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### Social Exclusiveness in Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes*

#### Abstract

Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* is a slave narrative historical fiction. It exhibits the world that is more complex in which race and gender historically harms the life of the Blacks. The novel spreads its wing to three continents and six decades to bring to life a dark and shameful portion in the history through the story of one brave and resourceful woman, Aminata Diallo. This paper brings out the struggles which the black woman faces in the society that results to her loss of freedom and self-confidence. It also investigates the psychological changes of the doubly marginalized black women when they live amidst the white people as slaves.

Key Words: Blacks, Slavery, Marginalization

Lawrence Hill is a Canadian writer, whose intuition is to provide a light to the enslaved people and the forced immigrants. The impact of marginalization lies on the title of the book itself. The novel is published in Canada as *The Book of Negroes* in 2007 and Hill is forced to change the title as *Someone Knows My Name* in his American publication with the target that Negroes would not be allowed to glide in America. Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* is a slave narrative historical fiction and the winner of Commonwealth Writers' prize. Hill's female protagonist Aminata Diallo tells the story of her abduction at age eleven from West Africa, and narrates her experience of migration and hardship in the United States, Manhattan, Sierra Leone, and finally Great Britain.

Marginalization occurs when a person is oppressed in the name of race, caste, class and gender. The marginalized people in the society become the victim of identity crisis. The marginalized groups are usually rejected and ignored by the powerful social agencies. In literary context marginalization can be categorized into two forms; societal marginalization and spatial marginalization. Societal marginalization refers to the factors responsible for exclusion, social injustice and inequality. It is imposed mainly on the powerless people like Blacks by the powerful human beings like Whites. Spatial marginalization focuses on the geographical infrastructure of a particular group of people. These practices directly or indirectly affect the growth of an individual or a group of people.

Since Racism is a tool of exploitation it mainly affects the life style of the marginalized people. Slavery refers to the practices when a power less group of people is ruled or controlled by the powerful people and it makes the powerless people to feel that they are marginalized by the upper class people. According to Frederickson "The Negroes are

destined by providence for slavery and it is not only by the colour of their skin but also by the intellectual inferiority and national providence of the race”(368). Racism gives a negative result in the life of Aminata and to her parents too because of their inter caste marriage. It happens according to the custom practiced in the African society that “the marriage between a Fula and a Bamana would not have been permitted”(24). As a result of this marriage Aminata’s parents are ill-treated and marginalized by Fulas, who are considered as an upper caste people in the society.

The clash in religious practices often results to marginalization. Though Aminata is a free born Muslim she gets alienated from her parents and religious practices when she is abducted from her parents by Americans. She says that “I had lost my mother. My father. And my community. I had lost my chance to learn all the Qur’anic prayers. I had lost my secret opportunities to learn to read”(48). She is marginalized by means of her colour and religion among the whites.

The power of the whites to threaten the natives and imposing the different culture that the Blacks hate, results to marginalization. After the abduction the Whites who are called as toubab start to treat Aminata mercilessly. She is unable to do anything to the torture that they have subjected. They start to give the food that the Muslims usually hate to have and so she says, “I would sooner die than eat poke”(121). Aminata as a young Muslim woman moves away from the whites when they supply the food to them.

When a person is marginalized from a society they are subjected to social inequality and violence. The Blacks who exist as slaves in a white society are not given equal rights, power and wealth. Blacks are treated as downtrodden people by stealing their freedom as a result of it, Aminata feels like she cannot do anything without her master. The violence that Aminata faces in Appleby’s plantation is too hard because the basic needs of a person are

denied by their master. To indicate the superior nature of mastership Appleby keeps his Slaves at the edge of the plantation. No good dresses are given to the slaves to wear, if they wear good dresses which are presented by their loved ones the dresses are torn and burnt. It happens in the life of Aminata when she wears the dress that is presented by her husband. “ ‘Your clothes,’ he said to me. When I hesitated, he tore them off and threw them down into the pile that Georgia had brought. ‘We have a law in the province of South Carolina,’ he said. ‘Niggers don’t dress grand’”(193). Morgan discusses the pathetic nature of the Negroes in American society as, “ the rights of property, and all civil and legal rights were everywhere denied the slave with clarity that left no doubt of his utter dependency of his master”(69).

The aim of an individual scatters when a woman is subjected to marginalization and it may result to loss of self confidence. Aminata is in fond of studying. She is the only woman and one of the only people in her village to be able to read Quran and to write Arabic script but her dreams get scattered at the time of her abduction. Aminata’s self- confidence vanishes and believes that she is born as a slave and always will be a slave till the end of her life. It shows the marginalized mindset of the black slaves in America

Exploiting women both physically and mentally often leads to the crisis of identity. The white owner shows her power over Aminata by abusing her physically mainly to dehumanize her. Hook systematically figures out the difficulties of the black slaves as “the black female slave was exploited as a labourer in the fields, worker in the domestic house hold, a breeder, and as a object of white male sexual assault”(22). She is physically tortured by Appleby for two times. The first time when he comes to know about the marriage between Aminata and Chekura, he rapes her. The second time when he comes to know that there is baby in her womb, he tortures her physically and mentally at one extent she “screamed as I have never screamed before. I didn’t recognize myself. I had no cloths, no hair, no beauty, no womanhood”(195-96).

Hook's *Ain't I A Woman* analyses the convergence between racism and sexism in black history and culture. He claims that "African culture were accustomed to a patriarchal order that demanded not only a woman accept a inferior status but they participate actively in the community labour force"(16). Aminata admits all this violence as an African woman. The whites abuse her and her fellow black skins in plantations and it makes her feel inferior. She does all the works that are assigned to her by her master. She trusts that she should admit all the pains because of her colour. The wretched action of the masters makes her to feel that she is a worthless individual.

Marginalized women are not permitted to imitate the posture of the white woman but Aminata fights to maintain her integrity as a black female. She dislikes Solomon Lindo when he calls her as wench and says "I'm not a wench. I had a baby and would have it now but Master Appleby stole him away. I am no wench. I am a wife. I am a mother. Aren't I a woman"(217). Though she reclaims her identity in the white community she is pushed back as an inferior and the whites treat her as a marginalized woman. The basic freedom to have her child and husband with her is denied to her. Aminata is separated from her parents at the time of abduction and then from her husband in Appleby's plantation. Later her child is stolen and sold to a slave master soon after the birth in the same plantation.

The violence against the marginalized people starts from their homeland and continues until their death. Aminata as a doubly marginalized woman faces much violence from her homeland Bayo. She is deprecated from her parents at the age of eleven in a violence planned by the captives. She lost her mother and her father during the violence. The whole village is burnt into ashes. She lost most of her homelander in the fight between the Whites and the Blacks in the ship.

Spatial marginalization focuses on the geographical infrastructure of the particular group of people. The slaves in America are subjected to spatial marginalization when they are captured and forced to live in Whites land. They find their homeland as the holiest as that of alien land. They hate to stay in the captors land and longs to return back to their homeland. In the alien land the toubab treats the Negroes rudely and keep them at the corner of their society. The native people searches for the map to return back to their land to regain the geographical infrastructure of the home town. Aminata wishes to return back to her place of birth after a long gap. She initially returns back to Africa just to rediscover the Bayo village but she never returns to her village. Aminata is unable to find the place of her birth, because of the violence that occurred in the village in her absence and it hurts her to the greater extend.

Marginalized people are easily trapped by the captivators. British captors who come to catch Blacks to fight in a war systematically traps the Blacks with the word that they are intended to free the slaves form Charles town to Nova Scotia. In Nova Scotia Aminata lost her second child and she says, "All I knew was that the people I had loved more than anything else in life had all been torn from me"(366). All her hopes to be reunited with her family members get shattered.

When Aminata returns back to Africa she sees a group of toubab trapping a group of people. As a free woman she looks after the captives of all ages and size and wonders how she can set them free. She remembers the torturers that she once admitted but she is unable to do anything because of her identity as a black woman. The people who are in her native place hurt her with the words of "You have the face of someone born in this land, but you come with the toubabu. You are a toubab with a black face"(411). The people in Africa hate her when she returns to her home land because she returns with a white man.

Aminata as a marginalized woman strive to get hold and fight against the illegal activities of the white people in America though she is admitted to several challenges. She rebuilds her health mentally, emotionally and spiritually to get her rights and freedom back to her life. But exploration of slave experience leads to the underlying domination of the masters in the plantation and this domination is subjected to force blacks to resist and accommodate to their oppressions.

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