



# Re-Writing/Righting the Middle Passage in Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts*

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## Abstract

Based on a close textual analysis of Fred D'Aguiar's *tour de force* novel *Feeding the Ghosts* (1998), this paper particularly examines how D'Aguiar's narrative reconstructs (from a fictional perspective) submerged facts about the unrecorded and/or distorted history of slavery. One major episode of the 'triangular trade' will be brought under close scrutiny in this paper: the slaves' horrendous experience of the Middle Passage with its unspeakable inflictions and degradations. I mainly argue that the literary text (fictional as it may seem) allows the retrieval of the slaves' 'inundated' memories and lost testimonies while on board a slave-ship. This very experience has been immensely marginalized/or distorted in Eurocentric 'official' texts about a three-century-long enterprise that immensely enriched Europe and yet went forgotten in its grand narratives of Enlightenment and progress. I show how the slaves' bodies, memories and identities are profoundly shattered by this infernal cross-Atlantic passage which brought millions of Africans to the Americas while burying their nightmarish tribulations in the very sea that witnessed their infamous passage. I also propose that unearthing the buried secrets of the Middle Passage is a vital task entrusted to the storyteller/writer in the Caribbean cultural and literary context.

**Keywords:** D'Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts*, The Middle Passage, history re-writing

## 1. Slavery's Persistent Memory

Frederick Douglass's famous saying "The past is not dead and cannot die" can best describe the novels produced by Afro-Caribbean writers in the last three decades or so. Indeed, a major feature of the late Caribbean fiction (published between the early 1980s and the present) is its meticulous revision of the history of slavery, with its unspeakable moral degradations and inflictions: physical, psychic, cultural, familial, racial, sexual, etc. A wide range of recent Caribbean novels (by such writers as Caryl Phillips, Michelle Cliff, Fred D'Aguiar, Jamaica Kincaid, Edwidge Danitcat and others) are intensely infused with the history of slavery exposing from the inside out its diverse forms of aggression. Many of these mentioned writers' novels intersect in their reliance on slavery history *per se* in the creation their stories, characters, settings, images, symbols and even language and modes of narration.

Many recent Caribbean novels also undertake *re-writing slaves' unrecorded memory and lost testimonies against the colossal historical amnesia that 'tinted' Eurocentric texts about the three-century-long slavery enterprise*. Thus, historical experiences such as the involuntary transportation of Africans to the New World, the maddening inflictions of the Middle Passage, the destruction of slaves' familial and tribal ties and the cruelties of plantation life constitute recurring themes in recent fiction from the Caribbean. Centuries after the 'official' abolition of "the peculiar institution," the contemporary Caribbean writer (a descendent of slaves himself/herself) still cannot transcend the long-lasting psychic legacy of slavery testifying of the deep psychological wounds and moral outrage that accompanied the transportation and displacement of slaves under the European slave trade.

## 2. 'Official' History Discredited

As a matter of fact, this remarkable and recurring re-telling of untold slavery hi/stories in recent novels from the Caribbean is not a random one. It should be rather perceived as part of a wider Postcolonial revisionist project that challenges Eurocentric essentialist 'History' and re-writes/right(s) submerged histories from the vantage point of "those who suffer history" rather than "those who make History" (Sarvan and Marhama, 1991, p. 40). Indeed, the history of slavery was hardly narrated from the perspective of those who underwent the Middle Passage and stood at the auction block firsthand. Narrating slavery was rather profoundly 'monopolized' by white enslavers/masters, sea-captains, slave-dealers, plantation owners, overseers and many other accomplices in the slave trade, hence the flagrant erasure and omission that mark the entire history of slavery and the commitment of the Caribbean writer to fill in the gaps of this eradicated past.

The Caribbean writer's commitment to retrieve slaves' 'hushed' testimonies and eradicated voices is also part of what seminal Postcolonial scholar Edward Said (in *Culture and Imperialism* 1994) eloquently calls the "voyage in", i.e. the efforts of Postcolonial intellectuals, scholars, historians, critics, writers, etc. to repossess their communities' "marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories" as an essential step towards identity claiming and history reconstruction (1994, p. 216). The deep reasons behind the radical revisionist project which one clearly notices when

reading recent fiction from the Caribbean can be read within the Postcolonial 'project' of re-centring marginalized histories and silenced voices:

The conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories is of particular interest [...]. This kind of work was carried out by dozens of scholars, critics, and intellectuals in the peripheral world; I call this effort the *voyage in*. (Said, 1994, p. 216)

Written within this Postcolonial radical revisionist project, Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* (1994) and *Higher Ground* (1989), Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* (1984) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory* (1994) and *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) and Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990) (to mention but a few novels) are all concerned, either wholly or partly, with re-writing diverse aspects of the slavery past into historical visibility echoing the "capacity" of fiction "to unseal the silent lips of official history" (Julien, 1999, p. 86). The mentioned narratives intersect in their radical dismantling of the absolutism and political correctness of Western narratives about slavery. They, therefore, engage into what Said calls a "contrapuntal" 'writing back' to Colonial 'mainstream' narratives whose biases and misrepresentations they strongly seek to undermine. Critic Simon Gikandi proposes that the major 'mission' of Caribbean literature is "to weaken the foundational status of the Western narrative" and expose "its absolutist theory of history" (1992, p. 253).

Emphasizing the urgency to question the 'received' History of the West and retrieve what has been omitted from its "official version," Michelle Cliff, an interesting female writer from Jamaica, tells us the following: "All we have are these stories, and they are endangered" (1994b, p.59). Cliff insists that a great deal of slavery history has been "tamed," i.e. shaped by the needs and desires of an Imperialist Europe that dictated both its functioning and the way it was recorded (Cliff, 1994a, p. 196). Hence, Cliff ascribes a crucial role to the Caribbean writer/storyteller to retrieve his/her community's "endangered" (i.e. distorted or lost) history and unrecorded past. "What unites all my books," Cliff reminds us, "is the loss of history and my attempt to restore pieces of it for myself and the reader" (qtd. in Shea 1994, p. 33).

### 3. Fred D'Aguiar: When Fiction 'Beats up' History

As a matter of fact, the novels of Fred D'Aguiar (mainly *The Longest Memory* and *Feeding the Ghosts*) fully adhere to the above-discussed trend in recent Caribbean literature to re-write slavery history from the perspective of marginalized slaves and silenced voices. Confirming the centrality of slavery as a major theme in the entire oeuvre of D'Aguiar, Frias remarks that "D'Aguiar has not been able to stop writing about slavery" (2002, p. 679). D'Aguiar's constant and relentless foregrounding of the experience of slavery throughout his oeuvre has to do primarily with his own status and identity as a black person (also slave descendant) living in the West. Though removed from the concrete unfolding of slavery by entire centuries, D'Aguiar (like many other Caribbean writers) is fully aware that slavery is now no more, yet its offshoot (i.e. racism) is holding full sway in the daily realities of blacks living in the West. Thus, D'Aguiar reads his own identity within the wider trajectory (and continuum) of black history dating back to the early days of slavery in an attempt "to come to terms with his own sense of 'outsideness', 'inbetweenness' and 'otherness'" (Frias, 2002, p. 679). D'Aguiar's zeal to explore and fully understand "black history" is directly related to a search for a "place in that history" (D'Aguiar, 2002, p. 419). The excavation, so to speak, of remote communal and ancestral history as a way to understand the self is directly admitted by D'Aguiar when he tells us: "My experience as a black person in a white-majority system predisposed me towards an interest in race since my skin carried this high negative premium whose history I was keen to find out about" (2002, p. 418).

From another perspective, D'Aguiar's digging into his ancestors' crevices of history stems from the conviction that those *who underwent the ordeals of the Middle Passage were denied the means to document their own tragedies on board slave ships. Thus, today huge gaps and vagueness wrap the history of the Middle Passage that connected Africa to the New World for about 400 years. In other words, this interest in ancestral history goes hand in hand with a need to retrieve the forefathers' submerged accounts about their involuntary passage to the Americas and what they really suffered on their way to the plantation*: "My interest in ancestry beyond those who are alive is really my attempt to fill in the gaps of an eradicated past" (2002, p. 418). *Millions of African slaves died even before reaching the other side of the Atlantic and their "sad endings" were "buried in shallow graves" and "sea burials" (2002, p. 423), hence the duty D'Aguiar undertakes to reconstruct their shards of memory and re-write their lost testimonies. D'Aguiar underlines the extent of loss characterizing the entire history of slavery and the need to reclaim this eradicated past: "Remember we are talking about slavery, a 400-year old institution. How many books are enough. [...] How many stories are lost because the people perished without leaving so much as their names behind?" (2002, pp. 419-423).*

What is interesting about D'Aguiar's 'rejoinder' to the erasure/or distortion of his ancestral history is the significant place he gives to fiction in this recuperative endeavour. D'Aguiar highlights literature's reclaiming potential and capacity to "fill in the details lost to history," namely 'official' Eurocentric history (2002, p. 424). Despite its imaginative nature, fiction, according to many Post-colonial writers, can out-tell the biased History that Europe has produced about the non-West for several centuries (Innes, 2007, p. 40). Underscoring the wealth of possibilities offered by fiction and imagination to reconstruct the past, D'Aguiar insists that the novel (as a purely fictional artistic form) can "offer" an interesting "possibility of repair" (qtd. in Asim, 2001, p. 2) in allusion to the 'damage' and 'destruction' inflicted on the history of slavery by Imperialist discursive manipulations and ideological formations.

#### 4. *Feeding the Ghosts: Re-Writing/Righting the Middle Passage*

In what is to come, I examine how D'Aguaiar's novel *Feeding the Ghosts* (the central text I will be reading in what will follow) grants powerful voice to unheard of slaves to narrate their own tragedies of the Middle Passage ordeal. I also explore how the literary text in the hands of D'Aguaiar permits the re-centering of testimonies and truths for centuries 'banished' from Eurocentric centralist History. I also emphasize how the literary text, though pure fiction, can out-tell biased history through centering unknown episodes about the complex realities of the Middle Passage and slave-master encounters on board slave ships. In order to give some context to my discussion of the mentioned points, I believe that a brief synopsis of *Feeding the Ghosts* would be of some help and guidance.

*Feeding the Ghosts* particularly records the immense human tragedy and "unremitting toil" (p. 19) which governed the slaves' involuntary journey to the New World where they would be bought, sold, owned and transferred as many times as their owners considered proper. *Feeding the Ghosts* is, in fact, written after the real, yet historically-submerged, case of the Zong; a disease-stricken slave vessel, which in the year 1781, carried slaves from West African shores to white-owned sugar plantations in Jamaica. Stricken with a devastating disease which takes hold of its human "livestock overboard" (p.97), the Captain (Cunningham) decides to spill 132 slaves alive into the sea. His target is to fetch their insurance value when the "the ship limp[s] into Jamaican waters," its intended destination (p.71). Mintah, a rebellious female slave on board the Zong, is thrown alive into the sea. She, however, manages to "climb back on board" (p.155), heroically resists the white crew of the Zong, survives the horrible Middle Passage and keeps "an account of her own" (p.155) in which she records the crimes of the white crew and the inhuman degradations of the Middle Passage as a whole. Years later, a court trial takes place in London to investigate into the unlawful dumping of the 132 slaves. The white crew members and the investors behind them are all absolved of any responsibility because slaves are regarded as soulless items of trade openly referred to as "stocks" and "holdings" (p.12). Besides, Mintah's attempts to counter Captain Cunningham's fallacies are literally "dismissed" by the white-run court because Mintah "was not free but owned as stock" (p.173).

*Feeding the Ghost* chronicles the appalling physical and moral degradations of the Middle Passage; the cross-Atlantic journey that "divided and destroyed many people" (p. 113) and relegated them to "one miserable tangled mass of humanity" (p.19). The transfer of slaves from Africa to the Americas was characterized by extreme brutal treatment, which, in many ways, prepared the transported human 'stock' to a life of worthlessness and toil. In his quintessential book *The Black Jacobins* (1963), C.L.R. James argues that on "no earthly spot was so much misery concentrated as on a slave-ship" (p. 46). Kelsal, a white crew member on board the Zong, strongly believes that slaves are naturally predisposed for a life of permanent pain and suffering. The slaves' survival of the "adverse circumstances" of the Middle Passage, Kelsal states, is "evidence of their suitability for a life of unremitting toil" (p.19).

From a historical perspective, the involuntary transit of slaves from their African homes to the alien New World was indeed one of the most destructive episodes of the slavery circuit. Added to its destruction of familial and communal ties and the severing of African roots, the Middle Passage resulted in extreme anguish (which at times reached madness) and high death rates that remain beyond any exact estimation. In her book *Showing Grit* (1993), Marlene Nourbese Philip elaborates on the complexity of determining the exact number of slaves who had been uprooted from their African homes and shipped into the Americas:

The most conservative estimate for the number of Africans brought to the Americas and the Caribbean is 15 million, excluding those who died either on the journey to the west coast of Africa, or during the Atlantic crossing. 15 million becomes 25 million when those who died are factored in. Some have estimated as many as 100 million Africans were victims of the trade. (p. 76)

Highlighting the countless tragedies of slavery in general, Kamau Brathwaite argues that the brutalities of the Middle Passage caused traumas from which no single slave could be ever spared. The "Middle Passage," Brathwaite proposes, "was such a catastrophic, definitive experience that none of those transported during the period from 1540 to 1840 escaped trauma" (1993, p.190). Arguing along similar lines, Edouard Glissant speaks about "all those Africans weighed down with ball and chain and thrown over and felt too weak to put up a fight" (1989, p.67). During this trans-Atlantic horrible crossing, millions of Africans "died and were thrown overboard," while the survivors suffered inhuman sale on the auction block (Sarvan and Marhama, 1991, p.35).

Caught in adverse weather circumstances, a captain was "known to have poisoned his [human] cargo" during a cross-Atlantic journey (James, 1993, p. 8). For the sake of further illustration, I suggest this passage from *The Black Jacobins* where the unimaginable horrors of the Middle Passage are recorded from a meticulous perspective:

The slaves were collected in the interior, fastened one to the other in columns, loaded with heavy stones of 40 or 50 pounds in weight to prevent attempts at escape, and then marched the long journey to the sea, sometimes hundreds of miles, the weakly and sick dropping to die in the African jungle. Some were brought to the coast by canoe, lying in the bottom of boats for days on end, their hands bound, their faces exposed on the tropical sun and the tropical rain, their backs in the water which was never bailed out. At the slave ports they were penned into 'trunks' for the inspection of the buyers. Night and day thousands of human beings were packed in these 'dens of putrefaction' so that no European could stay in them for longer than a quarter of an hour without fainting. The Africans fainted and recovered or fainted and died, the mortality in the 'trunks' being over 20 per cent. (pp. 7-8)

In *Feeding the Ghosts*, the transference of slaves from African shores to the sugar plantations in Jamaica stretches over what Mintah metaphorically calls a “road of bones” (p.183) along which slaves are “buried deep below deck” (p. 9) and caught in a “stagnation of death and disease” (p.11) . The slaves’ loss in strange seas, whose “current turns pages of memory” (p. 4), is made worse by the white crew’s total indifference to their “moans,” “cries” and pointless death. The crew’s abiding by a ruthless mercantilist creed, suggested in the text by the “Zong’s efficiency” rules (p.14), has hardened their hearts as to the slaves’ plight; thus “audible cries emanating from below deck” have become “so habitual to the sailors’ ears” making a mere “all-encompassing fabric of routine” (p.10). The words “habitual” and “routine” confirm the crew’s utter deafness to the slaves’ anguish and their wholehearted devotion to the capitalist system they work for and represent. “[T]he subjugation of these slaves,” Captain Cunningham reminds his crew members, “could be described as normal” (p.128). The Captain’s insistence on the normalcy of his crew’s actions and the routine nature of their undertaking is full of meanings; it is most probably meant to deter any sense of guilt which might arise and disrupt the crew’s devotion to the profession: the rigorous transfer of slaves from Africa to the Caribbean. We also surmise from the Captain’s words that all types of outrages (physical, psychic, moral, sexual, etc.) are justifiable “in the name of profit” (p.128).

In *Feeding the Ghosts*, the physical atrocities of the Middle Passage and the crew’s display of savagery are such that the slave’s life turns into a real torture that gets more intense with every next tide. Tormented by the tragedy of their compulsory passage, many slaves on board the Zong aspire for death, which comes to signify liberation and salvation for most of them. Slave mothers on board the Zong, for instance, have lost total control over their lives and the lives of their children. They, therefore, “pulled out their hair, fell into dead faints, wished for death to take them now, now, since, life could never mean a thing after this” (p.40). The mothers’ wish to die can speak volumes about the unspeakable horrors of the Middle Passage, horrors vividly portrayed in the opening paragraph of *Feeding the Ghosts* where the ruthless dumping of 132 slaves is pictured:

Over three days 131 such bodies, no 132, are flung at this sea. Each lands with a sound that the sea absorbs and silences. Each opens a wound in this sea that heals over each body without the evidence of a scar. Two hundred and sixty-four arms and 264 legs punch and kick against a tide that insists all who land on it, all who break its smooth surface, must succumb to its swells, tumbles, pushes and pulls. (p. 3)

The above passage exposes from the inside out how African slaves are bluntly denied humanness; slaves are not perceived as human beings, but rather as mere unidentifiable and lifeless numbers: “131” or “132” “bodies,” “Two hundred and sixty-four arms,” and “264 legs.” The aggressions on slaves are also suggested by such words as “flung,” “wound,” “scar,” “pushes,” and “pulls.” We can notice here the emotional effect created by the words “wound” and “scar;” these words do not simply refer to the physical aggressions inflicted on the 132 slaves as a result of being “flung” alive into a “hungry” sea (“The sea was hungry,” we read on page 212). The slaves’ scars and wounds also allude, no less significantly, to the onerous psychological and mental anguish generated by the horrible experience of being thrown alive into the blue sea, which is defined in D’Aguiar’s narrative in terms of “its limitless capacity to swallow love, slaves, ships and memories” (p.27).

The words “absorbs” and “silences” are also very telling about the extent of erasure which marked the story of the Zong, the Middle Passage and slavery at large. Reacting to this erasure is, in fact, D’Aguiar’s central mission in writing his novels *Feeding the Ghosts* and *The Longest Memory*: to retrieve slavery’s submerged history and re-tell slaves’ buried testimonies. According to D’Aguiar, a great deal of slavery history was deliberately erased and/or distorted by Eurocentric discursive, literary, historical, and ideological formations:

How many stories are lost because the people perished without leaving so much as their names behind? At every stage of the slave triangle, how many sad endings are buried in shadow graves, sea burials, [...] in the worn wood of slave hulls packed with bodies, on plantations across the Caribbean, South America and The United States. (2002, p. 423)

The submerged hi/stories of slavery are emphasized by D’Aguiar through a diction reverberating with loss and submersion; words such as “lost,” “perished,” “buried,” “graves,” and “burials” are clear indications of the amount of loss which characterized the history of slavery. Most of this history was, in fact, virtually forgotten and/or erased in Eurocentric authoritative records. Indeed, the history of slavery in the Caribbean was predominantly recorded by Europeans (slave-owners, colonial administrators, occasional travelers, priests, absentee landlords, explorers, etc.) whose texts intentionally omitted substantial parts of the slavery history as it factually unfolded. For instance, slave rebellions were “ruthlessly put down and their motivation, course, and result incorporated” within European narratives and records (Brydon and Tiffin, 1993, p. 39).

One should also underline the extent of erasure and omission that characterized the English literature produced at a time when the slavery mercantilist enterprise was in its full sway. Slavery was demoted to a marginal position in most literary texts written by English writers between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Despite the centrality of the slavery institution to Europe’s capitalist economy for about three hundred years, English literature hardly, if ever at all, recorded the flagrant tragedies of the slave trade and inhuman inflictions that marked the transfer of slaves from Africa to the New World. For instance, William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1619), Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814) staggeringly overlook slavery and slave-master encounters despite these texts’ temporal connectedness to the experience of slavery. Shakespeare, Defoe and Austen simply use the Caribbean as a mere backdrop for their stories while omitting its most marking features: slave-trade and slave-master encounters.

Emphasizing the erasure characteristic of the history of slavery, Ledent speaks about “Britain’s three-century-long amnesia concerning a practice” which “also belongs to British history” (1997, p. 273). Paul Carter describes the imperial history of the Caribbean as a “fabric” “woven of self-reinforcing illusions” (2006, p.333). Marlene Nourbese Philip calls the flagrant erasure that characterized the history of the Caribbean a “mutilation of history” and an “atrophy of memory” (1992, p. 197). Froude-Durix emphasizes the “distortion” inherent to the Eurocentric “records” and “accounts” about slavery:

For the West Indies and the slave trade, records and witness-accounts of the time were almost entirely written by the colonisers. This in itself provides the first ‘distortion’ of history for there is little to counterbalance this one-sided view because of the illiteracy of the vast majority of victims. (1998, p. 47)

It is in reaction to this ‘distortion’ of slavery history and counter to the imperial biased versions of what exactly happened on board slave ships (during the Middle Passage) and later on in the plantation that D’Aguiar writes his two novels *Feeding the Ghosts* and *The Longest Memory*. The following extract from *Feeding the Ghosts* illustrates how the writer meticulously re-centers the horrendous transfer of slaves from Africa to the New World:

Bodies had gone from strokes of love only and the labour of love, to lashes and cuts and bruises, chains and collars. And from dances in the arms of lovers, from dances at harvest, at births, at deaths, from drums, strings, flutes and horns, they had come to this: a confined hole where to twist a little encumbered another, where elbows on each side speared into ribs and sleep was light, patchy, eyes wide, fitful, snatched, troubled, whimpering. [...] Over the noise of the wind and the rain and the sea came the cries from below. Not just cries for a mother, father, brother or sister from the children, but from the men and women angry shouts and howls, accusations and curses, and they used their chains to bang on the deck as if those planks were the heads of the crew. Most of the women had to be restrained in a corner with a whip and with clubs to allow the sick to be dragged from among them. (pp. 26, 126)

The above passage shows how the experience of the Middle Passage is physically breaking and psychologically devastating. The enforced transit of slaves from the certainties of home (suggested by “the strokes of love,” “dances in the arms of lovers,” and “flutes and horns”) to the tomb-like confinement of the slave-ship (the “confined hole”) foreshadows what awaits slaves ahead in the plantation. Revolving around endless atrocities, the Middle Passage thus constitutes a ‘prologue,’ as it were, to the slaves’ animal-like and “invisible presence” in the New World (Glissant, 1989, p. 67). Dathorne eloquently describes the cross-Atlantic journey of slaves as the “training school of the Middle Passage” (1981, p. 4). In other words, the horrors of the Passage prepared the “owned stock” (*Feeding the Ghosts*, p. 173) for a life of weightlessness and degradation in the plantation where they would be subject to countless forms of abuse and dehumanization.

Words such as “bones,” “death,” and “buried” in the above passage from *Feeding the Ghosts* allude to the huge loss in human lives caused by the Middle Passage, hence the text’s potential to retrieve aspects of the unrecorded, yet ever-remembered, slavery past. The meticulous description of how slaves are horrendously transferred from “the labour of love” (“dances,” “harvest,” “births,” “drums,” and “flutes”) to the hellish world of the slave ship (“angry shouts,” “howls,” “cuts,” “bruises” and “chains”) and the juxtaposition of such scenes as “dances at harvest” with “to twist a little encumbered another” are worth discussing. These descriptions represent the writer’s endeavors to recover the untold horrors of slavery and the way slaves grappled with the ordeals of the Middle Passage. The above-quoted extract also shows how D’Aguiar’s text re-visits a three century-old experience which, despite the gaps and historical amnesia surrounding it, could still be re-imagined, reconstructed and re-written.

The reconstruction of the slavery past is possible through the capacity of fiction to re-invent a history which Eurocentric texts either overlooked or failed to narrate objectively. Froude-Durix explores the retrieval potential of D’Aguiar’s *Feeding the Ghosts*: “If written history is to be suspected of being weighted by the loaded point of view of the author, this novel is proof that fiction is capable, by its imaginative renderings and meanderings, of throwing new light on history” (p.53). D’Aguiar’s view about the way(s) fiction can unravel hidden accounts and re-center the submerged stories is articulately voiced in the following words: “Fiction about history should be the act of feeling one’s way into the past, not by holding a mirror but by stepping through the mirror into the unknown” (2002, p. 420).

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I mainly tried to show how D’Aguiar’s novel *Feeding the Ghosts* re-tells the predicaments of the infamous Middle Passage and retrieves slaves’ hi/stories from new and unknown perspectives. Indeed, D’Aguiar’s fictional text in many ways out-tells official History through ‘excavating’ the eradicated past of slavery and handing narration back to silenced and unheard of slaves to tell their own stories. By giving voice to enslaved African men and women who underwent the months-long cross-Atlantic journey into bondage, D’Aguiar’s brings to the fore testimonies for long erased from Eurocentric historiography about the trade in human flesh.

The new perspectives from which *Feeding the Ghosts* is narrated offer a myriad of testimonies about what happened on board slave ships and makes possible the reconstruction of the scattered shards of memory about the traumatic Middle Passage. Debunking the unreliability of ‘official’ History and divulging the secrets of its failure to give voice to the victims of slavery, D’Aguiar’s literary text gives priority to fiction and imagination to reconstruct the past of slavery by throwing light on its unknown victims and unspoken truths. Reading *Feeding the Ghosts*, the reader can lucidly notice fiction’s potential to retrieve remote histories and tell truths that have been deliberately ‘banished’ from Western official narratives and History about the centuries-long ‘holocaust’ of slavery.

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