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Black River

An account of Christmas Preacher, a slave freed

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Abstract

The novel and critical exegesis comes out of a desire to fill both a literal and a symbolic gap in my family history.

The novel, *Black River*, narrates the life of the fictional character Christmas Preacher over a period 40 years, between the 1790 and 1840, in the State of Kentucky. The narrative incorporates a battle in an external realm between an ageless queen-mermaid and a resurrected ancestor over the life of an enslaved Christmas Preacher. His master, Mr. Williams Preacher, adopts new Quaker doctrines and eventually sets him and two others free. As an emancipated African, he fights between verdicts of either making Kentucky home or nurturing the sacred revelation that he would one day levitate back to his village in Oli'doma.

This exegesis deploys practice-led journaling as a platform on which three key methodological approaches are employed: the ethnohistorical, the psychogeographical and literary studies. Thus the groundwork for my novel and the novel itself inform the exegesis, just as the exegesis and the research it embodies informs the novel in a dialogical process of development.

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SECTION ONE

FILLING A GAP IN A FAMILY HISTORY

An Exegesis

In liberty or bondage, the African could not be separated from the American

– Colson Whitehead

INTRODUCTION

THE WORLD AND ME

I have named this first mini-portion of the exegesis after the title of Ta-Nehisi Coates's book on his experience as an African-American in the United States: *The World and Me*. While Coates's book does not correlate with this section of my work in all aspects, it does reflect my experience in Western society as an African.

Before I go to sleep each night, I go through the online version of the New Zealand Herald using my cell phone. One night, I encountered depressing news. An Australian woman's son died due to the ineffectual handling of the boy's case by qualified doctors in her country. On noticing some unusual symptoms in her son, this woman visited the team of doctors several times. Her statement, which also happens to be the headline of the article I read, was: MY SON DIED IN A FIRST WORLD COUNTRY IN A THIRD WORLD WAY.

I shared in this grief. I found myself reflecting on her statement and wondering if she ever thought people from third world countries would read this. I asked myself certain questions days later. What does it mean to die in a third world way? Third world simply means an *underdeveloped* country, and this underdevelopment is described by Rodney (1973) as a terminological means of comparing levels of development and not in fact the absence of development itself.

Rodney (1973) states that all countries that are referred to as underdeveloped, are in some way exploited or have been exploited by others. My country of origin, Nigeria, may be categorised as a developing nation, but is there such a category as 'developing'? According to Rodney, it is either developed or underdeveloped.

In Ta-Nehisi Coates's book, *Between the World and Me*, he writes to his son. In one of his passages, he points out the following: "You have been cast into a race in which the wind is always at your face and the hounds are always at your heels" (p.107). I often wonder if I could share these words with my own children. New Zealand is not America where there are possibilities of a police officer of the state executing a black person on the street (Coates 2015). I am not justifying the society I live in as having no issues on race. I have had experiences and I have heard similar stories from some migrants.

On my psychogeographical trip to America, which I analyse later in this exegesis, I noticed that one part of Louisville Kentucky was dominated by blacks, and surprisingly I was advised by several people not to go there at night as it was not safe. This was the perception of Louisville's residents that were not part of the African-American community. I did not expect this in this century – that I, who is an African, would be given such advice.

I am from a third world country. I lived there until I was 27 years old. It is mainly a black population, but on reflection I realise that I may not have had the third world experience that the Australian woman spoke of. I went to good primary and secondary schools that propelled me to undertake this doctoral research in creative writing. I did not die in a third world way because of the great doctors we have. Do people really die in a third world way? I arrived in New Zealand to do a postgraduate diploma in communications sponsored by my parents. From that day, the 26th of July 2011, one question I am always asked by New Zealanders is: 'Where are you from?' I understand the question is synonymous with a question like, 'What the hell are you doing in my country?' It is easy to distinguish between those that ask out of positive curiosity and those that ask with a racist undertone. This experience in New Zealand cannot be compared the high level of racism in modern American society that I read about. Coates (2015 p.69) describes himself and

his African-American folks as ‘those of us born out of mass rape, whose ancestors were carried off and divided up into policies and stocks’ and in this century have become victims of vast shootings by American police.

I remember those nights in Nigeria as a child when the light supply was cut and the television, the electric ceiling fans and bulbs stop working. A candle was lit and I and my siblings would sit around our father and persuade him to tell us some folkloric stories. The stories that were of slavery remain in my heart and have paved way for my research pursuit. I remember some of the stories about the white man that purchased some of my forebears. I remember lessons acquired from these stories. My father used to say, ‘If you behaved badly in the olden days in Oli’doma, you would be sold to slavers or the white man.’ I also remember the magical stories – how one forebear planted an *udara* seed and sang to it until it became a massive tree in a day; how a taken family member levitated back home after many years in the land of the white man.

One great gift I acquired in New Zealand other than my marriage to my sweetheart, the births of my children and the acquisition of my Master’s degree, was attaining New Zealand residency. In other words, I and my family were gifted the opportunity to make New Zealand our country. The only work experience I had prior to my coming to New Zealand was working as an administrator in a medical centre owned and run by mother. There is no doubt that I now earn more than whatever I would be earning if I had remained in Nigeria.

The immigration officer that our residency application was assigned to assessed our application in great detail all because we were from a third world country. My children had to undergo expensive medical screening, despite being born in New Zealand, to meet the immigration requirements. I remember one nurse insisting that my first child was not born in New Zealand as though she had lived with me throughout my stay in New Zealand. I had my child’s birth certificate

to show her and with a defeated demeanour, she looked away. She had made assumptions based on a child's ethnic background.

It took the immigration officer more than two years to decide on our application, whereas people from first world nations were getting theirs in two months. I remember a statement made by my lawyer when I put a lot of pressure on her. She, who was also an immigrant but from the UK, said immigration had every right to decline my application even if I met the conditions. She further advised I should accept residency as a privilege should I be granted it. I swallowed hard. The immigration officer questioned a lot of things before giving approval – my wife and my English competencies, our Bachelor's degrees and our birth certificates from the so called third world.

Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie (2009), in her talk *The danger of a single story*, emphasised the single story that most Western folks have of Africans – that they come from a wretched continent where people live like animals and are almost devoured by poverty. Like Adichie, I am from “a conventional, middle-class Nigerian family” (Adichie 2009 p. 1). My father is a veterinary doctor and a senior university lecturer. My mother is a consultant ophthalmologist. Growing up as children we had normal lives. Most folks in Western society, which may include my lawyer and the immigration officer, have a single story of where I am from – that people from Africa have “no possibility of a connection as human equals” (Adichie, 2009 p. 2).

Aside from my PhD study, I work as a psychiatric assistant to meet the needs my family. I have had to confront some racist attitudes and outbursts at work from some of the people I support. It's no shock to me when I hear this: ‘Go back to your third world!’ A patient once called me a nigger, so did one pedestrian I met in my neighbourhood. The worst of all these hateful words was from another patient who told me to my face that he would commit suicide if he was black. And

for a moment I thought of my precious Nigeria filled with no other race other than the 186 million black people. What is wrong with being black? Adichie (2009) describes the downside of Africa like this: “Of course, Africa is a continent full of catastrophes: There are immense ones, such as the horrific rapes in Congo and depressing ones, such as the fact that 5,000 people apply for one job vacancy in Nigeria’ (p. 3). The author lays plain the argument that a Western person regards any one of these catastrophes as a single story about Africa. I do not deny being a victim of some of Africa’s shortcomings. I do have a better life in New Zealand but I do not agree with the single story approach to Africa of most people I come across.

During my psychogeographical trip to America I did a little personal research. I told a set of people I was from New Zealand, and told another set of people that I was from Nigeria. Before the trip, I contacted a Kentucky university professor. He was so excited at the prospect of meeting with me and talking about Kentucky’s slave past when I mentioned I was living and doing my study in New Zealand. As soon as I hinted in one email that I was originally from a third world nation, he severed every communication. This experience led me to conduct my personal research in addition to my psychogeographical study.

I wasn’t surprised at the outcome of my personal research. The white folks and even the African-Americans I told I was from New Zealand appeared to be much nicer to me than those I told I was from Nigeria. To my surprise, most of the ones I told I was from New Zealand didn’t even question the colour of my skin. They were interested in the country. They had heard New Zealand was beautiful. From those I told I was from Nigeria, I had less interest. If they wanted to prolong a conversation they spoke about Boko Haram or scammers.

On my return to New Zealand, I shared this with a friend and in return he gave me Walter Rodney’s book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1973). Through this work I came to

understand why my precious Nigeria had become a third world country. The Western world and Africa had a relationship which ensured the transfer of wealth from Africa to Europe even before the colonial era, and this was one of the factors that hindered development in Africa. I also learnt that the United States gained a lot of industrial benefits from slavery, the brutal exploitation of Africa, to be where it is today.

RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Black River: A Novel and Critical Exegesis comes out of a desire to fill both a literal and a symbolic gap in my family history. My great-great-great grandfather's brothers were captured, sold into slavery, and transported to America. Different stories were passed down the generations as to where they were taken and what happened to them, but nothing was written down, so the accounts have the status of folklore. Indeed, one family legend is that one of these forebears flew back to Africa in the manner of a superhuman being. In attempting to reconstruct this occluded narrative, my research has involved surveying a variety of ethnographical and historical texts (accounts of slavery both by slaves and by others) centring around the period in which my forebears lived, the late-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries. The specifics of my chosen location, in the State of Kentucky, laid the foundation for psychogeographical exploration of place, as explored below. However, in recognition of the mythical dimension to my family 'history', I also explore the creative possibilities of weaving magical realist elements into the commonly realist genre of the neo-slave narrative.

This exegesis deploys practice-led journaling as a platform on which three key methodological approaches are employed: the ethnohistorical, the psychogeographical and literary studies. Thus the groundwork for my novel and the novel itself inform this exegesis, just as the

exegesis and the research it embodies informs the novel in a dialogical process of development. The novel, *Black River*, narrates the life of the fictional character Christmas Preacher over a period 40 years, between the 1790 and 1840, in the State of Kentucky. While decrying the iniquities of slavery, it avoids presenting slavery in purely ‘black and white’ terms: some slaves were sold by fellow blacks in Africa and, in the later phase, some whites were Abolitionists. In the context of the United States, while slavery itself was clearly an abhorrent, oppressive apparatus, specificities of the treatment of slaves varied widely from state to state. Furthermore, being ‘freed’ could itself be partial and problematic, as there is evidence that during the slave era many slaves freed by their owners were unable to lead decent lives due to discrimination, and had no choice other than to return to their masters (Coleman, 1940, p. 55). Christmas is one of four slaves in the novel who return to their master, Quaker minister William Preacher, who initially set them free in accordance with Quaker doctrine. These chronological events are interlaced with, and thrown into relief by, Christmas’ West African roots and legendary heritage as revealed in a non-linear series of flashbacks in the novel. These interlaced narrative strands which comprise the novel aim to fill, in fictional form, the literal gap in my family history.

This exegesis has three major sections, reflecting my key methodological approaches. Method is ‘a set of procedures and techniques for gathering and analysing data,’ while methodology concerns the process by which the research is carried out (Fram 2013, p. 1). In the context of creative practice-led research, the two can be said to cohere in the less formalistic notion of ‘approaches’ to a research subject. In what follows, I talk about the application of my approaches to the research as a whole within a journaling framework.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

To symbolically fill the literal gap in my family history via the medium of fiction, I have produced a work that is both ethnohistorically informed, psychogeographically located and experimental in terms of genre. The narrative *Black River* is fictional but rooted in historical accounts of slavery, specifically that between 1790 and 1840. Research of varying kinds is crucial for creative writers. My ethnohistorical research has put to use prior studies in new ways (Babbie, 2015); for instance, my study of Henry Bibb's slave narrative ([1849] 2005) has informed my attempt to depict the slave era in *Black River*. It is vital that history is confronted and contested by historians, as per current thinking about history which sees it as an act of construction and interpretation (Macfie, 2014). This work can also be carried out by novelists who (re)construct the past through historical fiction. In *The Fiction of History*, Alexander Macfie (2014) argues that 'a fictional account of a process, situation or event can challenge an established history, by the telling of dissident stories and positioning of alternative realities' (p. 6). Themes like cruelty, religion, emancipation, and struggle are often treated in the various accounts and slave narratives, for instance, the works of Henry Bibb and Frederick Douglass ([1855] 2012).

The psychogeographical dimension to my study involved site specific research, including visits to slave plantations and other historic sites in Kentucky. Through this, I aim to inform my writing with authentic accounts of slave experiences. Psychogeography is the study of the laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on emotions and behaviour of individuals (Debord, 1955). "[P]laces remember events" (Orley, 2009), hence my visit to Kentucky and neighbouring states add to my understanding of slave history. My extensive records, experiences, analysis of notes taken, re-thinking and remembering vital

observations, and interpreting after the visit left me with a pragmatic approach, which is the deflation of a kind of commentary that is self-reflective (Kroll 2002). Orley (2009, p. 160) indicates that in psychogeography, self-reflexivity is necessary because being aware of ourselves at the site informs our research.

My research does not revolve around only the material history provided by slave narratives and accounts or even the precedents provided by the neo-slave narrative genre; I also investigate what literary scholars classify as magical realism and imbricate magical elements, as is common in the magical realist genre, into my neo-slave narrative as a key part of my creative process. To this end, I aim to reprise legendary modes of storytelling and work their often mythic materials into the fabric of my account through research and imagination. Macfie (2014) points out that history ‘finds, identifies and uncovers stories that lie in chronicles’ (p. 3). However, material history often does not provide a sense of the interior and imaginative lifeworld of human subjects. This is where literature has a role to play in its imaginative reconstructions. Genres such as magic or magical realism may do this in a quite different way to genres classed as realist, such as social realism. For instance, in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1991), a prime example of magical realism, spirits appear as actual characters, suggesting the possible existence of immaterial entities in the world. For *Black River* I have recurrent scenes in which Christmas encounters a black mermaid – Oda’nyaa – in both the physical and ‘spiritual’ realm. Thus, the novel blends history with fantastical elements. Mink (1970, p. 558) notes that ‘it is from history and fiction that we learn how to tell and to understand complex stories and how it is that stories answer questions.’ It is in bringing together ethnohistory, a psychogeographical experience and literary studies in my creative practice, that I aim to fill a gap that has been left in family history by ancestors who were disappeared by slavery.

RESEARCH QUESTION

In light of the above, the research question for both the creative and critical components of my PhD can be framed as follows:

How may a fictional neo-slave narrative with magical realist features symbolically fill the literal gaps in a family history whose accounts of forebears taken as slaves have attained the status of myth or legend?

In the follow sections I explore how the design of the creative and critical components address this research question, followed by in-depth discussion of my three main methodological approaches and how these have been formed and articulated through three corresponding types of journaling.

DESIGN OF THE CREATIVE WORK

Black River aims to fill the gap described in the research question not simply through historical research or a realist account of events but with magical realist elements that reprise the folklores of my family history. This project comprises a 89,394 word full-length novel covering a 50 year period. What follows here is a brief description of the key characters and rationale behind setting and related authorial choices.

Main Characters:

- Christmas Preacher: The protagonist. He is a captured slave from Idoma-land in Africa who is later set free.
- William Preacher: A Quaker and Christmas Preacher's (ex) master.
- Black John: Mr Preacher's (ex) slave.
- Moses: Mr Preacher's (ex) slave and brother to Black John.
- Ijeyi: Christmas's son.
- Nedi: Young slave woman that becomes Christmas's wife and mothers Ijeyi.
- Antonia: Mr. Preacher's slave
- Fiona Preacher: Mr. Preacher's wife.
- Esther: Mr. Preacher's (ex) slaver and mother to Black John and Moses.
- Emily-Margaret Thatch: Quaker woman and teacher.
- Orinya: Christmas' ancestor in the resurrected form of a masquerade (alekwuafia).
- Oda'nyaa: This is a Queen mermaid that often appears to Christmas. She claims to be his wife and has been existing in black rivers and oceans for centuries.

Events:

A portion of this novel was set around the time that the Nat Turner insurrection occurred. This was in August 1831 (Williams, 2012).

In 1815, escape through Kentucky became the best option available to fugitives from Tennessee, Alabama and other southern states (Hudson, 2011), and therefore, it was easy for me to portray this in the work.

The streets in Louisville were first named in 1812 (Kendrick, 1937), which was also portrayed in *Black River*.

It was in 1776 that Quakers finally prohibited slave ownership among members (Soderlund, 1985) and at times, members were given the chance to choose between giving up slavery or separating from the Society. Even though this occurred prior to the start of the novel, it was significant to my portrayal of Mr. Preacher.

In 1816 a number of Quaker ministers founded the American Colonisation Society (Everill, 2012). It was the Society's aim to return free blacks and former slaves back to Africa and as a consequence, they initiated the Migration to Liberia Scheme. However, it was only in 1833 that enough money was raised in Kentucky for the first expedition to Liberia (Coleman, 1940). The character Christmas and fellow black residents of the Preacher residence were all offered a chance to migrate to Liberia.

The country Kwararafa, Erim (1981) points out, existed between the 13th and 15th centuries, and may have been one of the seven greatest kingdoms of the Sudan, the territory of which included all the lower and part of the middle portion of Hausa regions, extending beyond the Cross River as far as the Atlantic. The character Orinya (Christmas's ancestor) existed in person during the portrayed 15th century via the magical realist mode.

In 1800, Jamestown weed came into Kentucky. If not controlled, it grew so rank that it looked like trees. It took over most of Louisville's waterways and open fields, and 'negro' slaves were brought in great number to remove and burn it. This event was imbricated into *Black River*.

African-American Vernacular

During my writing of *Black River* I researched the African-American vernacular, especially the one spoken during the slave era. I researched several dialects including Texas African-American (Cukor-Avila & Bailey, 2011) and other Southern Black Folk vernaculars (Guy & Maynor, 1985). The research extended towards their history and usage in the United States (Dillard 1972). I ended up adopting a literary depiction of the African-American vernacular at first as writers such like Joel Chandler Harris (*Brer Rabbit: stories from Uncle Remus [1941]*), Zora Neale Huston (*Collected Plays [2008]*) and Mark Twain (*Huckleberry Finn ([1884] 1996)*) had done in their respective works. As a result, I created such dialogues in *Black River* as follows:

‘He bought you an’ me. Please don’t act no fool. We Africans. B’fore they done took us in Africa, we was farmers an’ hunters. We never beg no white man tuh survive. The words Ah speak is for our ears ’lone,’ Moses said, looking straight at Christmas. He then showed Christmas his hands and continued, ‘Whoever betray mah words gon’ be killed by these.’

‘How dare you call that monster a good man!’ said Moses in anger. ‘This same white man be tried if caught in Africa for dividin’ families. Look how he got mah mother ’way fr’m me for all the years, an’ when she back, she different. She ain’t even mah mother no more. How dare yo say that white man good when he got mah Antonia pre’nant an’ then got her killed. He keep us all here makin’ us believe ’em lies that we free. Without us, he cain’t survive. He no good man.’

After one supervisory session, it was concluded that the portrayal of the vernacular was quite difficult to comprehend considering the nature of the novel that already required a lot of reading

effort to comprehend its shifts in time and magical genre features, hence I had to translate them into simpler form as follows:

‘He bought you and me. Please don’t act no fool. We Africans. Before they done took us in Africa, we was farmers and hunters. We never beg no white man to survive. The words I speak is for our ears alone,’ Moses said, looking straight at Christmas. He then showed Christmas his hands and continued. ‘Whoever betray my words gon be killed by these.’

‘How dare you call that monster a good man!’ said Moses in anger. ‘This same white man be tried if caught in Africa for dividin’ families. Look how he got my mother away from me for all the years, and when she back, she different. She ain’t my mother no more. How dare you say that white man good when he got Antonia pregnant and then got her killed. He keeps us all here makin’ us believe them lies that we free. Without us, he can’t survive. He no good man.’ (p. 180)

I will also touch on my portrayal of Quaker language in this section. I employed my creativity in the portrayal of the way Quakers spoke and did not exactly offer an accurate portrayal of the manner in which they spoke during the 18th and 19th centuries. I considered some factors in my portrayal in accordance with the observations of Wilson (1836) regarding the ways white folks communicated during 19th century days. For instance, he stated that the beggar or a slave during the slave era was likely to be addressed in the singular, that is, in the inferior manner, as, “You slave” or “You beggar”. The superior white man was likely to be referred to as “Your grace”. I utilised Quakers’ use of the pronouns “thy”, “thee”, “ye” and the like (Hamm, 2003), in *Black River* dialogues to reflect how Quakers spoke to each other, especially during their meetings. I did

not have Mr. Preacher talk in this way to close family members or to anyone else other than those who were devoted members of the Society of Friends.

‘I know I’m still worthy of God’s presence in my household,’ Mr. Preacher, who was carrying baby Marcus and leading the visitors into the dining area, said.

‘Thou act as thy typical fellow southerner. Free thy slaves and re-join the society, Mr. Preacher,’ one of them advised. ‘The status of being a slave is unacceptable to God, and it is our desire that thee yield to the light.’ (p.18).

Setting: Kentucky

The novel *Black River* begins in 1790 Virginia with character Mr Preacher purchasing slave Christmas who has been captured from Africa. The decision to start the novel in this place and at this time was informed and influenced by Kentucky slave history. Coleman (1940, p. 4) claims there is scant evidence of exactly when slavery started in Kentucky, noting however that slavery was established in Virginia in 1617 (When Kentucky was still part of Virginia). More recently Lucas (2003) notes that there were black slaves in Kentucky counties as early as 1751. The state was an established settlement in which both whites and black entered together with the blacks serving as slaves, and Colman (1940, p. 32) argues that some slaves in Kentucky were generally trusted and treated relatively humanely by their white owners – at least compared to the marked cruelty of their treatment in some states in the Deep South. Apparent support for this is provided by a number of examples of black slaves who strongly supported their white masters when in conflict with the Indians (1940, p. 6). However, according to Bibb ([1849] 2005, p. 154), a one-time Kentucky slave turned activist, he was better off being a slave to an Indian native than to a

white man. Bibb was pro-Emancipation, and may be making this case partly because at the time it was easier to escape successfully while being owned by an Indian (Bibb [1849] 2005, p. 154).

In *Black River*, (ex)-slaveholder William Preacher is shown to have a deeply problematic relationship with his slaves – sometimes overtly compassionate, other times exceedingly cruel. The turning point in his life comes as a result of his separation from his family, his decision to emancipate his slaves, re-join the Quakers and become active in sheltering fugitive slaves on the run in search of freedom:

Mr. Preacher had announced the coming of more fugitives. It was the dubious route he had taken since fully committing to new Quaker doctrines and practices to appear acceptable to his Quaker society. (p.70).

In spite of their prior treatment, the slaves choose to stay with Preacher even after their emancipation, due to the economic pressures of life as free slaves in the region, and in particular the lack of work available or harsh working conditions on offer.

During the slave era, many families and businesses within Virginia had to relocate to Kentucky regions in search of greener pastures (Coleman, 1940, p. 19). This migration is significant in *Black River*. William Preacher relocates to Kentucky after he suffers loss in his business and Quaker character Mr Banks gave him a prophecy of better life in Kentucky:

‘The words that I would say to you now are Godly. Don’t take them amiss. There’s a better life in Louisville, Kentucky County, that awaits thee. Success. Riches. Do not count thy losses in Richmond. The death of hogs or the losses in thy business ain’t the end of thee.’ (p. 20).

In Kentucky, many black family servants who worked in the houses of white slave-owners considered themselves privileged in comparison to regular slaves and under no circumstances would they accept freedom (Coleman, 1940, p. 26). This is not mirrored in my novel by the four of William Preacher's slaves who were freed, although they end up coming back to the Preacher residence to stay as society outside the residence was crueller than inside. Francis Fedric (Innes, 2010, p. 82), in his own slave account, described how: "Several I have known who were well-treated, and, if liberated, would willingly and gladly have remained with their master". However, not all those who were once slaves agreed. Emancipated slave Harriet Jacobs ([1860] 2003, p. 96) wrote that death was better than slavery no matter the treatment and ensured that all her children were emancipated.

Dicks and Mason (1998) discuss how, in carrying out ethnography (discussed below), writers need to place their subjects firmly in the flow of historic events. Accordingly, the fictional characters and associated themes in my story require concrete physical and temporal settings in order for the story to work. I chose Kentucky as the setting because my story required a state where there were varying degrees of cruelty, reflecting both the evils of slavery and significant Abolitionist and Quaker activities of aiding slaves escape to present a nuanced picture of the conflicting tendency of the times. It has been argued that, out of all the American South, slaves in Kentucky received the least harsh treatment from slave owners during the slave era (Coleman, 1940, p. 15). Yet despite the sympathy of some whites for slaves, Coleman points to evidence of systemic cruelty in Kentucky, as was practiced elsewhere. Examples include the whipping and

starving of slaves, the offering and retraction of rewards and privileges, and many other physical and psychological abuses.

Louisville, Kentucky, was my preferred setting, although I decided also to incorporate Lexington and Frankfort, both Kentucky cities. The enslaved population in Lexington during my portrayed era was too small with too many restrictions (Hudson, 2011) to support the scope of my projected narrative. According to Hudson, Louisville was a favoured place for fugitives (p122), and this influenced my decision, since there are certain points in *Black River* when Mr Preacher aids runaways from other parts of America. Coleman (1940) reiterates that there was also Abolitionist and Emancipationist activity aiding slaves to escape in Kentucky between 1790 and 1840. Kentucky, according to Hudson (2011, p1), held some of the most frequently travelled slave escape corridors via the ‘great river’, that is, the Ohio river. I needed to set part of the novel before 1830, because it was my intention to create a Quaker character who once owned slaves but who responded, if reluctantly, to the pressures from the Society to free his slaves. ‘Friends’, as they were also known, indeed owned slaves before this year (Chenoweth, 2014). I start my novel in 1790, as it was my intention that my protagonist arrive on a ship from Africa and live to experience slave life in 1830s Kentucky. It was between 1790 and 1808 that the last ships carried slaves from Africa to America, specifically, to Virginia; the importation of slaves was then banned (Ballagh, 1902). Lastly, in order to portray the Nat Turner 1831 insurrection in my novel, I had to construct the plot around the 1830s when that insurrection took place (Williams, 2012). This insurrection along with others and their depiction in *Black River* will be discussed in the Academic Journal section below.

Kentucky, as a border state, had elements of both the South with its slavery and the free North, so I chose it as a site of some political and moral complexity during the late phase of slavery. I decided against choosing core Southern states like Alabama and Mississippi because at that time fugitive slaves in these places often hid in swamps and formed gangs (Franklin & Schweninger, 1999): there was hardly any motivation to head north or to Canada, and if they needed to, they would set out on foot for Louisville, Kentucky, or Cincinnati, Ohio, which were long journeys which would have dominated my narrative. Escape through Kentucky became the best option in 1815 available to fugitives from Tennessee, Alabama and other southern states (Hudson, 2011). As for Kentucky's fugitive slaves, there was no such opportunity for them. They received minimal or no assistance in escape, unlike fugitives coming in from other states (p.7), and this again I have been able to portray in *Black River* in the instances of Christmas and fellow freed slaves being unable to live normal lives outside the Preacher residence. I considered using the border state Virginia, in which there were slave stories similar to those in Kentucky but, the latter state had what seemed like the gateway to freedom, to the north (Hudson, 2011), and some of *Black River* themes revolves around fugitives arriving Louisville Kentucky from other regions with the hope of proceeding to the north where there is freedom.

Hudson (2011) further points out that Louisville was known for its 'River Walk', that is on the banks of the Ohio River, and I was privileged to walk along these banks, even crossing over to Cincinnati, during my psychogeographical study, which I will treat later in this exegesis. Fugitive slaves escaping from or through Kentucky could not reach free territory without crossing the Ohio River via a ferry, by swimming, or on foot if frozen. In *Black River*, I utilized all modes of crossing with the exception of the ferry use.

As of 1822, Louisville was yet to become a major city (Hudson 2011 p16). There was a time in 1800 that Louisville only had 600 inhabitants (Kendrick 1937). The streets in Louisville were first named in 1812 (Kendrick 1937), and I incorporated it as an event in *Black River* (p.289). When fugitives were on the run in Louisville during the slave era notices or reward posters were pasted everywhere (Hudson 2011), and this I was able to portray in my story through adverts which mentioned personality traits of character Ark, when his potential inheritor tries to recapture him. Kendrick also points out that Louisville's most rapid expansion was during the years 1830 – 1840. There was population increase too. In 1831 the population of 10, 366 citizens (p.6). In the “small village of Louisville” as it was called, increased to 68,000. Kendrick recalls as it was told that someone could stand in front of father's house and count all the houses in Louisville (p.2), and this was another passage that influenced a portion of *Black River* (p.177).

Magical Realism and the African Perspective

Myths form a huge portion of what may be referred to as magical realism in African literature. It is vital to mention at this point that I classify this work, *Black River*, as supernatural fiction, under the umbrella of African Literature. Terming it magical realism alone may not be fair to my history that tells of my forbears as having core religious beliefs based on Idoma mythological and totemic themes, which I attempt to portray in the creative work. Bowers (2004) indicates that when a person is part of a supernatural belief system, extraordinary occurrences may appear natural to him/her, unlike an outsider who may see them as extraordinary, hence relying on the term ‘magical realism’.

Isidore Okpewho in his 1983 masterpiece *Myth in Africa* likens myth to creative literature and an imaginative experience. He further establishes that myth, while attempting to reveal culture,

does not reveal every aspect of it. Whatever is revealed often passes on knowledge but via the imaginative minds of storytellers. In my study on Okpewho's work, I relate some of my myth depictions to his analysis of the evidence that African medicine men and women (referred to as witch doctors) were historically viewed as gods. *Black River* depicts a resurrected ancestor and the queen-mermaid as having godly features.

Totemism is a system of belief with strong links to history and religion (Erim, 1981). The term is closely associated with mythology, whereby humans are said to have kinship relationships in the spirit-realm with animals or plants. Erim (1981) indicates that historically, totems interacted with a given kin group, and in the case of *Black River*, the people of Opialu once had a strong spiritual link to crocodiles. As told, they migrated to Opialu as crocodiles. In totemism, an individual may serve as the emblem or symbol of the animal he/she identifies with. African myth inspires many African stories. I remember growing up in the 1990s in Makurdi, Nigeria, and watching the television programme, *Tales by Moonlight*. This programme featured stories that had themes such as ancestral worship, the existence of mermaids and the role of witchdoctors in village societies. As a child, I believed *mami-water* (mermaids) truly existed. Stories we were told described them as very beautiful and light in complexion. One of their aims in visiting Earth is to break marriages by seducing husbands.

A lot of imagination in combination with myth, totemism and history formed *Black River*; however, these do not represent the belief system of the Idoma people.

DESIGN OF THE EXEGESIS

Journaling is now widely accepted in qualitative research (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 695), and researchers are urged to talk about themselves as well as their ‘presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions during the research process’ (Mruck & Breuer, 2003, p. 3). Everett (2013, p. 2) claims that personal experience shaped her thinking and that, therefore, she feels strongly that keeping a journal during the years she was doing her PhD in Education was essential to the completion of the degree. Scholarly health researchers concur that journaling provides the researcher with an opportunity to explore ideas and understandings relevant to the research and, afterwards, to document reflexive moments (Cecil & Glass, 2014). These are clear examples of how the reflexive method is a key to defining the focal point of a study and achieving a quality outcome. Ortlipp (2008, p. 697) raises an issue with journaling, stating that ‘the researcher cannot claim that what is described is true or valid’; however, the reason for keeping an academic journal, as recommended by Bacon (2014), lies elsewhere: it is to support thoughts and opinions.

Snyder (2010, p. 198) notes that journals are used to document events and encounters with reference to the writer’s reflection on events (or, in my case, my research and creative practice). This advice has a particular bearing on practice-led, creative writing research, in which context it provides an analysis of the process besides being a literary form in its own right (the journal as a literary device). Personal reflections on the research process and the personal meaning assigned to these reflections are all built into a journal. Journaling is holistic therapy because it involves all aspects of a person, that is, the physical (actual activity), mental (thought processes), emotional

and spiritual (interpretation), and therefore is a sign of interaction between consciousness and unconsciousness in the method (Snyder, 2010, p. 198).

It has been very important for me as a creative writer to keep a reflexive journal as a platform on which I can develop critical thinking about the research and synthesise the above approaches to both the novel and exegesis. Bacon (2014, Introduction section, para. 14) points out that ‘the practice-led researcher may use a journal as a method of inquiry, a placeholder for questions and investigations essential to the research; excerpts or bibliographies that will initiate or corroborate discussion, find or set direction, laying certainty into the research.’ Journaling also acts as a spreadsheet – a placeholder for methods and methodologies; for questions, their investigation and responses. I deploy journaling as a platform in which the ethnohistorical, psychogeographical and literary studies approaches are employed before being adapted for the exegesis. Bourke and Philip (2000) point out that creative writing is a dialogic engagement with literary theories and with a range of social and cultural discourses. In this regard, I inscribe in my journal my findings on the implementation of the approaches which my research attempts to integrate in the form of the creative work. ‘The journal offers a retreat where one can speak to a sense of urgency and, through intuitive reflection, share an easy intimacy with the self and process’ (Bacon, 2014, Introduction section, Para. 15). The journal and exegesis appear to work hand in hand to offer appropriate leading, guidance and interpretation (Kroll 2004) and to bring together the critical and creative analyses in the research.

Modes of Journaling

Eugen Bacon (2014) notes that the practice of journaling structures a researcher’s pathway in research, and she recommends keeping three journals in the course of the research, a practice. I

have adopted the journaling practice in three modes, as recently deployed effectively by Bacon, who identifies these as the academic, cathartic and literary modes of journaling.

The Academic Journal

As indicated by Bourke and Nielsen (2004), in the context of doctoral creative writing research all journaling is ‘academic’, and in my academic journal there is a foregrounding of scholarly literature to support both the literary and cathartic journal. As indicated, scholarly materials will be sourced to back up my analyses. The academic journal is a placeholder for my ethnohistorical study, which informed me of Kentucky prior to my trip, and also on other slave themes, traditions and practices and histories. Ethnohistorical research has been described as a ‘disciplinary hybrid’ (Axtell 1979) that makes it possible for the researcher to approach written documents (including historical slave narratives) from an interdisciplinary ethnographic and historical perspective. For scholarly recognition, good research must be i) subject to its own standards of rigour and validity, ii) assessable according to judgement of good and bad, iii) experiential and qualitative, iv) able to pursue research questions (Green, 2007). The academic journaling process has these qualities in the sense undergoing an ethnohistorical study of the period 1790 -1840, and as late as the 1860s as the novel reaches dénouement. The process here work around themes in pursuit of building of a story in answer to the research question which is grounded in material and social history.

The Cathartic Journal

According to Bacon, the cathartic journal is mobilised around the discovery of a ‘self in process’, hence the presentation of my opinions and understanding in regards to my American trip in this section. Psychogeography is the study of the laws and specific effects of the geographical

environment, consciously organised or not, on emotions and behaviour of individuals (Debord 1955). In this journal I document my psychogeographical experience with emphases on a question – how may this travel experience inform *Black River*? Such journaling provides a chance for catharsis in relation to emotional events, and ‘furnishes the avenue’ for the writer to explore causes, solutions and knowledge (Snyder, 2010, p. 198). Ortlipp (2008, p. 695) argues that in qualitative research, the researcher’s experiences, culture, values and position influence the research interest. It is very significant for me as a creative writer to have a reflexive journal as a platform on which I can confidently outline critical thinking regarding the research.

Furthermore, “[t]he cathartic journal is used to find a voice and discover a ‘self’ in the process” (Bacon 2014, Introduction section, para. 6) – that is, my reflections and opinions gives me a clear insight on where I stand, how I argue and how I approach the entire research. I relate some of my own commentary about slavery and magical realism to *Black River* in regards to psychogeographical trip to America; that is, I use it is a medium to identify certain key themes of slave experience and traditions (insurrection, Quakerism, colonisation, marriage, being ‘half-caste’, beliefs, and practices).

The Literary Journal

The literary journal, as the name implies, houses my analyses of literary writing from relevant authors who enrich my knowledge and informs my own writing. Through the adoption of a literary journal for this section of the exegesis I investigate cultures and themes that cohere around slave history and the magical realist genre in which process and opinions are decoded and restructured. Scholarly artist Coylar (2009, p. 426) notes that the journal keeps records to substantiate, make visible, and communicate knowledge, and in my case, from related literary texts. Coylar argues

that the practice is generative, creative in multiple ways, and summons the learning modes of doing, depicting and symbolising. In the case of ‘grey areas’, Ortlipp (2008, p. 296) suggests that the researcher’s judgement of findings or arguments can fill these in. The journal is also vital in identification of goals, plots, translation and revision in research (Bacon, 2014). Hence, decision-making, analyses and noting of experiences can be recorded. In it is in this journal that I relate *Black River* to related historical fiction on slavery, but also I plot my magical realism approach, revolving as it does around magical characters, occurrences and settings, incidents, mystery and mythology.

ACADEMIC JOURNAL:

THE ETHNOHISTORICAL APPROACH

My ethnohistorical research is based on collations of notes from my academic journal, which was started before the cathartic and the literary journals. The academic journal informed my research proposal as well as my pre-psychogeographical study prior to my America trip. In seeking to answer the question of how a fictional neo-slave narrative with magical features may symbolically fill the literal gaps in a family history, the journal delves into areas such as Quakerism during the slave era, insurrections during the slave era, the migration of both the free and enslaved to Liberia during the slave era, and slavery as a whole, using biographical and ethnohistorical sources.

The following subject areas of ethnohistorical research emerged as key themes in grounding the novel in a material, historical framework, providing a timeline of events, and contextualising the motivations and action of the characters in their real world settings.

The First Peoples

I could not undertake this research without acknowledging the first peoples of the United States. They are the true founders of the great land. They were faced with injustice in history whereby many were evicted from their lands and these lands stolen. I acknowledge their acts of kindness towards the Africans brought to their land. Cherokees often attended dances in slave quarters, and Cherokee children who were being educated at one mission school often socialised with black children (Miles & Holland, 2006). According to Silko (1991, p. 416) “[G]reat American and great African tribal cultures had come together to create a powerful consciousness within all people”. Tucker (2013) indicates that George Washington, in his era, desired to assimilate Indians

into white culture rather than exterminate them. As part of this new way of life, particularly in the South, the Indians started practising slaveholding. Washington did not entirely succeed in his assimilation aim, however, since most of the Indians were unable to adapt to the ways of the white man. For the Indians that practised slaveholding, testaments of former African slaves point out that the Indian natives were fairer compared to the white slaveholders. Henry Bibb ([1849] 2005), in his slave narrative, indicates he was treated with greater mercy by his Cherokee slave owner than by his former white owners. It has also been recorded that black slaves owned by Cherokees ate from the same pot as their owners and were free to go anywhere in the country they chose, unlike the blacks owned by white folks (Samoth, 1940). Tiya Miles, in her work, *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds*, which she co-edited with Sharon P. Holland, notes that Cherokees valued slaves not just for their labour, but also for their intellectual skills, such as their knowledge of English and Euro-American customs, and sometimes married them.

President Washington's failure to totally assimilate the Cherokee into the white culture resulted in years of conflicts. In my study on the first peoples, I had to decide on how to portray them in *Black River*. I chose the information gathered from Coleman's (1940) historical documentation that described an attempt by Cherokee Indians to take over farmland from a white farmer. A black slave was said to have fought so hard to defend his white master that he was prepared to forfeit his own life. I imagined that the conflicts between the first peoples and the whites would enhance my creative writing/plotting. Tucker (2013) indicates that there was a coalition between the British forces and the Cherokee raiders to fight against the Americans from the South, which I hinted in *Black River*. My motive was again based on my imaginative ability. I learnt of a Cherokee leader that accused fellow tribesmen who had taken to the ways of the Europeans of practising witchcraft. It was believed that their behaviour was bringing havoc to the

land and hence the Cherokee leader called for the death of such Indians. I depicted this in *Black River* with regards to the character, Edward.

Quakerism

In recent times, the word ‘Quaker’ appears to have become a synonym for the word ‘Abolitionist’ (Jordan, 2007, p. 8). The two words, however, have always represented dissimilar interests even though they shared the same objective during the slave era in the United States; that is, the emancipation of African-American slaves. Quakers tended to employ pacifism in their fight against slavery while the Abolitionists sometimes used defiance (Chenoweth, 2014, p. 94). However, unsurprisingly most Abolitionists belonged to or considered themselves members of the Society of Friends (Soderlund, 1985, p. 3). I have, however, noted some unfair practices among Quakers in my research, such as their failure to mingle among other members of society. In 1657, George Fox, founder of the Quaker church, reminded his slave-owning followers in America that everyone was equal in the sight of God (Soderlund, 1985, p. 3). Even after Quakers rejected slavery, a number of them continued to own slaves, as hinted in *Black River*. Aside from this, there were other biased practices amongst Quakers even though these were overshadowed by their involvement in the emancipation of the enslaved. For instance, there was no opportunity for a black man to be a Quaker minister, which is portrayed in *Black River*. Following the 1650s when the Society of Friends began, Quakers saw nothing wrong with slavery (Soderlund, 1985, p. 4). Also Quakers were not always pacifists, and it was also recorded that some fought for the Union during the war of the 1860s (Hamm, 2003). Prior to the war, Quakers appeared to stand against revolts (Hamm, 2003 p. 167). They rather aid slaves escape or try to negotiate with politicians to abolish the practice. These acts were evidence of their pacifism, and hence contradicts their role

in the war as indicated above. Soderlund (1985, p. 9) argues that Quaker Abolitionists can be viewed as a product of crisis on Quakerism. Quakerism is central to *Black River*. One leading character, William Preacher, re-joins the Quaker faith and adopts new doctrines before setting his slaves free. Preacher provides humanitarian aid, bringing back ex-slaves to his dwelling as part of Quaker practice (Soderlund, 1985, p. 180). Freed slaves were also sometimes paid a ‘restitution’ (Soderlund, 1985, p. 178), information that I use in my story:

‘You all are always welcome back. I will offer forty dollars each on a monthly basis if you find it hard to get work outside these gates and want to come back to live here and work for me. Go and see the world, boys (p.63).

Chenoweth (2014, p. 95) suggests that some Quaker doctrines were a response to the slavery system even though the nature of this response does not appear to have been recorded. When discussing the beliefs of Quakerism, Chenoweth points out that the religion should be seen as more ‘re-creative’ than ‘creative’ (p. 96). That is, it is a religion that has continued to develop new doctrines over time, especially during the slave era in the United States. Bourke (2014, p. 228) outlines the beliefs of Quakerism: Firstly, their faith appears to be guided by an ‘inner light’ which is of God and is implanted in every human – this is reflected in *Black River* when we see how Mr. Preacher and other Quakers in a meeting waited in silence for the spirit to lead’ (p.120). Secondly, a Quaker’s first-hand knowledge is acquired through human experiences in life. We again see this in *Black River* in that Mr. Preacher’s experience in owning slaves also helps him in his role of supporting fugitive slaves even though his motives are questionable. Thirdly, true religion is not only learnt from written words or prayer books, hence the Bible is not the final test of right conduct

and true doctrines. Hamm (2003) makes it clear that Quakers do not regard the bible as the word of God; only Jesus is the word of God. This is shown in *Black River*:

Tallie then stood up briskly, headed straight to Mr. Preacher and took Mr. Preacher's bible. He then walked towards the fire place in his tall frame and put the bible in the fire (p.52).

Hamm (2013, p.16) also refers to the Quaker belief that the God who made the world does not dwell in temples built by man; rather, God lives in people's heart. It was recorded that in the 1650s Quakers burned bibles focusing instead on this 'inner light'. Fourthly, a wide range of views were accommodated among members, with this conflict playing out in the novel between William Preacher as a reluctant emancipator and other Friends who pushed him to fulfil his godly responsibilities. Fifthly, Quakers reject ceremonies and sacraments but believe in their spiritual significances. Quakerism thus appears to be a Christian denomination, just like Catholicism and Anglicanism, whose respective doctrines differ, rather than representing a separate faith.

Quakers wrote epistles for meetings (Soderlund, 1985, p. 32), which means they saw themselves as instruments of God, as the apostles that wrote the New Testament of the Bible. The central concept of Quakerism is that potentially anyone can experience God directly and inwardly, regardless of gender, nationality or social status (Soderlund, 1985, p. 5). Quakers, however, believe in and carry out intense study of the New Testament; hence, Quakerism has been described as the religion of the 'New Testament, without dominion, without addition and without compromise' (Hamm 2003 p. 118).

It was in 1776 that Quakers finally prohibited slave ownership among members (Soderlund 1985, p. 4), which is about 14 years prior to the start of *Black River* in 1790. It should be assumed that the slaveholding character Mr. Preacher had no slaves as a Quaker, but was later expelled for acquiring a slave in the character of Antonia. Quakers were known during the slave era to ‘disown’ members who refused to emancipate slaves (Soderlund, 1985, p. 134), and at times members were given the chance to choose between giving up slavery or separating from the Society (Soderlund, 1985, p. 174). In *Black River*, Mr. Preacher is eventually re-embraced by the Society, as pardon was often offered to offenders who bought or sold slaves (Soderlund, 1985, p. 94). Varon (2014, p. 129) argues that Quakerism was established on the core conviction that all human beings are spiritually equal; hence, during the slave era, Quakers envisioned a future where black and white would live peacefully together as equals. (This future has been actualised, albeit imperfectly, to some extent, with growing numbers of modern societies made up of various ethnicities with equality written into the constitution). The concept of equality becomes a central question for William Preacher. When four of his former slaves return, he accepts them, but not as slaves and not as equals.

Jordan (2007, p. 6) explains that Quakers’ beliefs are in allegiance to the teachings of the 17th century founder of the church, George Fox, and one of the well-known characteristics of the religion is refraining from ‘uncovering the head, bowing, and bending the knees’ during their worship. Over the centuries, some of the ethics of reverence have become part of cultural custom, for example, bowing in greeting to a fellow man; however, Quakers reject this societal custom, indicating that reverence should never be directed at a fellow creature (Chenoweth, 2014, p. 95).

The depiction of Quakers in literature has been generally positive. An example is *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* ([1852] 2014), a novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe, in which two Quakers are

conductors in the ‘Underground Railway’ – a network of secret routes and safe houses used by slaves to escape to freedom (Jordan, 2007, p. 10). Francis Fedric identifies how an Abolitionist planter helped him to escape via the Underground Railway (as cited in Innes, 2010, p. 84). In *Black River* we see the character Mr. Preacher using his attic as a safe place for fugitive slaves on the run. This speaks of a common goal shared by Quakers and Abolitionists, except that the former appeared to be influenced by evolved doctrines. Quakers perceived radicalism as self-defeating, believing that it triggered even more Southern resistance to the emancipation of slaves (Varon, 2014, p. 129). However, it is evident that Quakers were often divided in opinion regarding slavery, that is, whether to maintain their pacifist principles or choose defiance (Jordan, 2007, p. 20). The controversy is evidence that defiance was a possible option. It was, in fact, defiance that appears to have prompted the Virginia legislature to take up the question of emancipation in 1831 (Breen, 2005, p. 2). Quakerism has mostly been associated with abolition rather than slaveholding (Chenoweth, 2014, p. 106). However it has been my aim to depict both tendencies in the creative thesis.

As noted earlier, there is little evidence that Southern Quakers owned slaves between 1800 and 1830 and those who did were pressured by the Society to set their slaves free (Jordan, 2007, p. 7). The (re)creation of Quaker doctrine may have triggered their opposition to slavery, as I have explored this and depicted it in *Black River*. Quakers used to allow slaves to be part of family meetings prior to their rejection of slavery (Soderlund, 1985, p. 9). In *Black River*, Mr. William Preacher is advised by a certain Quaker to renounce slavery and to ensure that the black people in his household attend meetings. Preacher ultimately sets his slaves free before 1805. Soderlund (1985, p. 27) reiterates that Quakers were taught that ‘negroes’ were equal to whites in the sight of God. To conform to such a belief during the slave era was difficult and was likely to contradict

moral society. I suspect it took time and effort for such a belief to take its place among Quakers, as dramatized in Preacher's initial reluctance in the novel. Eventually, Quakers began to prohibit slavery – they began to see slavery as a practice in contrast to the will of God and the influence of the Holy Spirit. In other words, those who supported slavery were not guided by the light, and their hearts are not sufficiently redeemed from the world (Soderlund, 1985, p. 27).

In 1758 Quakers had a new policy, setting up two mechanisms of change: one for eliminating leadership among their brethren, and another for persuading owners to free the blacks they already owned (Soderlund, 1985, p. 87). Quakers had their first black member at the Philadelphia yearly meeting in 1784 (Hamm, 2003, p. 170). Despite this stance, however, there was refusal at Quaker meetings to accept black members until the 1790s (Soderlund, 1985, p. 176), the time in which *Black River* begins. Even women, black or white, Hamm (2003) points out were not allowed to minister, hence Fox and other earlier Quakers continued to argue in this regard that women were spiritually equal to men and had as much right to minister (p. 19). In *Black River*, we see Quakers visit the Preacher residence several times to pressure William Preacher to free his slaves in the years between 1790 and 1795.

Overseers monitored the behaviours of members of the Society (Soderlund, 1985, p. 190). A divorcee was not allowed to be a Quaker minister (Hamm, 2003, p. 196), Quakers did not marry divorced people (Soderlund, 1985), and marrying a non-Friend as a Quaker was also not allowed (p. 190). However, divorced people were still able to work in the church, apart from in the office of the pastor (Hamm, 2003, p. 206). In regards to these findings, I settled for separation in the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Preacher in *Black River*. I portray Mrs. Preacher as being led out of the marriage by her 'inner light'; as Hamm (2003, p. 206) points out, this was often the stated rationale amongst Quakers. Many other ethnohistorical details were important in my realising a convincing

and historically grounded vein to the novel. For instance, Quaker graveyards lacked tombstones. It was in their practice not to use them (Hamm, 2003, p. 102), and I depict this in a dialogue in *Black River*:

When they carried the body close to the spot Harriet was buried, Marcus requested a tombstone.

‘Ain’t a practice amongst members of the Society of Friends,’ Tallie said.

‘My father didn’t die a Quaker!’ Simons was furious.

‘Father wouldn’t want a tombstone,’ Hugh intervened. ‘Harriet never had one.’

Mr. Preacher was buried and there was no tombstone. (p.209).

Insurrections

Three insurrection plots and revolts against slavery influenced my writing. These were Gabriel Prosser’s plot of 1800, Denmark Vesey’s plot of 1822 and Nat Turner’s plot of 1831. The *Black River* character Moses is on the verge of carrying out a revolt when protagonist Christmas, having the ability to see what awaits in the future, proceeds to foil it:

‘Massa, you gon die. You got to leave before he return,’ Christmas said in great alarm, sending Mr. Preacher scrambling off the bed.

Confused, the white man yelled, ‘Who? Who?’

‘Moses gon kill you.’ (p. 183).

Nat Turner (1800 -1831) is a famous name in the history of American slavery. The insurrection which he led in 1831 became a landmark, familiar to all researchers of slave history and related

literary studies. An aim for me was to depict this insurrection using not just historical fact but magical scenes and extraordinary occurrences. Turner's spirit is a character in my fictional work, although major scenes deal with the influence of his Virginia insurrection in Kentucky, as in the passage below:

As he lay down in that colossal room and became blood, he felt the cruelty which had taken hold of Southampton County in faraway Virginia as he flowed through a dark channel.

The man Moses's ghost had spoken of had seen the moon's rage take life out of the sun. The blood that Christmas had become saw this too while underneath a white man's skin soon to be slain by one of Nat Turner's men (p.233 - 234).

Over the centuries, Turner's image has appeared in print and other media represented as everything from a deranged brigand to a cerebral and divinely-inspired revolutionary. Various versions of Turner have come to public attention focusing on his momentous struggle within American politics and culture (Paquette, 2005, p. 1125). In addition, there has been a great deal of scholarly attention on the historical and literary works that have depicted Turner (Breen, 2005, p. 3).

Denmark Vesey (1767 - 1822), who like Turner was a preacher but whose story has not been as well documented by modern historians, started as a Chandler's man responsible for receiving impaired goods from incoming ships and cataloguing items (Egerton 2004). Some of the assorted merchandise that his captain master imported were black slaves, and it was Denmark's

unhappy assignment to receive the human cargo as well as inanimate freight (Egerton, 2004, p. 35). Denmark had already been free for 21 years, and had turned down a chance to migrate to Sierra-Leone, long before he became prepared to die for the cause and formed his group, 'Army of God' (Egerton, 2004, p. 132).

Gabriel Prosser (1776 – 1800), on the other hand, was not a preacher like the other two. However, like Turner and Vesey, he was educated (Egerton, 2003, p. 20). He was also known as a blacksmith that wore locks, had prison sentences for pig theft and for biting off a white man's ear (Egerton, 2003, p. 20). It was Charles Qersey, a French Abolitionist, who influenced Gabriel's insurrection (Egerton, 2003). Gabriel's response was a plot that would only spare white Quakers, Methodists and Frenchmen (Egerton, 2003, p. 49).

There are claims that Turner was motivated by his faith to lead the rebellion against slave-owners, and that this faith was a mix between Christianity and the pre-Christian African religion (Williams, 2012, p. 114). It is believed that both Turner's mother and grandmother, who were of African origin, passed on their West African beliefs, which influenced his then current religious status as a Christian. In Thomas Gray's *Confessions of Nat Turner* (1831), it is indicated that in 1925, Turner claimed that the Holy Spirit had communicated to him to carry out the revolt. Six years later, after seeing signs of an eclipse, he and some of his trusted slave friends set out to kill white slaveholders (Williams, 2012, p. 117).

Prosser did not believe in the supernatural, unlike Turner (Egerton 2003 p. 52); however, his skill as a blacksmith was instrumental in his plot as he had made some swords which he distributed among 'negros' (Egerton, 2003, p. 68) he recruited in tobacco fields; surprisingly he also recruited a number of unskilled whites (Egerton, 2003, p.56). Vesey, like Turner, had a religious influence and preached his gospel of 'liberty and hate' (Egerton, 2004, p. 113). Vesey

turned his back on the New Testament because of claims that Jesus taught forgiveness (Egerton, 2004, p. 114). He preached that whoever steals a man, according to Moses, shall be put to death (Egerton, 2004, p. 115).

There is evidence that revolts, no matter where they occurred – Virginia or South Carolina – had impacts in numerous regions across the United States. For instance, Harriet Jacobs ([1860] 2003, p. 97) spoke of how the Nat Turner insurrection threw North Carolina into commotion, creating high tension between whites and blacks. Douglass ([1855] 2012) also pointed out that Maryland slaveholders were often scared of insurrections arising. Paquette (2005, p. 1125) concurs with the account that Nat Turner's revolt drove the country across a threshold; that is, the defence of slavery hardened and the hostility toward Abolitionists intensified. False rumours appeared to go around quickly in that era, given the absence of communicative platforms such as televisions and radios. Even though there were papers, the distribution would not have been as swift, the implication being that word-of-mouth was at play and could spread like wildfire.

Williams (2012, p. 115) argues that Gray's *Confessions of Nat Turner* (1831), the first ever publication on Turner published after Turner's execution, was extremely biased since Gray portrayed the insurrection as slaves' engagement in 'cruelty and destruction'. Nelson and De Matos (2015, p. 1) state that a non-fictional/historical project tends to foreground historical figures or people. In the case of Gray, his creative process of investigating and documenting the life experience of Turner focused more on Turner than on the insurrection itself.

Liberia Calling

In 1816 a number of Quaker ministers founded the American Colonisation Society (Everill, 2012, p. 54). It was the Society's aim to return free blacks and former slaves back to Africa (Coleman,

1940) and as a consequence, they initiated the Migration to Liberia Scheme. How do Kentucky and *Black River* fit in here? It was only in 1833 that enough money was raised in Kentucky for the first expedition to Liberia (Coleman, 1940, p. 275), and a scene in my story is woven around this. Quaker friends of the Preacher's send ex-slaves and slaves on the voyage to Liberia. The character Black John and his mother Esther are ex-slaves who make the voyage. The character Nedi and two of her children are living as free people but they are slaves according to the law, and also go on the voyage. *Black River* characters Christmas and Ark turn down the opportunity, both having separate reasons. The latter is in love with a slave woman who will only go North, while for Christmas Liberia is not Oli'doma, his country where his ancestor has revealed that he will return through levitation.

American historical accounts long dismissed the Liberian settlement scheme during the American slave era of the 19th century 'as impractical, racist and naïve' (Everill, 2012, p. 53). In the state of Virginia, many freed slaves were offered the opportunity to emigrate to Liberia and a good number of them embraced the offer (Ballagh, 1902, p. 136). However, some refused to leave. It is understandable for a group of individuals to be divided on certain issues; it is also understandable why a slave may have decided against leaving America for Liberia since there was no way s/he could reclaim the place where his/her ancestors or parents were captured. For some slaves, therefore, the offer of passage to Liberia was based on persuasion and futile promises. *Black River* refers to some of the factors that discouraged blacks from going on the Liberia voyage:

'This Liberia them white folks talk about, I heard negroes die on the sea even before they reach there,' one of the new faces they met said.

‘Mosquito bites, they say causes it. Sea mosquitoes kill travellers a lot,’ another said.

This brought fear on Nedi. Esther slept most of the time, and Christmas noticed how glad Black John was about Esther not hearing these frightening stories about Liberia (p.229).

As cited by Everill (2012, p. 53), in 1832, an unnamed free black woman from Philadelphia encouraged other African-American people via an Abolitionist newspaper (*The Liberator*) to leave America, labelling it the land of ‘oppression’; however, there were slaves that preferred to remain in captivity rather than become free and be taken to Africa (Ballagh, 1902, p. 136). The Liberia call may well have been motivated by the good will of repentant slaveholders who renounced slavery and foresaw a better life for the freed slaves in Liberia. However, there were slaveholders who believed that Liberia was a land of suffering and freed slaves needed to be dumped there. A number of such slaveholders were reported to have given options to slaves to either remain in slavery or go to Liberia (Coleman, 1940, p. 275). There were certain factors that hindered or discouraged African-Americans from heading to Liberia; for instance, Coleman (p. 275) notes that a group of slaves on a ship to Liberia died of cholera fifteen days after departure. Even worse was malaria, yellow fever and the political instability that awaited them in Liberia (Everill, 2012, p. 63).

Everill (2012, pp. 54, 66) argues that African-Americans that willingly participated in this migration were naïve, and some even took with them the superiority/inferiority relationship that existed for them in America, the difference being that in Liberia, they were now in a position of

superiority and the indigenous people were perceived as inferior. I portray this in *Black River* when Christmas with his magical ability is able to visualise the Liberia settlement:

From a closer look, Christmas saw that the young lad was mulatto. It didn't matter. A mulatto born of a slave woman was a negro. He was dressed like the white man. In boots. But the field-hands had nothing on other than the leaves that covered their private organs. Christmas soon realised who actually held the whip. It was a young boy grown too big for his age. Probably fifteen years old now. It was Small John. This was what the free negroes were doing over in Africa. Becoming like the white man (p. 241).

Everill (2012, p. 61) also points out that a significant reason why some slaves chose to leave for Liberia was in order to keep their family together. This contrasts with some of the emancipation experiences within America during the 19th century, in which a male slave may have been set free but his wife was still in slavery. Emancipated slaves who chose to go to Liberia were allowed to travel with wives, husbands, children, and even elderly parents – as did the characters Black John, Nedi and the others in *Black River*. Coleman (1940, p. 280) notes how some African-Americans were drawn by the good news that trading with Liberian locals was lucrative. Everill (2012, p. 63) also points out how African-American preachers, especially from the American South, were excited about the move to Liberia since there were many restrictions imposed on them while living in America. For some, leaving America was a response to the cruelty they had experienced. In his work on Lydia Titus, a black woman, Dexter (2013, p. 370) points out how freed slaves in America

were often recaptured into slavery. What kind of free black person would have wanted to remain in such a land of oppression after hearing of such?

I do not believe that the Liberia call was ideal for freed blacks in America. Moreover, slaves were responsible for a great deal of development in the South of the United States, and once free, it was their right to opt to remain in the country they had contributed their labour to build. Everill (2012, p. 75) quotes ex-slave Frederick Douglass: ‘It is far more noble on the part of the free coloured people to remain here, struggling against the adverse winds of prejudice and slavery, than to selfishly quit the country with a view of bettering their own condition.’

Born a Slave

In *Incidents of a Slave Girl*, first published in 1860, Harriet Jacob’s describes how her biological father, a slave, worked so hard to buy himself out of slavery, but this accomplishment was inadequate and did not result in his family’s freedom. Harriet was a slave because her mother was a slave (Jacobs, [1860] 2003, p. 11). During the slave era (with a focus on the 18th and 19th centuries), Southern states of the United States had laws that declared children born of slave women slaves regardless of the father’s colour or condition (Coleman, 1940, p. 135). Life was hard for the slave. ‘The Negro Act of 1740’ refused to recognise the legality of slave marriage (Egerton 2004 p. 48), hence blacks married with the hope that their masters would be kind enough not to separate them by deciding to sell one member off, which to some was worse than death. Parenting was a painful issue in the time of slavery. Reverend Noah Davis, a former Virginia slave, sadly recounted in his narrative (*A Narrative of the Life of Rev. Noah Davis, a Colored Man*) the sale of his enslaved children: ‘The sale went on. My oldest son, aged twenty-one, sold for \$560; and the younger one, just turning his seventeenth year, brought \$570’ (Davis, 1859, p. 18). There

is also evidence in history that speaks of white people that broke laws, capturing free people and even free black children and then selling them into slavery (Northup, [1853] 1991, p. 1). Within my story, Mr. Preacher's son by a black slave woman is fortunate to be raised like a son and not a slave, unlike the norm. The son has features of a white male, hence only few have knowledge of his black mother. However, this fact emerges after the death of William Preacher, paving the way for his son's tragic transition into slavery.

White men impregnated black slave women in Virginia to such an extent that fines were established against any white man involved in this practice (Ballagh, 1902, p. 43). In their respective narratives, ex-slaves Bibb ([1849] 2005) and Douglass ([1855] 2012) pointed out how difficult it was for a slave to give a true account of his or her parentage, indicating that countless rapes were committed by the white population on black slave women. Alex Haley, in his creative nonfictional work that traces his ancestry to Africa, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976), documents how Kizzy (one of the author's ancestors), was impregnated via a horrific rape committed by a white slaveholder in North Carolina which resulted in the birth of one of the heroes of slave history, Chicken George. Even though there may have been consensual sexual relationships between whites and blacks (e.g., between a white man and Harriet Jacobs as recorded in the latter's account [Jacobs, [1860] 2003]), there were many accounts of rape and the issues raised by this were difficult to ignore. At the same time, some slaveholders had enough heart to allow slaves to marry other slaves. In his narrative, Lane (1842, p. 7) recounted how in 1828 he made a request to his master which was granted: 'I next went to her master, Mr. Boylan, and asked him, according to custom, if I might marry his woman. His reply was yes, *if you will behave yourself.*'

There is a good number of ex-slaves of mixed heritage known to have written about their slave experience. Examples are Harriet Jacobs, Henry Bibb and Frederick Douglass. In her narrative, Jacobs ([1860] 2003, p. 57) described seeing two children playing together: ‘One was a fair white child; the other was her slave, and also her sister. When I saw them embracing each other, and heard their joyous laughter, I turned sadly away from the lovely sight.’ She also added that a number of white women who were married to white men that had bi-racial children regarded the black children as property which could be sold any time. In this way, they were able to emotionally detach from the issue and stop it from affecting them or their marriages. In several accounts, the resentment of mixed race persons at being treated as slaves while white siblings were treated humanely is very clear. Surprisingly, in the contemporary novel *Drum* (1987), Onstott depicts these ‘mulatto’ or light-skinned ‘negro’ characters as proud, often thinking of themselves as being better in status than the typical black slave. I don’t argue with Onstott’s depiction; I can only point to the diversity of the slave experience. In dealing with themes like this in *Black River*, I also tell a contrasting story: a white woman accepts her ‘mulatto’ step-son as a son and not as a slave but never forgives her white husband (Mr. Preacher) for impregnating the child’s mother. In his narrative, Douglass ([1855] 2012) pointed out how it was rumoured that his master was his father, and that the latter simply did not care. As stated already, slave experiences differed.

A non-white person’s tone of skin colour may be one criteria that identifies him/her as being a ‘mulatto’. According to Faulkner (2000), the actual definition of a ‘mulatto’ is a person with one Native American Indian parent and one white parent. However, Faulkner (2000) further indicates that a ‘mulatto’ can also be regarded as a person with one black grandparent or even a single black great-grandparent, since it might take two or more generations for the taint of black skin to fade away – if the person of colour (usually a woman) in question continues to reproduce

children with white partners. In *Black River*, I often use the terminology, ‘mulatto’ to describe any black person of mixed race background, at various proportions – whether an ‘octoroon’ or ‘quadroon’. A ‘quadroon’, derived from the Spanish word ‘*cuateron*’, denotes a person one-fourth black, that is, with one black grandparent, while an ‘octoroon’ is said to be one-eighth black, that is, the child of a ‘quadroon’ and a white parent (Faulkner 2000).

There are slave history records of the 18th century of ‘octoroon’ slaves being mistaken for white people (Tenzer, 2007). Tenzer (2007) refers to a slave woman on auction with her children in the 1850s who was described as a “handsome mulatto” and her children as fully white like the fairest Americans. My interpretation here would be that the woman must have had a black grandparent and her children were possibly ‘quadroons’. This may not be the case since it is noted that the children were like the fairest Americans. Going by the description, the children may in fact have been ‘octoroons’.

The *Black River* character Hugh is described as a ‘mulatto’ that might pass for a white man. Having stated this, it might be necessary, though not convincingly so, to point out he is an ‘octoroon’. Given the fact that his mother, Antonia, is described as black may pose the question that Hugh does not even qualify as ‘mulatto’. However, it could also be the case that since Antonia was American born, there is a possibility that some of her forebears or even a parent may have been white, qualifying her to be of mixed heritage even though, as stated, she is described as black. Hugh is still likely to be a very fair ‘quadroon’ or ‘octoroon’ in this case. The character Nedi is genuinely a ‘quadroon’ or ‘mulatto’ in the real sense in *Black River*, since her fair side is an obvious feature, and her father is possibly her white owner. Nedi’s son Ark is not described as being able to pass as a white person but he alone in the novel could genuinely be described to be an ‘octoroon’ based on his family history.

Diverse key themes and timeline of events have been invaluable to the research in terms of my depiction of *Black River* as a credible story. The Academic Journal chronicles my ethnographical study (which will be discussed in the next chapter) which I undertook preparatory to the US trip; without undergoing the ethnohistorical research I would have no knowledge of Kentucky before I made the trip. The ethnohistorical research informed and equipped the neo-slave narrative portion of the creative work on the leadup to dealing with *how* a fictional neo-slave narrative with magical realist features may symbolically fill literal gaps in family history.

CARTHATIC JOURNAL:

THE PSYCHOGEOGRAPHICAL STUDY

This section develops the notes taken while I carried out my psychogeographical study in the United States. It is also an account of my journey and most importantly offers answers to my question of how a fictional neo-slave narrative might symbolically fill the literal gaps in a family history whose accounts of forebears taken to the United States as slaves. It is my intention in this part of the exegesis to discuss my experience and the reason for my journey – for a story to fill a gap, I needed to journey to a location where slaves were possibly taken and learn the history that was left behind and is still preserved. I also intend to reveal historical themes and findings that inspired sections in my story, hence filling that gap in my family history. It is also important to provide answers to the sub-research questions:

What is the relevance of psychogeography to a fictional neo-slave writing?

What are the outcomes of a psychogeographical research approach in *Black River*?

It was after a year of writing *Black River* that I embarked on my trip to America. I arrived in Louisville Kentucky on the 12th of April, 2016. The Louisville I was after, since it was the main setting for *Black River*, was the one of the slave era – between the 18th and 19th centuries to be specific. However, what I met was, of course, a modern Louisville. Instead of horses and carriages serving as the most common means of transport, there was the presence of cars. The landscapes of

the slave era had clearly been transformed. Some street names and many buildings, structures and locations had been renamed and restructured. At the same time, there were certain elements to the setting that could never transform, or even if they could, the change was minimal. The weather was one of them. The air had this sort of fresh smell like that of opulent spring water. The breeze could be felt most mornings and nights, although it was somewhat still during the day. Louisville was not a small village anymore as it was in the period of my novel (Kendrick, 1937). It had become a big city with development and road construction all over the place. In some areas, large modern buildings dominated; however, old 19th century buildings also could still be spotted.

In my travels to Lexington, the second largest city next to Louisville in Kentucky, it did not take long for me to pick the variances. Lexington's air had the smell of coffee. The landscape was more uniformly levelled, I would say, if compared to Louisville. Like Louisville there was also a mix of both modern buildings and earlier century buildings.

Frankfort, Kentucky's capital which was less than an hour's drive from Louisville, can be said to have a dry smell. The sun appeared seated right in the centre of the sky and I felt its glare over me the couple of times that I went there. It is one of the most mountainous cities I have been to. The grass covering these mountains was immensely green and attractive in nature.

These variances amongst the cities informed and inspired my description of them in *Black River*. I got lost on some occasions while travelling around. The first time it occurred was while I was in search of a Louisville slave market marker where a large number of slaves were traded. I kept travelling in circles not sure where it was to be found. In a way this opened Louisville to me. I got to know a lot of places without the use of a map. While travelling around Louisville a lost man, I imagined myself to be my protagonist, Christmas Preacher, driving a cart through the

woods. I imagined myself a fugitive slave on the run with no idea of where I was heading – another example of me devising a motivation to develop Christmas as a character.

Locust Grove

On the 13th of April, 2016, I drove towards the Ohio River Valley where a former slave holding residence was situated. Black River is the depicted terminology I use in the thesis for rivers including the Ohio River. I walked along the banks of this river and the experience inspired me creatively. Wherever you go around the world, you see people of African heritage – with slavery being a major factor in common within their history. Therefore, I relate the river upon which slaves were transported from Africa to the ‘race’ itself.

I was welcomed to Locust Grove by a tour guide, an elderly white woman, who was very passionate about the history of the place. She had stories about George Rogers Clark, the founder of Louisville. He was a well-respected US general who lived there with his sister and her family between 1809 and 1818, when he died. The tour guide was full of praise for this man, who I learned had a slave called Kitt. Yes, the man was recognised for his exploits in the revolutionary war, but my major interest was to learn about the lives of the black men and women that lived on the historic farm as slaves.



FIGURE 1 LOCUST GROVE

I was interested in the manner in which the house was run – how slaves lived their lives on a daily basis – and it didn't take long for the information I was after to pour out. *Black River* is directly informed by these fine-grained findings, as discussed below. I noticed a vast amount of land around the big house where the slaveholder and his family lived. The lawns were tidy but sparse in some areas, and I noticed a tree with some pink flowers on it. There were other trees I would describe as 'dried living trees'. They lacked leaves and also flowers. The house where the tour guide indicated that George Rogers Clark's sister and her husband (the Croghans) lived was the most distinct in view. It was indicated that Locust Grove became what it was during the slave era due to slave labour. The slaves that lived in Locust Grove continue to be acknowledged for their munificent skills in many areas such as in the production of furniture, drawing maps and farming expertise. It was mentioned that a lot of export of farm products was carried out from Locust Grove, over the Ohio River, down south.

The way the tour guide showed me around inspired a fantastical scene in *Black River*. This scene explores Christmas's visit to the future where he witnesses his reincarnated body being shown around the place where Christmas had previously been enslaved. The following passage describes this scene:

He (Olofu) waved to the driver after he was dropped off at the historic site. He looked around and followed the direction that led to the big house. Christmas felt proud that this magical soul had found this place. It was pride of the ground. The future was going to remember Christmas's days in America. However, the house looked different. The walls that used to be milk white and not so new were pure white and new. The flowers around the house never used to be there. And what happened to the

little puddles all around? The grounds that were once covered in patches of carpet grasses were now covered with bricks (p. 124).

The description focuses on the surroundings at Locust Grove. Locust Grove also inspired other sections in the novel. The Croghans at Locust Grove were largely self-sufficient, like many other early settlers. Yet such self-sufficiency required sunup-to-sundown exertion on the part of a whole community of people – both young and old, enslaved and free. Not too far from the building was a museum dedicated to Locust Grove and in it were displays of clothing worn during the slave times – of both the whites and the enslaved blacks. From my tour I gathered a huge amount of information on what life was like on the farm in the 18th and 19th centuries and the summary I give below also served as a guide to my portrayal of the routines established in *Black River*.

Daily Routines – Locust Grove

Slaves woke very early to milk the cows, and would also put out bacon from the smoke house for breakfast and dinner respectively. In *Black River*, Christmas is the only character that wakes early to tend to the hogs. In the early pages, however, the character Antonia is also seen to wake early and do her chores. After lunch, slaves could be seen butchering hogs and enslaved women helped out in the cutting and preservation of the meat.

The field slaves in the Croghan residence would be in the fields before 7am and it was presumed that the house slaves prepared breakfasts for them prior to their leaving. It was usual to see Mr Croghan's teenage sons set out to hunt in the woods after breakfast, but I doubt if it was an everyday routine. Before then, I lacked a particular scene for Mr Preacher's children while they holiday in Louisville, away from their mother's home in New York. The mention of hunting

inspired a hunting scenario in *Black River* (p. 115). Lunch was ready by midday, by which time Mr. Croghan's teenage sons would probably have returned from hunting, leaving the killed animals in the kitchen house.

By 8am all the master's children who were below six years of age were settled in the nursery under the care of a governess or perhaps a slave babysitter – this also inspired the creation of my governess character, Miss Emily Margaret Thatch.

At about 9am, enslaved field hands carried sheaves of harvested wheat to the mill where other slaves handled the grinding and then loaded the flour into barrels for storage. The master received reports from the overseer in regards to the farm activities and planned the shipping of farm products to New Orleans. A slave who usually collected rents for the Mr Croghan set out before midday to carry out his task – Mr Croghan is known to have had properties around Louisville. This information was the source of inspiration behind my conception of the *Black River* character Mr. Preacher, who has a number of houses scattered around Virginia, and later on in Kentucky. It is also evident in a scene in *Black River* (p. 159) when Christmas goes out to collect the rent for Mr. Preacher. The slave assigned to collect the family's mail from the post office at the Croghan's set out on his task by 11am. This also had an influence on one of the many errands the character Christmas carries out in *Black River*.

Dinner at the Croghan's was at 5pm. Most of the field slaves returned to their quarters at this time. Some of the field hands in Locust Grove ended their day by taking the cows to the pastures for milking and then settling into their quarters by 6pm. Another known feature in those days in the Croghan household was the sight of the white master writing letters. Those who kept journals updated them by the end of the day, 8pm. Quill pens made of feathers were used. Again, this image influenced me creatively and is reflected in the moments the *Black River* character Mr.

Preacher spends time alone in his study. Slaves told a lot of tales in the evenings (also at about 8pm) at their quarters, and this aspect I also related to my character Nedi, whose stories in *Black River* are influenced by her marriage to Christmas. The passage below is an example:

His spirit (Christmas) raced out of his body and found Nedi in the Peterson plantation telling the children of the plantation a story that he, Christmas, had told her about Africa – about a slave catcher from the country of Oli’gra who used to catch slaves and sell them to white people. His name was Onoja.’ (p. 161)

Slaves told many tales in the evenings at their quarters. They played card games too, sometimes with their white owners. Fires were laid before sleep time by the designated slaves, which informed my application of the fireplace in various scenes in *Black River*. One example is in a scene in which the character Tallie, who while ministering during a Quaker meeting, ‘walked toward the fire place in his tall frame and put the bible in the fire’ (p. 52).

Locust Grove was the home and workplace of dozens of enslaved African Americans during the Croghan’s residency from 1790 to 1849. Some were born there, and others were purchased and brought there to do the work of building the house and outbuildings, planting and harvesting the crops, digging the gardens, preserving and cooking the meals, stitching the clothes, doing the laundry, watching the children, and other tasks. At the peak of the farm’s operations in 1820, more than 40 enslaved people laboured there. None of them had control over the conditions of their lives. In contrast, in *Black River*, only two slaves are born at the Preacher residence – Hugh Preacher and Small John. The other slaves are bought, aside from Nedi and her other children who move into the Preacher residence after their master’s insanity is confirmed. Most chores in the

Preacher residence involve tending to the farm's livestock – mainly hogs, tending to the horses, cleaning the big house and as in the Croghan's residence, cooking and watching the children.

In 1849 the 20 slaves remaining at Locust Grove were emancipated by the will of Dr. John Croghan. Those freed were indentured for seven years to be trained in marketable skills, then finally released from bondage. This act is emulated in *Black River* in the form of Mr Preacher providing work, shelter and education to his emancipated slaves. There is no record of any runaways in Locust Grove but there is evidence that some of the slaves in the residence were sold 'down river' in New Orleans by the Croghans. The excerpts from the Croghan family letters and documents, which I studied at the Kentucky Historical Society, show this.



FIGURE 2 DINING, LOCUST GROVE MANSION



FIGURE 3 LOUNGE, LOCUST GROVE



FIGURE 4 BEDROOM, LOCUST GROVE

General Clark freed Kitt, presumably after his death. It was in the general's will, and below is what I read on a Certificate of Freedom signed by George Rogers Clark, March 31, 1818 and displayed in the residence:

Be it that Kitt, having served faithfully, and as the body servant of Genl. George R. Clark deceased, conducted himself for many years with entire approbation, is hereby liberated from any involuntary servitude...

Kitt is still a well-known name at Locust Grove today. Another slave named York is too. York became famous as the only black on a Lewis and Clark expedition. He was also a personal servant of George Rogers Clark during most his lifetime. He was a frequent visitor to Locust Grove, where he probably had enslaved relatives. During the Corps of Discovery expedition, York proved invaluable to its success. 'Indians were much astonished ... they never saw a black man before, all flocked around him and examined him from top to toe,' the tour guide had narrated. It is not known whether he was freed or he escaped slavery. No records were in place in this regards. However, it was recorded that he requested freedom after the expedition which was refused by his master.

Stephen Bishop (1820-1857) was another famed person of colour well known at Locust Grove. He was a mixed-race slave acquired by John Croghan in 1839 when he purchased Mammoth Cave. Bishop became the cave's most famous guide. With other enslaved guides,

Bishop conducted the first thorough explorations of the cave. His map, drawn at Locust Grove in 1842, is still in existence. One year following his emancipation he died at the age of 37.

The black residents I ‘encountered’ in Locust Grove were far more skilled than my *Black River* characters. Christmas is the most skilled black among the others, and he is only a butcher, rice farmer and hog tenderer. The people who lived during the slave era were more modernised than I expected. The dining was similar to the dining arrangements we have today. The cutlery was also similar. The candles and the mat placed on the floor during dinner time distinguished the setting a bit. Note that the reason for the mat being placed beneath the dining table and chairs was to prevent crumbs and particles that fell during the course of dinner from soiling the floor. The mat was taken out after every meal to be cleaned rather than sweeping or vacuuming it which is done in the present era, and this practice is portrayed in *Black River* (p. 18).



FIGURE 5 GENERAL CLARK'S BEDROOM AT LOCUST GROVE



FIGURE 6 SLAVE DWELLING, LOCUST GROVE



FIGURE 7 KITCHEN HOUSE, LOCUST GROVE

The bedrooms at Locust Grove were also quite fashionable. There was the guest room, the children's room, and the master room. Each bedroom had a fire place. Figure 5 (*above*) pictures the guest room which General Rogers Clark stayed in when he came to stay with the Croghans.

Kitt stayed with him in this room. There is a pallet seen in the photo by the foot of the bed, where it was pointed out that Kitt slept. The slave was likened to a caregiver since the ex-General was disabled; that is, he had lost a leg. 'Pallet' was a word I came across in related works such as Sue Monk Kidd's novel, *The Invention of Wings* (2014). It was in Locust Grove I saw a pallet for the first time and I depict it in *Black River* in several instances. In the *Locust Grove* big house, which is unlike the residence I envisaged for Mr Preacher in my narrative, there was another guest room upstairs where visiting families could stay. The room had two double-sized beds, a baby cot and a small table with a candle. The house had a study, where a lot of paperwork was done in regards to the farm and house business. There was also the lounge which appeared quite exotic. The master bed was of exceptional quality with a type of covering over it. Some of the beds had nets to prevent mosquito bites. I came across other furniture of extraordinary quality that could still fit in our modern setting. Some examples of this furniture are drawer-sets, wardrobes, bedside drawers and stools. There were also toys in place – especially dolls for girls, which is again very similar to what we have in our present era. The picture frames were of dazzling quality.

The kitchen house, as they called it then, was situated outside the house to prevent fire outbreak. The fire place in the kitchen house produced intense fire when in use. It was pointed out by the tour guide that the slave woman in charge of the kitchen during the slave era had a sleeping place in the attic of the kitchen house and had all her belongings in there. In addition, all the dishes were washed in the kitchen. This was an extremely difficult task as I came to understand. It

involved the conveyance of pots and dishes from the kitchen house to the dining room in the big house after all the dishes were done, and after meals the slaves had to convey them back as dirty dishes to the kitchen house to be washed before being taken back to the main house again. I portray this in *Black River* when the character Christmas ‘found Black John carrying a load of clean dishes from the kitchen and heading towards the lounge’ (p. 116 -117).

Clearly there is a significant contrast between the dwellings of the whites and their slaves. However, even though slaves experienced such a low status, they still tried to live comfortably. They created families and they enjoyed leisure time as far as possible – playing card games and enjoying family tales after dinner. In their bondage they lived life as best they could. They had goals and even appreciated life on each passing day with the hope that the future would be better. Figure 6 is a photo of one slave couple’s dwelling.

Farmington Plantation

In the early 1830s, hemp constituted the primary cash crop at Farmington and throughout Kentucky. In August, mature fields could reach heights of 15 feet. In addition to the yearlong process of sowing the fields, cutting mature hemp and ‘braking’ the stalk away from the inner core of the plant, enslaved African-Americans at Farmington processed fibre from the plant into twine and rough bagging. The manpower necessary for hemp production ensured Kentucky’s reliance on slavery. Unlike in Locust Grove, there is evidence that slaves absconded from Farmington. There’s a passage below shows how the ‘Massa’, who was at that time John Speed, advertised for a missing slave, promising a reward for anyone who could find him. This form of search informed my portrayal of the search for my character, Ark, in *Black River*. The passage below shows this portrayal:

‘Mrs. Brightline, as ye know, is out to get Nedi and her children,’ Tallie began looking at the white men. ‘She done recaptured some twelve negro mens, seven womens and nine children. Some of the children she got was born after their mothers left the Peterson plantation.’ (p. 226).



FIGURE 8 HEMP AT FARMINGTON

100 DOLLARS REWARD.

Ran away from the subscriber, living on Beargrass, near Louisville, a mutatto man, named **FRAZIER**.
 He is about 6 feet high, large, likely, and very active. He is quite intelligent—was taken, not long since in Shepherdsville, and let loose again, upon his producing a forged pass.

Should he attempt to go into Illinois, Indiana or Ohio, it is more than probable, he will procure, again, some forged paper.

I will give the above reward, of one hundred dollars, for his delivery to me, if taken in this county, or for his confinement in a jail so that I get him. If taken out of this state, I will pay the jail fees in addition.

JOHN SPEED.
 august 19 82 low

University of Kentucky Libraries, Kentucky Newspaper Microfilm Collection

In 1826, an enslaved man known only as "Frazier" escaped from Farmington. This advertisement, placed by John Speed in the *Louisville Public Advertiser*, is typical of "runaway slave ads" found in newspapers throughout the South prior to 1865.

FIGURE 9 ADVERTISEMENT BY SLAVE MASTER

The total value of Farmington's enslaved African-Americans equalled \$22,300, or roughly 72 percent of Speed's entire estate. Although some slaveholders left instructions in their wills to emancipate their slaves, Mr. John Speed did not. Instead his will stated that there should be equal division of his properties among his heirs and this probably forced the separation of enslaved families. Useful historical information here is centred around the relationship between Mr Joshua Speed (John Speed's heir) and President Abraham Lincoln, under whose presidency slavery was abolished. The latter was a Republican while Mr Speed was a Democrat; however, they remained good friends. Mr Joshua Speed followed in his father's footsteps and continued to hold slaves; however, he also supported the emancipation of slaves. I was informed that when President Lincoln was shot dead, there was great mourning in Farmington. There is existing evidence of the relationship the two had. Below is an extract of President Lincoln's letter to Mr Joshua Speed:

Dear Speed

...you suggest that in political action now, you and I would differ – I suppose we would; not quite as much, however, as you may think. You know I dislike slavery; and you fully admit the abstract wrong of it. So far there is no cause of difference—

But you say that sooner than yeild your legal right to the slave – especially at the bidding of those who are not themselves interested, you would see the Union dissolved – I am not aware that any one is bidding you to yeild that right; very certainly I am not.

At the onset of my research I did not have a clear sense of the nuanced political positions of the time. However, documents like the above were invaluable as when my characters are in dialogue they frequently air political statements in regards to the era in which the story is set. For instance, the character Christmas has this to say when rumours begin circulating about the Indians starting a war: ‘President Madison ain’t sleeping.’ (p.138).

Speed family letters and documents speak about a slave called Morocco, and from them we know he took goods to the market and travelled around Kentucky acting as a courier for the Speeds. Like Morocco, *Black River* also has characters who do the courier job for both the Preacher and Peterson residences. In the early 20th century, a farmer plowing fields that once belonged to Farmington discovered a rare, abandoned marker – a tombstone engraved for a slave – named Morocco. This finding inspired me to create a tomb for my *Black River* protagonist, Christmas, and this I carried out in one of my magical scenes (supernatural) of the future. I plotted it in a way that a reincarnated Christmas and a decedent (Ijeyi) come to see this tomb (p. 254).

My visit here occurred on the 15th April, 2016. Farmington was a typical plantation. It was bigger than Locust Grove and records show that Farmington had a lot more slaves than Locust Grove. The big master’s house in Farmington is not what I would match to my fictional depiction of Mr Preacher’s Kentucky residence, even though I would liken a section of the Farmington surroundings to that of the Preacher residence. It is evident that many of activities were carried out by slaves on the Farmington plantation. The tour guide argued that there are documents that proves that the Speed family treated their slaves well; however, I came across a chair that had chains – evidence which I shared with the tour guide that a slave was perhaps held against his will there, confined to that seat. Before bedtime at Farmington, it was the duty of some slaves to tighten the

bed strings or ropes upon which the mattress lay, to make them firmer when the straw mattress was placed on it. It is believed that President Lincoln as a young man, before he became president, stayed in the room situated underneath the mansion (see Figure 11) when he visited Farmington.



FIGURE 10 FARMINGTON MANSION



FIGURE 11 THE ROOM LINCOLN STAYED

The white people's dining at Farmington, which was very similar to that of Locust Grove, bespeaks their extreme privilege. The images I use here, such as that of the dining room, give me a sense of the environment in which I placed my characters while writing *Black River*. Music was a part of the life of Farmington. I came across a piano and violin in the living room – an indication that slaveholders as well as slaves must have been skilled in the handling of musical instruments. I also came across a baby-walker made in Farmington, obviously by slave hands, and the photo inspired another scene in my thesis. The *Black River* slave character, Antonia, murders the baby of her master, and the image of a baby-walker was the strongest I could use to dig out memories that haunted the Preacher residence:

Christmas had kept it clean. It was a symbol that signified the importance of her existence. For some reason he found himself staring at it. Mr. Preacher thought he saw Harriet on it for a moment. Christmas saw it was her ghost. The seat in the middle of the walker dangled. Mr. Preacher launched himself forward toward it (p. 104).

I was informed that the women that lived in or visited Farmington were women of high class and that it was a notion at that time that the whiter the skin, the more beautiful the woman and therefore skin-whitening cosmetics were used by the women to lighten their skin. The master bedroom was also similar to the one at Locust Grove. Before my visit, I anticipated the existence of bath houses and ancient bathtubs. I imagined that they probably had bathrooms in those days and I even created a scene in a bath house where the character Antonia murders Mr Preacher's baby. On visiting these historical dwellings, I came to realise that there were no toilets during the slave era. There were no bathrooms either. Male folks probably relieved themselves outside the

house perhaps in the woods and on the other hand, the women may have used bed pans and chamber pots for defecation. At night, it was indicated that bed pans and chamber pots were placed in the rooms to serve as toilets for all – in which slaves, and even masters and mistresses, could relieve themselves. It was also pointed out by the tour guide that in that era, people hardly ever had a bath. Perhaps once or twice in three weeks. Figure 13 is a photo of a tub in which white folks washed themselves.



**FIGURE 12 BABY-WALKER AT THE
FARMINGTON PLANTATION**



FIGURE 13 TUB IN FARMINGTON

Ohio



FIGURE 14 MUSEUM, CINCINNATI



FIGURE 15 THE OHIO RIVER

Cincinnati was closer to Louisville, Kentucky, than I thought. To many slaves, it was the North. It was freedom! From my ethnohistorical research I learnt that a lot of fugitives fled Kentucky for the freedom in Cincinnati prior to 1850 – the year that the fugitive act (fugitive slave law) was established:

It required that all escaped slaves were, upon capture, to be returned to their masters and that officials and citizens of free states had to cooperate in this law. (Qtd. in document displayed on one of the walls of the Farmington Museum).

Cincinnati is actually very symbolic to *Black River* in the sense that it is in this city that Christmas is perceived to have died in America. However, the novel has two differentiable endings and the other, fantastical ending would indicate that Cincinnati is the city in which Christmas levitates into the sky and heads back to Africa. On the 16th of April, 2016, I drove about two hours from Louisville across the bridge over the Great Ohio river to Cincinnati.

In the state of Ohio, I visited the National Underground Railroad Freedom Centre. It felt as if Africa was brought to life in America at the start of the tour. There were audio recordings of various conversations in African language(s). I was inspired here to include some Idoma words in *Black River*. This experience at the centre was accompanied by the humming voice of the sea, and the creaking sounds of a ship. Many black people moved into the Northwest territories and established settlements in cities as Cincinnati. Below is a brief description of Cincinnati in *Black River* (p. 240):

Cincinnati was nothing like Louisville. Christmas understood why it was easy for fugitive slaves to last a long time in the city without being caught – if only he could keep his mouth shut. Even amongst the black population there were those who betrayed their race. They reported to the authorities once they were able to identify a fugitive. Negroes could be seen playing games heart-to-heart with white folks. Whites could be seen in loud arguments with blacks, unusual for Christmas.

These people became the nucleus for important free black communities that aided runaway slaves escaping from Kentucky and other places. I encountered strong images of slavery, from its history in Africa to America. I had by this time written a quarter of *Black River*. The visit prompted me to become very conscious of depicting Africa's relevance in *Black River*. It was at this point my invented magical character, Orinya, Christmas's resurrected ancestor, became relevant in the novel.

Brief biographies of heroic ex-slaves adorned the walls of the museum. One was of Yarrow (Mamout) Marmood (c. 1736-1823) who was captured on the Guinea Coast and was enslaved prior to the American Revolution in what is known today as the Georgetown section of Washington D.C. In 1807, Marmood's owner manumitted him, and Marmood began to buy acres of land to establish his family. He bought several pieces of real estate, established a hauling business. He was one of the first stockholders of the Bank of Columbia. Another person whose biography was displayed on the wall was a woman named Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784). Wheatley was kidnapped as a child from the Senegal-Gambia region. In Boston in 1761, she was purchased by John Wheatley, and while she was under his holding as a slave she learned English, Latin and Greek. She was also taught to read and write. In 1767, Phillis Wheatley published her first poem

in the *Newport Rhode Island Mercury*. Soon after, she became famous in America and London for other poems published. William Wells Browns (1814-1884), another heroic figure celebrated on the wall, was born enslaved near Lexington, Kentucky. His father was a white plantation owner and his mother, a slave. He was owned by several white men before escaping slavery in 1834. He adopted the name of his friend, Wells Brown, a Quaker who had helped him escape and remain free. William Wells Browns worked on the Underground Railroad, ferrying many people to freedom. In 1843, Wells Brown became an agent for the New York Anti-Slavery Society and later the American Anti-Slavery Society. He settled in Boston in 1847, where he published his autobiography, *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave*, which is included amongst the works in my ethnohistorical archive.

I came across a space dedicated to the woman who inspired Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, a powerful motivation behind my research. The woman was Margaret Garner. Born enslaved on a farm in Richwood, Kentucky, the 22-year-old made a dramatic escape for freedom in January, 1856. Margaret, her four children, her husband Robert and his parents left with a party of 17 people on a horse-drawn sled. They crossed the frozen Ohio River on foot from a spot near Covington, Kentucky into Cincinnati, Ohio. Robert was familiar with Cincinnati since he had been hired out to the hog market there. Upon reaching Cincinnati, they found shelter with Margaret's cousin who was supposed to seek help from a Quaker. Instead, U.S. Marshals surrounded the house. Robert fired several shots, wounding one member of the posse. Margaret, stating that she would not see her children returned to slavery, killed her two-year-old daughter with a butcher's knife and wounded the other three children before she was overpowered. The family was jailed and the trial lasted for a month. An Abolitionist feminist shocked the courtroom with her extraordinary accusation that Margaret's children were evidence of sexual abuse by a slaveholder

– Archibald Gaines. The allegation was never proven and Margaret was returned to slavery. Her owner sold her to a plantation in Mississippi where she died in 1858. In *Black River* no black character found success like Marmood or Wheatley. If Morrison’s inspiration, Margaret, had successfully escaped slavery, would that have been success? In that case my character Ijeyi wins in war and slavery is ended; and the character Nedi and her family gain a passage to Africa and find freedom there.

I came across one placard showcasing a brief biography of one slave woman whose narrative also inspired me greatly and is a vital study in my ethnohistorical research. In Harriet Jacob’s *Incidents of a Slave Girl* ([1860] 2003), she described her experience as a slave and a fugitive, touching on family experiences and biracial relationships. On the placard it was written:

Harriet Jacobs was born enslaved in Edenton, North Carolina, the daughter of two slaves owned by two different men. At the age of twelve, Jacobs was willed as part of an inheritance to a young child. That child’s father, Dr. James Norcom, became Jacob’s effective owner. From the beginning, Norcom made sexual advances toward Jacobs. In order to escape from Norcom, Jacobs became involved with ‘a caring white lawyer’ and bore two children. The infuriated Norcom decided to sell her and her children south.

As I have suggested previously, America’s history of slavery anchors the plot of my narrative. There were spaces in the museum created in honour of the enslaved. The feeling I had there was very deep. I along with other tourists heard the cries of our hearts as we paid our respect in silence. I was able to see photos of manilas which were used to buy slaves in Africa during the 1800s. Most

of them were made of metal. Some were made of bronze, brass and even gold and were ring-shaped. It was indicated that items such as slave pipes displayed at the Freedom Centre were excavated from a site that once had slave quarters situated on it.

Cotton was also a very crucial natural resource often associated with American slavery. However, around the 1700s, planters in the low-country started growing rice and many enslaved persons were brought to the Americas for this complicated skill. The rice fields needed to be nearly dry for planting, then flooded for the growth of the plants, and finally drained for harvesting. Growing rice was very dangerous. Enslaved Africans had dangerous encounters with snakes, alligators and mosquitoes. They were bitten by insects that made their homes in the rice growing areas and carried diseases that included malaria and yellow fever. For reasons like this, death rates were very high on rice plantations. I used the finding in *Black River*: the protagonist, Christmas, hires himself out to a rice planter in order to save some money to purchase his son's freedom, and in this rice farm he witnesses a fellow hand die of a snake bite (p. 136). Before I embarked on this psychogeographical journey, it was on my agenda that the Liberian migration in slave history would be one core area of my research.



FIGURE 16 PIPES ON DISPLAY, FREEDOM CENTRE

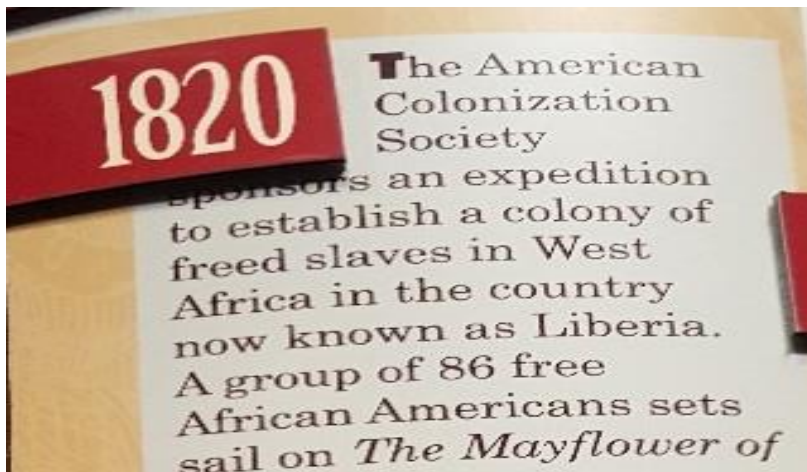


FIGURE 17 BILL ON THE WALLS OF THE MUSEUM

I was overjoyed to see references to Liberia on the wall of the museum in Cincinnati. In 1832, a shipload of former slaves arrived in Liberia, Africa, sponsored by the American Colonization Society. Below is a brief passage concerning this in *Black River*:

This was different. The trees and grasses were of different species. The landscape was fuller and greener. Liberia's forest had slimmer trees than the forests in Oli'doma. The buildings were sparse and weren't like the mud walls and thatched roof of an Opialu home (p. 228).

When I embarked on this journey to the US, it was not my intention to carry out any study after 1850. Of course, however, the American Civil War is inseparable from slavery in the pages of history. Since my work has magical elements with supernatural events taking place, I realised I had the licence to make my protagonist live in the future briefly; hence, I could write about the American Civil War for a moment. For me to do this, I had to understand the war story of that era. I had to learn about its cause. I had to know about 'who was fighting who', I had to learn to differentiate between the Border States, the Union States, and the Confederate States. I had to understand the respective stands.

It was also exhilarating for me to see the painting of Frederick Douglass (c1817-1895) among the great African-Americans honoured on the walls of the Freedom Centre. He was born enslaved in Maryland and escaped to freedom as a young adult in 1831. He did this by pretending to be a black sailor. The Civil War galvanised Douglass and others who saw that slavery might finally end and they lobbied President Lincoln and others for the recruitment of black soldiers.

My knowledge of American Indian history was limited until I visited this museum. I learnt that white settlers broke treaties and continued moving west claiming land. Indians were faced with few choices: to adapt to American society, to stand and fight and probably die, or to move even further west. I also learnt of several Indian heroes, of which one was Joseph Bryant (1742-1807). During the American Revolution, he convinced his people (the Mohawk) to support the British because he feared that Indians would lose their land if the Colonists achieved independence. When America won the war, he led a great number of his people into an area of Canada that was part of their traditional Iroquois land. It was said that he then became a wealthy landowner and slaveholder. One event in particular was of great interest to me, the outcome of the 'Indian Removal Act' which was signed by President Andrew Jackson in 1830. The law resulted in the forced removal of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Creek, Seminole and Choctaw from the Southern United States to the Indian Territory in Oklahoma. In 1838, around 16,000 Cherokee were forced to leave their home and march to a reservation in Oklahoma. The march is today known as the *Trail of Tears*. There was little depiction of this history in *Black River*, although hints and rumours circulate of Indians warring against Europeans in America. Glancing at several photos hung on the walls of the museum, one captured my attention. It was a swamp in Canton Mississippi. That photo of the moment inspired a scene in *Black River*. There are historical evidences of fugitive slaves hiding in swamps in Mississippi, and even though Mississippi is not part of the setting of my work, I was able to weave a swamp-related event into the plot. Hugh, a character in the novel, is captured in Kentucky and taken into slavery in Mississippi. Christmas, despite his magical abilities, was unable to spot the actual location Hugh was taken to as a slave. Christmas, in his abilities, could see Hugh in the future as a fugitive slave in this swamp (p. 220).



FIGURE 18 A SWAMP IN MISSISSIPPI



FIGURE 19 WELL-DRESSED 'NEGRO'

Waveland Plantation, Lexington

On the 20th of April, I drove down to Lexington which was about an hour or more from Louisville. As earlier mentioned, the lawns, from my observation, were much lusher in Lexington, the wind was a bit more still, and Lexington was not as populated as Louisville. I would say the city was quieter. These features were in my mind as I portrayed Lexington in *Black River*. I met a very welcoming tour guide at the Waveland plantation, an elderly man who had a lot of energy for talking. Waveland was home to the son of Kentucky pioneer, revolutionary war soldier, Daniel Boone Bryan (1758-1845). Joseph Bryan, his son, built the Waveland Mansion in this plantation. The slaves that lived with the Bryan family were skilled in making guns and gunpowder as The Bryan family was known to operate a gun shop. A lot of Kentucky rifles were made here.

As pointed out earlier, after inheriting Waveland, Joseph Bryan built the mansion, making it the 'great historic site' it is today. He tore down a smaller stone cabin his father had built before this, the tour guide narrated proudly. I got into a lively argument with him, pointing out that Joseph Bryan never built a mansion. Slaves built it. He understood what I was saying and strangely commented that slavery was not originally the sin of white people alone. He tried to argue that before white people set foot in Africa, slavers were Africans themselves. I also knew what he was talking about. In a sense, he was right. There were African ethnicities that traded slaves amongst themselves – some tribes even traded slaves to acquire horses (Erim, 1981), and this was research I carried out as part of my literary study. Questions then came up in my reflections as to why the slaves were taken to the white man's land or to Brazil or Jamaica. Why did the story of these slaves remain so strong, while the history of African slaves taken by Africans had vanished into thin air? Enforced migration added more fuel to the cruelty of slavery, with the impact still felt today. Slaves taken by African slavers who raided neighbouring villages, on the other hand, perhaps integrated

into their new lives and were allowed to continue within a familiar environment for generations and generations. The farther the distance that slaves were taken, the broader and more profound the impact of slavery.



FIGURE 20 MANSION AT THE WAVELAND PLANTATION

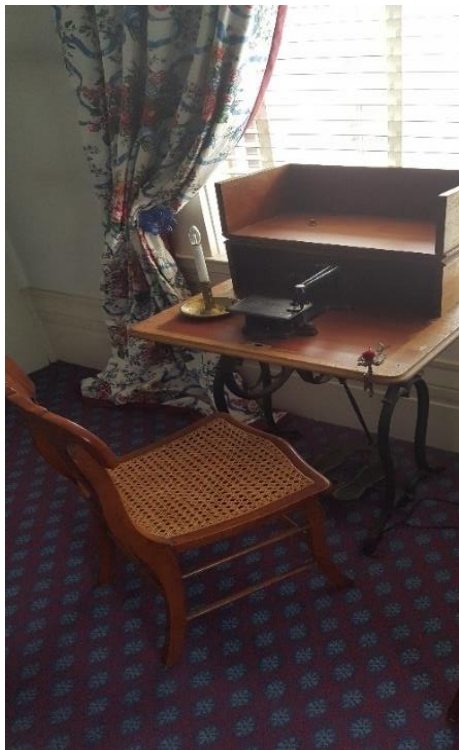


FIGURE 21 SEWING MACHINE AT WAVELAND



FIGURE 22 BEAUTIFULLY MADE DRESS

There were known to be 13 slaves in Waveland – three women and 10 men. The tour guide mentioned that Joseph's wife, Margaret Catmell Bryan, made all the clothes that the slaves in the house wore. There was even a sewing machine in the house, which inspired one of the scenes in *Black River*. While Mrs Preacher is busy on the sewing machine, her own daughter is being killed by Antonia, a slave character (p. 55).

The male slaves in Waveland usually worked on the farm. They lived in cabins around the acres of land that made up Waveland. It was said that they enjoyed a lot of freedom and that even after slavery was abolished, they remained on the plantation by choice. This is a significant happening in my portrayal of Christmas Preacher and his ex-slaves. Christmas and the others slaves decide to stay on at the Preacher residence even after their emancipation.

The tour guide conveyed to me that Joseph supported the Confederacy during the war, which opposed the liberation of enslaved blacks in America's South at that time. Even though *Black River* does not cover the war, I created a future world that as mentioned is on the side of the Union as earlier mentioned. On entering the mansion at Waveland, I noticed what could have been the elegant clothes that Mrs. Bryan tailored using her sewing machine. This speaks much about the woman's skill and it was indeed inspirational as I worked on the character of Mrs. Preacher. The staircase of the mansion was another terrific sight. Again I came to appreciate the many skilled slaves that lived and worked during that era. In terms of achieving a concreteness of representation, there are a number of scenes in *Black River* where the character Antonia scrubs the wooden handrails of the staircase. In one of these scenes Mrs Preacher pushes Antonia down the stairs as a result of her deep anger over the affair between Mr. Preacher and Antonia:

When Mrs. Preacher came out of the boys' room, heading for the stairs, Antonia was there polishing the mahogany handrails. It was all Christmas noticed while he shone the shoes Master Gill wore. The filth and venom in this man had drawn all his focus so that he nearly did not see how Mrs. Preacher grabbed Antonia by the neck and shook her violently on the stairs. Christmas got to his feet. The house shook as Antonia's weight thundered down. A section of the carpet over the stairs ripped apart revealing a crack. Antonia moaned. (p. 42).



FIGURE 23 BEAUTIFUL STAIRCASE AT THE WAVELAND PLANTATION



FIGURE 24 LOBBY AREA AT WAVELAND PLANTATION

Like the two previous historic places I have discussed, I also saw furniture of high workmanship in Waveland. I imagined a lot of my *Black River* scenes occurring at Waveland, even though the mansion was still too big for it to stand as the big house that my character Mr. Preacher lived in. However, the interior design and environment at the Waveland plantation matched all I had envisioned in Mr. Preacher's residence. The portrayal of Mr. Preacher in *Black River* is not one of a very wealthy man. In his lifetime, he never owns more than five slaves, which is contrary to the practice of some of the wealthiest people at that time who owned as many as forty or more slaves. However, some of the detailing at Waveland was suited to realising the settings in *Black River* against which the novel's events take place. The slave dwelling, for instance, as shown in figure 26 (*below*), perfectly suited the Kentucky slave dwelling I describe in the Preacher residence.

Below is the first description of the *Black River* dwelling inspired by the slave dwelling at Waveland. In my description, the building is altered. The actual building as pictured in Figure 26 is two stories. However I had to invent a three-storey building in *Black River* to suit what I wanted.

There was a three storey brick building behind the big house, and it was what Mr. Preacher referred to as the 'slave dwelling.' This excited Christmas. It was a smaller mansion and they wouldn't have to live in cabins any more. The ground floor would be the storeroom for the hay. Their rooms were on the middle floor. The women all stayed on the left side of the building's sitting room, the males on the right side. There was a third floor which Mr. Preacher said would be a meeting place. (p.28)



FIGURE 25 TEA ROOM AT THE WAVELAND PLANTATION



FIGURE 26 SLAVE DWELLING

One of Joseph Bryan's sons was said to have lost the mansion after inheriting it due to a large amount of debt that he was unable to pay and because of this, most of the family members never forgave him. His name was also Joseph Bryan. Joseph Bryan Jr. did garner some praise, however, as during his time Waveland produced great horses that competed in Kentucky competitions. However, he lost it all – including the horses and the mansion as mentioned – all to pay off his debt. I relate this to my character, Mr. Peterson. Despite also being a drunk, Mr. Peterson does not lose his plantation or his source of wealth because of his weakness; instead, he loses control of his life, including his slaves, due to insanity.

In a number of passages in *Black River*, the character William Preacher is described as spending time in his study and inscribing into a journal. The setting of the study is similar to the one in Locust Grove, and they were truly sources for certain scenes in *Black River* for instance there is a scene where Mr. Preacher is to write a letter. He ends up writing a good number of letters but is unsatisfied with them in regards to his reasons for wanting to quit the Quaker Society (p. 196).



FIGURE 27 STUDY AT THE WAVELAND PLANTATION



FIGURE 28 SLAVE DWELLING AT WAVELAND

When I came across the slave dormitory room at Waveland, as shown in Figure 28, it struck as being the right scene for the slave dwelling in *Black River* occupied by Nedi and her family when they move to the Preacher residence. When writing about the lounge of the slave dwelling in *Black River*, I envisioned the photo of the lounge of the Waveland dwelling above while I wrote. It was in this setting that I envisioned conversations and some indoor games amongst the black people at the Preacher residence. An example of a conversation/incident that occurs in this setting in *Black River* can be found in the following passage:

Then someone's footstep was heard on the staircase of the dwelling. The door opened and closed. It was Mr. Preacher. 'You all should leave this...'

'We ain't your slaves no more.' Black John stood up to challenge Mr. Preacher. 'You don't tell us what to do! You should give me back all them money you held back for Moses' rent now that you and your white folks done kill him.' (p. 186 - 187)

I saw a pass (in Figure 30) on one of the tables in the slave dwelling at Waveland. I had this image in my head every time I created a *Black River* scene where the pass was significant.

'Nedi, you know where to find their papers?' Simons asked.

'I look in them rooms,' she said and started to head toward the house.

'Mine in my shoes,' Christmas yelled after her with his face still against the ground.

Christmas remembered how the fire had consumed all the original freedom papers. The current ones had been redone by Mr. Preacher after they had all moved into the big house. Nedi was soon back (p.217).

My next stop would be the Camp Nelson Heritage Park, located 20 miles south of Lexington.



FIGURE 29 LOUNGE OF THE SLAVE DWELLING AT WAVELAND

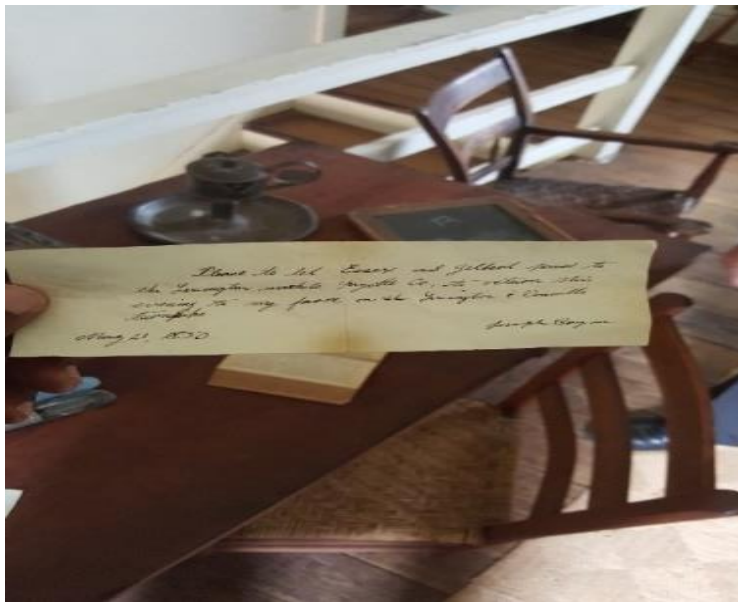


FIGURE 30 FREEDOM/EMANCIPATION PAPER AT WAVELAND

Camp Nelson

Camp Nelson was established along the Kentucky River in 1863 by the Union Army, first serving as a supply and training camp for the Army of the Ohio and District of Kentucky. In May 1864, in what was to be a very relevant moment in history, it became a recruitment point for black soldiers and later a refugee camp for other freed slaves and their families. The ground of Camp Nelson was one of the last places I visited during the trip, arriving there on the 26th of April 2016. The depiction of this camp in *Black River* is filled with magical scenes. Recorded events at Camp Nelson occurred in 1863, while *Black River* is set between 1790 and 1840. Hence, my portrayals needed to be minimal, an example of which is when Christmas tries to locate his lost son by appearing in Kentucky's future, during the civil war of the 1864.

The tour was self-guided; however, I was significantly informed by documentation pinned on the walls. Camp Nelson was a training ground for the Union army, and at that time, if a slave could make it into the grounds of Camp Nelson on a voluntary basis in order to join the army, he was declared a free man and was enlisted into the Union troops. It was recorded that about 10,000 of these black men were emancipated in the 1860's. Making use of this historical information, I created a *Black River* scene set in the future in which Christmas's son (who is sold into slavery) is emancipated:

His son, born in American, had survived a war and returned to Louisville. Ijeyi was as tall as an Ogah except that he was a very bulky man. His beard gave him an intimidating look. Here was Ijeyi standing before a tombstone engraved with the name, 'Christmas Preacher'. The sky was confused and Oda'nyaa's voice echoed from a distance. (p. 254).

One of the most devastating incidents in the history books of Camp Nelson, which I also captured in *Black River*, was the incident in which approximately 400 black women and children were forced to leave the camp as the authorities claimed that only the services of men were required. This incident ended tragically as the weather was bad and about 100 of the women and children lost their lives. African-American soldiers saw this as a betrayal. However, the decision was overturned a week later and the surviving women and children of the soldiers under the ‘United States Coloured Troops’ were taken back into the camp. There was one affidavit I came across in one of my readings about the camp. It was by one anonymous ‘U.S. Coloured Infantry’ who stated the following:

About 8 o’clock Wednesday morning November (23) a mounted guard came to my tent and ordered my wife and children out of Camp. I told the man in charge of the guard that it would be the death of my (sick) boy.... On thus being threatened my wife and children went into the wagon. At night I went in search of my family.... I found my wife shivering with cold and famished with hunger.... My boy was dead.

Freedom alone was not always joyous for these emancipated slaves. It was a time of war. It was a significant time for them – in this America where their ancestors were brought as slaves, emancipation became something they could fight for. Notorious acts occurred. There were murders of more than 40 wounded and surrendering ‘U.S. Coloured Troops’ in one incident. Below is a *Black River* passage which makes clear how the stories of Camp Nelson influenced me in the novel:

Ijeyi's family soon settled into their clean and nicely arranged cabin. A bed and small cushions fitted the size of the room. The white soldiers played cards with the blacks and they joked about their women. Several days later, Ijeyi wore the blue uniform and held his gun in pride as he marched alongside other black soldiers to the Ohio border where they exchanged fire with white people in green uniforms. Many of the blue uniformed soldiers died. Many in the green uniforms also died. But the stars were pleased that Ijeyi returned home to his family at the refuge. (p. 170).



FIGURE 31 DEPICTION OF A UNION'S PROPERTY AT CAMP NELSON



FIGURE 32 ONE CAMP NELSON PHOTO

In a certain placards pinned to the wall were printed writings I was privileged to go through during my visit. There was one statement made in the pre civil war era by an anonymous black enlisted in the Union Army: ‘See how much better off we are now then we was four years ago. It used to be five hundred miles to get to Canada from Lexington, but now it is only eighteen miles! Camp Nelson is now our Canada.’

Camp Nelson also had the largest military hospital facilities in Kentucky during the slave era. Small pox and measles were rampant then and doctors and nurses handled these cases in addition to the treatment of wounded soldiers. There were different hospitals in Camp Nelson – an employee hospital, a prison hospital and a hospital for ‘coloured refugees’. There was racism even during America’s revolution as blacks were accepted as part of white society. The death rate at Camp Nelson was high. There was poor understanding of diseases and the significance of hygiene. For instance, in 1865 over a period of 5 months more than 1,500 people died. There is little depiction of the death rate in relation to disease and sickness in *Black River’s* Camp Nelson, nor even within Louisville society where the work is largely set. However, there are doctor services for women characters during delivery and when Christmas has an infection, he visits the drug store.

Standing on the lawn under the open sky on the grounds of Camp Nelson, I breathed the same air as the emancipated African-American men, women and children. It was said many of them died and were buried on the grounds. I imagined the tents that they once lived in, but were no more. History is indeed a great book of many stories but the fact remains that a lot of stories are always lost. Many died in Camp Nelson, so did their stories. I am from a family with a lot of lost stories that surround the numbers of forebears taken as slaves. It is one of them that sets me on a task to create a fictional narrative on a leadup to answering *how* a fictional neo-slave narrative

with magical realist features may symbolically fill literal gaps in my family history. Setting is very important in plot. And without the sites visit documented in the exegesis, the novel would never surface.



FIGURE 33 A DEPICTION OF CAMP NELSON HOSPITAL

LITERARY JOURNAL:

LITERARY STUDIES

This section of the exegesis, adapted from the literary journal I have maintained since the start of my PhD researches, provides me with an opportunity to elucidate why and how literary genres such as historical fiction, neo-slave narrative, and magical realism can mutate or come together (Arnold, 2005), hence equipping me to tackle the research question: of how a fictional neo-slave narrative with magical features may symbolically fill the literal gaps in a family history whose accounts of forebears taken as slaves have attained the status of myth or legend. In my reading of selected literary works on slavery, I have been able to draw out themes around the African American slave experience. I have also researched Idoma history and religion in the process, drawing out magical themes to imbricate into the plot as a creative component. Based on the research question, I have built the following sub-research questions for this section:

What are the themes that *Black River* shares with related literary works on the African America slave experience?

What magical themes can be drawn out of Idoma history and religion of old that can be imbricated in *Black River*?

This section of the exegesis looks first at the influence of neo-slave narratives, distinguishable for actual slave narratives of ‘published antebellum accounts’, on my literary

development, and then goes on to look at the equally formative influence of magical realism, surrealism and the fantastic on *Black River*.

Hall (2005) defines literary studies as an interrelation between literary texts and humanity. Literary studies can be approached in a variety of ways: in this section, I am primarily interested in themes and genre features in more-or-less contemporary literary works. Slave stories, both fictional and non-fictional, have been written in various forms and are now variously defined as slave narratives or accounts and, in the cases of more recent (re)tellings, neo-slave narratives/novels or historical fiction. Slave narratives were originally referred to as published antebellum accounts; however, 'their widened application over time and circumstance speaks of power present in the periods of institutional neglect' (Sekora, 1987, p. 484). Neglect may tacitly have acted to undermine the radical agendas of such writings, given that as Hedin (1982, p. 634) wrote, 'When the slave story narrators wrote, they were inclined to direct their energies toward one overriding goal, the destruction of that slavery institution.'

The modern form of slave narrative emerged after World War II and is characterised by fictional rather than biographical or auto-biographical accounts which nevertheless draw on the history and form of early slave narratives (Hawkins, 2012. p. 9). This has led to terms like *neo-slave narrative* and *historical fiction*. Neo-slave narratives are fictional stories about slavery written by contemporary authors using historical information (Bell, 1987). They are perhaps referred to as both a form of history and as the fiction of the historical awareness of an African-American art form (Stepito, 1991). The neo-slave narrative form is thus a synthesis of history and fiction which originated in the social, intellectual and racial circumstances of the 1960s and even afterwards (Hawkins, 2012. p. 14) as "The historical novel is the product of the purported subject

it represents, and the social and cultural conditions which were its cause as the literary form it employs” (Hawkins, 2012. p. 2).

The Gripping Lives of Slaves

Beloved (1988), by Toni Morrison, was my greatest influence prior to the start of the research journey. In *Beloved*, the protagonist Sethe escapes slavery, but is confronted by horrific circumstances that lead to the criminal killing of her two-year-old daughter. Death is an option for her and her children if they have to return to slavery. When she and her children are about to be recaptured in Ohio and taken back into slavery in Kentucky, her outrage takes full control and she is bent on taking life out of every one of her children; however, only one ends up lifeless. The child’s spirit haunts Sethe’s Ohio household for many years and presumably comes back in human form. There is also Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979), which like *Beloved* (1988) is a literary work that touches on slavery, but via the fantasy genre – an interesting practice of time-traveling that significantly informs my craft. Butler’s African-American character, Dana, travels between 1976 present time and the 19th century slave era. It is a travel that actualises without her knowing, and she doesn’t understand how it just happens. Amongst the people of that era that she meets, are her ancestors that comprise of white slaveholders and black slaves, and she becomes entwined in their history. Time-travel, in *Kindred*, actually fill gaps in ways that realist historical fiction can’t. It facilitates the escape from reality that allows for different understanding of the circumstances of the main character, while providing ancient evidence from the past. Levitation, time travel and appearance of range of ancestors in *Black River* become narrative devices that provide another set of knowledge, in this case, the mythological and totemic beliefs and histories of Idoma people. The supernatural elements in *Beloved* allows an engagement with the deep emotional struggle

and traumatic experience of slavery. How then will a fictional neo-slave narrative with magical realist features, symbolically fill literal gaps in a family history? I answer this by indicating my establishment of the cultural elements of my Idoma people into the slave narrative tradition. In doing so, I have extended the discourse into the imaginative realm of hyperreal lifeworld which is associated with African folklore.

Venerated literary classics in the genre of this kind are greatly important, but I also wanted to be informed about the very latest treatments of the subject in order to locate my novel within the contemporary scene. As I assimilated this literature I reworked the very first draft of *Black River* with informed knowledge by such studies and literary treatments. Since 2014, the year my study began, authors have continued to revisit slave history, as the selection of their works analysed in this literary journal suggest. I analysed areas where the novelists were more or less informed in comparison to my own work. *The Underground Railroad* (2016) by Colson Whitehead and *Grace* (2016) by Natasha Deon are both works that deal with enslaved blacks in America's South heading North in pursuit of freedom. The former, however, alters the history of the figurative underground rail networks of Quakers and Abolitionists that aided slave fugitives by creating an actual underground train network that aided slaves in their journey. These recent works re-echoes the happenings of history, that is, the many routes of escapes that the likes of Frederick Douglass, Henry Bibb, Harriet Jacob and Francis Fedrics, all historical figures, explored in search for freedom.

I looked at another recent work, which is outside the 'historical' field but deals with similar themes in an interesting, satirical way. *The Sellout* (2016), by Paul Beatty, is set in a contemporary Los Angeles and focuses on a black man's attempts to reintroduce slavery and segregation. The relevance of this work, which won the 2016 Booker prize, is an indication that the topic of slavery

will always be relevant in scholarly and literary discourse. *The Sellout* (2016 p. 21) reminds African-Americans that their history can be ‘traced back to the first vessel to escape state sanctioned southern repression’. *The Underground Railroad* (2016) is more of a typical historical slave story that begins by exploring the origin of African slaves. Whitehead introduces the character Ajjarryl and the village ‘Quidah’, where she is taken. Whitehead goes on to touch on the sad happenings of the slave era: ‘how black parents were sold even before their children could walk’ (p. 21); how slave women lost their children. The early pages of *Black River* similarly show how the protagonist Christmas is sold to Mr. Preacher in Richmond, Virginia. It is later that the Christmas’s history is revealed – he is from an African country called Oli’doma (Idoma land) and he was sold into slavery by an uncle.

Henry Bibb in his slave account writes, ‘I was so badly punished that I was not able to work for several days. After being flogged as described, they took me off several miles to a shop and had a heavy iron collar riveted on my neck with prongs extending above my head, on the end of which there was a small bell’ (Bibb, [1849]2005, p. 134). The theme of cruelty appears to be the most common theme reiterated in fictional slave narratives. In *The Underground Railroad*, protagonist Cora sees ‘men hung from trees and left for buzzards and crows. She sees women carved open to the bones with the cat-o’-nine-tails [whips]. Bodies, alive or dead, roasted on pyres. Feet cut off to prevent escape and hands cut off to prevent theft’ (p. 33). In his novel, Whitehead successfully describes the harm that slavery brought upon blacks. Even though Morrison portrays her character Mr. Garner as a ‘good slaveholder’ in *Beloved* (p.14), ‘in the absence women’ the five sweet home men ‘had taken to calves’, a kind of metonym of the bestial nature of the slave system. Sethe’s sons, even after slavery has long ended, flee from home and never return due to the haunting in their dwelling. Morrison pens a powerful description of the ‘loss’ Sethe never gets

over, and this seem similar in representation to one of Whitehead's passages in *The Underground Railroad* (2016): 'In death, the negro became a human being' (p. 139); that is, death is better than slavery. In the novel *Grace* (2016), Deon shows us the naked Naomi running in the dark from slave-catchers and dogs while carrying her new born. She is caught and her 'nigger baby' is taken away from her (p. 4). In *The Sellout*, Beatty's contemporary satire reminds African Americans of the role of dogs in history, maintaining that the only benefit gained in the post-slave era is that black people are not as afraid of dogs as they used to be.

These depictions of 'profound losses' inform my portrayal of loss in *Black River*. Ijeyi, the son of the protagonist Christmas, is taken and sold down south, and Christmas never sees the boy again. In *Beloved*, the character Baby Suggs, another who slavery broke, concludes in her own words that 'in my sixty years a slave and ten years free – ... there was no bad luck in the world but white people' (p. 145).

Baby Suggs, like the *Black River* character Esther, shares this history, having lost children as younger women. Morrison's Quaker character Edward Bodwin experiences the cruelty of slavery even as a white person because of the known path he took as a Quaker who fights against slavery: 'Twenty years ago when the Society was at its height in opposing slavery, it was as though his "the colour of his skin" was itself the heart of the matter. The "bleached nigger" was what his enemies, the pro-slavery folks, called him; and on a trip to Arkansas, some Mississippi river men, enraged by Negro boatmen they competed with, had caught him and shoe-blackened his face and hair' (p. 359). *Black River's* Quaker or white characters do not suffer such cruelty, except for the character Hugh, Mr Preacher's half-caste son, who suffers a dreadful turn. He passes for a white man and is raised by a white stepmother amongst white brothers, believing he is white until adulthood. However, he is taken as slave at the least expected time, not understanding what slavery

is despite his mother giving birth to him while she was a slave. This tragedy affects Mr. Preacher's family and also the Quaker society.

In *Black River*, a female slave is worth more than a male slave. This is revealed in a dialogue between the characters Mr Peterson and Mr Preacher in regards to Christmas's wife.

'Don't go putting your words in my mouth, Mr. Preacher. I need her to bear me that child, and if it's a girl, it gon fetch me thrice of what Nedi can fetch me any day. Come see me after the infant is born, Mr. Preacher.' (p.106).

In *Grace* (2016) a similar point is made. Deon's slaveholder character Mr Randall is interested in the worth of his slave woman giving birth to a male child, and does not mind several men having a try for this to occur. The worth of a slave in some depictions involves 'gradations of skin colour'. Fedric, in his documented slave experience, said, "Slavery is bad enough for blacks, but it is worse, if worse can be, for mulattos" (as cited in Innes 2010, p. 41). Since a half-caste was often the child of a white slave master, their bitterness at being their own parent's slave was great. Douglass ([1855] 2012, p. 20), who himself was half-caste, agreed with Fedric: "He can be a father without being a husband, and may sell his child without reproach, if the child be by a woman in whose veins courses one thirty second part of African blood." Sue Monk Kidd's *Invention of Wings* (2014) describes the term 'mulatto' as the fair side of brown, and *Grace* protagonist Naomi, who is of mixed race, does not suffer slavery like her half-sister or mother did in the Randall Plantation. Surprisingly, in the novel *Drum* (1987) by Kyle Onstott, the protagonist enjoys more privileges as a mixed-race slave than fellow slaves of darker complexion. In *Grace* (2016), Deon

explains through dialogue how dark-skinned slaves constantly work in the fields while the mixed-race slaves work inside the master's house. In contrast, it is the mixed-race characters in *Black River* that experience a higher degree of misfortune – as in the example of the character Hugh who is raised like a privileged white child and certainly passes as white, but who suffers misfortune and is bundled and sold to traders from the Deep South.

Another area of class distinction is between the free and enslaved blacks in America during the slave times. Most main slave characters in *Black River* acquire their freedom quite early in the story. There is little difference in their lives as free people in comparison to their enslaved days. Christmas, for instance, continues with the same chores but collects wages in return. In *Black River* the character Moses describes to Christmas their situation as freed slaves:

‘You think any negro in America free?’ Moses asked. ‘You ain’t free Christmas. Look at you. No black fellow in the Preacher residence or even all of America free.’
(p.104).

A conversation in *Grace* between characters Naomi and Albert leads to the former saying something that relates to the above depiction in *Black River* – ‘But you say you “free”. Been here five years and still do what you told, eat when you told to, sleep in the field. “Free”.’ Morrison sets *Beloved* post-civil war after slavery has ended, although flashbacks continue to unveil the Kentucky slave experience. Sethe and her household still find life hard despite being free. Good jobs are hard to come by and at a certain point they find it hard to even find food. In contrast to

their past when Mr Garner was still alive, the slave men in the sweet home keep guns for hunting – they may be living ‘in freedom’ but they are still enslaved.

Things change when the man called Schoolteacher takes charge. He takes their guns away. The slave men are whipped mercilessly over small mistakes. In *Kindred*, Butler (1979) via a dialogue, reveals how a man bragged of how he and his friends had caught a free black, tore up his papers, and sold him to a trader. One could be free, yet not entirely safe. It was dangerous to go about aimlessly as a black slave during the slave era anywhere in America’s South, and even when free, freed slaves were required to carry their freedom papers or passes. In *Grace*, the character Albert is confronted by a situation that leads to his freedom papers being asked for. Deon writes that he ‘stood up slowly and reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out his wrinkled freed-papers, then dropped them’. In my depiction of freed blacks in *Black River*, my characters don’t always go around Louisville with their papers tucked in their pockets or socks. The character Christmas’s freedom papers, on one account, is found in a shoe:

‘Nedi, you know where to find their papers?’ Simons asked.

‘I look in them rooms,’ she said and left.

‘Mine in my shoes,’ Christmas yelled after her with his face still against the ground (p. 217).

The Civil War of 1863 has always been associated with the end of slavery. While on my research visiting historical sites in Kentucky – including slave plantations and museums – as mentioned previously, I was often reminded by people I met to visit Camp Nelson, a historic site

being a vital part of Kentucky slave history. I eventually visited Camp Nelson noted in history as having recruited a large number of blacks into the Union Army of 1863. *Black River* is set between 1790 and 1840, and my story wasn't going to be prolonged to 1863. The only way I could visit this 'future' in *Black River* had to be in the supernatural way. And in this 'future' Christmas sees his son in the blue uniform of the Union:

It was war time but it was unlike the war times Christmas knew. The war was eating up cities and lives. At the big iron gate were white men in blue uniforms. They welcomed Ijeyi and his wife and children. Ijeyi's locks were beginning to thin. The strands were long. They were longer than anything his mother had. Two of Ijeyi's children had locks similar to Ijeyi's when he was sold by Mr. Peterson. And his wife, a mulatto, was beautiful. They were led to this refuge as free people. (p. 169 -170).

Morrison mentions in *Beloved* (1988) that the character Paul D fought for the Union side. When I visited the Farmington plantation, I was informed in a conversation that Frederick Douglass became one of President Lincoln's advisor on the inclusion of African Americans in the war. In *Grace* (2016, p.160), Deon's descriptions and dialogues provide a clear picture of the war. For instance:

'We have heard thirteen thousand soldiers lost their lives in Fredericksburg, Virginia, most of 'em Union soldiers, the North. It happened at the river crossing just before Christmas. A victory folks here say. And a slaughter. So now, the North is recruiting

any life, black or white, and when the fighting gets near enough, Everett say he gon’ enlist, too...’

I did not engage the emancipatory discourse of the ‘North Star’ as I wrote *Black River*, since the use of this emblem rhetorically to represent freedom began well after the time the novel was set, that is, in the 1940s (Hudson 2011). By contrast, *The Sellout*’s protagonist reflects on his childhood and mentions that he had this set of ‘toy humans’ named after Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman – all running toward the North Star – towards freedom. As satirical as it reads, it suggests that African-Americans are still running and searching for freedom in the present time. The North Star is also relevant in *Grace*: the character Naomi is instructed by Hazel to follow the North Star while fleeing north, with her possible destination being Boston. Naomi, in her ghostly voice, admits to not recognising the star during the course of her journey. During my ethnohistorical study, part of my findings were that fugitive slaves fleeing north depended more on the underground railroad system – the organised network of Quakers and Abolitionist that provided shelter for slaves as they journeyed from one southern town to the other – than on stars functioning as navigational aids.

Insurrection histories have always been depicted in recent literary works that reflect the slave era. However, scholars have debated the historical accuracy of William Styron’s novel *The Confessions of Nat Turner* ([1966] 2004), pointing out particulars in the historical record that Styron had mistaken (Breen, 2005). Mink (1970, p. 558) disapproves of this inaccuracy, and as a creative writer I relate to his point ‘that it is from history and fiction that we learn how to tell and to understand complex stories and how it is that stories answer questions’. Where fact is necessary in historical fiction, it may be used; however, where fact cannot be found, fiction may stand in in

its place. Breen (2005, p. 3) also claims that Stephen Oates' dramatic 1975 narrative of the Turner rebellion (*The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner's Fierce Rebellion*) eschewed the traditional rules of evidence, and instead imagined events and even dialogue for which there were no sources. Aren't novelists not allowed to do this? A.S. Byatt, in her novel *Possession* (1990), famously conjured up a fake archive belonging to two fictitious Victorian poets (Nelson & De Matos, 2015, p. 1). Literary writers have the license to construct and imagine techniques that can be used to pass on the message to readers, and I employ this approach at many junctures in *Black River*.

Nat Turner, as earlier mentioned, was known in history to have carried out what remains as the bloodiest insurrection against whites in 19th century America, and Whitehead in *The Underground Railroad* (2016, p.161) makes this quite clear, stating it as it occurred: 'Before the Southampton rebellion was smothered, Turner and his band murdered sixty-five men, women and children. Civilian militias and patrollers killed 'negroes' three times that number and this includes conspirators, sympathisers, and innocents. The retaliation was done to set an example'. Butler in her work *Kindred* (1979) also does not neglect to describe the impact of the Nat Turner insurrection in her Maryland setting. As mentioned earlier on, Nat Turner in *Black River* is a short-lived character:

Nat had split his allies, more than forty of them assigned to various murders. Blood kept flowing that night. Blood of women. Blood of children. (p. 234).

Character and fellow ex-slave resident in the Preacher resident, Moses, predicts Turner's insurrection in 1831 and supports an early insurrectionist, Gabriel Prosser. However, Moses'

plot is foiled, and, just like Turner, he is sentenced to death. Christmas's spirit later witnesses Turner's insurrection in real time in distant Virginia.

The representation of America's first people is one aspect that historical and literary writers in this field often touch on. My representations of the Indians in *Black River* takes three different turns.

- The Indians were responsible for the death of Mr. Preacher's father and other members of the family during one of America's early wars.
- An Indian aids black fugitive slaves on the run to the North.
- The Indian character Edward and his close relatives have adopted Western ways such as wearing Western clothing, and this leads to their death by fellow Indians who see their actions as abominable.

Whitehead in his depiction of the first people in *The Underground Railroad* (2016, p.204) is critical of Europeans settlers:

'They sat on Cherokee land, land of their red fathers, until the president decided otherwise and ordered them removed. Settlers needed land, and if the Indians hadn't learned by then that the white man's treaties were worthless.... They rounded up the Indians in camps, the women and children and whatever they could carry on their backs, and marched them west of the Mississippi. The Trail of Tears and Death, as one Cherokee sage put it later.... When Indians got to Oklahoma there were white

people waiting for them, squatting on the land the Indians had been promised in the latest worthless treaty.'

In her work *Grace* (2016), Deon shows similarities to Whitehead in her portrayal of the Indians; however, there is a magical realist element to her approach. The ghost narrator refers to Tallassee, not as a city, but as a spirit, which was stolen from the Cherokee by white America: 'Tallassee didn't say nothing when they split her up. Of course she didn't. She's a piece of land. A mute spirit. Any voice she may have had went when the last Indian tribes left. But you feel her fury. Angry at how she was tricked over the years – slow and steady...' (p. 40) Ex-slave, Henry Bibb who in his account claims to have been owned by seven people and one among them was a Cherokee Indian (Bibb, [1849]2005). Bibb's portrayal of the Indian was mixed. In regards to slaveholding itself which was evil; but Bibb ([1849]2005) insists he was better off being a slave to an Indian native than to a white man on the basis of cruelty .

There have been other related histories and influences in regards to all I have portrayed in *Black River*. In Morrison's *Beloved* (1988), Paul D and Stamp Paid tend to pigs to earn an income. *Black River's* protagonist, Christmas, also undertakes this job. While in servitude, he tends to Mr Preacher's pigs, and eventually begins to earn a living using the same skill when he is set free. I constantly use the word 'patrol' when referring to the law and order of the antebellum era in character issues, which was inspired after closely reanalysing *Beloved* (1988), in which the author uses 'Patrollers' and 'Sheriffs' in dealing with societal crimes. There are a few coincidental similarities between *Black River* and *Beloved*, which are not intentional. I first read *Beloved* when I was fifteen years old, and have been rereading it occasionally ever since; that is, for the past nineteen years. The death of the character Beloved in Morrison's novel relates to Harriet's death

in *Black River*. Both continue to exist as ghosts, although the outcome of Harriet's death is not as plot-dominating as it is in Morrison's story. In *Beloved*, the character Paul D spends time in jail which relates to *Black River*'s depiction of Black John's experience. Even the stench of rose that Morrison portrays in *Beloved* that devours Cincinnati relates to my portrayal of the 'Jamestown' weed that almost takes over Louisville in *Black River*.

The Underground Railroad (2016) also has similar happenings to some of the *Black River* scenarios. One is the opportunity of revenge given to Whitehead's character Cora towards the end of the narrative against slavecatcher Ridgeway who has made her escape to freedom tough. Cora kicks Ridgeway in the face three times with her new wooden shoes when her escape to freedom is certain. The three kicks are in revenge for the murders of her three fellow fugitive slaves and friends, Lovey, Caesar and Jasper. The *Black River* character Nedi gets the opportunity to whip her master, who had gone insane before she flees the plantation where she has been enslaved (p. 166)

Sue Monk Kidd's 2014 *The Invention of Wings*, set during the antebellum years, is based on the life of one Sarah Grimke – a Quaker woman that lived most of her adult life as an Abolitionist. Her novel informs mine in several respects. For instance, it was from her novel that I first learned that white slaveholders in the slave era would sleep on comfy beds made of feathers while black slaves settled on their little pallets, thin as wafers. It was from Kidd I also got to know that molasses was used to treat mosquito bites as portrayed in her novel. Below is a description of the same in *Black River*:

'Them mosquitoes been terrible here. You should rub them molasses on your body every mornin' and evenin'.' (p. 22)

Magical Genre Features in Black River

I researched the history of my tribe for magical realist themes, such as the existence of supernatural beings, mermaids and ancestral masquerades; information first relayed to me during childhood via traditional folklore. Supernatural events such as levitation, reincarnation and time-travel are easily identified in diverse magical realist genres of fiction, and scholars have analysed their representations. My depiction of the supernatural has its history not only in the Idoma religious and belief system but also amongst the tribe's neighbours: the Igbos, Igalas, and the Tivs.

In this chapter I discuss some Idoma beliefs and the portrayal of my family history in *Black River*. Features of genres such as *magical realism*, the *fantastic* and *surrealism* appear to encroach on each other as the novel develops. Bowers (2004) indicates that diverse magical genres are evident in certain works.

Magical realism is a term that has often been used interchangeably with the similar term the fantastic. There is, however, a difference between the two. They refer to different genres, and both are constructs created in particular cultural contexts (Bowers, 2004.). Magical realism refers to any extraordinary occurrence, particularly spiritual occurrences or manifestations that cannot be explained in terms of rational science (Bowers, 2004). In contrast to the fantastic, magical realism naturalises the supernatural hence giving birth to a strange world (Chanady, 1985). On the other hand, Todorov ([1970] 1993) defines the fantastic as a piece of narrative in which there is a constant faltering between belief and non-belief in the supernatural or extraordinary event presented. Chanady (1985, p.149) concurs, defining the fantastic as that which creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and mystery. The fantastic can be seen as accepting the conventions of realism while bringing them into question or going beyond them, so that we are unsure of the

ground of reality on which we are standing. *The Turn of The Screw* (1898) by Henry James is a famous example of the fantastic; the elements of doubt and the governess's own fear of the unknown (ghosts) stops the text from being magical realism. However, it is exactly this hesitation between the two explanations – either that there really are ghosts or that the governess really is mad – that affirms the novel's fantastical nature. *The Famished Road* (1991) by Ben Okri, on the other hand, is an example of magical realism. It also has a mysterious protagonist, one who has repeatedly died and returned to the world. The supernatural appears as a normal daily event, hence orienting the reader to the world's acceptance of the supernatural (Chanady 1985). This mysterious procedure – of dying and reborn back to life is explained as *abiku* or *ogbanje* in West African mythology: the acts of spirit children, which Dingome ([1980] 2014), p. 32) explains as 'a concept of the wanderer child who dies and returns again and again to plague the mother'.

Bowers (2004) suggests that unless the magical aspects are accepted as part of everyday reality throughout a text, the text cannot be called an example of magical realism – hence the question on whether *Black River* is or is not magical realism – due to its double-laced ending. The character Christmas Preacher may have died in Cincinnati or perhaps he really flew back to Oli'doma. In Morrison's *Beloved*, the character Beloved's origins are also questioned: whether she is really from the dead or if she escaped from captivity where she was being held as a sex slave. Magical realism, the fantastic, and surrealism are highly disputed terms not only due to their complicated history but also because they encompass many variants. Their wide scope means that they often appear to encroach on other genres and terms. However, their qualities have influenced my creative writing all through the period of this research.

Surrealism is the supreme point in the contradiction of the real and imaginary in a text (Richardson 2006, p. 20) Surrealists are in accord with the artist Picasso in believing that the

emotions or feelings needed to produce art can be inspired by many different sources, such as the expanse of the sky or a spider's cobweb, a forest or a snail, or even an empty wine bottle (Fowlie 1950, p. 164). Richardson (2006, p. 20) argues that the distinction between the fantastic and the marvellous (likened to magical realism), although at times tenuous and difficult to grasp, is important to an understanding of surrealism.

Bowers (2004, p. 61) states that magical realism originated in Europe even though it has mostly been associated with Latin America, especially in regards to mythology and cultural context. Faris (2004, p. 40) indicates that viewing the role of magical realism as serving diverse cultures and agendas is problematic. Some readers who, due to their cultural beliefs, view magical happenings as natural occurrences stand in contrast to those readers who have no understanding of magical happenings and do not regard them as representative of reality. Therefore, they may become divided when distinguishing between the fantastic and magical realism. Magical realism was properly introduced into Latin American fiction in the 1950s (Bowers 2004, p. 2). Robert Dombroski (1996, p. 522) notes that Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli is cited as being the first creative writer of the genre, through which he sought to present the mysterious and fantastic quality of reality. However, the works of Latin American writers Alejo Carpentier and Ursula Pietri are recognised as being the most influential on magical realism (Bowers 2004, p. 14). Flores (1955) indicates that Jorge Luis Borges was the first magical realist, without acknowledging magical realism in Latin America.

The international recognition of Latin American magical realists such as Alejo Carpentier and most particularly Garcia Marquez has led to a misconceived assumption that magical realism is specifically Latin American (Bowers 2004, p. 16). Bowers (2004, p. 17) points out that this has long been disproved, with magical realist writers recognised in India, Canada, Africa, the United

States and elsewhere around the world. Salmon Rushdie, for instance, who is of Indian and British origin, has been influenced by both the magical realism of Garcia Marquez of Latin America (Columbia) and Gunter Grass of Germany, while the British Guyanese magical realist writer Wilson Harris, based on the U.K. for most of literary career, has written over two dozen novels in the genre.

In the process of writing *Black River*, I have explored slavery in terms my own origin in an area from which it is recorded that slaves were taken. The country Kwararafa, Erim (1981, p.15) writes, existed between the 13th and 15th centuries, and may have been one of the seven greatest kingdoms of the Sudan, the territory of which included all the lower and part of the middle portion of Hausa regions, extending beyond the Cross River as far as the Atlantic. There is actual evidence of escaped slaves later recaptured off the coast of Sierra-Leone in the 19th century that claimed they came from *Kurorofa*, the country of Idoma tribe. It is vital to reiterate here that *Black River* as historical fiction reflects and aims to fill a gap in my family history. Idoma's history in itself is magical in its form. Imbricating my findings into *Black River* brings together African magic and realism. Abutu Eje, in Idoma history, was the founding father of the Idomas, and in accordance with the tribe's mythology, his father was a leopard and his mother, a beautiful woman (Erim, 1981, p. 65). The possibility of a leopard impregnating a woman inspired my creation of certain abilities attributed to the protagonist, Christmas. He metamorphosises into animals such as a crocodile, dog and owl. There is an ancestral cult central to Idoma religion of old in which their ancestors called alekwuafia are resurrected (Kasfi 1985, p. 2), and this history is behind the creation of one of the central magical characters in *Black River*, named Orinya. The character Christmas is a reincarnation of this resurrected ancestor, also known as alekwuafia. The Idoma belief system, which is very much imbricated in the research, classifies *Black River* as magical

realism. However, my fictional depiction of characters' reincarnation in *Black River* tends to shift the genre classification towards the 'fantastic', as the Idoma belief system has little or no reincarnation beliefs.

Faris (2004, p. 1) notes that reality, fantastical narrative and different cultural traditions give rise to magical realism, and further explains that characters in magical realism react to magical events in recognisable and sometimes disturbing ways (p. 13). In Idoma culture, it is still a norm that a person lying while under the oath of alekwu (spirit of the ancestor) brings swift death from the ancestors upon himself/herself (Kasfir 1985, p. 11). There are people of the Idoma tribe that still believe this, and if in anyway the belief is depicted in a narrative, it truly can be said to be magical realism. It is also still in Idoma belief system that people maintain daily contact with their dead ancestors through constant libations and ritual ceremonies (Erim 1981, p. 145), and this I tried to portray in the character Christmas's relationship with his alekwuafia. As earlier mentioned, in my family folklore, one member of my family flew back from the land in which he was held a slave. I attribute the source of Christmas's levitation to his ancestor. Kasfir (1985, p. 9) describes the alekwuafia as

'a tall ghost often appearing in a long indigo tube and conical superstructure with streamers – two vertical panels of red & yellow appliqued triangles for the resist – dyed patterns. The use of red, yellow and green applique – cloth strips in place of homespun cotton, and the embellishment of the cone superstructure with rings of cowries near the apex'.

Le Diable Amoureux ([1772] 2003), a novel written by Jacques Cazotte, is considered to be the first *fantastic* narrative by critics such as Todorov and Bessiere. As described by Chanady (1985, p.57), this is a work about the apparition of the devil in the ruins and his subsequent transformation from a hideous camel into a spaniel and then into a beautiful young woman. Bowers (2004, p. 24) indicates that the *fantastic* genre has elements of doubt in it while magical realism's magical occurrences are central and accepted features of a plot. Hence the feature of the former is established in Cazotte's work, since the protagonist is surprised at this metamorphosis and keeps it a secret. The end of *Le Diable Amoureux* reveals to the reader that the entire work is a dream, thereby situating the work as the *fantastic*; moreover dreams, most of the times, are not believed. In the novel *Ironweed* ([1983] 2011) by William Kennedy, the protagonist Francis Phelan encounters ghosts that would under normal circumstances scare a person. Francis chooses to communicate with them, mock them and even laugh at them. This contrasts with the *fantastic*. I depict the resurrected ancestor in *Black River* as an omniscient and supernatural being imbued with the ability to levitate. Christmas's response is accepting. In Idoma tradition, there's no known folklore other than the stories told in my family history of a resurrected ancestor flying between continents. However, it remains a traditional belief of the Idoma people that ancestors are resurrected in the form of masquerades. Reaction among tribesmen outside my family may doubt such a belief, casting the narrative on the side of the *fantastic*. The *fantastic* has been described by Chanady (1985) as a genre that sits between the uncanny and the marvellous. The researcher describes 'uncanny' as the outcome of either mysterious happenings that turn out to have natural causes or as something that is disquieting (p. 4).

Magical realism may rely on realism but surrealists write *against literature* (Bowers 2004); that is, surrealism explores the non-pragmatic, non-realist aspects of human existence, which

necessitates writing unrealistically using dreamlike story telling (Fowlie, 1950). In my reading of Comte de Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror* ([1869] 1976), a poetic novel which has been discussed by scholars such as Todorov ([1970] 1993) to be a major influence on surrealism, I noticed the following features:

- I liken its dramatic nature to magical realism or the fantastic; for instance, in a certain scene, a glowworm asks a man to take a stone and kill a woman that represents prostitution. Instead, she smashes the glowworm (p. 11).
- The work reads like a dream.
- The wind is a character that murmurs its languorous strain through the leaves and an owl in the novel can intone his sad complaint (p. 13).
- Dogs howl at the northern stars (p. 13).
- The author switches the point of view while narrating without the slightest hint. The author writes his narrative in the third person for a period before changing the point of view, for instance, when he converses with the ocean: 'Psychology has a long way to go. I salute you, ancient ocean' (p. 22); 'Tell me if you are the dwelling place of the Prince of Darkness?' (p. 25).

What dreams offer surrealists more than anything is an experience of otherness; its uniqueness differentiates it from the fantastic and magical realism (Richardson 2006, p. 9). Richardson (2006) points out that too often surrealists are characterised as being principled about bringing to the surface the detritus of the unconscious (dreams) to provide the artist material or resources to work with (p. 9). Hence, a surrealist work of fiction may tend to have elements in it

that are familiar yet distorted or placed out of context in order to express a non-physical aspect of life (Bowers, 2004). The surrealist writer, it has been suggested, should see himself as the miracle creator (Fowlie 1950, p. 25); he has licence to create a phenomenal world if he chooses and follow his inner mind. A surrealist must learn to go down into his dreams, and of course dreams have diverse interpretations. This is what Fowlie (p. 26) means by saying, 'The surrealist must discover solely in himself his universe.' The mermaid world depicted in *Black River* is phenomenal (supernatural), and is created to represent the force of slavery that took many Africans via the Middle Passage to America.

There are neighbouring tribes of the Idoma people that worship water spirits; however, the worship of water spirits is not associated with the aspect of myth I portray and have researched. The phenomenal feature licenced my creativity of the Oda'nyaa character. The surrealists also drew inspiration from psychological unease and communal rebellion that ran through certain times, (Richardson 2006) and surrealism explores aspects that are not associated with reality; rather, it draws on the imagination and the mind, and in particular, it attempts to express the 'inner life' and psychology of humans through art (Bowers 2004). Fowlie (1950, p. 16) points out that surrealists consider that the 'conscious' states of man are not enough to explain himself and therefore seek to express the sub-conscious and the unconscious. The genre quality the Surrealist seems to value most is the marvellous (Richardson 2006). In a story where a man needs to become an animal, for example, he should not be depicted as a man reduced to a kneeling, domesticated animal; instead the surrealist should lift the man up and transform him into a marvellous, empowered animal imbued with treasures and abilities (Kyrrou, 1985 trans in Hammond 2000, p. 159). Magical realism is related to, but distinct from, surrealism due to magical realism's focus on the material object

and the actual existence of things in the world as opposed to the more psychological reality explored in surrealism (Bowers, 2004, p. 10).

Surrealism is deeply associated with imagination and the mind. It may relate more with superstition while magical realism relates more with an irrational world (Chanady, 1985, p. 21), though the distinction is a fine one. Faris (2004, p. 34) notes that surrealism is more related to magic, while the marvellous or magical realism is related to miracles. She further claims that magical realism in the West developed from a combination of surrealism and realism and mentions a number of Salman Rushdie's works such as *Midnight's Children* ([1981] 2013) and *The Satanic Verses* ([1988] 2008) as examples. In one passage in *Black River* that may be surrealistic, we see the character Christmas using his spirit and sometimes his mind to become present despite not physically being there:

It was a profound pain. Christmas's spirit suffered being stuck in the body of the dog. His body was sentenced to his straw bed in his room with no hope of life. But his mind wandered around Louisville, now colourful with the downpour of both dry and green leaves. His mind had become the convulsing air within the big house in the Preacher residence (p. 54).

Magical realism is often considered a disruptive narrative mode that explores and transgresses boundaries, for instance, political, geographical and logical facts (Zamora & Faris, 1995, p. 5). There is also disruption of time, space and identity; for example, the sun does not appear for ten years in Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* ([1967] 2007, p. 11). Fowlie (1950) points out that surrealists are always interested in discovering the past, both near and

distant. This is a confirmation of their beliefs and practices, which makes this feature similar to the disruptive narrative mode. The fantastic may allow for this feature too, except that unlike magical realism, there is a bold line that separates the presence of two different levels of reality, that is, of the present world and of the past or future – the natural and the supernatural (Chanady 1985). Chanady (1985) argues that in the fantastic there is a juxtaposition of the natural and supernatural which creates an illogical and disconcerting worldview, while in magical realism the coming together of two worlds makes it more acceptable or accessible to the reader, as there is a supernatural explanation attached to traditions. In regard to *Black River*, Christmas, in ‘ether’ spirit, earthly element or animal form, is able to visit the past as far back as the 15th century, and even the future, preternaturally previewing the period around the civil rights movement. In the following a scene in *Black River*, for example, there is a disruption of time when the character Christmas visits the distant past of his ancestors who once lived in a country called Kwararafa:

Night time had come and Christmas, frustrated over his loneliness, metamorphosed into the rain and wandered in the past, amongst descendants of Abute Eje, the leopard man. Christmas saw his forefather, Orinya Ogah. It was the same Orinya who shed tears when his people became refugees for a decade in Kwararafa country (p. 36).

Magical realism also opposes fundamentalism, racism, ethnic issues, homogeneity and other related issues (Cooper 1998, p. 2); similarly surrealism, according to Fowlie (1950), is anti-everything – anti-racism, anti-fundamentalism – in its approach. This research not only touches on the marginalisation of both the enslaved and free blacks in America, but it also throws some light onto the ethnic issues in Idoma history which included participation in the slave trade. It is recorded

that Idoma people traded slaves (their own people) to other tribes, as well as trading slaves with white slave-traders for horses (Erim, 1981). I portray this in the character Christmas's experience: his uncle sells him into slavery (*Black River*, p. 10) in scenes that he revisits in spirit, gaining information and insight inaccessible to his conscious mind, as he did not in fact witness them. Such scenes could be called visions but they are not dreams. According to Bowers (2004, p. 22), 'The extraordinary in magical realism is rarely presented in the form of a dream or a psychological experience because to do so takes the magic out of recognisable material reality and places it into the little understood world of imagination.' Faris (2004, p. 17) reiterates that magical realist scenes may seem dreamlike, but are not dreams. Diverse scenes in *The Famished Road* (1991) by Ben Okri appear like dreams but are not; for instance, the character Azaro, narrates how a rat spoke.

Surrealism, as earlier indicated, has a broader attitude in terms of dreams connected to a revelation of the sub-conscious mind; in other words, the sincerity of individual morality (Fowlie, 1950, p.11). The images induced by opium, for example, can be regarded as surrealistic in that they rise up spontaneously and despotically without the man (smoker) invoking them (Fowlie, 1950, p. 108). These are involuntarily generated images which relate to the dream image. The fantastic is described by Fowlie (1950) as the coming together of the uncanny and the marvellous, with the latter being labelled as the world of the fairy tale, which I relate to a dream world, hence giving the three genres a relationship to dreams.

Black River's magical scenes appear like dreams but are in fact 'actual' happenings in the logic of the fiction; however, this does not stop me from making my characters dream dreams. As previously mentioned, in Idoma myth, a woman was said to have been impregnated by a leopard (Erim 1981, p.65). This is something that may have been possible only in a dream, but it is actually what Idoma people believed happened. This same Idoma tradition treats the relevance of a dream

as separate; for instance, a person (Abakpa) is chosen through revelation in a dream to create a masquerade costume. Magic occurs in realism and also in dreams, hence there are times I let my character Christmas wander about in his dreams to discover secrets. Even in other magical realist works such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* ([1967] 2007), *The Satanic Verses* ([1988] 2008) and *The Famished Road* (1991), dreams are still portrayed. In *The Famished Road*, the character Azaro has many visions of the magical world and still dreams of his hands covered with 'yellow blood' (Okri, 1991, p. 7).

Faris (2004, p. 6) points out that magical realism has irreducible elements which she defines as something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe; for instance, an old man has wings in Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* ([1967] 2007). Other examples of irreducible elements include Saleem's ability to speak in his head to all other similarly gifted children born at the same time as him in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* ([1981] 2013) and Grenouille's ability to detect the scent of virgins from afar in Patrick Suskind's *Perfume* (1985). It is difficult to tell the difference between the fantastic and magical realism (Chanady 1985). Just like magical realism, the fantastic can have irreducible elements, except that they remain in the circle of mystery with no tradition or culture to back them up. For instance, magical realism may change people to animals to represent the primitive American mentality, whereas in the fantastic, a human may become an animal with no traditional beliefs to draw on. There is no rational explanation at the end of a fantastic story. No set of norms, whether rational or irrational, can ever explain the functioning of the fictitious world (Chanady, 1985, p. 12). For example, in Jacques Cazotte's *Le Diable Amoureux*, we see the transformation of a camel to a spaniel and then to a beautiful woman (p. 35) with no rationale. To situate Cazotte's work as *fantastic* is even more credible once the reader realises the entire story is a dream. There are irreducible elements in

surrealism too, except that these elements are regarded as superstition, for instance, the belief that Satan exists on earth in European belief (Chanady 1985, p. 19). The surrealist work itself can be seen as evoking both magic and the miraculous (Fowlie, 1950, p.24). In relation to *Black River*, it is similar – how can an ancestor resurrect, coming forth physically in the prescribed masquerade ensemble and symbolically in the *oyioje* ceremony to become the new alekwuafia (Kasfir 1985 p.3)? This is clearly an example of magical realism.

It has been noted that magical genres are usually set in rural locations (Bowers, 2004, p. 31); for example, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) is set in rural areas and partly in townships. However, magical realism can also be set in big cities such as modern London and New York, as in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* ([1988] 2008). There are also practices like those of Marquez who sets the majority of his novels in a fictional town called Macondo. Okri uses the trunk of tree as a setting in a scene in *The Famished Road* (1991). *Black River*'s real world is set in an 18th–19th century rural Louisville, Kentucky, but as earlier mentioned, time and geography are often disrupted with further settings including the Idoma ahistorical regions, unknown realms and the fantastical water worlds. Whatever the choice of setting, magical elements can be introduced. A surrealist accustomed to living in a dream-world where factors of time and space are not rigorous, would deplore an art in which the physical setting for an action is minutely described (Fowlie 1950, p. 109). In the fantastic, the supernatural is seen as problematic because it cannot be integrated with the implicit ideological code conveyed by the text (Chanady 1985, p. 8).

According to Bowers (2004, p. 54), if a reader lives within a cultural context where magical happenings of the type portrayed in a novel are considered to be a possible aspect of reality and not magical at all, then the reader may not recognise the magical elements of the narrative. Formal characteristics spanning different traditions and an account of the interactions between different

cultures in magical genres are vital for this research. In regards to *Black River*, I acknowledge that true sacrifices are offered to the spirits of the ancestors to bind together the living and the dead (Kasfir 1985, p. 3); however, since the belief systems of Christianity and Islam were introduced into Idoma society, the majority of the people belonging to the Idoma ethnic group, including myself, now disregard the traditional religion and beliefs. Nevertheless, magical occurrences, just as Bowers indicated, remain familiar since we continue to live within the cultural context of the Idoma belief system. Established writers have distanced themselves from classifying their works as magic realism, magical realism, marvellous realism, surrealism, allegory, fantasy and other related genres (Bowers, 2004, p. 1). This, I suppose, is because within respective works, various features of diverse magical genres encroach on each other. The intent here is to identify some of these encroachments – that is, the surrealist, fantastical and magical features in *Black River*, even though from the outset, I have personally seen the work seated between the fantastical and magical realism. Ben Okri, whose novels are highly regarded as magical realism, distances his work from the terminology (Issifou, 2012, p. 12). However, terming Okri's work magical realism, or something related, is vital for research since genres within literature represent an area under continuous investigation and analysis.

CONCLUSION:

FILLING THE GAP IN A FAMILY HISTORY

Black River is a neo-slave narrative with magical genre features that symbolically fills the literal gaps in my family history. The narrative, covering over 40 years of the slave era, incorporates a battle in an external realm between an ageless queen-mermaid and a resurrected ancestor over the life of Christmas Preacher. His slave master Mr. William Preacher, amidst unreliable circumstances, adopts new Quaker doctrines and eventually sets him and two others free. As an emancipated African, he fights between the verdict of either making Kentucky home or nurturing the sacred revelation that he will one day levitate back to his village in Oli'doma.

The ethnohistorical research touches on areas such as Quakerism in relation to the slave era, insurrections histories, early African wars and migrations and most importantly, slavery. The role played by the Society of Friends during the slave era is vital to this research. The Society of Friends all saw the value of the 'inner light' which was sacred to them, yet despite the strength of the combined forces that fought against the adversity called slavery, there were many shortcomings and impediments to their eventual success. In Quakerism, doctrines developed over time, from the early acceptance of slavery to its rejection, and history records the eventual acceptance of black members within the Society itself, a fact portrayed in *Black River*.

We also see the brutal responses to slavery by Africans themselves in the form of revolts, and *Black River* develops its plot around some dramatic insurrections in history at diverse points, with the insurrectionist Nat Turner having the most impact as reflected in the novel. The three portrayed insurrections were all regarded as similar in the sense they were seen to be intelligently plotted far above the perception of slaveholders.

One vital but controversial migration of African-Americans from America to Liberia is portrayed in *Black River*. Some believed Liberia was a land of opportunity for black folks, especially in an America that had become an affliction on African-Americans. Others saw the Liberia migration as a dumping ground for blacks relieved of their servitude during the first half of the 19th century. In the narrative *Black River*, there is an opportunity for the African-American residents of the Preacher residence to migrate to Liberia, which is taken up by several of the characters.

To be born of a slave woman was to be a slave during the slave era, and it did not matter if the father was a white slave master. Basically, if a black man at that time did not die a slave, his journey in life had two directions, one as an enslaved man, and the other as a free man. *Black River* portrays lives from both experiences. In this *Black River* portrayal of the slave era, there is little difference between the enslaved and the free 'negro'. The mixed-race child born of a slave woman is also no different from the slave whose parents are blacks. A mixed-race child's white father is his master. There are some variances in related works of fiction concerning the possibility of the mixed-race 'negro' being treated better, and this trend occurs in *Black River*.

Psychogeography has been of great importance to this research. In the course of the research, I imagined myself a fugitive slave on the run with no idea of where I was heading. In this way I developed the main character, Christmas Preacher. The way the past residents of Locust Grove and other plantations in Kentucky ran their affairs as documented also informed my plot. I was informed on the skills of the enslaved and got to understand that there were those skilled in caregiving, exploration, hunting and the like which superseded the sorts of skills I depict in *Black River*; however, what is vital is the presence of skills within my portrayal. My visit to the National Underground Railroad Freedom Centre followed. I encountered strong images that reminded the

public about the origin of the slaves, that is, Africa. It was after my visit here that my portrayal of Oli'doma in *Black River* was strengthened.

My portrayals of Camp Nelson is minimal. There is a scene in which Christmas tries to locate his lost son by appearing in Kentucky's future during the civil war of 1864. In *Black River* the civil war ends slavery in America. The camp had its own trying times. It took a lot of debate and effort to accept the enlistment of African-Americans, both the free and enslaved. There was a time that families of enlisted African-Americans were thrown out of the camp. Just like the Quakers who realised their mistakes and forged ahead with the fight against slavery, so did the Union side. They realized that they needed to value the wives and children of black men that wore the blue uniform in the course of ending slavery.

Literary works such as *Beloved* (1988) by Toni Morrison, *The Underground Railroad* (2016) by Colson Whitehead, *Grace* (2016) by Natasha Deon and *Kindred* (1979) by Octavia Butler provide me with an opportunity to elucidate why and how literary genres such as historical fiction, neo-slave narrative, and magical realism can mutate or come together. This equips me to handle my research and also to tackle its question by being able to draw out themes around the African-American slave experience.

Supernatural obscurities such as levitation, reincarnation and apparition are easily identified in diverse magical genres of fiction, and during this study I researched my tribe's history and beliefs in this respect. Features of magical genres such as *magical realism*, the *fantastic* and *surrealism* appear to encroach on each other as the novel develops.

Abutu Eje, as earlier indicated, was the founding father of the Idomas, and in accordance with the tribe's mythology, his father was a leopard and his mother, a beautiful woman. In *Black*

River, this is reflected on more than one occasion by Christmas, who himself is able to transform into animals such as a crocodile, dog and owl.

There is an ancestral cult central to Idoma religion of old in which their ancestors are resurrected, and this history is behind the creation of one of the central magical characters in *Black River* named Orinya. The Idoma belief system, which is very much imbricated in the research, may classify *Black River* as magical realism.

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