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Rape victims and victimisers in Herbstein's *Ama, a Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade*

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This paper examines how Manu Herbstein employs his fictionalised neo-slave narrative entitled *Ama, a Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* to address the issue of sexual violence against women and to foreground the trans-Atlantic rape identities of victims and victimisers in relation to race, gender, class and religion. An appraisal of Herbstein's representations within the framework of postcolonial theory reveals how Herbstein deviates from the stereotypical norm of narrating the rape of female captives and slaves during the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade by creating graphic rape images in his narration. This study therefore shows that a postcolonial reading of Herbstein's novel addresses the representations of rape and male sexual aggression in literary discourse and contributes to the arguments on sexual violence against women from the past to the present. **Keywords:** Manu Herbstein; neo-slave narrative; postcolonial theory; rape; trans-Atlantic slave trade; women.

Introduction

This study is predicated on the trans-Atlantic slave trade, otherwise known as the Atlantic slave trade or Triangular trade across Europe, Africa and the American continents. The trans-Atlantic slave trade refers to the forced transportation of men, women and children from the western and central parts of Africa across the Atlantic Ocean (Middle Passage) between the fifteenth century and the nineteenth (Rawley & Behrendt 15), to work as slaves in the Americas (New World), before its eventual "abolition in 1888" (Horne 246). Once captured, the Africans were forced to embark on a long march "to the coast in walking caravans, or coffles" (Postma 101) where the European traders at the slave factories awaited them. On arriving at the slave factories, the captured men, women and children were stripped naked as "the ship's captain or doctor examined the captives" (Kachur 53) and carefully checked their bodies for illnesses. Thousands of captives were kept in the dungeons of the slave factories for months awaiting the slave ships that would transport them for enslavement in the New World, thereby creating diverse opportunities for many women to be "raped by their captors" (Bailey 18).

It is against this backdrop that this study assumes that many contemporary writers on the trans-Atlantic slave trade, especially those of African descent like Manu Herbstein, narrate the atrocities inherent in the trans-Atlantic slave trade such as

kidnapping, rape, flogging, killing, enslavement, as well as other forms of physical and sexual violence, through the lens of postcolonialism rather than simple historical fiction. While many notable scholars such as Julie Allison and Lawrence Wrightsman, Nicola Gavey as well as Miranda Horvath and Jennifer Brown have explored rape and the violation of women, fewer critics such as Thelma Jennings, Adrienne Davis, Thomas Foster and Ken Donovan have explored the rape of slaves during the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the antebellum American slavery.

This study focuses on rape because “rape remains a largely misunderstood crime. Incorrect information still abounds about the frequency of rape, the characteristics of rapists, and the recovery of survivors” (Allison & Wrightsman 2). As a result, this study seeks to examine how Herbstein addresses the sexual violations against women during the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade by focusing on the interface between victims and victimisers of rape.

Reading *Ama, a Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* through the lens of postcolonial literary theory

Postcolonial literary theory largely refers to the manner in which race, identity, gender, culture and ethnicity are presented in the present epoch. It is a late-twentieth-century development which entails repossessing the colonised past and interrogating the colonialist’s ideology. It emerged from the discourses of minorities such as African-Americans and Third World countries in their effort to offer “a hegemonic ‘normality’ to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, race, communities, [and] peoples” (Bhabha 171). Postcolonial theory has ancestral links to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) where it is respectively argued that colonised people should reclaim the past by finding a voice and an identity and also reject erroneous beliefs about Western universalism.

Postcolonial writings reject claims to Western universalism by exposing their flaws and highlighting issues relating to cultural differences and hybridity in literary works (Barry 196). In an attempt to reconstruct Western historical and fictional records, postcolonial writings subvert the Empire’s discourses from a subaltern point of view to expose their hegemony. As Boehmer (3) puts it, postcolonial literature subversively resists colonialist discourses which include the “myths of power, race classifications” and “the imagery of subordination”. Postcolonial writings attempt to dismantle Eurocentric codes, acknowledge indigenous voices and recognise the postcolonial culture as being hybrid and dialectic.

The novel as a literary genre is fundamental to postcolonialism as “it combines analyses of objective historical processes with the subjective experience of those who undergo them” (Young 16). Postcolonial writers like Manu Herbstein structure their novels around the trans-Atlantic slave trade and use the experiences of their

protagonists to foreground the realities of African slaves. Hence, drawing on the words of Childs and Williams (14), such postcolonial novelists confront the past to “recover ‘lost’ pre-colonial identities” and recreate an independent local identity in their works. These representational strategies highlight their preoccupations with white supremacy and black inferiority. Herbstein’s novel can be read through the lens of postcolonialism because, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin:

Post-colonial theory involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. None of these is ‘essentially’ post-colonial, but together they form a complex fabric of the field. (2)

Ama, a Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade chronicles the horrifying experiences of the eponymous protagonist, Ama (Nandzi), across various kingdoms and continents in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The novel stems from Herbstein’s attempt to conjure up the spirits of the enslaved Africans who perished during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, “give them back their names and listen to their voices” (Musitwa 3). Herbstein captures the story of the trans-Atlantic slave trade by laying out its tragic implications and knitting its “scattered details” (Anyidoho) into a complete narrative. Herbstein acknowledges that the written evidence of the trans-Atlantic slave trade is largely recorded by Europeans yet he creates Ama as a fictional character whose life is sketched as a result of questions interrogating how she would have reacted to the real circumstances of slavery.

The story of Ama, formerly called Nandzi, begins in Bekpokpam hamlet when at the age of seventeen she is left alone to take care of her sick brother, Nowu. Shortly after Nowu lays down to sleep, twenty Bedagbam horsemen under the command of Abdulai arrive to sexually assault and kidnap Nandzi while Nowu is left behind. Nandzi is first taken to Yendi and later to Kumase where her name is changed to Ama. At Kumase, Ama engages in a sexual relationship with the adolescent king, Osei Kwame Panin. Following the discovery of the sexual trysts, the Queen Mother and the chairman of the Regency Council decide not to hand over Ama for execution as their custom demands but to accuse her of stealing. Her punishment is thereafter commuted to exile in the form of sale to the Europeans at Elmina Castle. On arriving at Elmina Castle, Ama catches the fancy of Director-General Pieter De Bruyn at the point of inspection and soon afterwards becomes his mistress. She is granted the opportunity to sleep in De Bruyn’s bed and dine with him, unlike her counterparts in the slave dungeons. Ama’s relationship with De Bruyn creates enmity between her and Sven Jensen who, on the demise of De Bruyn, rapes Ama. Jensen revokes Ama’s manumission and orders her to be put on the slave ship, *The Love of Liberty*, sailing to South America.

Herbstein's effort in writing about the past is important and yields results because postcolonial writers engage with history rather than reincarnating colonial texts. Herbstein subverts the received conception of history by re-evaluating and reconstructing history "against the inadequacy of the terms and conceptual frames invented by the West" (Xie 10). Herbstein acknowledges the past but revises its historical and narrative representations. His aim is not to "replace white with black" (Boehmer 222) but to highlight a form of hybridity. Hence, *Ama, a Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* interrogates previous colonial texts and what are perceived to be truths thereby creating a tapestry of crucial discourses about issues such as the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Herbstein falls within the class of authors who incorporate their immigrant and cultural backgrounds into their literary works in order to achieve the "representations of themselves in the literature of their new homeland" (Teleky 210). Herbstein is a South African of Jewish European descent but like the majority of white South Africans, his family has been resident in South Africa since the 1890s. Herbstein, however, migrated from South Africa to Ghana in 1970 and currently holds dual citizenship. He infuses his homeland, South Africa, into his novel, *Ama, a Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, through the character of Pieter De Bruyn, who works for the United Dutch West India Company as the Director-General of Elmina Castle. While dictating his will to Van Schalkwyk, De Bruyn bequeaths his estate to his "only son, Isaak De Bruyn, resident at Cape Town" (240).

The fact that Herbstein is a white South African problematises his African heritage in such a way that we are forced to ask whether white South Africans can be considered Africans. Categorising people as "white" in South Africa is a mere racial construct established "under the political and social conditions created by apartheid" (Griffiths & Prozesky 25). Such classification has nothing to do with the various cultural, historical, linguistic or religious affiliations existing among white South Africans. In essence, people of African descent are, in fact, black, white, Indian and coloured. Additionally, Herbstein's dual citizenship in two African countries shows that the African heritage which gives him the moral authority to speak on behalf of African slaves is not a product of blackness but of the African culture he possesses.

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

the slave masters (victimisers) as it damaged the humanity of the slaves (victims).

Herbstein's novel is a reflection of what bell hooks (352) defines as "a politics of pleasure and danger" because it focuses on the racial and sexual politics that inform the construction and expression of desire within black heterosexual bonds, as well as interracial sexual relationships. Ama develops a sexual bond with the white Governor in Elmina slave castle, but the chaplain sees this as an abominable act and considers her lover to be committing treachery to the white race, even though the chaplain himself tries to rape Ama. While foregrounding sexual liaisons between the Europeans and the slaves in *Ama*, Herbstein employs rape as a central trope and constructs it as an inevitable part of the patriarchal nature of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Delineations of rape victims and victimisers in *Ama, a Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade*

Rape is a pervasive component of the trans-Atlantic slave trade history. It was used as a powerful instrument by many slave merchants and masters to punish the female slaves and force them into submission. According to bell hooks (18), rape was employed as "a common method of torture slavers used to subdue recalcitrant black women. The threat of rape or other physical brutalization inspired terror in the psyches of displaced African females". Going by hooks's assertion, Herbstein's novel reveals the physio-psychological dimensions of rape and how the slave masters employed rape to achieve sexual gratification while "inflicting physical and mental pain on enslaved women" (Donovan 148). The slave masters in Herbstein's novel use rape to violate, dominate and inflict punishment on their female slaves. They also rape the female slaves to demonstrate how powerless the male slaves are in their inability to protect the vulnerable female slaves. Hence, beyond expressing sexual desire, slave masters raped their female slaves in order to exert dominance, control and power that is "exercised from innumerable points" (Foucault 94).

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

also describe the portions omitted from abridged versions of books; Wolfthal uses it to designate omission or suppression of the violence of rape and the harm to its victims." Employing elision as a tool of silence in canonical slave narratives reflects how writers such as Equiano try to avoid writing about rape or deny its ubiquity and viciousness. Yet, a denial of rape is "by extension a denial of violence that has been, and continues to be, inflicted primarily on women" (Heller 331). In spite of the elision that dominates the discourse of rape in canonical slave literature, it is worthwhile stating that rape is now being foregrounded in contemporary narratives. Postcolonial neo-slave narratives such as Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997), Manu Herbstein's *Ama, a Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (2000), Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* (2007) and Prince Justice's *Tutuoba: Salem's Black Shango Slave Queen* (2007) depict different forms of rape prevalent during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era in an attempt to address the sexual violence against women in the present. Critics like Higgins and Silver (11), however, posit that there are differences in the manner male and female authors narrate rape because male-authored narratives either omit rape scenes or portray rape by using "representations of masculinity". Herbstein, by contrast, fills this gap by narrating rape explicitly, and also narrating it from the viewpoint of the female victims.

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

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

The above illustrates that slavery as an institution, whether practised in Africa or any other continent, is an institution steeped in violence. It is a practice of unequal power relations that renders the female vulnerable. The slave (victim) is at the mercy of the enslaver (victimiser). This is especially so for the female slaves whose bodies were not just subjected to the physical pain associated with forced labour but also to inhumane sexual violence that gratified the perverse masculine sexual desires of the slave traders and

masters. Herbstein's novel shows that where the woman is in a position of lesser power in relation to the man, sexual violence is often the inevitable end game. The identities of the victimisers cut across race, class and religion but the common denominator is the presence of male sexual aggression. The perpetrators of rape in this novel are all men of different races and cultures who use various power dynamics to oppress women.

Nandzi endures an "aggravated rape" which involves "no prior relationship between the victim and perpetrator, multiple assailants [and] extrinsic violence" (Horath & Brown 7). However, while the focalisation on Nandzi's rape begins with the victim, Herbstein shifts it midway to the victimiser, Abdulai, who is characterised as a blood-thirsty individual who enjoys thrusting his penis like a spear. We are therefore forced to ask why the shift to the victimiser's perspective occurs. Herbstein appears to want his reader to engage with the mental processes of the torturer who derives pleasure in inflicting absolute pain. The reader cannot fully grasp the magnitude of Nandzi's pain unless the reader is confronted by the torturer's perspective through language. While pain cannot be represented adequately because it "shatters language" (Scarry 5), lacks literary representation, has no referential content and resists objectification in language, experiencing pain from the torturer's perspective results in some certainty. Therefore, portraying Nandzi's rape using Abdulai's focalisation enables Herbstein to present Nandzi's torture and pain in a realistic manner.

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

The sexual torture of female slaves is overtly depicted in *Ama* as ranging from various forms of sexual battery to perversion. Following the arrival of Ama's slave caravan to Elmina slave castle, Ama sees Jensen for the first time and is fascinated by the white man. She nudges her friend Esi who immediately recognises Jensen as the man who, the previous night, had taken her "from behind, without ceremony. She could still feel the pain in her loins and the humiliation and degradation of being taken like a dog" (145). Jensen's actions fit into the motivations of rape which

include the need to “express feelings of power, anger, aggression, or sadism” (Allison & Wrightsman 4). Narrating such sexual assault enables Herbstein to utilise his fictional language in a way that is concomitant with Jensen’s infliction of pain and displays of sadism. Ama also suffers a similar fate after De Bruyn’s death. As such, Herbstein uses Jensen’s act of sodomising Ama to shock the reader and conjure up disturbing images as we question whether such violations actually took place in history:

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

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

Inasmuch as this study focuses on sexual violence against women by men, it does not suggest that women are incapable of sexual violence against men. This is because “there are many different motivations of rape, many different situations and settings in which it occurs, and many different kinds of rape victims, including men” (Allison & Wrightsman, 5). Recent examples of violence by women on men are the varying involvements of Lynndie England, Sabrina Harman and Megan Ambuhl in the 2003 sexual torture of the male prisoners in Abu Ghraib, Iraq, which rendered the women co-conspirators in sexual crimes. These women interrupt “gender stereotypes about war” because they “are the enemy from whom the [male] prisoners need protection” (Sjoberg 195). While Herbstein, in his novel, locates girls and women as predominant victims of sexual violence and men as the predominant perpetrators during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, there are accounts of African male slaves as victims and European female mistresses as victimisers. Even though cases in which the male slaves are victims are usually perceived as having been isolated, Prince Justice

depicts such abuse in *Tutuoba: Salem's Black Shango Slave Queen* in which Martin, an African slave, is seduced by his mistress, Pamela Porter:

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

The act of female sexual coercion affirms Gavey's (12) observation that "while it is difficult to imagine a woman forcing a man to have sex through the use of physical force ... it might not be so implausible to imagine a woman pressuring a man to have sex through verbal coercion". Gavey engages in the intricacies surrounding female sexual aggression and male sexual victimisation but during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era, "sexual contact between white women and enslaved men ranged from affectionate to violent" (Foster 459). Women who engage in sexual violence against men do so in an attempt to assert dominance over men, thereby subverting the stereotype that depicts white women as being sexually passive. Unfortunately, sexual violence against male victims is not widely acknowledged because "men are far less likely than women to be victims of heterosexual assault" (Smith, Pine & Hawley 101), there is a "social stigma associated with male rape" (Mitchell, Hirschman & Hall 369), "the legal definitions of rape have traditionally been restricted to female victims" (Krahé et al 142) and "the majority of rape victims continue to be women" (Suarez & Gadalla 2010).

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

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

The gang rape of African female slaves can be paralleled to the public heterosexual gang-rape of women, which is prevalent in many societies and used as an act of male dominance and female subjugation. Moolman (119) avows that "gang rape and

dominant masculinity are based on common values of dominance, control, conquest, competition, sexual performance and achievement". Knox and his cohorts can be regarded as multiple victimisers who perform a collective act of sexualised violence against the female victim in order to degrade women, exercise control over the slaves and compete against one another in the show of masculinity. Herbstein, therefore, employs the gang-rape of female slaves during the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a model to speak against the sexual violence directed at women in contemporary times.

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

He [Senhor Jesus] rose and grabbed her [Ama] once by the shoulders, pulling her towards him. She struggled to free herself but he was too strong. He forced her lips apart and drove his tongue into her mouth [...] she sank her teeth into his lower lip. He screamed in agony and threw her away so violently that she fell backwards. Her head struck the stone floor. She lay there immobile, stunned. He dropped onto her and ripped her cloth off. Then he was inside her, thrusting away his hatred and frustration. (441)

Herbstein presents various traumatising images of rape to metaphorically portray the European subjugation and exploitation of Africa in diverse forms ranging from the trans-Atlantic slave trade to colonialism and neo-colonialism. As Tyson (370) puts it, "patriarchal subjugation of women is analogous to colonial subjugation of indigenous populations". By elevating the sadism of Abdulai, Jensen, Knox and Senhor Jesus and relating it to African division and European imperialism, Herbstein makes the victimisers instruments used to annihilate the "Other" and destroy the African consciousness.

Conclusion

Herbstein, in a scholarly manner, foregrounds diverse images of rape through Ama the eponymous rape victim, and other female slaves, as well as their victimisers. The identities of the victimisers cut across race, class and religion but the common denominator is the presence of male sexual aggression. Herbstein refuses to relegate the violent acts to men of African ancestry alone. As represented in the narrative, the perpetrators of rape are men of different races and cultures who oppress women using various power dynamics. Even though the forms of rape that Ama endures can be theorised as forming part of the universal experience of all women, the fact that they are predicated on the historical trans-Atlantic slave trade make them unique to all the females who endured slavery. This does not, however, deny the mass rapes suffered by women in modern slavery or the rape victims in civil wars. A majority of these rapes occurred in refugee and detention camps the way trans-Atlantic female slaves were raped in slave castles, on slave ships and on slave plantations which served as places of detention and incarceration. Herbstein, therefore, reconstructs diverse forms of rape perpetrated during the trans-Atlantic slave trade to address issues relating to male violence against women which include rape, forced prostitution and other forms of sexual assault and battery, thereby enabling readers to seek ways to fight against the abuse of women in modern times.

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