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**Defying Appropriation of Racial Discourse in Steve McQueen's *Twelve Years a Slave*— Sunita Tiwari**

**Defying Appropriation of Racial Discourse in Steve McQueen's *Twelve Years a Slave***

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Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English**

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Letter of Recommendation

SunitaTiwari has completed her thesis “Defying Appropriation of Racial Discourse in Steve McQueen's *Twelve Years a Slave*” under my supervision. She carried out this research paper from February 2018 to March 2019. I hereby recommend this thesis be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Defying Appropriation of Racial Discourse in Steve McQueen's *Twelve Years a Slave*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Sunita Tiwari, has been approved by the undersigned members of the thesis committee.

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### Abstract

*The major thrust of this study is to probe how White Americans used the idea of racial differences of Blacks as a means to oppress and enslave them in the film Twelve Years a Slave. When racial inferiority pertaining to Blacks got stabilized and normalized, even Blacks accepted their inferior plight giving Whites a chance to enslave them. The notion of Black people's internalized racial inferiority was exploited as a springboard to promote slavery. Repeatedly Blacks were told to believe that they are inferior and it would be better if they simply accept White people as their masters. The more discourses on Blacks' innate inferiority circulated, the more easily they accepted their inferior and marginalized lot. As this discursive practice got normalized giving rise to institutionalized forms of slavery, it became quite easier for Whites to sell Blacks as though they are sellable commodities. To probe this issue, the theoretical idea of Althusser's notion of ideological state apparatus is used to probe the issue at hand. Additionally, Foucault's idea of how self is cultivated following an individual's exposure to discursive, systematic and societal practice constitutes the methodological basis of this study.*

**Key Words:** Race, Slavery, Discourse, Self, Appropriation, Interpellation

## Defying Appropriation of Racial Discourse in Steve McQueen's *Twelve Years a Slave*

This research examines the way McQueen defies the discourse of racial binaries in his film, *Twelve Years a Slave* published in 2013. The notion of black people as inherently inferior and subordinated is used by white people as a tool to fulfill their sense of superiority and ascendancy. To maintain the dominion of the white American, the rhetoric of black people as inherently uncivilized, inferior and ugly people was exploited repeatedly subtly producing in black people the impression that they are inferior and they need control, and constant surveillance.

Solomon was held in captivity and forced to endure countless numbers of racial injustices, continues to remain in passive condition of being a slave. He is unable to plan for his freedom as he had already accepted his lot. White masters are impressed by his fortitude and endurance. Yet he hesitates to explore alternative way to freedom. Solomon's appropriation of racial violence and his capacity to go beyond the bound of slavery occupy the centrality of the film's thematic spectrum.

Lots of discourses on black people's racial inferiority are multiplied and circulated so that white Americans would be able to maintain their sense of superiority which would ultimately enable White Americans to enslave Black people. By imposing in Blacks' minds the idea that they are inferior and need to be enslaved by people far more superior to them, White Americans succeeded enslaving and buying and selling Blacks as though they are sellable commodities. Gradually, the idea that Blacks are inferior got normalized giving rise to various institutional forms of conquering and then holding Blacks into captivity.

Solomon, the protagonist in the film *Twelve Years a Slave*, accepts the condition of being enslaved for more than a decade. Overtime, he might appear docile

and compliant but inwardly. He obeys his white master but his obedience to his white master and his willingness to accept his condition is the effect of the appropriation of racial violence.

The whole system of slavery makes the then American society different. They are taught by the system and the style of normalization that they can flourish only in the state of control. Such a discursive and direct practice of manipulating directly or indirectly strengthens the reality of racial violence. The system of slavery and abuse implant in Blacks' mind the idea that they have to accept their present lot but Blacks resist vehemently. Initially, Solomon also does the same thing. Though Solomon is exposed to violence perpetually, he is not ambivalent in his struggle for actualizing his dream of independence.

To probe the issue at hand, Foucault's notion of normalization and Althusser's theory of ideological and repressive state apparatus are used. Solomon is at first coercively taken to the plantation against his will. He does not develop the idea that he can bloom into a free individual. No matter how appealing and confining the system of slavery, Solomon finally comes out of it.

Ideological state apparatuses, according to Althusser, use "methods other than physical violence to achieve the same objectives as repressive state apparatus. They may include educational institutions, media outlets, churches, social/sports clubs and the family" (17). These formations are clearly apolitical. They are a part of civil society. They are in no way a formal part of the state. In terms of psychology ideological state apparatus could be described as "psychosocial, because they aim to inculcate ways of seeing and evaluating things, events and class relations" (Althusser 18).

Instead of expressing and imposing order, through violent repression, ideological state apparatus disseminates "ideologies that reinforce the control of a dominant class. People tend to be co-opted by fear of social rejection, e.g. Exclusion, ridicule and isolation" (Althusser 18). In Althusser's view, a social class cannot hold state power. It can do so if it simultaneously exercises hegemony over and through ideological state apparatus.

Althusser uses the term interpellation to describe the process by which ideology constitutes individual persons as subjects. The ideological social and political institutions are the family, the media, religious organizations, the education system and the discourses they propagate. Althusser compares ideology to "a policeman shouting "hey you" to a person walking in the street. The person responds to the call and in doing so is transformed into a subject — a self-conscious, responsible agent whose actions can be explained by his or her thoughts" (23). Althusser thus goes against the classical definition of the subject as cause and substance.

At the core of this concept of the abnormal are the sexual monsters of the nineteenth century. These sexual monsters are the hermaphrodite. This label includes the perverse, and the masturbating child. The notion of abnormality develops primarily in the context of sexuality. It intended as a direct counter to the repressive hypothesis. Foucault emphasizes, "I would like to suggest a different conception of power, a different type of analysis of power, through the analysis I will be undertaking of the normalization of sexuality since the seventeenth century" (43).

The norm functions positively in the domains in which it is applied. "Normalization", Foucault argues, "erupts on the scene in the nineteenth century neither as a product of the juridical institutions, nor the medical ones. It is, rather, a



third element and it introduces a new “field of gradation from the normal to the abnormal” (41). Foucault launches into a history of the moral and sexual monster. He traces its genealogy back to “the early figure of the political monster—to the dual figures of the incestuous monarch” (34).

Foucault presents the norm as playing a fundamental role in the origin, recognition, expansion and circulation of power. The norm establishes what is normal. Techniques of normalization in turn function to make normal. With respect to this practice, Foucault remarks “This ever-growing knowledge of the individuals made it possible to divide them up in the prison not so much according to their crimes as according to the dispositions that they revealed” (45). Normal levels are cultivated. It is important to bear in mind that not all individual social norms are normalizing. Social norms act as nodal points. Power passes through and along norms. These points of intersection can either facilitate or inhibit the further circulation of power. Norms that facilitate power’s circulation do not pose a problem.

Long after Solomon is kidnapped, Solomon sits in a calm mood of accepting his lot. Solomon sits huddled with two other prisoners on a slaver’s boat headed south. This journey implants in him the idea of accepting his lot and then transcending the suffering by cherishing his dream of liberation. His enslaved and tortured self is restored by his own efforts. One man insists that they should fight their crew. But the protagonist is careful in this direction. He is not haphazard in actualizing his intended goal. A second disagrees and says survival is not about certain death. Seated between them, Solomon shakes his head no.

In the film, *Twelve Years a Slave*, the protagonist happens to lose his freedom unfortunately. He is captured and sold to a brutal white master. In the hands of white master he suffers a lot. He is beaten and bullied. He is intimidated. Over time, he is

forced to live as a slave for twelve years. After that long lapse of time, he is finally released through the help of his friends. During his captivity, he is exposed to indescribable abuses, callous treatment, and heart-rending brutalization.

When the protagonist is trapped in the vicious cycle of slavery, free Black men are sold and subjected to several dehumanizing practices. He had to endure unexpected level of given physical and mental abuse. He appears with wounded psyche in the very beginning of the film. He is haunted by nightmare. Under the assault of anxiety attack, he cannot act normally. He loses harmony and symmetry in his daily life overwhelmed by the premonition of assault. He is sold as a slave to Georgia.

The protagonist is subjected to atrocity. Cruelty, dehumanization and various other unspeakable sufferings have become an undeniable part of his life in captivity. He is sold as a slave from one white master to the other. He is made restive and restless by an unconscious fear of being chased by a hooded man. Increasingly, he is afflicted with troubled agony resulting from his subjugation in the society that fosters slavery.

The concept of the normal appears to be entirely problematical in the film. The definition of the so-called normal, which the White imposes on the Black, is strategic in intention. It is actually manufactured in such a way that it favors the goal of the White elite and weigh heavily on the ruled. When the ruled are in the state of ignorance and illiteracy, they can be fooled around easily. To fool them around, those who are in power can concoct any workable notion of what is normal. The White elite of people go on changing the idea of the normal so that they could use this concept to prolong their rule and avert the possibility of revolt from the side of the ruled. They are bent on robbing the free and imaginative power of the Blacks.

The assumption and practice on the part of the ruler goes on creating havoc, disorder and anarchy. Initially, the ruled are unable to know the politics of normalcy. Over time, they see through the mechanism and strategy of the ruler. The relationship between free White and the enslaved Black is formidably problematical. The notion of the normal appears to be a construct. This conception of the normalcy paves the way for the continuity of the survival of shipwrecked and displaced.

The film is characterized by the inclusion of elements of emotionality as far as its narrative content is concerned. It appears to be designed with a purpose of evoking emotional appeal and attraction so that the issue of captivity of free born citizens and their subsequent harrowing conditions can be internalized. At the heart of the film, there is a complicated relationship between master and slave, master and master, slave and slave, and so on. Despite this, the film has managed to stare directly at slavery and maintain that gaze.

Owen Gleiberman claims that *Twelve Years a Slave* is an epic account of the sufferings. It is a living archive of atrocity faced by a free man who is kidnapped and made slave forcibly. Gleiberman appreciates the poignant portrayal of indescribable suffering and victimization. Gleiberman makes the following observation concerning the film:

*Twelve Years a Slave* is a slave narrative in the form of film which serves as a landmark of cruelty and transcendence. It is about a life that gets taken away, and that's why it lets us touch what life is. He also commented very positively about narrative design of this novel. It states that *Twelve Years a Slave* lets us stare at the primal sin of America with open eyes. Yet it's a novel of such humanity and graces that at every moment. (16)

The film falls into the category of neo-slave narrative in the form of visual depiction. The depthless pathos and pride in suffering coexist side by side in the film. The protagonist plays the role of Solomon with a powerful inner strength. Yet he never touches on the silent nightmare that is Solomon's daily existence.

Robert Ebert holds the view that *Twelve Years a Slave* contains plenty of violent scenes which can pose painful jolt to the delicate children. The major thrust of the film is to show how lingering vices of and life-saving virtues take different form. It also intends to question human endeavor. Dwelling on this point, Ebert holds the following view:

Parents need to know that this novel involves a great deal of comic-book violence executed with near-bloodless restraint but, at the same time, visceral efficiency. One character is a slavery survivor; there's much discussion about tolerance and hatred and prejudice. This film's fictional context of slavery is marked with special abilities appearing in the Black people. (31)

The old version of the conflict between oppression and hatred has taken new form. In the past the conflict between the freedom and the bondage took place in the context of the religious and ethical sphere. Now, it has taken place in the historical context. The inner zeal of seeing the conflict between the passion for freedom and the forced slavery remains the same. In this regard it can be said that *Twelve Years a Slave* furnishes new taste of audience for digital representations of violence resulting from slavery.

Manohla Dargis, a noted critic of the nineteenth century slave narratives and their film versions, declines to appreciate the film *Twelve Years a Slave*. She admits that the film is full of extravagant elements. The inclusion of extravagant elements has

spoiled some of the incomparable aspects of this novel. Dargis makes the following remarks:

*Twelve Years a Slave* is hailed as an undeniable part of an individual's desperate path. It is an extended story in the form of film that seizes you almost immediately with a visceral force. But Mr. McQueen keeps everything moving so fluidly and efficiently that audience is too busy worrying about Solomon.(17)

The protagonist travels from auction house to plantation. He continues to linger long in the emotions and ideas that the movie explores in the course of time. The key to Northup's existence is the suppression of his rage. He must feign illiteracy. He follows the path of subservience to survive. It is notable that for all the anger and shame that the film stirs up about recent history. McQueen remains exceptionally even-handed.

Jason Arnold contends that those who are positioned as racial others are seen as less than, different from white. Violent exposure to challenges set up in a racially divided society is likely to cause traumatic impact. He puts forward the following views in this connection:

The protagonist in *Twelve Years a Slave* is prone to stigmatizing conditions. Implied is the idea that a blemished person, ritually polluted, is to be avoided. He is especially avoided in public places. As is marked on the body, stigmatized bodies have to be policed, controlled or excluded in particularly ways in order to minimize the threat. (65)

In this way race invades the self. It would be tough to reclaim it. Radicalized expectations and stereotypes mark one's sense of self. Jason treats stigma of the protagonist as the burden on those who stand for the progressive transformation of society.

Sarah Turner is prompt in locating the burgeoning symptoms social alienation on the part of the protagonist in *Twelve Years a Slave*. The protagonist's upbringing takes place in an anarchic atmosphere. He is compelled to quit home due to unprecedented factors. The protagonist begins to suffer from the shock and ostracism due to his anomalous acts. Turner throws lights upon this aspect of the form as follows:

Moved from home to home, from brick tenement to orphanage, he had had by the age of twelve, only one year's formal education. It was in saloons, railroad yards and streets that he learned the facts about life under white subjection, about fear, hunger and hatred. Gradually he learned to play Jim Crow in order to survive in a world of white hostility. (21)

The protagonist secretly satisfies his craving for books and knowledge. Thereafter, he could follow his dream of justice and opportunity in the north. But his efforts are thwarted constantly by the organized racial biases. He nearly falls victims to the unprecedented play of forces. These forces and factors are beyond the control and command of an individual.

Kathryn Hampshire makes a brief commentary on how the film was developed out of the bare content of a novel. Hampshire insists that it is a breathtaking piece of art that displays spectacularly the undying hope and spirit of a man who longs for freedom. His view is presented below:

In 2013, director Steve McQueen released *12 Years a Slave*, his film adaptation of Solomon Northup's 19th century slave narrative of the same name. However, in spite of overwhelming public response and widespread critical acclaim, currently the film has received very little attention within

academia, and has yet to be made a significant subject of critical scholarship and discussion. (1)

The immeasurable violence is inflicted on human beings; Solomon is just a representative character. The lack of mercy of other human beings is depthless.

The accounts of Northup describe injustices. The gradual path to moral degradation forces us to confront the corrupt horror of slavery.

Although all these critics and reviewers examined the film, *Twelve Years a Slave*, from different points of view and then arrived at several findings and conclusions, none of them notice the issue of the emotional narration of violence.

Patsy, Northup and various other Black slaves are beset with anxiety attack. They are troubled by unconscious fear of punishment, nightmare and constant desperation. The forcibly imposed practice of slavery has inflicted non-curable wound.

Solomon is removed from a place of safety into a constant battle. He is face to face with a dangerous society. He comes into a confrontation with his inner beliefs. He had to resist the pressure of being kept captivity. But he does not miss to endeavor to fill his mind with sentiments of morality.

After severe punishment for asserting that he is a free man, Northup decides to hide this past in order to survive and waits for an opportunity to escape his captivity. He is held by several slave owners such as the kind William Ford and the cruel Edwin Epps. He endures the hardship of slavery together with the other slaves on the plantations. He is held as a slave for twelve years. Thereafter he comes into contact with the carpenter Bas through whose efforts Northup is finally freed. The opening scene immediately sets the tone of the movie. It reveals the main topic of racial violence. Yet it departs from the original account in terms of chronology. The

following forceful utterance of Edwin Epps is suggestive of how racial violence is appropriated and how he managed to affirm and explore his longing for freedom:

Edwin Epps: Having awakened Solomon in the middle of the night, Epps coaxes him outside, puts his arm around him as if consoling a friend, and guides him into the woods. Well, boy. I understand I've got a learned nigger that writes letters and tries to get white fellows to mail me. Well, Arms bytoll' me today the devil was among my niggers. That I had one that needed close watching' or he would run away. When I axed him why?

Solomon Northup: There is no truth in it.

Edwin Epps: You say.(0:21:13-0:25:12)

The film starts with an overseer. He explains how sugarcane is harvested to a group of slaves. The director shows this as the first scene of the movie. Northup explains the process of sugarcane harvesting and processing into sugar in detail. The opening scene can be seen as a creative way of explaining how work on a cane plantation is done. It is a fair way of dealing with expressing how plantation work was done. It is done by skipping the details. It involves the method of processing.

Althusser emphasizes instead how the situation always precedes the (individual or collective) subject. Concrete individual persons are the carriers of ideology. They are always-already considered as subjects. Individual subjects are presented principally as produced by social forces, rather than "acting as powerful independent agents with self-produced identities" (Althusser 62). Althusser intends his theory to explain and develop a revolutionary outlook. His rejection of humanism created the sense that agency was illusory.

Without a theory of human alienation, his approach risked positing the eternity of capitalism. This idea of Althusser is applicable in the novel, *Muglan*, because of



the new forms of exploitation to which Sutar and Thule are subjected. In Althusser's view, ideological apparatuses can properly be described as belonging to the state, even if they appear formally separate from it. He argues that the state actually has two components: a repressive state apparatus, "which includes the army, the police, and the courts, and enforces class domination directly, and the ideological state apparatuses (ISA), which maintain complicity and identification with class society" (24). Althusser argues that the domestic sphere of family life is included in the domain of the state. It functions to maintain and develop an ideology that will maintain psychological adherence to and participation in class society.

The scene creates an oppressive atmosphere of a group of silent slaves. They listen meekly to the instructions and commands given by an overseer. The effect of starting the movie with an explanation of sugar cane harvesting is enduring. It plunges the audience immediately into the life of a slave. It shows the difference in agency between overseer and slaves. This scene of sugar cane harvesting is followed by a remarkable scene in which one unnamed female slave makes sexual advances to Solomon. Taking control of one's own body is a very explicit way of obtaining some agency over one's self.

Patsey: I went to Massa Shaw's plantation!

Edwin Epps: Ya admit it.

Patsey: Freely. And you know why? (She produces a piece of soap from the pocket of her dress) Patsey: I got this from Mistress Shaw. Mistress Epps won't even grant me no soap ta cleans with. Stink so much I make myself gag. Five hundred pounds is a cotton day in, day out. And 'of that I will be clean; that all I ax. Dis here what I went to Shaw.

Edwin Epps: You lie. (0:27:45-0:34:55)

The above dialogic part emphasizes the lack of shrewd and straightforward assertiveness on the part of Solomon and his allies. This scene is complex in this regard in that it gives Northup only little sexual agency by satisfying the woman. Northup refuses to enjoy the sexual encounter. He wishes to be faithful to his wife. The purpose of the scene this early in the movie is mainly to convey a sense of desperation and depression caused by the condition of enslavement. He and his family have the same kind of clothes and are treated respectfully by the storeowner from whom they are buying a suitcase.

These scenes show the happiness and relative richness of the Northup family. It contrasts sharply with the depictions of slavery as everyone can see in the preceding scene. The pathetic outcry and appeal of an enslaved Black woman and indifference on the part of a white master are reflected in the following visual snap:



Fig I: Female Slave Making Sexual Advance with a Strange Master

The need to remain submissive and humble in front of white master weighs too much on a female slave. It occasionally takes the form of sexual encounter. In this picture, the female slave expresses her agency sexually by embarking on the sexual encounter.

The effect of her agency is lost as she disappears from the movie altogether after this scene. Northrup is represented as equal to middle-class whites.

Cinematographically, the introduction and first twenty minutes of the movie are a sequence of short scenes that visually are starkly contrasted with each other. This contrast is achieved by the movie showing alternating scenes shot in vibrant colors and showing happy family life and scenes depicting darkness and depression. This sequence makes very explicit the divide between freedom and slavery. Cinematography is another technique which the researcher uses to analyze this movie. It includes the movement of camera, visual effect and emphasis on sound that suits the intensity of events. Theodore Brass is the leading theorist of cinematography. He brings innovations in the field of modern cinematography. His ideas are relevant in this research. In addition, Christopher Paul is distinctive theorist of contemporary dramaturgy. He maintains that “Cinematography is the mold in which film content is poured” (54). The ideas of Brass and Christopher would be effectively utilized in the context of Solomon's appropriation of racial violence and transcendence over it.

Cinematography is the film techniques whereby the director has sought to capture realities regarding to communal violence and genocide. These two methods are used to convey who incited communal hatred and ethnic hostility and how genocide broke out. Cinematography is the experimental technique of presenting film subject and content in the visually appealing and attractive way. Robert Bresson's work *Cinematography*:

A glimpse is the major book from which the researcher quotes significant theoretical ideas to conduct this research. The film theory is studies to examine how the use of these techniques enhances the emotive effects of

communal violence. The effect is that cinematographic molding immediately brings slavery and the inherent injustice to the foreground in the movie. (14)

The way these scenes are mixed shows that the memory of slavery, racial violence and its inherent injustice have a connection to the injustice many African Americans face in daily life at the time of the movie's release.

Racial violence is represented slightly differently in the movie than in the slave narrative. Because of slaves' prolonged period of dehumanizing condition, they outwardly have become submissive, subjugated and compliant. But they would not delay in grasping a chance to secure their precious freedom and liberation. The following visual snap exemplifies this sort of compliant attitude which is subtly followed by the fresh keenness to secure their freedom:



Fig II: Glimpse of the Dehumanization of Solomon by a New White Master

In this visual snap, Solomon Northrup is critical of the institution of slavery rather than of the individual slaveholders: “It is not the fault of the slaveholder that he is cruel, so much as it is the fault of the system under which he lives” (0:32:12 - 0:39:17).

Concepts of normality are used to exclude, stigmatize and oppress individuals on the basis of gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and religion. With respect to this, Foucault makes the following remarks:

Norms are also an indispensable part of society in that they are grounded in values without which a community cannot exist. Norms can also be the basis of a collective identity. What are the philosophical and social backgrounds and implications of norms as values? How do norms and values interact? (2)

Considering normality also brings to mind its opposites which are the extraordinary, the outsider, and the crisis. The non-normative, however, can sometimes become normative. It serves as a way of showing how far the Waknuk people have come.

Tibeats's dramatic effusion is indicative of how he is willing to act on the norm established by racially divided society and how he managed to cultivate fresh longing to go beyond the racial category of slavery. His passionate commitment and submission to the demand of racially divided society are manifested in the following dialogic part:

Tibeat: (singing) Nigger run, nigger flew/Nigger tore his shirt in two/Run, run, the pattyrollergit you/Run nigger run, well ya better get away. That's right, like you mean it. Nigger run, run so fast/Stove his head in a hornet's nest/Run, run, the pattyrollergit you/Run nigger, run, well yabettegit away/Run, nigger, run, the pattyrollergit you/Run nigger run, well ya better git away/Some folks say a nigger don't steal/well I caught three in my cornfield/One had a bushel.

(0:1:12-0:9:17)

This critique of the system (environment) rather than the agent (slaveholder) does not explicitly appear in the movie. One possible explanation is that from a cinematic perspective, it is difficult to translate such an exposition into an audiovisual medium.

Northrup certainly repeats these observations. He makes audience see the moral blindness of slaveholders as itself the result of environment rather than innate evil or irrationality.

William Ford is depicted as a gentle master. In the words of Solomon, “he [William Ford] was a model master, walking uprightly, according to the light of his understanding, and fortunate was the slave who came to his possession. Were all men such as him, Slavery would be deprived of more than half its bitterness” (0:34:32)). In the midst of harrowing living conditions also, Solomon is aware of the fact that liberation of certain sort is possible to actualize no matter how tough and insurmountable the hurdle. The following visual snap throws light on this aspect of bitter experience:



FigIII: Slaves Involved in Plantation Works Revealing the Beauty of Patience

In this figure, the depiction of racial violence as an inherent evil is made more complex with the addition of Harriet Shaw. The beauty of work ethics on the part of slaves and the ugliness of slavery are contrasted in this visual snap. This woman is portrayed in only a few sentences in film as the African American wife of a white plantation owner. But the character is given a whole scene in the movie.

At the core of this concept of the abnormal are the sexual monsters of the nineteenth century. These sexual monsters are the hermaphrodite. This label includes the perverse, and the masturbating child. The notion of abnormality will be developed primarily in the context of sexuality. It intended as a direct counter to the repressive hypothesis. Foucault emphasizes, "I would like to suggest a different conception of power, a different type of analysis of power, through the analysis I will be undertaking of the normalization of sexuality since the seventeenth century" (43).

The norm functions positively in the domains in which it is applied. "Normalization", Foucault argues, "erupts on the scene in the nineteenth century neither as a product of the juridical institutions, nor the medical ones. It is, rather, a third element and it introduces a new "field of gradation from the normal to the abnormal" (41). Foucault launches into a history of the moral and sexual monster. He traces its genealogy back to "the early figure of the political monster—to the dual figures of the incestuous monarch" (34).

Harriet Shaw explicitly states that rather than serving a master herself, she has slaves serving her. The status of this character is in this regard that of a black slaveholder. It reinforces Northup's idea that the institution rather than the persons being warped by it that is to blame. The way in which she communicates with Patsey and Northup is not as equals. Northup is openly apprehensive of speaking out of line. Shaw commands Northup to sit as well as addressing him as nigger Platt.

The movie does not put Shaw on an equal level as Patsey and Northup, but above them. Such a mode of portrayal shows Shaw is changed by the institution of slavery. The dread of sexual molestation and various other indecent acts were committed when the entire American society was deeply involved in the practice of

racism and slavery was a defining attribute of the then American society. The following visual snap is illustrative of the point:



Fig IV: Slaves Coerced into Being Yes Sayers

To make slaves docile, passive and compliant, white masters used every callous means of brutalization and barbarism. The assertive and outspoken slaves are subdued terribly till they turn out to be yes men. Only this level of subjugation satisfies the requirement of security especially for the White.

Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions. The following extract throws light on how ideological state apparatus works:

This is the fact that the (Repressive) State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly by repression, while functioning secondarily by ideology. The Army and the Police also function by ideology both to ensure their own cohesion and reproduction. For their part the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression. (45)



If the ideological state apparatus function massively and predominantly by ideology, what unifies their diversity is precisely this functioning. Given the fact that the ruling class in principle holds State power (openly or more often by means of alliances between classes or class and therefore has at its disposal the (Repressive) State Apparatus.

Shaw is given lines very reminiscent of lines spoken by Master Bass in the film. Master Bass is an exemplary character. He shows the moral superiority of abolitionist thought. He is a vital actor in facilitating Solomon's release from slavery. Bass says to the slaveholder Epps:

There is a sin, a fearful sin, resting on this nation that will not go unpunished forever. There will be a reckoning yet – yes, Epps, there's a day coming that will burn as an oven. It may be sooner or it may be later, but it's a coming as sure as the Lord is just. The Good Lord will manage Epps. In His own time the Good Lord will manage dem all. Yes, Lordy, there's a day comin' that will burn as an oven. It coming' as sure as the Lord is just. (0:37:47-0:44:49)

The similarities between these dialogic exchanges are obvious. As Li points out, there is a minor linguistic detail which should not be overlooked. Bass damns the nation and the institution of slavery that is generative of racial violence and uninterrupted sense of racial politics. In order to understand the significance of this difference, one need to look at the characters these lines are spoken to. Li observes that Bass addresses Epps, who hires him as a carpenter. Shaw addresses Patsey and Northup, a former slave addressing two slaves.

All the State Apparatuses function both by repression and by ideology. They work with the difference that the (Repressive) State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly by repression, whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses function

massively and predominantly by ideology. Elaborating on this line of reasoning, Althusser argues:

Whereas the (Repressive) State Apparatus constitutes an organized whole whose different parts are centralized beneath a commanding unity, that of the politics of class struggle applied by the political representatives of the ruling classes in possession of State power, the Ideological State Apparatuses are multiple, distinct, 'relatively autonomous' and capable of providing an objective field to contradictions which express. (77)

Althusserian Marxism incorporates those changes keeping in mind the changes in social conditions which have undergone change over time. Whereas the unity of the (Repressive) State Apparatus is secured by its unified and centralized organization under the leadership of the representatives of the classes in power executing the politics of the class struggle of the classes in power, the unity of the different Ideological State Apparatuses is secured, usually in contradictory forms, by the ruling ideology, the ideology of the ruling class.

Shaw is an active participant in the institution of slavery which is the source of racial unrest and segregation. Bass is a Northerner who is opposed to slavery. In this regard, as a former slave, Shaw has more moral authority and has more dignified level of awakening. She has personal experience of both aspects of slavery. During his forced transportation by ship to the slave states, one of his fellow slaves gets stabbed and thrown overboard. One slave bitterly notices:

Better off. Better than us. When Elisa can't stop crying over her lost children and questions whether Solomon does not feel the same, Solomon loudly proclaims I survive. The complexity, as Stauffer explains, is that right after being captured and being told by other captured African Americans to stay

low, he replies you're telling me that's how to survive? I don't want to survive; I want to live. (39:57)

These two statements show a significant change in Solomon's perception of the circumstances he finds himself in. Northup initially tried to argue with his captors that he was a free man. But he is forced to give this up as he gets mercilessly beaten when he brings it up. As a result, Solomon takes on the guise of someone who is explicitly passive. But his passivity is depicted as a strategy to appropriate racial violence and goes beyond it.

There are the difficulties in finding Solomon and connecting Bass and Henry. The movie does not show the events leading up to the successful release of Solomon. He transfers some of the lines spoken by Bass to Mistress Shaw. Patsey clearly rejoices in Solomon's return to his own family and escape from captivity. The following dialogic portion of the film dramatizes the aforementioned case in point:

On my way back to the carriage, Patsey ran from behind a cabin and threw her arms about my neck. "Oh! Platt," 'she cried, tears streaming down her face, "you're going' to be free—you're goin' way off yonder where we'll neber see ye any more. You've saved me a good many whippins, Platt; I'm glad you're goin' to be free—but oh! DeLord, de Lord! What'll become of me?" (0:49:23-0:55:34)

It is Solomon who approaches Patsey. He hugs her tightly. This embrace symbolizes Northup appropriating racial violence and exploring way out to the world of individual freedom. He then returns to the carriage. He is anything but joyous about his freedom. Even when he returns home to see his family, there is mostly sadness and crying. Solomon apologizes for his absence rather than being overcome with joy. Indeed, it shows that there can be no joy from slavery and racial violence.

The problem with this comparison is that lynching is different. It is different in that it is done in a mob context. Police brutality is often limited to a small group of trained professional law enforcement officers. Furthermore, the intent of a lynching is explicitly racial. Some extra-judicial killings can be considered racial violence. But the main use of the term extra-judicial killings is to indicate injustice by killing someone of any race without a proper trial. The scene where Epps nearly kills Northrup after suspecting that Patsey, an enslaved black woman for whom he has conflicting feelings of ownership and intimacy, is involved with another white man is also an example of an unconscious racial bias. The following visual figure is indicative of how a slave in captivity continues to cherish liberation and how some white ladies are simply confined in their own self-centric indifferent activities:



Fig V: Inner Preparation for Anti-racial Rage and Complacency of White Master

In this visual snap, allowing one to be molded by the status quo of racism and slavery, Solomon inwardly struggles to prepare for it. Out of the tussle between the spirit of an undying longing for freedom and the compulsive state of working for a White master, true self is born.

The film encapsulates the normalization of racial bias. It is the scene in which Solomon Northup is left dangling from a noose after nearly being lynched by John Tibbeats. The following part of dialogue throws light on this issue:

Northup dangles between life and ('social') death. Stauffer does not try to relate this scene to its implications for contemporary US society. Northup's desperate situation is symbolic for many contemporary African Americans' struggle for economic survival and an attempt to find a space for them in a white-dominated society. The inequality of the races is blurred in the movie with the character of Harriet Shaw, who can be considered an intermediary between the world of the slavers and that of the slave owners. (1:12)

The whole scene with everyday slave life continuing can be seen as a metaphor for the racial tension within the United States before the Black Lives Matter movement. Within the frame of an unchanging and largely uncaring social environment, Northup, as a character stuck in captivity while at the same time being legally a free man. He is desperately trying to find ground and stay conscious.

This idea of normalcy is subsequently utilized by them as a means to utilize Foucault's notion of discursive formations becomes indispensable methodological truth to probe the issue postulated. The notion of normalcy becomes an indispensable tool. How the fabrication of the normal ultimately turns out to be a means to establish a sort of control over reluctant people who want to withhold their consent to those who are in a privileged position.

To conclude, this study brings into light lots of harsh and harrowing effects of slavery. By portraying the saga of an individual slave's sufferings and his subsequent struggles for liberation from the clutch of slavery, the film puts human longing for freedom on the pedestal. The narrator at first allows himself to be subjugated by the

system of slavery. Then slowly he develops awareness about the limits of this system. Overtime, he calculates how immortal human passion for freedom is. With this realization he proceeds forward in the direction of claiming freedom, fighting for liberation and facing any setbacks and ordeals that came on the way. Thus, it appears this whole film is a celebration of will to freedom from the vicious cycle of slavery, dehumanization, extreme cruelty and recurrent practice of dispossession and deprivation.

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