POWER AND AGENCY IN FRANCOPHONE
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN LIFE NARRATIVES
OF SLAVERY IN THE MODERN ERA

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ABSTRACT

Power and Agency in Francophone Sub-Saharan African Life Narratives of Slavery in the Modern Era

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Up until now, there has been no slave narrative tradition to speak of in the French speaking world; francophone slave narratives are deemed virtually non-existent or have yet to be discovered. This study thus seeks to break new ground by arguing that a modern slave narrative tradition is beginning to emerge in the French speaking world. In order to demonstrate this, it brings into focus two life narratives - one written by a former child soldier from the Democratic Republic of Congo (Badjoko 2005), the other composed by a former domestic slave in Paris (Akofa 2000).

As this study will reveal, leading figures from the field of slavery studies (Bales 1999, 2005; Patterson 1982) have played a pivotal role in moving beyond traditional understandings of slavery and thus have paved the way for this study to qualify Akofa’s and Badjoko’s intra-textual experiences as slavery. At the same time, through close reading of these two life narratives in conjunction with relevant strands of critical theory, this study will demonstrate that a greater nuance is at work than existing definitions of slavery can account for.

More specifically, this study pays close attention to what these texts reveal about power and agency in situations of enslavement. It maintains that in depicting their intra-textual selves as acting within the parameters of their constraint, both writers call into question the assumption that somebody who is enslaved is a passive victim devoid of agency. Taking this argument a step further, this study concludes by investigating power and agency at an extra-textual level. It posits that while Akofa and Badjoko find themselves to some extent constrained by the demands of writing for a French publishing house, both writers manage to exercise varying degrees of agency.
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Introduction

Background

By the end of the twentieth century, slavery as ‘a legally-permitted labour system’ had been abolished worldwide (OCHCR 1991: 3). As a result, until fairly recently slavery was spoken of in the past tense or in the case of France and other francophone territories, barely spoken of at all.¹ Over the course of the last decade, however, the French government has taken significant steps in order to break this silence that has surrounded slavery in official discourses and the public arena since 1848 (Cottias 2005: 59), the year of the definitive abolition of slavery.² For instance, in 1998 France commemorated the sesquicentennial anniversary of the (second) abolition of slavery in its empire; in 2001 the French parliament ratified the loi Taubira that recognises the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery as crimes against humanity³; and in 2004 the Comité pour la Mémoire de l’Esclavage (CPME) was created with a mandate to assist the French government ‘sur les questions relatives à la recherche, l’enseignement, la conservation, la diffusion ou la transmission de l’histoire et des mémoires de la traite, de l’esclavage et leur abolition’.⁴

Whilst many scholars have welcomed this much needed excavation of memories of trans-Atlantic slavery and the slave trade, they have also raised their concerns about

¹ The silence surrounding slavery had been so prominent in French political discourses and historiography that Myriam Cottias (2005: 60-61) describes slavery as ‘un non-lieu de mémoire’. To demonstrate this, Cottias (2005: 61) stresses the fact that in some of France’s most famous works by historians such as Pierre Nora and Fernand Braudel, no article is dedicated to colonialism or to the abolition of slavery. In addition, in the same work Cottias (2005: 59) draws attention to the fact that from the date of the definitive abolition of slavery in 1848 until 1998, the French Republic orchestrated a systematic ‘forgetting’ in its colonies in order to allow for the better assimilation of the indigenous populations into the Empire.
² France is unique regarding the legal abolition of slavery insofar it is the only nation to have abolished slavery twice. Slavery was first abolished in its colonies in 1794 only to be reinstated less than a decade later in 1802; it was then abolished for a second time in 1848 (Comité pour la Mémoire de l’Esclavage 2005: 8).
⁴ This information was taken from the CPME’s website, see: <http://www.comite-memoire-esclavage.fr> On the 6th May 2009, the Comité pour la Mémoire de l’Esclavage was renamed the Comité pour la Mémoire et l’Histoire de l’Esclavage.
how and what is (or is not) remembered of this zone d’ombre in France’s history, as President Jacques Chirac (2006) once described it. In this respect, writers and pressure groups based in France and the French Caribbean have been particularly vocal. For example in the opening letter of the CPME’s first report, addressed to the French Prime Minister at that time, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé states:

La très grande majorité de nos concitoyens du monde issu de l’esclavage sont convaincus que, malgré la loi du 21 mai 2001, l’histoire de la traite négrière, de l’esclavage et de leurs abolitions continue d’être largement ignorée, négligée, marginalisée. (2005: 2)

Condé’s remarks essentially call into question the effectiveness of the actions the French government has taken in recent decades. One reason behind this is that France has tended to focus attention primarily on the abolitionist movement of France’s metropolitan elite, resulting in the marginalisation of ‘the long experience of enslavement (and its permanent resistance)’ that formerly enslaved societies remember (Forsdick 2008: xii). In consequence, resistance movements carried out by the slaves themselves are ignored and the struggle against slavery is presented as that of the French metropolitan abolitionists only.

Other critics have underscored the irony of the celebration of the abolition of slavery in France’s empire as ‘a founding moment of the much-vaunted principles of equality, fraternity and liberty’ (Reinhardt 2006: 3) and abundant praise of Victor

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5 The 2001 law recognising slavery and the slave trades as crimes against humanity was proposed by French Guyanese MP Christine Taubira and came about after decades of political activism in France’s overseas territories (Forsdick 2008: xii).

6 The French government, however, has since adopted measures towards addressing these concerns and followed some of the recommendations outlined by the report. By way of illustration, in 2006 President Jacques Chirac declared the 10th of May (the date suggested by the CPME) as a Day of Remembrance for the victims of trans-Atlantic slavery and the slave trade and acknowledged that ‘au-delà de l’abolition, c’est aujourd’hui l’ensemble de la mémoire de l’esclavage, longtemps refoulée, qui doit entrer dans notre histoire: une mémoire qui doit être véritablement partagée’ (le 30 janvier 2006).
 Whilst Victor Schoelcher is often singled out and praised for his involvement in the abolitionist movement, he was also a fervent proponent of the myth that colonialism was necessary in order to put an end to slavery (Schmidt 2006): scholars have shown that slavery continued under various guises during the colonial period in Sub-Saharan Africa (Botte 2005: 652-653; Miers 2005: 669-677; Fall 1993), thus undermining the Republican ideals of égalité, fraternité and liberté for all.  

Similarly, despite the formal abolition of slave trading in 1815 (Rawley & Behrendt 2005: 113), historical evidence suggests that an illegal trade between Africa and the Americas continued until around the 1860s. In light of this, Senegalese critic Matar Gueye’s contention that in Sub-Saharan Africa ‘l’impression dominante est que l’abolition n’a jamais eu lieu’ (2000: 91) is hardly surprising. Gueye posits: ‘seulement une forme de domination et de servilité a succédé à une autre’ (2009: 91). Gueye refers to the fact that whilst the trans-Atlantic slave trade came to a formal end, other kinds of trades developed whereby Africans were trafficked to other countries for forced labour (2000: 91).

In the postcolonial moment, Gueye’s assertion is all the more relevant given that Sub-Saharan Africans continue to be trafficked to other parts of Africa, the Middle East and Europe (including France) and internally from rural to urban areas (Dottridge 2002; 7

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7 A prominent example is a French governmental study into contemporary forms of slavery (Monriquée 2003) commissioned by the Conseil Économique et Social, which began by praising Victor Schoelcher for his role in the abolitionist movement. For the full text of the report entitled ‘L’esclavage contemporain et ses réseaux’ see: <http://www.conseil-economique-et-social.fr>

8 John Fage posits: ‘to stamp out the evils of slavery and slave-trading in West Africa, occupation of its territories was thought essential.....The view that the West Africans left to themselves were inherently prone to own and trade in slaves became in fact one of the received myths of the conquering colonizers’ (1969: 393-394).

9 For further details, see chapters three and five from Serge Daget’s La repression de la traite des Noirs au XIXè siècle: l’action des croisières (1997).

More alarming for others is the persistence of chattel slavery (also known as traditional or classical slavery), whereby individuals are bought and sold as property and their bondage is considered life long and hereditary (Miers 2000: 715). This form of slavery is particularly prevalent today in several Sub-Saharan countries including Niger, Mauritania and Sudan (Miers 2000: 720-721). The landmark ruling of the Hadijatou Mani Koroua v Niger case in 2008 vividly illustrates the extent to which slavery remains deeply embedded in societies such as these. In this case, the Community Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) intervened and ruled that the state of Niger had been in violation of its international obligations for not protecting Hadijatou Mani, a Nigerien woman, from enslavement in her own country of origin (Duffy 2009: 151). Paradoxically therefore, as France and francophone Sub-Saharan African countries continue to grapple with their slaving pasts, they are not only charged with the task of weaving memories of slavery of the past into the fabric of the present, but also with acknowledging the persistence of slavery under various guises in the contemporary moment.

In academic studies, a similar tension can be found between slavery of the past and present. For instance, the recognition of the perpetuation of divergent forms of slavery in both the colonial and post-colonial periods has led Joel Quirk to ask: ‘if slavery is renounced, but property claims and extreme exploitation persist under other designations, what does this say about the efficacy of legal abolition?’ (2008: 530). In response to this question, Quirk distinguishes between formal abolition that he defines as ‘a formal change in institutional status,’ and effective emancipation, ‘a series of

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11 In her discussion of child trafficking in Sub-Saharan Africa, Loretta Bass defines human trafficking as ‘the movement of people from one place to another through force, coercion or deception to exploit them for their labour’ (2004: 152). As this indicates, human trafficking consists of a chain of events rather than a single act, which are usually broken down into the following: i) movement ii) technique (force, coercion, deception) iii) exploitation. Often human trafficking is referred to as a form of slave trading (Quirk 2007; Benot 2003: 257) because of the similar pattern they both follow: the transfer of human beings from one place to another for exploitative purposes.

evolving aspirations and expectations’ (2008: 530). Quirk argues that the former is often mistakenly seen as ‘a decisive endpoint’ thus ‘leaving an impression that subsequent events marked a fundamental departure from the earlier status quo’ (2008: 529). This appears to have been the case in France as Françoise Vergès’ (2006b) remarks suggest: ‘dans l’historiographie officielle française, la fin de l’esclavage colonial est présentée comme un moment inévitable de l’histoire où la France remplit finalement son rôle de patrie des droits de l’homme’. Yet, as noted earlier, despite the legal abolition of slave trading by France in 1815 and slavery in 1848, slavery continued under colonial rule, disguised by alternative appellations such as forced or indentured labour (Quirk 2008: 97) and old slave trading routes continue to be exploited.

Importantly, Quirk (2006: 566) also stresses the ‘longstanding historical roots’ of contemporary forms of slavery, thus undermining the sharp divide academics often draw between ‘new’ and ‘old’ slavery. Quirk’s argument finds resonance in Alain Morice’s work, who pertinently asks ‘où et quand démarre le “moderne”?’ in the phrase modern slavery (2005: 1017). Morice argues that part of the confusion stems from the use of the adjective ‘modern’ (and its variants ‘new,’ ‘contemporary’ and so forth) which lends to the idea of the rebirth or resurgence of slavery in the modern world (2005: 1017). Accordingly, in an attempt to resolve this conceptual ambiguity, from this point onwards, the phrase ‘modern slavery’ and its variants will be replaced by the expression ‘slavery in the modern era’ in the hope of conveying a sense of continuity instead of rupture. Academics thus have been faced with the challenge of constructing a theory of slavery that does not betray the practices of the past but that also reflects manifestations in the present. A leading figure in this respect is Kevin Bales, whose work (1999; 2005) has not only expanded the conceptual parameters of existing definitions of slavery by shifting the focus from legal ownership to violent (and illegal)
control but significantly enhanced understanding of slavery as a global phenomenon. In the French speaking world, the influence of Bales’ work has only gradually begun to be felt and has not yet had the impact that it has had in the English speaking world. This is, however, slowly beginning to change.\footnote{In the report into contemporary slavery (2003) commissioned by the Conseil Économique et Social (mentioned above), Monrique makes significant references to Bales’ work in the opening section. More recently, Bales was invited to be the keynote speaker at a conference entitled ‘Pour en finir avec l’esclavage: comment pouvons-nous éradiquer l’esclavage aujourd’hui’, which took place in Aix-en-Provence, 27-28th June 2008.}

In stark contrast, and surprisingly, given Africa’s long and sustained slaving past, a great deal of work in African literary studies has revolved around an alleged ‘silence’ surrounding historical forms of slavery and the slave trades (Opoku-Agyemang 1996; Maduakor 1997; Chalaye 1999; Borgomano 2000; Alem 2006). Whilst Christopher Miller (2008: 34) laments the virtual non-existence of slave narratives in the French speaking world and questions why there is no francophone Equiano, Achille Mbembe argues that ‘il n’existe pas, à proprement parler, de mémoire africaine de l’esclavage’ or suggests that if memories do exist, they are so fragmented that they are insignificant (2000: 32). Furthermore, while literary critics have explored francophone Sub-Saharan African literary representations of trans-Atlantic slavery and slave trades of the past, research into the question of slavery in the modern era in this field remains in its infancy, despite the growing number of francophone Sub-Saharan African writers who have treated contemporary manifestations of slavery in their work.\footnote{Since the late 1990s francophone Sub-Saharan African writers have adopted a variety of styles of writing to depict contemporary manifestations of slavery, from children’s literature (Hazoumé 1999; Fassinou 2000; Attidoko 2003; Gbado Lalin 2003) to short stories (Tadjo 1998; Kourouma 1998) and novels (Boutoura-Takpa 2002; Miano 2006; Couao-Zotiti et al. 2006).} By way of illustration, in Postcolonial Slavery (2008), an edited collection of essays (which arose from a series of papers given at a workshop aimed at exploring literary representations of slavery from the past and present), only two out of the eight chapters published explored literary representations of slavery in the modern era.
(Decouvelaere 2008; Skinner 2008); the others examined the indirect and direct legacies of slavery in the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean.

Focus and significance of research

This research project seeks to contribute to these debates surrounding francophone Sub-Saharan African literature, memory and slavery, and in the process open up new avenues of enquiry by producing an interdisciplinary study of Henriette Akofa’s Une esclave moderne (2000) and Lucien Badjoko’s J’étais enfant soldat (2005). In the former, Akofa depicts her experiences of being trafficked into domestic slavery in Paris in the 1990s. In the latter Badjoko represents his experiences as a child soldier in the Democratic Republic of Congo (the former Zaire) during the 1990s.15 Drawing on contemporary theory on slavery in conjunction with pertinent critical theory, this study aspires to break new ground by arguing that these texts form the basis of a modern slave narrative tradition in the French speaking world.

Clearly the two writers present very different forms of enslavement and oppression. In the case of the former, Akofa portrays a form of slavery that is particularly prominent in West Africa (Dottridge 2002; Adepoju 2000) and that has been granted considerable attention in debates on slavery in France over the course of the last decade (Rabarijaona 2000; O’Dy 2001; Benot 2003; Deshusses 2005).16 While in France (and other European nations) slaveholders take advantage of stricter immigration laws for Non-EU members in order to hold individuals in domestic servitude (Benot 2003: 263), in the Sub-Saharan African region, traffickers exploit the

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15 Some of the events of the narrative take place in Zaire before it was renamed as the Democratic Republic of Congo by Laurent Kabila on the 17 May 1997, when he and his armed coalition ousted the then President, Mobutu Sese Seko (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2004: 5). For the sake of clarity, this study refers to the DRC only when it alludes to Badjoko’s experiences.

16 The magnitude of the problem in France is reflected by the fact that the Comité Contre L’Esclavage Moderne, which was initially set up in 1994 to deal with all forms of contemporary slavery, quickly became an expert in domestic slavery issues (CCEM 2008: 2).
traditional practice of ‘placing’ (whereby a child is entrusted to another family to carry out light domestic work in return for schooling or training) (Dottridge 2002: 39; Rabarijaona 2000: 94). In Badjoko’s case, the Congolese writer gives narrative form to a phenomenon that although not new, has only recently become the object of sustained academic study (Druba 2002: 271). Although children have been involved in warfare throughout history, the scale of the problem of child soldiering has increased whilst the nature of it has changed significantly (Honwana 2006). There are currently an estimated 120,000 children participating in armed conflicts throughout Africa (Malan 2000). The Central African region is particularly affected by the phenomenon, with child soldiers found in Burundi, Rwanda, the Congo (Brazzaville), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Malan 2000).

This study argues that by opening a space for dialogue between these two narratives and theory on slavery, both stand to benefit from a more active engagement. On the one hand, by deploying current theoretical frameworks of slavery, it is possible to identify narratives of enslavement that might not necessarily be recognised as such by literary critics. Such is the case for Badjoko’s narrative (2005), in which the word slavery is never evoked, nor is any direct analogy drawn between Badjoko’s textual construction of his experiences as a child soldier and slavery. This said, this study is not the first to redefine a child soldier narrative as a slave narrative - in 2008 Kevin Bales and Zoe Trodd published an anthology of modern slave narratives, six of which included testimonies written by former child soldiers. It differs, however, in that it examines a narrative written from the perspective of a male child soldier; the six testimonies included in Bales’ and Trodd’s anthology (2008) are all written by female child soldiers.17

17 Badjoko’s narrative also belongs to a different linguistic tradition as the narratives published by Bales and Trodd (2008) were all published in English.
On the other hand, this study argues that bringing theory on slavery into more sustained dialogue with these narratives, allows for a better understanding of power and agency in situations of enslavement. In this respect, whilst this study agrees that ‘slavery is fundamentally a question of power’ (Bales 2005: 10), it calls into question Bales’ association of power with violence through close critical reading of Une esclave moderne (Akofa 2000). It posits that while violence is presented as being an integral part of Henriette’s enslavement, it does not form the basis of the power relationship that is depicted between her and her respective slaveholders. Moreover, it questions the assumption that somebody who is enslaved is necessarily passive and devoid of agency, as suggested again by Bales (1999; 2005) and other scholars such as Patterson (1982). While Bales (2005: 57) contends that ‘slavery is a state marked by the loss of freewill’ and by implication the loss of freedom to make choices, Patterson (1982: 1) depicts the slaveholder relationship in binary terms whereby a powerless slave submits to the will of an all powerful slaveholder.18 In contradistinction, this study argues that both narrator-protagonists (Akofa 2000; Badjoko 2005) are portrayed as acting within a field of possibilities albeit limited and as resisting within the structures of their constraint.

Taking this argument further, this study also explores power and agency at an extra-textual level. It contends that while Akofa and Badjoko depict their textual selves in situations of constraint, both writers also find themselves to a certain degree restricted by the demands of writing for a French publishing house and with a French co-author, yet manage to exercise varying degrees of agency.19 In this regard, it goes against the current of much existing literary criticism on slave narratives from the

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18 Although, as chapter three will reveal, the focus of Patterson’s work (1982) is less on the slave-slaveholder relationship than on slavery as a system bound up with the broader social order.

19 Akofa co-wrote her narrative with Olivier de Broca and it was published by Éditions Michel Lafon (Paris). Badjoko co-wrote his narrative with Katia Clarens and it was published by Éditions Plon (Paris).
African American tradition, the most distinctive slave narrative tradition worldwide. John Sekora for instance uses the metaphorical image of the black message ‘sealed within a white envelope’ (1987: 483) in order to convey his concerns about the close involvement of white abolitionists in the production of antebellum slave narratives. James Olney, on the other hand, argues that ‘the slave narrative is most often a non-memorial description fitted to a preformed mold’ (1984: 49) and comes to the conclusion that the slaves’ ‘narrative lives…were as much possessed and used by the abolitionists as their actual lives had been by slaveholders’ (1984: 51). This study maintains that in bringing to light solely signs of constraint in these narratives, these scholars inadvertently co-opt in the silencing process by presenting the slave narrators as voiceless and devoid of agency. It differs in this respect in that in addition to exploring how publishing and cultural constraints shape Akofa’s and Badjoko’s narratives, it also looks for indications of these writers’ agency such as inconsistencies and internal contradictions found in the texts.

Structure and Methodology

This thesis will be composed of four main chapters and will be structured as follows. Chapter one will begin by reviewing some of the key debates surrounding Sub-Saharan African literature and slavery to date in order to establish the contribution this study seeks to make to the field of francophone African literary studies. Next, it will focus on the key issues that have surrounded the slave narrative genre since its inception by paying close attention to those relating to the African American slave narrative tradition, the most influential in this respect. Finally, this chapter will conclude by arguing that existing definitions of slave narratives are too restrictive. In response to this

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20 As this study will reveal in chapter one, in marked contrast to the African American literary tradition in the United States, no such tradition exists in the French speaking world, slave narratives are deemed virtually non-existent.
and in order to delimit the generic parameters of the slave narrative tradition to which this study aspires to draw attention, a slave narrative is redefined within the context of this study as a ‘life narrative of slavery’. Accordingly, the remainder of chapter one will explore Smith and Watson’s theory of life narrative (2001) on which this definition is based. After establishing the generic framework through which Akofa’s and Badjoko’s narratives will be read in the chapters that follow, this study will then determine how and why Akofa’s and Badjoko’s literary representations of their experiences constitute slavery in chapters two and three.

Accordingly, chapter two will focus specifically on Akofa’s narrative. In the first section it examines Akofa’s intra-textual experiences in conjunction with both traditional and contemporary definitions of slavery. While these are useful for bringing to light why these experiences amount to slavery, this study argues that Michel Foucault’s theoretical insights on power in modern, Western nations can take this discussion further. As this chapter will demonstrate, Foucault’s work (1982; 1980; 1975) not only assists this study in questioning Bales’ suggestion that violence is the constituent element of the power relationship between the slave and the slaveholder, but also in shifting attention from the body as passive and acted upon to the body as active and acted upon.

Chapter three will focus on Badjoko’s narrative. Given the very different form of slavery Badjoko portrays and the geographical location in which it takes place, a different methodological approach is needed to that adopted in relation to Akofa’s narrative. Moreover, whilst in Akofa’s narrative the focus lies on the emergence of the female Sub-Saharan African slaveholder and the symbiotic relationship between two agents, here attention is granted to Badjoko’s portrayal of his intra-textual persona Lucien as both victim and agent of violence. Lucien’s status as a modern slave is further
called into question by the fact that he is cast as voluntarily joining an armed militia group. At present only child soldiers who are recruited by force are defined as modern slaves in international instruments. However by drawing on Orlando Patterson’s conception of slavery as a ‘liminal state of social death’ (1982: 46), this study argues that whether Lucien is presented as being recruited by force or not is irrelevant. Instead what is important is the kind of symbolic death Lucien is portrayed as undergoing in order to render him obedient. In order to bring this to light, this chapter exploits the concept of liminality as it is theorised by anthropologists Arnold van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1967; 1969; 1974) and postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1994).

After having demonstrated and justified why both texts constitute modern slave narratives, chapter four concludes by interrogating how the material conditions of production and publication have affected and shaped Akofa’s and Badjoko’s narratives. It argues that postcolonial concerns are raised over the possibility of a genuine ‘subaltern voice’ as both writers have to negotiate the space ‘in-between’ giving voice to the oppressed and that of the co-writer and reconcile their demands with those of the publishing house. However, this study contends that there are several indications within the text that indicate the writers’ agency and that both have negotiated these constraints. Within this context, it also pays close attention to memory and the various ways in which memories of slavery and the colonial era are reclaimed, repressed or controlled in Akofa’s and Badjoko’s texts. This chapter will reveal, for instance, that in Badjoko’s narrative memories of the colonial period are evoked through implicit references and several Western nations are directly and indirectly denounced for their ambiguous political roles in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African region.

21 The most important in this respect is the ILO’s (International Labour Organisation) Worst Forms of Labour Convention (1999) which only includes the ‘forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict’ in its definition of slavery and practices similar to slavery (Article 3) (as cited in Glind & Kooijmans 2008: 4, my emphasis).
more generally. In relation to Akofa’s narrative, on the other hand, a certain sense of
estrangement from her cultural heritage and collective memory can be felt, as memories
of the trans-Atlantic slavery period and France’s presence in Togo are absent. This is all
the more salient when Akofa’s text is brought into a dialogue with other francophone
Sub-Saharan African literary representations of domestic slavery where the slave trade
is implicitly evoked through subtle allusions and metaphors (Boutora-Takpa 2002;
Couao-Zotti & al. 2006). Given the different contexts in which Badjoko’s and Akofa’s
narratives were produced and published as noted earlier, this raises important questions
about publishing and cultural constraints and how they can obstruct or distort the
memory of slavery.

Ultimately then, through critical analysis of Badjoko’s and Akofa’s texts, this
study seeks to highlight the significant benefits of a more dynamic interaction between
theory on slavery and life narratives of slavery. In the process, it seeks to propel to the
forefront of academic debates regarding modern slave narratives the protagonist-
narrators’ and the writers’ agency.
Chapter One

Literature Review

1.0 Introduction

This chapter offers a critical review of the key aspects of existing debates surrounding African memory and literature of slavery and the slave trades and indicates how this research will form a distinct contribution to the field of francophone African literary studies.\(^{22}\) It takes as its point of departure Achille Mbembe’s contention that ‘il n’existe pas, à proprement parler, de mémoire africaine de l’esclavage’ (2000:32) and examines the reasons Mbembe advances to explain this absence. Whilst Mbembe’s assertion resonates strongly with other critics such as Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang (1996: 51) who describes the history of slavery and the slave trade in modern African literature as ‘an orphaned cry, a rootless echo that has no lineage,’ this discussion will reveal that a new body of work is beginning to emerge that calls into question this ‘silence’ and ‘forgetting’ (Miller 2008; Murphy 2007, 2008). If indeed this silence is ambivalent regarding Sub-Saharan African fiction, the situation is decidedly bleaker in relation to slave narratives, which in the French speaking world are deemed virtually non-existent (Moudileno 1999: 84; Reinhardt 2006: 14; Miller 2008: 34). It is at this point in the discussion that this study begins outlining its central premise - that Henriette Akofa’s *Une esclave moderne* and Lucien Badjoko’s *J’étais enfant soldat* form the basis of a modern slave narrative tradition in the French speaking world.

\(^{22}\) This study refers to the term ‘trade’ in the plural in order to draw attention the other kinds of slave trades (in addition to the trans-Atlantic slave trade) that have existed in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as the trans-Saharan slave trade, which trafficked Africans to the Middle East and internal slave trading within the African continent itself. For an overview of the trans-Saharan slave trade see Miller (2005); for an overview of internal slave trading see Lovejoy (2000).
1.1 Slavery in Sub-Saharan Africa: a narrative of trauma and fractured memories

In ‘A propos des écritures africaines de soi’ Achille Mbembe firmly asserts: ‘il n’existe pas, à proprement parler, de mémoire africaine de l’esclavage. Ou si mémoire de l’esclavage il y a, celle-ci se caractérise par la diffraction’ (2000: 32). Here Mbembe suggests that there is a deep silence surrounding slavery in the African collective consciousness or that if such a memory exists—the use of an if-clause suggests that this is highly unlikely—it is so fragmented and insignificant that it is barely noticeable. Instead Mbembe implies that because of the trauma associated with the slave trade, memories of it have been buried in the realm of the unconscious and remain unavailable to conscious recall. Mbembe points to the trauma of the slave trade by describing the experience of it as ‘une blessure’ and by claiming that its meaning can only be understood at an unconscious level (2000: 33).23 Mbembe claims that any attempt to recover these repressed memories has been futile, arguing ‘là où des efforts de remémoration consciente ont lieu, ils n’échappent guère à l’ambivalence’ (2000: 33).24 Mbembe does appear to concede though, by suggesting that memories of slavery and the slave trade may be expressed indirectly through symbols and rituals associated with witchcraft. He does so by referring to an article by Rosalind Shaw (1997) in which she explores how memories of the slave trade in the Temne-speaking communities in Sierra

23 Caroline Garland posits: ‘trauma is a kind of wound. When we call an event traumatic, we are borrowing from the word from the Greek where it refers to the piercing of the skin, a breaking of the bodily envelope’ (1998: 9). In the field of psychoanalytic studies, trauma used to be understood as a bodily wound; it also later became defined as a mental wound thanks to the work of Sigmund Freud (1922). According to Freud (1922), when somebody experiences trauma, something breaks through the mind’s protective shield—the membrane of the ego. The traumatic experience cannot be fully registered in the consciousness and therefore resides in the unconscious; it remains unspeakable.

24 Mbembe refers here to a work by Theresa Singleton (1999) in which she explores how the trans-Atlantic slave trade has been remembered along the former slave coast of West Africa, with a particular focus on Ghana. Singleton argues that while increasing efforts have been made since the 1990s to excavate memories of the slave trade, these have been hampered by struggles over meaning. A prominent example Singleton (1999) draws attention to is the controversy concerning the restoration of castles in Ghana that once served as key slavery sites. African-Americans both based in the US and currently living in Ghana have fiercely objected to ‘the slave dungeons being used as a staging areas for concerts, plays and other public events’ and as museums (1999: 156). However, for the locals and museum personnel ‘the slave trade is only one chapter in the complex histories of the castles, and of Ghana as a whole’ and view the castles as a place to tell their stories (Singleton 1999: 157).
Leone are expressed through spirits and rituals. However by alluding to Shaw’s article in a footnote Mbembe ultimately dismisses its significance.

Like Mbembe, Sylvie Chalaye (1999) and Maurice Bandaman (1998) also stress the collective trauma of the slave trade and suggest that these memories have yet to emerge out of the African unconscious. In her discussion of francophone African drama and slavery, Chalaye—like Mbembe—also refers to the experience of the slave trade as a wound: ‘l’esclavage et la traite restent une plaie encore à vif et suintante; il n’y a pas eu de dépassement libératoire’ (1999: 7). The image of an open, weeping wound implies that there remains a significant amount of healing to be done; the contention that there has been no effective outlet or release for these traumatic memories suggests that they remain buried beneath the surface. Ivorian writer and playwright Bandaman on the other hand states: ‘on éprouve encore de la douleur à évoquer ce passé’ (1998: 27). In this interview, Bandaman (1998) compares the reactions of Sub-Saharan Africans to those of individuals from the French speaking islands of the Caribbean: he argues that while the latter consider it necessary to mourn this dark period in their history, Africans are keen to forget it. Yet Bandaman (1998) argues, it is only in evoking this past that Africans today will be able to move forward and ‘extirper’ these traumatic memories from their subconscious.

1.2 Obstacles to the recovery of memories of the slave trade(s) and slavery
Mbembe (2000) continues his discussion by considering several factors that have hindered the task of recuperating these repressed memories of the trans-Atlantic slaving period. Firstly, Mbembe contends that Africans have been hesitant in engaging with the historical memory of trans-Atlantic slavery because of ‘la culpabilité et le refus des Africains de faire face à la part troublante du crime, celle qui engage directement leur
responsabilité’ (2000: 33). The acknowledgement of African participation in the slave trade, Mbembe argues, would risk removing the African individual from the position of perpetual victim. Here Mbembe’s remarks fall within a wider discussion on nativism and Afro-radicalism which, Mbembe claims, have dominated African scholarship since the anti-colonial era and subsequently driven African philosophical thought to ‘a dead end’ (2000: 19). For Mbembe the main issue with nativist thought derives from the way in which it fully embraces the fiction of race by stressing Africans’ uniqueness and alterity (2000: 25-27). Afro-radicalism on the other hand, Mbembe argues, has led to ‘la névrose de la victimisation’ (2000: 30), that it, it has fostered an understanding of the African subject as a passive body acted upon by forces out of his control. Mbembe asserts: ‘l’Africain ne serait, au fond, qu’un sujet castré, l’instrument passif de la jouissance de l’Autre’ (2000: 25). Accordingly, the African subject is never seen as acting for himself and therefore cannot be deemed to be responsible for actions that are determined by forces beyond his control.

Similarly, Senegalese writer Boubacar Boris Diop (1998) argues that one of the main reasons for which the subject of the trans-Atlantic slave trade is rarely evoked in Africa is because of ‘la difficulté pour les victimes de reconnaître leurs fautes, car l’une des situations de l’esclavage veut qu’on soit à la fois victime et complice’. Yet negotiating this liminal position is no easy task as academic debates reveal a tension between constructing Africans as victims, as only they were subjected to slave trading and forced labour on a mass scale, and constructing Africans as freely choosing agents, who collaborated with European slave traders and therefore are partly accountable.25

For other scholars, however, it is not a case of refusing to recognise African

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25 For instance on the one hand Pierre Akendengue (2006) argues that the slave trade involves ‘un double partage de responsabilité’ and rejects the idea of compensating Africans financially on the basis that this would negate Africans’ responsibility in the trade. On the other, Akendengue maintains that in order for the history of trans-Atlantic slavery and slave trade to be taught in a more open and transparent manner, it is necessary to move beyond narratives of abolitionism in order to acknowledge that ‘l’esclavage a appauvi le continent africain au profit de l’Occident’ and that the slave trade remains one of the root causes of problems in Africa today.
participation in the trade, but rather a concern as to the purpose and merits of doing so. Lawoetey Pierre Ajavon (2009: 2) for instance raises his concerns about what he calls ‘la globalisation de la culpabilité’ – the tendency to hold all Africans accountable for the trade. Ajavon points out that during German occupation of France in World War II, a number of French nationals and even the French state collaborated with the Nazis, yet he argues ‘cela n’a pas transformé tous les Français en collabos’ (2009: 2). Françoise Vergès on the other hand, points to the perils of denouncing Africans for their participation in the trade arguing: ‘dès lors qu’il n’existerait pas de frontière claire entre bourreaux et victimes, le crime se trouverait amoindri et ne constituerait plus un crime contre l’humanité’ (2006a: 142).

As well as an alleged historical refusal on behalf of Sub-Saharan Africans to accept responsibility for their role in the slave trade, Mbembe argues that a second challenge to the recovery of repressed memories of slavery and the slave trade is the refusal of descendants of African slaves to acknowledge their roots. Mbembe states:

La deuxième raison est d’un autre ordre. Dans certaines parties du Nouveau Monde, la mémoire de l’esclavage est consciemment refoulée aux marges de l’existence par les descendants d’esclaves africains […] Il s’agit à la fois du refus d’avouer ses ascendances et du refus de se souvenir d’un acte porteur de honte. (2000: 34)

Mbembe suggests that memories of slavery and the slave trade are deliberately suppressed because of the shame they arouse for the descendants of slaves living in parts of the New World today. Yet Mbembe argues, despite their efforts, they are unable to escape ‘une sorte de spectre’ that constantly persecutes and haunts them and inscribes on their unconscious ‘le corps mort d’un langage qu’il s’agit, sans cesse, de refouler’ (2000: 34). The notion that this language must be constantly repressed not only
reinforces the difficulty of doing so but also brings to light the nature of traumatic memory: as it is commonly asserted in the field of trauma studies, people who have experienced trauma are haunted repeatedly and relentlessly by memories of it that interrupt the present. A prominent figure in this respect is Cathy Caruth who asserts that a traumatic experience is an event that is experienced ‘too soon, too unexpectedly to be fully known’ (1996: 4) and is therefore unavailable to conscious recall. As a result, the traumatic experience can only be understood when it imposes itself belatedly and repeatedly in the form of flashbacks, nightmares and other repetitive actions of the survivor; the survivor is thus compelled to ‘perform’ and re-enact the traumatic experience in the present (Caruth 1996: 91).

Mbembe argues that efforts to deny one’s slaving heritage because of the shame it arouses have been particularly notable in the Caribbean (2000: 34), a claim reinforced by Christiane Falgayrettes-Leveau (2006) and Édouard Glissant (2006). Falgayrettes-Leveau contends that attempts to integrate this painful history into the social fabric of the present becomes a daunting task because of ‘[la] grande honte’ it still evokes for some people living in the Caribbean today. In the same way, Glissant (2006) asserts ‘il y a quelque chose de la honte de la souffrance subie’ that has led to the desire to forget this painful past amongst people in the Caribbean. However, Glissant (2006) stresses that ‘la volonté d’oubli’ there is very different to that in France: whilst in the case of the former it is an unconscious reaction caused by the trauma of the slave trade he claims, in France’s case it is calculated and deliberate in order to avoid any negative reaction to the colonial enterprise, the system behind slavery.

Surprisingly given its dominant role in the French Atlantic triangle, Mbembe (2000) makes no reference to France and to how its fraught and ambivalent relationship with its slaving (and colonial) past may have affected collective memory in the French
Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet in light of the work of scholars such as Catherine Reinhardt (2007) and Myriam Cottias (2005)—who argue that the French Republic orchestrated ‘a controlled forgetting’ of slavery in its colonies in order to allow ‘[les] frères esclaves d’entrer dans la grande famille nationale’—France’s role in the repression and obstruction of memories of trans-Atlantic slavery and the slave trade in francophone territories clearly warrants attention. Such a task is rendered more urgent by works such as Sylvie Chalaye’s (1999) mentioned earlier, in which she proposes a relationship between France’s reluctance to engage with its slaving past and the dearth of francophone Sub-Saharan African plays on the subject of trans-Atlantic slavery and the slave trade.

1.3 African literature, slavery and the slave trades: amnesia and silence?

Like Mbembe (2000), a number of writers and scholars in the field of African literary studies share the view that there remains a profound silence surrounding trans-Atlantic slavery and the slave trade (Opoku-Agyemang 1996; Maduakor 1997; Borgomano 2000; Alem 2006). One of the most important works in this regard is Madeleine Borgomano’s ‘La littérature romanesque d’Afrique noire et l’esclavage: « une mémoire de l’oubli »?’ (2000) because of the scope of her analysis – she offers one of the most comprehensive studies of twentieth century francophone African novels of slavery and the slave trades. In a similar way to Mbembe, Borgomano suggests that trauma and shame have played an integral role in cultivating this silence, she argues: ‘l’esclavage et la traite forment une zone si douloureuse et chargée de honte que l’on ose à peine s’en

26 This is indicated by incidents such as the controversy surrounding the much cited controversial fourth clause of the of the 23 February 2005 law that requested that the positive role of France’s presence in its colonies be recognized and taught in schools, and the case brought against French historian Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, whose remarks (“les traites négrières ne sont pas des génocides”) in an interview led to the first invocation of the Taubira law (Forsdick 2008: xiii). For the full text of the ‘Loi n°2005-158 du 23 février 2005 portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés’ see: <http://legifrance.gouv.fr>.

27 Here Cottias (2005: 59) cites Ernest Renan, a nineteenth century French philosopher and writer.
approcher’ (2000: 99). For Borgomano this silence is all the more perplexing and paradoxical in light of the fact that memories of the slave trade can be strongly felt in the African oral tradition and the vigour with which these same novels that ignore slavery have ‘représenté, raillé et dénoncé tous les maux de l’Afrique’ (2000: 101, 99). Yet for other critics, such as Kangni Alem (2006), it is precisely because of les maux to which the Sub-Saharan African region has been subjected that there has been—what the Togolese writer refers to as—‘une amnésie sélective’ amongst Sub-Saharan African writers not only regarding the trans-Atlantic slave trade, but also internal slave trading and the trans-Saharan slave trade. Ultimately, for Alem (2006) the reason for the absence or dearth of African fiction on slavery and the slave trades derives from the fact that Sub-Saharan African writers were and remain preoccupied with more pressing political and social issues such as colonialism, the struggle for independence, civil war, neocolonialism and so forth.

By the same token, this may explain to some extent why trans-Atlantic slavery and the slave trade have received comparatively less attention in francophone Sub-Saharan African writing than in that of the French speaking islands of the Caribbean (Borgomano 2000: 100). For the writers most actively involved in integrating painful memories of slavery and the slave trade into the social fabric of the present come from France’s remaining overseas territories, namely Martinique and Guadeloupe - in other words, from countries whose histories have been relatively less turbulent and volatile.

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28 Borgomano refers here to the work of Djibril Tamsir Niane (1997). Similarly, Françoise Vergès argues that oral memories of the trade constitute ‘une archive irremplaçable’ (2005: 1155) and more recently conferences have been held in order to gather together researchers currently looking into memories of the slave trades in ritual, song and dance in African communities, such as that held by the University of Toronto (20-23 May 2009) entitled ‘Tales of Slavery: Narratives of Slavery, the Slave Trade and the Enslavement in Africa’. The significance of the African oral tradition in perpetuating memories of slavery and the slave trade is not downplayed here intentionally, it is that this is beyond the scope of this study, which focuses on how slavery is represented in the francophone African written tradition. One might speculate that one of the reasons for which memories of slavery and the slave trade are evident in the African oral tradition and not the African written tradition at least during the colonial era, is because the former was not controlled by the European colonialists. As it is generally acknowledged, for much of the colonial period, African writers could only publish literary works via ‘the patronage of the colonial administrators, school teachers and missionaries’ so that the colonial powers could dictate or censor the content (Jack 1996: 125). Writers would therefore perhaps hesitate in choosing slavery as a theme for their work, given that this would explicitly undermine the legitimacy of the colonial enterprise.
than many nations in the Sub-Saharan African region. Moreover, as Aurélie L’Hostis reminds us, for writers living in the Antilles, representing slavery and the slave trade in their works not only serves as a way of giving expression to their cultural dislocation and sense of loss, but also of reclaiming and re-writing the region’s tortured history (2008: 53, 55). Prominent writers in this respect include the late Aimé Césaire, who as far back as the 1930s was representing the damaging effects of slavery, the slave trade and colonialism in works such as his well-known poem *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (1939); Edouard Glissant, who in works such as *Monsieur Toussaint* (a play produced in 1961 that portrays the life of the famous Haitian leader who orchestrated the Haitian revolution, which led to independence in 1804) has endeavoured to recover histories marginalized by the master narratives of French historiography and actively re-shape the Antillean collective memory; and Maryse Condé who through her writing has sought to re-inscribe into the Caribbean consciousness forgotten or neglected historical figures such as Tituba (Condé 1986), a former slave of Barbados and the first female to be accused of witchcraft in the Salem trials of 1692.

Ironically, while Borgomano laments ‘un grand silence’ concerning slavery and the slave trade amongst francophone Sub-Saharan African writers (2000: 100), the extensive list she offers of Sub-Saharan African writers who have represented these themes or alluded to them in their works (Borgomano refers to the more than a dozen novels written by some of Sub-Saharan Africa’s best known writers), suggests that the themes of slavery and the slave trades nevertheless remain a feature of the region’s

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29 Within this context, it is interesting to note that critics such as Alem (2006) suggest that there is a silence surrounding slavery and slave trade in Haitian literature. This is all the more surprising given that Haiti (or Saint Domingue as it was known under colonial rule) waged one of the most important historical slave revolts, culminating in its independence from the French in 1804 and thus was the first Caribbean state to gain independence (Quirk 2009: 76-78). Again, it could be argued that the decades of political strife, instability and civil war that has characterised Haiti’s history has diverted attention away from the issue of slavery amongst its writers.
literary canon. Moreover, Borgomano concludes her study arguing that ‘l’Afrique attend encore le grand roman qui réparerait cet oubli et briserait ce silence’ (2000: 112), yet at the same time refers to some of the most searing indictments of the internal and external slave trading in the Sub-Saharan African region such as Yambo Ouologuem’s *Le Devoir de Violence* (1968) and Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Monnè, Outrages et Défis* (1990).

Ouologuem’s novel (1968) centres on the fictitious African country of Nakem and its long brutal and rigorous slaving history, during which the native population fell prey to the European colonial powers and Muslim slave traders. However, it is not only outsiders who are actively denounced for their roles in the trafficking of slaves in the region but Africans too. Interestingly, when the novel was published in 1968 the Malian writer was accused of plagiarism and the novel was met with fierce criticism by several African critics who ‘wished to discredit Ouologuem for having laid a portion of the blame for the slave trade at the doorstep of conniving Black chieftains’ (Sellin 1976: 141). The accusations levelled against Ouologuem and the fact this criticism mainly emanated from African critics is telling in that it implies a certain reluctance to acknowledge the role of African middle men in the slave trade, thus reinforcing Mbembe’s remarks discussed earlier. In the same way, Kourouma also focuses attention on the involvement of Africans in slave trading and slavery in the African interior prior to the arrival of the Europeans in *Monnè, Outrages et Défis* (1990: 21). The novel depicts a small Malinké kingdom and its king Djigui Keita, who in his lifetime witnesses the arrival of the French colonisers and their consolidation and abuse of power in the seven decades that follow. More importantly, the Ivorian writer also brings to light the contradictions of the definitive abolition of slavery in France’s colonies by

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alluding to the forced labour to which the indigenous population were subjected - with biting sarcasm the narrative voice states: ‘Les travaux forcés n’étaient pas l’esclavage: les travailleurs forcés seraient nourris, logés, vêtus et rémunérés. A leur départ, ils auraient un couvre-pieds; au retour, un pécule, c’est-à-dire de l’argent, qui leur permettrait…d’acheter des miroirs et des aiguilles; autant de choses qui civilisent’ (1990: 61).

More recently, literary scholars have begun to question this ‘profound silence’ and ‘forgetting’ regarding slavery and the slave trades amongst Sub-Saharan writers: while Christopher Miller argues that this silence ‘is in fact rather noisy’ (2008: xiii), Laura Murphy refutes it altogether claiming that memories of the slave trades are often overlooked ‘because they are not revealed in the forms of overt narrativization so familiar to African American literature’ (2008). Miller’s remarks are made in The French Atlantic (2008)—the first comparative study of the cultural ramifications of the trans-Atlantic slave trade on French, African and Caribbean literature and film. Although Miller explicitly states that his intention ‘is not to refute or describe an African literary “silence”’ (2008: 364), he nevertheless appears to reject the idea that Sub-Saharan Africans have done little to break this silence by arguing: ‘if there is a silence, it is what Sony Labou Tansi once called un silence métissé, a half-caste silence, interrupted by some creative sound’ (2008: 364). In order to illustrate the kind of ‘interruptions’ and ‘creative sounds’ he is referring to, Miller refers to films such as Roger Gnoan M’Bala’s ‘Adanggaman’ (2000) and Christian Richard’s ‘Le Courage des Autres’ (1983). The former take places in seventeenth century West Africa where King Adanggaman wages war against neighbouring ethnic rival groups, subsequently captures them and sells some of them to European slave traders. The latter was filmed in Burkina Faso and centres on a slaves’ revolt against their black African oppressors.
The significance of both, Miller argues, is that ‘the slave trade is visualized as a black-on-black crime,’ thus breaking the silence of African participation in slave trading (2008: 376-377).

With regards to francophone African literary representations of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Miller alludes to Ousmane Sembène’s novel *Le docker noir* (1956), which he describes as ‘one of the most significant and explicit considerations of the world the French slave trade left behind’ (2008: 369). The novel centres on the life of Diaw Fall, a Senegalese migrant working in the Marseille docklands during the 1950s and on the migrant community to which he belongs. He writes a novel entitled ‘Le dernier voyage du négrier Sirius’ which portrays the horrors of the Middle Passage and trans-Atlantic slavery. Unable to find a publisher, he enlists the help of a young Parisian woman. When he finds out that the same woman passes off his novel as her own, he accidently kills her and ends up on trial for murder. Importantly, Miller (2008: 369) recognises the metaphorical connection Sembène establishes between modern migrant labour and slavery in order to suggest a continuous history of exploitation and oppression in the post-abolitionist era. Indeed, this is a narrative ploy Sembène will take up again in *La noire de...* (1962), a fictional account of a young Senegalese girl Diouna, who is brought to France where she is exploited as *une bonne* by her white French employers. In order to create the analogy between the French couple’s exploitation of Diouna and that of African slaves during the trans-Atlantic slavery period, Sembène alludes to the symbolically significant landmark of Gorée island when the protagonist contemplates her future life in France (Sembène 1962: 168) and to the Middle Passage, as she travels to France by boat, while her employers travel by plane.

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31 By way of illustration, when the protagonist protests about the exploitative and precarious circumstances in which he and his fellow migrant workers find themselves in, he makes several references to chattel slavery: ‘Nous ne sommes pas des esclaves’ (1956: 143); ‘Personne ne travaillera plus sous la pluie. Après tout on ne vous appartient pas’ (1956: 144); ‘Il veut nous posséder’ (1956: 146, my emphasis).
As this study will reveal in chapter four, this interplay between historical and contemporary moments of exploitation is equally visible in several contemporary francophone African literary representations of slavery in the modern era (Boutora-Takpa 2002; Couao-Zotti et al. 2006).

Murphy (2007) on the other hand, is much more radical in her approach than Miller as she actively disputes the notion of a silence and amnesia regarding the slave trades in Sub-Saharan African literature, and in particular Mbembe’s contention that there is no African memory of slavery as such.32 Although Murphy (2007: 143) concedes that ‘there may be a certain silencing of discourse regarding the trade’ she argues that the presence of the slave trade can nonetheless be strongly felt in West African fiction. Murphy contends that part of the problem of existing scholarship on African literature and slavery is that scholars have failed to see memories of the slave trade because they are encoded in implicit forms of representation such as tropes and metaphors. One recurring trope that Murphy (2007: 147) identifies in novels such as Amos Tutuola’s My Life in the Bush of Ghosts (1954) is what she coins ‘the trope of the body in the bag’ (whereby the protagonist of the text describes being placed in a big bag). For Murphy (2007: 147) this ‘is clearly part of the imagination of the machinations of the slave trade’ as slaves were usually placed in sacks during slave raids in the African interior. Consequently, Murphy contends, instead of looking for overt and familiar forms of narrativisation, particularly those associated with Afro-
American literature ‘we must seek ... representations of the traces of the collective past which arise in the conscious and unconscious memory of these texts’ (2007: 144).

As this section has shown, two conflicting yet complementary positions have emerged in scholarship regarding Sub-Saharan African literary representations of slavery and the slave trades. On the one hand, there is the idea of a collective ‘silence’ and ‘forgetting’ surrounding slavery and the slave trades; memories remain repressed or are so fragmented that they are insignificant. On the other, is the contention that representations of slavery and the slave trade are visible in Sub-Saharan African literature; rather it is a question of deciphering the implicit forms in which they are represented and recognising that the fragments of memory found in these texts bear greater significance than they first appear. As this study will reveal, these opposing viewpoints will prove an effective framework of reading for Akofa’s and Badjoko’s narratives.

1.4 Slave narrative traditions

While Miller describes the silence regarding slavery as ‘un silence métissé’ in relation to francophone Sub-Saharan African fiction, he admits that the situation is distinctly less favourable in relation to francophone slave narratives:

In the English-speaking world and especially in the United States, the problem of silence is significantly offset by testimonies and narratives, beginning with Equiano’s. But in French the problem is far more serious, for there are no real slave narratives in French—not as we know them in the Anglophone Atlantic, not that have yet been discovered. (2008: 34, emphasis in original)
Olaudah Equiano was a former African slave who became a prominent figure in the British movement for the abolition of the slave trade. His autobiography *The Interesting Narrative* (1789), a vivid portrayal of the horrors of the Middle Passage and slavery in the New World, is said to have played a part in persuading British lawmakers to abolish the slave trade in 1807, eight years before the French did in 1815. Equiano’s narrative is only one of several slave narratives (Baquaqua 1854; Cugoano 1825 [1757]) that depicts the African side of the trans-Atlantic triangle (Miller 2008: 33-34), as he portrays his capture as a child from his village (in what is today known as Nigeria). The majority of Anglophone slave narratives were written by slaves from the American South. Conversely, in the French speaking islands of the Caribbean, no slave narratives are said to have been written (or have yet been discovered). In fact, Miller (2008: 34) describes the slave testimonies that appeared in the States as ‘an exception’ given that only one slave narrative from Cuba (Francisco Manzano 1849) came out of the entire Caribbean. The reason for the absence of francophone slave narratives Miller (2008: 35-36) proposes, is because of strict controls on literacy in the French speaking islands of the Caribbean; an educated or literate slave was deemed to be a danger as he risked staging a revolt. For this reason, instruction was avoided at all costs, except for that in religion which was taught orally (Miller 2008: 35). Miller (2008: 36) grants that there were some exceptions (for example letters by slaves from Saint-Domingue and others published in newspapers) but that they do not compare to the African American slave narratives (Douglass 1845, 1855; Jacobs 1861) which emerged in the United States during the nineteenth century.

Françoise Charras (1998) on the other hand, offers an altogether different explanation to account for the absence of slave narratives in the French speaking world as she argues:
Ceci tient sans doute à ce que, chez nous, le discours abolitionniste est essentiellement philosophique ou politique, ou bien il s’inscrit dans la tradition du roman philosophique ou sentimental. Malgré les liens qui unissent les différents mouvements anti-esclavagistes, il s’agit bien de deux traditions distinctes.

Indeed the abolitionist movements in the English and French speaking worlds were conducted very differently to one another.\(^{33}\) Whilst in the former, slave narratives played a pivotal role in the anti-slavery efforts (Smith Foster 1994: 190), in the latter, French Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu (1748) Raynal (1770) Mercier (1771), drummed up support for the abolitionist cause by focusing attention on the brutality and injustices of slavery (Kadish 1998: 534). The Enlightenment thinkers also inspired the intellectual elite that led the fight against the slave trade and slavery in France from 1789 to 1830 (Jennings 2000: 21).\(^{34}\)

While Miller’s and Charras’ arguments may differ, they nevertheless come to the same conclusion, that is, there is no slave narrative tradition as such exists in the French speaking world. As noted earlier, the central tenet of this thesis is that a modern slave narrative tradition is beginning to emerge in the French speaking world. Given the absence of francophone slave narratives and more importantly, because the slave narrative genre is said to have originated in slaves narratives written by slaves from the American South in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this study now briefly looks

\(^{33}\) It is, however, important to note how closely linked the two movements were and the profound influence the British abolitionists had on the French anti-slavery efforts. For instance, the British provided the French abolitionists with the necessary documents to attack the slave trade and supported them financially (Jennings 2000: 1-2). Thomas Clarkson, a leading figure of the British abolitionist movement and other British abolitionists, also spent a considerable amount of time in France in an attempt to inspire and advance the French abolitionist efforts (Jennings 2000: 2). As a result of British support, the French abolitionists became very isolated; it also limited the chances of anti-slavery becoming popular in France (Jennings 2000: 21). For a detailed overview of the French abolitionist movement see: Lawrence Jennings (2000).

\(^{34}\) On account of its elitist orientation, the French abolitionist movement received little public support or funding. Consequently, the French turned towards the British abolitionists for assistance and guidance, as noted above.
at the African American slave narrative tradition in order to identify key issues that have dominated the slave narrative genre since its inception.

Although slave narratives originated around the mid eighteenth century (see Hammon 1760; Gronniosaw 1770; Equiano 1789), it was only those from around the 1830s onwards that became recognised as part of ‘a distinct and coherent genre’ in the United States (Meer 2001: 814). The majority of texts were written when slavery remained legal in the American South but had been prohibited in the North (Heglar 2001: 8) and were mainly ‘produced under the aegis of the American Anti-Slavery Society’ (Meer 2001: 814-815). Slave narratives not only became crucial to the abolitionist efforts of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but also played a pivotal role in propagating religious ideas and therefore often ‘employed Christian tropes about the nature of enslavement and liberation’ (see Craft 1860) (Gould 2007: 20). While the Northern abolitionists usually managed the whole enterprise of producing, publishing and disseminating slave narratives, the Quakers and other religious groups were often important patrons. The narratives were generally marketed for a predominantly white audience in order to gather support for the abolitionist movement in the United States. This meant deploying a set of rhetorically effective conventions that white readers both valorised and recognised (Hesse 2002) but that did not ‘unnecessarily antagonize’ them (Foster Smith 1994: 13). It also involved depicting scenes of violence and cruelty, not only to stir up support for the antislavery cause but also ‘to satisfy the public’s appetite for sensationalism’ (Foster Smith 1994: 20). In turn, these factors provided fertile grounds for defenders of slavery from the South to call into question the authenticity and credibility of slave narratives and the abolitionist movement as a whole (Smith and Watson 2001: 29-30). One of the most significant examples in this regard is Harriet Jacobs Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861), one
of only a few surviving slave narratives written by a woman. Soon after the publication of Jacobs’ narrative, it was dismissed as a fabrication and Jacobs’ status as its author was called into question (Smith and Watson 2001: 30). These claims arose from the fact that Jacobs fictionalized the names of several people in her narrative including that of her autobiographical self and because of the close involvement of Lydia Maria, the editor, in the production of the narrative (Smith and Watson 2001: 30). It was not until Jean Fagan Yellin published a study in 1987 that documented the historical veracity of the narrative that it shifted from being an alleged fabrication to one of the most taught slave narratives in the United States (Smith and Watson 2001: 30).

For these reasons until their re-editing and publication during the civil rights movements of the 1960s in the United States, African American slave narratives were disregarded as ‘une littérature de propagande sans aucune valeur historique’ (Charras, 1998). Since then, African American slave narratives have been incorporated into the literary canon in the United States and credited with laying the foundations of the African American literary tradition. What has become clear, however, is that underlying tensions surrounding authorial control and white mediation continue to plague the slave narrative genre. Questions still remain over the extent to which the subaltern voices of the slaves could be heard given the close involvement of the abolitionists and white sponsors. In this respect, James Olney’s article ‘I was born: slaves narratives, their status as autobiography and as literature’ (1984) has been highly influential.

In this article, Olney laments ‘the overwhelming sameness’ (1984: 46, emphasis in original) of African American slave narratives and focuses attention on the problem of memory in order to disqualify them as autobiographical writing. Olney posits:
The slave narrative, with very few exceptions, tends to exhibit a highly, conventional, rigidly fixed form that bears much the same relationship to autobiography in a full sense as painting by numbers bears to painting as a creative act. (1984: 48)

In the act of remembering, the autobiographical subject actively reflects on and creates the meaning of the past; memory shapes the past ‘according to the configuration of the present’ (Olney 1984: 48). Yet Olney claims, in antebellum slave narratives the former slaves exercise memory with the sole intent of recalling their experiences as ‘fact’ and not of reflecting about them in an imaginative and subjective fashion (see Brown 1851; Ball 1837). Olney (1984: 48-9) attributes this to the fact that the main objective of these narratives was ‘to give a picture of “slavery as it is”’ so as to meet the political ends of the antislavery movement and avoid accusations of fabrication. This led to slave narratives tending ‘to exhibit a highly conventional, rigidly fixed form’ and adopting a set of conventions that were so firmly established, that they constituted what Olney calls a ‘Master Plan for Slave Narratives,’ which dictated both the form and the content (1984: 49-52). With regards to the form, Olney (1984: 50-51) maintains that the slave narratives normally included specific paratextual features such as the inclusion of an engraved portrait, signed by the narrator; a poetic epigraph; a title that included the claim (or a close variant) “written by himself”; each narrative was endorsed by a white abolitionist who vouched for the authenticity of the narrative and so forth. With regards to the content, Olney (1984: 50-51) contends that the narratives usually included a vivid description of the cruelty of the slave owner and details of the physical acts of brutality to which the slave protagonist had been subjected; a description of the slave auction and of families being separated and destroyed; an account of how hard working the slave was to cite just a few examples. In turn, Olney (1984: 51) argues, this left no room for
creative and imaginative intervention on behalf of the writer, nor did it leave any for the intellectual, emotional and moral growth of the slave narrator-protagonist.

The impact of Olney’s article could be immediately felt in the late 1980s. A poignant example is Toni Morrison’s well-known novel *Beloved* (1987). Morrison claims that the purpose of her text was to recreate the interior life of the slave, which up to that point had been deliberately suppressed by slave narrators due to the constrained conditions in which their narratives were produced (cited in Fleischner 1996: 14). Another prominent work that Olney appears to have influenced at that time is John Sekora’s ‘Black Envelope/White Envelope’ (1987). Like Olney, Sekora also discounts the autobiographical dimension of slave narratives and takes up the related problem of authorial control. Sekora argues that due to anxieties surrounding the credibility and authority of black slave writers, the abolitionists were more interested in ‘white authentication’ than in ‘black storytelling’ (1987: 497). As a result, more attention was paid to ensuring these texts were “validated” through paratextual means similar to those outlined above (testimonies written by white figures, signed photos of the slaves and so forth) than to what the slaves had to say (Sekora 1987: 497). Ultimately, for Sekora ‘the overarching shape of the story [...was] mandated by persons other than the subject’ (1987: 509).

While Olney’s article (1984) found wide-ranging support in the 1980s, its influence on literary criticism on slave narratives can still be felt today despite the passing of over 25 years. By way of illustration, Jennifer Fleischner argues that until the publication of her text *Mastering Slavery* in 1996 slave narratives were deemed ‘not amenable to psychoanalysis because of the limiting demands of the genre and the market prohibited their individuation, one from another’ (13). More recently, Barnor Hesse (2002: 147) in his discussion of antebellum slave narratives maintained that slave
writers ‘escaped economic commodification only to be commodified politically’ in the hands of the abolitionists. Michael Chaney (2008: 284) in his critical review of the *Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative* laments the fact that the overall preoccupation amongst scholars with the contexts in which these narratives were produced, had led to ‘the implication that there is little of sustained thematic or theoretical value in slave narrative texts themselves’.  

Interestingly, in recent (albeit very limited) literary criticism regarding modern slave narratives, academics such as Ben Schiller (2004) and Dominic Thomas (2007) have also drawn attention to the process of mediation on which several modern slave narratives (Nazer 2003; Bok 2003; Akofa 2000) have relied and explore the impact of publication in a diasporic context on their content and form. Ben Schiller’s concern with authorial control is immediately made known by the title of his work - ‘[Un]authorised Voices – Who Speaks for the Slave?’ (2004). In this article, Schiller draws parallels between ‘the quest for authority’ (2004: 7) in African American slave narratives from the antebellum era and two modern slave narratives written by Sudanese former slaves Mende Nazer (2003) and Francis Bok (2003), which were both published in the United States. In *Slave* (2003) Nazer the narrator relates her experiences of being captured in a raid by Arab militia, of subsequently being enslaved in Khartoum and later being taken to London to be enslaved once again, this time by a Sudanese diplomat. In his slave narrative entitled *Escape from Slavery: the True Story of My Ten Years in Captivity and My Journey to Freedom in America* Bok also describes being captured during an Arab militia raid, his subsequent his life as a slave for a Sudanese Arabic man and his escape. Schiller (2004) underscores how, in the case of Mende Nazer’s text, a journalist was recruited ‘to witness the rescue [of Nazer] so it was “on record”’ thus mimicking the practice of the white authorities who vouched for North American slaves. Schiller

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35 Both Fleischner (1996) and Hesse (2002) refer to Olney’s article (1984) when making these statements.
(2004) also draws attention to the fact that in titles of both slave narratives, the words ‘true story’ are emphasised, thus imitating another convention of antebellum slave narratives.

The object of Dominic Thomas’ discussion (2007) on the other hand, is in fact Henriette Akofa’s Une esclave moderne – one of the primary texts of this study. Throughout his discussion, Thomas suggests how the writing of Akofa’s text in France may have impacted on its content and form. For instance Thomas argues that ‘assumptions are made concerning choices that African women should take, through paradigms indebted to Western feminist discourse’ (2007: 118) and that her narrative ‘is mediated through the lens of her post-French experience’ (2007: 118). More problematically, Thomas argues, the narrative is presented in such a way that an opposition arises whereby France is associated with justice and freedom and all responsibility for Henriette’s enslavement and oppression is transferred on to the African outsider (2007: 118-120) – an issue to which this study will return in chapter four. Although Thomas never directly equates this with the fact that Akofa relied on a process of mediation when writing her narrative and the involvement of French intermediaries in the production of her narrative, he nevertheless suggests that this has played some part (2007: 117).

Like that of Thomas, this study will also explore the postcolonial, diasporic context in which Akofa’s narrative (and Badjoko’s) is written and produced and how this affects how her experiences are represented, later in chapter four. It will also examine more closely the involvement of French intermediaries in the production of both texts. Where it differs from Thomas’ work, however, is that it pays close attention to signs of agency and indications that Akofa is behind the narrative. For while Thomas (2007: 125) describes Une esclave moderne as ‘an important testimonial narrative’ the
overall impression his critique leaves is that Akofa’s text is nothing more than an intricate web of French hegemonic discourses. To be clear, the intention here is not to dispute Thomas’ arguments, which are valid and insightful (in fact this study will draw on a number of them later in chapter four). Nor is it to suggest that the autobiographical subject can speak from an unmediated position or to deny the powerful forces of mediation to which literature in postcolonial, diasporic contexts is generally subjected. Rather it is to stress that consideration also needs to be taken of the writer’s agency in order to avoid co-opting in the silencing process; the (postcolonial) subject needs to be positioned as an agent rather than as a ‘pawn’ in the hands of Western publishers. A critique that is directed more towards Olney’s and Schiller’s works than Thomas’. The concern here is that once literary criticism on contemporary slave narratives begins to emerge more prominently, scholars will be so concerned with demonstrating the various ways in which the narrative lives of modern slaves are controlled and manipulated (like their predecessors’ as Olney and Sekora suggest) that little reflection will be given to how the writers exercise agency within these constraints. For while Olney’s and Sekora’s arguments are important because of how they draw attention to publishing and cultural constraints, it is equally vital that attention be granted to the growing awareness amongst writers of how to negotiate and manipulate the constraints to which they are subjected.

This heightened awareness particularly comes to light in the work of Richard Watts (2005) and Graham Huggan (2001). In *Packaging Post/Coloniality* Watts explores the use of paratextual material in francophone literature from the colonial era through to the postcolonial age and considers how it ‘is marked by changes in authority (both in who wields it and how it is wielded)’ (2005: 6). While Watts (2005: 9) concedes that ‘French publication of works in the postcolonial francophone world bear
traces of the colonial past,’ his work nonetheless documents the progressive loss of metropolitan control. In addition, Watts explores how postcolonial writers demonstrate their agency by manipulating and subverting paratextual features in their work. For instance Watts considers how, through their careful ‘reflection[s] on the architecture of the book,’ Henri Lopes and Édouard Glissant successfully break down the border between the inside and outside of the text (2005: 119-138). In the case of the former, Watts (2005: 126-130) looks at how the Congolese writer (1990; 1997) stresses the role of the publisher in the production of the text at an intra-textual level. In the case of the latter, Watts (2005: 133-134) examines how Glissant erases the hierarchical relationship between the patron and the author in novels such as Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Esclave vieil homme et le molosse* (1997) through a series of ‘entre-dires’ – textual episodes which do not promote the novel in any way but instead anticipate and run parallel to it.

Huggan (2001) on the other hand, examines the material conditions of production and consumption of postcolonial literature in the global market place. While Huggan considers the processes of commodification of postcolonial writing and how they are made ‘palatable’ for a predominantly metropolitan audience, he stresses that this does not mean that postcolonial writers are ‘lackeys’ in the publishing industry (2001: 30) and draws attention to how writers ‘play the market’ for their own ends (2001: 176).

The final issue that needs to be addressed here and which concludes this chapter is how a slave narrative is defined. The task of ensuring that the generic parameters of slave narratives are clearly defined in academic studies such as this, is rendered all the more pressing in light of the conceptual laxity that has already begun emerging surrounding the phrase ‘slave narrative’ in literary criticism regarding modern slave narratives. By way of illustration, in a review essay of Francis Bok’s *Escape from Slavery* (2003), Joe Lockard (2004) uses the phrase ‘neo-slave narratives’ and
‘contemporary slave narratives’ interchangeably, yet they are not synonymous. Whilst the former refers to a contemporary novel that assumes the conventions and the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative (Rushdy 1999: 3), the latter refers to a self-referential mode of writing by a former slave, as this study will shortly reveal. In a similar way, Charlotte Baker and Jennifer Jahn when introducing an article I wrote (Skinner 2008) mistakenly referred to the two modern slave narratives discussed—one of them being Akofa’s text (2000), the other Jean-Robert Cadet’s Restavec (1998)—as ‘neo-slave narratives’ (2008: 4).

1.5 Towards a new definition of a slave narrative

This study proposes that a slave narrative be redefined as ‘a life narrative of slavery’. This definition not only alters the generic framework within which a slave narrative is recognised, as this section will reveal, but also involves drawing on the novel repertoires of meaning with which the term ‘slavery’ is now being inflected. The latter will be explored in chapters two and three when this study looks at what it is that renders Akofa’s and Badjoko’s intra-textual experiences slavery. For now, this study explores how life narrative is theorized in tandem with the generic terms of the most common definition of slave narrative - an autobiography written by a (former) slave (Meer 2001: 814).

Life narrative is chosen instead of autobiography for the following reasons. Firstly, this study argues that slave narratives and narrators have been and continue to be judged against the generic ‘rules’ of what some critics, such as George Gusdorf

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36 At the back of their work on life narrative (on which this study’s definition is based) Smith and Watson (2001) provide a number of definitions for different genres of life narrative. They define a slave narrative as the following: ‘A mode of life narrative written by a fugitive or freed ex-slave about captivity, oppression—physical, economic and emotional—and escape from bondage into some form of “freedom”’ (2001: 204). Clearly, this resonates to some extent with my definition. However, it differs insofar as they are referring here specifically to African American slave narratives from the antebellum era and literary portrayals of chattel slavery - my definition on the other hand, involves moving beyond traditional understandings of slavery and is defined in relation to contemporary representations of slavery in the modern era.
define and understand as a Western mode of writing and its attendant ideologies. It is for precisely this reason that this study adopts Smith’s and Watson’s notion of ‘life narrative’ (2001). Smith and Watson (2001: 4) state that it was conceptualized in response to postcolonial and postmodern concerns about the inadequacies of the term ‘autobiography’ to describe a set of heterogeneous practices of self-referential writing from the past until the present day, and from the non-Western world also. Instead of getting rid of the term autobiography altogether however, Smith and Watson redefine it as a sub-genre of life narrative and distinguish between the two in the following way:

Life narrative, then, might best be approached as a moving target, a set of ever shifting self-referential practices that engage the past in order to reflect on identity in the present. Autobiography, by contrast, is a term for a particular practice of life narrative that emerged in the Enlightenment and has become canonical in the West. (2001: 3)

By suggesting that life narrative ‘might best be approached as a moving target, a set of shifting self-referential practices’ Smith and Watson point to the more fluid and flexible approach this study advocates in reading modern slave narratives. As the following chapters will show, the form and structure of Akofa’s and Badjoko’s narratives are very different from one another. There is no ‘rigidly fixed form’ that Olney (1984: 48) argues characterised African American slave narratives from the antebellum era.

In addition, it moves away from the master narrative of autobiography as theorised initially by philosophers such as Georg Misch (1907) and later developed by scholars such George Gusdorf ([1956] 1980) and Philippe Lejeune (1975). Their parochial focus on ‘a particular mode of life storytelling, the retrospective narration of “great” public lives’ (Smith and Watson 2002: 8) immediately becomes problematic
when brought into dialogue with Akofa’s and Badjoko’s texts. For although generally speaking both narratives conform to Philippe Lejeune’s definition of autobiography as ‘un récit rétrospectif en prose qu’une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu’elle met l’accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l’histoire de sa personnalité’ (1975: 14), they call into question the assumptions that surround understandings of canonical autobiography. For example, both narratives consist of ‘un récit retrospectif’ as indicated by the fact that the time of the narration is posterior to that of the story in each and the predominant use of the past tense. In both texts each narrator ‘met l’accent sur sa vie individuelle’ as indicated by use of the first person singular of ‘je’. Finally, they are both based on the experiences of ‘une personne réelle’ as suggested by paratextual features such the inclusion of a photo of Akofa on the front cover and the nominal relationship between the author, narrator and protagonist.

On the other hand, however, Badjoko’s and Akofa’s identities and experiences do not conform to the understanding of traditional autobiography as the prerogative of the white, Western male in which to reflect on his public achievements (Smith 1993). Une esclave moderne is the story of a young black Sub-Saharan African woman who is

37 The convergence between the identity of the author, narrator and protagonist indicates the sealing of what Lejeune (1975: 23-24) refers to as an autobiographical pact—a key defining feature of life narrative according to Smith and Watson (2001: 8). In other words, there is some indication embedded within the text that the narrator and protagonist share the same name as the real life writer, even if it is not explicitly stated. Lejeune (1973) presents this pact as a kind of implicit agreement between the writer and the reader whereby the writer invites the reader to believe that he/she is attempting to impart the truth when recounting his/her life story. Akofa demonstrates her commitment to telling ‘the truth’ at the beginning of the narrative, when she identifies the motive for writing her text as the desire to denounce ‘une forme d’esclavage moderne’ and declares that: ‘ce livre retrace le plus fidèlement possible mon histoire’ (2000: 9). In turn, Lejeune’s pact can be used to distinguish between life narrative and the generic terms of other definitions of slave narratives such as Ashraf Rushdy’s ‘neo-slave narrative’ (1999) as already discussed and Yolando Pierce’s ‘first person accounts of slavery’ (2006). With regards to the former, while narrators may employ the first person voice of antebellum slave narratives, the author, narrator and protagonist do not share the same name, and there is no referential relationship. The latter on the other hand, is paradoxically too broad yet at the same time too limiting. On the one hand, although it appears Pierce (2006) intends to refer uniquely to self-referential modes of writing—earlier in the same article Pierce refers to slave narratives as ‘any narrated, non-fictional account of an individual’s life in slavery’—allusion to the ‘first person’ voice means that fictional works, where there is no autobiographical pact established also fall under this definition. On the other hand, reference to the ‘first person’ as a key element of this definition immediately disqualifies as slave narratives literary oeuvres where the narrator deploys alternative or multiple subject positions. This is particularly problematic in relation to narratives of trauma where authors tend to ‘move away from recognizable autobiographical forms’ (Gilmore 2001: 7) and relate their lives through different subject positions as does Lucien in J’étais enfant soldat (2005), as chapter three will reveal.
reduced to slavery in Paris during the 1990s. Akofa’s undocumented migrant status and experience of being trafficked for domestic purposes depart significantly from Misch (1907) understanding of a ‘great public life,’ that is, somebody who has achieved fame in the public arena or played a pivotal role in important historical events (Smith & Watson 2001: 114). Likewise, Lucien Badjoko’s narrative centres on the life of a black African child soldier, a victim and agent of violence and thus does not conform to Misch’s notion (1907) of a representative and appropriate subject either. Moreover, unlike traditional autobiographers who wrote their autobiographies late in life (Smith and Watson 2001: 121), Akofa and Badjoko wrote theirs when they were in their early twenties and in both texts the story primarily centres on the teenage years of both narrator-protagonists.

Arguably, in recent decades an increasing number of postcolonial and/or marginalized subjects have found a space in which to represent their lives by renegotiating the terms of traditional autobiographical writing. By way of illustration, Françoise Lionnet (1995) and Barbara Harlow (1987) underscore how postcolonial writers have challenged the individualistic approach to autobiography, as advocated by critics such as Gusdorf ([1956] 1980). Lionnet argues that such an approach ‘contrasts sharply with the one used by most postcolonial writers who tend to define themselves with regard to a community, or an ethnic group’ (1995: 22). Likewise, Harlow posits that the prison memoirs of Third World political detainees discussed in her book ‘are to be distinguished from conventional autobiography inasmuch as the narratives are actively engaged in a re-definition of the self and the individual in terms of collective enterprise and struggle’ (1987: 119, 120).
Yet, as Smith and Watson argue in another collaborative work, traditional understandings of autobiography remain pervasive and still dictate to a certain degree the terms against which other practices of life narrative are measured:

While inviting all subjects to participate in its practices, it [autobiography] provides the constraining template or the generic “law” against which those subjects and their diverse forms of self-narrative are judged and found wanting. (1992: xviii)

This is not to deny the various ways in which the ‘constraining template’ of conventional autobiography has been challenged by new understandings of the (autobiographical) subject: psychoanalytical theories of a split and fragmented self have unsettled traditional notions of a coherent, unified self (Lacan 1968); postcolonial and feminist thought have problematized the notion of the white, Western male as the only representative subject for autobiographical writing (Whitlock 2000); poststructuralist notions of a decentred self have dismantled notions of a universal, sovereign self (Derrida 1967) and so forth. Rather, in positioning Akofa’s and Badjoko’s narratives (and other modern slave narratives) outside of the particularities of autobiography and re-situating them within the theoretical framework of life narrative, this study seeks to move away from a preoccupation with how they conform to or challenge the generic ‘rules’ a particular mode of self-referential writing in order to value the texts for what they are as opposed to what they are not.

Ultimately where the strength lies in Smith and Watson’s conceptualization of life narrative is that it is less prescriptive than autobiography. This is illustrated by the following definition they propose for life narrative:
Our working definition of...life narrative, rather than specifying the rules as a genre or form, understands it as a historically situated practice of self-representation. In such texts, narrators selectively engage their lived experiences through personal storytelling. Located in specific times and places, they are at the same time in dialogue with the personal processes and archives of memory. (2001: 14)

Importantly, Smith and Watson do not specify a historical period or a geographical location in which life narrative is said to have originated. Consequently it offers a broader, more inclusive perspective than autobiography, the roots of which are said to be firmly rooted in the early modern period in the West (Smith and Watson 2001: 2). Secondly, the use of the word ‘dialogue’ and the phrase ‘at the same time’ in the last sentence suggest a much more dynamic and interactive relation between the past and the present than in Lejeune’s definition discussed earlier. By stating that ‘narrators selectively engage their lived experiences through personal storytelling’ Smith and Watson also draw attention to the fragility of the traditional boundary drawn between fact and fiction and how it becomes blurred in practices of self narrative. For the self portrayed in the text is a projection and an image of the real-life writer, and not a transparent replication; it an image that is mediated through language, memory and the ego. Accordingly, in order to highlight this gap, from this moment onwards this study refers to the real life authors as Akofa and Badjoko and their textually constructed selves as Henriette and Lucien. Finally, this study argues that life narrative captures more effectively Akofa’s and Badjoko’s narratives because of its particular focus on ‘embodiment’. Crucially, Smith and Watson link the materiality of the body and subjectivity by describing life narrators as ‘embodied subjects’ and stressing that ‘the body is the textual surface upon which a person’s life is inscribed’ (2001: 37). As the
critical readings of Akofa’s and Badjoko’s narratives will reveal in the following chapters, their bodies are the very grounds upon which their narratives are written.

This brings this chapter to an end. To summarise, this chapter has examined critical debates concerning Sub-Saharan African literary representations of slavery and the slave trades. It has shown that whilst scholars hold conflicting views regarding Sub-Saharan African fiction, there is a general consensus that there is no slave narrative tradition in the French speaking world. It has also explored the origins of the slave narrative genre in the African American slave narrative tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and outlined some of the key concerns surrounding authorial control and white mediation, which prevail in contemporary discussions. Finally, it has indicated how the readings of slave narratives in this study will differ and has redefined slave narratives as life narratives of slavery. If Akofa’s and Badjoko’s texts constitute life narratives, then the next question to be addressed in this study and to which chapters two and three turn is: why and how do Akofa’s and Badjoko’s intra-textual experiences constitute slavery?
Chapter Two

Henriette Akofa’s *Une esclave moderne* (2000): violence, power and the body

Slavery is a history of endless assaults on bodies; forcibly subjugated in order to be transformed into productive and reproductive bodies

–Bakare-Yusuf, ‘Black Bodies and the Unspeakable Terror’ p.314

2.0 Introduction

In the Greek language, one term used to designate a slave is *soma* (so’-mah), which taken literally means ‘body’. In Ancient Greek times, slavery was seen as essentially the power of the slave owner over the body of the slave (Benot 2003: 9); slaves were considered ‘no more than bodies, the passive property of their owners’ (Montserrat 1998: 153 emphasis in the original). In African American and Caribbean literary studies, critics have also examined slavery as an embodied phenomenon in their analytical readings of slave narratives: Bibi Bakare-Yusuf (1999) for instance, explores how physical brutality and force transforms the liberated body into a captive one that labour in the slave narrative *Mary Prince* (1831); Sidonie Smith (1993) looks at how Harriet Jacobs (1861) transcends colonial and patriarchal ideologies of gender that codify the female body as passive and submissive by depicting her textual self as highly resilient; and Carol Henderson (2002: 36-39) considers how Frederick Douglass (1845) and other slave narrators (Prince 1831; Equiano 1789; Bibb 1849) make their suffering ‘legible’ in their narratives by calling into existence the scarred black subject and focusing attention on the physical wounding of their black bodies. Crucially in these slave narratives it is the body that is at issue and that is portrayed as coming under assault.
In a similar fashion, this chapter argues that in Henriette Akofa’s *Une esclave moderne*, the primary focus of this chapter, Henriette’s body is also depicted as coming under assault in order to transform it into a submissive and useful one. In her life narrative Akofa selectively engages her lived experiences of being trafficked into domestic slavery in Paris during the 1990s. Through personal storytelling Henriette, the narrator-protagonist, recalls being lured from her native homeland of Togo to France by Simone, the sister of one of her father’s wives. Instead of going to school as promised, Henriette is presented as being exploited and enslaved as *une domestique* initially in the hands of Simone and later by another French woman of African descent named Fabiola, and their respective white French husbands Jo and François. Unlike the slave protagonists from the American South mentioned above, whose bodies are depicted as being subjected to relentless and brutal acts of physical violence, this chapter explores the various ways in which Henriette’s body is portrayed as being coerced through more subtle and less visible means. Here, although the modalities of power differ, they nevertheless remain of a physical order, that is, the body remains the locus of power and control. Ultimately, this chapter argues, Akofa’s psychological portrait of Henriette offers a nuanced portrayal of why, in the absence of chains and constant brute force, she is unable to walk away.

In 2.5.1 of the previous chapter, this study proposed that a slave narrative be redefined as a *life narrative* of slavery: first, to move away from the ideologies of autobiography, a particular mode of self-referential writing against which other practices of life narrative have been judged and found wanting; second, because of the

38 As stated in chapter one, the persona of the author encountered in the text is referred to as Henriette, the person of the author encountered in life is referred to as Akofa.

39 As also argued in the previous chapter, the sealing of an autobiographical pact and the inclusion of a photo of Akofa on the front cover suggest that the narrative is based on Akofa’s ‘lived experiences’. This is further reinforced by the proceedings from the European Court of Human Rights, before which Akofa took her case and which will be discussed later in this chapter. Many parallels can be drawn between this extra-textual material and Akofa’s intra-textual experiences.
emphasis Smith and Watson (2001) and such narratives place on embodiment. Having thus already established the generic parameters within which Akofa’s narrative will be read, the focus of this thesis now turns to justifying why Akofa’s intra-textual experiences amount to slavery. To this end, this chapter will begin by drawing on what have been classified within this study as ‘universal’ definitions of slavery (theoretical models applied to all practices of slavery) and contrasting ‘particular’ models (used for certain forms of slavery only). While the ‘universal’ definitions proposed by scholars such as Kevin Bales (1999; 2005) serve as a useful starting point for this kind of critical exploration, definitions of domestic slavery complement this by capturing some of the ‘particularities’ of Henriette’s textually portrayed enslavement.

As the first section will reveal, the complexities of slavery mean that theorizing and understanding this phenomenon is a difficult and on-going process. One area that Une esclave moderne can shed light on and to which the second part of this chapter will turn, is power and agency in situations of (domestic) slavery. While this chapter will demonstrate that Bales’ theoretical insights on slavery can significantly enhance understanding of Henriette’s enslavement, it simultaneously contends that Bales’ association of power with violence can obstruct it. It argues that if power in situations of slavery in the West is to be understood as ‘specifically the power to use violence’ (2005: 10) as Bales posits, then crucial elements of Henriette’s enslavement are overlooked. Drawing on the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault (1975; 1980; 1982), this study posits that although violence plays a part, it does not constitute the basis of the power relationship that is presented between Henriette and her respective slaveholders.
2.1 Rhetorical or literal claims of slavery?

At a cursory glance, a number of paratextual features in Une esclave moderne convey the idea that both Akofa’s and her literary rendered self’s experiences constitute slavery - the main title of the narrative being the most obvious example. This is immediately reinforced by the opening pages of the narrative - the subtitle of the preface is ‘Esclave à Paris’ (2000: 5). Furthermore, the author of the preface Robert Badinter, a high-profile lawyer and politician, alludes to the definitive abolition of slavery in France’s colonies and evokes the Comité Contre l’Esclavage Moderne (France’s leading non-governmental organization on issues concerning domestic slavery) (2000: 5-6).  

Finally, Akofa states in the foreword that the primary objective in writing her life narrative is to denounce ‘une forme moderne d’esclavage’ (2000: 9).

To date, however, the question of the degree to which Akofa’s intra-textual experiences can actually be defined as slavery has not been the object of any sustained academic study. This is hardly surprising in light of the fact that Une esclave moderne has received minimal critical attention; at the time of writing only two academic studies about it have been published, both by Dominic Thomas (2007; 2004).  

Although Thomas posits that ‘Une esclave moderne targets a modern form of slavery’ (2007: 122), he does not actually address the question of why Akofa’s textually rendered experiences can be understood as such. This study argues that this is perhaps because no critical framework exists that facilitates careful qualifying of such experiences and finds evidence for this in the fact that the real-life experiences that inspired the narrative, were themselves subject to definitional debate when Akofa took her case before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Here, clearly it was Akofa’s life

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40 Robert Badinter was the French Minister of Justice between June 1981 and February 1986. He was also heavily involved in the fight to abolish the death penalty in France in 1981. This information was obtained from his website, see <http://www.badinter.com/> 
41 These pieces of work are very similar to one another: that published in 2007 is a revised and updated version of that published in 2004.
experiences and not her narrative that were subject to definition. However, her experiences in court and the resultant definitions of experiences, whose referential role in her narrative are undeniable, provide an informative context for an exploration of how slavery is traditionally defined.

Akofa—whose legal name is Siwa-Akofa Siliadin—began her application to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in April 2001 (Cullen 2006: 587). Akofa argued that under the French penal system, she had not been guaranteed adequate protection against slavery, forced labour and servitude, contrary to Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights (Mantouvalou 2006: 402). When Akofa had taken the Bardets (the couple who enslaved her and who are portrayed as Fabiola and François in the text) to court in France in 1999, they were initially punished with a penalty of 12 months for making a vulnerable individual do unpaid work for them (Cullen 2006: 587). However, this judgement was later quashed on the basis that Akofa had had some autonomy and her working conditions were not deemed incompatible with human dignity (Mantouvalou 2006: 402-403). Instead the Bardets were ordered to pay Akofa damages for her unpaid work (Mantouvalou 2006: 402-403).

The European Court examined the case in 2005. After coming to the unanimous decision that there had indeed been a breach of Article 4 of the ECHR and that Akofa had been at the very least subjected to forced labour, the Court was then faced with the question of determining whether her experiences constituted slavery or servitude. The Court gave the following determination:

"En ce qui concerne l’esclavage, bien que la requérante ait été privée de son libre arbitre, il ne ressort pas du dossier qu’elle ait été tenue en esclavage au sens propre, c’est-à-dire que les époux B. aient exercé sur elle un véritable droit de propriété, la réduisant à l’état..."
d’objet. La Cour estime donc que l’on ne saurait considérer que Mˡˡᵉ Siliadin a été maintenue en esclavage au sens « classique » de cette notion.

Quant à la servitude, elle s’analyse en une obligation de prêter ses services sous l’empire de la contrainte, et est à mettre en lien avec la notion d’ « esclavage ». A cet égard, la Cour relève que le travail forcé auquel la requérante a été astreinte s’effectuait sept jours sur sept durant près de 15 heures par jour. Amenée en France par une relation de son père, Mˡˡᵉ Siliadin n’avait pas choisi de travailler chez les époux B. Mineure, elle était sans ressources, vulnérable et isolée, et n’avait aucun moyen de vivre ailleurs que chez les époux B. où elle partageait la chambre des enfants.

La requérante était entièrement à la merci des époux B. puisque ses papiers lui avaient été confisqués et qu’il lui avait été promis que sa situation serait régularisée, ce qui ne fut jamais fait. De plus, Mˡˡᵉ Siliadin, qui craignait d’être arrêtée par la police, ne disposait d’aucune liberté de mouvement et d’aucun temps libre. Par ailleurs, n’ayant pas été scolarisée malgré ce qui avait été promis à son père, la requérante ne pouvait espérer voir sa situation évoluer et était entièrement dépendante des époux B.

Dans ces conditions, la Cour estime que Mˡˡᵉ Siliadin, mineure à l’époque des faits, a été tenue en état de servitude au sens de l’article 4 de la Convention. (Anon 2005)

There are two particularly striking aspects about the Court’s decision. Firstly, the Court discounts Akofa’s experiences as slavery based on a traditional concept of slavery (i.e. the exercise of the right of ownership over other human being), yet implicitly suggests that her experiences constitute a modern form of slavery. The fact the Court qualifies the kind of slavery (l’esclavage ‘au sens propre,’ ‘au sens classique’) on which its decision is based, implies a recognition of the fact that there are other forms or ways of defining slavery. This is reinforced by discursive context in which the passage itself is set - just before making its decision on what grounds Article 4 has been violated, the
Court refers to the French Parliamentary Assembly’s assertion that ‘bien que l’esclavage ait été officiellement aboli il y a 150 ans, des situations d’esclavage domestique’ perdurent en Europe’ (Anon 2005). Similarly, straight after the decision is made, references are made to the 2001 French Parliamentary inquiry into contemporary forms of slavery and to the Council of Europe’s regret that domestic slavery has not been made a criminal offence in its member states. Subsequently, a paradox emerges: while the Court is unable to recognise Akofa’s experiences as slavery from a legal point of view, an alternative narrative embedded within the legal text suggests that she was reduced to a contemporary form of slavery (i.e. domestic slavery).

The other revealing aspect of the Court’s decision, closely related to the first, are the grounds on which it states that Akofa was held in a position of servitude. By stressing that servitude should be seen as ‘une obligation de prêter ses services sous l’empire de la contrainte, et est à mettre en lien avec la notion d’ “esclavage,”’ the Court directly acknowledges here a constitutive relationship between the two concepts. This is reinforced by the fact that the elements the Court identifies to justify its decision are similar to those deployed in discussions concerning slavery in the modern era. Mike Dottridge outlines these elements as the following: ‘in place of the criterion of “ownership” which is associated with slavery in historical terms, we see reference to notions such as “control,” “coercion” and “dependence”’ (2005: 709). For instance, the Court’s assertion that Akofa was compelled to work under *coercion* and against her will, that she was entirely at the Bardet’s *mercy* and completely *dependant* on them, and that restrictions were placed on her movement and time (thus implying control) all serve to reinforce this. Effectively, what this indicates is the Court’s attempt to find an alternative definition of slavery when it is not possible to classify Akofa’s experiences...
as slavery in line with the orthodox legal understanding of slavery, as the exercise of the right of ownership over another human being.

The apparent difficulty the Court had in defining Akofa’s experiences derives from the fact that definitions of slavery have barely evolved or been reworked in legal instruments since the 1926 Slavery Convention (Allain 2006: 1) in which slavery was defined as ‘the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised’ (Article 1) (as cited in Masika 2002: 36). This means that the Court would have had no other alternative but to draw on this traditional notion of slavery when determining, from a legal perspective, whether Akofa’s experiences amounted to slavery or not. Overall then, what emerges from the Court’s decision is the implication that it made the best judgement it could under current legislation, but that it was unable to go as far as officially qualifying Akofa’s experiences as ones of enslavement because of the restrictive legal framework in which slavery is currently defined.

In contrast to the Court’s discounting of Akofa’s experiences as slavery, in *Une esclave moderne* Akofa portrays property claims being exercised over her intra-textual persona Henriette, and her being reduced to the status of an object as a result. This particularly comes to the fore about half way through the narrative when Simone—the woman who is presented as initially enslaving Henriette—comes to collect her from Fabiola and François, the French couple to whom she had ‘lent’ her days earlier. When Simone arrives at their house, François is cast as refusing to give back Henriette, as the following passage shows:

Le matin, à sept heures, on a sonné à la porte. Je suis allée ouvrir. C’était Simone.

- Tu rentres avec moi.

Et elle m’a attrapée par la manche.
À cet instant, Monsieur est sorti de sa chambre.

- Elle ne part pas. Elle reste ici.

Il m’a saisie par l’autre bras.

- Pas question, elle est à moi, je l’ai ramenée d’Afrique pour moi !

- Non, elle ne sortira pas !

Ils me tiraient chacun de son côté, comme un meuble qu’on se dispute. Je n’avais pas droit à la parole. (2000: 114)

The fact that Henriette is portrayed as being caught in a tug of war between Simone and François indicates her objectification to the reader. This is reinforced by Simone’s remembered voice where Henriette is presented as being twice the object of the verb – ‘elle est à moi’ ‘je l’ai ramenée d’Afrique pour moi!’- thus indicating possession and ownership. This is further supported by Akofa’s description of her textually rendered self as ‘un meuble’ with its connotations of an inanimate object and the fact that Henriette is presented as having no opinion on the matter. Henriette is again depicted as being reduced to the status of an object a few days later in the diegesis, as indicated by Fabiola’s re-cited voice: ‘Henriette, j’ai donné beaucoup d’argent à Simone pour qu’elle me ramène une fille de Togo et comme elle ne m’a rien amené, je te prends toi, à la place’ (2000: 115). That Fabiola was prepared to exchange money for a girl (even if she did not do so for Henriette directly) shows an acceptance on her part of the notion of ‘purchasing’ another human being – precisely the practice of slavery that was once legally sanctioned. The result of this can only be to transform that individual into a commodity.

As this passage shows, Akofa’s textual portrayal of her experiences in Une esclave moderne corresponds to the classical notion of slavery as the exercise of rights of ownership over another human being. While on the one level, this supports the central tenet of this thesis that Akofa’s narrative does indeed constitute a slave
narrative, on the other, this study is reluctant to qualify Akofa’s intra-textual experiences as slavery uniquely based on this conception, for two main reasons. Firstly, as this chapter will reveal, Henriette’s enslavement is presented as being considerably more complex than somebody exercising property claims over her. Secondly, as indicated by the European Court’s deliberations and final decision on Akofa’s own life experiences, this notion of slavery can be restrictive, particularly in an era where chattel slavery has been formally prohibited all over the world.\textsuperscript{42} By continuing to stress ‘ownership’ as the key distinguishing feature of slavery, it runs the risk of ignoring or obscuring other practices of slavery where ‘enslavement and control are achieved without ownership’ (Bales 2004: 32). Practices such as child soldiering as the critical study of Badjoko’s narrative will reveal in the following chapter.

\textbf{2.2 Bales: from ownership to control}

Admittedly, trying to establish a universal definition of slavery, that is, a distinct set of criteria that captures the essence of slavery is no easy task, and one that remains a point of contention amongst academics (Philips 2003-4: 27). For others, such an endeavour is futile, ‘a fruitless exercise in semantics’ as Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff once called it (1979: 7). This is hardly surprising in light of the growing recognition, particularly in the Social Sciences, that slavery is a complex spectrum of practices that are constantly evolving and taking on new guises or mutating into new forms (Botte 2005: 656; Benot 2003: 7, 255, 262; Patterson 1982: 13). One academic who has attempted to construct a theory of slavery that—in his own words—‘is dynamic and yet sufficiently universal to identify slavery no matter how it evolves’ (2001: 41) is Kevin Bales. One of the central tenets of Bales’ work is that while the form and shape slavery takes depends on the variety of contexts (social, cultural, religious, political etc.) in

\textsuperscript{42} It does, however, persist in certain parts of Sub-Saharan Africa such as Sudan and Mauritania (Miers 2005).
which it is embedded ‘the core attributes of slavery remain the same as they have always been’ (2005: 9). Bales presents these as the following:

The state of control exercised over the slave based on violence or threat of it; a lack of payment beyond subsistence; and the theft of the labor or other qualities of the slave for economic gain. All slavery shares these attributes, though there may be occasional exceptions, such as gifts or remuneration beyond subsistence. (2005: 9)

The strength in Bales’ definition derives from the shift of focus from (legal) ownership to (illegal) control in situations of enslavement. As Patterson (1982: 22) and Guillaud (2003: 71) have shown in their work, property claims can be made in relation to individuals who are clearly not ‘slaves’. Consequently, it can be deduced that a definition of slavery based on the concept of ownership as its key defining feature simply does not allow for a comprehensive enough understanding of what slavery is. For Bales, more usefully, whether property claims are exercised or not is irrelevant; what is important and what remains the core feature of slavery is the violent control of one person by another for exploitative purposes.

In relation to Une esclave moderne, the emphasis on ‘control’ rather than ‘ownership’ offers a much more effective way of understanding Henriette’s enslavement, for it is essentially the control of Henriette’s body that makes her submit to her respective slaveholders’ wills. One effective way of rendering Henriette compliant that is portrayed in the narrative, is the subjugation and persistent monitoring of her physical body. Fabiola for instance, is cast as regulating everything that Henriette eats and regularly depriving her of food. Under Fabiola’s control, the narrator-protagonist reveals that she is only allowed to eat when authorised to do so (2000: 116), is given only one box of breakfast cereal that is to last for a month (2000: 117) and
leftovers as her main meal: ‘je n’ai droit qu’à leurs restes, tout froids, touchés, peu appétissants’ (2000: 123). Moreover, Fabiola is constructed as monitoring the household foodstuffs very closely—‘elle s’est mis à compter les morceaux de poulet et les tranches de jambon dans le frigo, elle marquait le niveau de la soupe dans la marmite’ (2000: 168)—upon the realization that Henriette had been taking food behind her back.

In turn, this activity is indicative of Henriette’s agency, as is the fact that she blames Fabiola’s daughter as she continues to sneak food from the fridge (2000: 168). Hence, while Henriette’s body is presented as a locus of control and the suffering body becomes a recurring motif in the narrative (2000: 124, 166-167, 168, 170, 174), this is offset by her resisting body - that body that is still controlled by her own mind and that serves as a vehicle through which she can resist the constraints imposed upon her. In fact, at several times in the narrative, it is precisely through the reclaiming of her physical body that she is able to resist her subjection and exercise her agency - a prominent example being when she is cast as refusing to eat despite Simone’s pleas (2000: 79-80). In so doing, Henriette chooses for her body to become a site of opposition by taking the restrictions imposed upon her to an extreme, and in the process transform them into a choice. Henriette’s resistance and agency will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. For now, this study returns to Bales’ definition of slavery cited above.

Bales’ departure from slavery per se as unpaid forced labour (Manzo 2005: 524) by recognising that a slave may receive some payment in the form of subsistence, is equally useful in this respect: while Henriette is cast as receiving no payment for her work (2005: 205-206, 208), she does receive food and accommodation. Yet as this section has shown, the items necessary for her existence are the very means through
which Henriette is controlled and made to comply. Similarly, Bales’ contention that the individual may be controlled through the threat of violence and not only its actual use is significant as it draws attention to the coercive nature of slavery. Although physical violence may not be constantly used, the threat of it can serve as effective instrument of control and lead to the psychological impairment of the individual. By the same token, when Henriette’s body is not portrayed as being subjected to acts of violence, as the discussion above shows, the threat of brute force is always present and serves as the backdrop against which other mechanisms of control are deployed. This is vividly portrayed a few days after Henriette arrives in Paris. Upon realizing that she has been misled and learning that Simone will not allow her to go home, the protagonist becomes distraught. Later, when Simone finds her in the kitchen talking to Stéphanie (another female domestic slave), she looses her temper:

Mais soudain Simone a surgi dans la pièce. Elle a attrapé Stéphanie par le bras, elle l’a secouée en criant:

- Vous n’avez pas le droit de dire un seul mot dans la cuisine! Je ne veux pas vous entendre parler!

La méchanceté déformait ses traits, ses yeux étaient exorbités. Soudain, elle m’a fait peur. [...]

Through Akofa’s portrayal of Henriette’s psychological state, she relives the deep sense of fear Simone incites in her. This is conveyed here by the depiction of Simone as some kind of wild animal that pounces on its prey (in this case Stéphanie) as expressed by the chain of actions and choice of verbs –‘a surgi,’ ‘a attrapé,’ ‘a secoué,’– by Simone’s bulging eyes and by the way in which she is constructed as dragging Stéphanie away at the end. Moreover, earlier in the narrative the intra-textual voice describes Simone as
‘une lionne qui rugissait’ (2000: 61) after Simone is presented as shouting at her for talking to her mother-in-law. The structure of the passage itself creates an impression of agitation and panic through the short, sharp sentences that speed up the narrative time.

Up to now, this discussion has explored how physical violence—defined in this study as a direct and physical assault upon the body with the intent to inflict harm—renders Henriette submissive. However, as Bales argues elsewhere, psychological violence can be equally (if not more) effective at inducing subservience and causing damage. He argues: ‘even when it [enslavement] does not involve beating or other physical torture, it brings about a psychological degradation, that often renders victims unable to function in the outside world’ (2002: 2). It is thus not the body that is the target of this calculated and destructive force that constitutes violence but the mind.

In the narrative itself lies the suggestion that the assaults upon Henriette’s psyche are considerably more damaging than those inflicted upon her body. This is indicated by the fact that although when under Simone’s control Henriette’s body is presented as being subjected to more acts of physical violence, the narrator-protagonist describes Fabiola as crueller despite the fact that she rarely resorts to physical violence: ‘Simone était dure, mais Fabiola était cruelle. La première m’exploitait, la seconde voulait m’huiïlier jusqu’à m’anéantir. Parfois, j’aurais préféré qu’elle me gifle’ (2000: 165). Indeed, the narrative vividly depicts the lengths to which Fabiola goes to ensure the constant degradation of Henriette’s psyche. For instance, the intra-textual voice reveals that Fabiola confiscates any gifts Henriette is given: ‘l’idée que je puisse recevoir un cadeau ou même connaître un instant de joie lui était devenue insupportable...elle a horreur de me voir sourire’ (2000: 148-149), in turn pointing to the way in which Henriette is deprived of all opportunity to experience or express emotion. The narrative voice also reveals that Fabiola constantly taunts and verbally
abuses Henriette: ‘elle ne pouvait pas me voir passer sans me lancer des méchancetés …elle me rabaissait en permanence’ (2000 : 165). This becomes all the more prominent in the diegesis when Fabiola gives birth to her second child and blames Henriette for his restlessness and crying: ‘mon fils est devenu méchant parce que j’ai passé ma grossesse à côté d’une fille méchante’ (2000: 166). She also resorts to belittling and making fun of Henriette as demonstrated by her reaction when Henriette struggles to get out of bed one day due to physical exhaustion: ‘regarde-toi, on dirait une petite vieille....tu n’es bonne à rien...’(2000: 167). Simone, on the other hand, deploys psychological tactics in order to incite fear and subsequently restrict Henriette’s movement and contact with others in the public space: ‘il ne faut pas parler aux inconnus dans la rue. Parce qu’ici, les gens sont mauvais, ils vont te dénoncer, ou ils vont te vendre, ils vont te couper la tête’ (2000: 110). The long lasting effects and efficacy of such acts of psychological violence are illustrated by the fear the narrator-protagonist expresses of being arrested by the French police for having no papers when she attempts to escape: ‘j’avais constamment peur d’être arrêtée. J’étais prise de panique dès que j’apercevais un uniforme de policier’ (2000: 156).

Like Bales, the Comité Contre l’Esclavage Moderne (CCEM) also includes physical and psychological violence as constitutive elements of (domestic) slavery. Strikingly though, the CCEM does not offer a succinct definition of slavery like Bales, that is, the violent control of one person by other for economic gain (2005: 9). Instead it provides a lengthy set of criteria for determining whether or not an individual has been

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43 The Comité Contre l’Esclavage Moderne (CCEM) is France’s leading non-governmental organisation regarding matters of domestic slavery. It was initially set up in 1994 in Paris to combat all forms of modern day slavery, but domestic slavery soon became its main concern. Its principal remit is to assist victims of domestic slavery who wish to take their former employers to court. It also provides practical, psychiatric and financial support to victims of domestic slavery. It was in fact the personnel from the CCEM who initially supported Akofa when the French police intervened and who later helped her file a case against the Bardets (Ghijs 2007: 13) as discussed earlier. These externally referential events are inscribed into the narrative itself as the re-cited voice of the policeman (who is cast as rescuing Henriette) shows: ‘des gens du Comité Contre l’Esclavage Moderne. Ils vont s’occuper de vous en attendant que votre situation soit réglée’ (2000: 195) in addition to the last section ‘Paris: tête haute’ (2000: 199-212) of the narrative.

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reduced to the condition of a domestic slave. This suggests that the complexities of domestic slavery cannot be reduced to a single sentence and thus reinforces the need for engagement between the universal and the particular. The CCEM presents these criteria as the following:

i) Charge exorbitante de travail sans congé ii) absence ou insuffisance de rémunération iii) confiscation des documents d’identité iv) menaces, brimades, insultes ou tout autre violence psychologique ou physique v) contrôle des liens familiaux vi) isolement culturel/et ou social vii) conditions de vie discriminatoires au sein du foyer de l’employeur. (CCEM 2008: 2)

The attention granted to detail here immediately allows for an exploration of the ‘singularities’ of domestic slavery and thus demonstrates how the CCEM’s definition of slavery can complement Bales’ when reading Une esclave moderne. For while Bales argues that ‘enslavement does not require ownership, only control’ (2005: 57) and that the curtailment of freedom of movement is inherent to slavery (2005: 52) the key characteristics identified by the CCEM illustrate the means used to achieve these ends in situations of domestic slavery: the difficulty in establishing a legal identity due to the confiscation of ID documents, the subsequent exclusion from rights assigned to citizens only and threat of removal, economic destitution, the absence of support networks and thus nobody to turn to, all render the possibility of escape remote. More importantly, the elements identified by the CCEM demonstrate that the control and subservience of the individual in situations of domestic slavery can also be achieved without recourse to physical forms of violence. In Une esclave moderne these mechanisms of control feature prominently and are shown to be extremely effective in rendering Akofa’s intra-textual persona submissive. This is neatly illustrated when the intra-textual voice states:
From this it can be deduced that Henriette’s social and cultural isolation play an important part in rendering her captive, an issue to which this chapter will shortly return. The justificatory and defensive tone of the passage, as indicated by the phrases ‘j’étais obligée’ and the way in which the reader is directly addressed with a question, suggest an anxiety at the level of authorial consciousness surrounding how her circumstances will be interpreted. An anxiety that might be expressed in the following way: I was not chained up or constantly subjected to physical abuse, so why did I stay?

To sum up then, Bales’ definition of slavery offers a more dynamic framework against which to evaluate Henriette’s enslavement than one based on property claims. This study argues, however, that although it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of Henriette’s enslavement, it does not go far enough. The main drawback in Bales’ work in relation to understanding Henriette’s enslavement is the contention that ‘slavery is fundamentally a question of power, specifically the power to use violence’ (2005: 10 my emphasis). The problem here does not stem from Bales’ assertion that slavery is essentially a relationship of power (with which this study agrees), but from the suggestion that violence is the constitutive element of this relationship. The central premise of this chapter is that by equating power with violence, Bales inadvertently obstructs understanding of slavery in modern Western societies, and more specifically its portrayal in Une esclave moderne. This is not to deny that violence is an integral and necessary element of slavery but instead to show that the
preoccupation with violence as the basic nature of power can have serious implications for how slavery in the modern era is understood, particularly in Western, capitalist societies.

2.3 Foucault: power and the body

One figure who offers a radically different perspective to Bales’ understanding of power and whose work can deepen understanding of power relations as they are constructed in *Une esclave moderne* is French philosopher Michel Foucault. Foucault is attributed with revolutionizing the way in which power in the West is conceptualized and understood. Before his work, power had essentially been theorized in one of two ways: either from a Marxist perspective whereby power was understood to be concentrated in the State and visible in terms of its apparatus (i.e. police, army) or it was equated with the law and its exercise conceived of in judicial terms of constitution and sovereignty (McHoul and Grace 1993: 87). As such power had been conceived of as operating top-down, in descending order, and little attention was paid to power at a grassroots level. Foucault’s work radically challenged these conceptions of power by identifying the body as the site of power and by moving away from both an understanding of power as something that someone possesses and the supreme power of the State, towards an understanding of power as an intricate web of relations dispersed throughout the social body. In addition, Foucault demonstrated that power is a phenomenon to be differentiated historically. To this end, Foucault (1975) explored systems of discipline and punishment in French society and in particular the transition from public spectacles of torture under monarchical rule in the sixteenth century and power as a highly visible phenomenon to the invention of the modern prison in the nineteenth century and more subtle forms of power. In short, Foucault demonstrated the shift from explicit manifestations of power,
to more subtle and pervasive forms of control through discipline regimes and surveillance.

Foucault’s reconceptualization of power immediately brings to light the limitations of Bales’ understanding of power as ‘specifically the power to use violence’ in situations of enslavement. Although violence used to be the supreme expression of power in Western industrialized nations (as suggested by the spectacle of torture), today this is no longer the case. In consequence, in his later work Foucault (1982) distinguishes between a relationship of physical violence and a relationship of power in modern Western societies:

What defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future action or present actions. A relationship of violence, acts upon a body or upon things, it forces, it bends, it breaks, it destroys, it closes off all possibilities. (1982: 340)

The fact that Foucault differentiates between the two suggests that the nature of power has changed to such an extent that power has emerged as something quite different to violence. As he hints in his earlier work (1975) and here, power has shifted from being a physical and direct assault on a body that is unable to resist, to a mode of action that acts indirectly upon an active body. Foucault stresses, however, that this does not mean that power and violence cannot overlap or are not related in some way; he posits that ‘obviously the establishing of power relations does not exclude the use of violence’ and that ‘no doubt, the exercise of power can never do without [violence]’ (1982: 340-1). Instead his point is that while violence can be an instrument of power it ‘[does] not constitute the principle or basic nature of power’ itself (1982: 340-1) in modern Western
nations. In turn, this has important ramifications in relation to Bales’ notion of power as stated earlier, as the emphasis on violence means that the subtleties of power in situations of enslavement go unnoticed. Although physical violence may be present in Henriette’s relationships with Simone and Fabiola, violence in itself does not give a comprehensive picture of what is going on in these relationships or of what it is that also renders Henriette captive and obedient.

Clearly Foucault’s distinction above is made between power and physical violence as indicated by his allusion to the destruction of the body through excessive force. The following question thus arises: what is the relationship between psychological violence—the other form of violence Bales refers to—and Foucault’s notion of power? At first glance, the two concepts appear to have several features in common. For instance, for Foucault, power in modern Western societies is very subtle: ‘sa force est de ne jamais intervenir, de s’exercer spontanément et sans bruit’ (1975: 240). Similarly, psychological violence works undetected, it remains hidden, invisible to the human eye (Imbusch 2003: 23). Secondly, above Foucault describes power as ‘an action upon an action, on possible or actual future action or present actions’ (1982: 340). One might argue that in a similar way, psychological violence sometimes consists of an action that acts upon (or influences) the actions of others. This is illustrated by the example drawn on earlier which referred to Simone’s use of psychological threats in order to incite fear and restrict Henriette’s forays into the public space.

Yet to claim an affinity between psychological violence and power on this basis would not only reduce the complexities of power as Foucault conceptualizes it, but to misunderstand his notion of power altogether. For power, as Foucault sees it, it is not at the level of conscious intention or decision (1980: 97) nor does it have a source or origin. There is no individual who actively seeks to inflict harm upon another, nor is it
necessarily seen in negative terms. Instead, for Foucault, power consists of a constitutive field of forces within which ‘everybody is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised’ (1980: 156). This does not mean to say, however, that everybody occupies the same position, for while each individual is situated in a field of possibilities, some have more options available to them than others, which ‘permit an effect of supremacy’ (Foucault 1980: 156). More importantly, in relation to psychological violence, the target of power according to Foucault is the body (1975: 160) and thus by implication not the mind. Power as Foucault theorizes it does not create an immediate response nor does it directly act upon the body. Instead it penetrates the body and inserts itself into its actions, its movements and its gestures (1980: 39). It does so ‘selon une codification qui quadrille au plus près le temps, l’espace et les mouvements’ thus allowing for the meticulous control of the operations of the body and therefore ensuring the subjection of its forces (Foucault 1975: 161). It operates through ‘techniques minutieuses, souvent infimes’ that in isolation appear insignificant but together ‘définissent un certain mode d’investissement politique et détaillé du corps’ (Foucault 1975: 163).

Foucault’s theoretical insights immediately enhance understanding of power relations as they are constructed in Une esclave moderne. For instance, Henriette’s body is presented as being disciplined through the imposition of a spatial-temporal grid. Henriette is cast as not only being predominantly confined within the four walls of the house, but also within certain rooms. The intra-textual voice reveals that in both Fabiola’s and Simone’s homes, Henriette’s movement is essentially restricted to the kitchen (2000: 68, 134). In Fabiola’s house, Akofa describes the room in which Henriette sleeps as her ‘cagibi sans fenêtre’ (2000: 140) and her textually rendered self as a prisoner (2000: 125), thus stressing her sense of entrapment. It is not only the
confinement of Henriette’s body that allows for the effective and efficient application of disciplinary power but also her physical and social isolation. Foucault states: ‘l’isolement ... garantit qu’on peut exercer ... avec le maximum d’intensité, un pouvoir qui ne sera balancé par aucune autre influence ; la solitude est la condition première de la soumission totale’ (1975: 275). Henriette’s sense of seclusion and alienation is constantly evoked in the narrative both explicitly ‘j’ai passé la journée seule, presque recluse, sans prononcer un mot’ (2000: 141), ‘j’avais tout oublié, j’étais coupée de ma famille, complètement isolée’ (2000 : 148) and indirectly through metaphorical images such as ‘j’étais une île perdue’ (2000: 140) or ‘je me sentais orpheline de tout’ (2000: 147).

Within these confined and solitary spaces, time is also depicted as being closely regulated and brought under tight control. The intra-textual voice reveals that Henriette wakes up at the same time every day—‘le matin, je suis debout à six heures moins le quart’ (2000:118)—and has a strict routine to abide by. For instance, for six pages (2000: 118-124) the narrative lists the multiple tasks Henriette must complete on a daily basis, tasks that are structured around time constraints: ‘d’abord, sortir les habits des trois enfants. Il faut que je me dépêche avant que le bébé se réveille’ (2000: 118); ‘c’est déjà l’heure de préparer le déjeuner’ (2000: 120); ‘il est une heure et demie. Je reviens, il faut que j’endorme Alice’ (2000: 120); ‘je fais la toilette d’Alice et je la couche. A neuf heures et demie, dix heures moins le quart, elle dort’ (2000 : 123); ‘il est onze heures du soir. L’heure du repassage’ (2000: 123). As these quotes suggest, each activity is assigned a specific time and/or duration, with no time for rest. This is reinforced by the short, simple sentences and the predominant use of dynamic verbs, which punctuate the pages. For Foucault it is precisely through the exhaustive use of time and the need to take advantage of every second, as if time may run out, that docile
subjects are created (1975: 175, 180). It thus constitutes an effective technique of subjection.

Likewise, Akofa’s intra-textual voice reveals that several of Henriette’s actions are timed. For instance, each time she is presented as taking a shower, Simone is cast as telling her to hurry up a few minutes later: ‘[Henriette] j’étais à peine sous la douche qu’elle a frappé la porte. [Simone] Tu as cinq minutes, ne traîne pas’ (2000: 62); ‘ça fait déjà 5 minutes que tu es dans la salle de bains, tu n’as pas encore fini?’ (2000: 81). Similarly, under Fabiola’s control, time restraints are also placed on activities such as showering: ‘[Henriette] J’entre sous la douche. [Fabiola] Tu n’as pas bientôt fini!’ (2000: 121); ‘au bout de deux minutes, elle passe la main à l’intérieur et ferme le robinet’ (2000: 173). The fact that Henriette is portrayed as hurrying to put on her clothes and get back to work each time indicates how ‘le temps pénètre le corps et avec lui, tous les contrôles minutieux du pouvoir’ (Foucault 1975: 178). This is equally prominent when Fabiola is portrayed as timing Henriette whenever she ventures into the public space: ‘dès que je passe la porte, elle chronomètre mes sorties’ (2000: 173); ‘quand je m’engouffre dans l’immeuble, elle compte les minutes, elle calcule combien de temps je mets pour monter’ (2000: 149). The fact that Akofa presents her textually constructed self as rushing into the building demonstrates again how the strict monitoring of time influences her actions. It is also illustrative of Foucault’s contention that power ‘does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts upon their actions’ (1982: 340).

In addition to disciplinary regimes that organize the body in time and space, Foucault posits that power in contemporary Western societies coerces by means of observation: ‘la discipline suppose un dispositif qui contraint par le jeu du regard’ (1975: 201). Foucault argues that it is the individual’s visibility that guarantees the hold
of power that is exercised over him or her; the fact of being permanently trapped in a regime of visibility that maintains the individual in his or her subjection (1975: 208). In Henriette’s case, surveillance essentially comes in the form of the gaze: both Simone and Fabiola are both depicted as watching Henriette very closely and thus producing asymmetrical power relations between them. Behind closed doors, Fabiola is cast as keeping a close eye on Henriette from the living room (2000: 121). Her gaze even encroaches on Henriette’s personal and intimate spaces as the intra-textual voice discloses: ‘je n’ai même plus d’intimité dans la douche [...] Fabiola m’a interdit de fermer la porte sous prétexte que la vapeur allait écailler la peinture’ (2000: 173). The only respite Henriette is depicted as having from this constant surveillance is when she cleans François’ office, where she temporarily escapes Fabiola’s gaze: ‘lorsque je vais là-haut, c’est un des rares moments où je peux souffler un peu. Je suis enfin seule’ (2000: 126). The fact that the intra-textual voice conveys a sense of relief brings to light the oppressive force of Fabiola’s watchful eye bearing down on Henriette. Similarly, Henriette’s forays into the public space are accompanied by the disciplinary gaze of Fabiola and Simone. In the text, the narrator makes numerous references to them both watching her from the upstairs window (2000: 84, 85, 122, 149, 151, 153, 177) thus allowing them to maintain her body within a field of visibility beyond the parameters of the house.

2.3.1 Power, resistance and agency

Thus far, this chapter has explored how power is exercised over Henriette and the structures of constraint within which her body is positioned. Yet Foucault maintains: ‘there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are
exercised’ (1982: 142). Here Foucault stresses the fact that resistance should not be seen in oppositional terms to power but as operating in the very structures of power that it simultaneously challenges and helps to sustain. As mentioned above, in *Une esclave moderne* Henriette is presented as highly resilient and defiant on several occasions. For instance, shortly after she arrives in France, Henriette insists on calling her parents. Until Simone agrees to let her, Henriette is cast as refusing to carry out any domestic chores:

> Le soir, quand Simone est rentrée, je n’avais rien préparé, rien touché. Je n’avais qu’une idée en tête : rentrer chez moi. Ne pouvant rien obtenir de moi, elle a été obligée de me laisser téléphoner à mon père. (2000: 68)

The fact that the intra-textual voice claims that Simone had no choice but to let her call her father suggests that Henriette believes that she is in control of the situation. However, as the passage reveals, as she tests the boundaries of her ‘metaphorical’ confinement (the relations of power in which her body is situated), they are then immediately reinforced by Simone. For instance, as soon as Henriette starts relaying the situation to her father, Simone cuts the phone line. When Henriette’s father calls back, Simone is cast as picking up the phone and manipulating him by relaying that Henriette is getting on well. Shortly after, Henriette is depicted as refusing to work. However, upon realizing that she will never be able to convince her father of her enslavement when she speaks to him again on the phone a few days later, she is depicted as succumbing to Simone’s will as the intra-textual voice indicates: ‘je ne protestais plus. À tout ce qu’elle me disait, je répondais “oui”’ (2000: 72). What this passage poignantly demonstrates is Simone’s effective exercise of power; instead of resorting to physical violence (i.e. a direct assault upon the body), she is portrayed as structuring the possible
field of Henriette’s actions—or ‘governing’ them in Foucault’s terms (1982: 341)—in order to obtain her compliance. In addition, the constant to-ing and fro-ing between Henriette who challenges Simone’s authority and Simone appeasing her, conforms to Foucault’s description of a relationship of power as ‘a relationship that is at the same time mutual incitement and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation that paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation’ (1982: 342).

The portrayal of Henriette attempting to escape (2000: 151) is the point in the narrative where she is presented as pushing to their limits the boundaries of her metaphorical confinement. Although she manages to leave Fabiola’s house with the help of Fabiola’s friend Orlande, Henriette is unable to escape the network of relations in which her body has become entangled. This is demonstrated by the fact that even when she is ‘free,’ she rarely leaves Orlande’s house for fear of being arrested by the police as Fabiola (and Simone) had always warned her (2000: 156). More striking is the fact that it is her uncle, a member of her own family, who refusing to believe her (having spoken to Fabiola beforehand), takes her back to Fabiola’s house. In so doing, the uncle’s actions strengthen the net in which her body is already ensnared and she is subsequently portrayed as submitting to Fabiola’s will: ‘les menaces étaient inutiles, puisqu’elle m’avait à sa merci’ (2000: 160).

There does, however, come a moment in the narrative when the power relationship between Henriette and Fabiola is presented as beginning to break down. It occurs when Henriette is cast as reclaiming her passport and then hiding it from Fabiola:

Du jour où j’ai repris possession de mon passeport, j’ai senti que le rapport était inversé : ce n’était plus moi qui avais peur des Calmar, mais eux qui avaient peur de moi. Fabiola ne me parlait plus de la même manière. (2000: 191)
The phrase ‘j’ai senti que le rapport était inversé’ and the apparent change in Fabiola’s attitude immediately mark a shift in the relationship. This is reinforced by the fact that Fabiola increases her surveillance of Henriette once she does not know where the passport is: ‘elle allait même jusqu’à me prendre en filature. Elle m’envoyait au Casino, et soudain, pendant que je faisais la queue à la caisse, je l’apercevais derrière les rayons’ (2000: 191). Through the repossession of her passport, Henriette is portrayed as becoming aware of the fact she also has opportunities in the field of power relations within which she is situated that can impact on Fabiola’s actions. Consequently, when she is no longer complicit in her subjugation, Fabiola is no longer able to act upon her actions in the same way, that is, exercise power over her. For instance, the intra-textual voice reveals that Fabiola tries everything to retrieve Henriette’s passport and thus re-establish the power relationship: ‘elle a tout essayé, les menaces comme la manière douce’ (2000: 189). Unsuccessful, Fabiola is presented as having no other alternative but to resort to violence by locking Henriette in the house (2000: 191). This signals the end of the power relationship - according to Foucault, for power to exist there must be the means of escape or possible flight otherwise the power relationship transforms into one of physical constraint (1980: 346).

In conclusion, this chapter has illustrated that slavery as it depicted in Henriette Akofa’s *Une esclave moderne* is a multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be reduced to traditional notions that define slavery only in terms of one individual exercising property rights over another. As it has unfolded, it has critically examined the ‘universalities’ and ‘singularities’ of Henriette’s textually portrayed enslavement. More importantly, this chapter has taken these debates further and enhanced understanding of Henriette’s enslavement by drawing on Michel Foucault’s work on power. All in all, it has sought to demonstrate that Bales’ definition of slavery (with violent control as its
core element) combined with Foucault’s concept of power offer an extremely useful formula for understanding Henriette’s enslavement. Having established why Akofa’s intra-textual experiences constitute slavery, the focus of attention now shifts in the next chapter to the other life narrative that lies at the heart of this study – Lucien Badjoko’s *J’étais enfant soldat* – and to determining how and why this child soldier narrative can also be redefined as a modern slave narrative.
Chapter Three

Lucien Badjoko’s *J’étais enfant soldat* (2005): violence and the liminal state of social death

3.0 Introduction

Badjoko not only offers a very different portrayal of slavery to Akofa as he articulates his experiences as a child soldier in the Democratic Republic of Congo during the 1990s, but also depicts a form that is practised in an entirely different geo-political setting. The focal point of this study therefore shifts from a literary representation of domestic slavery in a Western European, capitalist nation to that of child soldiering in a politically volatile, developing country in the Central African region. In his life narrative, Badjoko depicts his intra-textual persona, Lucien, as voluntarily joining a militia group at the age of 12 years. Upon arrival, he is cast as being subjected to a series of brutal initiation acts in an attempt to eradicate memories of his former life and thus render him obedient to the group. Nurtured for five years in this culture of violence and brutality, from which there is no escape (other than death), Lucien is not only presented as a victim of violence but also as an agent. His endurance and resilience are portrayed as guaranteeing him the role of commander, before becoming bodyguard to Commander Anselme Masasu, one of the principal leaders of the *Alliance des forces*

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44 The events portrayed in Badjoko’s narrative occurred during two conflicts, which took place in Zaire/the DRC during the 1990s: the first started in September 1996 and ended in May 1997 when the then President Mobutu went into exile and Laurent-Désiré Kabila took power; the second started in August 1998 when Rwanda, Uganda and a series of Congolese army units took control of large segments of the Eastern DRC and should have ended when a peace agreement was signed by nearly all of the different groups involved in the conflict, in Lusaka in July 1999 (Weiss 2008: 1). However, this cease-fire did not hold for long, resulting in further conflict. In 2003, another peace deal was signed and a transitional government came into effect, however, the threat of civil war has since re-emerged particularly in the Eastern part of the DRC (BBC 2009).

45 As George Nzongola-Ntalaja (2007: 215) notes: ‘no region of the African continent has known as much political strife, loss of life and social dislocation during the last 42 years as the Great Lakes region’.
démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaïre (ADFL). Masasu’s imprisonment and subsequent execution are constructed in the narrative as triggering Lucien’s downward spiral, which eventually leads to his demobilisation.

In a similar fashion to the previous chapter, the primary objective of this chapter is to determine what it is that renders Badjoko’s intra-textual experiences as a child soldier, slavery. It argues that although his experiences are not explicitly presented as slavery—unlike Une esclave moderne no direct analogy is drawn at a paratextual level between Badjoko’s/Lucien’s experiences and slavery, nor is the word slavery ever evoked in the narrative itself—they are implicitly constructed as such. In order to illuminate this critical reading, this study draws on the work of historical and cultural sociologist Orlando Patterson, and more specifically on his conception of slavery as a ‘liminal state of social death’ (1982: 46). In so doing, this study now departs from the definitional frameworks of slavery deployed in the previous chapter in relation to Akofa’s Une esclave moderne – that is, the traditional definition of slavery based on property claims and ownership and Bales’ understanding of slavery as essentially the violent control of one person by other for economic gain (2005: 9).

As a corollary, the following question arises: why is a different theoretical apparatus necessary? Firstly, as it was argued in the previous chapter, the emphasis placed on ownership in the traditional understanding of slavery means that situations where individuals are enslaved and oppressed without necessarily being ‘owned’ or treated as property are overlooked. Such is the case here for Lucien, who (as noted above) is presented as ‘choosing’ to join the armed militia group. Clearly Lucien is not acquired by force or purchased, nor is he the object of any kind of transaction as was the

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46 Anselme Masasu Nindaga was one of the four leaders of the AFDL, the coalition of armed groups which ousted President Mobutu Séré Seko and brought Laurent-Désiré Kabila to power in May 1997. Suspected of plotting a coup d’état, Masasu was arrested and then released on several occasions, only to be arrested for the last time in November 2000, taken to an unknown location and executed (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2007: 226).
suggestion in relation to Henriette in Une esclave moderne. Secondly, in moving away from this orthodox understanding of slavery, this study follows in the footsteps of prominent scholars of historical forms of African slavery such as Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, who maintain that in order to understand slavery as it existed in the African interior, concepts of ownership and property need to be discarded (1979: 11). They stress the importance of examining forms of slavery on their own terms and according to the historical and social contexts in which they are practised. They therefore find it highly problematic to define slavery in Sub-Saharan Africa in terms of ownership and property, which they regard as a Western model of slavery conceptualized in relation to trans-Atlantic slavery and plantation slavery in the American South (1979: 3-5). Instead, they maintain that slavery in pre-colonial and colonial African societies should be seen as part of a broader social system of kinship, lineages and ‘rights-in-persons,’ whereby the rights of an individual are transferred by one kinship group to another (1979: 7, 10, 14). They show in their work how the slaving process was used as a means to integrate strangers into the host society - the individual gradually ceased to be an outsider and become incorporated as a full social being within his or her new kinship group (1979: 22-26).

Like Miers and Kopytoff, Patterson (1982: 46) also situates slavery within a broader social context and stresses the slave’s marginality in his conceptualization of slavery as ‘a liminal state of social death’. For Patterson it is not only acts of violence that transform people into slaves, but the kind of symbolic death that accompanies these acts. Consequently, in addition to permanent violent domination, Patterson (1982: 13) identifies natal alienation and dishonour as the constitutive elements of slavery across time and space. ‘Forced to deny his natal kin ties’ and alienated from his society at birth, the slave ceases to belong to any legitimate social or moral order and thus
becomes ‘a socially dead person’ (Patterson 1982: 54, 5). In consequence, the slave has no social existence beyond that associated with his master and the milieu in which he finds himself (Patterson 1982: 38).

Crucially, where Patterson’s understanding of slavery differs from Miers’ and Kopytoff’s is that instead of seeing slavery as one phase along the way to a final stage of integration into the host society, he argues that the slave remains socially dead and on thus on the margins of society. Paradoxically however, Patterson (1982: 54) maintains that the ‘social death’ imposed by slavery means that while the slave remains a kinless outsider to the host society and estranged from his society at birth, he acquires fictive kinship ties with his master and the master’s family. In turn, Patterson (1982) contends that this enforced liminality serves as a source of empowerment for the slave as it allows him or her to manoeuvre through the betwixt and between places where members of society cannot go. Patterson states: ‘the essence of slavery is that the slave, in his social death, lives on the margin between community and chaos, life and death, the sacred and the secular’ (1982: 51). In relation to Bales’ definition, while Patterson also argues that slavery is rooted in violence, the emphasis in his work (as suggested above), is less on individual affliction and the slave/slaveholder relationship than it is on slavery as a distinctive social system. It is for these reasons that this study exploits Patterson’s theoretical insights on slavery as opposed to Bales’ when defending the premise that Badjoko’s intra-textual experiences constitute slavery. For the focus in the narrative is less on Lucien’s relationship with a slaveholder as such than his oppression as part of a collective group.

This study argues that in his life narrative Badjoko also presents his intra-textual self as ‘socially a non-person’ and as existing in ‘a liminal state of social death’. In order to demonstrate this, this chapter begins by examining Lucien’s experiences in
relation to Arnold Van Gennep’s rites of passage model (1960) from which the term ‘liminal’ originates and which Miers and Kopytoff (1979: 15) and Patterson (2003: 102) refer to as the model through which the enslavement process is expressed. This study posits that while this model is useful for describing the series of transitional phases Lucien is presented as going through, it is limited by the fact that ‘the liminal’ is seen as a site of passing from one state to another. The model thus suggests that Lucien completely sheds all traces of his former existence and fully embraces his new life as an agent of violence. Yet, as the narrative reveals, Lucien remains suspended in the liminal state of social death. In order to bring this to light, this study draws upon two contrasting but complementary notions of liminality: an anthropological perspective through the work of Victor Turner (1967, 1969, 1974, 1979) and a postcolonial one through the work of Homi Bhabha (1990, 1994, 1999). While conceptually speaking both scholars focus on the space(s) between points of classification, the nuanced differences between their theoretical models further enhance understanding of Lucien’s identity in different ways. This chapter concludes with a comparative analysis of what Badjoko’s and Akofa’s narratives reveal about slavery in the modern era and some of the limitations of existing definitions of slavery that they bring to light.

3.1 Rites of passage and the origins of the term ‘liminal’

Arnold Van Gennep introduced the term ‘liminal’ in order to describe the second stage of three successive stages; he referred to the first stage as the preliminal and the last as the postliminal. He used this three-fold model in order to describe significant transitions in human lives, maintaining that ‘the life of an individual in any society is a series of passage from one age to another’ (1960: 3). He paid particular attention to ritual ceremonies and initiation rites in non-Western societies in order to demonstrate the
phases through which an individual moves from one state to another and the social transformation this process involves. According to his conceptual scheme, the preliminal marks the phase during which the individual withdraws from his surroundings. The individual then enters the ‘in-between’ phase known as the liminal during which the old self gives way to the new. The rites of passage sequence concludes with the postliminal phase when the individual re-enters society with a new status and identity. To illustrate this more clearly, Van Gennep (1960:19-21) uses the analogy of a threshold separating two rooms in a house: the first room represents the preliminal phase; the crossing of the threshold, the liminal; and the other room, the postliminal phase. This metaphor also lucidly illustrates the ephemeral nature of the liminal passage in that it does not constitute a fixed state or dwelling but is considered a site of transition.

Given the removal of Van Gennep’s model from its anthropological context and its application to a literary context, it is hardly surprising that the boundaries between the various phases are not readily identifiable in Badjoko’s narrative and often become blurred. This is complicated further by the fact that the events of the diegesis do not follow a linear progressive pattern—they do not always take place in the order they were experienced, instead the narrative shifts from one period of Lucien’s life to another—thus making it difficult to trace the pattern of succession implicit in Van Gennep’s model. However, as literary scholars have already shown, this three-fold schema can be successfully applied to literature: Wangarî Wa Nyatetũ-Waigwa (1996) for instance, uses it in order to explore the coming of age in three francophone Sub-African novels (Hamidou Kane 1961; Laye 1953; Beti 1957) and to support her claim that these novels should be reclassified within the genre of Bildungsroman. In addition, in its original context, Van Gennep’s conceptual schema is intended to map out the
series of social phases an individual goes through when passing from one status to another and pays little attention to the psychological aspects of this transition (Bloch 1992). In this thesis, this model is adapted and applied in broader, more abstract terms in order to account for the psychological journey the protagonist-narrator is presented as taking and how this impacts on the formation of his identity.

As already noted, Lucien is presented in the narrative as becoming a child soldier at the age of 12 years old. Seduced by the idea of wearing a uniform (2005: 17), influenced by violent action films (2005: 18), and driven by patriotic desires to free his country from the dictatorship of Mobutu Sésé Seko (2005: 19), Lucien is cast as voluntarily joining a militia group on his way home from school one day. While this marks his physical departure from his family and surrounding environment, his contact with les maï-maï the summer before he joins is clearly the beginning of his psychological journey. During that summer, an older friend and also a recruiter for les maï-maï had approached Lucien and convinced him to train with them. As a result of that experience, the narrative voice reveals that Lucien becomes excited and obsessed with the idea of going to war:

Bien entendu, ce stage a tout changé. Auprès de ces hommes, dans la forêt, j’ai attrapé la manie des armes. Je n’ai jamais vraiment pu me réadapter à la vie civile ensuite [....] Mon secret me grignotait. En moi, un mal s’était installé et je l’alimentais [....] Toute la journée je pensais aux combattants, aux militaires. (2005: 35)


48 Les maï-maï is the name given to ‘a complex civil resistance (militia) movement’, which formed against the occupation of Congolese territories, particularly in the North and the East by Rwandan, Ugandan and rebel forces (Cawthra & Luckham 2001: 255, 264). For further information regarding les maï-mai, see Acker & Vlassenroot (2001).
The fact that Lucien is unable to readapt to civilian life following his training with les mai-mai suggests a definitive break with his former life and thus signals his gradual movement from the preliminal to the liminal phase of Van Gennep’s rites of passage schema. This sense of detachment and separation is reinforced by the layout of the narrative when Lucien is cast as later joining the militia group:


Fin de la vie civile.

Je me souviens de cela comme si c’était hier. (2005: 19)

The isolation of the third sentence in this passage effectively shows once again Lucien’s psychological withdrawal from his former life and his subsequent entrance into the liminal passage. This is followed by the symbolic portrayal of the shedding of his former self when he and the other new recruits are forced to have their hair cut short and their clothes are forcibly removed upon arrival (2005: 20). They are then presented as being subjected to brutal acts of violence:

Ils ont alors resserré le cercle. Et la foudre s’est abattue sur nous. Ils nous ont d’abord bousculés en tous sens en nous criant dessus. Quelqu’un m’a volé ma veste. Une belle veste que maman m’avait rapportée d’un voyage […] Je courais dans un sens puis dans l’autre, en essayant d’éviter les mauvais coups. (2005: 20)

Like the ritual ceremonies Patterson (1982) identifies in pre-colonial African societies, these initiation acts give symbolic expression to Lucien’s social death and the severing
of ties with his family, as indicated here by the theft of the vest to which he obviously attaches emotional value as a result of it being a gift from his mother. Consequently he, alongside the other recruits who are stripped naked, are left with no material reminder of their former existence and become ‘natally alienated’ in Patterson’s terms (1982: 331). Shortly afterwards, Lucien and the other recruits are depicted as being made to perform lewd sexual acts (2005: 25) and are beaten with tree branches until three of them die (2005: 22-23). Again this brings to light the extreme measures taken in an attempt to eradicate the recruits’ life spirit. These acts are also illustrative of what Van Gennep calls rites of separation: ‘the administration of a whipping or beating serves in some cases [...] as a physical rite of separation from the previous world’ (1960: 174-5).

Subsequently Lucien is left in a state of confusion and distress: ‘J’étais vide. Ma tête bourdonnait fort. Je revoysais les trois cadavres, sans cesse. J’ai pensé à ma famille. Qu’allaient-ils dire à leur retour ? Plus de Lucien....’ (2005: 23). As the narrator-protagonist contemplates his family’s reaction to his decision to become a soldier, the fact of talking about himself in the third person suggests the death of his current self, or perhaps his anticipation of it; a recognition that he is leaving that life, and the identity that it gave him, behind. Moreover, the repetitive imagery of the dead bodies in his mind points to the trauma of the experience as this incident returns to haunt him in the textual present. This series of events shares striking parallels with Van Gennep’s description of initiation ceremonies into totem tribes in Australia as he states:

In some tribes, the novice is considered dead, and he remains dead for the duration of the novitiate. It lasts for a fairly long time and consists of a physical and mental weakening which is undoubtedly intended to make him lose all recollection of his childhood existence.

(1960: 75)
Likewise, Lucien and the other new recruits are made to forget their family and friends and former existence through ‘a physical and mental weakening’ in order to prepare them for life as a soldier. In the initiation ceremonies of the Totem tribes, the novitiate (the liminal passage) is then followed by the novice’s resurrection from his symbolic death (Van Gennep 1960: 75). Similarly, Lucien’s resurrection is portrayed as coming shortly after these brutal initiation acts:

Pendant quelques jours, j’ai eu envie de mourir. Tout m’était égal, ils pouvaient bien me tuer. J’ai fait les exercices comme hors de moi-même […..] un miracle s’est produit. Au matin du onzième jour, je me suis réveillé décidé à devenir un soldat. Un bon soldat. (2005: 30)

The fact that he carries out the exercises ‘comme hors de [soi]-mème’ suggests a divorce between his body and mind and subsequently the shedding of his former self at the level of psychology. This is swiftly followed by ‘un miracle’ – his awakening and resurrection on the eleventh day, which carries implicit religious connotations. This rebirth is accompanied by a change in his attitude as he forbids himself from thinking of his family: ‘Ce jour-là, je me suis aussi interdit pour toujours de repenser à ma famille. C’était un poison qui me faisait souffrir. Je devais à présent me consacrer à ma carrière’ (2005: 30). The analogy he draws between thoughts of his family and poison here is very telling as he does not want his new self ‘polluted’ or unsettled by thoughts of his old. The implication is that physical harm can be done to his new self if those thoughts are allowed to surge up to the level of consciousness. His mind and body, having first been split by the initiation rituals must now be reunited in the aftermath of the ceremony.
This reunification is implied by the fact that Lucien’s assumption of his new status coincides with a change in his body perception: ‘en peu de temps, mes muscles se sont destinés. J’en étais fier’ (2004: 30). Only weeks earlier in the narrative had he described himself as feeling ‘si petit’ (2005: 21). Likewise, when he describes his arms as ‘de plus en plus costauds’ and then adds ‘pourtant ce matin, ils n’étaient pas solides’ (2005: 41) there is once again an incongruity between how he perceives his body and how it really is. His bodily perception is not only indicative of his psychological transformation and altered state of consciousness but also how ideological, social constructions of masculinity (i.e. virile strength and physical endurance) impact on the formation of his identity. Similarly, the violence Lucien is portrayed as inflicting upon new recruits once he is made commander serves as another way for him to assert his masculinity:

J’ai cogné fort. Sans pitié. J’ai essayé de frapper où ça faisait mal, et la peur que ces types dégageaient m’a excité. Je me suis dit que j’avais progressé. Que quand l’heure viendrait, je tuerais. (2005: 36)

The markedly aggressive and hostile tone deployed here vividly expresses Lucien’s increasingly belligerent attitude. The narrator-protagonist’s impression of having progressed implies that he has undergone some kind of transformation, that there has been a sense of resolution to his identity crisis. This is reinforced when he states: ‘maintenant je tabassais les recrues. J’étais de l’autre côté’ (2005 : 51). In relation to Van Gennep’s rites of passage model, it is as though metaphorically speaking Lucien has crossed the threshold dividing the preliminal and postliminal and thus has made a complete transition from one fixed status to another. Again this supports the idea that Lucien has undergone some kind of resurrection from the ‘social death’ that has
characterized his enslavement up to this point in the narrative. Yet, it soon becomes apparent that this sense of resolution is only temporary as its stability is presented as being constantly under threat in the remainder of the narrative, as this discussion will shortly reveal.

In consequence, this demonstrates one of the limitations of Van Gennep’s rites of passage model in understanding Lucien’s identity. The problem derives from its reliance on binary logic, which in turn suggests that Lucien moves from one essentialised state to another, that once he reaches the postliminal that he acquires a fixed and stable identity. This is suggested by the fact that in the rites of passage schema the individual cannot dwell in the liminal passage but only remain there temporarily before reaching the definitive point of the postliminal phase. Consequently, it gives the impression that Lucien’s ambivalent position between multiple worlds (victim/perpetrator, child/adult, civilian/soldier) is somehow resolved. However, through close reading of Badjoko’s narrative, it is evident that Lucien’s status as child soldier cannot be viewed in simplistic, essentialist terms; he does not become a soldier and thus completely abandon knowledge of his former existence. This is poignantly demonstrated by Lucien’s reaction when he returns to his home village of Bukavu whilst still under the violent control of the militia group he joined:

Whilst he recognises that he has significantly changed since he left his home town—‘moi était un autre’—it is clear that his former life continues to impinge on his current. Evidently, he has been unable to keep to the promise he had initially made to himself during training to forget ‘le petit garçon qui aimait sa maman et adorait sa petite sœur’ (2005: 36). The fact he claims he had no choice but to break this promise conveys the difficulty in, if not impossibility of, attempting to abandon all traces of his former existence. Moreover, the tone of this passage is considerably softer than when he describes beating the new recruits discussed earlier as he imagines directly addressing and reaching out to his mother, thus conjuring up an image of a child seeking affection.

In sum then, while Van Gennep’s model serves as a useful framework for describing the social transformation Lucien is depicted as undergoing and for giving symbolic expression to his social death, it is limited in that Lucien’s identity is conceived of in essentialist terms. In light of this and in order to further deepen understanding of Lucien’s identity, this study now turns to the work of Victor Turner, whose notion of liminality replaces the essentialist claims and ‘either/or’ paradigm implicit in Van Gennep’s model with the more inclusionary perspective of ‘both/and,’ ‘neither/nor’ (Schechter 2005).

3.2 The liminal state of social death

Turner’s theory of liminality derives from his adaptation and development of the middle passage of Van Gennep’s model. Whilst Van Gennep’s sees the liminal passage as a site of transition and as temporary, Turner argues that it constitutes a state in itself and that it can turn into a potentially permanent condition for certain individuals (1969: 107). In this liminal passage, Turner asserts that the individual mediates between social states whereby he or she is ‘neither this nor that and yet is both’ (1967: 99). Madeleine
Schechter’s work (2005) on the concept of liminality is useful in teasing out the significance of Turner’s model in relation to Van Genneps’. Schechter argues that in recent decades there has been an important epistemological shift in how the concept of ‘limit’ is understood in Western thought. Schechter contends that while the term ‘limit’ used to seen as a border that separates, it is now also understood as a threshold that at the same time separates and connects. Accordingly, the former understanding best describes Van Gennep’s model and the latter, Turner’s.

The idea of a threshold, which both divides and connects serves as a better analytical framework for understanding Lucien’s identity: although Lucien appears to reach the postliminal phase and thus cross the liminal border, that in Van Gennep’s schema separates it from the preliminal, he never actually progresses beyond this stage. Rather, in Turner’s terms (1974: 232) he remains ‘betwixt and between’ multiple social positions. This can be demonstrated by returning to and exploring further the incident discussed earlier when Lucien returns to his home town for the first time. Following the passage in which he admits to thinking about his mother and sister often, he imagines their reactions if he were to go and visit them unexpectedly:

J’imaginais les retrouvailles. Maman qui me prendrait dans ses bras et me serrerait. Et ma sœur qui me demanderait de lui raconter mes aventures….La tête me tournait. Je n’avais pas eu de leurs nouvelles depuis mon départ. Quand j’étais encore un enfant [....] Comprendraient-elles ce que j’étais devenu? Sûr qu’elles m’agaceraient avec leurs questions:
- Pourquoi, Lucien ? Pourquoi es-tu devenu un assassin ? diraient-elles au bout d’un moment…

Once again, Lucien stresses the extent to which he has changed, so much so that he no longer sees himself as a child. At the same time however, his remarks are undermined by his preceding comments - the intimate description of mother hugging him when he imagines seeing her again and the use of the affectionate term ‘maman’ once more evoke images of a little boy seeking reassurance from his mother. The tone in the passage swiftly changes as he becomes volatile and aggressive as demonstrated by his imagined dialogue with his sister and mother. Yet once again his attitude is portrayed as ambivalent: while he depicts in a cold and calculated manner what he would do if his family questioned him about his role as a soldier, the fact he projects on to them the idea of being called ‘un assassin’ is indicative of his guilt for the acts he has committed – a guilt that can only occur as a result of the continuation of his earlier (and not so simply previous) self coming into contact with the psychological realities of his (more) current self.

More specifically, the ambiguity surrounding his identity in the passage above stems from the paradox that emerges as result of his liminal position as a child and a soldier—a role usually assigned to adults. Whilst the former is normally associated with innocence and vulnerability, the latter is usually identified with aggressiveness and force (Honwana 2000: 59-62). Consequently, while Lucien conveys a kind of childish innocence when he first imagines speaking to his mother, thus preventing him from being fully assigned to the realm of the adult, his later hostile and violent attitude situates him outside of the realm of the child. This in turn serves as a marker of his liminal existence as Turner states: ‘the attributes of liminality or of liminal personae (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space’ (1969: 95).
A similar ambiguity can be seen when Lucien is cast as being injured and ends up in a coma for several weeks. When he wakes up, he finds a female stranger at his bedside. He later realises that it is his mother: ‘ça c’est ma mere….ça C’EST MA MÈRE!’ (2005: 87). Like in the passage above, he speaks affectionately towards her as he recalls addressing her as ‘maman’. Yet when his memory begins to return and he realises that he is a body guard for Commander Masasu (2005: 88) his attitude towards his mother dramatically changes. The immediacy of this change is conveyed by his comment straight after this realization—‘tout s’est remis en place d’un coup’ (2005: 88, my emphasis). This, and his aggressive attitude towards his mother who he orders to leave, suggest that he fully embraces his identity as a soldier over that as a child/civilian. However, it becomes apparent that he is unable maintain this strict boundary between himself as soldier and his mother as civilian, as demonstrated by the following passage:


Despite his efforts, Lucien is unable to remain hostile towards his mother as he is presented as suddenly becoming engulfed with emotion. This effectively demonstrates that Lucien is never able to completely shed his former self—a necessity in order to enter the postliminal phase according to Van Gennep’s rites of passage model—but only repress it temporarily. The boundary he has constructed between his former and current selves is effectively broken down as he fluctuates from one status to another.
This ambivalence is accompanied by a sense of physical estrangement—another feature of the liminal experience (Flannery 2008: 4)—as indicated by the statement above: ‘sans que je sente rien. Comme si ce corps n’était pas le mien’. Badjoko’s psychological detachment from his body is reinforced by the use of the impersonal demonstrative adjective ‘ce’ as opposed to use of the possessive adjective ‘mon’. This also indicates a response to the trauma of his experiences as Badjoko ‘dissociates’ his mind from his body. ‘To dissociate’, Charles Whitfield argues, ‘means to separate’ (1995: 105) and serves as ‘an active and fluid defence against pain’ (1995: 106). Such is to say that in disconnecting one’s mind from the traumatic experience that the psyche is unable to fully assimilate, the individual is able to minimise the pain it evokes.

The sense of alienation Badjoko feels towards his body is even more strongly conveyed earlier in the narrative when he talks about ‘cette envie de vomir tout l’intérieur de mon corps’ (2005: 36). This occurs during the period when he is subjected to violent initiation acts as discussed earlier. This trope of the alienated, vomiting body is later repeated in the narrative when Lucien states: ‘j’avais envie de me vomir, de sortir de moi’ (2005: 133-134) after he tries to commit suicide but fails. Again in articulating his desire to escape his body, he expresses a rejection of the self. Clearly these memories are equally highly traumatic for Badjoko as indicated by the fact he expresses them through the body; the trauma re-enacts itself through bodily performances. In Lacanian terms, Badjoko is haunted by the language of the Real. Lacan (1977) contends that trauma involves a rupture in the Symbolic order (the social realm of language), that is, when a person experiences trauma, something slips out of the Symbolic and into the Real. Accordingly, the traumatic experience lies outside of linguistic representation, resists symbolization and can therefore only be understood through the non-verbal language of the Real (Lacan 1977).
The suggested alienation from the self conveyed by the rejection of his body in
the examples above is reinforced by the moments in the narrative when Lucien appears
to speak to himself. This is usually made explicit by the use of tagged direct speech and
use of his first name. For instance he says to himself following demobilization: “ça
y’est Lucien, tu es libre” ai-je pensé’ (2005: 152). The act of speaking to himself
implies a fracture or splitting of the self and is suggested again when Lucien expresses
his fear of becoming ruthless like a soldier whom he had witnessed throwing a child
against a wall: “mon cher Lucien, tu dois te contrôler sinon un jour tu finiras aussi par
jeter des enfants contre les murs” j’ai pensé’ (2005: 66). The use of the expression ‘mon
cher’ infuses his words with a paternalistic tone giving the impression of a father
speaking to his son. Similarly, when he congratulates himself on becoming bodyguard
to Masasu it is as though a commander or perhaps even Masasu is speaking to him:
“mon bon Lucien, tu es décidément le meilleur” ai-je pensé’ (2005: 70). Lucien’s
occupation of multiple subject positions is also more subtly incorporated into the text,
as illustrated when he states: ‘J’ai relevé la tête. L’avion! Parole de Lucien, j’allais
monter dans ce putain d’avion’ (2005: 134). This statement is made straight after his
attempt to take his life. When he fails, he decides to run away by boarding the plane
with injured soldiers destined for Kinshasa. The lack of speech marks here suggests the
entanglement of his multiple subjectivities due to the ignoring of the textual rules that
delineate different speaking voices within the diegesis, and therefore is indicative of
Lucien’s interstitial existence.

As this section has shown, Turner’s conception of liminality is useful for
understanding the ambiguity surrounding Lucien’s identity, his physical estrangement
and bringing to light his marginal position on the edge of society. It successfully
conveys the idea that Lucien is ‘betwixt-and-between’ multiple points of classification,
whereby he is ‘neither this nor that and yet is both’ (Turner 1967: 99). This chapter now turns to a different conceptualization of liminality in the form of Homi Bhabha’s ‘third space’ in order to examine Lucien’s identity from an alternative discursive space.

3.3 The liminal ‘third space’

Bhabha (1994) uses the notion of liminality in order to challenge how culture and identity are perceived and conceptualized in the West. He opposes the tendency to conceive of cultural and social existence according to a binary structure for, he argues, this establishes a power hierarchy whereby one part of the binary opposition is privileged over the other. Instead Bhabha (1994: 2) overcomes these monolithic assumptions by speaking of a ‘third space,’ which emerges when domains of difference overlap and displace one another. This in turn ‘opens up the possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy’ (Bhabha 1994: 4). Within this interstitial passage Bhabha (1994: 9) posits that there is an unceasing process of negotiation and dialogue which unsettles any essentialist claims and eludes ‘the politics of polarity’. Accordingly, the boundary separating the two arms of the binary opposition conveyed by Van Gennep’s model is broken down and replaced by a liminal third space.

In relation to Turner’s concept of liminality, while both theorists focus on the space(s) between opposing points of classification, as noted in the introduction, their liminal models differ in two important respects. Firstly, whereas Bhabha focuses on the ‘in-between spaces’ which emerge when domains of difference overlap and displace one another, as stated above, Turner’s liminal passage is ‘betwixt-and-between’ all fixed points of classification (Turner 1974: 232). As a result, Bhabha’s model suggests a
much more dynamic interaction and process of negotiation than Turner’s as the following illustrations reveal:

![Illustrations](image.png)

**Fig 1**
Bhabha’s ‘third Space’

**Fig 2**
Turner’s liminal passage

The second important difference between the two models is that while Turner’s is implicitly transitional in nature and therefore offers the possibility of resolution (i.e. movement beyond the liminal passage), Bhabha’s suggests suspension and an on-going process of mediation in the ‘third space’ with no possible stable final resolution.⁵⁰

In applying these models to Badjoko’s narrative, this raises the pertinent question of whether Lucien will be able to transcend this liminal state of social death following enslavement or whether he will remain suspended in the ‘third space’ and have to live through an ongoing process of mediation. In response to this question, this study turns to what the narrator-protagonist reveals at the end of the narrative about his life following demobilisation (and by implication the end of his enslavement given his physical removal from the violent environment in which he has existed). In this final chapter, Lucien compares his life to those of other child soldiers who have been demobilized. He expresses his concern for them as he talks about seeing them in the streets begging for food, wandering aimlessly, heavily drugged and looking haggard (2005: 156). In essence, he depicts their position on the fringes of society.

⁴⁹ All illustrations provided are my own.
⁵⁰ It is useful to note here that, based on Hegel’s thinking, Bhabha describes the ‘third space’ as ‘a form of the dialectic without transcendence’ (1995: 82).
Contrastingly, the narrator-protagonist portrays his life in a very different light as he describes himself as ‘un résilient’ (2005: 155) and talks about how he has managed to redefine his life outside of the army (2005: 157). To this end, he lists his achievements of passing the equivalent to le bac and of pursuing a University degree in law, he describes the new friends he has made and his participation in a church choir (2005: 157). In short, he portrays his attempts to re-integrate himself into society and re-establish his position in the social and moral order. Consequently, there is the strong implication that, like Turner’s model suggests, Lucien is progressing beyond the liminal phase.

However, embedded more subtly within the narrative is the impression that Lucien remains trapped in the liminal state as he continually mediates between his life as a civilian and his experiences as a soldier. For instance, he states that although he has ‘des amis civils [...] peu d’entre eux savent ce que je suis en réalité’ (2005: 156-157, my emphasis) and therefore subtly distinguishes himself from them. In order to maintain these relationships he must be selective with the truth and how he presents himself. Nor is he able to reveal the difficulty he has in integrating his former life into his present. This particularly comes to the fore in the narrative when he states:

Pour ce qui est de la souffrance… Les psychologues ont échoué. J’ai mal. Dans mon esprit, la colère ne l’emporte pas mais elle me guette. Ça a longtemps été un rempart entre moi et les choses, la colère. Aujourd’hui que ma vie est plus tranquille, j’aimerais qu’elle me laisse en paix. (2005: 156)

His sense of anguish and the fact that he is unable to get rid of the anger that plagues him suggests an unresolved conflict between his multiple selves. Likewise, this is reinforced earlier in the chapter when he states: ‘chaque matin, la colère me gagne,
malgré moi. C’est un truc viscéral’ (2005: 155). Again this struggle is indicative of an
on-going process of negotiation in the ‘third space’ for as Bhabha argues, this process of
mediation is ‘not always collaborative and dialogical but also sometimes profoundly

As Lucien continues to talk about his daily life, he describes the pain of the
injuries incurred in combat, he adds: ‘quand la poison des balles se réveille’ (2005:
155). Strikingly, the analogy presented earlier in the narrative between poison and
memories of his family is reversed; it is now his (former) existence as a soldier which is
considered harmful to his body and by implication his identity. This in turn shows ‘the
interstitial intimacy’ (Bhabha 1994: 13) that emerges when the past and the present
become entangled. This is illustrated again by the description of when Lucien is
reunited with his family following his demobilisation. The fact that he goes to visit them
is telling as it reveals that they still have a place in his life, despite his experiences as a
soldier and attempts to sever ties with his family and the broader social order. This is
strengthened by the sense of happiness he expresses upon seeing them again and his
affectionate and somewhat romanticised description of his mother - ‘elle était toujours
belle’ (2005: 156). Yet at the same time he feels estranged from his family—‘j’étais
devenu un étranger....trop de choses nous séparaient à présent’—to the point that he
describes them as just a memory to him, ‘un souvenir d’enfant’ (2005: 156). What this
example and that discussed above in relation to his new friends demonstrate is an
ongoing struggle; both give the impression that he is always looking from the outside in
without ever being able to fully participate. This said, as the reading above (using
Turner’s model) brings to light, although Lucien appears to be suspended in the liminal
passage following demobilisation, this space is at the same time a site of resistance and
of hope.
This marks the end of this critical exploration of Badjoko’s narrative. Thus far, this study has examined the reasons why Badjoko’s and Akofa’s intra-textual experiences can be qualified as slavery. Despite the very different forms of slavery both writers depict in their narratives, a number of important parallels can be drawn between the two, and with which this chapter now concludes. The first aspect that they immediately highlight are the limitations of traditional understandings of slavery based on ownership and property. In the previous chapter, this study argued and demonstrated through close reading of Une esclave moderne that Henriette’s enslavement is considerably more complex than somebody exercising property claims over her and thus reducing her to the status of an object. Through close reading of Badjoko’s narrative, it becomes apparent that this notion of slavery fails as a definition because it does not take into account the ways in which individuals such as Badjoko become enslaved without necessarily being ‘owned’ or treated as chattel. Instead, both literary portrayals of slavery suggest that attention needs to be focused more on an understanding that takes the subjugation of the body as a core element. As it was shown in chapter two, Henriette’s body is presented as being controlled through both explicit (physical and direct assaults on the body) and more subtle means as her body becomes entangled in a complex network of power relations. In Lucien’s case, obedience and subservience are obtained through the threat or actual destruction of the body and the enforcement of a mind/body split, which facilitates the manipulation of that physical form.

Secondly, as hinted at here, both narratives illustrate that violence constitutes an integral part of slavery. In the case of Lucien, physical violence is used in an order to sever ties with the broader social and moral order, thus culminating in his ‘social death’. The narrative reveals that the attempted annihilation of the body (and by implication of
the self) through brutal and permanent acts of violence, leads to a kind of metaphorical death from which there appears to be no resurrection. As for Akofa’s narrative, whilst this study has argued—by drawing on the theoretical insights of Michel Foucault—that violence does not constitute the basis of the power relationship that is presented between Henriette and her respective slaveholders, it nevertheless serves in its various forms (namely physical and psychological) as an effective backdrop against which other mechanisms of control and subservience are deployed.

Finally, both literary articulations of enslavement in the modern era unsettle the simplistic master-slave opposition/victim-perpetrator dichotomy by which Bales’ and orthodox definitions of slavery are informed. As Badjoko’s intra-textual experiences reveal, slavery in the modern era can be as much a collective form of oppression as an individual affliction where there is no ‘master’ as such, but instead a culture of violence and brutality in which individuals are nurtured and rendered obedient. Moreover, Lucien’s liminal position as both a victim and agent of violence further destabilises these neat divisions. Likewise, *Une esclave moderne* suggests that slavery needs to be situated within a larger more dynamic framework or broader set of relations, as the narrative reveals that Henriette is as much an agent in the field of power relations in which her body is situated as her ‘slaveholders’ can said to be. Following on from this, in the next chapter this study explores power and agency at an extra-textual level. Within this context, it investigates how Badjoko and Akofa have to negotiate and reconcile their demands with those of the publishing house.
Chapter Four

Publication in a postcolonial, diasporic context: mediation and negotiation

*NB The degree of Master of Philosophy was awarded based on the inclusion of the contents of this chapter. However, for copyright reasons, they have been removed. For an overview of some of the main arguments and themes presented in this chapter, please see an essay I wrote (Skinner 2008) for ‘Postcolonial Slavery: an overview of colonialism’s legacy’, a collection of essays edited by Charlotte Baker and Jennifer Jahn – full reference details can be found in the bibliography.
Conclusion

By focusing attention on two francophone Sub-Saharan African life narratives (Badjoko 2005; Akofa 2000), this study has sought to demonstrate that a modern slave narrative tradition is emerging in the French speaking world. It has been underpinned by the premise that by creating a space in which life narratives of slavery and theory on slavery can be brought into dialogue, both stand to benefit from this engagement. On the one hand, it has shown that the ‘universal’ definitions of slavery advanced by prominent scholars from the field of slavery studies (Bales 1999, 2005; Patterson 1982) have moved beyond traditional notions of slavery and thus have allowed for this study to qualify Badjoko’s and Akofa’s intra-textual experiences as slavery. On the other, it has argued that Badjoko’s and Akofa’s life narratives bring to light complexities that these theories of slavery and traditional understandings of slavery simply cannot account for.

In particular, this study has illustrated how these two narratives destabilise the simple slave-master opposition by which existing notions of slavery are informed and call into question the assumption that somebody who is enslaved is necessarily devoid of agency. In presenting their intra-textual selves as highly resilient, both Sub-Saharan African writers subvert ‘the victim paradigm’ that Mbembe (2000) argues has been so pervasive in African writing of the self, as discussed at the beginning of chapter one. As it was shown in chapter two, Akofa depicts her intra-textual persona as resisting and acting within the parameters of her constraint. Alternatively, chapter three drew attention to the way in which J’étais enfant soldat highlights the failure of attempts to eradicate all traces of Lucien’s former (and not so simply previous) self, thus bringing to light his agency.
This study then took this argument further by exploring power and agency at an extra-textual level. It argued that while both Sub-Saharan African writers find themselves to some degree constrained by the demands of writing for French publishing houses, they manage to exercise varying degrees of agency. Within this context, this study paid close attention to the processes of negotiation and mediation upon which both writers relied and how the social and political spaces in which their narratives were written may have shaped them. Finally, this study stressed that while Akofa’s narrative in particular, gives rise to concerns of white mediation and authorial control, consideration also needs to be taken of the positive role(s) of Western cultural intermediaries in the production of these texts. Ultimately, by producing a critical study of these two narratives, this research has sought to pave the way for future critical explorations of francophone Sub-Saharan African life narratives of slavery.

Finally, one area that has not been fully explored in this study due to its predominant focus on life narratives of slavery, and which clearly warrants attention in the future, are francophone Sub-Saharan African fictional accounts of slavery in the modern era. For whilst literary critics have lamented the dearth of Sub-Saharan African literary oeuvres of slavery of the past, more attention needs to be geared towards the growing number of literary representations of slavery in the modern era (Tadjo 1998; Kourouma 1998; Hazoumé 1999; Fassinou 2000; Attidoko 2003; Gbado Lalin 2003; Miano 2006) so that debates on African literature and slavery can move forward. Yet, at the same time, such critical investigations need also to take into account the presence of memories of slavery and other forms of oppression from the past in these texts, so as to avoid dislocating the present from the past.
Appendices

*NB The appendices relate to Chapter Four of this study and have therefore also been removed.
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