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Inserting Trauma into the Canadian Collective Memory: Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* and Selected African-Canadian Poetry

Zusammenfassung

*Die afro-kanadische Literatur ist ein aufstrebendes Segment der kanadischen literarischen Szene. Dies drückt sich in steigenden Auflagen, wachsendem Angebot, aber auch in einer sich ausweitenden populären und akademischen Rezeption aus. In diesem Artikel wird anhand des aktuellen Romans *Lawrence Hill's The Book of Negroes* (2007; Gewinner des Commonwealth Writers' Prize 2008) und einer Auswahl afro-kanadischer Lyrik nachgezeichnet, inwiefern die behandelten Autor(inn)en individuelle und kollektive Trauma-Erfahrungen in ihre Werke einfließen lassen. Die afro-kanadische Literatur insgesamt zeigt die Tendenz, ein kollektives Gegengedächtnis zu etablieren, welches diese Erfahrungen in den Vordergrund stellt. Ziel ist es, das von den schwarzen kanadischen Autor(inn)en als einseitig und ‚weißgewaschen‘ perzipierte Majoritäts-Selbstbild Kanadas zu korrigieren. Die stereotypisierte Darstellung Kanadas als ein ‚Kanaan‘ sowohl in der Vergangenheit (im Sinne eines sicheren Hafens angesichts der U.S.-amerikanischen Sklaverei) als auch in der Gegenwart (im Sinne eines multikulturellen Paradises) wird somit kritisch hinterfragt.*

Résumé

*La littérature afro-canadienne est une branche en essor dans le milieu littéraire au Canada. Phénomène visible non seulement dans le nombre croissant de tirages et de nouvelles parutions, mais aussi dans l'intérêt grandissant que portent la population et le milieu académique à ce genre littéraire. Par l'intermédiaire du nouveau roman de Lawrence Hill (*The Book of Negroes*, 2007; prix Commonwealth Writers en 2008) et grâce à un choix de poésies afro-canadiennes, cet article permettra de constater dans quelle mesure les expériences traumatisantes individuelles ou collectives se retrouvent dans les œuvres des auteurs traités. L'ensemble de la littérature afro-canadienne a tendance à établir une « contre-mémoire » collective qui met ces expériences au premier plan. Le but étant de corriger l'image générale, perçue par les auteurs afro-canadiens comme unilatérale, d'un Canada qui tend à « se blanchir ». Il s'agit donc d'une remise en question*

d'une vision stéréotypée du Canada en tant que « pays de Canaan » – dans le passé (fuite devant l'esclavage aux États-Unis) et paradis multiculturel de nos jours.

The construction of a national memory in particular is concerned with those points of reference that strengthen a positive self-perception and which are consistent with certain objectives of action. Victories are more easily memorized than defeats. [...] It is far more difficult to incorporate into [a group's] memory moments of shame and guilt, as these cannot be integrated into a positive collective self-perception. This applies to the persecution and eradication of Native peoples on different continents, to the deportation of African slaves, to the victims of a genocide in the shades of World War One and Two. (A. Assmann 2001, 309; translation CJK)

In this paper, I will argue that African-Canadian¹ authors aim at an insertion of trauma into the Canadian collective memory. They embark on the difficult endeavour of integrating "moments of shame and guilt" – particularly "the deportation of African slaves" (cf. introductory quote) and the ensuing discrimination and maltreatment of enslaved, indentured or free Blacks – into a Canadian collective memory that has been constructed to reflect a (distorted) self-perception of Canada as a 'Canaan' for Blacks in both the past and the present. African-Canadian literature thus constitutes a counter-memory whose goal is a restructuring of the prevalent, 'whitewashed' national memory of Canada. It undermines common stereotypes and notions of Canadian moral superiority and acknowledges memories that have been virtually purged from mainstream discourse for centuries.

There are three levels of dealing with trauma in the subsequent literary analysis: One level is the individuals' immediate experience of trauma. On this personal scale, Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* will be discussed and individual characters' exposure to different traumata, particularly the experience of dehumanization and objectification as well as the experience of utter disillusionment will be illustrated. On a social or collective scale, the characters of *The Book of Negroes* – particularly its female protagonist – are archetypes and stand *pars pro toto* for the experiences of Black Loyalists coming to Canada in the 1780s. Hill unambiguously collectivises the experience of his characters so that we arrive at a description of a collective trauma

1 Due to spatial limitations, I will not justify at length my choice of terminology. "Black Canadian" and "African-Canadian" will be used interchangeably in this paper, agreeing with Clarke (2002, xi-ii), who expresses confidence in using both terms synonymously (as well as his favorite coinage "Africadian" for Maritime African-Canadians). For a thorough discussion of terminology cf. Tettey/Puplampu 2005.

caused by slavery and continuing racism. On a third, and more theoretical level, this paper reasons that the continued and prevalent preoccupation of Black Canadian authors with issues of slavery and racial discrimination (both historical and current) aims at keeping these memories alive and seeks to bring them to the fore – where ‘standard’ Canadian self-perception has never allowed them to be. This point will be further substantiated by a brief outlook beyond *The Book of Negroes*, i.e. with a survey of several African-Canadian poems.

Trauma and the theory of collective memory

Current approaches to theories of collective memory are largely based on the ground-breaking works of French philosopher/sociologist Maurice Halbwachs.² In the 1920s, Halbwachs, a student of Bergson and Durkheim, developed a theory of collective memory based on three main assumptions:

First, memory is seen as the basis of identity (cf. e.g. Assmann 1988, Weber 2001). Without distinct memories, individuals would not be able to establish coherent identities, i.e. diachronically and synchronically stable versions of self-perception (cf. Halbwachs 1967, 74). Individuals (as well as groups) strive to ascertain coherent versions of who they are, hence two features of memory are of eminent importance: Memory is selective and it is constructed (cf. Halbwachs 1966, 22). Unlike modern computer hard drives, human memory does not faithfully retrieve information it has stored; instead, it selects and (re-)constructs, modifying memories according to current needs of identity construction (cf. Halbwachs 1966, 126).

Second, individual memory is framed and thus shaped by social memory, which Halbwachs calls *cadres sociaux*. These *cadres sociaux* – provided by social milieus such as friends, colleagues, families, religious groups etc. – influence the contents and processes of saving and retrieving memories (cf. e.g. Halbwachs 1967, 35-38). Halbwachs uses the now famous ‘walk through London’ as an illustration: On an imaginary walking tour through London, Halbwachs’ perspective, his way of noticing and perceiving certain features of the city, is influenced by his friends and colleagues, even though he is taking the walk in absolute solitude. Still, he takes notice of architectural designs as if in conversation with an architect friend, notices certain monuments as if in conversation with an art historian etc.³ Our perception, and thus the contents and modes of what and how we remember, are hence pre-structured by our social framework (even *in absentia*).

2 Cf. Halbwachs’ chief works (Halbwachs 1966 and 1967). A biographical sketch is provided in Halbwachs 1966, 11-23. For a good summary of Halbwachs’ theories as well as current developments, cf. Erll 2003. Brief introductory articles on collective and cultural memory: Assmann 2001 and Bering 2001. Neumann 2005 provides a good overview with some detailed criticism before presenting her own analyses.

3 Cf. the opening of Halbwachs’ seminal *Das kollektive Gedächtnis* (The Collective Memory) (Halbwachs 1967).

The third main assumption is the concept of a *collective* memory as opposed, or rather in addition, to individual memory. Not only are individual memories shaped by the individual's social surroundings; there is a memory that is genuinely social: the memory of a group. This memory, due to a lack of a unified neuronal basis in which to store information, by necessity relies on the individual members' cerebral networks.⁴ It is, however, externalised in that it is an abstract agglomeration of the individual group members' memory. As such, it is as selective and constructed as individual memory. A group structures its collective memory hierarchically as well, attributing different levels of importance to certain memories. Accordingly, the processes of 'forgetting' are considered not as an arbitrary loss of information, but as a deliberate (though not always consciously planned and executed) way of selection. Those memories deemed important for a group are kept 'alive', while memories either unimportant or harmful to a group's identity are deleted. A group – in analogy to individuals – strives to arrive at a coherent memory version and thus at an identity that is positive and devoid of major contradictions (cf. Halbwachs 1966, 382).

Collective memory is thus a volatile entity: Processes of selection, interpretation and (re-)construction render and re-render information into modifications of the 'original' information (which, as such, is a detested concept in itself). Modern theories of collective memory have focused on a number of aspects, often dealing critically with Halbwachs' assumptions, though largely adopting the three main tenets of collective memory as identity-informing (and as such selective and constructed), socially framed and externalised as a 'meta'-memory. A number of scholars have warned against easy analogies between individual and collective memory processes. One strand of scholarship is devoted to the research of the media of collective memory, dealing with issues such as literate vs. oral communities, the impact of the advent of electronic storage devices and the internet etc. (cf. e.g. Erll/Nünning 2004). Other strands have attempted to render the theory of collective memory compatible with different scholarly disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, history, communication sciences or cultural studies. Cultural studies in particular have adopted collective memory as a powerful tool for analysis. The prolific works of Aleida and Jan Assmann⁵ above all have provided the theoretical foundations for the use of collective memory as an analytical approach in the humanities. Their thoughts on memory as *ars* and *vis* (cf. A. Assmann 1999, 29), the differences between cultural and communicative memory (cf. J. Assmann 1992, 56) as well as the concept of functional and storage memory (cf. A. Assmann 1999, 134) are elements of the theoretical underpinnings of this paper. Aleida and Jan Assmann's elaborate

4 Cf. Halbwachs 1967, 35. Halbwachs himself, however, did not subscribe to theories of neuronal activity within cerebral networks as storage processes, cf. 1966, 21-22.

5 Both Aleida and Jan Assmann have edited numerous collections and published a wide range of monograph and articles. For introductory purposes, cf. their key works (A. Assmann 1999, J. Assmann 1992).

distinctions and modifications to Halbwachs' concepts have been exceedingly important for the terminology and conceptual clarity needed in e.g. literary analyses lest the term 'collective memory' become a universalised shell and mere catchphrase.⁶

It has become a commonplace that the same danger looms large over the term 'trauma'. Originally designating violent physical injury, psychoanalytical approaches in particular have employed the term for instances of intense psychological injury, its causes, processes and effects. The connection of physical trauma to psychological trauma as a causal relationship is still a dominant aspect, as cases of intense violence, sexual abuse, the experience of major bodily harm or the witnessing thereof are key sources of psychological trauma (cf. Eggers 2001). Yet the concept of trauma has been widened to include experiences of psychological or structural violence (particularly in child- or early adulthood) as well as the threat or imminent danger of violence. In connection to the theory of collective memory, the most salient aspect of trauma is its problematic integration into coherent and positive memory versions and thus self-identifications: The "moments of guilt and shame" identified in the introductory quote by Aleida Assmann are obstacles to such a coherent and positive, *ergo* successful and stable, construction of identity. Assmann argues that only recently have societies begun to integrate into their national self-perceptions the darker moments of their histories, thus embarking on what she calls a "therapeutic surmounting of the paralysing repercussions" of these traumatic instances (Assmann 2001, 310). My argument here is that African-Canadian authors are paving the way for this therapeutic surmounting of the omission/denial of slavery and discrimination in hegemonic constructions of a Canadian collective memory. The dominant Canadian collective memory is still constructed along the presumption of a benevolent Canada in both the past and the present. In order to maintain a fissure- and blotch-free Canadian identity, the existence of slavery and the ensuing experience of Canadian Blacks (namely disillusionment, segregation and continuing discrimination) have been blanked out for centuries (cf. Cooper 2007, 68-70; Foster 1996, 31-32; Walker 1982, 6). African-Canadian authors challenge this 'whitewashed' conception of Canada as a 'Promised Land', thus attempting to insert their traumatic experiences into a Canadian collective memory of which they should rightfully be a part.

Lawrence Hill: *The Book of Negroes*

The Book of Negroes (2007; abbreviated as 'BN') is the third novel by Lawrence Hill, son of social activists and US émigrés to Canada. In his works, which include non-fictional writings as well, Hill places particular importance on the passing on of memories, on keeping forgotten or suppressed aspects of (Black North American)

6 Others have furthered the task of providing enhancements to the adaptability of collective memory theory to the study of literature; cf. for instance Erll / Gymnich / Nünning 2003.

history alive.⁷ He often focuses on the traumatic elements of the Black presence in North America, such as segregation, discrimination, racism, limited upward social mobility for Blacks, stereotyping, violence and racial hatred. In *The Book of Negroes*, Hill explores, through the eyes of his protagonist Aminata Diallo, the trials and tribulations – yet also the small triumphs – of an 11-year-old girl captured by slave-traders in Mali in 1756 who is sold to a plantation-owner in the United States. Hill does not shy away from gory detail when relaying the atrocities of the Middle Passage ensuing Aminata's abduction. The reader is also painfully confronted with notions of total ownership and de-humanization that were so blatantly central to the institution of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade. Barely surviving the slave coffle from her native village to the coast and the subsequent Middle Passage, Aminata is put to work on an indigo plantation in South Carolina. In 1775, she manages to run away from her new master in New York City. Fluent in three languages and literate, Aminata is then hired by the British Army to work on the name-sake Book of Negroes, a ledger that contains the names of those Blacks who, by serving the British, have qualified for shipment to Nova Scotia as Black Loyalists. In 1783, Aminata joins the exodus of Blacks – partly runaway slaves, partly indentured or free persons – to Canada. Settling in Birchtown, Nova Scotia, Aminata helps to organize a second exodus: The Sierra Leone Company, in 1792, ships 1,200 African-Canadians from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone, the first independent Black colony. Aminata joins the ones willing to cross the ocean once more. After an abortive quest to go back inland to her native village of Bayo in 1800, Aminata agrees to sail the Atlantic a final time in order to accompany a British abolitionist to London, fostering the abolitionist cause by giving testimony of her life.

The story of Aminata's life, presented by Hill in a fictionalized autobiography recorded by Aminata in the early 1800s, explores traumata in a variety of constellations and levels of intensity. The text furthermore includes discussions of coping with trauma and the inability to do so, thus confronting the reader with an intricate treatment of issues revolving around remembering and forgetting, suffering and surviving.⁸

7 Hill's first two novels, *Some Great Thing* (1992) and *Any Known Blood* (1997) both feature protagonists who explore their family history, uncover a larger (Black Canadian) history beyond their immediate families' stories and set out to write down what they have learned about their literal and metaphorical ancestors in order to pass their newly found knowledge on. For insightful reviews of *Any Known Blood*, cf. Clarke 2002, 310-312 and Bailey Nurse 2003, 173-174.

8 *The Book of Negroes* deals with trauma both in detail and in broad scope. Instances of trauma include – but are not limited to – racial and sexual violence, dehumanization, impotence vis-à-vis cruelty and humiliation, loss of family and friends, loss of identity, disillusionment and broken promises, subhuman living conditions and preventable sickness, total heteronomy and dispossession of self, and structural violence in general. Given the fact that the 486-page novel spans, among others, the histories of the abduction of Africans by slave-traders, the Middle Passage, plantation slavery, indentured labor, broken promises in Nova Scotia, and the impossibility to return 'home', it should be obvious that no single paper can adequately deal with all of

Textual level: diverging reactions to trauma

The novel opens with a scene set in London in 1802, headlined "And now I am old" (BN 1). Despite her old age, Aminata is haunted by memories of her abduction and enslavement as an 11-year-old. Her traumatic recollections are still present and vivid through sensory perceptions: "I still can smell trouble riding on any wind [...]. And my ears still work as good as a hound dog's." (BN 1)⁹ The trauma that most haunts and aggrieves Aminata at her old age is having lost her family. Having neither parents nor children to comfort her is the one regret that stands out among the others. Interestingly, the loss of her own children – both of them torn away from her by whites – is rivalled by a longing for her parents.¹⁰ Aminata has her own way of dealing with the loss of her parents, who have been killed by slave traders in the raid that sent her into slavery: she imagines their presence. When young, it had been impossible for Aminata to be without the counsel of her parents, so she holds imaginary conversations with both her father and her mother (cf. e.g. BN 28, 82, 132-133). Accordingly, in absence of the living parents, her memory of them guides and advises her. The imaginary conversations serve, in Halbwachs' terminology, as *cadres sociaux*, the social framings exemplified in the London walk with physically absent friends. This psychological mechanism is preserved in Aminata up to her old age. In 1802, when writing her memoir, she says:

Most of my time has come and gone, but I still think of them as my parents, older and wiser than I, and still hear their voices, sometimes deep-chested, at other moments floating like musical notes. I imagine their hands steering me from trouble, guiding me around cooking fires and leading me to the mat in the cool shade of our home. I can still picture my father with a sharp stick over hard earth, scratching out Arabic in flowing lines and speaking of the distant Timbuktu. (BN 3)

It is Aminata's literacy, initiated by her father in Bayo, that sets her apart from other slaves and qualifies her for services such as book-keeping and the recording

these aspects – let alone all of the individual instances, circumstances, responses and results of the traumata being inflicted on the novel's characters. Consequently, the reading offered here will by necessity remain cursory and eclectic.

- 9 Sensory perceptions play an important role in mnemonic contexts; cf. van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, particularly 173. Also cf. e.g. Kölbl 2001 on olfactory memory and Hartmann 2001 on taste.
- 10 "[...] I wish my parents were still here to care for me." (BN 3) Aminata has lost her parents and both of her children to the *buckra*, the whites. Her parents were killed in the slave-traders' raid on her village; her first child was sold by her master and died in his infancy; her second child was abducted by a white couple for whom Aminata worked. Deprived of her family, Aminata, at 57, feels like an amputee: "I have escaped violent endings even as they have surrounded me. But I never had the privilege of holding my own children [...]. I long to hold my own children, and their children if they exist, and I miss them the way I'd miss limbs from my own body." (BN 2)

of names for the exoduses to Nova Scotia as well as to Sierra Leone. It is important not to underestimate the social aspect of Aminata's literacy, as it designates Aminata as both a survivor and a teacher. Part of Aminata's strength – next to the almost miraculous fact of her sheer physical survival – indeed lies in encouraging, teaching and inspiring her fellow people, in not letting her and her fellow Blacks' memories slip away.¹¹ Notions of transmitting memories are repeated throughout *The Book of Negroes*, strongly emphasized by Aminata's ability to indeed externalize her memories into written form (the ledger called the Book of Negroes as well as her autobiography). Yet remembering and reifying trauma is not only a life-saver for Aminata; it is also a painful process.¹² Aminata admits: "It was less painful to forget, but I would look and I would remember." (BN 190) Which, of course, Aminata does in writing her life's account, in producing (not simply retelling, but restructuring, reconstructing) the narrative that gives meaning to her life: "I have my life to tell, my own private ghost story, and what purpose would there be to this life I have lived, if I could not take this opportunity to relate it?" (BN 7)

It is through the task of record-keeping and the passing on of memories that Aminata is able to sustain herself psychologically throughout the atrocities of the Middle Passage. Most of her fellow slaves are less fortunate. Fanta, fifth wife of Bayo's chief and captured alongside Aminata, is a case in point. The very thought that her status as a slave will be entailed to her child, that the trauma of her objectification will be passed on, makes her kill her own child as well as the child of a fellow slave.¹³ Aminata recalls the foreshadowing of the infanticide and the gruesome murder itself:

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- 11 Lawrence Hill, in an as of yet unpublished interview I conducted with him in April 2007, asserts that Aminata's key strength, however, is constituted by the fact that she retains a capacity to love in spite of all the suffering she has lived through and all the pain she has witnessed. This view certainly matches the notion that trauma of a scope such as the one presented bears the almost insurmountable danger of rendering positive emotions impossible. For instances of Aminata's sustained capacity for love, cf. e.g. the birth of her second child May (BN 330) or the reunion with May at the very end of the novel.
- 12 Which of course is a well-explored concept; cf. in the Canadian minority context for instance the masterful treatment of this conflict in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1994, particularly 218, 232-235, 237-238). Lawrence Hill cites Joy Kogawa as an example of how to insert history into fiction in order to pass on forgotten memories: "Dramatizing critical moments of our past can produce excellent fiction. Joy Kogawa comes to mind. Many Canadians might not have known about the experience of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War if she hadn't written about it in *Obasan*." (Thomas 2006, 135)
- 13 The notion of trauma breeding trauma, of entailing the status of slave, and thus of property, through (racial) ancestry is maintained throughout the novel. As Georgia, Aminata's surrogate mother on the South Carolina indigo plantation, tells Aminata: "Got a slave mama, then you is slave. Got a slave daddy, then you is slave. Any nigger in you at all, then you is slave as clear as day." (BN 134) For a discussion of the term "slave" as a possible "misnomer" for African-Canadians' ancestors, cf. Prince 2001, 39-49.

I put my hand on [Fanta's] shoulder and told her to think about the baby. She grunted. 'I stopped caring about that a long time ago. No toubab will do to this baby what they have done to us.' A shiver ran through my body. (BN 82-83)

Fanta brought out the knife from the medicine man's room, placed a hand over the baby's face and jerked up his chin. She dug the tip of the knife into the baby's neck and ripped his throat open. Then she pulled the blue cloth over him, stood and heaved him overboard. (BN 90)

While Aminata's reaction to the trauma of the Middle Passage is to survive in order to testify, thus reconstructing subjects through narration, Fanta can see no other way of escape than to disrupt the chain of objectified selves by murder. Fomba, the *woloso* (intra-African slave) of Bayo's chief, reacts differently to the humiliation and pain of the Middle Passage. In contrast to Aminata, who witnesses to testify, and to Fanta, who kills to break the chain of entailing subhuman status, Fomba completely retreats and falls silent. At the slave auction in South Carolina, Fomba is among the 'leftover' slaves – the old, sickly and useless – just as Aminata:

I caught a glimpse of Fomba, sitting on the ground, elbows around his knees, palms over his ears, eyes shut, rocking back and forth. [...] Dead weight, but not dead. [...] Fomba opened his mouth, but nothing – not one sound – came from his lips. (BN 115)

Aminata claims that Fomba's mind is "gone" (BN 114); he refuses to interact with the world of cruelty that surrounds him. The scene described above is an almost stereotypical depiction of a deeply traumatized person. Later on, Fomba is able to work again, but he never recovers his ability to communicate. Tragically, his social death¹⁴ also precipitates physical death: Fomba is shot by a guard when he fails to identify himself (BN 214).

Aminata, in contrast, in a limbo of wanting to witness and having to suffer terribly throughout the process of witnessing, cannot and will not shut herself off from the pain: "I shut my eyes and plugged my ears, but could not block out all the shrieking." (BN 93) There are two factors that secure Aminata's psychological survival (though a mere 'survival' it is indeed): her young age and the notion of being a *djeli*.¹⁵ At the

14 Cf. the widely discussed work of Orlando Patterson (1982).

15 Though the conception of being a *djeli*, a storyteller, is the more interesting one from a literary perspective (as it ties into narrative modes and roles), Aminata's young age provides her mind with a certain flexibility that she claims is lost in adults. Aminata recalls her time aboard the slave vessel and how she was able to endure the horrors aboard the ship: "But also, the child's mind has elasticity. Adults are different – push them too far and they snap. Many times during that long journey, I was terrified beyond description, yet somehow my mind remained intact." (BN 56) Also cf. Aminata's surrogate mother Georgia, who, in the plantation English usually re-

very beginning of the Middle Passage, Aminata decides to act as if she were a *djeli*. A *djeli*, occasionally written *jeli* or *jali*, is a West African storyteller; *griot* is the term predominantly used in Anglophone contexts.¹⁶ His obligation is to relate and pass on oral history (cf. Schulz 2001, 240-241). As such, he is the quintessential specialist in the field of preserving and transmitting identity-informing collective memories (cf. distinctions between cultural and communicative memory, e.g. J. Assmann 1992, 50-52). Aminata, after her passage to London almost 45 years after her abduction, bears witness before the King and Queen as well as before Parliament. By subsequently writing her memoir, thus rendering her story into a durable medium, Aminata – as a *djeli*-cum-writer – externalizes and spreads those memories.

Some of us still scream out in the middle of the night. But there are men, women and children walking about the streets without the faintest idea of our nightmares. They cannot know what we endured if we never find anyone to listen. In telling my story, I remember all those who never made it through the musket balls and the sharks and the nightmares, all those who never found a group of listeners, and those who never touched a quill to an inkpot. (BN 56-57)

Aminata wants to share her pain (or rather: *their* pain, as she explicitly speaks for a collective, including those who have died), she must pass on her/their memories lest the nightmares of the abducted Africans die with the slaves themselves and be forgotten.¹⁷ Two levels of dealing with trauma are reflected in this quotation: The immediate reaction to trauma (nightmares) and the need to keep alive the traumatic memory (either orally: “listeners”, or through writing: “quill to an inkpot”). In effect, thus, the insertion of the traumatic memory of slavery into a mainstream collective memory unperturbed by these recollections (“without the faintest idea of our nightmares”) is at the core of Aminata’s testimony.

served for communication with whites, contrasts Aminata with Fomba: “You done cross the river [the Atlantic], and your head is on fire. But grown man done cross the river and shut his mouth forever.” (BN 130) The elasticity of her mind is thus presented as a major factor in Aminata’s ability to cope with trauma. For Fomba, however, the ocean has proved to be “one nasty shut-mouth river.” (BN 130)

16 Cf. for instance the collection *T-Dot Griots: An Anthology of Toronto's Black Storytellers* (Richardson / Green 2004).

17 This notion is repeated a number of times in *The Book of Negroes*; the collective voice embodied by Aminata is an important aspect of stressing collective rather than personal memory, even though on the surface we are dealing with a fictionalized individual autobiography. Cf. for instance: “They [the people of Canvas Town, NYC] took me into their dancing, and did not ask where I came from, for all they had to do was look at me and hear my own sobs in my maternal tongue and they knew I was one of them. The dead infant was the child I had once been; it was my own lost [son] Mamadu; it was every person who had been tossed into the unforgiving sea on the endless journeys across the big river [the Atlantic].” (BN 256)

Consequently, Aminata – in contrast to Fanta or Fomba – has both the predisposition (her young age) and a reason to survive physically as well as mentally. She brings herself to channel her traumatic experiences and renders the process of witnessing usable against caving in: “No, I told myself. *Be a djeli. See, and remember.*” (BN 64)

The Canadian perspective: Canaan denied

In 1783, Aminata is asked to work for the British Army – by then preparing to retreat from New York City, their last stronghold south of the 49th parallel separating the two North American countries – by helping to compile the Book of Negroes. This list of Black Loyalists signifies, so Aminata and her fellow Canvas Town residents are promised, their ticket to a life in freedom and equality under the lion’s paw of British rule in the North. “Nova Scotia, Miss Diallo, will be your promised land,” Aminata is told by a British officer (BN 286). All Blacks registered in the Book of Negroes (an actual historical document that has survived and is available to scholars today) were guaranteed to be “as free as any [white] Loyalist” (BN 286) in the British colony of Nova Scotia.

The history of Black Canadians, however, has been a history of broken promises. Hill describes Aminata’s first day of recording the names of those willing to leave New York City for Nova Scotia:

A group of ten Negroes was called up to the deck [where Aminata logs the names of those Blacks wishing to sail for Nova Scotia]. I had never seen them before. ‘Who are they?’ I asked [Captain] Waters. ‘Slaves and indentured servants,’ he said. ‘But I thought...’ ‘We will get around to evacuating the refugees in Canvas Town,’ Waters said. ‘But first, we register the property of white Loyalists.’ [...]

A girl appeared before me. [...] I could see that nothing about this trip suggested freedom. *Hana Palmer*, I wrote, again taking down the colonel’s words. *15, stout wench. Ben Palmer of Frog’s Neck, Claimant.* ‘Claimant?’ I asked the colonel when the white man had taken away the girl. ‘It means that he owns her,’ the colonel said. (BN 293; italics in the original)

In a twist of sardonic irony, Hill has Aminata record the name of a slave once belonging to Lord Dunmore, the British governor who issued the very declaration promising Blacks freedom if they joined the British ranks. “Virginia governor got to have his slaves,” Dunmore’s blind ex-slave squarely comments (BN 299). Through Aminata’s entries in the Book of Negroes, Hill thus discerns the fact that slavery – contrary to popular opinion – indeed existed in Canada. The text also cites advertisements for runaway slaves (slave-owners promised rewards for captured and reenslaved fugitives) and describes raids for these fugitives. Aminata summarizes the British policy which so blatantly violates the promises made to Blacks:

I came to understand that if you had come to Nova Scotia free, you stayed free – although that didn't prevent American slave owners from sailing into town and attempting to snatch back their property. However, if you came to Nova Scotia as a slave, you were bound as fast as our brothers and sisters in the United States. (BN 321)

The first crucial element of the traumatic treatment of Blacks as presented in *The Book of Negroes* is thus: Slavery existed in Canada as well as in the United States, though certainly on a smaller scale in terms of numbers and economic and social enmeshment (particularly due, of course, to the absence of an extensive plantation economy in Canada). As Aminata observes in the summary that was just quoted, there are also those Blacks for whom the promised land indeed meant freedom. But even for those who had come as free people and managed to evade (re-)capture, Nova Scotia turned out to be anything but the Canaan they had hoped for. First of all, due to the economic dependence of Blacks on the white population, the institution of indentured labour constituted a prolongation of slavery under only slightly better terms. Aminata, discussing the difference between slavery and indenture, resolves: "After such a long journey to freedom, I couldn't imagine agreeing to" indenture (BN 295), yet many of her fellow exiles hardly had a choice. And for those Blacks who, like Aminata, avoided both (re-)enslavement and indenture, Nova Scotia did not materialize as the land of milk and honey they had been led to anticipate either.

Aminata's first encounter with white Canadians is marked by her apparent invisibility ("as if I didn't exist," "without stopping to look at me," BN 313), which of course alludes both to well-known African-American literary notions (cf. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, 1952, and its perception) and the impression that 'white Canada' largely has and continues to ignore the Black presence. Aminata is refused service in a coffee house and British soldiers pelt her with nuts; segregation and racial hatred are the bottom line of the Black Loyalists' experience. In terms of trauma, the disillusionment that a vast majority of Black Loyalists experienced has left obvious scars that still reverberate in contemporary African-Canadian literature. In general, this aspect of the Black experience is the most distinctly *Canadian* one: Slavery, indenture, racism, and segregation all existed in the United States (most of the time more harshly so than in Canada). But Canadian Blacks *expected otherwise*. They had been promised a refuge but got only a continuation of their suffering and hardships under slightly improved conditions.¹⁸

18 Disillusionment is one of the most pervasive themes in African-Canadian literature in general. It has been explored from the onset of the Black Canadian literary landscape in the 1960s (by Austin Clarke, cf. Bailey Nurse 2006, XIV-XV) and is applied to historical as well as to contemporary issues (cf. *ibid.*). For a survey of the African-Canadian literary field, cf. Lutz 2005, 313-319.

In Birchtown, a segregated Black community halfway between Yarmouth and Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia, Aminata lives among the disappointed and disgruntled Black Loyalists waiting for the promised land allocations.

Nova Scotia had more land than God could sneeze at, [the blind pastor] Daddy Moses said, but hardly any of it was being parcelled out at black folk. 'But the British said we could have land,' I said. 'Get good and comfortable at the back of the line,' he said. 'There are a thousand coloured folks waiting before you. And, ahead of them, a few thousand white people. They call this place Nova Scotia, but folks in Birchtown have another name for it.' 'What's that?' I asked. 'Nova Scarcity.' (BN 317)¹⁹

As the ironic usage of the name "Moses" suggests, the Black exodus to Nova Scotia has thus turned out to be a continuation of the structural racism experienced by Blacks in the United States. The scale of traumatic experiences has been reduced, yet their underlying factors, such as assumptions of racial superiority, persist. Those African-Canadians who have been granted freedom – and thus humanity and the status of subject, not object – still remain second-class citizens and humans.²⁰

Clearly, *The Book of Negroes* presents a picture of the exodus of Blacks to Canada in terms of a Canaan *not* secured, thus contradicting the common notion of Canadian moral superiority vis-à-vis the slave-ridden United States. Hill seems to discern a need to correct the lopsided perception of Canadian history and national identity – in unison with a large number of African-Canadian writers. This endeavour to insert trauma into the Canadian collective memory will be further illustrated by a closer look at a number of poems by Black Canadian writers in the following section.

Beyond *The Book of Negroes*: selected African-Canadian poetry

As I have exemplified in the discussion of *The Book of Negroes* above, one of the goals of African-Canadian literature is to present little-known memories regarding the Black presence in Canada. The impetus behind much of African-Canadian literature is the fact that life for Black Canadians has incorrectly, yet consistently been portrayed as a bed of roses by Canadian mainstream (historical) discourse. The cur-

19 If land plots were allotted to Blacks at all, they were indeed second-rate or worse. Boyko summarizes: "Freed slaves fared little better than those still in bondage. [...] Whites were afforded land grants of fifteen to 150 acres and given their choice of location. Freed Blacks were given an average of less than twenty acres and were assigned land that was nearly all rocky, swampy or far from fresh water." (Boyko 1998, 159) Walter Borden describes the land allocation to Black Loyalists in his poem "The Hebrew Children": "Ham's descendants [Blacks] / shouted HALLE-LUYAH, / Caught a train [the Underground Railroad] / And travelled / To the Warden of the North [Halifax] / Who counted heads, / Heaved a sigh, / And told them: / Go, and make potatoes / Out of rocks!" (Borden 1992, ll. 18-27)

20 This treatment of the newly-arrived Black Loyalists is well-documented; cf. e.g. the seminal works of Winks (1997) and Walker (1982) and particularly Walker's *The Black Loyalists* (1992).

rent Canadian self-perception, based on a continuation of the assumed historical absence of "moments of guilt and shame" (cf. the introductory quote by Assmann), consequently ascribes a Canaanite status to the life of Blacks in Canada:

In Canada, the prevailing view suggests, nobody has doors slammed in their faces because of the colour of their skin, for Canada has the potential to be one big, comfortable home for all people fortunate to live within its boundaries. [...] No, the prevailing view argues, minority groups have no reason to whine or complain. Not in Canada, not in the place that had been the terminus of the Underground Railroad for American Blacks fleeing slavery. (Foster 1996, 31-32)²¹

A similar analysis regarding the lack of acknowledgement of the Canadian history of slavery and suppression has long been presented by a number of Black scholars, yet the charge that mainstream Canada still refuses to recognize this particular, traumatic aspect of its collective memory is still being upheld by African-Canadian authors. Compare, for instance, the following remarkably similar statements, made in a 1982 and a 2007 publication respectively:

[From the end of the 17th century] until the early nineteenth century, throughout the founding of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Ontario, there was never a time when blacks were not held as slaves in Canada. Slavery is thus a very real part of our history, yet the fact that slavery ever existed here has been one of our best-kept historical secrets. (Walker 1982, 19)

Slavery is Canada's best-kept secret, locked within the national closet. And because it is a secret it is written out of official history. But slavery was an institutionalized practice for over two hundred years. (Cooper 2007, 68)

Throughout African-Canadian fictional as well as non-fictional writing, this concept of a 'dual denial' is strongly emphasized: the historical denial of actual freedom and equality is closely followed by the denial of the existence of slavery and racism in the first place. Accordingly, African-Canadian authors claim that two promises

21 An excellent example of lopsided assumptions about African-Canadian history and social reality is provided by Africville, an all-Black community just outside Halifax, torn down in the early 1970s because of its alleged 'backwardness'. Africville's symbolic nature and its salience as an almost quintessential contested memory have been well-documented in fictional as well as non-fictional literature. For an overview cf. the study by Clairmont and Magill (1999), a children's version of the story of Africville by Perkyns (2003), a number of poems (e.g. Nolan 1992, Tynes 1990c, Ward 1997, Clarke 1994) and the scholarly articles by Bast (2003), Gerlach (1997), Moynagh (1998), and Nelson (2002).

have been broken. The first promise is an historical one, illustrated in *The Book of Negroes* – full equality under the lion's paw.²² The second one is the contemporary promise of multiculturalism, viz. the pledge of full participation in the life and identity of the country. African-Canadian literature dissects the mechanisms of what I have called a 'dual denial', laying bare the actual racism of both the past and the present as well as the tendency to erase the acknowledgement of these shortcomings from the Canadian collective memory – and consequently, from the construction of a national identity. While *The Book of Negroes*, necessitated by its autobiographical narrative structure, cannot comment on the contemporary suppression of memories directly (but does so indirectly by presenting the ignorance of Canadians concerning the country's history of slavery²³), many African-Canadian poets, for instance, very consciously link the wrongs of the past to the shortcomings of the present: The same mechanisms of dual denial (first the social policy of denying full equality, then the refusal to remember the policy) are attributed to both the past and the present. The Underground Railroad as a marker of freedom in the North, the exodus of Black Loyalists to Canada and the multiculturalism doctrine of today are thus linked and exposed as pretences that allow Canadian society to perpetuate discriminatory actions while simultaneously denying them in order to arrive at a self-perception that describes Canada as a historical and current paradise – in particular as opposed to the immoral United States of both the past and the present.

George Borden's poem "Empathy" (1988) is a case in point. Its unostentatious style and structure as well as its straightforwardness in terms of content underline the primal and essential nature of the connection between the past and the present in African-Canadian literature. This link is not poetically encrypted or delicately alluded at; instead, the text's lyrical I quite literally remembers the suffering of his ancestors, bridging the gap between slavery ("this dastardly deed", l. 3²⁴) and his current situa-

22 "As the freed slaves of Nova Scotia had discovered, however, slavery's death did not mark the birth of true freedom." (Boyko 1998, 160) The racist practices of e.g. indenture or unfair land allocations presented in *The Book of Negroes* are of course only a small aspect of the discrimination Blacks have faced in Canada. Boyko for instance also deals with issues such as discriminatory admittance into the military, limited upward social mobility, segregation, and racist immigration practices, tracing racial discrimination against Blacks from the time of slavery up to the 1970s.

23 "But there are men, women and children walking about the streets without the faintest idea of our nightmares. They cannot know what we endured if we never find anyone to listen." (BN 56, also quoted in the analysis of *The Book of Negroes* above)

24 It is worthwhile mentioning the ironic usage of the Biblical quote employed here by Borden, as it bears resemblance to Hill's ironic usage of "Daddy Moses": The first lines of "Empathy" read: "In as much / as you have done / this dastardly deed / to those of my heritage - / you have done it unto me." (Borden 1988, ll. 1-5) The original Biblical passage ("And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Mt 25, 40) would primarily suggest a reward for a positive deed done, while the poem can only be read in terms of retribution for the "dastardly deed"

tion ("With them - / I have suffered", l. 9). Borden creates a collective of African-Canadians through diachronic unity, a feat that might be deemed lofty as even synchronic unity is disputed due to the multiplicity of backgrounds, immigration histories, countries of origin etc. of people(s) subsumed under the umbrella term 'African-Canadian'.²⁵ Still, it is the poem's imperative impetus that the shared memory, as Aminata's shared pain in *The Book of Negroes*, is upheld and passed on: a trauma remembered and brought to the fore time and time again.

One of the literary mechanisms through which the bridging of past and present is achieved in Black Canadian poems is the use of sound/music or other sensory perceptions. Slavery and field work, for example, are often alluded to through music (*The Book of Negroes* makes use of field songs as well; cf. BN 136-137; also cf. notions of sensory perceptions triggering memories in Aminata as discussed above). Olive Senior, for instance, writes: "Now against the rhythms / of subway trains my / heart-beats still drum / worksongs. Some wheels / sing freedom, the others: / home." (Senior 1980, ll. 40-45) Worksongs – songs based on field hollers, spirituals and African call-and-response patterns – have come to represent both the unendurable slave work and the hope of freedom. Senior combines these memories with the current "rhythms / of subway trains", keeping the memory of slavery and indentured labour closely connected to the present situation of the lyrical I.

Similarly, a sensory perception triggers memories of past injustices in the lyrical persona of Maxine Tynes' "Black Heritage Photos: Nova Scotia Archives" (1987b). In another poem, Tynes (1990a) strongly asserts the Black presence in Nova Scotia:

Black Song Nova Scotia

We are Africville and Preston,
 North and East
 We are Portia White singing to a long-ago king
 We are Edith Clayton weaving the basketsong of life
 Black and old with history
 and strong with the new imperative.
 We are Graham Jarvis bleeding on the road in Weymouth Falls.
 We are the Black and the invisible
 We are here and not here

of slavery – again a reversal of expectations, as in the hope of being led to the promised land by (blind Daddy) Moses.

- 25 Other poets go beyond the creation of a collective memory shared by African-Canadians as a locally defined group, speaking of 'race memory' ("The ritual [of planting] was ingrained / in the blood, embedded / in the centuries of dirt / beneath his fingernails / encased in the memories / of his race," Senior 1980, ll. 17-22). Also cf. Afua Cooper, who quotes Jan Carew in her poem "Roots and Branches": "Names are like magic markers in the long and labyrinthine stream of racial memory, for racial memories are rivers leading to the sea where the memory of mankind [sic] is stored." Cooper 1992, 23 ([sic] in the original).

We are gone but never leave
 We have voice and heart and wisdom
 We are here
 We are here
 We are here.

The lyrical I (really, a collective 'lyrical we') in "Black Song Nova Scotia" identifies so completely with both the heroines (White, Clayton) and the victims (Jarvis) of Black Maritime Canadian history that again, an absolute diachronic unity – identity in the original sense of the word – is created: 'we *are* these people.' It thus transcends even the collectivization of Aminata's suffering in *The Book of Negroes*. Like Aminata, the persona(e) also experience(s) the apparent invisibility of Blacks (l. 8). The transmission of memories is a central element once more: The memory of the Black experience in Canada will be upheld, though the actual witnesses may long be departed (ll. 9-10). The concluding lines again emphasize vigorously the need to assert the Black presence against a collective memory that has erased the traumata (ll. 7-8) and the achievements (ll. 3-4) of African-Canadians from dominant national self-definitions.

Another writer who has extensively dealt with the literary revival of the Black presence, particularly in Nova Scotia, is George Elliott Clarke. He has emerged as the foremost scholar and one of the most highly acclaimed authors of African-Canadian literature. His *Execution Poems* (2001) antedate his 2005 novel *George and Rue* in tone and in content. Both the novel and the collection of poems tell the story of two Africadians, based on the true story of two of Clarke's cousins who killed a white taxi driver with a hammer to rob him. The unorthodox question Clarke confronts the reader with is: Could this crime be even remotely justified (or at least triggered) by the traumata and the vicious circle created by centuries of slavery, indenture, discrimination and disillusionment? In "The Killing", Clarke uses these suggestive lines for Rue's defence statement in court:

Here's how I justify my error:
 The blow that slew Silver [the taxi driver] came from two centuries back.
 It took that much time and agony to turn a white man's whip
 into a black man's hammer.
 (Clarke 2001, ll. 36-39)

Whether or not the moral burden of the murder might be eased by the history of African-Canadians may be up to each reader to decide; in any case, the effect of this moral judgment is that Clarke virtually *forces* his audience to confront and deal with the issues of Canadian slavery and racism in the first place (using, as many contemporary Black Canadian authors do, the easily recognizable image of the whip to conjure up the institution of slavery). Other authors employ the richly metaphorical

tropes of the Middle Passage to recall the traumata suffered by slaves; the persona in Claire Harris' "A Dream of Valor and Rebirth" (1989), for instance, in a dream- or trance-like state "sees slow swelling moon tastes the flow / of blood and tides knows centuries / knows nothing ever changes in fact" (ll. 50-52). Later on in the poem, Harris describes in gruesome lines the memory of the slave ships, including several aspects – such as the olfactory onslaught of the slave ship – also employed in *The Book of Negroes*: "she swallows the wail stench / of men shackled spoon shaped" (ll. 106-107).²⁶ Harris concludes this scene by connecting the pain and suffering of the slaves to the lyrical I of today as the contemporary persona's "cramped legs burn at the ankles" (l. 115) in empathy with the slaves. Consequently, for the poem's persona, the traumatic experience (here also in the original meaning of the word as being physically hurt) is vividly present. Likewise, Harris' "Sister (y)our Manchild at the Close of the Century" (1996) deals with the atrocities of and the particular Canadian involvement with the slave trade from a contemporary perspective, emphasizing the link between past and present.

On the larger scale of African-Canadian literature, then, the constant conjuring up of these traumatic issues points to the importance contemporary Black Canadian writers place on the historical and current Black experience as well as to the perceived need to assert and re-assert, to tell and re-tell these memories (whether in full length as novels or in metaphorical density in poems) lest they remain blanked out. The very titles of African-Canadian poems suggest a strong preoccupation with issues of slavery and bondage: "Chains and Shackles", "VIII – Exodus", "Forgotten Holocaust", "Breaking Chains", "Patterns of Escape", "Fashions of Slavery", "Plantation North", "A Century after Slavery" are only a small sample. These poems frequently add specifically Canadian elements to make sure that their direction of impact is not misunderstood as an attack against the United States (and thus, again, as an excuse for Canadian mainstream discourse to exclude their own traumatic historical moments by pointing south).

G. A. Borden, in his poem "I Never Heard Their Cry", summarizes this re-calling to attention, this need to establish and to assert the memories of African-Canadians as part of the larger collective memory, in the following way:

Today, centuries later, in
the quiet of the evening,
as I gaze about this
wretched plantation-like
Black Nova Scotia community,

26 In *The Book of Negroes*, the stench of the slave ship haunts and tortures Aminata (the smell of the slave ship is the first thing she notices about the vessel she is forced to board after her abduction, cf. BN 50), yet she is also spellbound by it years later – a remnant of her urge to witness and not turn away: "The stink grew as the [slave] ship drew closer. Some of the Nova Scotians went [...], but I was transfixed." (BN 378-379)

I can hear their cry ... and
 feel their pain.
 (Borden 1988, ll. 46-52)

The reference to a “plantation-like / Black Nova Scotia community” is of course historically counter-factual in its allusion: Nova Scotia has never been a place of plantation slavery. Yet the combination of a marker of forced labor and a specifically Canadian locale illustrates the underlying similarities between the plantation economy and the Canadian treatment of Blacks (e.g. notions of racial superiority). Though lacking actual plantations, these lines seem to suggest, Nova Scotia has been “plantation-like” (l. 49, emphasis added) in its dealings with African-Canadians.

As a final example, the following excerpt from Maxine Tynes’ “Black Teacher: To this World, To my Students” underlines the salience of witnessing (cf. the similarity to Aminata’s wish to be a *djeli*, i.e. her urge to witness in Hill’s *The Book of Negroes*), the connection of past and present through strong ties to the ancestors (l. 45) as well as the aspiration to be part of the (historical) discourse by asserting, through literature, the Black aspects of a rewritten Canadian collective memory (Tynes 1987c, ll. 44-48):

take me as a true Black statement
 take me as a legacy of the fathers
 take me as a witness
 for I demand to read every word
 and to write some of my own.

Conclusion

This paper has explored questions of trauma and slavery in African-Canadian literature. A closer look at the way in which trauma is dealt with in Lawrence Hill’s 2007 novel *The Book of Negroes* has yielded results on three different levels. On a personal or individual level, Hill presents a range of possible reactions to the trauma of objectification and dehumanization through slavery. The novel’s protagonist, Aminata Diallo, is able to sustain herself psychologically to a degree that allows her to continue living. While even her sheer physical survival is against all odds, her ability to lead a purposeful life with a distinct possibility of retaining her capacity for love is simply astonishing. This achievement largely rests on her self-proclaimed mission to be a *djeli*, to record and pass on the memories of both her own enslavement as well as that of her fellow slaves. Her survival is contrasted with other characters’ caving in or “snap[ping]” (BN 56) – remembering and telling are thus presented as the alternative to destructive reactions such as infanticide or complete retreat. On a second level, Hill portrays a part of Canadian history that has largely been forgotten (‘forgetting’ here implies the ranking of certain memories on a scale of alleged importance for a group, with those memories of lesser salience being

relegated to the background of the collective memory).²⁷ As such, the experiences made by the novel's characters are representative of the fate of many Black Loyalists migrating from the United States to Canada in the 1780s. On a third level, *The Book of Negroes*, by the very fact of reviving these 'inactive' memories (Assmann calls them 'uninhabited', cf. Assmann 1999, 133), works towards a more encompassing ambition of African-Canadian literature: to assert the (historical) Black presence in Canada, which, for reasons of cleansing the national self-perception of the cracks and blotches of inflicting traumata on one of Canada's – officially cherished – minorities, has remained widely unacknowledged. Hill's novel is only one example of this tendency. Several more examples have been given in the section on Black Canadian poetry. The list of authors striving to revive the Black Canadian experience and to incorporate these traumatic memories into the Canadian self-perception could easily be expanded; though African-Canadians account for only about three per cent of the total population, and although there is still a lack of scholarly interest in Black Canadian literature, it is a literary strand both prolific and increasingly appreciated by a wider public. As such, Black Canadian literature stands a good chance to cause a positive rupture in the fabric(ation) of a coherent Canadian collective memory and identity that is based on superficial notions of a benevolent, Canaan-esque nation, and to bring to the fore traumatic memories of slavery and racial discrimination in order to arrive at a more detailed and more faithful representation of a national 'self'.

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27 A process aptly described by Aleida Assmann's conception of functional vs. storage memory, cf. Assmann 1995.

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Lawrence Hill presents Aminata, the most powerful literary heroin I have seen created . Based on historical factual events of what thousands of Africans endured less than three centuries ago, with no choice. This follows Aminatas painful journey from captivity in the mid 1700s , to her final days as an older lady helping abultionists in London in 1802.Â I'll definitely be reading other Hill novels but no it'll be tough to find one to match The Book of Negroes. Read more. One person found this helpful.Â was recommended this by a Canadian friend. it is good to read for those who don't know any history at all of these tragic, horrific and sad times for thousands in the world. Definitely worth reading and of course it takes one to another time, others dreadful lives. Lawrence Hill wrote the novel in the tradition of slave narratives, using the language and tropes of the genre. For instance, the narrator tells her story after achieving literacy and freedom. Her story helps forward the abolitionist cause. As a work of historical fiction, The Book of Negroes incorporates actual events and figures into its fictional plot and characters.Â Lawrence Hill worked with filmmaker Clement Virgo to adapt The Book of Negroes into a six-part TV miniseries. The ambitious \$10 million production was shot in Canada and South Africa with an international cast of 120 and a crew of more than 400 people. It stars Shailyn Pierre-Dixon and Aunjanue Ellis as the child and adult Amanita, respectively.Â Selected Works of The Book of Negroes. Â—. External Links.