



Trauma in Amiri Baraka's *Slave Ship*

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Abstract

Baraka's *Slave Ship* (1967) reenacts historical scenes of transatlantic slave trade, which lasted more than three centuries, and scenes from the Southern plantations. This study shows that the horrendous condition of the ship hold in addition to the brutality of the slave traders resulted in the affliction of the enslaved Africans with trauma. It will attempt to examine the play through the lens of Literary Trauma Theory which appeared in the middle of 1990s, henceforth it has been developed by so many scholars, and the latest revision is proposed by Joshua Pederson in 2014. The first wave of the theorists claim that trauma causes amnesia for the victims; they cannot remember nor describe what they have experienced, but Pederson in his revised edition of the theory proposes otherwise. Two methods are used to approach the text of the play through literary trauma theory; first, examining the invisible post-traumatic narrators' memory and then by connecting the text of the play with Olaudah Equiano's slave narrative. Equiano, who is the founder of slave narrative genre, suffered from firsthand slave ship's trauma.

Keywords: Slave ship, transatlantic slave trade, trauma theory, victims' memory.

1. Literature Review and a Brief Theoretical Background:

Literary trauma theory originally emerged in the field of literary criticism with the publication of Cathy Caruth's book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* in 1996. The first generation of trauma theorists claim that survivors cannot remember, represent nor describe traumatic events, which can only belatedly reemerge as repeated nightmares and compulsive thoughts (Caruth 1991). Caruth, in an introductory essay to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), provides a clear description of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She suggests that a traumatic event cannot be "experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (emphasis original; p. 5). Countless scholarly works have been conducted in the light of literary trauma theory.

Shoshana Felman, in her book *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (2002), offers an account of the surprising interaction between trauma and justice and explores the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis. Felman argues that "the encounter of law with trauma impacts the structures of the law and transforms that legal procedure, thereby giving to the trial a new jurisprudential dimension" (Starman, 2006, p. 1). Initially, trauma theory surfaced in the field of psychology, then employed in the domains of sociology and literature; that is to say, they share the same theoretical premise.

Michelle M. Sotero (2006), a scholar at the University of Nevada, in an article entitled "A Conceptual Model of Historical Trauma: Implications for Public Health Practice and Research", hypothesizes "historical trauma theory" which is a relatively new concept. The premise of this theory is that "populations historically subjected to long-term, mass trauma — colonialism, slavery, war, genocide — exhibit a higher prevalence of disease even several



generations after the original trauma occurred”(p. 93). According to Sotero, the descendants of nations who are affected by historical trauma exhibit various symptoms of PTSD.

Mohatt et al. (2014) in their study “Historical Trauma as Public Narrative: A Conceptual Review of How History Impacts Present-day Health” explain how historical trauma “influences the health of individuals and communities. [They] argue that historical trauma functions as a public narrative for particular groups or communities” (p. 128). Mohatt et al. point out that scholars to describe the generational aspect of historical trauma use different terminologies as transgenerational, intergenerational, multi-generational, or cross-generational, and have introduced concepts, such as soul wound or Post Traumatic Slavery Syndrome.

In addition to the effects of slavery’s historical trauma, Danzer et al. (2016) in “White Psychologists and African Americans’ Historical Trauma: Implications for Practice” suggest that white racism is another source of trauma for African Americans.

Dr. DeGruy (2005) develops her theory of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome and publishes it under the title *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*. She describes a set of behaviors that are related to African Americans’ transgenerational trauma. DeGruy suggests that the slaves’ untreated PTSD is passed to their descendants.

Returning to the first wave of literary trauma theory in the field of criticism, Anne Whitehead’s (2004) *Trauma Fiction* applies it to miscellaneous literary works. In the introduction, Whitehead raises a question about the contradictory nature of literary trauma theory via commenting on the title of her book, “The term ‘trauma fiction’ represents a paradox or contradiction: if trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation, how then can it be narrativised in fiction” (Whitehead, 2004, p. 3)?

Michelle Balaev (2008) in an article titled “Trends in Literary Trauma Theory” suggests that identity is shaped by trauma’s transgenerational transmission. After two decades from the outset of literary trauma theory, Michelle Balaev edited and collected a group of contemporary academic articles and published them under the title *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* (2014). In chapter five interestingly, Irene Visser’s “Trauma and Power in Postcolonial Literary Studies” shows the limitation of trauma theory for postcolonial studies, and adapts the theory of ‘grid-group’ diagram in order to interpret trauma in postcolonial criticism.

In a PhD study at the University of Manchester by Electra Georgiades (2014) under the title “Trauma, Company and Witnessing in Samuel Beckett’s Post-War Drama, 1952-61” relies on the first wave theorists of trauma like Cathy Caruth, Kai Erikson, Dori Laub, Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart. These theorists claim that the victims of trauma suffer from traumatic amnesia and are not able to remember nor to describe their past traumatic event, but Georgiades after an extensive study proves otherwise.

However, Joshua Pederson, who is a scholar at Boston University, depending on a myriad of academic researches of Richard McNally’s research team at Harvard University’s Department of Psychology, proposed an alternate model of literary trauma theory in 2014 in his seminal study “Speak, Trauma: Toward a Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory”. Pederson, unlike the first wave of trauma theorists, suggests that survivors can both recollect and describe their traumatic experience (Pederson 2014, p. 338). Pederson’s theoretical framework is comprised of three elements: first, scholars in order to analyze a text, should change their attention to the text rather than searching for gaps or traumatic amnesia because trauma is memorable and speakable, and victims can construct “reliable narrative” about their experience, which has a great role in alleviating or healing their traumatic wounds. Second, traumatic exposure does not hinder or banish survivors’ memory; adversely, it enhances the memory of the victims. They precisely remember what has happened to them in



detail. Usually victims record the traumatic event by using the five senses; they use visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile and gustatory cues to register their exposure. Third, although trauma strengthens the memory of the survivors, their memory partially might be altered, only affectively not in substance, for instance, time slows down, the world seems unreal, spaces may loom, and victims may feel they slip outside their bodies, which scholars call it 'peritraumatic dissociation'.

Pederson himself applied his theory to three works of art. First, Alain Resnais's drama film, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, Pederson offers "a critique of Caruth's interpretation of Resnais's ... *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, and suggest[s] the film's depiction of personal and historical loss supports McNally's theory of trauma, not her own" (Pederson, 2014, p. 340). The second work is titled "Dulce et Decorum Est" by one of the First World War's noticeable veteran poet, Wilfred Owen. His poem is concerned with the memory of trauma in the battlefield. The third one is a novel by Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005). Additionally, this paper has benefited from another study by Pederson in the field of trauma entitled "Trauma and Narrative" published as a chapter in a *Trauma and Literature* (2018) edited by J. Roger Kurtz.

This study, by adopting Pederson's theoretical framework, will try to analyze *The Slave Ship* (1967) by Amiri Baraka, to demonstrate how the playwright reflects upon traumatized African American characters and how he deals with trauma in this work, then how the three elements of Pederson's new literary trauma theory play out in the close reading of the text of the play.

2. Introduction

2. A. Historical Slave Ship: A Survey of Slave Trade

*A charnel stench, effluvium of living death
Spreads outward from the hold,
Where the living and the dead, the horribly dying,
Lie interlocked, lie foul with blood and excrement . . .*

Robert Hayden

The term 'slave ship' signifies transatlantic slave trade during the Middle Passage that lasted from the "mid-fifteenth century until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was a distinctive event in both global history and the history of slavery" (Burnard and Heuman, 2011, p. 80). Between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is estimated that "nearly twelve million African people were held as cargo on ships destined for the Americas and slavery" (Murphy, 2008, p. 52). The first English slave trader named Sir John Hawkins (1532-1595). Hawkins was supported by Queen Elizabeth I, she loaned him a Royal Navy ship named '*Jesus of Lubek*'. "The ship was the literal embodiment of the alliance between the rhetoric and symbolism of the Church and the economic and the expansionist demands of the state" (Finley, 2018, p. 29).

Slave trade is frequently referred to as triangular trade because slave ships followed a triangular path between Europe, Africa and America (Hornsby Jr., 2005, p. 243; Burnard and Heuman, 2011, p. 84), known as 'Middle Passage', it was one of the most horrifying practices in human history" (Hornsby Jr., 2005, p. 243). Producing goods and exporting them to Africa by ships, the major Europeans were involved in slave trade. The goods were exchanged for African slaves. In the second phase of the journey, these slaves were transferred to the North and South Americas (Burnard and Heuman, 2011, p. 84). Bailey (2005) depending on the Harvard University Archive demonstrates the profound complicity of America and Europe in slave trade. She writes, "over twenty-seven thousand slave ships, though it represents only a small fraction of the total number of slave ships that participated in slave traffic, attests to the depth and influence of such involvement" (p. 15). Burnard (2011) comments on the Middle Passage as, "It was one of the worst experiences in human history,



where hundreds of traumatised men, women and children were sent in tightly packed, foul-smelling ships on a four-to-six-week journey across the Atlantic” (p.87).

Ira Berlin (2003) depicts the appalling image of the slave ships en route from African costs to the New World’s plantations: “Slaves were forced to wallow in their own excrement and were placed at the pleasure of the crew. [...] death stalked these vessels, and more than one in ten Africans who boarded them did not reach the Americas.” Berlin continues in her horrific description, “The survivors arrived in the New World physically depleted and psychologically disoriented” (pp. 103-104). Sowande M. Mustakeem (2016) reports shocking examples of raping African female slaves on board slave ship even little girls were not safe from the sailors’ sexual molestation: “Regardless of age, females were regularly exposed to violence as seafarers sought to hold complete dominance over their personal lives. Deemed docile and thereby voiceless, black women had few if any methods to escape sexual violation. Instead, crewmen were ‘permitted to indulge their passions among them at pleasure’ throughout the passage” (p. 86). In one report a ship captain, writes, “mistreated a very pretty Negress, broke two of her teeth, and put her in such a state of languish [sic] that she could only be sold for a very low price at Saint Domingue, where she died two weeks later.” The captain still unsatisfied, he “pushed his brutality to the point of violating a little girl of eight to ten years, whose mouth he closed to prevent her from screaming. This he did on three nights and put her in a deathly state” (qtd. in Mustakeem, 2016, pp. 86-87).

The captured Africans faced death and sickness aboard the slave ship. “Uncontrollable, catastrophic epidemics erupted from time to time, which is why the slave ship was called a ‘marine lazar house’ and a ‘floating bier.’ [...] A ‘sickly ship,’ everyone agreed,” writes Marcus Rediker (2007), was a “horror beyond imagination. The ill lay on bare planks, without bedding, as friction caused by the rolling motion of the ship rubbed away the skin from their hips, elbows, and shoulders. A man below decks sometimes awoke in the morning and found himself shackled to a corpse” (p. 274). Probably Dr. Alexander Falconbridge portrays “the most famous image of a sickly ship”, who recorded “his visits to a lower deck ravaged by fluxes and fevers: ‘the deck was covered with blood and mucous [sic], and approached nearer to the resemblance of a slaughter-house than anything I can compare it to, [and] the stench and foul air were likewise intolerable’” (qtd. in Rediker, 2007, p. 275).

Swahilian people use the word Maafa to capture the genocide or the holocaust of the Africans (Barndt, 2007, p. 269; Spitzer, 2002, p. 1319). “Maafa is akin to the word Shoah (the Hebrew word for the Holocaust)” it means “disaster, catastrophe or calamity” (Woolfork, 2010, p. 15). Even infants were not spared the horror of the Maafa:

A child on board a slave-ship, of about ten months old, took sulk and would not eat; the captain flogged it with a cat-o’-nine tails; swearing that he would make it eat, or kill it. From this, and other ill-treatment, the limbs swelled. But even his tender mercies were cruel. The cook, on putting his hand into the water, said it was too hot. Upon this the captain swore at him, and ordered the feet to be put in. This was done. The nails and skin came off. Oiled cloths were then put around them. The child was at length tied to a heavy log. Two or three days afterwards, the captain caught it up again, and repeated that he would make it eat, or kill it. He immediately flogged it again, and in a quarter of an hour it died. And after the babe was dead, whom should the barbarian select to throw it overboard, but the wretched mother! In vain she tried to avoid the office. He beat her till he made her take up the child and carry it to the side of the vessel. She then dropped it into the sea, turning her head the other way, that she might not see it. (Lowance Jr., 2003, p. 371; Mustakeem, 2016, pp. 92-93)

In 1781 Luke Collingwood, Captain of the *Zong*, committed an atrocious massacre, by throwing overboard 133 slaves, their hands bound, so ship owners can collect insurance money (Brown, 2011, p. 110; Fisch, 2007, p. xv; Mustakeem, 2016, p. 188). Hence, it is no wonder that a famous African American scholar DuBois overtly equates slavery with hell:



“The most magnificent drama in the last thousand years of human history is the transportation of ten million human beings out of the dark beauty their mother continent into the new-found Eldorado of the West. They descended into Hell” (qtd. in Bogues, 2010, p. 54). This is the very reason that a cargo of chained Africans newly arrived in St. Simons Island in Georgia preferred death to slavery. Their slave ship named “*The Wanderer*, docked at Dunbar Creek, [the] African slaves [...] refused to go ashore, and opted to commit mass suicide that [sic/than] to be slaves. They were said to have started singing an Igbo [West Nigerian people] war songs and the group committed suicide by drowning while chained together” (Bangura, 2017, p. 73).

The unimaginable traumatic suffering inflicted on the Africans during the Middle Passage has not only affected their lives psychologically but physically – “the trauma of the ocean passage from Africa to America during the slave trade” has caused genetic changes (Curtin, 1992, p. 1681) – as well. Additionally, their trauma, in accordance with historical trauma approach, passed onto their descendants.

2. B. Baraka’s *Slave Ship*: A Background of the Play

The full title of the play is *Slave Ship: A Historical Pageant*, usually referred to as *Slave Ship*. The title immediately connects the spectators’ minds to the past slave trade. Slave ship as an object symbolizes one the most heinous crimes in human history which is human trafficking. The subtitle of the play implies that the play is a mere presentation of historical events that surrounded the slave ship during the Middle Passage. Within the play, Baraka heavily relies on the traumatic scenes of the historical slave narratives like Olaudah Equiano’s account onboard slave ship.

The play is one act which is designed to shock the audience by involving them in the traumatic conditions of the ship hold. Because “theatre, more than any other art form, is perfectly placed to attempt a dialogue with, if not a representation of, trauma” (Duggan, 2007, p. 46). Malpede, K. in “Teaching Witnessing: A Class Wakes to Genocide” clarifies this statement by proposing that “[b]ecause theatre takes place in public and involves the movement of bodies across a stage, theatre seems uniquely suited to portray the complex [...] realities of trauma” (qtd. in Duggan, 2007, p. 47).

Within the limited space and darkness of the slave ship and sparse use of language as well as anonymous unnamed characters, it is a very challenging task to have detailed insights into the characters’ psychological state. The action basically relies on sound, illumination and smell. The audience hear continuous sounds, groans, squeaks, screams, cries, and people worshipping God in supplication, rising and falling of sound. These sounds are mixed with odors and illumination effects. The play has detailed stage directions and employs a few dialogues. Larry Neal (2002) likens this play to modern music, he writes:

This work has special affinities with the New Music [...] Events are blurred, rising and falling in a stream of sound. Almost cinematically, the images flicker and fade against a heavy back-drop of rhythm [...] It functions on the basis of movement and energy—the dramatic equivalent of the New Music. (p. 64)

Foster Hirsch, a critic, in Fall, 1969 attended the performance of *Slave Ship* “directed by Gilbert Moses and staged at the Theatre-in-the-Church by the Chelsea Theatre Center in New York City” (Pittman, 2010, p. 33). Hirsch reviewed the play in *Educational Theatre Journal*:

The use of stage space is as extraordinary as the acting. The whole theatre has been converted into a slave ship. The audience sits on benches surrounding the center stage, which is double-levelled. The top level, slightly above the heads of the audience, is



used for the deck of the ship and the slave market; the bottom level, divided into four cell-like cubicles, represents the ship's hold. The whole structure rocks to convey the motion of the ship. The actors also use small stages in the corners of the theatre, and the area in which the audience sits: no section of the theater is out of bounds. All the walls are covered with wood panelling to resemble the wood of the ship itself. (Hirsch, 1970, p. 103)

Moreover, by converting the whole theatrical space into a slave ship, "Baraka links the audience to the transformative sphere of the ship space by drawing on embodied experience, and by linking the audience members to an ongoing Middle Passage" (Pittman, 2010, p. 34).

Baraka aims at addressing "transgenerational trauma" in his play to "transmit traumatic memory" of the slave ship to the present audience. For Gabriel Schwab, the author of *Haunting Legacies*, "literary narrative might not only communicate trauma; it might also pass traumatic memory from generation to generation" (qtd. in Pederson, 2018, p.105). Accordingly, Baraka aims to pass the traumatic scenes of the slave ship to the new African American generation and attempts to convey a message to the black audience that their present racial discrimination, segregation, marginalization and so forth are rooted in the history of Middle Passage slave trade. Baraka like many other African American authors seeks to rediscover the history slavery to be expressed in artistic works. Toni Morrison (1974) in "Rediscovering Black History" writes about the black author's motivation in the past, "There is no need to be nostalgic about 'the old days' because they weren't...but to recognize and rescue those qualities of resistance, excellence and integrity that were so much a part of our past and so useful to us and to the generations of blacks, now growing up" (p. 11).

With the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965 Baraka established a radical movement named the Black Arts Movement that called for using weapons for self-defense. (Bressler, 2011, p. 216). Within this play, Baraka, due to his revolutionary stances, does not address the white audience at all, and calls for collapsing bridges of communication with whites. Baraka (2009) comments on the role of *Slave Ship* and ritual dramas of the sixties in the awakening of African Americans, he suggests that "theatre is a deeper world" from which we can see the world clearly:

The responsibility to inform is our deepest task, but information is alive and can only be deeply grasped as a living entity passed to the living. The theater should wake us from the "dead" of the blunted sense, the mediocrity that day-to-day evil has wrapped our feelings in, and as we heighten the audience's feelings, it is these feelings which become the enhanced antennae of learning. (142)

In the performance of the play the audience's proximity to the action, unlike movies, makes them "hear, see, touch and even smell the performers; this connection places [them] in a frame of both responsibility for, and complicity in, the action" (Duggan, 2007, p. 55). Accordingly, the audience can get living information or live and feel the action. In this case language might not have the power of action. By connecting the audience with the actors kinesthetically, the audience can empathize with the action or the traumatic moments, because "through a kinesthetic empathy with the bodies of the performers an embodied and experiential experience of performance can give the effect of trauma's presence" (Duggan, 2007, 56).

3. *Slave Ship* and Memory:

With a subject such as slavery and the slave trade, we especially need artists to give us access to the story, and especially to the hold of its memory on us.

David W. Blight



For the first wave trauma theorists, the overwhelming events that cause trauma is so painful that the victim's mind cannot process it in a normal way, therefore survivors of traumatic events suffer from traumatic amnesia i.e. they cannot recollect and describe their experience (Pederson, 2014, p. 334; Caruth, 1991). However, following McNally's research, Pederson proposes that trauma is memorable and describable.

Baraka reenacts the traumatic circumstances of the newly captured enslaved Africans. The overwhelming experience on board the slave ship is precisely depicted. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* LaCapra's (2014) shows compliments to artistic works – like *Slave Ship* – that emulate trauma: “Some of the most powerful forms of modern art and writing [...] often seem to be traumatic writing or post-traumatic writing in closest proximity to trauma” (p. 23). Thus Baraka's play can be considered as a ‘post-traumatic writing’ that accurately portrays the details of a historical traumatic experience. For evaluating the text through the lens of Pederson's literary trauma theory, the study employs two methods:

3. A. Firstly, no matter how realistic the events of *Slave Ship* are represented on the stage, the audience are not watching reality. Dancyger and Rush (2013) observe that “the act of representing the world implies narration. The narrating may be overt or virtually invisible, but it is always present” (p. 262). In this play, as a post-traumatic work, the dramatic voice is an invisible character who has witnessed the traumatic events onboard the slave ship during the Middle Passage and on the southern plantations in the antebellum era. At the present time the narrator retells these events through memory to be acted on the stage; the dramatic voice narrates what has happened and what has been conversed by the African slaves then delivers direction to the method acting cast to reenact the past traumatic events. “It is important, here, to highlight that while the return of the event is an imagined re-living (or remembering) it is nonetheless a powerfully visceral experience that the survivor embodies; it seems to be happening again” (Duggan, 2007, p. 45). Thus, recollection and depiction of trauma can be examined through analyzing and indicating to the traumatic images that the speaking voice exposes in the text of the play. So, whatever written in the text of the play is exposition of the traumatic memory of the narrator as the most noticeable traumatic scenes are examined in the section 3.A and its subsections (3. A. i.) to (3. A. v.).

In this case, the narrator can be considered as a victim of trauma because drawing on DeGruy's (2005) list of the events that cause trauma, “seeing another person injured or killed as result of accident or physical violence causes mental and/or emotional trauma” (p. 118).

3. B. Secondly, since the play is a historical pageant, it is a reenacting of historical scenes of slave narratives. Thus connecting the text of the *Slave Ship* with one of the victim's narration (Olaudah Equiano's slave narrative) of a real slave ship during the Middle Passage will facilitate the application of Pederson's theory to find out whether trauma is memorable and describable or not. Thus, this study analyzes the traumatic scenes in Baraka's *Slave Ship* in comparison with the text of Olaudah Equiano's narrative.

3. A. The Text of *Slave Ship* as a memory of a Post-traumatic Narrator:

Slave Ship as a post-traumatic literary narrative “might possess a privileged (if not unique) value for communicating [the slaves'] deepest psychic pains. [...] it can help [readers] ‘read the wound’ of trauma” (Pederson, 2018, p. 97), or it can assist the audience to ‘feel’ the traumatic events.

Interestingly, the narrator refers to the main characters, as nowadays prisoners, by numbers instead of names. In other words they are unnamed and anonymous. There are six main African American characters, three men and three women, labeled as 1st Man, 2nd Man, 3rd Man, 1st Woman, 2nd Woman and 3rd Woman. Likewise, the anonymous white characters



are Captain, Sailor and Plantation Owner. Creating archetypal African American characters known by numbers as well as their white masters known by their profession, the playwright attempts to make his work universal. Sam Sacks (2015) suggests that modern writers employ this technique to “set their tales outside of time.”

Therefore, using numbers does not indicate that the narrator suffers from traumatic amnesia, or cannot remember the names, as suggested earlier by Caruth, it rather demonstrates that the posttraumatic narrator wants to honestly depict the traumatic scenes and the characters in order to offer a more ‘general truth’ as opposed to a ‘situational truth’. Through the course of the traumatic events, the narrator only recollects some names which were called out by other characters.

There is only one character named Old Tom Slave and New Tom Preacher (i.e. the slave turns to preacher). The playwright proposes that the Middle Passage slave trade and Southern plantation ordeal are not the adventures of a handful of African people, but the quest of a nation. Therefore, the unnamed black characters, men or women, are representatives of enslaved Africans who suffered from slave trade, in the same way the unnamed Captain, Sailor and Plantation owner stand for the white men. On the other hand, the playwright by giving numbers to slaves aims to remind the audience the procedures for purchasing slaves at the Africans coasts. The slaves were “branded, given numbers inscribed on leaden tags, and herded on shipboard” (Elkins, 1976, p. 100).

By merging the elements of cast and props components, then arranging them in chronological order an astute reader can create an adequate account of slavery’s history:

African bata drums; African slave; Heavy chains; dirt/filth smells/bodies; Ship Noises; 1st woman (prayer); 2nd woman (screamer attacked); children; voices and bodies in the slave ship; Captain; Ship Bells; Sailor: Rocking and splashing of sea; Banjo music for the plantation atmosphere; Plantation owner – ‘Eternal oppressor’; Whips/ whip sounds; 3rd man (struggler); Guns and Cartridges.

Some of the cues in cast and prop lists as (African slaves, whips, heavy chains, dirt/filth, screamer attacked, prayer, eternal oppressor, struggler, guns and cartridge) create an impression of a disastrous condition and great human suffering. The theatre is visually dark to represent the narrator’s account of the darkness of the ship hold. The sound of splashing sea waves in addition to intermittent sounds of the ship (as groaning, squeaking and rocking) are mixed with sea smells.

Until this point nothing is out of the ordinary in the stage direction. However, with the gradual increase of the sea smell and sounds of the ship in the sea blended with the obnoxious odors of urine, excrement and death, merged with terrible sounds of crying and whipping, shape the traumatic atmosphere of the slave ship:

Whole theater in darkness. Dark. For a long time. Just Dark. Occasional sounds like ship groaning, squeaking, rocking. Sea smells. In the dark. Keep the people in the dark, and gradually the odors of the sea, and the sounds of the sea, and sounds of the ship, creep up. Burn incense, but make a significant, almost stifling, smell come up. Urine. Excrement. Death. Life processes going on anyway. Eating. These smells and cries, the slash and tear of the lash, in a total atmos-feeling, gotten some way. (Baraka, 1969, p. 1)

Noticeably, the play does not start at the Western African coasts where slave traders carried their cargo of black bodies. It describes the condition of a slave ship that has already left the African shores in the midway to America. It is noteworthy that the enslaved Africans before boarding the slave ship were traumatized many times during their capture in native



wars or raiding expeditions. Then, their next shock were the hardship of the long journey for several weeks marching on bare feet inside the jungles towards the sea. “[T]hey were driven along like beasts tied together by their necks” (Elkins, 1976, p. 99). The slaves were collected inside folds near the trading position on shore before their sale to the European slave traders and “kept there overnight, sometimes for days, the slaves were brought out for examination. Those rejected would be abandoned to starvation” (Elkins, 1976, p. 100).

The African slaves after their boarding on the *Slave Ship* are traumatized another time by dreadful condition of the ship hold. The narrator in the above extract is preoccupied by the image of darkness, sounds and smells. The speaking voice as a victim and witness of trauma revisits, relives, and re-experiences the past wounds repeatedly in order to narrate the story (Pederson, 2018, p. 104). It can be noticed that the word ‘dark/darkness’ is repeated five times. The word ‘sound’ repeated three times, and sound derivations can be seen in “groaning, squeaking, rocking”, and “cries. The slash and tear of the lash”. In the same way the word “smell” repeated three times, and its derivatives are “odors”, “incense”, “Urine. Excrement. Death”. On the other hand, the speaker’s preoccupation with these images demonstrates the multisensory of the dramatic voice’s traumatic memory (Pederson, 2014, p.339). The traumatic experience, which heightens the traumatic memory, is recorded with vibrant intensity.

The traumatic scenes of screaming, crying, lashing, whipping of the traumatized African slaves “mashed together” in the darkness of the ship are contrasted with the laughter and conversation of two white characters, Captain and Sailor who are blissful at the prospect of becoming rich, returning to America after carrying a cargo of slaves from African shores:

VOICE 2. Aye, Aye, Cap’n. We’re on our way. Riches be our, by God.

VOICE 1. Aye riches, riches be ours. We’re on our way. America! (*Laughter*)
(Baraka, 1969, p. 2)

This contrast between the dejected, chained black Africans in the darkness of the lower part of the ship and the happy free white Americans on the upper sundeck deepens and intensifies the traumatic scenes further. It is a sharp contrast between two opposite stances, ‘fear’ of Africans from the mysterious future and ‘hope’ of Americans for a distinguished life.

The traumatic memory of the dramatic voice presents an audiovisual imagery of chained men and women who are praying to three African gods Orisha, Obatala, and Fukwididila. Women are screaming and children crying,

(We get the feeling of jmany [sic] people jammed together, men women, children, aching in the darkness. The chains. The whips, magnify the chains and whips. The dragging together. The pain. The terror. Women begin to moan and chant songs, ‘African sorrow song,’ with scraping of floor and chains accompaniment) (Baraka, 1969, p.1)

When other traumatic scenes are examined, similarities or repetition can be noticed with a nuance of changes. Almost all the distressful sights are comprised of women screaming, chanting, moaning, humming, children crying, men praying, mourning or cursing sometimes swearing white men and contrasted with the laughter of white men. “Captives produced sounds often cast as depressing, yet the content varied. The primary composition of many of these songs centered slaves’ separation from family members and friends [. . .] they vocalized the pain, suffering, neglect, and relentless abuses” (Mustakeem, 2016, p. 121). The reason behind recurring and repetition of the traumatic scenes is that the narrator has repeatedly experienced onboard slave ship the same traumatic scenes on the daily basis from the beginning of the journey until the arrival to the American shores. Moreover, the narrator



as a victim of trauma is haunted by these repulsive scenes which return as nightmares. Worthy of notice, the importance of repetition and return goes back to Freud who observed “victims reexperiencing trauma in dreams and flashbacks and reliving it through the repetition compulsion” (qtd. in Pederson, 2018, p. 104).

In the appalling condition of the ship hold, loss and separation of family members, relatives and friends rub salt into the emotional wound of enslaved Africans. The speaking voice depicts a traumatic scene of families’ forceful separation “*for the first time*” because enslaved African family members were exposed to split, for the second time, in an auction after their arrival to the New World, and later the ramshackle slave families were in jeopardy to be vended by the plantation master. The following excerpt is a scene on the slave ship:

(dragging chains, percussive sounds people make in the hold of a ship. The moans and pushed together agony. Children crying incessantly. The mothers trying to calm them. More than one child. Young girls afraid they may be violated. Men trying to break out, or turning into frightened children. Families separated for the first time.) (Baraka, 1969, p. 4)

Historically, slave families, relatives or friends were exposed to be sold and separated for the second time when they arrived the New World shores. After the arrival of the slave ship, the slaves were divided into small groups and exhibited on the auction boards, “sold to the highest bidder, and scattered among small plantations” (Billingsley and Billingsley, 1965, p. 311). On the plantations the trauma of separation haunted the slave families continuously because during financial crisis slaveholders frequently separated slave family members by auction (Tolman, 2011, p. 7). Within the *Slave Ship* the separation of slave families on plantation can be observed in this extract:

ALL. *(Alternating jman [sic] and woman losing mate in death or through slave sale, or the aura of constant fear [of] separation)* (p. 10)

The speaking voice, in another audiovisual tragic tableau, presents the cramped people in the dismal space of the ship hold gasping for air and a man and a woman wailing and lamenting together over their lost spouses:

(moans . . . the chains, and Black People pushed against each other, struggling for breath and room to live. The Black Man weeps for his woman. The Black Woman weeps for her man together in the darkness, some calling for God.) (p. 6)

The repetitive scenes of the wailing and agony of the Africans in contrast to “*(the constant crazy laughter of the sailors)*” (p. 6) underscores the repetitive nature of the trauma or the traumatic memory cannot be effaced:

(the white men begin to laugh and point, as if they were pointing at the filth, misery and degradation of the Black People. They laugh: HHAAAAA HAA HAAAAHAAHAAAAHAAHAAAAA When they are outlined again they are rolling in merriment. Pointing, dancing, and jumping up and down, HAHAAHA hahaha Haaaa . . .) (p.5)

The narrator as a victim and a witness of trauma recounts recurring traumatic and peritraumatic dissociation scenes in an endeavor to communicate what has happened. Scholars assert “traumatic repetition has narrative ramifications. Victims do not merely relive or reexperience their traumas; they retell them, too” (Pederson, 2018, p. 104). Because the



speaker “feels compelled to tell the story of his hellish time at sea over and over again – to whomever will listen. These tellings soothe, but only momentarily” (Pederson, 2018, p. 104). Accordingly, narrative repetition of traumatic scenes has a cathartic power to the speaking voice in order to purge his mind from psychic anguish.

The dramatic voice, who is an invisible character, witnesses many traumatic events and others sufferings. In the following subsections the narrator recollects and portrays the image of the enslaved African young women, old women, men and white men.

3. A. i. The Enslaved African Women and Trauma Vulnerability:

Women in the in the *Slave Ship*, as the dramatic voice portrays them, are twofold traumatized due to their race and gender as well. Further, they are traumatized by the abominable atmosphere of the ship hold; for instance, they are vulnerable to harassment by men. In general “*young girls [are] afraid they may be violated*” (p. 4). In an attempt of rape a horrific hand in darkness grabs and drags a female character named Woman 2. She screams and pleads the anonymous man not to touch her, then she calls her husband, Akiyele and her child Ifanami. She might have intended to give a message to the attacker that she has her own family, husband and child and does not have an intention to commit adultery or marital infidelity. Here touching sense (tactile cue) is protuberant in recording traumatic experience then visual and auditory cues to a less degree:

WOMAN 2. Oh, please, please don't touch me . . . please ... (frantic) Ifanami, where you (*screams at someone's touch in the dark, grabbing her, trying to drag her in the darkness, press her down against the floor*) Akiyele . . . please . . . don't, don't touch me. . . please, Ifanami, where you? Please, help me . . . Go. . . (p. 6)

The horrified helpless women, who are in desperate need of security, have nothing to do except screaming concurrently: “*the hideous screams. All the women together, scream. AAAAIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII. [in] black darkness of the slave ship. Smells [. . .] Scream. AAAAIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII. [in] black darkness with smells*” (p. 2).

The ship is crammed with slaves. However, there are only three unnamed female voiced characters in the play; Woman 1, Woman 2 and Woman 3. They pray and worship heathen African gods as Obatala, and Shango and make efforts to comfort and calm down their children:

WOOMAN 1. Ooooooooooooo, Obatala!

WOOMAN 2. Shango!

WOOMAN 1. Ooooooooooooo, Obatala

(*Children's crying in the hold, and the women trying to comfort them. Trying to keep their sanity, too.*)

WOOMEN 3. Moshake chile, calm, calm be you. Moshake chile. O calm, Orisha save us!

WOMAN 2. AAAAIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII (pp. 2-3)

Women in a nightmarish scene repeatedly scream, moan and “*chant-songs 'African sorrow song,' with scraping of floor and chains for accompaniment*” (p. 3). The narrator's preoccupation with the trauma of Woman 2 and Woman 3 is very evident. Their dreadful images regularly appear in the play, as the speaker cannot get rid of their perritraumatic dissociation scenes and compelled to tell their story repeatedly. The narrator as a witness of the pains of Woman 2 retells her story after being abducted from her child Ifanami and her husband Akiyele, the painful loss haunts Woman 2. She constantly utters their names. She



cries desperately and calls out her child “Ifanami, Ifanami . . . where you?? Where you?? Ifanami. (*Cries*) please, oh, God” (p. 4). Likewise, in other scenes she repeatedly cries out their names:

WOMAN 2. Akiyele . . . Akiyele . . . Lord, husband, where you . . . help . . . me.

.....

WOMAN 2. Ifanami!

The speaking voice also cannot purge himself from the haunting image of Women 3 (Dademi) and her child Moshake’s death, as if obliged to recite her story repeatedly. Dademi always shows her strong emotional concern about her child Moshake. She speaks three times in the play before committing suicide; in the first and the second one she tries to calm down Moshake, while in the third one she struggles to keep Moshake safe in the crowd:

WOMAN 3. Oh, chile . . . my chile, please, please, get away . . . you crush!

The most severe traumatic event in the ship hold occurs when Women 3 chokes her child Moshake and commits suicide by strangling herself:

WOMAN 3. Aiiiiieeeeeeeeeeeeeee.

WOMAN 1. She strangled herself with the chain. Choked the child. Oh, Shango! Help us, Lord. Oh, please.

WOMAN 2. Why you leave us, Lord?

MAN 1. Dademi, Dademi . . . she dead, she dead . . . Dademi . . . (her man wracked with death cries, screams) Dademi, Dademi!!!! (pp. 5-6)

After the scene shifts from the ship hold to the Southern plantation, some intermittent instances of “peritraumatic dissociation,” or “dissociative alterations in consciousness” can be observed as repetitive “literal terrifying nightmares” of the slave ship that perplexes the mind of Woman 2 and Man 1 (husband of Woman 3, Dademi). The traumatized Woman 2 has visions of Woman 3 (Dademi) while she speaks (*after death*) in a whispering voice to her child Moshake, it seems that for Woman 2 the death of Woman 3 is not real:

WOMAN 3. (*Whispering after death*) Moshake . . . Moshake . . . Moshake, chile, calm yourself, love. (*Woman runs down into soft weep, with no other distracting sound, just her moaning sad cry, for her baby. Chains. Chains dragging the chains. The humming. Hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm*)

WOMAN 2. AIEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

ALL. Uhh, Uhhh, Uhhh, Uhhh, Oooooooooooooooooo. (p. 8)

The painful events of the slave ship haunt the traumatized enslaved Africans’ minds, the ghost of Woman 3, calling her child Moshake, appears now and then until the end of the play. Additionally, the ghost of an African woman in the play, that demonstrates her care to her child, reflects “African religious thought” as they believe in protective power of specters (Morison, 2008, p. 62; Brogan, 1995, p. 150). For example, Woman 3’s character in all the scenes of her reappearance posthumously as a ghost she shows her emotive care to her child Moshake. The playwright, seemingly here extols Dademi for her suicidal act, as she refused to be enslaved by the white folks. Similarly, she strangles her own son Moshake as she cannot imagine the enslavement of her only son, after her death, under the mercy of whips of white man. Dademi’s act is not a unique incident in the history of resisting slavery; Perhaps Baraka reenacts the story of Margaret Garner –appears as Sethe, the main protagonist in Toni



Morison's *Beloved* – who murdered her child in order not to be returned to slavery (Wolff, 1991). However, implicitly the roles of Woman 1 and Woman 2 are disapproved, as they do not have any positive action except crying and screaming on the slave ship as well as on the plantation.

3. A. ii. The Image of Old Black Women Slaves:

The dispirited old African enslaved women, who are victimized by their color and gender when they were young, are depicted as powerless flat characters and assuming a negative role. They are always mourning for their sorrowful dejected past life. Their formidable screeches and screams during their exposure to traumatic experience in the past, when they were young on board slave ship and on the plantation, now turned to desperate humming. They have been “(*humming for three centuries in the slow misery of slavery*)” (p. 4) or much worse that they are “(*humming forever in deathly patience forever. . .*)” (p. 5)

3. A. iii. Trauma and the Role of African Men:

The enslaved African men are divided into three types and classified in accordance with their reaction to the traumatized condition of slave ship. The men are briefly depicted in the character list as; 1st Man (Prayer – husband of Dademi), 2nd Man (Curser) and 3rd Man (Struggler). Initially, Man 1 has a positive role as he pacifies the traumatized screaming women and prays to African gods in supplication.

WOMAN 2. AAIIIIIEEEEEEE.

MAN 1. Quiet woman. Quite. Save your strength for your child.

WOMAN 2. AAIIIIIEEEEEEE.

MAN 1. Quiet, foolish woman! Be quiet!

WOMAN 3. Moshake, baby, chile, be calm, be calm, it give you, oooooooo.

MAN 1. Shango, Obatala, make your lightening, beat the inside bright with paths for your people. Beat. Beat. Beat. (p. 3)

The role of Man1, is closer to women. He is a religious and highly emotional person. He, for the most part in the play, prays and mourns the death of his wife Woman 3 (Dademi) more than his child (Moshake). Man 1 is severely traumatized and endures torments after the passing of Woman 3 (Dademi), his role another time is likened to the women in the play when he screams for Dademi:

MAN 1. Dademi, Dademi . . . she dead, she dead . . . Dademi . . . (*hear man wracked with death cries screams*) Ddemi, Dademi!!!!

Moreover, Man 1 in his praying is likened to “(*old black women humming for three centuries in the slow misery of slavery . . . hummmmmmmmmmm*)” (Baraka, 1969, p. 4).

In his first reaction to the death of Woman 3 (Dademi), Man 1 is likened to mad old black women who are in deathly patience humming forever:

MAN 1. God, she's killed herself and the child. Oh, God. Oh, God. (*Moans. Moans [. . .] the constant, now almost maddening, humming . . . hummmmmmmmm . . . hummmmmmmmm . . . like mad old nigger ladies humming forever in deathly patience forever*). (p.5)

In scenes of peritruamatic dissociation Woman 3 (Dademi) reappears as a ghost to Man1, who has “a tendency to relive the past, to be haunted by ghosts or even to exist in the present as if [he] were still fully in the past, with no distance from it” (LaCapra, 2014, p. 142):



WOMAN 3. (*Dead whispered voice*) Moshake, Moshake . . . chile . . . calm, calm . . .
we be alright, now . . . Moshake, be calm . . .
MAN 1. White beasts!

Man 1 in the final scene reacts positively and calls for revolution: "O gun. Give me weapon. Give me iron. My spear. My bone and muscle make them tight with tension of combat" (p. 11).

Man 2 in the character list is defined as "curser" reacts angrily to the overwhelming traumatic events. He calls an African deity, Fukwididila, then curses Orisha and asks them to show their powers or miracles, then angrily demands Orisha and Obatala to help him:

MAN 2. Fukwididila! Fukwididila! Fukwididila! Screw you, Orisha! God! Where you be? Where you now, Black God? Help me. I be a strong warrior, and no woman. And I strain against these chains! But you must help me, Orisha. Obatala!

MAN 3. Quiet, you fool, you frighten the women! (p. 3)

Traumatic events, like the case of Man 2, sometimes shatter human's belief in the deity as Judith Herman (2001) asserts "They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis" (p. 51).

But Man 3 who is stronger than the rest and described as "struggler", reacts against Man 2's manner of speaking, Man 2 after his debut disappears on the stage until the end of the play. Man 3 has a revolutionary stance and a strong character, he does not show any signs of trauma, early in the play attempts and calls for freedom by breaking the chains, and always threatens, swears and dubs the white sailors as "devils":

MAN 3. I kill you, devils. I break these chains (*sound of men struggling against heavy chains*), I tear your face off. Crush your throat. Devils. Devils.

On Southern plantations, the enslaved men plan and revolt twice; they fail in the first one, being betrayed by Old Tom. The white plantation owners assassinate the leader of the rebellion, Reverend Turner. This is a direct reference to and celebration of the historical figure Nat Turner, who revolted with a group slaves against the plantation slaveholders and their rebellion soon suppressed by the whites. Turner was captured and sentenced to death in November 1831 (Breen, 2016). Nevertheless, the enslaved men in the play successfully lead the second revolt against the white plantation owners and celebrate their success.

In the abovementioned lists of traumatic incidents, it can be noticed that the dramatic voice relies on depicting images rather than reciting a traditional narrative because in drama the "emphasis [is] on showing rather than telling" (Cluck, 1979, p. 84). It proves, the first element of Pederson's theory, that the narrator is able to remember and describe the events, further, the dramatic voice uses a 'performative' language – in Susan Brison (2002) words – to describe the experience because "the action could be described as transforming traumatic memory into narrative memory" (p. 72)

3. A. iv. Trauma and African Deity:

More often than not, human beings during traumatic events instinctively seek refuge in supernatural powers. The overwhelming situation compelled the enslaved Africans to pray to their heathen gods. In the text of the play, there is a reference to religious music between the first and the second paragraph in the opening stage direction, there is a break of African drum "*like the worship of some Orisha. Obatala. Mbwana-rattles of the priests*" (p.1). The



main African gods in the play are Orisha, Obatala, and Shango. Orisha is the supreme deity in the Yoruba pantheon, Obatala is the Yoruba god of purity and creation, and Shango the god of thunder and lightning (Kumar, 2009, p. 52).

Generally, African music, song and dance are deployed effectively in various scenes of the play. A scholar argues that “‘the souls of black folks’ cannot be expressed through words alone, and that instead of a play, an event must be orchestrated to ‘capture the rhythms of that life, committing the community to a form of total engagement of body/ spirit’” (Kumar, 2009, p. 45).

Here the narrator by referring to the old African gods – the enslaved African characters in the play mostly pray to Orisha, and Obatala – and music signifies that Africans have their own religion and culture, and black people through the slave trade are uprooted from their own rich civilization. The playwright wants to employ the power of religion in resisting and revolting against white men. Paul Harvey (2011) remarks:

By the eighteenth century, enslaved people showed that their religious beliefs could not only survive the tortuous passage but also empower resistance. Both the Stono Rebellion in South Carolina in 1739 and the “Great Negro Slave Plot” in New York in 1741 evidenced the religious roots of slave resistance, a theme of many American slave revolts. (p. 9)

On the other hand, calling African gods in supplication is a kind of rejection of Christianity by dint of the church’s involvement in the Middle Passage slave trade that supported and justified the commerce spiritually and morally, for this reason the first British slave ship named ‘*Good Ship Jesus*’ also known ‘*Jesus of Lubek*’ (Kenan, 2013, p.706; Finley, 2018, p. 29).

The enslaved Africans, who were uprooted from their land and language, by passing of time under the pressure of traumatic circumstances of plantations, changed their African names to English Christian names, lost their faith in African deity and converted to Christianity:

ALL. Uhh. Uhh. Uhh. Obatala. Obatala. Save as Lord. Shango. Lord of forest. Give us back our strength. (*Chains. Chains. Dragging and grunting of people pushed against each other*)

The sound of a spiritual “Oh Lord Deliver Me . . . Oh Lord” . . . And Now cries of “JESUS, LORD JESUS . . . HELP US, JESUS . . .” (p. 11)

In the next extract the names of the African deities disappear from the text, and the slaves chant Christian hymns:

(*the same patient humming . . . of women, now, no men only the women . . . strains of ‘The Old Rugged Cross’ . . . and the women and the humming . . . the time passing in the darkness, soft, soft, mournful weeping*) “Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . .” (p. 11)

Historically, the missionaries, who Christianized the slaves, were able to convince the slaveholders that converting slaves will not harm slavery system. They “assured slaveholders that conversion would create a more docile, sober, and productive slave. To this end, they attacked aspects of slave culture that they felt ran contrary to the productive interests of the plantation” (Young, 2005, p. 177). Here the dramatic voice demonstrates the impact of the consecutive traumatic incidents – on slave ship board and on plantations – in converting the African slaves from paganism into Christianity. It can be deduced that the traumatic events





into center of floor” (p. 16). It is an overt call for violence against those black leaders who cooperate with white folks.

As a matter of fact, Baraka was one of the black scholars who believed that the nonviolent action protest of the southern Civil Rights Movement failed to solve the issues of “urban poverty, inequality, segregation, and economic disrepair afflicting African American communities” (Jarrett, 2014, p. 612). Here the radical playwright clearly calls for revolution against the white hegemonic authority. He believes that nothing can be achieved through negotiation and peace. Further, in Baraka’s view, justice can be attained only through the power of revolution.

All in all, the text of *Slave Ship* as narrated through the memory of a post-traumatic narrator demonstrates the traumatic moments on board slave ship in which the dramatic voice remembers the traumatic events and describes them precisely. The narrator’s traumatic memory does not miss the boat to show the peritraumatic scenes and to record the experience via visual, aural, olfactory and tactile imageries. The dramatic voice portrays different images of the helpless enslaved African men, women, and old women who are tortured physically and psychologically by the brutal white slave traders on the slave ship as well as white slaveholders on the plantations. The exposure of the enslaved Africans to the hardship of the traumatic journey from Africa to America in addition to the Southern plantations adversities forced African Americans to acquire new names and a new religion. The African American men, within the play, are portrayed positively much stronger than women – who only cry, pray and scream – during their experience of traumatic events. Men plan and initiate two rebellions against white masters. The play depicts how white men exploit and employ some well-known religious African American characters for the application of their hegemonic policies.

White men are represented as evil characters who are the very force behind all the miseries in the African American life in the past as well as present.

3. B. Slave Ship and Olaudah Equiano’s Slave Narrative:

The playwright for reproducing the events heavily relies on slave narratives as Olaudah Equiano’s account. “Equiano’s account of his own experience is critical and has been used time and again by historians to describe how Africans were enslaved” (Walvin, 2000, p.4). Luminita M. Dragulescu (2018) suggests that the slave narratives reveal traumatic scenes that gave birth to African American identity and she equates “the fractured and sporadic first-person narratives of the Middle Passage with trauma itself.” Therefore, “literary imagination proves especially useful and relevant in representing the race trauma of the Middle Passage and its aftershocks in contemporary American culture” (p.271)

Mohatt et.al. (2014) proposes that the “historical trauma is a narrative representation, it connects histories of group-experienced traumatic events to present day experiences and contexts” (p. 129). Thus Baraka plays on historical trauma by connecting past traumatic events of the slave trade to the present time. LaCapra (2014) reiterates that “historical trauma is related to particular events that do indeed involve losses” (p.80), such as African slave trade which is “the largest loss of life in human history” (Moor et.al, 2010, p.29). “Of the nearly 12 million in the Atlantic slave trade, around 15 percent, or up to 2 million more, died on the Atlantic voyage—the dreaded ‘Middle Passage’” (Drescher, 2009, p. 105; Rediker, 2007, p. 5; Dragulescu, 2018, p. 227). African Americans, Danzer et.al. (2016) consider as historically traumatized population “due to their culturally unique history of intercontinental slavery, post-Civil War barriers to upward socioeconomic mobility, and ongoing vulnerability and marginalization” (p. 352). Furthermore, “The children and grandchildren of historically traumatized populations [as African Americans] continue to manifest such symptoms and risk factors even when they have not been, in a traditional sense, directly traumatized” (Danzer



et.al., 2016, p.351 ; Sotero, 2006, p. 97). Therefore, Baraka as an individual, who belongs to the African American community might be considered historically as well as racially traumatized.

What might have forced Baraka to write such fiery play is the Americans political authority's denial of African Americans' genocide (Maafa) during the Middle Passage. America's overemphasis on the Holocaust is to obscure "contemporary problems related to the heritage of slavery. Charles Maier has raised the question, somewhat rhetorically, of why, on the Mall in Washington, we have a Holocaust museum but no museum dedicated to slavery or to the American Indians" (LaCapra, 2014, p. 171).

Leslie Sanders refers to Baraka's play, *Dutchman* as a "reenactment of a script written by history" (qtd. in Harris and Larson, 2007, p. 32). So, what about *Slave Ship* that Baraka himself defines it as *A Historical Pageant*? Hence, Baraka for writing *Slave Ship*, in order to relive or remember "an imaginary or phantasmatic past he had never experienced in historical reality" (LaCapra, 2014, p. 34). He had benefited from historical scripts or slave narratives and empathized with them. LaCapra writes about the role of empathy:

It involves a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place [. . .] Empathy is important in attempting to understand traumatic events and victims, and it may (I think, should) have stylistic effects in the way one discusses or addresses certain problems. (LaCapra, 2014, p. 78)

It might be the reason that renders the reader tentative, whether the speaking voice is a survivor of this traumatic experience or just an omniscient narrator?

Through connecting *Slave Ship*'s text to Olaudah Equiano's (2007) *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, who is a slave narrator and a real passenger of the slave ship, the memorability and speakability of traumatic memory (Pederson, 2014, p. 238) of the survivor of the Middle Passage trauma will be evaluated. If "the wound of mind [trauma]", as Freud proposes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and Caruth follows him, "is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event" (Caruth, 1996, pp. 3-4), most probably forgetting its [traumatic] memory is next to impossible, as evidently can be observed in Equiano's narrative, he recalls and records his traumatic memory after thirty years. Vincent Carretta (2007) considers Equiano's narrative as "the most important and most widely published author of African descent in the English-speaking world of the eighteenth century, Olaudah Equiano founded the genre of the African American slave narrative" (p. 44).

Olaudah Equiano was one the passenger-survivors of the slave ship. His first-person narrative of the traumatic scenes is considered by scholars as the trauma of the Middle Passage. "His story remains one of the few personal accounts of that fundamental and traumatic experience which was the fate of millions of Africans in the era of the Atlantic slave trade" (Walvin, 2000, p. 3). Equiano was traumatized as he was exposed to the harsh and dehumanizing condition of the slave ship. "Equiano recalled his enslavement more than thirty years after the event. He wrote as part of the abolitionist drive against the slave trade, hoping to persuade British readers that the Atlantic slave trade should be abolished." Equiano was not amnesic, "his crucial traumatic enslavement remained fresh in his mind" (Walvin, 2000, p. 4). His narrative, "give[s] grim evidence of the traumatic effects the Middle Passage had on the Africans who endured it" (Dragulescu, 2018, p. 281). Equiano (2007) in his slave narrative affirms that he does not only recollect the traumatic atrocities of the slave ship but their memory affects his ontology: "my former sufferings in the slave-ship presenting themselves to my mind, the recollection of them made me shudder" (p. 60).



Equiano's voice is a representative of innumerable enslaved Africans who were "[s]tripped of everything, sold against their will, and faced with incredible psychological trauma" (Mustakeem, 2016, p, 121). Equiano's depiction, as Walvin (2000) writes, of the horrors of the slave ship is not only a personal story, rather it is a rich historical and testimonial document:

Equiano's description of what followed - the oceanic agonies of the slave trade - is the best remembered part of his book, repeated time and again by any historian lost for words to capture the unique terror of the Middle Passage (the Atlantic crossing). Equiano's account has been used so frequently because it is a unique African insight and is unsurpassed in the power of its testimony. (p. 13)

Equiano precisely remembers and records his experience aboard the slave ship. When the massive ship catches his eyes for the first time in his life, firstly surprised then soon his astonishment turns to terror after boarding the ship:

When I looked round [sic] the ship too and saw a large furnace or copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. (p. 24)

He frightens out of his wits that causes a kind of peritraumatic dissociation which inflicts temporarily his consciousness. He thinks that he "had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they [the horrible white men] were going to kill [and eat him]." The cataclysmic atmosphere of the slave ship leads him to reflect: "Indeed such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment, that, if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with that of the meanest slave in my own country" (Equiano, 2007, p. 24).

The smells of "*Urine. Excrement. Death.*" and the "*screams*" and "*cries*" of enslaved Africans – that overflows the text Baraka's *Slave Ship* – are distinctly portrayed by Equiano's (2007) first encounter with the ship hold. He records his first-hand traumatic exposure with olfactory, auditory and visual cues. The overpowering stench in combination with the utter chaos makes him lose his appetite to such an extent that he prefers death over life:

I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me. (p.25)

Equiano is traumatized not only emotionally but physically as well. When he refuses to eat. The brutal sailors give him some appetizers that he has never been tasted it before! They whipped him very mercilessly in a way that he might have committed suicide, if he had been allowed:

to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and, on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and laid me across I think the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely. I had never experienced anything of this kind before; and although, not being used to the water, I naturally feared that element the first time I saw it, yet nevertheless, could I have got over the nettings, I would have jumped over the side, but I could not. (Equiano, 2007, p. 25)



Sometimes sailors to prevent slaves from committing suicide by self-starvation forced the slave to eat. Some slaves attempted to commit suicide by hitting their heads against the ship walls or by holding their breath to smother themselves (Muhammad, 2003, p. 898).

The narrow space of the slave ship, the crammed people against each other, the chained people stumbling, the slaves gasping for air, stinks, moans, cries, rattle of chains that the speaking voice describes in the *Slave Ship*: “(Feeling of people moving around tumbling over each other. Screaming as they try to find a “place” in the bottom of the boat, and then the long stream of different wills, articulated, as screams, grunts, cries, etc)” (Baraka, 1969, pp. 3-4), and in another place (moans . . . the chains, and Black People pushed against each other, struggling for breath and room to live. The Black Man weeps for his woman. The Black Woman weeps for her man together in the darkness, some calling for God.) (Baraka, 1969, p. 6), are precisely detailed and registered by Equiano’s multisensory traumatic memory. The unimaginable ordeal of the ship hold is well captured and portrayed accurately via using different imageries, as olfactory (stench), tactile (feeling the chains, crammed people) visual (chained slaves) and auditory (scream of women, groans):

The stench of the hold [. . .] was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time [. . .] the whole ship’s cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died . . . This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable. (pp. 26 - 27)

The trauma of family separation that haunts Woman 2 in the play, likewise haunts Equiano when he was separated from his sister. Remembering the traumatic experience after three decades and registering the detailed description of his emotional trauma are evidence that trauma enhances memory of survivors rather than effaces it:

The only comfort we had was in being in one another’s arms all that night, and bathing each other with our tears. But alas! We were soon deprived of even the small comfort of weeping together. The next day proved a day of greater sorrow than I had yet experienced; for my sister and I were then separated, while we lay clasped in each other’s arms. It was in vain that we besought them not to part us; she was torn from me, and immediately carried away, while I was left in a state of distraction not to be described. I cried and grieved continually; and for several days I did not eat anything but what they forced into my mouth. P.17

Hill and Barnet (2009) suggest that *Slave Ship* replicates the journey of African slave trade during the Middle Passage (p. 449) and the above extracts of Equiano’s narrative prove that the playwright reenacts and employs the same scenes in his play. The evaluation of the slave ship’s passenger [that is to say Equiano narrative] reveals that he suffers from PTSD as he was exposed to various traumatic events. In his initial encounter with the slave ship Equiano temporarily suffers from peritraumatic dissociation. His account proves that trauma can be remembered and described in detail by the victim of traumatic experience. Victims of trauma do not suffer from amnesia, on the contrary it enhances the memory and Equiano uses multisensory cues to record his exposure.



Conclusion:

Baraka in *Slave Ship: A Historical Pageant* aims to shock the audience with historical traumatic scenes of the past slave trade in order to link it to the present racial discrimination problems. The play replicates traumatic moments of slave narratives as Olaudah Equiano's account as he registered traumatic moments on board slave ship. Baraka tries to bear witness to the trauma of the slave ship and depict graphically the different traumatic scenes of the horrendous atmosphere of the enslaved Africans. The hidden message of the play reflects an African philosophy, Sankofa – which emphasizes taking moral lessons from the past – that yesterday's traumatic events are accountable for today's dejection.

African women in the play are the most vulnerable characters to traumatic events. They are traumatized by their race and by their gender as well. Through repeated traumatic and peritraumatic dissociation scenes the narrator relives, re-experiences and retells the traumatic events to purge his mind from psychic anguish. In repeated peritraumatic dissociation scenes an enslaved woman in the play demonstrates her emotion and care posthumously for her child. Generally, men in the play are portrayed positively and stronger than women in their exposure to traumatic experiences and in their resistance to slavery.

Both of the dramatic voice who is an invisible *Slave Ship's* character and the Equiano who is a real character of the slave ship are victims of trauma and they witness other people's psychic anguishes onboard slave ship. They show the validity of Pederson's theory of literary trauma that survivors of trauma are not amnesic and victims after their exposure to traumatic events can recollect and speak about their experience accurately. Additionally, trauma does not efface memory, quite the reverse it enhances survivors' memory, victims of trauma can remember their experiences distinctly even after long period of the traumatic events occurrences. The multisensory of traumatic memory is another aspect of the accounts in which victims (the narrator and Equiano) record their exposure by using different senses. Finally, survivors of trauma sometimes provisionally suffer from peritraumatic dissociations.

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ملخص

مسرحية سفينة العبيد يعيد تمثيل مشاهد تأريخية من تجارة العبيد عبر محيط الاطلسي التي دامت اكثر من ثلاثة قرون، بالإضافة الى مشاهد من مزارع الجنوب. هذه الدراسة تظهر ان الظروف المرعبة على متن السفينة بالإضافة الى قساوة تجار العبيد ادت الى اصابة المستعبدين الافارقة بالصدمة النفسية. هذه الدراسة تقييم المسرحية من خلال نظرية الصدمة التي ظهرت في منتصف التسعينات، ومن ذلك الوقت فصاعدا تم تطويرهذه النظرية من قبل العديد من النقاد، و احدث مراجعة للنظرية قام بها جوشوا بيدرسون في عام 2014. ان الجيل الاول من المنظرين يدعون بأن الصدمة تؤدي الى فقدان الذاكرة؛ أي ان الضحايا لايمكنهم تذكر أو وصف ما حدث لهم. لكن بيدرسون في نسخته المنقحة للنظرية يقترح خلاف ذلك. لتطبيق هذه النظرية تقوم هذه الدراسة باتباع طريقتين: أولاً، التعامل مع نص المسرحية من خلال ذاكرة الراوي الغير مرئي مابعد الصدمة. ثانياً، من خلال ربط نص المسرحية بالسيرة الذاتية (رواية العبيد) لأولوداه اكيوانو.