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**Ideological underpinnings of slavery and its ironic
relationship with Christianity: A critical look at *Narrative of
the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave and
Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl***

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Declaration

I, SIBHEKISIPHO FAYAYO, declare that the dissertation, Ideological underpinnings of slavery and its ironic relationship with Christianity: A critical look at Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave and Incidents in the life of a slave girl is my own work and that all sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signed



Date

04/09/2018

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Abstract

This study examines the ironic elements embedded in the fascinating relationship between Christianity and the American system of slavery in the 19th century. Through the use of Marxist's Literary Criticism as a theoretical framework, the study examines the autobiographies of Harriet Jacob and Frederick Douglass, respectively entitled, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. The theory used helps bring to the fore the ironies and contradictions in the religion practiced in the slave holding Antebellum South.

The primary research question of this study was to investigate the ideological underpinnings in Christianity used by slave masters to justify the domination of slave as well as how slaves used Christianity as an emancipatory and liberating tool. Marxist Literary Criticism augments this study as it debunks the inconsistency in masters and slaves in terms of their interpretations of Christianity, while sharing the same description of God and faith yet still remain in their conflictual positions of masters and slaves. Marxist Literary Criticism is used in probing the primary texts. An array of secondary texts are used throughout this research to back opinions, arguments and conclusions that are advanced by this research. The conclusion drawn from the analysis of these texts is that there are ideological contradictions in the different versions of Christianity and the irony thereof, hence noticeable elements of ironies in actions and speeches of slave masters and slaves.

Dedication

To the two people that made this research project worth pursuing, my wife and son, Thobekani Maphosa and Siyabonga Ryan Fayayo.



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Nginyabonga

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Chapter One

1.0 Introduction

A critical analysis of American literature within the framework of slavery and Christianity is not a new venture but indeed one that persists in its importance in helping with the discussion of righting the wrongs made by the unfortunate accident of history. One reason for this is that slavery remains a crucial part of American history, one that continues to be the basis of relationships between white and black Americans. In fact, slavery was perhaps one of the most appalling tragedies in the history of the United States of America. Accordingly, to inform the world at large of their terrible experience, runaway slaves wrote their accounts of slavery.

Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, who were some of the most important leaders of the slave abolitionist movement that fought to end slavery in the United States during the 19th century, were just two of the many slaves who did this. Slaves had different experiences of slavery, but they all had one thing in common: they told their readers of the abominable institution of slavery and how it adversely affected their lives. As former slaves, both Fredrick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs poignantly point to religion as one of the ideological weapons used by the slave master to perpetrate this subjugation.

In their autobiographies, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1861) and *Incidents in the life of a slave girl* (1861), they both painstakingly depict the life-threatening conditions of slavery as well as their escape to freedom in the North. Throughout their narratives, they describe how their masters justify the beatings, and even the murders of

slaves through religious “excuses”, which, ironically, raise questions on some people’s religious views in the 19th Century.

Douglass (1986:68), for example, makes a point in his narrative that the Christianity version of the slave masters (or “white Christianity”) was different from the slaves’ Christianity in that the whites’ religion was a wrong belief and that their acts were very sacrilegious. “He that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes” (Douglass, 1986: 68). This is apparently an extract from the Scripture that one of Douglass’ masters quotes in justification of beating his slave; the slave in question was beaten until her back dripped with blood and barely any skin remained. For ideological reasons, it was in the interest of the slave owners to entrench the system of slavery and they used religion to reinforce it. Douglass’s narrative movingly captures this and makes his audience rethink about, or be sceptical of, organized Christianity in the 19th Century. In addition, many of the white churches during the slave era did not take a stand against slavery, but, instead, turned their backs to it. For example, one of Douglass’ masters, Captain Auld, went to a Methodist camp meeting, and upon returning home to the slaves, became “more cruel and hateful in all his ways” (97).

While religion is meant to offer a fair and just life to everyone, “He (God) will judge the world with justice and rule the nations with fairness” (Psalm 9:8), in her narrative, *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl* (1861), Jacobs believes that Southern plantation life contorted religion into something else. Although many slaves believed God would save them, their conception of God as saviour was terribly morbid as they felt that salvation came only by death and their rewards will be in the afterlife.

It was not enough to enslave people even though the profit for doing so in monetary terms was high; Christianity was used as a justification - hence it is the purpose of this study to investigate the ideological assumptions entrenched on the slaves through religion, which further perpetuated slavery.

The study, therefore, investigates the ideological assumptions at play in these two texts (by Douglass and Jacobs) in the entrenchment of slavery through religion. It also seeks to unlock the complex relations between Christianity and slavery as portrayed in these texts. The research study, therefore, aims to use these two texts as a point of departure to grapple with this complexity.

1.1 Literature Review

Most of Douglass' detractors have tended to dwell on the form of his *Narrative* to point out their reservations about the text. For example, Mark K Burns, in his essay, "A Slave in Form but Not in Fact": Subversive Humor and the Rhetoric of Irony in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*" (2005:83) opines that essential irony inspires Douglass's account of his struggle for freedom. According to Burns, his relation of freedom is itself ostensibly shackled by the chains of "genre slavery," and accomplished - ironically - in the very same discourse, which had cooperated in his repression. He continues by pointing out that even as Douglass's narrative chronicles his development into language and the subsequent liberty that upshots from this influence through the written word; this story, for the reason that it is designed by white Christian standards, unavoidably parameters Douglass's sovereignty to define and express his sense of selfhood.

Because Douglass is forced to adopt the language of his masters as he records his experiences, then, he is confronted by a unique dilemma as he writes his autobiography - how to signal his independence from the white society whose language he must borrow. Without somehow distinguishing his voice from those of his oppressors, his narrative is doomed from the start to failure or hypocrisy. (Burns, 83)

The extent to which Douglass resolves this predicament in his *narrative* has principally been the attention of much of Douglass's derision from the 1980s to the present. As an ex-slave auto-biographer, Douglass was roaming a road well-worn by the putative conventions of his day for both slave narratives and autobiographies. Ziolkowski (1845), for example, refers to "Douglass's mastery of the only terms available - those of the dominant discourse" (165). Moses (1991) for his part, writes of him, "His development as an artist and an intellectual was circumscribed by the time and place in which he was born" (66); then, again,

Douglass found that he had to confine himself within a literary box. The slave narrative was a means to freedom, but it also represented a tactical confinement and imposed what might be called a genre slavery that deprived its author of literary and intellectual elbow to room. (67).

The crucial issue of the reproach boils down to this: Does the *Narrative* indicate Douglass's mastery of literary discourse, or its mastery of him?

Yet, in spite of its obvious conformity to phonological and generic constrictions, Burns (2005) maintains that Fredrick Douglass's account is extraordinarily self-conscious and succeeds to preserve its narrative

impartiality by “cleverly subverting the very language in which it is written via the subtle, sophisticated use throughout the text of a kind of understated, ironic humour which compels us to read the text in other terms”(84). This persistent use of irony in the narrative happens on many different levels, permitting the text constantly to say one thing and mean another. This in deduction suggests that the narrative’s language is meant to be taken as ironical as the rest of the work.

Stepto’s (1988) essay centres on biblical images and arrangements that overflow in the narrative. According to Stepto, Douglass’s “linguistic model is obviously scriptural” (53). An exciting facet of this persistent allusion is that it transpires not only through individual words and images, but also in the “chiastic or parallel structure that Douglass employs in many of his sentences - a structure derived from the poetic language of the Hebrew Bible” (53).

Stone (1988), on the other hand, comments on this narrative pattern, arguing that “the balances of the antiphonal structure of many of Douglass’s sentences is wholly appropriate” because the cadence of the sentences is “strongly reminiscent of the Old Testament, particularly the Psalms” (23). This continuous infusion of biblical language has potency to lead the reader to believe that this is a language which Douglass trusts. In and around this layer, however, Douglass concurrently inverts and destabilizes many of the more understated biblical themes and signs in the text.

It has become an everyday thing in the criticism of Jacob’s *Incidents* to emphasize that the text offers an interpretation of the conditions of slavery that counters or complements Fredrick Douglass’s *Narrative*. However, one

key dissimilarity between the two writers is found in the way each develops the critically foreshadowed scenes of learning to read and to write. This research focuses here on the scenes of writing: for Douglass, of course, the passage of writing takes on a gargantuan import as he progresses into a male adult attempting to gain freedom, though he learns to write covertly; while Jacobs's character Linda learns to write overtly, taught early in life by her white mistress.

While most critics of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the life of a Slave Girl* emphasise the gender blemishes imposed by the province of slavery in their evaluations of her narrative, Ferguson (1996) attempts to bring to the fore a striking irony in the portrayal of slave-narrative fierceness, namely, its recurrent relationship with Christianity. In her article titled, "Christian Violence and the Slave Narrative", she opines that, "Their [Douglass and Jacobs' narratives] exposure of this religious fanaticism certainly lends moral authority to the voices of their narrators, voices speaking primarily to a hostile white reading public eager to expiate Original Sin, the central dogma of Christian theology" (298). Ferguson (1996) further puts this violence in the spotlight when she makes an observation in Harriet Jacobs' narrative that, "When I was told that (slave owner) Dr. Flint had joined the Episcopal Church, I was much surprised. I supposed that religion had a purifying effect on the character of men; but the worst persecutions I endured from him were after he was a communicant (74)." Jacobs is particularly effective in indicating how earnest Christians used the religious models of original sin, blood sacrifice, and spiritual atonement to justify the moral ambiguities and cruelty that characterised the practice of Christian slavery.

Rather than emphasise the quantifiable outcomes of slavery, as most scholars tend to do, Ferguson (1996) believes that slave writers like Douglass and Jacobs, through their works, have put attention on its hominoid grounds in an attempt to understand why white people chose to victimize them with such impunity.

Their representations of religious violence identify deep and complex psychological forces that drive the slave owner to try imposing upon coloured people an absolute power and control rivalling that of the Maker Itself. By depicting the slavery regime as a brutal theological patriarchy, the slave authors illustrate how it affords white American men the unprecedented opportunity to appear divine by reconstructing, genetically and mentally, the dark-skinned people fashioned by the universal Creator. (298)

All members of the human family are born bodily free in a world of varied sexes, cultures, and skin colours. But the white slave owner sought to steal from dark-complexioned people the physical autonomy with which the supreme Maker awards all persons and to reorganize the world into hierarchically systematic groups whose purpose is determined by slave owners and their descendants.

Ferguson (1996) notes that, "Indeed, even as the whites demonized the blacks, they made the coloured people more desirable, re-affirming universal principles of human biology set by the Creator and mocking the mortal nature of divinity seekers " (304).

1.2 Research Problem

Most of the academic commentaries that have been done on these texts have largely dwelled on the form of their *Narrative* so as to point out their misgivings about the texts. While some academic research in the study of Slavery and Christianity has, thus far, largely concentrated on the mere superficial facts, like how the Bible justifies or does not justify slavery, less focus has gone to delving deep into the ideological dynamics or complexity of the relationship of the two. In the process some crucial aspects in the texts, such as how slavery sustained itself even way after it had been abolished have, been missed.

It is those crucial aspects, enshrined in ideologies of the subjects under study, which clearly demonstrate the importance of recognizing and openly addressing the past, and lay the groundwork for genuine dialogue, understanding, and healing in clinical environments, classrooms, and other settings. It is precisely this observation that has prompted this research.

1.3 Research Questions

Through a close analysis of the two chosen texts, this study investigated the following questions:

1. How is slavery depicted in each text?
2. What are the ideological assumptions at play in the representation of slavery in each text?
3. To what extent do these authors, in their different ways, attribute the sustenance of slavery to Christianity as its central ideological underpinning?

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

The core objectives are to:

1. Interrogate how slavery is represented in each text.
2. Examine the ideological assumptions at play in the representation of slavery in each text.
3. Determine the extent to which these authors, in their different ways, attribute the sustenance of slavery to Christianity as its ideological underpinning.



1.5 Theoretical Framework

As is well known, the Marxist approach to Literature is based on the philosophy of Karl Marx, a German philosopher and economist. To read a work from a Marxist perspective, one must understand the Marxist assertion that literature is a reproduction of culture, and that culture can be affected by literature.

Significant in this research is the concept of ideology as it is an essential analytical tool in literary, cultural, and film studies. It refers to a set of ideas, doctrines, or beliefs that form the basis of a political or economic system and inspire individuals, groups, classes or cultures. Sometimes, ideology is understood as creating ideas for certain inspired groups to use as weapons against other groups.

Modern understanding of the term is deeply entrenched in the writings of German philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Their notion of ideology is, of course, captured in that world renowned and often quoted statement:

"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas ... The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production"(Brooker, 999).The wholeness or the system of ideas of the ruling class would be the ideology of a given society. The function of ideology is seen as the continual reproduction of the means of production to ensure the continuous dominance of the ruling class. Whereas in fact the split in dominant and submissive social classes is synthetic (i.e. manmade) and aids the prerequisites of the economic system, ideology makes it seem normal. It makes the subservient classes consent to a state of estrangement a scenario they would revolt to at any given time.

The model of ideology, as framed by Marx and Engels has been critically assessed and expanded to adapt to the changes our societies underwent since 19th century. Most recently, however, cultural critics have suggested other groupings in which categorised power structures are also at work other than social class. The more obvious of those are gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality. In those contexts, ideology would work analogous to Marx's and Engels's model to maintain the existing power relations of, for example, a patriarchal society.

Another essential extension of the model stems from Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci. He has presented the notion of hegemony, meaning that ideology's control stems largely from assent as opposed to the use of power. Gramsci also lengthened the concept of ideology from a set or prescribed ideas to include "common sense." By the latter, he means usual approaches which have been conformed from ruling class ideas, i.e. they seem absolutely natural or reasonable, yet they owe their original existence to

artificial concepts as they came in to serve the resolution of a particular social group.

French critic Louis Althusser (1971) erected on this perception to articulate two categories of "apparatuses" for sustaining dominance: "repressive state apparatuses" (RSAs) (the army, police, etc.) which have unequivocal outlines to use control and "Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISAs) (the media, education, the family) which often function semi-independently and with no obvious intention to use control. Ideology and discourse are the two vital models in appreciating the ethnic spread of ideas, values, and assumptions. An important point of argument in this developing model is how much ordinary people can fight, negotiate, or transform ideology on their own, or whether only social critics equipped with methodical tools for debunking the regulating purposes of ideology and discourse can effectively play this role.

On the connection between art and ideology Eagleton (1976) offers two conceivable extremes that are imaginable. On one hand he says literature is ideology in a certain creative form. He posits that "...works of literature are just expressions of the ideologies of their time. They are prisoners of 'false consciousness', unable to reach beyond it to arrive (24)." This is mostly a locus usually taken, and typical of much 'vulgar Marxist' criticism, which he says "tends to see literary works merely as reflections of dominant ideologies" (24). As a result it is incapable to clarify why so much literature essentially contests ideological molds of its time.

Althusser also comes up with a contrasting scenario founded on the fact that "so much literature challenges the ideology it confronts, and makes this part of

the definition of literary art itself.” True art, as Ernst Fischer argues in his significantly entitled book *Art Against Ideology* (1969), constantly surpasses the ideological parameters of its period, yielding us insights into the actualities which ideology conceals from view.

Having stated the above, Terry Eagleton’s theoretical perspective, therefore, becomes relevant to this particular research as he seems to concur, albeit in a different context, that texts like the two narratives under study are not mere reflections of the ideologies of their time but provide insight into the realities which ideology hides from the view. Guided by Eagleton’s above named views as well as that of Althusser and Gramsci, the narratives in question will be interrogated in order to examine the ideological assumptions at play in these texts and the potential ideological effect these may have on the readers.

For the purposes of this study, whose central thrust is the relationship between religion and slavery, it is imperative to provide just a brief outline of what Marxism has to say about religion. Lenin (1962), writing on Socialism and Religion, agreed with Marx that "Religion is opium for the people. Religion is a sort of spiritual booze, in which the slaves of capital drown their human image, their demand for a life more or less worthy of man" (43). As far as Lenin was concerned, it was somewhat logical why the beleaguered would look to religion: "Impotence of the exploited classes in their struggle against the exploiters ... inevitably gives rise to the belief in a better life after death" (43).

Like Engels and Marx, Lenin understood religion to be a historical phenomenon, knotted to the tyrannical arrangements of human history such

as feudalism and capitalism. In Lenin's words, "the yoke of religion that weighs upon mankind is merely a product and reflection of the economic yoke within society" (46).

1.6 Research Methods

A close textual analysis of Fredrick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs's original autobiographies namely, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1986) and *Incident in the life of a slave girl* (1861) will be conducted in this study.



1.7 Significance of the study

The significance of the study is to add to the discussion on the ironic relationship between Christianity and slavery. A lot has been said with regard to the relations particularly during the 19th century yet little or nothing has been done with regards to investigating the ideologies embedded in the religion of that time. This study seeks to interrogate ideological underpinnings found in Christianity of the time and how they (ideologies) influenced the institute of slavery. Most significantly, the research will hopefully contribute to the existing scholarship on Douglass and Harriet available thus far.

1.8 Ethical Considerations

Due to the nature of this investigation, as a textual analysis of literature, there are no foreseeable ethical challenges.

1.9 Intellectual Property Considerations

The intellectual property to be used in the prospective dissertation will be extracts from published books, articles or theses made available via the internet or as hard copy. Appropriate referencing will be used when drawing upon the ideas or work of another writer in the construction of this investigation. I further give the University of Fort Hare full access to my dissertation once completed.

1.10 Envisaged structure of the dissertation

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides the background and overview of the study as well as the theory that informs the analysis of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter gives an outline of the literature review relevant to the study.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

This chapter details the theoretical framework that informs the research

Chapter Four: Critical Analysis of Harriet Jacobs and Fredrick Douglass

This chapter examines how Jacobs and Douglass represent slavery in their texts. It also explores the ideological assumptions at play in the representation of slavery in the texts and how they attribute the sustenance of slavery to Christianity as its ideological underpinning.

Chapter Five: Conclusion.

This chapter provides a conclusion and research findings.

Chapter Two :Literature Review

2.0Introduction

This chapter seeks to provide a more expanded literature review on previous research done regarding the subject under investigation than the brief one provided in the previous chapter. It also attempts to provide a contextual background to key issues regarding the relationship between Slavery and Christianity. The historical and political contexts that inform the writers' narratives provide this research with tools to make comments and opinions on the subject under study. One will also be able to make observations and arguments on the writers and the society that they sought to critique.

2.1Slavery

The emergence of American colonies gave slavery life and, according to Tadman (1989), the first Africans to arrive in the English colonies arrived in the early 1600s. When the colonies finally acquired their independence, a ratio of about one is to six was a slave. Hitherto the torturous dehumanising at the hands of plantation owners, Africans were treated as indentured slaves as the high need of additional source of labour forced farm owners to purchase slaves (Tadman, 1989). According to Davis (1966), "...at first Africans were treated somewhat like servants, many earning their freedom by several years of work before the system got brutal with years" (28).

Between 1600 and 1850, about 15 million Africans had travelled through the Great Passage as slaves into America, courtesy of the Europeans. Most were

first taken to the plantations in the West Indies before their shipment to America. This was before the civil war and emancipation proclamation of 1863 forced an end to slavery. Even though the unfortunate accident of history ended centuries ago, many questions are still being asked today regarding the institution of slavery. One such question is why specifically Africans were subjected to such unprecedented inhumane treatment in the history of humankind. Several answers have come out and most of them seem to justify slavery, while some place the blame on the victims.

2.2 Religion

Religion was not only used as a justification for slavery by the slave owners, but also played a pivotal role in the abolition of slavery as an institution. Although spiritual actions moulded the slave systems that settled in particular societies, the practice and interpretations of those religions were themselves affected by slavery in their nucleus. Furthermore, slaves themselves were active contributors in modelling the interface between the establishment that held them in suppression and the religious discourse that enlightened, vindicated and, ultimately, destabilised that bondage.

Before a comprehensive scholarship of how religion operated in the American slave period, one has to appreciate the phenomenon of religion. Religion has permeated human life since time immemorial. The explanation of its phenomenon is complex, but it is largely agreed that the basis underlining the crux of all religions is a conviction in a highest force or being. Gerardus Van der Leeuw (1982:3) says, “religion comes about in how man conducts himself in his relation to power.”

Religion is a two faced animal as it is a place for a battle of supremacy struggles, a heart for the controlling of the deprived, a sigh of relief for the oppressed or as described by Marx 'the opium of the poor'. On the other hand, it is a source of uniting people, offering them a sense of drive and meaning and functions as a springboard for social revolution. Hence, it was imperative during slavery for the institution to monitor religious activities carefully.

2.3 African Religion and Slavery

African Religion's role during the slave trade has proved difficult to locate for most researchers; debates have arisen to effect that, when the African slave arrived in the 'New World' he was empty of any traditional custom as it was methodically obliterated during the passage to America. When an African slave reached America, he was already a tabula rasa. However, this has been a source of some great and intense debate with some interesting schools of thought emerging.

Frazier and like-minded scholars contend that the modus operandi in which Africans were apprehended and subjugated in America laid bare their African societal tradition, religion included. Frazier (1964) posits "...this (uprooting) was a deliberate process by the slave traders and slave masters, who could more easily maintain control over culturally disoriented and dehumanised slaves (26)."

However, Gershenhorn (2004), amongst others, launched a spirited effort to demonstrate that African endurances could be discovered in almost all characteristics of black natural life in America. He also indicated that the

inhumane experiences of slavery system could not completely erase the entire African culture of the Negro.

It is apparent that although African religion was chiefly unorganised and not constant, it succeeded in fostering a spirit of confrontation among the slaves as they faced the vicious conduct of the slave masters. Nevertheless, this religion was ensured a short life span as the slave institution master made protracted efforts to squash it and replace with Christianity, which rendered them docile.



2.4 Christianity and Slavery

The early stages of black slavery can be found in the request of a Christian bishop, the Catholic Bishop of Chiapa in Mexico, Bartolome de Las Casas (Johnson, 1987). Thereafter attempts were made to comprehend whether Christianity, without external interpretations, condoned or condemned slavery.

Scholars such as Haynes (2007) quickly pointed out that Christianity did not beget slavery, instead, he opines "it unquestionably played an important role in justifying and rationalising it, thus allowing it to continue longer than it might otherwise have done (81)." Hence, it becomes imperative to use the Bible, the moral compass of every Christian, to interrogate the Christian perspective on slavery. The masters, slaves, and abolitionists used different readings of the Bible either to support slavery or to challenge slavery.

Graham Ward in *Christ and Culture* (2005) explains that "Christianity and by extension Jesus did not exist in isolation but existed within a certain culture

that had its own values and assumptions. How people interpret this is governed by a cultural standpoint” (4) and Christ as a representation of Christianity is a ‘cultural event’ (2005:21). Based on this submission, it turns out to be incorrect to reproach Christianity of going to bed with the slavery institution, however, what complicated slavery were varying readings that were given from various societal positions. The Bible was read or interpreted in numerous ways to suit various ideological commitments. For instance, Carroll and Shiflett in *Christianity on Trial*(2002), while concurring with Ward, postulates that Christianity came into being in an environment ‘teeming’ with slaves, an environment that had accepted enslavement to be a society’s modus operandi. Hence, according Carroll and Shiflett, the fight against slavery was a cultural fight, not a religious one. They also believe that slavery, principally, had worldly and religious support from opinion leaders like David Hume, Thomas Jefferson, Voltaire and even John Locke. Therefore, it was left to devout Christians like James Ramsey, Granville Sharp, John Wesley, Fredrick Douglass and Nat Turner and Sojourner Truth, amongst others, to contest servitude.

2.5 Religion and Power

Religion in the past has functioned as instrument of social control. It developed into a battleground for supremacy as the slaves and the slaveholders fought to take God to their flank and use Him for their own purposes. The slaveholder sought to establish his supremacy as the dominant, and his slaves as unknown chattel. The slaves wanted to change

the status quo; therefore, religion became not only a divine tussle but also a bodily battlefield for control.

Gary Max (1969) notes that religion went to the side of the slave master as the slave master sought to justify subjugation and effect eternal bondage. He says “the history of slavery exposes how 'God' has suddenly taken sides and has been interpreted for the benefit of the masters. In America, religion became the opiate of the slaves” (23).

Also singing from the same hymn was Frederick Douglass (2008) who revealed to all and sundry that the church had taken sides. He poignantly depicts the cry of the slaves who believe God has forsaken them and relegated them to step children while embracing slave masters.

Out of religion, a policy of white supremacy and of black inferiority developed to keep slaves in perpetual servitude and unable to challenge the social stratum, as doing so will be tantamount to challenging God. Martin Luther King Jnr (1976) specified that divinity became a prepared supporter of the slave trade.

A preposterous religious syllogism was communicated for the subordination of the Negro “all man are made in the image of God; God, as everyone knows, is not a Negro; therefore the Negro is not a man”(Luther King Jnr, 1962).Consequently, the determination nerve of religion was shrunken as the white man eventually made God his ally in the manipulation of the Negro. Pillsbury (1880) explain that man make their own god who develops to an ally, therefore, the slaveholder created their own god solely to degrade the Negro.

Religion was competently turned against the slave to make him subservient, hold the white man in high regard and be transferred to the lesser other hierarchy of the society.

2.6 The Religion of the Slaves

Even though the bulk of the slaves enthusiastically settled for the position of perpetual enslavement, some interrogated things and defied the authority of the master. There was always the danger of slaves having a glimpse to the other side of religion, especially the scriptures that spoke of freedom and emancipation.

Kalm (1966) detected that the masters whose slaves were exposed to Christianity had a torrid time keeping them docile. According to Kalm, masters “would not be able to keep their Negroes so subjected afterwards” (p.48). While religion consolidated the status quo to the masters’ delight, slaves also found a way to use religion to their favour. Frazier (1964) states:

Slaves did not passively accept what the ministers chose to inculcate in them. They drew selectively from white Christianity and shared their own religious experiences in a fashion that not only gave them an area which was semi-independent from the control of the master but also provided an important physiological mechanism for channelling anger and projecting aggression in many ways that would not bring physical retribution from the white community (43).

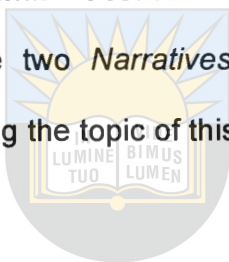
A definitive instance of a slave who found encouragement in Christianity to defy the status quo is Nat Turner, whose insurgence culminated in the murdering of about 60 whites in Southampton County (Oates, 1975). Turner,

the numinous evangelist, learnt the precise significance of the prophets of the Old Testament. Moreover, identifying with the slave familiarity of the Israelites, Turner and other slaves felt that the social morality which the prophets preached related openly to their condition. The representation of the Lord exercising retribution against the oppressors gave them confidence and motivation. While the Bible did seem to tell the slave to be faithful and compliant to his master, it also condemned the wicked and provided examples that could be understood to prove God's readiness to use mortal tools in order to bring righteousness. Confrontation became a crucial feature of the ecclesiastical during slavery. Cone (1981) states:

The basic idea of the spirituals is that slavery contradicts God; it is a denial of his will... the rejected white distortions of the gospel, which emphasized the obedience of slaves to their masters. They contend that god willed their freedom and not their slavery. That is why the spirituals focus on biblical passages that stress God's involvement in the liberation of the oppressed people (14).

Black people sang about "Joshua of de battle of Jericho", 'Moses leading the Israelites from bondage', 'Daniel in the lions' den' and the 'Hebrew children in the fiery furnace'. Now, the importance was on God's deliverance of the weak from the cruelty of the tough, the deprived and defeated from the proud and mighty. The slave gave a good thought that if God could cool the fire for the Hebrew people, as in the prophecy of Amos, he certainly could deliver African Americans from servitude.

Accordingly, religion has been understood and executed differently by the two rivalries to reflect the control matrices at play. Religion was used to elevate the whites as the preferred race, in the process, demoting blacks to the wastebasket of social ladder “as beasts of burden”, “hewers of wood and drawers of water.” Yet, it ought to be emphasized that some slaves understood scriptures in a close, historical and spiritual sense, which empowered them to interrogate the social pyramid and to analyse the legendary omnipotence of the white race. Having provided this background, it is now time to focus on the two *Narratives* under study and what the researches have done regarding the topic of this investigation, as will be done in the next subsection.



2.7 Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.

Most of Douglass' critics have tended to dwell on the form of his *Narrative* to point out their misgivings about the text. For example, Mark K Burns in his essay, "A Slave in Form but Not in Fact": Subversive Humor and the Rhetoric of Irony in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*" (2005:83) pronounces that essential irony inspires Douglass's account of his struggle for freedom. He observes that Douglass' narrative of liberation is seemingly bound by the restraints of "genre slavery," and accomplished - paradoxically - in the same discourse which had collaborated in his oppression. He continues by pointing out that even as Douglass' account chronicles his evolution into language and the ultimate autonomy that results from this power through the written word; this version, because it is arranged by white Christian standards, predictably limits Douglass's liberty to define and express his sense of selfhood.

Because Douglass is forced to adopt the language of his masters as he records his experiences, then, he is confronted by a unique dilemma as he writes his autobiography - how to signal his independence from the white society whose language he must borrow. Without somehow distinguishing his voice from those of his oppressors, his narrative is doomed from the start to failure or hypocrisy. (Burns, 83)

The notch to which Douglass resolves this quandary in his storyline has fundamentally been the focus of much of the Douglass criticism from the 1980s to the present. As an ex-slave auto-biographer, Douglass was drifting in a road well-worn by the accepted conventions of his day for both autobiographies and slave narratives. Ziolkowski, for example, refers to "Douglass's mastery of the only terms available - those of the dominant discourse" (1845: 165). Moses, (1991) for his part, points out, "His development as an artist and an intellectual was circumscribed by the time and place in which he was born" (66); and, again,

Douglass found that he had to confine himself within a literary box. The slave narrative was a means to freedom, but it also represented a tactical confinement and imposed what might be called a genre slavery that deprived its author of literary and intellectual elbow to room. (67).

The prevailing issue of this criticism boils down to this: Does the Narrative signify Douglass's mastery of literary discourse, or its mastery of him?

Yet, notwithstanding its noticeable conformity to linguistic and generic limits, Burns (2005) concedes that Fredrick Douglass's Narrative is remarkably self-conscious and succeeds to uphold its narrative freedom by "cleverly

subverting the very language in which it is written via the subtle, sophisticated use throughout the text of a kind of understated, ironic humour which compels us to read the text in other terms” (84). This continuous use of irony in the narrative takes place on many different levels, allowing the text consistently to say one thing and mean another. This in effect implies that the narrative’s language is meant to be taken as ironically as the rest of the work.

Stephens’s (1988) article centres on biblical images and constructions that flourish in the narrative. Stephens believes that Douglass’s “linguistic model is obviously scriptural” (53). A thought-provoking aspect of this inescapable allusion is that it transpires not only through individual words and images, but in the “chiastic or parallel structure that Douglass employs in many of his sentences - a structure derived from the poetic language of the Hebrew Bible” (53).

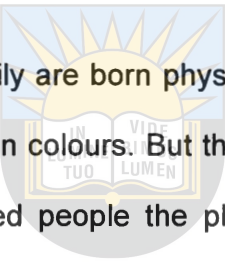
Stone (1988) also offers interpretations on this narrative structure, arguing that “the balances of the antiphonal structure of many of Douglass’s sentences is wholly appropriate” (23) because the rhythm of the sentences is “strongly reminiscent of the Old Testament, particularly the Psalms” (23). This continuous infusion of biblical language might lead the reader to believe that this is a language which Douglass trusts. In and around this thin covering, however, Douglass concurrently inverts and undercuts many of the more subtle biblical themes and signs in the text, as this research intends to show.

It has become commonplace in the criticism of Jacob’s *Incidents* to assert that the text offers an explanation of the conditions of slavery that counters or complements Fredrick Douglass’s *Narrative*. While most critics of Harriet

Jacobs's *Incidents in the life of a Slave Girl* emphasise the gender scars perpetrated by the province of slavery in their readings of her narrative; Ferguson (1996) endeavours to bring to the fore a conspicuous paradox in the portrayal of slave-narrative violence, specifically, its frequent association with Christianity. In her article titled, "Christian Violence and the Slave Narrative", she notes that, "Their [Douglass and Jacobs' narratives] exposure of this religious fanaticism certainly lends moral authority to the voices of their narrators, voices speaking primarily to a hostile white reading public eager to expiate Original Sin, the central dogma of Christian theology" (298). Ferguson's (1996) article puts this viciousness in the limelight when she makes an observation in Jacobs' *Narrative* that, "When I was told that (slave owner) Dr. Flint had joined the Episcopal Church, I was much surprised. I supposed that religion had a purifying effect on the character of men; but the worst persecutions I endured from him were after he was a communicant (74)." Ferguson is of the view that Harriet Jacobs is essentially effective in demonstrating how pious Christians used the theological concepts of original sin, blood sacrifice, and spiritual atonement to vindicate the moral contradictions and brutality that characterised the practice of Christian slavery.

Rather than give emphasis to the material results of slavery, as most scholars tend to do, Ferguson (1996) believes that slave writers like Douglass and Jacobs, through their narratives, have put focus on its human causes in an effort to comprehend why white people chose to victimize them with such licence.

Their representations of religious violence identify deep and complex psychological forces that drive the slave owner to try imposing upon coloured people an absolute power and control rivalling that of the Maker Itself. By depicting the slavery regime as a brutal theological patriarchy, the slave authors illustrate how it affords white American men the unprecedented opportunity to appear divine by reconstructing, genetically and mentally, the dark-skinned people fashioned by the universal Creator. (298)



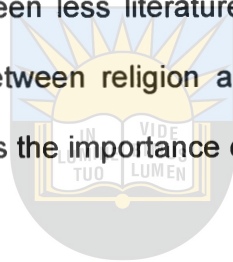
All members of the human family are born physically unchained in a world of diverse sexes, cultures, and skin colours. But the white slave masters sought to steal from dark-complexioned people the physical liberty with which the original Maker endows all humans and to rearrange the universe into hierarchically ordered groups whose destiny is determined by slave owners and their progeny.

Ferguson (1996) notes that, "Indeed, even as the whites demonized the blacks, they made the coloured people more desirable, re-affirming universal principles of human biology set by the Creator and mocking the mortal nature of divinity seekers" (304).

In conclusion, Larry Morrison (1980) in his essay titled "The Religious Defence of American Slavery Before 1830" observes that, the prominence from proslavery defenders was always upon a literal reading of the Bible which represented the mind and will of God himself. He believes that slavery was not only vindicated but also moral because it was recognized as such in their reading of the Holy Scripture. Slavery's defenders relied on this literal

reading as a response to the emphasis upon the "principles of Christianity" used by those opposed to slavery. This kind of myopic Biblical reading led to Frederick Douglass (2007) unhesitatingly cataloguing the religion of the south as a mere covering for the "most horrid crimes", the "justifier of the most appalling barbarity", a "sanctifier of the most hateful frauds", and a "secure shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal abominations fester and flourish" (vi).

As can be seen, there has been less literature that provides an ideological reading of the relationship between religion and slavery in the analysis of these two works, which justifies the importance of this study.



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CHAPTER THREE: Theoretical Framework

At their most basic level, theories provide us with a lens by which to view the world. Think of theories as a pair of glasses. Corrective lenses allow wearers to observe more clearly, but they also influence vision in unforeseen ways. For example, they can limit the span of what you see, especially when you try to look peripherally outside the range of the frames. Similarly, lenses can also distort the things you see, making objects appear larger or smaller than they really are. You can also try on lots of pairs of glasses until you finally pick one pair that works the best for your lifestyle. Theories operate in a similar fashion. A theory can illuminate an aspect of your communication so that you understand the process much more clearly; theory also can hide things from your understanding or distort the relative importance of things.

Dainton and Zelley (2010: 3)

3.0 Introduction

Marxist Literary Criticism Theory becomes ideal in a research such as the present, as it seeks to bring to the fore ideological underpinnings embedded in slavery and its ironic relationship with religion. The aim of this chapter is to outline very briefly the theoretical framework of Marxism as propounded by Karl Marx and then move on to discuss the appropriateness of Marxist Literary theory and its applicability to the reading of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass' *Narratives*.

The conceptual and theoretical framework that this study seeks to use is Marxist literary theory. Marxism posits that everything that occurs in a society

is related to, and determined by, the mode of production also known as the economic base or 'bases'. It believes "the economic relation-forces and relations of production or modes of production are the primary determining factor in all social relations" (Eagleton, 1976:6). Siegel (1970) quotes Karl Marx, who underlined this principle, by saying, "the mode of production in material life determines the social, political, and intellectual life in general" (10).

Slavery brought in its wake particularly hellish conditions of existence for African Americans, as articulated in Harriet Jacobs (1861) and Frederick Douglass (1845), who had to place their survival in jeopardy to escape bondage. Socially and historically, slavery was born in a situation where one race uprooted natives of a certain race and planted them in a foreign land to work laboriously on their plantations. They also proceeded to denigrate and belittle those people in a bid to ensure that they felt inferior culturally, socially and politically. This was done in order to use these people to build a slave empire and consolidate its economic base, agriculturally and commercially, while, in the process, creating a complementary superstructure to sustain this newly established, illegal and immoral state of affairs.

3.1 MARX AND SLAVERY

3.1.0 Racialised Slavery

Contrary to various racial justifications of slavery prevalent throughout the 19th century, Karl Marx understood that the slave status was a condition branded from without rather than a predisposition alive within, and maintained that slave status was not a natural occurrence. He took great care to intricately

untangle the components of how racialised slavery contrasted with wage slavery, how it came to be, and why its racialisation was another form of similar kind of weaponries used against the alliance of the working class for their emancipation.

On the comparison between labour structures, Marx explained that although remuneration labourers and their labour were also commodified, remuneration labourers existed as variable capital and their labour in concrete or abstract forms. In contrast, “the slave-owner buys his labourer (slaves) as he buys his horse. If he loses his slave, he loses capital” (1972:21). This meant that, as Marx further explained, “in the slave system, money capital invested in the purchase of labour plays the role of the money form of fixed capital, which is only gradually replaced after the expiration of the active life period of the slave” (1972:21). Then, as a slave, the worker is not even recognised as a living labourer, but as dead labour. Additionally, in this statement Marx foregrounds the different levels of alienation. The worker as a slave is contrasted with the remuneration labourer by recognising the slave as fixed capital, whereas wage labour has previously been referred to as working capital. He further goes on to breakdown the alienation found in remuneration labour, and distinguishes the formally free working class from slave labour. In this regard, he wrote, “We are not dealing here with indirect slavery, the slavery of the proletariat, we are dealing with direct slavery, the slavery of Blacks in Surinam, in Brazil, in the southern states of North America” (1972:36).

Marx also brings to fore the perilous consequences of choosing race solidarity over class solidarity. He wrote, “In the United States of North America, every

independent workers' movement was paralyzed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic"(1977:414). By raising the floor as a collective with cross-racial class solidarity, Marx was convinced that the fight would be waged on a narrower front. Momentarily, Marx succeeded. As Kevin Anderson (2010) writes in *Marx at the Margins*, "In Marx's view, the 1861-65 Civil War in the United States constituted one of the century's major battles for human emancipation, one that forced white labour in both the United States and in Britain to take a stand against slavery"(79).

Adding to the view that slavery abolition is a means for the emancipation of the working class, Marx advised that if Whites were to relegate Blacks further down the caste within the proletariat, it would only widen the spectrum to which they could be pushed down. If Marx's warning went unheeded, writes Anderson, "the result would be a new form of capitalism, openly structured upon racial and ethnic lines, in which immigrant whites would join Blacks at the bottom" (Anderson 90). There was serious requirement to fight the seduction of the misconception of becoming part of the capitalist class, as Marx is quoted by Anderson as saying:

This was accomplished by giving the poor whites' 'turbulent impulses for action an innocuous direction and, to tame them with the prospect of themselves one day becoming slaveholders.' Thus, the sectional conflict over slavery operated in an ideological manner to deflect the poor whites from conflict with the dominant classes of the south (Anderson 89).

Not only was Marx advising the white proletariat to do away with their petty middle-class imaginations, but he was of the view that they had only two options-allow the South a victory that will herald the expansion of enslavement across racial lines, or align themselves with fellow oppressed human beings and overthrow the Southerners largely made up of the ruling class.

3.1.1The U.S. Civil War

Marx, according to his 1867 preface to the first German edition of *Capital* Vol. I, regarded the U.S. Civil War as another revolution with a socioeconomic and political outlook. He wrote, "Just as in the eighteenth century the American War of Independence sounded the tocsin for the European middle class, so in the nineteenth century the American Civil War did the same for the European working class" ([1867-75] 1976:91). Not only did he see the Civil War as a liberal democratic rather than a communist revolution, but he also believed that it could be the forerunner of the more radical communist revolution in Europe. And as it happened, the Paris Commune, a rebellion Marx saw as permeated with communist aspirations, did break out in Europe only a few years after the end of the Civil War, in 1871.

Marx, as quoted in Robin Blackburn (2011), further adds, "Defeating the slave power and freeing the slaves would not destroy capitalism, but it would create conditions far more favourable to organizing and elevating labour, whether white or black" (13). Therefore, the war would fashion new potentials for American workforce, which in fact happened with the founding of the first national labour federation, the National Labour Union, in 1866.

The Civil War had key economic as well as political effects for Marx. A Northern triumph would shore up what was, with all of its limitations, one of the world's few democratic republics. This was to happen not only by conquering the reactionary secessionists of the South, but also by abolishing slavery. The latter measure would result in formal freedom for a substantial part of the U.S. population, making that democracy more of a reality.

To Marx, the Civil War also had huge economic consequences regarding land and property. Given the massive and mounting size of the U.S. economy and of the proportion of it based upon slave toil, the liberation of four million slaves and expropriation without compensation would mean, in economic terms, the greatest expropriation of private property in history up to that time (Blackburn, 2011).

Another economic facet concerned landed property in the South. Marx had mutual hope and aspiration with that of abolitionists and Radical Republicans and socialists in general, that in the occupied South the post war Rebuilding policies would go further than the establishment of full political rights for the former slaves and towards a genuine agricultural revolution that would untangle the old slave plantations and redistribute the land. For instance in his preface to *Capital* (1867), Marx alludes to the Radical Republican programme of granting forty acres and a mule to the freed slaves. This was all in reference to Benjamin Wade, next in line to become President of the United States, should the poisonously racist and stalling Andrew Johnson, who succeeded Abraham Lincoln to the presidency in 1865 upon the latter's assassination, have been successfully impeached by the Radical Republican majority in the Senate: "Mr. Wade, Vice-President of the United States, has

declared in public meetings that, after the abolition of slavery, a radical transformation in the existing relations of capital and landed property is on the agenda" ([1867-75] 1976: 93). The programme was deferred the following year, after the Senate's failed attempt to impeach Johnson, who openly aligned himself with the Southern ruling elite.

3.1.2 Marx's Critical Support of the North

Marx was strongly behind the North from the beginning despite Lincoln's refusal to place on the agenda the abolition of slavery. Despite these shortcomings by the North, Marx could not align himself with the South as he believed that they were utterly reactionary, more especially after having put the "right" to own slaves as a founding principle of their Constitution. The North's deficiencies did not go unpunished as Marx issued a strong public reproach of Lincoln. In an August 30, 1862 article for *Die Presse* in Vienna, Marx confronted Lincoln's rejection to endorse abolition as part of the aim of the war by quoting at length a speech by radical abolitionist Wendell Phillips. Phillips, in his speech of summer 1862, had castigated Lincoln, as "first-rate second rate man" who had failed to grasp that the U.S. would "never have peace... until slavery is uprooted" (MECW 19: 234-35; Marx and Engels 2016:125-26).

It should not escape our mind that when Marx's First International was founded in 1864, it happened largely because of the Western Europe network of labour and socialists that had supported the North. The network organised people on behalf of North during the decisive formative years of the war when Britain and France appeared to threaten involvement on the side of the South.

In January 1865, after Lincoln had not only delivered the Emancipation Proclamation, but begun to employ Black troops in the Union Army, the International sent a public Address to Lincoln drafted by Marx, congratulating him on his resounding victory in the November 1864 election. As Marx pointed out privately, this election victory, unlike the one in 1860, amounted to an explicit endorsement of the politics of emancipation.

3.2 Central Concepts of Marxist Literary Criticism.

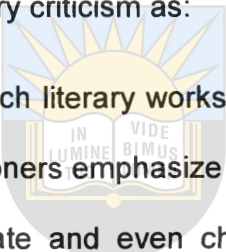
Coming up with a definition for Marxist literary criticism has never been an easy task for Marxist critics. This is owing to the complication and dynamic nature of the concept of Marxism, a concept this literary theory is grounded. Emphasising the complex nature of the topic, Eagleton (1976) observes, "Marxism is a highly complex subject and that sector of it known as Marxist literary criticism is no less so" (xi). In addition, Mulhern (1992) highlights the ever-changing nature of the subject, when he says:

Marxist culture is something more than its inherited canon, various and evolving as this may be. Marxism is historical not merely because it is itself fully a part of the history it seeks to understand and action. History is as much a part of Marxism as Marxism is of it; they inhabit one another in unending tension.... Marxism has not "arrived" nor has it "departed". It persists theoretically and practically, in a continuing history whose outcome is uncertain. (2)

Despite the subject being complex and evolving in nature, some scholars have attempted to define Marxist literary criticism from different perspectives. Eagleton (2003:vi), for instance, views Marxist literary criticism as a sort of

criticism that “analyses literature in terms of the historical conditions which produce it; and it needs similarly to be aware of its own historical conditions.” Eagleton’s view appears to propose that the historical circumstances that occur in a certain epoch determine the kind of literature that is created in that period.

Murfin and Supryia (1998) give an elaborate and comprehensive definition of Marxist literary criticism. In their *Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary terms*, they define Marxist literary criticism as:



A type of criticism in which literary works are viewed as the product of work and whose practitioners emphasize the role of class and ideology as they reflect, propagate and even challenge the prevailing social order. Rather than viewing texts as repositories for hidden meanings, Marxist critics view texts as material products to be understood in broadly historical terms. In short, literary works are viewed as a product of work (and hence the realm of production and consumption we call economics). (62)

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Apart from emphasising the presence of the role of ideology and class in opposing, spreading or reproducing the predominant social order, Murfin and Supryia’s Marxist literary criticism definition introduces a different aspect that of looking at literary works as products of economics. This association between literary works and economics would lead us to the Marxist criticism concept of a base and a superstructure.

Bisztray (1978) attempts to elaborate on the concept of base and superstructure, he writes:

.... the active productive man gradually creates an increasingly sophisticated relation to his material world, to his fellow men. The sum total of production factor is called the “economic base” of human existence, from which rises the legal and political superstructure and to which corresponds definite forms of social consciousness with the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less transformed. In short there is nothing in human consciousness, or in its products (to which literature and art also belong), that does not originate in the economic conditions of a given age. (18)

In that same breath, Eagleton also comes up with a comprehensive account on the importance and connection of base and superstructure. In his *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976:5), he states, “from the economic structure of a society or what is commonly known by Marxists as the economic base, or infrastructure emerges a superstructure-certain forms of law, politics, a certain kind of state, whose essential function is to legitimate the power of the social class which owns the means of production.”

The above quotations of Bisztray and Eagleton on the notion of base and superstructure imply that the superstructure provides a direct or indirect mirror of what is happening at base level. With Marxism, art is one facet of the superstructure. Hence, Marxists stress that there is a direct connection between form and content of art and economic class, social or ideological factors that form and influence form and content. Thus Trotsky, as quoted in Siegel (1970:15), observes, “a knowledge of how literature is governed in a

general way by the functioning of the modes of production is essential for its fullest understanding.” (15)

Modern development in Marxist literary criticism still does not concur with the notion that the economic base categorically determines literature. Present-day Marxist critics reject the impression of a determined base and a determined superstructure in literature as they feel that the model does not recognise the likelihood that literature might be in friction with the dominant formation of the economic base. Demetz (1967) demonstrates the switch of attention of Marxist critics from the “deterministic relationship” of base and superstructure to reciprocal relationships between the two:

The relation between foundation and superstructure is now characterized by the possibility of mutual interaction; moreover, this interaction is subject to the scientifically indeterminate effects of “a whole series of accidents”. There is no longer a direct contact between more distant spheres; economics may exert its influence upon the neighbouring area of politics, but it can no longer force the more distant sphere of literature directly under its tyranny. The more abstract fields of the superstructure are only lightly touched by economic impulses which in turn, are subjected to serious metamorphoses on their way through the intermediate levels. (151)

In support of the above notion is Louis Althusser who introduced the notion of overdeterminism. He tries to avoid crude economic determinism by arguing that in every social formation there are different modes of production and that the conflicts within a social formation are overdetermined (Althusser 1969).

Overdeterminism basically means to be an effect which arises from a variety of causes acting together. This concept undermines the simplistic notions of a one-to-one correspondence between the base and superstructure. He also introduced the notion of relative autonomy which believes in the degree of independence for art from economic forces, despite the relationship between culture and economics. This also posits that a superstructure is not entirely determined by the nature of the economic base (Althusser 1969). Gramsci also provides more clarity on Althusser's discussion on the complications of the relationship between base and superstructure with his theory of ideology and hegemony.



3.3 Gramsci's Theory of Ideology and Hegemony

According to Gramsci (2004), power, economy and ideology are basic elements for the ruling classes to succeed in controlling society: they maintain their power not only through dominion, but also through moral and intellectual leadership. Gramsci (2004) presents two basic ways in which the ruling class governs: the spontaneous consent and the coercive power (673-74). If the spontaneous consent fails, the dominant group resorts to the apparatus of state coercive power which legally imposes discipline on those groups who do not consent either actively or passively. Coercive and consensual powers are necessary powers for the state. Physical forces and aggressive laws are necessary to seize power, while consent is necessary to maintain power.

Gramsci (2004) treats ideology as a set of ideas and representations, which bind people together. He argues that hegemony creates a kind of unity

between classes and political groupings, because ideology and power are inseparable:

individuals are actively involved in their own conditioning, but also that ideology is therefore diverse, embodied in material practices rather than unified monolithically according to class. (Haslett 2000: 57)

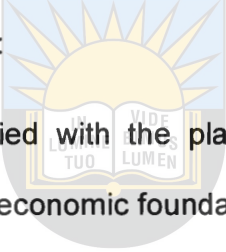
Gramsci's example of the successful hegemony is that of the French Jacobins who motivate the bourgeoisie to increase its class interests. Through leading a coalition of classes, the bourgeoisie could achieve triumph in the case of the French Revolution. That is why Gramsci shows political struggles as complex relations of forces rather than a simple conflict between aggressive classes. Ideology is not a form of false consciousness only; it is more complex than that. It is not enough to say that the dominant class imposes its ideas on the subordinate classes, but the dominant class must present its interests as universal as well.

To conclude, the model of Base and Superstructure has been held as an indispensable tool in Marxist theory, influencing various fields such as art and literature, but is used with caution in present times.

3.4 Marx and Engels on Literature

While Marxist literary criticism draws on the political and philosophical writings of Marx and Engels for its basis, it is critical to point out that they did not develop a complete artistic theory. Eagleton (1976) states, "Marx and Engels's comments on art and literature are scattered and fragmentary, glancing allusions than developed positions" (2). Marx and Engels's perspective is influenced by their 'base' and 'superstructure' model which

believes that the “mode of production” in material life influences the social, political and intellectual life progression in general. Similarly, they contend that, “literature, like all cultural phenomena is fundamentally determined by its economic condition” (Mulhern, 1992:18). Bisztray consolidates this point when he states, in his *Marxists Models of Realism* that, “Marx and Engels restrict the function of literature to the reflection of the economic basis of society.” However, after the death of Marx, Engels gradually limits the “deterministic effect of the economic forces over the superstructure” and this is noticed by Demetz (1967), who comments:



Where Marx was satisfied with the plain linear dependence of the superstructure upon the economic foundation, the late Engels limits the effects of the economic forces and postulates at the same time the possible effectiveness of the intellectual epiphenomenon. Engels admits that in every moment of human history there exists a level of intellectual traditions removed from the area of economic forces. (144-145)

Also giving us an insight into Engels' perspective concerning the subject are his letters to Minna Kautsky (1885) and Margaret Harkness (1888). In the letter to Kautsky, Ngara (1985:10) paraphrases Engels: “Engels states clearly that the socialist novelist does not have to provide a solution to the problem of his day. All a socialist novel needs to do is, as Engels notes, shake the optimism of bourgeoisie and instil doubt as to the eternal validity of their assumption”.

Moreover, the same point is emphasised in Engels's other letter to Harkness. In the letter, Engels remarks, "there is no need to write point blank socialist novel" (Hapgood, 1996). Ngara (1985) quotes him as saying, "the more the opinion of the author remains hidden the better for the work of art". With the above comments in mind, many doubt that Marx and Engels were against bias in literature, but Bisztray (1978) guarantees:

The two "founding fathers" (Marx and Engels) of Marxism regard literature as a reflection not merely at the "social" and material "realists" of certain age but also of the consciousness of the age, appealing at the same time to the readers' consciousness (21).

Marxist critics' locus on form and content in a literary work is clearly illustrated by Terry Eagleton (1976) when he says, "Marxist criticism has traditionally opposed all kinds of literary formalism attacking that inbred attention to sheerly technical properties which robs literature of historical significance" (20). He goes on to say, "a good deal of Marxist criticism has in practice paid scant attention to question of artistic form." It is, thus, not surprising to notice a trend in many a Marxist critics emphasising on content rather than form. However, this researcher will not spend too much time on this topic as it form no part of his text analysis which will be done in Chapter Four.

3.5 Marxist's conception of Art and Literature

Marxism is basically of the view that economic and social circumstances influence the religious beliefs, judiciary systems and cultural frameworks; it considers art and literature as a truthful reproduction of these situations. Balibar and Macherey, as quoted by Mulhern (1992:26), contend, "the

classical Marxists theses on literature and art set out from the essential philosophical category of reflection.” To grasp this category holistically, according to them, is central to the Marxist idea of literature. Art is viewed by many Marxists as historic reality. Amid attacks by formalists for not giving adequate devotion to the creative value of literary works, Marxists still emphasised that a work of art cannot be separated from historical and economic circumstances. Conspicuous by its absence in the major approaches to literature, form, like in Formalism and Structuralism, is thus of serious interest. Many literary academics would now consider as very important issues such as the historical situatedness, or historical embedment, as well as the politics of literary texts. Hence, Marxist criticism has “traditionally opposed all kinds of literary formalism, attacking that inbred attention to sheerly technical properties which robs literature of historical significance and reduces it to an aesthetic game” (Eagleton 2002:19). Marxist criticism has been devoted to a reconstruction of the past on the basis of historical evidence in order to find out to what extent a text is a truthful and accurate representation of social reality at any given time. As Léon Trotsky, as quoted in Cuddon (1998), suggested: “artistic creation is a changing and a transformation of reality in accordance with the peculiar laws of art” (493). Or, as Mao Tse-Tung, as quoted in Balibar and Macherey (1996), writes, “works of literature and art, as ideological forms, are the product of the reflection in the human brain of the life of a given society” (278).

Terry Eagleton (2002) defines Marxist criticism as

...part of a larger body of theoretical analysis which aims to understand ideologies—the ideas, values and feelings by which men experience

their societies at various times. And certain of those ideas, values and feelings are available to us only in literature. To understand ideologies is to understand both the past and the present more deeply; and such understanding contributes to our liberation. (xiii)

The purpose of Marxist criticism, therefore, is to enable an understanding of the social and cultural world that will contribute to societal transformation. Marxists study literature as part of a larger political project, but, in consequence, they sacrifice a purely literary study of literature. Their focus on a political understanding of culture necessarily excludes a broader investigation into non-political or aesthetic phenomena. For Marxism, literature does not exist in some timeless, aesthetic realm as an object to be passively contemplated. Rather, like all cultural manifestations, it is a product of the socioeconomic and hence ideological conditions of the time and place in which it was written, whether or not the author intended it so. Because human beings are themselves products of their socioeconomic and ideological environment, it is assumed that authors cannot help but create works that embody ideology in some form. As György Lukács (1972) puts it: "Achilles and Werther, Oedipus and Tom Jones, Antigone and Anna Karenina: their individual existence [. . .] cannot be distinguished from their social and historical environment. Their human significance, their specific individuality cannot be separated from the context in which they were created" (136).

However, it is not only the formalists who have challenged the notion of literature being a mirror of historical conditions, as discorded opinions have also arisen among Marxists regarding the issue. For instance, Mehring,

according to Demetz (1967), blames class struggle and the revolution for poisoning pure art and literature. He says,

...in the present every literary effort is condemned to failure as long as the class struggle poisons men's mind, any pure joy in beauty, any genuine creativity is impossible. "In all revolutionary periods", "in all class fighting for their freedom", taste will always be extensively obscured by logic and morality which translated into philosophy, means only that where the capacity for perception and desires are severely restrained, aesthetic judgment will always come under pressure. (188-189)

In light of these different viewpoints proffered, it becomes important and necessary that a revisit be done on prominent Marxist critics to capture their views on literature and art.

3.6 Mehring and Plekhanov on Literature

Demetz (1967) regards Mehring and Plekhanov as the first followers in the historical growth of Marxist literary criticism. Both were the first to put to practice the theory in European and Russian literature. The two disciples of Marxist literary criticism have more similarities than differences concerning literature and how it should be understood. Mehring reckons that the production of great literature in an environment laden with class struggle is impossible. He states that, "the political derive of the fighting classes destroys any possibility of disinterested enjoyment; and with the destruction of detached joy the possibility of great art is demolished" (188-189).

For the same reason, Plekhanov, as stated by Demetz (1967), places faith in Marx's economic basis of art and in the devastating force of historical expansion. However, like his compatriot Mehring, he is concerned with the independence of pure art. Explaining Plekhanov's perspective on art, Demetz (1967) observes that, "Plekhanov took the position that propaganda for or against Marxism destroys the work of art because political rhetoric forces "the writer into the role of the preacher." (198)

If these two critics (Plekhanov and Mehring) have any differences in the subject of literature, it is whether literature should mirror what is happening in the world. Plekhanov, diverging from Mehring, did not entirely reject "utilitarian attitude towards art" which attempts to arm twist art into the service of outside forces. Buttressing this notion, Mulhern (1992), while quoting Plekhanov, posits:

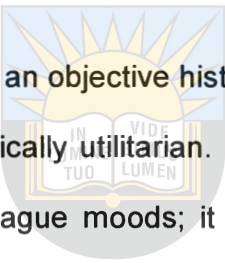
Plekhanov takes for granted the power of "art" as a value and sees it as a particularly rewarding "test" of "general view of history": a science that raises its standard on the highest ground of culture must be recognized as a great intellectual power.

For Mehring, according to Bisztray (1978), "society determined the author's view, which then determined the work. For Plekhanov, however, the author's mediating function between the external reality and the internalized world of the work was more complex." (7)

3.7 Trotsky on Literature and Art

Trotsky, who played a pivotal role in the Russian revolution, is also a prominent fixture in Marxist literary criticism. His *Literature and Revolution* is

still regarded as one of the major classic effort in Marxist literary criticism. Trotsky's opinion of art and literature combines both the utilitarian function and their sovereign, liberated existence. He states, "...a work of art should in the first place be judged by its own law that is by the law of art. But before we really understand we must see that work in its historical context" (Siegel, 1970:13). Trotsky states how literature helps its utilitarian function without losing its aesthetic beauty when he states in his "Formalist School of Poetry and Marxism" that



From the point of view of an objective historical process, art is always a social servant and historically utilitarian. It finds the necessary rhythm of words for dark and vague moods; it brings thoughts and feelings closer and contrasts them with one another, it enriches feelings; makes it more flexible, more responsive, it enlarges the volume of thought in advance and not through the personal method of accumulated experience, it educates the individual, the social group, the class and the nation. And this does quite independently of whether it appears in a given case under the flag of a 'pure' or a frankly tendentious art (Craig, 1975:367).

Even as Trotsky is very much worried with the historic ancestries of literature, he highlights the need for comprehending 'art as art'. In *Class and Art*, Trotsky, as observed by Siegel (1970), attacks those who find the sole value of Dante's *Divine Comedy* for understanding the state of mind of certain classes in a certain epoch (15). According to him, "such view of literature makes it merely a historical document, not a work of art which must speak in some way to our feelings and moods."

Trotsky also gives a perspective on the type of art that should be fashioned during revolutionary phases. Moreover, as a person dedicated to the cause, his attraction is to that literature produced by revolutionaries. He writes,

During the period of revolution only that literature which promotes the consolidation of the workers in their struggle against the exploiters is necessary and progressive. Revolutionary literature cannot but be imbued with a spirit of social hatred, which is a creative historic factor in an epoch of proletarian dictatorship. Under socialism, solidarity will be the basis of society. Literature and art will be tuned to a different key (Siegel, 1970:60)



However, Trotsky is an authentic advocator for 'literature for the cause of revolution' and strongly feels that artistic creativity should be free from propaganda and the spirit of conformity. He is vehemently not in tandem with Stalin and his proponent's order that artists should produce works, which conform and serve the party (in this case, the Soviet Socialist Party). He writes:

Our Marxist conception of the objective social dependence and social utility in art, when translated into the language of politics does not at all mean a desire to dominate art by means of decrees and orders. It is not true that we regard only that art as new and revolutionary which speaks of the workers and it is nonsense to say that we demand that the poets should describe inevitably a factory chimney or the uprising against capital! Of course the new art cannot but place the struggle of the proletariat in the centre of its attention. But the plough of the new

art is not limited to numbered strips. On the contrary, it must plough the whole field in all direction (Craig, 1975:369)

With the above, it is clear that, for Trotsky, literature is not limited to serving the function of encouraging the struggle of the proletariat's quest to abolish capitalism but also as an aesthetic work that should appeal to one's senses and emotions.

3.8 Lukacs and Realism

Many literary critics consider George Lukacs as the 'founding figure' of Marxist criticism due to his contribution in its expansion in the 20th century.

Lukacs' interpretation of literature is intensively connected to the concept of realism, which, according to Lukacs, is a true mirror image of life in its entirety. Lukacs, according to Bisztray (1978), is "anthropocentric" in his description of literature. He gives a complete meaning of realism with its facets in "The Germany Collection of Lukacs Writings". He says:

Realism is "the reflection of humanism in art. Also Realism is never a matter of technique. It is one kind of style opposed to other kinds, but the expressions of a high degree of consciousness and a set of human experience on behalf of the writer" (Demetz, 1978:62)

Taking the three characteristics realism mentioned into cognisance, Lukacs further comes with other three basic points. The first one is concerned with the "creation of concrete, vivid, and tangible human situation" (Bisztray, 1978:62). Following concreteness, as Bisztray (1978) observes, comes 'the total view of life'. Lukacs believes 'details are not self-justifying' but it is their

duty to contribute meaningfully to the complete picture. He, thus, accuses the naturalists precisely for looking for the illusion of entirety through limitless details. Then comes the concept of typicality as the third characteristic. "Everyday life is chaotic and full of coincidences." Hence, the writer has to differentiate the demonstrative and significant experience from the unintentional ones and identify their sequence.

Lukacs is convinced that only realistic forms of narratives are creatively and potentially valid. He argues that accomplished artists are solely those who can efficiently epitomise the entirety of human life. He reckons that the objective of art is that of truthful and accurate representation of the totality of reality. "It aims at a profound and comprehensive depiction of reality and does not present reality abstractly" (Ngara, 1985:15). Lukacs does not take lightly to "naturalism and its photographic method of depicting reality since it is a distortion and deterioration of realism into abstraction". He remarks:

While the crux of Marxist aesthetics is realism, it also combats vigorously to naturalism and any direction which is satisfied with a photographic reproduction of the immediately perceptible surface of the external world. True realism enables the writer to see the connection between things and to relate his description of objects to the essence of these objects and of the reality around them (Ngara, 1985:15)

Looking closely at Lukacs' locus on the commitment of the writer and his work we discover that, despite being a party member, he reluctantly took duties and had less political attitude. This did not go unnoticed as he received criticism from Brecht for "separating the tendency of the author from the tendency of

the work” (Bisztray, 1978:108). His response was, “the writer is committed only to himself, to his objective judgment of perceived reality, his humanism and his capacity to reflect his experience in a dialectical way” (Bisztray, 1978:64). Lukacs believes literature will lose its self-righteousness and artistic value if it is produced in favour of political parties and other merits.

As Eagleton (1976:53) states, “Lukacs has been attacked on two main fronts for this position. He has been harshly criticized by Brecht who claims that Lukacs makes a fetish of nineteenth century realism and is culpably blind to the best of modernist art”. Criticism of Lukacs has also come from fellow Communist party comrades who do not understand why he cannot and is less interested to use art for socialism endeavours.

While tearing into Lukacs’ concept of Realism, Brecht contends that, “our conception of realism needs to be broad and political, free from aesthetic restriction and independent of conventions” (Craig, 1975). For Brecht Realism is:

Laying bare society’s causal networks/showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators/ writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting human society/emphasizing the dynamics of development/ concrete so as to encourage abstraction.

(424)

Opposing Lukacs’ opinion of the novelist as a recapturer and recreator of human life, Brecht contends, is “the role of the artist as of the intellectual is the overthrow of the weight of the heritage; to the question what does the

proletariat expect of its intellectuals? The answer is that they 'disintegrate' bourgeois ideology" (Mulhern, 1992:251). Brecht believes, "a literary work is a good work in so far as it produces a specific knowledge, a certain domination of reality." Bisztray (1978) explains the contentious difference between Brecht and Lukacs' conception of realism, he says,

According to Lukacs, although the author's political consciousness may be ideologically incorrect, he can still create correct characters unintentionally. According to Brecht the author's political consciousness may be ideologically right and yet he still may create false characters intentionally, to attain a rational distance between his audience and his heroes (Brecht regarded this device, this "intellectualizing through distancing" as an application of the Marxist idea of alienation to literature and the theatre, he called it estrangement). While Lukacs tends to forget that perception is already an integrated part of human consciousness, Brecht tends to forget that there is also false consciousness and therefore cannot be evaluated solely in terms of itself (109).

As has been shown in this section, the theories of Marxist literary criticism vary and are complex. Marxist literary theory is very broad and entails within itself contradictory, dynamic beliefs and opinions of various Marxist critics. The following extract taken from Demetz (1967:223) clearly explains this fact and hence serves as a good concluding remark:

The centre of attention in Marxist criticism has shifted. In the last century, one spoke of foundation and superstructure, of cause and

effect; in recent decades interpretations have emerged that are trying to place economics and the world of literature in a complicated and oblique relationship. The sociological background of the author and his political opinions are ignored, and critics concentrate on questions of inner structure of the work of art, the social implications of its form, or the development of genres in the stream of historical consciousness.

3.9 Ideology and Literature

To fully comprehend Marxist literary criticism it is essential to have a firm grip on the concept of ideology and its relationship with literature from a Marxist point of view. It might look simple to explain ideology and pointing out the connections it has to literature but Marxist critics themselves do not come up with the same perspective regarding the issue. Below is an attempt to see how critics view the concept of ideology.

For Marx, ideology is part of the superstructure created by an economic base with its main purpose to validate that base. He further elaborates on his point in Mary Klages, (2017) *Literary Theory: The Complete Guide*, who quotes him as saying, “the ideologies present in a capitalist society will explain justify and support the capitalist mode of production” (96). A contemporary Marxist critic, Ngara (1985), attempts to come up with a simpler version of defining the term as he says, “ideology refers to the dominant idea of an epoch or class with regard to politics and law, morality, religion, art and science.” Taking Engels’ side is Eagleton, who is also convinced that ideology is an instrument used in society to create “false consciousness”. He writes:

Ideology is not in the first place a set of doctrines; it signifies the way men live out their roles in class society, the values, ideas and images which tie them to their social functions and prevent them a true knowledge of society as a whole (1976:16/17)

What makes the perspectives of these Marxist critics harmonious is that their notion of ideology emanates from the base and superstructure model. All the critics agree that ideology is part of the superstructure with its purpose being to “legitimate the power of the ruling class in society” (Eagleton, 1976:5). The critics also agree that literature is a simple conveyer and broadcaster of the dominant cultural ideologies, stifling assessment of ideas as ‘truth’. Usually, this is used as rationale used by dominant class to consolidate their power. Eagleton (1976) agrees that,

Literature is nothing but ideology in a certain aesthetic form-that works of literature are just expressions of the ideologies of their time. They are prisoners of ‘false consciousness’, unable to reach beyond it to arrive at truth. It is a position characteristic of much ‘vulgar Marxists’ who tend to see literary works merely as reflections of dominant ideologies. (18)

From the above, one is not off the mark if he/she concludes as saying that ideologies for Marxists are mutable concepts, principles and approaches which persons gain knowledge in their societies. Commonly, they present the dominant concepts and principles as the conviction of the society while inhibiting individuals from fully comprehending how society really functions.

However, the above notion raised its fair share of dust with some critics being quick to register their disapproval. One such critic is Louis Althusser who challenges the idea of false consciousness. He believes that ideology is the medium through which persons gain understanding of their surroundings. Here is Althusser, as quoted by Eugene Goodheart (1997),

Althusser explicitly distinguishes ideology from false consciousness. Ideology, according to Althusser represents “the attitudes, predilections and dispositions of a group, “its practice and lived experience” which cannot be constructed as true or false. It is not “a contingent excrescence of history; it is a structure essential to the historical life of societies. (3)

By eliminating the influential weight of economics, Althusser saw ideology as itself a decisive force affecting consciousness, alive in the material signifying practices of “ideological apparatus” and relishing relative independence.

It hence becomes essential that all ideology, as stated by Althusser in Mulhern (1992:45), “must in practical way ‘hail’ or interpellate individuals as subjects so they perceive themselves as such, with rights and duties, the obligatory accompaniment.” Althusser has also tried to formulate a different theory on the relation that art has to ideology. Contrary to the vulgar Marxist critics, he believes that there is a complex relationship between art and ideology. Eagleton (1976) further elucidated on Althusser’s notion by saying,

Althusser argues that art cannot be reduced to ideology, rather a particular reaction to it. Ideology signifies the imaginary ways in which men experience the real world, which is of course the kind of

experience literature gives us too-what it feels like to live in particular conditions, rather than a conceptual analysis of those conditions. However, art does more than just passively reflect that experience. It is held with in ideology, but also manages to distance itself from it, to the point where it permits us to 'feel' and 'perceive' the ideology from which it springs. (18)

Althusser's structuralist type of Marxist understanding, and its particular emphasis on the connection between ideology and culture, paved the way for other critics, especially those with keen interest in the political element of literature. Pierre Macherey (one of Althusser's colleagues) suggests vital techniques that works might oppose the process of interpellation by revealing the ideological illusions on which official society is based. In demonstrating his notion, he uses the suggestion of how literary language is influenced by other dialogues (scientific or everyday speech) that surround it in the historical moment. He believes that the rest of the ideological power of art is realised in the way its language is successful in mimicking or parodying these other disciplines.

Christopher Caldwell (2009) does not believe the earlier notion of ideology in a work of art as being that of the dominant class. He believes that art produced under oppressive environment is likely to favour the oppressed while challenging the dominant class. He submits that art is as a result of tension between changing social relations and out-moded consciousness and such a crisis laden environment is fertile for the emergency of a challenge to the ideology of the ruling group.

In a nutshell, Marxism believes that not all ideologies are not desirable. An ideology is undesirable if it furthers and promotes repressive political agendas of the society and it is desirable if it ignites the fire that torches down repression while ushering in freedom. Consolidating this point is Goodheart in his *Reign of Ideology* (1997:64), he says, "ideology necessarily plays an ambiguous role in Marxist thought: as a false consciousness when it refers to the ruling class and as good ideology when it refers to the interest of the revolutionary class." Hence, it is imperative that an archetypal Marxist critic views a literary work as both a product of a work and something which in itself goes out to do the work - especially that of challenging, consolidating or perpetuating its culture's dominant value-systems.

3.10 Althusserian Ideological State Apparatus

In the 1960s Louis Althusser provided an effective explanation on ideology and how it is able to hide authentic reality from us. Althusser's proposition is that ideology is "a 'Representation' of the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to their Real Conditions of Existence" (1971:162). The quotation affirms that ideology distorts our view of our true 'conditions of existence.' Furthermore, Althusser links ideology with its social sources. He believes ideology works with what he terms 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISAs), which although may have their own sub-ideology, are all subjects of the dominant ideology. He states,

To my knowledge, no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State

Ideological Apparatuses . . . The ideology of the ruling class does not become the ruling ideology by the grace of God, nor even by virtue of the seizure of State power alone. It is by the installation of the ISAs in which this ideology is realized and realizes itself that it becomes the ruling ideology. (1971:146-85)

Althusser's ISAs entail all the societal institutions that we interact with, that is the law, organised religion, educational and political systems. They "are part . . . of the private domain. Churches, Parties, Trade Unions, families . . . schools . . . newspapers, cultural ventures, etc., are private" (144). Their main task is to reproduce the social relations of production by constructing individual 'subjects' who identify themselves in the dominant ideology, and consequently assent to it.

Subsequently, while we are in the confidence that we are acting out of our own free will in reality, we are "acted by the system" (Ferretter 2006:87). This amounts to saying that ISAs cogently precede its individual members. It "is not because we hold certain beliefs that we construct ISAs; rather, it is because ISAs have been constructed that we hold certain beliefs. The material apparatus—the institution, with all its practices and rituals—governs the beliefs of its members" (Ferretter 87). As Althusser argues, thoughts are not the property of individual subjects, but result of the situation of those subjects, in class society, within a set of ISAs.

However, since within such a perspective there is no room for freedom, Althusser does not point the imbalanced sharing of wealth that we find within capitalist societies to the direct manipulations of the bourgeoisie or the ruling associates. In other words, the motivating instrument behind ideology is not

the self-centredness of those who profit from the way a given society has economically organised itself and who work hard to hide the exploitative nature of that organisation from the lower classes. Those who gain are also as blind as everybody else. This then leaves one wondering where ideology comes from and how it has such influence on subjects (us). In an attempt to answer these questions Althusser pulls from the writings of a fellow French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. If anything is to be read from Althusser's essays, "Freud and Lacan" and "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", it's that Althusser's return to Marx has affinities with Lacan's modification of psychoanalysis through a return to Freud. Thus, he uses Lacanian conceptions of the subject to describe how subjects are 'interpellated' by social structures.

Lacan believes that the progressions that we go through while growing up leave us forever incomplete. Conscious of that unfathomable lack and yearning for completion, we turn to ideology. Althusser believes ideology creates subjects through interpellation; it constantly 'hails and interpellates' (addresses) us as 'concrete subjects' as if we are complete already: "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject" (Althusser, 173). In so doing, it may 'interpellate' us in the different social roles that we play, or the different 'subject positions' that we occupy. Althusser summarises the process by which we become subjects in the following passage:

Ideology . . . 'functions' in such a way that it . . . 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation . . . (of) interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined

along the lines of the most commonplace every day police ... hailing: 'Hey, you there!', . . . the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was really him who was hailed' (and not someone else). (174)

By 'interpellation' Althusser means this: ideology calls me into existence as a subject, as if it were calling me by name in the street. It compels me to believe that I am a subject, although in reality, I have none of the attributes of that ideological concept. To Althusser, "ideology has always already interpellated individuals as subjects" and "that individuals are always already subjects," (subjects of ideology) (176). Ideology addresses me, before I am even born, as I grow up and throughout my life, as an 'I', as a subject, as a site of identity, thought and action. Althusser's analysis implies that the interpellation of individuals as subjects presupposes the existence of a unique and central other 'Subject' which is written with a capital 'S' (Subject) to distinguish it from ordinary subjects, with a small 's'. In this case, there are only ever subjects through the interpellation of the individual into a subject by a Subject who names him. A subject, therefore, is created "*through the Subject and subjected to the Subject*" (Althusser, 179). To become a subject means to become obedient and an unresisting agent of the mode of production within which the ISAs to which we belong function. As Althusser explains it, the subjects of ideology '*work all by themselves*' (165). We perform to satisfy our various roles in the system of production relations, a system of exploitation, without arguing and without imagining that there could or should be any other

system of relations. Within ideology, although apparently free and responsible agents, we are in reality precisely the opposite; we are thinking as we are told to think, and acting as we are told to act, in the interests of the economic dominance of the ruling class.

Persons recognise themselves as subjects and identify their rights and duties exactly as their Ideology aims. Each ideology has its specific mode: each gives to the 'subject' one or more appropriate names. It convinces us that we are whole and real, that we are the 'concrete subjects' we want to be. Althusser states: "the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself' " (182). It therefore comes as no surprise that we see whatever ideology makes us see as natural, as belonging to the normal, and pleasant order of things. The reflected mirror-structure of ideology makes certain that the subjects recognise what they are and behave accordingly, so, "everything will be all right: Amen—'So be it" (181).

3.11 Terry Eagleton's Conception of ideology

In *Criticism and Ideology*, Terry Eagleton examines the relationship between the literary text and ideology, arguing that the literary text is not an expression of ideology, but it is rather a certain production of ideology:

A dramatic production does not 'express', 'reflect' or 'reproduce' the dramatic text on which it is based ; it produces the text, transforming it into a unique and irreducible entity (Terry Eagleton 1976:69).

The relation between text and production cannot be conceived as that of an essence to an existence and it is not a matter of releasing it from its suspended animation. To Eagleton, the relation between text and production is a relation of labour: the theoretical instruments transform the raw materials of the text into a specific product; so the literary text produces an ideology, which is itself production, in a way similar to the operations of dramatic production on dramatic text. The text's relation to ideology constitutes that ideology to unravel some of its relations to history. Eagleton looks at ideology as a kind of false consciousness. He says that "ideology is 'a false consciousness' which blocks true historical perception, a screen interposed between men and their history" (Terry Eagleton 1976:69). He adds that despite the fact that ideology carries elements of reality within itself, it deformatively produces a text. Ideology pre-exists the text, but the ideology of the text forms that ideology in ways unpremeditated by ideology itself. The particular production of the ideology of the text has no pre-existence. Moreover, it is identical with the text itself. Eagleton states that ideology offers itself to the work in different forms. It presents itself in ordinary language and those particular aesthetic, political, ethical and other formulae which may immediately penetrate ordinary language. In fact, criticizing the dominant ideas in a certain society is a way writers follow in order to destroy the ideology of that society.

In conclusion, the literature chosen for this thesis reflects the condition of the black people in the slave holding South, sometimes as a people engaged in a struggle to regain their freedom, and, most of the time, as a vanquished

people who must look towards a better day in the future when they can regain their freedom. One will also observe that the content of two Narratives reflects the struggle to control the basic means of production in the South, with all its attendant consequences.

A definition taken from the handbook of "Marxist-Leninist Aesthetics," as quoted by Béla Köpeczi (1972:356) suggests that, "the content of art is reality, reflected by the artist in the light of a definite ideology and aesthetico-social ideas. Content combines with the author's style to form a closely knit unit in a work of art. As Eagleton (1976) asserts, "forms are historically determined by the kind of 'content' they have to embody; they are changed, transformed, broken down and revolutionised as that content itself changes. 'Content' is prior to form just as for Marxism it is changes in a society's material 'content,' its mode of production, which determine the 'forms' of its superstructure"(6).

In the case of the Narratives, the conservative ruling class was the slaveholder while the oppressed class were the African-American slaving population, which sought to change its oppressive conditions under which it lived. This historical content is re-enacted in the novels. Content, therefore, becomes very important in a work of art and the novel is no exception. The way a former slave's novel will be understood will be partly determined by the position of the slaving population within the history of the African-Americans particularly during Slavery. The content and meaning of those novels are products of African-America's particular history and their study will illustrate the meaning of Marx's dictum, "it is not the consciousness of man that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." (1976:42)

3.12 Economic structure

If we consider the economic structure of the South during slavery, we see that the social relations between Africans and white people were bound up with the way they produced their material life: whites as masters and blacks as slaves. This relationship is evident in the two texts under study. Marx and Engels (1845) have asserted that “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time the ruling intellectual force.” They continue:

The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations grasped as ideas; hence of the relations which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance (Marx and Engels 1845).

3.13 Dominant Ideology

Indeed, when Slavery was rampant in the South oppressive ideology was dominant in the day-to-day lives of the people. Laws were passed that allowed the continual subjugation of the slaves while draconian provisions were implemented all to inflict inhumanly effects on the slaves. This was also true when there was a racist ruling class in Africa during the colonial period; the racist ideology was dominant in the day-to-day lives of the people. Black people in certain areas of employment such as the police, the army, the hotel industry and so on, also reinforced those racist ideas by beating up their

fellow Africans or segregating against them in the use of certain social facilities. The segregation was legalised and so the police and all the other people who maltreated their fellow Africans had no choice but to enforce the laws of the day underpinned by the ruling ideas of the day, which, as will be seen, are reflected in the novels. This is because art–literature in particular—is part of the superstructure of society. On this point, Eagleton (1976) writes,

Literary works are not mysteriously inspired, or explicable simply in terms of their authors' psychology. They are forms of perception, particular ways of seeing the world; and as such they have a relation to that dominant way of seeing the world which is the "social mentality" or ideology of an age. That ideology, in turn, is the product of the concrete social relations into which men enter at a particular time and place; it is the way those class-relations are experienced, legitimized and perpetuated. Moreover, men are not free to choose their social relations; they are constrained into them by material necessity—by the nature and stage of development of their mode of economic production. (6)

To understand the novels by former Slaves, therefore, is to do more than interpret its symbolism, study its history and add footnotes about sociological facts of which it is made. "It is first of all to understand the complex, indirect relations between those works and the ideological worlds they inhabit—relations which emerge not just in 'themes' and 'preoccupations,' but in style, rhythm, image, quality and form." (Eagleton, 1976:6)

The different racial groups emerge very clearly in the narratives and it is quite easy to see where those groups stand in relation to the mode of production, because literature permits us to 'feel' and 'perceive' the ideology from which it springs by putting that ideology into dramatic situations. Herein lies the difference between science and art— "science gives us a conceptual knowledge of a situation; art gives us the experience of that situation" (Eagleton, 1976:18) by dramatising it, moving it from a theoretical to a practical level with people actually living out the proposed ideology of the day. By doing this, it allows us to 'see' the nature of that ideology, and thus, it begins to move us towards that full understanding of it which is scientific knowledge. That is why some literary works end up being banned in some countries because they elucidate some ideology in such a manner as to make it appear wholly ridiculous. Ideology is given shape, structure and a determinate form in literature, thereby, being transformed into something different altogether.

Therefore, Terry Eagleton's readings of ideology and literature will guide this particular research, as this researcher will attempt to provide an ideological reading of the two texts under study. The researcher will investigate embedded values, beliefs, biases, and assumptions in the two texts under study. The scholarship will attempt to expose the motivations and power relations underlying these. While the focus will also be on identifying the workings of dominant ideologies and the contradictions involved in maintaining them the researcher will also put under microscopic view the ideology of the work and expose its worth and/deficiency.

3.14 Irony

However, since irony as a literary device is also a crucial aspect of the study, it is perhaps imperative that a very brief context of the conception in which it is used in this study is provided below.

Irony is taken as an inconsistent means of conveying messages that are obvious to some but ambiguous to others; clever to some, but hostile to others. While the comicalness existing in linguistic conversation is most of the times positively regarded and considered pleasant, irony tends to be frowned upon. As such, the one who does ironies is more dreaded than loved by those he is in conversation with and they do not hesitate to call him/her “an ironic person with a non-positive axiological load (Machado 2014).

Although it is perhaps a stereotypical view of irony, it is still a recurring view throughout studies on the topic. Peck and Coyle (1984) refer to irony as a literary stylistic device “in which what is meant is contrary to what the words appear to say” (135). For instance, a motorist can thank the traffic police officer soon after being given a speeding ticket. However, the words used may be so overgenerous that they signal the person being referred to does not deserve such kind words, while the motorist is in fact venting his frustration. The intention of irony here is to signal that the plan taken by the motorist to otherwise endorse it (the action of traffic police officer) is comically inadequate because of its falsity.

The reason why irony is a regular fixture in satiric works is because it is above societal flaws. The writer may write from a detached level, while also assuming an omniscient and omnipresent role. Peck and Coyle (1984) also buttress this point: “One effect of such verbal irony with its contrast between

fine phrases and sordid reality is that the writer can suggest the gap between how things might be and how things really are" (135).

Proudhon (1849) also comes up with an interesting view of the term Irony. He avers: "Irony, true freedom! It is you who deliver me from the ambition of power [...] the fanaticism of reformers, superstition of this great universe, and worship of myself" (6).

One is inclined to agree with Proudhon. What would become of us without a good dosage of self-criticism, especially in this world of "signs and conventions, a world that forces us to adopt certain social roles and, as a result, more or less codified behavior" (Machado 2010:10). Irony gives us the freedom to make fun of ourselves as well as that which we do not approve of in society. We do all this discreetly because irony works hand in glove with discretion. It also gives us strength to smilingly contest that which has been heard or seen, that which has been intentionally created to destabilise. This is all done armed with no weapons but words. What this study seeks to achieve is to present the ironical vein that both Douglass and Jacobs use in their life narratives to bring to the fore the ideological contradictions in the masters' version of Christianity.

Chapter Four: Ideological Reading of the Narratives

4.1 Introduction

Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass have religious constituents as the dominant aspect in their work and they use some examples to present their locus as well as opinions on it. They repeatedly and constantly lay bare the irony of religion (Christianity) in the institution of slavery in their work. In both their works the authors use satire to explore how Christianity, a religious institution which speaks of love, mercy and forgiveness, was abused in the Antebellum South to rationalise slavery and sanction the cruelty of slave masters. Both writers present the religion of the South from the perspective of the slave. This chapter seeks to provide an ideological reading of the texts under study as guided by Terry Eagleton. Focus will also be on identifying the workings of dominant ideologies and their underlying contradictions.

4.2 Harriet Jacobs: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

Harriet Jacobs through her narrative brings to the fore the difference between Christianity and religion in the South. She presents several of the contradictions and double standards she encounters. According to Gramsci (1971), for the ruling class to be successful in controlling society, power, ideology and economy are key components. He adds, that such power cannot be maintained by dominion only but can be maintained also through moral and intellectual leadership. In Jacobs's *Narrative* Linda's mistress demonstrates this point. Linda has lots of admiration for her mistress for the

things she has imparted to her as a slave, including blessing her memory with happy times she spent with her. However, she expresses her disbelief and disillusionment on her late mistress' decision to send her to serve someone else, instead of emancipating her.

All along she had been advising Linda, trying to inspire her with moral teachings, by providing her with guidelines of God's word, captured here in the words of the Bible "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself...Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them", to which Linda responds "But I was her slave" (128). This points to the fact that Jacobs recognised irony in the teachings of her mistress. The scripture above is found in the New Testament book of Matthew 7:12 and has come to be known as the 'Golden Rule' recommending the way people, particularly Christians, should relate to one another mutually, impartially, and fairly. To make someone a slave meant one can also, in like manner, be made a slave. However, it was not the case with the way Linda's mistress related to the Biblical precepts. Through Linda's response, Jacobs reveals the obvious absurdity in the denotation her mistress wanted to convey to her and what she thought was the autonomous meaning of the scripture. This reveals that Linda's mistress has been imparting moral and intellectual leadership to Linda, not for her personal growth, but to instil ideological teachings in line with slave masters' religious teachings bent on sustaining slave master hegemony.

One also gets the impression that the word "neighbour" either had more than one meaning or had one select meaning recognised by the slaveholders. The latter seems more plausible in this case as Jacobs notes; "I suppose she did

not recognize me as her neighbor” (128). That led Jacobs to conclude cynically that perhaps slaves are not considered neighbours and the reference in the bible regarding loving and doing good to one’s neighbours refers to an exclusive group of people including her mistress’ kind and does not apply to slaves. The sheer relativism that characterized the use of scriptures, especially by the slaveholders, presented the Bible as a manual for legitimizing the institution of slavery, justifying their unjust actions towards the slaves and hoodwinking the slaves into conformity with their wishes. This proved to be easy to achieve because of two reasons; slaveholders were literate and custodians of education, any formal means of learning was a special preserve of the slaveholders; to be taught by their kind masters/mistress how to read and write, slaves themselves considered it a rare privilege because it was unlawful for a slave to have education. Hence, the inconsistent use of the teachings of God by slave-owners aided, not only in getting away with horrendous treatment meted out to slaves, but also had an effect on the way the slaves viewed and interpreted the bible and Christianity in general.

After the death of Linda’s father (130), Linda’s grandmother tries her utmost best to support and comfort her in one of her series of difficult periods in her slave life. Her faith as a little girl is tested by death, which has taken away very close people, father, mother, mistress and friend. When it finally crumbles and she rebels against God, Linda’s grandmother, in an effort to comfort her, makes this significant statement: “who knows the ways of God? Perhaps they have been taken from evil days to come” (130). One can

deduce the following beliefs from the above: grandmother believes that man cannot know the ways of God; and she also believes that death is a way of God, and remains a mystery to man.

Given the above premises, it is essentially logical for her grandmother to come to a conclusion that God may have used death as his will to take the departed out of inevitable troubles that lie ahead of them. In a later statement made by Linda's grandmother with regards to the status of her grandchildren as slaves, Linda admits that her grandmother literally fought to make them accept their status as slaves as the will of God and that God "had seen it fit to place them under such circumstances; and though it seemed hard, [they] ought to pray for contentment" (138). When juxtaposed, the two statements reveal some inconsistencies. In the first statement it is clear from her grandmother's rhetorical question "who knows the ways of God?" (138), that no finite human mind can know God's ways, including herself, but in the second statement grandmother seems to know the ways of God as it relates to the slave status of her grandchildren enough to robustly implore them to accept it. Grandmother's convictions can be attributed to the teachings of Christianity mostly practiced in the South: One of the precepts of Christianity is that one's destiny is predetermined and thus inevitable.

It is also important to note that it is ironic to claim that a situation such as slavery, with its subsequent rejection of comforts and human dignity in the Antebellum South, is the will of God, while admonishing the slaves to pray to the same God who purportedly willed it for them to grant them appeasement. This discrepancy negates the grandmother's quest for her own freedom and encourages rather than denounces the practice of slavery from the biblical

point of view. It renders grandmother an active participant in the continuous subjugation of her family members in particular and slave community in general. This act can be equated to what was happening even in Africa during the colonial period.

During the African colonial period when a racist ruling class was in charge people in certain areas of employment such as the police, the army, the hotel industry and so on, it also reinforced those racist ideas by beating up their fellow Africans or segregating against them in the use of certain social facilities. The segregation was legalised and so the police and all the other people who maltreated their fellow Africans had no choice but to enforce the laws of the day underpinned by the ruling ideas of the day. Eagleton (1976) explains that such kind of behaviour is influenced by the dominant way of seeing the world which is the “social mentality or ideology of an age” (6). He adds,

That ideology, in turn, is the product of the concrete social relations into which men enter at a particular time and place; it is the way those class-relations are experienced, legitimized and perpetuated. Moreover, men are not free to choose their social relations; they are constrained into them by material necessity—by the nature and stage of development of their mode of economic production. (6)

The penchant to relativize Christian teachings by both slaves and slave-owners relentlessly challenged the authority of the Bible as an unprejudiced moral basis for life. The reasoning of Jacobs and her siblings in reaction to what their grandmother said leans towards what can be termed an objective

proposition of the Bible "it is much more the will of God for us to be situated as she was [in freedom]" (138).

The conversation between Benjamin and his grandmother in chapter four, when they visited him in jail, demonstrates a notable degree of inconsistency on the issue of forgiveness. After an unsuccessful attempt to escape, Benjamin is captured and imprisoned by his master. When asked about the role of God in overturning a decision to commit suicide when he was captured, Benjamin's admission that he forgot about God when hunted like an animal triggered his grandmother's response "Don't talk so, Benjamin," said she. "Put your trust in God. Be humble, my child, and your master will forgive you"(144). Benjamin obviously had a different view from his grandmother's encouragement that he should ask for forgiveness from his master. He said,

"Forgive me for what, mother? For not letting him treat me like a dog? No! I will never humble myself to him. I have worked for him for nothing all my life, and I am repaid with stripes and imprisonment. Here I will stay till I die, or till he sells me" (144).

The dialogue shows that Benjamin and his grandmother agree that there is an offence for which pardon is required. But, they differed on who ought to be asking for forgiveness and who should be doing the forgiving. Benjamin, like other like-minded slaves, believes that slave masters should be the ones asking for forgiveness from their maltreated slaves. He, therefore, does not see the reason for asking for forgiveness from a man whose amusement is to treat him as an animal. His firmness to not humble himself and ask for

forgiveness from his master can be considered as a replication of the inconsistency entrenched in his grandmother's gentle persuading.

Yet again when Benjamin was questioned if he ever thought of God, he responded, "No, I did not think of him. When a man is hunted like a wild beast he forgets there is a God, a heaven" (144). He points out that his only preoccupation was to evade imminent danger and struggle by getting beyond the reach of his assailants, whom he referred to as "bloodhounds" (144). One would suppose that as they believed and trusted God, they would constantly look up to him, depend on him for security, more particularly in times of suffering, but this slave makes us conscious of the fact that even a slave in his desperation to be free at times does not look up to God for solutions. On the one hand, there is a profession of faith in God but, on the other hand, especially when it was inevitable, as in Benjamin's case, to seek divine intervention, the expressed action or reaction betrays the confessed faith in God, revealing an irony of a kind.

If we reflect on the economic structure of the South during the 19th century slavery, we notice that the way material life was produced influenced social relations between Africans and white people: whites as masters and blacks as slaves. This relationship is evident in Jacobs's *Narrative*. Marx and Engels (1970) posit that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time the ruling intellectual force" (1). They continue:

The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations grasped as ideas; hence of the relations which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance (Marx and Engels 1970:1).

The above notion is demonstrated by Jacobs who draws attention to yet another inconsistency in chapter 5 where the ruling classes (slave masters) have imposed their abnormal ideas on the slaves. Not only have they elevated them to normal realm, but the slaves are supposed to consume them without questioning. She notes:

If a pastor has offspring by a woman not his wife, the church dismisses him, if she is a white woman; but if she is colored, it does not hinder his continuing to be their good shepherd (204).

Within the context of Christianity at the time, this pronouncement was most likely a creed by which the affairs of the formal church community were conducted. The substance of this self-made religious ideal hangs on the belief that a pastor's culpability for the offence of having a child from an adulterous relationship is based on the skin colour and status of the woman with whom the act was committed. In essence, the act is not an offence deserving dismissal if the woman involved is a black slave. This shows that the interpretations of certain parts of the bible were manipulated to satisfy selfish interests and ulterior motives. The language in the creed above also accentuates the discursive practices that reveal the power relations in the

slave era society. This discursive practice shows the assertion of power and designates the social status of slaves and slave owners, thus bringing the marked social stratification of the era into focus.

When likened to the bible, this created dogma fails to account for appropriate moral conduct and precision of biblical thought on the topic of adultery. The Bible records in Exodus 20:14 that, “You shall not commit adultery”. From the biblical point of view, adultery is conjugal infidelity where a man or woman has illicit sexual intercourse with another other than their spouse. It is clear from the scripture that God proscribed it and a severe punitive measure in the form of death was meted out to those who were caught in the act. Again, the Bible says “If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die — the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel” (Deuteronomy 22:22).

In the teachings of Jesus Christ in the New Testament book of Matthew, the meaning of adultery was even more stretched to contain lustful thoughts as recorded: “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart”(Matthew 5:28). The obvious result of adultery in the New Testament, as Jesus taught, was divorce as it is written that “...whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery”(Matthew 19:9).

None of the scriptures above suggests that adultery and adulterous off springs are lawful or socially approved in the Christian context. The gravity and propensity of the transgression seems trivialized in the pious thought of the slave owners in the South. Their self-invented creed self-destructs when

closely explored and is ludicrous in comparison to the Bible's position on the matter. The reasoning lacks internal consistency and fails to account for a sound basis for an objectively justifiable conclusion. The constant, a pastor's adulterous lifestyle, now becomes a variable because it remains no hindrance to his pastoral duties as long as his partner in infidelity is a coloured slave. From the foregoing, it can be concluded that the offender is, therefore, a coloured female slave. It is even more sardonic when one considers the fact that the slaves, especially black women, had no free will and were at the disposal of the whim of their masters.

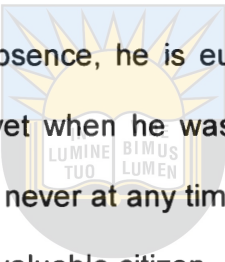
The slave women had no right to say no to the wishes of their masters (since they were the ruling ones and their ideas the dominant ones) and this explains the many sexual abuses they suffered in this era. A legitimate question to ask is how the flouting of a law is enough to prohibit a pastor from continuing with his pastoral duties, but allows him to continue his work when it applies to another woman? The difference in application of the law is influenced by the skin colour, background and status of the woman: one is white and free and the other black and a slave. Behind the irony mentioned above, is a sense of simple-minded commodification of black female slaves whose worth, among others, was reduced to the fulfilment of the libido of their masters.

Also highlighted in Jacobs's chronicle is a graphic of the characteristic ironies in many of the dialogues that took place between slave holders and slaves. Linda points out the insincerity in the dignity conferred upon a black person after death. She recognises how a friend of her uncle Philip suggests how of

no use it is that black slaves are not acknowledged when alive but highly praised when they are dead.

Now that death has laid him low, they call him a good man and a useful citizen; but what are eulogies to the black man, when the world has faded from his vision? It does not require man's praise to obtain rest in God's kingdom (350).

A slave is dead, and, in his absence, he is eulogized as a good man and classified as a useful citizen; yet when he was alive those terms were not commonly used as a slave was never at any time in this epoch considered by his owners as a good man or a valuable citizen.


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An excerpt of a church fellowship assembly in chapter 13 offers a case study of the fundamental investigation of this research, the ironic relationship between slavery and Christianity. The chosen sermon for the ministry by Rev. Mr. Pike, the speaker of the day reads: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ" (Ephesians 6:5). For Marx, ideology is part of the superstructure created by an economic base with its main purpose to validate that base. He further elaborates on his point in Mary Klages, (2017) *Literary Theory: The Complete Guide*, who quotes Marx as saying, "the ideologies present in a capitalist society will explain justify and support the capitalist mode of production" (96). Rev. Mr. Pike is a classic example, as, in

his sermon, he distorts the Bible and seeks to win God to his side so that the slavery institution can continue. In his sermon Rev. Mr. Pike says,

Hearken, ye servants! Give strict heed unto my words. You are rebellious sinners. Your hearts are filled with all manner of evil. 'Tis the devil who tempts you. God is angry with you, and will surely punish you, if you don't forsake your wicked ways. You that live in town are eye-servants behind your master's back. Instead of serving your masters faithfully, which is pleasing in the sight of your heavenly Master, you are idle, and shirk your work. God sees you. You tell lies. God hears you. Instead of being engaged in worshipping him, you are hidden away somewhere, feasting on your master's substance; tossing coffee-grounds with some wicked fortune-teller, or cutting cards with another old hag. Your masters may not find you out, but God sees you, and will punish you. O, the depravity of your hearts! When your master's work is done, are you quietly together, thinking of the goodness of God to such sinful creatures? No; you are quarrelling, and tying up little bags of roots to bury under the doorsteps to poison each other with. God sees you. You men steal away to every grog shop to sell your master's corn that you may buy rum to drink. God sees you. You sneak into the back streets, or among the bushes, to pitch coppers. Although your masters may not find you out, God sees you; and he will punish you... (Jacobs, 198).

The above quotation reveals how slave owners like Rev Mr Pike distorted bible interpretations to further subjugate slaves yet; St Paul wrote this scripture

to encourage the slave to work diligently even in the absence of master supervision. The gist of the Biblical text above lies in the relevance of the historical and cultural context in which the writing of the text was grounded. Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians during the reign of the Roman Empire. There was a cultural tolerance for slave ownership and a social and moral order that defined the master-slave relationship. Slavery was an accepted institution in the Roman Empire. According to the New Testament Bible Exposition (NTBE) Commentary, there were probably six million slaves in the Roman Empire at the time of the letter. Part of this epistle was, therefore, intended by the writer to address the master-slave relationship from another perspective. The NTBE Commentary identifies a two-fold reason for Paul's gentle chide to the slaves who had become Christians. Firstly, by serving their earthly masters, they were indeed rendering service to God. This would curtail the complaints of the masters that the slaves were lazy and idle, especially when no one was watching and, ultimately, give them a sense that their labour and service was a submission to Jesus Christ as head of the household. The second reason is expressed by the phrase "in singleness of heart" which means the right work attitude.

This means Paul was inspiring the slaves to be outstanding in their work because it aggregates to doing the will of God. The NTBE commentary's additional notes indicate that slaves were assigned with tasks that they hated but they were to do them regardless, so long as they were not against the will of God. In this context, disobedience to one's earthly master implied

disobedience to God and the author points out that such a behaviour was not a reflection of true Christianity.

The practice of slavery did not undergo any radical transformation from the Roman Empire to the 17th and 18th centuries in the Antebellum South. Of particular significance is the role of Christianity in these two eras. In Paul's writing, he saw the need to go further, in the same context and chapter, to state the responsibilities of the slave masters: "and masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favouritism with him". (Ephesians 6:9).

Two amazing thoughts are apparent in the verse above. First, mutuality, and second, egalitarianism. By mutuality, it is meant that the masters treat the slaves just as they would the slaves respond to their wishes in their duty. By egalitarianism, Paul suggests that both the master and the slave owe allegiance to one God before whom they are equal. From the foregoing, one can consider Ephesians 6:5 and Ephesians 6:9 as parallel passages that complete each other.

Turning back to the narrative under study, in the sermonette of Mr. Pike to the slaves, mention is not made of verse 9 at all. Thus, the message only emphasised the compulsion of slaves to their masters and pronounced with passion the sentences waiting anyone who contravened the heavenly command. By deliberately omitting verse 9 Rev. Mr. Pike seeks to disguise the actual message being sent by the scripture so as to perpetuate the

ideology of white dominance. Eagleton (1976) is also convinced that ideology is an instrument used in society to create “false consciousness”. He says:

Ideology is not in the first place a set of doctrines; it signifies the way men live out their roles in class society, the values, ideas and images which tie them to their social functions and prevent them a true knowledge of society as a whole (16-17)

Eagleton’s assertion above, albeit used in a different context, could be seen as buttressing the point that churches in the South during slavery were part of an agenda whose main plot was to push an ideology which legitimates the dominance of the white slave master. Rev. Mr Pike, through his sermon and religious functions, acted as a simple conveyer and broadcaster of the dominant cultural ideologies while stifling assessment of ideas as ‘truth’. His continuous use of the axiom ‘God sees you’ terminates the idea of egalitarianism before God inferred in the Bible text. Is it only the case that God sees the slaves in their rebellious disobedience to their masters or he also sees the masters in their dehumanizing treatment of their human chattels? It is very clear that the slaves understood the Bible in this context much more than their teaching masters. They expected their masters to reciprocate their service with a touch of human dignity and mercy, which was illusive. This is why Benjamin in chapter six refuses to apologize to his master after his recapture because he feels his master has only treated him badly in return for all his good efforts. The apparent contradiction in the use of biblical texts by the masters or their hired agents like Mr. Pike is a deliberate effort to distort and use religion and Christianity in particular way to consolidate the

legitimacy of the institution of slavery and make any attempt to revolt against it a religious offence deserving punishment from God.

Undoubtedly, the image of Christianity suffered a dent in the slavery era so severely that it affected the ethical reflections of both the slave masters and the slaves. One effect of this was the biased propensity to interpret the bible in a way that obscured the truth but highlighted parochial self-interests. That this led to a number of notable ironies is evident in both individual and parallel statements made by slave masters and slaves in the books under study.

4.3 Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

The autobiographical text by Frederick Douglass captures the supremacy pattern found in religion, as religion is distorted to serve the interest of the slave master. The text is appropriate for investigation as it demonstrates how appalling his (slavery) condition was, the dreadful punishments exacted upon his person, the barbarities inflicted upon the mind by those claiming to have the same mind in them as the biblical Jesus. As if whips, chains, thumbscrews, blood-hounds and overseers were not enough to keep the slave down and give security to the callous masters, religion was also used to defeat any semblance of humanity and resistance from the slave.

Through his *Narrative* Fredrick Douglass did the unthinkable by arguing that religion and its relation to slavery confirmed that religion practiced in the South was a distorted one, while also bringing to light the scourge of slavery on both the slave owner and the slave. The strange combination of wit and religion created the necessary indecency that ultimately led to the acceptance

of the *Narrative* and its consequent influence on the abolitionist cause. Witty treatment and the contrasting of the slaveholding religion and the true religion of Christ brings about a new insight, which is, to use Holly Stevens' words "the loss of belief in the sort of God in whom we were all brought up to believe" (1967, 348). Undeniably, religion played a proactive role in the enslavement of the black race as well as in their subsequent emancipation. Douglass contests the slaveholding religion that was embedded in the South by bizarrely treating it amusingly and comparing it with the true Christianity of Christ so as to bring out its vice.

In 1846 Douglass brought to the fore Free Church of Scotland's vice as he criticised them for accepting monetary benefits from slave masters;

Every imaginable excuse for slaveholding was brought forward by these men eminent for their learning—men who claim to be the heaven-appointed instruments for the removal of all sin. I heard these men, standing up there, appealing to the sympathies of those who heard them to remember the slaveholder, and not one rose who spoke of remembering "those in bonds as bound with them." They were called on to look on the difficulties in which the slaveholder was placed. Their manacled bondmen were not thought of for a single moment, but, like the Levite of old, they "passed by on the other side" (Douglass, 1979).

This reproach is directed at religion practiced by slave masters symbolised by the biblical Levite who, while on their way to Jericho, ignored and passed by, leaving a "manacled bondmen" lying on the side of the road yet confessing to be followers of Jesus Christ. Douglass allegorically pronounced this

'manacled bondmen' as a slave from America. This symbolic narrative allows one to differentiate between the religiously preserved social ladders in America, the Levite with his deceitful religion inhabiting the seat of honour, and the slave who is all the while manacled, ignored and left on the roadside. This allows one to differentiate between real religion that "sends its votaries to bind up the wounds of those who have fallen among the thieves," and the slave owners' religion as practised by Free Church of Scotland that "leaves the bruised and the wounded to die" (Douglass, 1982: 99-100).

When describing Marxist literary criticism, Murfin and Supryia (1998) defined it as a "type of criticism in which literary works are viewed as the product of work and whose practitioners emphasize the role of class and ideology as they reflect, propagate and even challenge the prevailing social order" (62). Marxism is against hierarchical structures (Levite and Bondsman) that are set as stable frames of references (pities) and, as is the case in Douglass's *Narrative*, the subjugated blacks are publicised as lesser to the sophisticated whites slave owners who "ride about in their carriages ... with the finest of cloth on their backs, with ring upon their fingers, and in enjoyment of every luxury that wealth can buy" (Douglass, 1978:7) at the expense of black agony. For Marxism, the hierarchical structures need to be dishonoured and during the slave period this pecking order was maintained by religion, which Douglass says "sanctifies the system under which I suffer, and dooms me to it, and the millions of my brethren in bondage" (1978:24-25). This is buttressed by Ambrose who confirms that most Christians in the slaveholding South:

understood slavery as a familiar relation between unequal members of a hierarchically structured and divinely ordained household ... such a relation, like all relations, carried with it duties and obligations that flowed from God. Ministers continually reminded their flocks that how well individuals fulfilled or failed to fulfil those duties and obligations would bear heavily on the fate of their immortal souls. (1988:62)

Louis Althusser reveals that it is through power residing in ideology that the slaveholding master managed to sustain these hierarchical structures. For Althusser, ideology is “a ‘Representation’ of the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to their Real Conditions of Existence” (1971:162). This confirms that ideology distorts our view of our true ‘conditions of existence’. The religiously preserved slavery was a social order that sought to distort slaves’ true ‘condition of existence’. It is precisely that social order which Douglass in his *Narrative* sought to interrupt. Such an entrenched social order “blinds us to other views, we develop a ‘trained incapacity’ and strongly resist attempts to alter our standpoint. Indeed, new views seem impious to us because they violate our sense of what properly goes with what and produce guilt in those attracted to them” (Solomon, 1988: 186-87). However, Fredrick Douglass provoked these religiously sustained categorised systems by exploring the inconsistencies and tension in religion, thereby undermining slavery. Fredrick Douglass’ use of wit and contrast became an appropriate stylistic approach to “redeploying and destabilising” (Butler, 1990: P122) these oppressive social systems, and this he achieves by shocking and unsettling the existing social patterns through the side by side comparison of the slaveholding religion and Christianity of Christ. This, combined with the comical treatment of slave

holding religion, Douglass argues, disturbed the 'natural' order of things as Hall (1996:17) observed that, "what really disturbs cultural order is when things turn up in the wrong category." Douglass turned up in the wrong category – an eloquent and learned slave in an arrangement that fought tooth and nail to subdue such attributes.

Douglass and other protestors faced an insurmountable undertaking while trying to fight the institution of slavery. What made religion in the slaveholding South problematic to contest was because of the fact that it had been accepted as part of American culture and social system. This can be attributed to calculative and manipulative slavery ideology which had elevated everything to the natural realm. In trying to explain this phenomenon, Eagleton comes up with illustration which reveals how certain structures in society help legitimatise and maintain the status quo. He brings out the importance and relationship between base and superstructure. He says, "from the economic structure of a society or what is commonly known by Marxists as the economic base, or infrastructure emerges a superstructure- certain forms of law, politics, a certain kind of state, whose essential function is to legitimate the power of the social class which owns the means of production" (1976:5). In this case, it suffices to say that power, economy and ideology were the primary elements which were needed by the ruling class (slave holders) to succeed in controlling the slaves. Althusser also links ideology with its social sources. He believes ideology works with what he terms 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISAs), which, although they may have their own sub-ideology, are all subjects of the dominant ideology. ISAs entail

all the societal institutions that we interact with, that is the law, organised religion, educational and political systems. They “are part . . . of the private domain. Churches, Parties, Trade Unions, families . . . schools . . . newspapers, cultural ventures, etc., are private” (144). Their main task is to reproduce the social relations of production by constructing individuals who identify and assent themselves to the dominant ideology. The slave holders of the south made it almost impossible for abolitionist to break into their vicious cycle and completely bring down slavery because they maintained their power not only through dominion, but also through moral and intellectual leadership concealed in the Christianity they administered to the slaves. However, Douglass purposefully managed to penetrate into this cycle.

Douglass made headway where most abolitionists were unsuccessful because he tactically compared the slaveholding religion and the Christianity of Christ, thereby disrupting the “normal patterns of association” (Rosteck and Leff, 1989: 330) instead of just focusing on facts and logic. Douglass attacks the Slaveholding religion of the South, which created the existing social systems. Nonetheless, his attack on this religion should not be taken as an attack on Christianity proper as has been erroneously debated by Ernest (2009). He (Ernest) faulted Fredrick Douglass of just paying lip service to Christianity and using Christianity for “rhetorical packaging for promoting his antislavery views in a largely Christian culture” (67). This meant Douglass was preoccupied with packaging (being more rhetorical) than being sincere. Sharon Carson (1992) also claimed that Fredrick Douglass’s Narrative “powerfully and symbolically indicts mainstream Christianity at its foundation”, while Hutchins (2014: 296) strongly accused Douglass of “destabilising the

Bible and reject[ing] Christianity proper, transforming sacred text into a tool for accomplishing more central concerns, namely abolition and related social concerns.”

This would seem to demonstrate failure by these faultfinders to appreciate the stylistic approach used by Douglass to compare religious viewpoints. He deliberately used this approach so as to bring out the irony in its relation with slavery; to show the tension in religion; also to use as a tactic to not condemn Christianity but to tear into its preposterous interpretations. In the text Thomas Auld would habitually tie up a lame young woman, and whip her with a heavy cow skin upon her naked shoulders, causing warm red blood to drip; and in justification of the bloody deed, he would quote this passage of scripture – “he that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth not, shall be beaten with many stripes” (1978:44).

It is such blasphemous interpretations that Douglass was confronting in his condemnation of Christianity. The explanation by Auld shows that he does not comprehend the parable as he quotes the passage out of context; interestingly this also attracts condemnation from Rudoff (2000:227) who posits that “by reciting the verse, he does not condemn his slave to human punishment but condemns himself to divine punishment.” This portrays religion in the slaveholding South as ludicrous and empty, especially when one compares it with Christianity proper, this is further attested by the inappropriate juxtaposing in Auld’s statement between the sacred and the blood. Auld took pride in flogging his slaves until “warm blood” came out while claiming to be doing exactly what the bible request of him; yet it is the same bible that says “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”.

Antonio Gramsci believes that the ultimate goal of the proletariat is to create a proletarian hegemony and state, and considers that in order for it to come to fruition the proletariat must develop its own counter-hegemony to win leadership of society.

The proletariat can become the leading and dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of alliances which allows it to mobilise the majority of the population against capitalism and the bourgeois state. Gramsci (1978:443)

In Douglass' *Narrative*, albeit in the context of a largely feudal system, the proletariat can be likened to the slaves who toiled the land for the betterment of their capitalist slave masters. For the slaves to be a leading and dominant class there was need to counter the slave master hegemony. Hence Douglass, in his *Narrative*, sought to do exactly that and he does this by opposing the slaveholders' explanation of the bible. Douglass also tears into the interpretation on a Genesis story of Ham. It was deduced in such a way that it warranted slavery. The black race was described as the cursed offspring of Ham, cursed to eternally serve their brothers (understood to mean white brothers by slave masters). Thus, slavery came to be misinterpreted as God's will, hence had to be regarded as the gospel truth. As a way to dispel the notion Douglass states that,

A very different looking class of people are springing up at the South, and are now held in slavery, from those originally brought to this country from Africa, and if their increases do no other good, it will do away the force of the argument, that God cursed Ham, and therefore

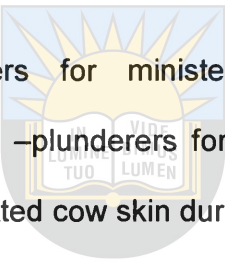
American slavery is right. If the lineal descendants of Ham are alone to be scripturally enslaved, it is certain that slavery at the South must soon be unscriptural for thousands are ushered into the world, annually, who...owe their existence to the white fathers, and those fathers most frequently their own master (1978:50)

In this way, Douglass not only interrogated but renders questionable the slave masters' version of Christianity which is deliberately distorted to buttress their position and justify their treatment of the slaves. Also throwing their weight against such interpretations which bound blacks to servitude are scholars like Lott (1999). His argument boards on the interaction of races during the Old Testament biblical times as "Noah's curse did not point specifically to black people because Cush and Canaan were both sons of Ham. Ethnologists who use Biblical reference to establish racial distinctions that imply black people's 'inferiority' employ 'a curious chain of evidence' for there is no African race, that is, there is no group with pure African blood (58)."

Gosset, as quoted in Mutyasira (2002: 102), also shows how racist whites wanted to make religion their primary ally in their mission of domination over the black race in Africa and the entire world. Gosset elucidates that race inequalities were Godly ordained unlike the slavery.

Slave holders used religion as their companion and cushion to commit evil with impunity upon the slaves. The slave holders made alliances with religion to perpetually subjugate slaves. Gramsci (1971:263), albeit in a different context and different era in Italy, explains this occurrence. He argues that a state could not withstand its power over a long period of time by coercion

alone; it had to realise widespread hegemony. In order to accomplish this hegemony a dominant class must win consent from other classes and social forces through such means as creating and maintaining a power bloc through a system of alliances, showing its prowess in the world of production and by its reputation as well as status. Poignantly capturing this type of Christianity, where the slave owner has made God his primary companion in evil, is Douglass's famous statements in which he attacks the religious pomp and funfair:



We have men stealers for ministers, women –whippers for missionaries, and cradle –plunderers for church members. The man who wields the blood-clotted cow skin during the week fills the pulpit on Sunday and claims to be a minister of the meek and lowly JesusHe who sells my sister, for purposes of prostitution stands forth as the pious advocate of purity (1978:178).

The above exposes slave masters as using religion as an extension of the master's tools of control.

Slaveholding hegemony was rampant in the Antebellum South as it was the essential tool to exert and maintain control of the slaves. Gramsci states that power is one of the fundamentals a class needs to hold influence over a society. However, power alone cannot sustain the control as ideas are needed to legitimatise the control and render it essential. Supporting the notion is Althusser, who states that,

To my knowledge, no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State

Ideological Apparatuses . . . The ideology of the ruling class does not become the ruling ideology by the grace of God, nor even by virtue of the seizure of State power alone. It is by the installation of the ISAs in which this ideology is realized and realizes itself that it becomes the ruling ideology. (1971:146-85)

In the text we come across Mr Edward Covey a purveyor of the slaveholding hegemony. Mr Covey is a religious but poor white man and farm renter whose brutality towards slaves made him a well-known and feared figure within the slave community. He compensated his lack of wealth with a renowned reputation of breaking down slaves and turning them into beasts and objects of servitude. Additional to such attributes of applying coercive influence, Mr Covey also sought consent through religion. He was a “professor of religion, a pious soul, a member and class leader in the Methodist Church (99)”. Unlike Mr Thomas, he did not starve slaves but he overworked them mindlessly to a standstill, all for the master’s profit. Mr Thomas used both consent and force to uphold slave master hegemony as well as be able to constantly reproduce the means of production for the master. He also thrived on deceit, “everything he possessed in the shape of learning or religion, he made conform to his disposition to deceive. He seemed to think himself equal to deceiving the Almighty...I do verily believe that he sometimes deceived himself into the solemn belief, that he was a sincere worshipper of the most high God (104).”

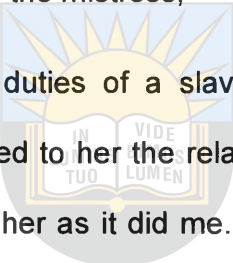
To show the preposterous levels of double standards among these slaveholders, one has to look at how Mr Covey contravenes one of the great commandments of Christianity, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery.’ He turned one of his slave women into a ‘breeder’ all in the name of adding to his

wealth. He forced her to commit adultery by hiring a married man, Samuel Harrison, to live with and impregnate her. She gave birth to twins. There is nothing that can rival such level of religious pretence. Thus, Douglass describes the religion of the slaveholding South as "...a mere covering for the most horrid crimes, a justifier of the most appalling, barbarity, a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds, and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slave holders find the strongest protection (117)."

Living in the vicinity of Mr Freeland's residents were Ministers of the Reformed Methodist Church. These were Reverend Daniel Weeder who sporadically whipped his slaves to remind them of the master's authority, and Reverend Rigby Hopkins who whipped them in advance. About Hopkins, Frederick Douglass says "and yet there was not a man anywhere round who made higher professions of religion, or was more active in revivals, more attentive to the class, love-feast, prayer and preaching meetings, or more devotional in his family, that prayed earlier, later, louder and longer, than this same revered slave-driver, Rigby Hopkins (119)."

It appears the greater the pretentiousness to religion, the crueller the master, attesting to the fact that this religion had nothing to do with mercy, deliverance and forgiveness as taught in the bible. All it sought to do was to preserve the status quo in the slave holding South, thus putting more stain on the religion of the masters. Another dent on this particular religion is the incident where Christians, Wright Fairbanks and Garrison West, both class leaders, disbanded the Sabbath School led by Douglass.

Not only was the slavery institution harmful to slaves only, it also affected the slave masters. Douglass proves this. Mrs Hugh was a religious and compassionate person, the first white person to show kindness to Douglass. Yet, with time 'slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities' and she converted to a far harsher than her unchristian husband. This is evidence enough that Christianity and slavery cannot exist in the same space, save for if one embraces the hypocritical slaveholding type of Christianity. Douglass says of the mistress;



In entering upon the duties of a slaveholder, she did not seem to perceive that I sustained to her the relation of a mere chattel...slavery proved as injurious to her as it did me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm and tender hearted woman. There was no sorrow or suffering for which she had not a tear. She had bread for the hungry, cloths for the naked...slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities (1978:81).

It is very ironic that in the Narrative slave masters who make religious pretentious in the text are the cruellest ones. These masters are meant to be contrasted with non-religious slaveholders like Mr Freeland and Hugh who have some respect for humankind. To this end, Douglass says that "for of all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst. I have ever found them the meanest and basest, the most cruel and cowardly, of all others. It was my unhappy lot not only to belong to a religious slaveholder, but to live in a community of such religionists" (1978:117).

Such pretences to Christianity, as seen above, leave one to conclude that Christianity was conveniently manipulated to achieve slave holding hegemony. Religion has been doctored and has been made to conform to the standards of a class which owns the means of production, a point poignantly illustrated by Pillsbury (1880) that “religion as a political institution, religion and worship always follow, never leads in the growth and unfolding of the human race. Men make their god’s more than gods make them, and it is no satire today, ‘An honest god the noblest work of men’ (165).

Being juxtaposed with slave holding Christianity, a permanent religion which became part of American culture during the slavery era, is the Christianity of Christ (Christianity proper). Douglass simplifies the two by explaining that;

what I have said respecting and against religion, I mean strictly to apply to the slaveholding religion of this land, and with no possible reference to Christianity proper; for, between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference—so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked (1978: appendix).

By comparing the two religions the delusion of the master religion is laid bare and readers are forced to question the supposedly natural social systems existing in the Antebellum South. Eagleton states that ideology works in different forms. It presents itself in ordinary language and those particular aesthetic, political, ethical and other formulae which may immediately penetrate ordinary language. He further says criticism of the dominant ideas in a certain society is a way writers follow in order to destroy the ideology of

that society. By contrasting the two incompatible religious standpoints, therefore, Douglass produced a discord that interrupted the audience's sense of what ought to be in the process laying bare the anomaly which had been elevated to normal status. Through this discord, the master's religion is presented as "empty and ludicrous" (Bingham 1817: 26). While no straight reference is made to the Christianity of Christ in the text; it is Douglass' belief that it was Christian-like of Mrs Hugh to treat him kindly despite being short lived. This is the uncontaminated, nonviolent and unbiased Christianity as compared to the salutary, dishonest, fabricated and hypocritical religion of the master, practised by Covey, Auld, Hopkins and Rigby amongst others. Douglass ridicules them as he presents them "as professing to love God whom they have not seen, whilst they hate their brother whom they have seen (1978:181)". It is against this backdrop that Douglass hoped that Master Auld would be humane, especially after acquiring religion; however, it turned out his religion was not Christian proper. He made a division between master Christianity and Christianity of Christ. Douglass believes that slaveholders are not different to biblical Pharisees who did not attend to the weightier matters of the law, mercy and faith. Hutchins (2014:186) reflects that Douglass was against the usage of bible and religion, but not Christianity, to subjugate slaves into bondage. Sharon Carson believes that Douglass remained "firmly within the Christian tradition, merely reversing the terms of the southern slaveholders and countering their scriptural interpretations."

A fellowship hosted by one who is malevolent towards the next human being is a curse, not a blessing to humanity as the nature of the religion of Antebellum South. The bible views such people as "scribes, Pharisees,

hypocrites, who pay tithe of mint, anise, cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy and faith". (Matthew 23v22). Hence *Narratives* goes against the authorised religion of the master, as it is understatedly compared not only with Christianity proper but even with those who do not claim allegiance to any religion.

Criticizing the dominant ideas in a certain society is a way writers follow in order to challenge the ideology of that society. In the case of Frederick Douglass and fellow slaves, to defeat slaveholding hegemony, had to come with a counter one which would dislodge that of the slave master. Apparently, that counter-hegemony also came in the form of music. Douglass answers the question of how music and dance play a pivotal role in politics and struggle for freedom. He reveals to us that Christianity is more than prayers as it involves song and dance. The Negro spirituals were part of the Negroes' religion which served as some form of confrontation to the brutalities of captivity. As much as the Slave masters and holders adopted religion as their tool to keep Africans in enslavement, the subjugated, contrary to the piety, used religion not to obey the master as was interpreted in scripture, but used it as an emancipation strategy. In Douglass's *Narrative* slaves chose to go to the Great Farm House, they would sing:

I am going to the great House farm!

O, yea! O, yea! O! (57)

On a superficial level, it would seem like a meaningless song of slaves delighted by the idea of going to the Great Farm House. Yet the song displays or reveals some deep lying yearning form of some sort for a 'Great House' on

the part of the slaves; a house where black people will be finally accorded justice and equality, a land of plenty. The “Great House” can be taken to metaphorically mean not only Heaven but also the nation of America, a ‘Great House’ that has declined to accommodate the slaves. Hence, such songs as the one sang by these slaves express a desire for a better living. Douglass says of such songs;

They breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains...the songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart and is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears (1978:58).

There are a number of other works that reveal the true religious songs as being the reason Africans in bondage have managed to stay afloat the tide of bondage. In *The Marrow of Tradition*, after hearing the Afro-Americans singing notes that the songs empowered the slaves with capacity and courage to tackle slavery unabated, even when the odds were not in their favour, Charles Chesnutt raises questions about whether slaves

...showed a cheerfulness of spirit which enabled them to catch pleasure on the wing and endure with equanimity the ills that seemed inevitable. (Is) the ability to live and thrive under adverse circumstances the surest guarantee of the future? (61-62)

The melodies conveyed some formula of motivation to the distressed blacks just as much as the Rastafarians in Orlando Patterson’s *Children of Sisyphus* (1964) would be inspired by singing;

The lion of Judah shall break every chain

And give us victory

Again and again (103)

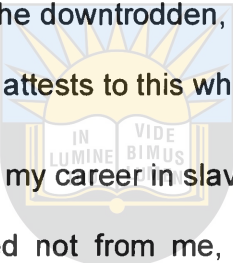
The slave had a way of coming up with defiant music without raising suspicion of the slave owners; this is summed up by Sullivan (2001) who observed that;

A form of music emerged among African – Americans that was deemed acceptable and even encouraged by slave owners- the African American spirituals. To slave owners it appeared that African-Americans were converting to Christianity and singing the praises of their new found religion. Slave owners welcomed this apparent conversion, as embracing Christianity represented submission to European-based ideology... African spirituals were allowed relative freedom as a musical expression which superficially praised a Christian God, but developed meaningful undertones that served to communicate, without detection by whites, subversive messages of support, unity, and revolt, and even directions to the Underground Railroad (24).

Not all slaves were flaccid recipients of such belittling method of Christianity. Though most slaves tended to be sunken in religion, a few understood scriptures in a relevant manner that did not only give them hope for a future bliss in heaven but also some hope of a better life on the very earth they were mistreated. Thus Wall (1984) writes that;

Religion is supposed to function in certain ideological way so that the subject accepts certain well defined practices. Thus, while religion is designed to keep the Afro-American in an oppressed condition, here black people subverted that institution and used it to assist them to withstand the cruelty of the American experiences (13).

Hence, in Douglass's work true Christianity armed slaves with enough ammunition to face up daily and withstand their crushing nature. Christianity played a crucial role among the downtrodden, as it inspired an ambition to be free among slaves. Douglass attests to this when he says:



In the darkest hours of my career in slavery, this living word of faith and spirit of hope departed not from me, but remained, like ministering angels to cheer me through the gloom. This good spirit was from God and to him I offer thanksgiving and praise (1979:36)

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While the slaves, through the spirituals appeared to be conforming to the slave holding religion, because of their biblical and spiritual language they, unknown to their slave master, conveyed the slave's insolence and longing for political freedom. According to Douglass:

They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit, and filled me with ineffable sadness. (1979:324)

Fowler (2015) bolsters the discreet but operative nature of the spirituals by recognizing that it may have escaped white Christians' notice that slaves assigned this double meaning to songs, which outwardly seemed to be about the liberation found in death and heaven. But this cover of co-orthodoxy with white Christianity covered numerous rebellious policies in the Christianity of slaves, while slave-owning Christians had the paternalistic belief that they were bringing converted slaves into the fold. Reagon (1965: 37) adds that "in a system like slavery, where open critique is dangerous, the spirituals by their sound become a dissenting voice." It is from these spirituals that Douglass made a resolution to battle the institution of slavery and fight for his rightful place as a human being not as a beast of burden, as supposed in the slave holding religion.

Christianity proper brought slaves from bondage and did not recognise the social hierarchies skewed in favour of the slave holders, hence in Douglass' *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2008) references are made to black religious leaders like Turner, Toussaint L'Ouverture and Madison Washington.

Conclusion

The texts reveal the religion of the slave masters for what it is, a deceitful religion used for the controlling of slaves. The slave masters make affectations of religion as they selectively picked scriptures to engrain the existing status quo of master and slave relationship and validate their unpleasant conduct. Religion and religious institutions just exist to rubber stamp and not lead to the growth as well as unfolding of the human race, hence the varying interpretation of scripture in that of the slaveholder and that

which is proper and humane. By stressing their identity as slaves, Jacobs and Douglass invoked a set of pervasive cultural assumptions of slave masters about slaves, that they were ignorant and childlike, incapable of learning, dependent on their white masters, and suited only for servitude. They enacted a persona starkly at odds with those assumptions. By comparing slave master religion and Christianity of Christ, Douglass and Jacobs succeeded in their efforts to “shake the foundation” of “the white Christian churches,” (Carson, 1992: 19-20). By producing novel devotions, they did not discard Christianity but reinterpreted it, thus providing replacement frames of position for slave-master religion which is the Christianity of Christ undergirded by an active liberation theology.

Prevailing Levite viewpoints, in the case of Douglass’ *Narrative*, are tested and shown as hollow and preposterous, and the reader is offered a new viewpoint that demands Christianity to be a liberating force which strongly and clearly pursues the freedom of the slaves. Opposing what was being preached in the slave-master’s church the language of providence in the *Narratives* enables the imprisoned and campaigns for their emancipation. Discord created by these viewpoints places the church in an awkward situation, as Douglass provides no middle ground between the religion that subjugates and the religion that frees;

Let the Church, then, look to it, for here is the source of her weakness, attracting, as well from the sky of truth, as from the clouds of error, the exterminating bolt and the devouring fire. Her new moons, appointed feasts, Sabbath days, solemn assemblies, are no atonement for refusing to do justice. She is under the law to cease to do evil, and

learn to do well. She must seek justice and relieve the oppressed. In a word, she must abolish slavery, or be abolished by slavery. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, has the same lesson to-day as in the days of Jesus. The axe is laid at the root of the tree. Usefulness is the price of existence (Douglass, 2000: 323).

Thus religion, in its relationship with slavery, proved to be a double-edged sword in that while it made slaves more submissive and vindicated their enslavement, it unquestionably led to the rebellion by the “manacled Bondsman” ignored by the roadside to Jericho. The viewpoint of the Levite, the status quo, is shaken to the root, for it fraudulently places the subjugated at the lowest rung of the social ladder and the slave-master at the summit for they are superior. The counter angle of the Samaritan is presented as a test to existing virtues, thereby forcing the audience to re-examine their own insights towards religion and slavery. These Narratives contributed to the abolitionist cause and to the continued debate between the slaveholding religion and Christianity proper and this, Jacobs and Douglass achieved by exposing the irony rampant in the relationship between Christianity and Slavery.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

As can be seen from the previous chapter, slave master ideology under the guise of Christian precepts is rampant and is punctuated with irony, a regular fixture in the relationship between Christianity and slavery as seen in several examples given from the narratives which have been discussed. Some of the ironies are further discussed in this concluding chapter thematically.

On the subject of love for one's neighbour, there was inconsistency in the use of the term neighbour as seen in the Bible text "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself...Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them" (Luke 10:27b, Luke 6:31 KJV). It is apparent that Jacobs had trouble in comprehending the meaning of the text above as she responds, "But I was her slave" (128). This response shows that Jacobs saw the apparent inconsistency in the implication her mistress sought to convey to her and what she thought was the unprejudiced meaning of the scripture, which incorporated her in the group "neighbour". What is also apparent is the fact that Linda's mistress' moral teachings and intellectual leadership was not a genuine and innocent endeavour as it all fed into the white supremacy agenda to condition slaves not to question the status quo but allow slave master hegemony to exist unabated.

On obedience as underscored by Mr. Pike through his sermon to the black slaves presented is ironical. Presenting his communication from Ephesians: "servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ" (Ephesians 6:5), Mr. Pike stressed on indebted service as the only condition

for pleasing the slave masters. This version of scripture cannot be detached from its broad context and be narrowed down to an elucidation that put the slave owner in a better light to receive loyalty and respect. Reasonably, Ephesians 6:5 stated above should be equated to Ephesians 6:9 "And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favouritism with him"- to make it far-reaching and complete. The slave owners did not take mutuality and egalitarianism, which are the mainstay of the texts, into consideration. This was done on purpose and it was a deliberate ploy to avoid mutuality and egalitarianism in the sermon as this was an ideological instrument used to create "false consciousness" by distortion of the bible as well as try to win God to be their partner in this whole plan of subjugation. Having said that, it became illogical to assume, for instance, that God was more preoccupied with seeing slaves give respect to their masters than having the masters treat their slaves in the same way as they would want to be treated.

Moreover, there was the delusion that, being a slave in the South was a situation far better than that of being free in the North. This notion had no biblical foundation but rather a perspective. With 19th century in mind it defies logic to suggest that there is independence in slavery in one place (south) but believably, not necessarily, servitude in another (north). Ironically, the very people who perpetuated such a notion were a free group who also happened to be slave owners- the whites.

In a conversation between Benjamin and his grandmother religion of the slave master is exposed as an inconsistent religion; knowing the will of God become situational. Benjamin had been recaptured after a foiled attempt to escape and what lied ahead was severe punishment. On the subject of forgiveness his grandmother implores him to ask for pardon. Grandmother is playing an active and principal role in the continued domination of her family. This is typical of such characters as they would have been conditioned and incorporated by the ruling system to continue the oppression on their behalf and their reward being “freedom”. However, Benjamin does not hide his disagreement with his grandmother. Like many other slaves, he saw it as self-defeating, self-contradictory and bizarre for a hardworking slave seeking to flee from the wickedness and insensitive treatments of his master to be commanded to ask for forgiveness from the same cruel master.

The discussion did not progress without the observation of an irony in the moral defect in one of the most ubiquitous areas of slave abuse, sex and its consequences. The critical issue was adultery and a case in point from Jacobs’ *Narrative* is the situation whereby a pastor was excommunicated from the church for having an offspring with a married woman. The reason he was excommunicated is because the woman was white yet if the woman is black it is said that does not hinder the pastor from carrying out his church duties. (204)

From the above assessment a striking irony is revealed in this scripture particularly against the backdrop of a message in the bible which states: “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14 NKJV) and “If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die — the man

that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel” (Deuteronomy 22:22 NKJV).

The ruling ideas became those of the ruling class. The slave master had the means of material production and it meant that he also owned the mental means of production while everyone else had to be a subject of it all. Since they belong to the lowest rung of social strata, black slave women in this era were treated as commodities as they had no right to ward off any sexual quests by their white male owners. Where consensus could not be reached force was applied and they were sexually abused. It was unheard of and not possible for a black man, free or bonded, to marry a white woman in this epoch due to repressive legislation which discriminated on the basis of race. This means that it was not a sin only if the affair involved a white pastor and a slave woman. It is ironic that a pastor forfeits his job on the basis of his extramarital relations with one woman (white) but preserves it when involved with another woman (black). It is also absurd that although the bible denounces infidelity absolutely, the slave owners were discriminatory in demoralizing the act yet they claimed they were directed by the Bible.

The nature of the beast called Slave owner Christianity was also noted in the death of Philip, Linda's uncle, in terms of how he was glorified as a good man and his memory purportedly honoured by the slave masters. Here was an observation of misrepresentation and a sharp paradox that betrayed the authenticity in their assertion of calling Philip a respectable man and a valuable citizen (350). It is ironic that one gets to shower the dead with praises, yet when the person was alive the same person made his life a living

hell. As such the slave master initiative is rendered futile while their patronage ideology is unmasked.

In Douglass *Narrative* he compares his initial experiences of Christianity: Christianity of Christ and that of the slave master. Slave-owning religion is presented as hollow and disgraceful as embodied by Mr Auld and Mr Covey. They expose the religion for what it is while also laying bare the most striking irony of the type of religion that was being practiced; the more a master professed to religion, the more cruel he became. Mr Auld and Mr Covey only payed lip service to Christianity; they never committed themselves to it in any substantial way as what preoccupied their mind was white supremacist ideology and hegemony. This is contrary to Mr Freeland who was the least religious but the most kind. This prompted Douglass to this kind of observation;

I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes,—a justifier of the most appalling barbarity,—a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds,—and a dark shelter under, which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. Where I to be again reduced to the chains of slavery, next to that enslavement, I should regard being the slave of a religious master the greatest calamity that could befall me. (1979: 369)

Such a comparison of the slave holding version of religion and the Christianity of Christ was effective in creating what Hickman (2013:361) terms the “theodical crisis”. It is such conflict which led to crushing of slave master religion and its ideological underpinnings paving way for the resurgence of the

Christianity of Christ. The account of the Hebrews in the Bible and God's mediation in human affairs to stop man's inhumanity to other fellow man appears to motivate slaves to interrogate their oppression. In those instances where God intervened in a conflict on the side of the oppressed he used force and violence, like in the case of Pharaoh, making it apparent that God supports the use of emancipating force. It was not ungodly of Douglass to combat Covey or for the other slaves to desire for freedom, nor was it nonreligious of the Islamic Malcolm to preach violence in the name of self-preservation. Through the use of conflicts and comic rhetoric Frederick Douglass went against correctness and confronted the church and its ideologies teachings for standing in the way of freedom. He ridiculed the religion of the slave holding masters and their ironic unwarranted brutality as compared to those who did not practice religion. He also sees the ludicrous in an attempt to rationalise slavery by using the Bible. It is through this use of the ridiculous treatment of proslavery religion, that Douglass brings out the irony in the slavery-Christianity relations and unfastens potentials of freedom and equality.

Douglass and Jacobs do not limit themselves to looking at slaves and religion, but also the religion of the masters as they hypocritically subverted religion to justify their slaveholding ideologies. This is not to say that all masters were hypocrites; a few examples of masters whose conduct was very Christian are provided, but they just remain a minority and remain unconvincing.

The common argument that arises is that during slavery religion, mainly Christianity and its entrenched ideologies, has been used as a tool for social control. It became not only a spiritual, but a physical battlefield for control as

the oppressed and the oppressors took God to their side and used Him to their advantage. While it was the intention of the masters to see their slaves submerged into religion of Christianity, not all slaves adopted a 'wait God will take care of everything mentality' but some, though few, saw in the very religion the liberating hand of God and challenged the slave institution.

In their efforts to convert the accepted ways of slavery and religion, Jacobs and Douglass, committed impious acts, thereby joining a successful league of dissenters guilty of impieties for urging a different interpretation of social realities (Hoban, 1977: 172).

The circumstances and instances explored in the two works have highlighted some of the deep-rooted moral, intellectual and religious issues in 19th century slavery in America. More specifically, they have shed light on nature of the relationship between Christianity and slavery which was rampant during the 19th century slavery. The study reveals that most of the actions and reactions of the slave masters, where religion was concerned were characterised by elements of irony or contradiction in relation to what they believed and how they eventually acted, their ideology had nothing to do with fairness and equality.

From the various examples gathered from the two works, one can conclude that, in addition to the specific accounts of slave experiences in the slave narratives, it is observed that there are noticeable elements of ironies in actions and speeches of slave masters and slaves. Along with the contradictions or ironies pointed out were some understandings of possible reasons behind these ironies. Some of the reasons included religious piety on

the part of the slave masters, ignorance or illiteracy on the part of the slaves, race and culture.

This work does not have the full latitude of the focus of this thesis. However, it raises the consciousness about ironic reflections in slave narratives in general and in the two Narratives in particular



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