 2007: 323). Lynching is also common happened as witnessed by Aminata who said: "usually I passed four or five people on the way between Shelbourne and Birchtown, but on this day I saw only

⁷ The testimonials compiled by prominent white abolitionist, Benjamin Drew, in his *The Refugee: or The Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada Related By Themselves* (1856) (Nancy Kang, 2005), Samuel Ringgold Ward in his writing "Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro: His Anti-Slavery Labours in the United States, Canada and England" (1855).

⁸ In the antebellum slave narrative, when the slave reaches "the Canada line," the narrative showed an allegorical crescendo in Nancy, 2005:434) to show a hospitable queen, colonial Canada's *genius loci*, implicitly became a re-inscription of America's Lady Liberty, while her promise of stability and refuge would later prove less stellar. In the "cold but happy hand" was preferable to the specter of the sadistic American master, at least for the time being.

one Negro, and he was dead--hanging from a tree to the side of the path. ...The man had been so badly beaten and bloodied that I could not recognize him” (Hill, 2007: 341). She came to that conclusion: “I came to understand that if you had come to Nova Scotia free, you stayed free. However, if you come to Nova Scotia as a slave, you were bound just as fast as our brothers and sisters in the United States” (Hill, 2007: 321). Indeed, she has less food and comfort (poor), but she got free, albeit the poverty has been caused a riot on black and white in Nova Scotia.

Book four, Hill alludes the history of Freetown in Sierra Leone as the next settlement of the Nova Scotian exodus. Hill remarked that the Freetown Sierra Leone was built by the Nova Scotian those exactly former slaves who, some of them were born in Africa before they chained in coffles in slave trade. Hill borrows some historical accounts of Europeans account on the experiences in Sierra Leone and personages to rely on his story. John Clarkson was real person abolitionist that personages in the novel organizing the exodus of the black Loyalists from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone in 1792. Aminata found a lot of irony in Freetown; it is not a free town but one of the British colony, and Aminata and others who transported from Nova Scotia, experience the same: bitter as colonized. Aminata moved to London, and lived poorly there to meet the King and Queen to testify the the struggle of abolitionist in abolishing black slavery. However, Aminata create a two version of her testimony, for abolitionist and from herself. She could not write something that she don't know.

The Sketch of Aminata's Cultural Affiliation and Revisiting the Black Stereotypes

Hill figured out his main character, Aminata Diallo, as a free born Muslim who lived in Bayo, Near Segou, Mali, West Afrika. Aminata in America called Meena Dee, was Aminata's new name after shipped to America, since Aminata Diallo was not a familiar name and difficult to pronounce by Americans. Aminata is close to the Muslim woman's name 'Amina' a custom name generated from Holy Prophet Muhammad's mother and adopted by those Muslim women to engage their identity as Muslim. Name has been the important cue for Hill to recast the identity of black people in Nova Scotia.

Hill so far draws a connection of black Loyalist to Muslim background based on his discovery about the people of in Sierra Leone⁹ (as the next place of black Loyalist headed to after Nova Scotia).

Hill puts Aminata's role in the novel as a *djeli*¹⁰ to approach a popular traditional slave narrative generic structure (Yorke, 2010: 129) to provide Aminata Diallo's autobiography, “but undercutting those thematic features that have generated racial mythologies” (Yorke, 2010: 129). Yorke argued that slave narrative has been further reaching by-product of a textual tradition that continues to inflect popular constructions of race and geared toward a

⁹ Sierra Leone in Christopher Fyfe's document (1962) is the smallest of the British Colonies but its history become a key interest to study of nineteenth century of West Africa. The presence of Islam in West Africa dates back to eighth century where the spread of the faith in regions that are now the modern states of Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali and Nigeria, was in actuality, a gradual and complex process. John Newton's document on the *Thought of African Slave Trade* (2001) mention part of the African shore, which lies between the rivers Sierra-Leone, and Cape Palmas, is usually known by the name of the Windward, or Grain Coast (3). Grain Coast is close to Mali and this is where Hill started to install Amina's background family through her sketch of parental lineages in the very first page of the novel to show the a little bit sketch of Black Loyalist lineages in Nova Scotia.

¹⁰ as a *djeli*, a local term to describe a position a trustworthy storyteller and a congenital position

white Christian in Abolitionist political interest. By showing the strong affiliation of cultural identity and ethnicity of Aminata Diallo, Hill made a correction of popular construction of race and directed our heed to “complex processes of black self-invention, dwelling and “diasporic home-making,” to use Tina M. Campt’s words, in late eighteenth-century/early nineteenth-century North America, West Africa and England (Nehl, 2016: 139). As a *djeli*, Aminata allows herself to “see and remember, to witness and to testify” (Hill, 2007: 56) the atrocities on the ship, the violence of the master, and all historical events during her life after leaving her home land. She also controlled her storytelling and realization of the liberating quality of this act. She presented her purpose as well as gives her life meaning along the way. Hill’s strategy in engaged its story to the actual narrative of slave narrative that has been characterized with “I was born...” to specifying place and (but not) a date of birth, a sketchy account of parentage, and insist Aminata’s self-identity and authority. Aminata obviously tells she was born in the village of Bayo, three moons by foot from the Grain Coast in West Africa and predicts it was the year of 1745 or close to it (Hill, 2007: 4, 8). She is also sketching her parentage account that she is a daughter of Mamadu Diallo and Sira Kubali, mix tribes as a Bamana and a Fula. Aminata clarifies that she was a free born Muslim child as a half of the Bayo’s people were Muslim and her father “had a copy of the Qur’an, and knew how to read and write,” and she declared that: “I am writing this account, all of it” (Hill, 2007: 4, 9). The sketch of Aminata’s background affirmed the power of “Aminata’s identity, her genealogy, and the words she write” (Duff, 2011: 245) that leading to the effort of dismantling or undermining the racial mythologies and showing the black people strong identity and cultural association.

In many meta-narrative of slavery, in history and pro-slavery fiction, black is used to display into stereotypes; either demonic—frequently employ the visual metaphor of “other-as-beast” (Mellinger, 1992: 413) as the discursive features of racist ideology to depict African Americans as physically, intellectually, and temperamentally, distinct and inferior or the noble savage innocent and the “wise old man.” The other racist idea is blacks were considered infidels, so whites felt obligated to convert them to Christianity (Jordan, 1972: 81-94). From these labels, black was considered not only traditional and primitive, wild and difficult to control, but also required to be ‘conquered,’ ‘educated,’ and ‘redeemed’ from their primitivism and backwardness, and slavery had been defined implicitly as an institution ‘to civilize’ black people. Hill in ‘*Someone Knows My Name*,’ throughout the set of black cultural artifacts, reconstructs the portrayal of black outstanding and distinctive, who are not only physically different from European, but intellectual and temperamental are appealing. Hill revised the picture of unappealing exaggerations and distortion to not only black body but also savagery and bestiality in racist discourse. Bayo—Aminata’s village is a jungle-wild village, indeed as Aminata described: “the entire villages and towns were walled, and sentries were posted with poison-tipped spears to prevent the theft of men”, but it was nothing to do with demonic or savage brutes traits, they are normal people who precaution for safety: “but when trusted traders arrived, villagers of all ages came to admire the goods” (Hill, 2007: 8).

Hill generated names for his black characters associated with Muslim named-style; Aminata (Aminah) and Mamadu Diallo (Muhammad Diallo), Dinah, Fatima, Yusuf, and Mamed supposed to be familiar name in Islamic holy personages. The others were Sirra Khubali, Fomba, Fanta, and Chekura associated in African names. These strongly attempted to form black identity and authority; they call out each other’s names, and identifying the cultural background, and struggling to be recognized as human beings. Names become the crucial items in Hill’s *Someone Knows My Name* to insert a paradigm shift in the conceptualization

of African American history and culture to stirring from victimization to empowerment on a meta-level (Nehl, 2016: 138). Hill remarked that he rewrote of Baldwin's title "Nobody Knows My Name" that conceptualized the story as the victim of the racism.

Aminata is depicted having uncommonly beauty: "a rich, dark skin or have described it as blue black," her eyes are hard to read: "showing distrust, disdain, dislike" (Hill, 2007: 8). Hill presents Aminata within the perspective of African and Aminata does not demand for beauty image: "I wouldn't wish beauty on any woman who has not her own freedom, and who chooses not the hands that claim her" (Hill, 2007: 12), since skin hue is additional feature of beauty and body image that may have major associations for African American women. Color-ism is a system where individuals of color with lighter skin are perceived more favorably compared to their darker-skinned counterparts in racism. She also performs a resourceful woman, not only skilled in catching babies, but also quick-witted mind. In Bayo, she learned catching babies from her Mother and this skill has granted Aminata opportunity to earn money in Americas and Canada. She also learned writing and reading Arabic from her father and learning English Standard so fast in America "She done learn so fast," Georgia said. "Zing zing zing. Words y out her mouth like eagles" (Hill, 2007:133). Hill uplifts African local indigenous skill to de/reconstruct the racial mythologies that used to label black slaves as backwards.

Mamadu Diallo, Aminata's father, depicted as the biggest man in her town but he was kind-hearted man and loved (Hill, 2007: 22). He was also a jeweler that every days used to end up "a gold necklace for a metal teapot with bulging sides and a long, narrow, curving spout and had crossed the desert and would bring luck and longevity to any who drank from it" (Hill, 2007: 8). Mamadu Diallo represents the transition from the stereotypical "Black Buck" (Bogle, 1972) character in literature and film, which followed by a violent and bestial African American big man to more positive representations and a character of the "Black Hero" (Ana Kocić, 2017: 86). A powerful, strong body and a proclivity to violence have also often been connected to the representation of black masculinity, which, in turn, has often been constructed as an alternative to the dominant (and desirable) white masculinity.

Fomba and Chekura are two characters adapted from Uncle Tom type but revisited. Fomba, a stupid *woloso*, represents such a Tom-type (second generation slave) (cf. Harriet Becker Stow *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1852) whose handicapped, and therefore endures the ridicule of the Bayo children without complaint: "we teased Fomba mercilessly, but he never seemed to mind us children. He would smile, and put up with rude taunts that would have gotten us beaten by any other adult in Bayo" (Hill, 2007: 17). In America, Fomba becomes a useful slave: "strong, silent, and compliant" (Yorke, 2010: 142). Still, Chekura as thin as a blade of grass (Hill, 2007: 38), is neither sexually aggressive, nor eunuch-like (Yorke, 2010: 143), subjugated the archetype of black male rapist or "bad buck" (Bogle, 1972) in pro-slavery narration. Chekura is depicted as a romancer but "doesn't press the matter" of sex with Aminata (Hill, 2007: 159). Hill, in the other hand, presents the white patriarch Appleby, who rapes Aminata and takes her virginity to challenge the prototype of black male rapist into white male rapist. Hill adapted Uncle Tom type in Chekura who he could be maternal; "he enjoys passionate, consensual sex with his wife" (Yorke, 2010: 143) and neglected the rapist one.

Hill is also very strong showing the cultural background in Aminata, through the attribution of Islam which was strongly opposed and prohibited from being practiced upon arrival in America. Islam seems to be a platform for Hill to refute the image of blacks who are

culturally backward and temperamental black in the pro slavery narrative. Through Aminata, Hill shows that slaves had strong bases of cultural and civilization in their ancestral lands before being destroyed into slavery. Aminata explained that when her Papa travelled to bring his goods to markets and to pray in Mosques, he returned with the Qur'an or other writings, in Arabic. She also was taught by her Papa to read and write in Arabic, witnessed by her mother, "showed how to use a reed dyed water and parchment to learn how to write phrases in Arabic such as *Allaahu Akbar* (God is great) and *Laa ilaaha illa-Lah* (There is none worthy of worship except God)" (Hill, 2007: 11). Here, the stereotypical image that blacks are backward and illiterate was decomposed. Aminata recalled her conversation with father about Timbuktu to reveal how Islamic civilization had been built in Africa and it is an important point of refutation of the racial myths that 'black are backwards and primitive' (Mellinger, 1992) and propagated in the institution of slavery in order to rationalize the enslavement of black people.

Aminata countless times declared as a Muslim and tried to insist her faith is Islam by repeatedly saying: *Allaahu Akbar. Ashhadu Allah ilaaha illa-Lah. Ash hadu anna Muhamadar rasululah* (Hill, 2007: 111) to endure her Islamic spirit, but the condition was difficult in Americas (and Canada). Since she abducted and shipped in the slave ship, she had been facing the challenge against her faith, not only in food but also the prohibition of practicing ritual of prayer. Food was the primary challenge in surviving her faith since pork had contaminated the entire bucket of food in the slave ship: "Biton shooed her away and brought the food to my lips. I was too weak to protest" (Hill, 2007: 109). Practicing ritual prayers also prohibited. Aminata said that: "I began the ritual prayers, but Biton forbade me, hand on my shoulder, stern and unmoving. Biton said that just a day earlier a man had been beaten for praying in my manner" (Hill, 2007: 109). The slave owners forbid Islam and will beat Aminata if she is caught. The girl delivers these prayers mentally, which she later abandons since it is impractical. "Praying inside my head felt lonely and futile. As the nights came and went thoughts of Allah faded" (Hill, 2007:153).

The challenge of maintaining Islamic beliefs in America, Aminata inserts the need of negotiation to survive in her new land. Aminata also faced the project of covert to Christian. She many times attended the Church sermons, teaching in the Church, she did, but never convinced that she was a Christian. The attribution of Islam in Aminata's character, and her decision finally to be an atheist is also a milestone for criticizing the irony of the abolitionist movement in the liberation of slaves. The traditional slave narrative recounted a fugitive slave's personal story to condemn slavery and hence working towards abolitionist, Aminata in other hands refuse to write by sequencing the narrative and thematic choices under Abolitionist's interest, she did for Abolitionist, but set partly from her own personal recount. *Someone Knows My Name*, indeed, recounted a slave freedom seeker but "undercutting those thematic features that have created racial mythologies," and displays a double standard of stances; "he wrote both within and against the abolitionist tradition, and presents a genuine fiction rather than a politically expedient one"(Yorke, 2010: 120). In traditional Slave narrative obviously its political function was to harness public reaction against slavery, and the abolitionist movement, though apparently "for" enslaved blacks, was a white Christian cultural phenomenon, and slave narratives were geared toward a white Christian audience (Yorke, 2010: 129), thus its further reaching by-product was a textual tradition that continues to inflect popular constructions of race.

Conclusion

Someone Knows My Name offers alternative perspective reconstructing the experience of black slave in eighteenth century. It is not only challenging the colonial mainstream perspective on black experience in slavery, but also black culture and identity. Through Aminata, Hill displayed the experience of the past and struggles to gain identity. Hill was able in connecting the memories of black Africa, America, Canada, Freetown, and London, to show us the long journey of black slave in struggling to get freedom and self authority. Hill reconstructed the ignored crucial historical events and identity of fugitive slave in pre-American revolutionary war.

References

- Duff, C. (2011). Where literature fills the gaps:*The Book of Negroes* as a Canadian work of rememory. *Journal Studies in Canadian Literature*, 36(2): 237–254.
- Emode, R.(2013). Possibilities of “Peace”: Lévinas’s ethics, memory, and black history in Lawrence Hill’s *The Book of Negroes*. Thesis. *University of Victoria*. ebook.
- Gasztold, B. (2020). Slavery through a rhetorical lens: The Book of Negroes by Lawrence Hill as the female neo-slave narrative. *Rhetoric of Silence in American Studies*, 7 (4): 80-97.
- Hutcheon, L. (1988). *A poetics of postmodernism:history, theory fiction*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Hutcheon, L. (1989) 'historiographic metafiction: parody and the intertextuality of history'. *Intertextuality and contemporary American fiction*. Ed. O'Donnell, P.,& R,C,Davis. Baltimore: JHUPress, (pp.3-32).
- James W. St. G. Walker. (1992). Black exodus Clarkson’s mission to America, 1791–1792. *The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Jeslin, P. (2019). Social Exclusiveness in Lawrence Hill’s *The Book of Negroes* *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities*, 7(4): 65.
- Jordan, W. (1972). Modern Tension and the Origins of African Slavery. Ed.N. Donald L, *The Origins of Slavery and Racism* (pp.81—94). Columbus, Ohio: Charless E Merrill Publishing Co.
- Mellinger, W,M.(1992). Postcards from the Edge of the Color Line: Images of African Americans in Popular Culture, 1893–1917. *Symbolic Interaction*, 15(4): 413-433.
- Nehl, M. (2016). Transnational Diasporic Journeys in Lawrence Hill’s *The Book of Negroes*. *Transnational Black Dialogues: Re-Imagining Slavery in the Twenty-First Century*. Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld: Deutsche Nationalbibliothek.
- Oduwobi, O., Sewlall, H., & Abodunrin, F. (2016). The Postcolonial female “Bildung” in Lawrence Hill’s *The Book of Negroes*. *Journal of Black Studies*, 47(5), 383–401.