Zora Neale Hurston's *Barracoon* as an Alternative Form of Memory Politics about the Jim Crow Era

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1. Introduction

"I was sent to ask." Zora Neale Hurston

This paper[1] focuses on Zora Neale Hurston's (1891-1960) posthumously published 2018 non-fiction work *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo." Barracoon* tells the authentic story of Cudjo Lewis (Kossola)[2] (c. 1841 – 1935), a survivor of the Clotilda/Clotilde, the last known U.S. slave ship, as a combination of his first-person vernacular reminiscences and Hurston's anthropological oral history narrative. In 1927, Hurston travelled to Alabama and visited Kossola, a former slave and survivor of the Middle Passage of the transatlantic slave trade. Hurston's non-fiction story also breaks the taboo of the inconvenient truth of illegal slave importation to the United States after the 1807 "Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves," which banned the importation of enslaved people into the United States, taking effect on January 1, 1808 ("The Slave Trade"). Kossola was illegally brought to the United States and became enslaved in 1860. Hurston also tells the story of this inconvenient truth about this "illegitimate trade" (Plant "Introduction," xvi).

Hurston's literary legacy includes this profound first-hand account of slavery in its historical and cultural context. In *Barracoon*, Hurston challenges the public view of the Middle Passage and the transatlantic slave trade. At the age of nineteen, Kossola was kidnapped by the neighbouring Dahomey kingdom as a prisoner of war and carried to the barracoons (barracks used to accommodate enslaved Africans) in Oidah. He was kept as a slave for five and a half years in Plateau-Magazine Point, Alabama, from 1860 until Union soldiers told him he was free. Kossola lived the rest of his life in Africatown (Plateau). (Plant "Introduction," xv-

1 The present paper is the written form of my conference presentation, "The Reception of Zora Neale Hurston's *Barracoon* in the Jim Crow Era," delivered at the 15th Biennial HUSSE Conference 27–29 January 2022, Budapest, Hungary (online). I am grateful to András Tarnóc for his endless patience, which made this study possible.

2 Hereafter, Cudjo Lewis is solely referred to as Kossola in the article. Kossola's name went through multiple spellings and variations. Within *Barracoon*, he is referred to as "Kossola" by editor Deborah G. Plant and "Kossula" by Hurston. In academic articles on the topic, either Kossola or Cudjo Lewis is used.

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xvi). His mother named him Kossola, meaning "I do not lose my fruits anymore" or "my children do not die any more." (Plant "Introduction," xv-xvi) Kossola's story, with Hurston's mediation, highlights freedmen's history in the Jim Crow Era[3]. Hurston is transgressing the traditional narrative about the Middle Passage by emphasizing that although Britain abolished the international trafficking of African people in 1807 and the United States had followed its example, European and American ships were still transporting enslaved people from the West African coast to the Americas. The inconvenient truth was that some groups of Africans contributed to the persistence of the "transatlantic slave trade" and opposed ending the traffic that persisted in the enterprise. As Deborah G. Plant, a literary historian who specialized in African-American literary history and the oeuvre of Zora Neale Hurston, argues, the Fon of Dahomey was foremost among those African peoples who resisted the ending of trafficking since the external sale of their prisoners afforded their kingdom wealth and political dominance. Therefore, to continue the "slave supply," the king of Dahomey instigated wars and led raids with the sole purpose of filling the royal stockade (Plant "Introduction," xvi-xvii). One of the most remarkable contributions of his account is that Hurston left Kossola's imperfect English dialect intact in the story. In *Barracoon*, Hurston scrutinizes and highlights Kossola's resilience without romanticizing it. This paper introduces Hurston's non-fiction narrative *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"* by examining its publication history and narrative strategies, e.g. the recurring theme of silence. Moreover, the paper focuses on Hurston's methodology of cultural anthropology, the purpose and reception of her research in the Jim Crow Era, and the current interpretation of her work as an alternative form of memory politics.

2. "Poor Zora. An anthropologist, no less!": Hurston's Methodology of Cultural Anthropology

African American folklorist, anthropologist, filmmaker and writer Zora Neale Hurston's impact on revitalizing African-American Diaspora literature is still persistent today. She was a celebrated voice of the Harlem Renaissance who died in oblivion and was buried in an unmarked grave in 1960 (Seymur-Smith-Kimmens 24). In 1973, Alice Walker rediscovered Hurston's legacy and had a headstone placed at her grave site with this epitaph, a poem extract from Jean Toomer (Walker, 1974: 86): Zora Neale Hurston 'A Genius of the South' Novelist Folklorist Anthropologist 1901 – 1960 (Cobb-Moore 25). Alice Walker wrote a

3 See more about the Jim Crow Era at the Jim Crow Museum website: https://jimcrowmuseum.ferris.edu/what.htm.

Foreword[4] to the *Barracoon.* Walker's exclamation "Poor Zora. An anthropologist, no less!" (Walker x) reveals the significance of Hurston's oeuvre and the way "black Americans, enslaved themselves, ridiculed the Africans; making their lives so much harder. While the whites simply treated their "slaves" like pieces of machinery" (Walker x). Hurston influenced the Harlem Renaissance and left a legacy that inspired a renewed interest in African-American (trans)cultural identity, folklore, and the self-empowerment of Black women's voices. As a local colorist, Hurston offered an authentic portrayal of those affected by the experiences of the African diaspora (Cobb-Moore 33). Her legacy is not just literary but cultural and political, helping to shape a diasporic consciousness that is still persistent in the form of cultural memory. She was a controversial and much-misunderstood figure of the era.

The Great Migration[5] of rural blacks from the Mississippi Delta region took place for the sake of better working and living conditions, running away from the threat of lynching as the physical manifestation of the Jim Crow segregation. The Great Migration significantly impacted African American arts and culture of the post-World War I era. The Harlem district of New York City – had become a place of blossoming black culture. Harlem represented the symbol of freedom for the vibrant urban black community. The Harlem Renaissance manifested its artistic blossoming in music, dance, the visual arts, theatre and literature (Ciment 133-134). Hurston graduated from Howard University before moving to Harlem in 1925. Ironically, the desire to articulate an artistic voice to represent black Americans coincided with the fact that they remained culturally and socially separate from the needs of the larger black community that remained largely rural even during the Great Migration. Moreover, they depended financially on white patronage for living. During and after the economic recession following the

4 The complete title: "Foreword. Those Who Love Us Never Leave Us Alone with Our Grief Reading *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo*."

5 According to James Ciment, in 1910, around 90 per cent of all African Americans lived in the South and around 80 per cent of those working in agriculture. The roaring twenties, the next decade, showed a dramatic demographic and geographic transformation resulting in the Great Migration, blacks moving to the Northern cities due to economic recession, and Jim Crow segregation by the 1960s. This movement was fostered by push and pull factors. The dramatic increase in the urban black population intensified discrimination, violence and hostility towards blacks among the whites. One of the direct consequences of the Great Migration was the establishment of large, black urban communities, the emergence of the "New Negro" – a term coined by the African American writer Alain Locke -and the birth of a new racial consciousness that appreciated black business enterprise and artistic achievement on its terms. As a result, an unprecedented flourishing of black political and artistic expression occurred; one of its manifestations was the Harlem Renaissance. See more about the Great Migration in Ciment 129-131.

stock market crash of 1929, white patronage ceased. The civil rights movement of the post-World War II era revived interest in black cultural and historical studies (Ciment 136-137). Lindsay Stewart argues that Zora Neale Hurston's academic recovery occurred in the 1980s and 1990s since Alice Walker's 1975 essay "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" was published in *Ms*. Magazine. Stewart quotes Hazel Carby's notes in "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston" by arguing that the celebration of Hurston and Black southern culture in the 1980s and 1990s coincided with the persistent impact of institutional racism in the United States. Consequently, Hurston was taught in school curricula to increase Black representation despite the persistence of institutionalized racism (Stewart 5).

Barracoon was researched and written alongside Hurston's 1928 essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me." Following Stewart's argumentation, Hurston developed the politics of joy in her essays. Politically, the term involved a move towards self-determination and away from the pursuit of white political recognition, a firm refusal of ideas associated with Black southern tragedy and inferiority and an awareness of racial dynamics (Stewart 14). In her essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me", Hurston writes, "I am not tragically coloured", meaning that she is not depicting herself as a victim of racism but an independent Black woman who embraces her cultural heritage with celebration rather than sorrow. She strengthens her identity: "I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife" by referring to the metaphor for actively participating in life's challenges and preparing herself with empowerment rather than suffering from social injustices and constraints. Hurston rejected emphasizing sorrow in the representations of Black life in her writings. She criticized the Black male leadership, especially W. E. B. Du Bois's model of the "Talented Tenth" was dealt with irony in the issue of "double consciousness" and she argued that this phenomenon is related to the internalized racism of the elite class of Black educated men (Stewart 14). Salam Alali's 2024 "Embracing Resilience and Reclaiming Happiness," a book review of Lindsey Stewart's *The Politics of Black Joy: Zora Neale Hurston and Neo-Abolitionism,* highlights that Stewart articulated two forms of ethnographic refusals in *Barracoon.* One is a discursive refusal to alter Kossola's dialect in the narration and the silence about the trauma of slavery in the narrative. The other is Kossola's narrative refusal, which influenced Hurston's refusal of the neo-abolitionist depiction of Black tragedy by revealing to Hurston that Kossola's fellow African people sold him to white people. Consequently, Hurston may have learnt emotional resilience and empowerment from Kossola via his story-telling, which is the premise of Black joy (Alali 276-277) and became the foundation of Hurston's unique voice and "literary sovereignty" (Stewart 84).

Hurston was a cultural anthropologist by profession, a student of Franz Boas (1858-1942), the founder of the culture-centered school of American anthropology (Plant "Afterword," 121), teaching that race itself was a cultural construct and racism could be eliminated by education.[6] Hurston graduated from Barnard College in 1828 (Patterson, 2005: 17). Hurston was the first black student studying at Barnard. Boas helped her find funding for six months of fieldwork. It was Boas who had recommended that she visit and interview Kossola (Panovka). She conducted field research on black folklore in the Deep South. Research was vital for her, as she argued about her work in her 1942 autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road: A Memoir*, "Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein" (101.). Conducting field research in the segregated South was challenging for a single African-American woman. Hurston occasionally slept in her car when she could not find a hotel that would rent her a room and travelled with a pistol for protection (Plant 16). However, her intellectual curiosity was always a driving force behind her research. She argues, "I was sent to ask" (Hurston 16). Authenticity was important for her narratives. Hurston rejected the objective-observer stance of Western scientific inquiry for a participant-observer stance. Hence, she was simultaneously working and learning (Plant xxiii).[7]

Her research trips were funded by a white patron, Charlotte Mason, at the beginning of her research. Their relationship was problematic. Mason negotiated with the Viking Press to publish Hurston's manuscript. The publisher asked for "extensive revision" (Panovka). However, Hurston refused to change the vernacular

6 As Boas argues in *Race, Language and Culture* (New York: The MacMillan Company): "Hereditary characteristics when socially significant have a cultural value as in all cases of race discrimination or in those cultural conditions in which a specially gifted line is given the opportunity to impress itself upon the general culture. Any attempt to explain cultural forms on a purely biological basis is doomed to failure" (265).

7 In this paper, I extended and further developed Hurston's methodology of cultural anthropology. I also outlined in my conference presentation at the DIASPORA 2025 REVITALIZATION Conference (3-4 April 2025, Pécs) and my article on the topic "Revitalizing the African-American Diaspora Literature: the Politics of Memory in Zora Neale Hurston's *The Life of Herod the Great"* which is under publication.

of her monograph *Barracoon,* which was dedicated to Mason[8]. Hence, she did not find a publisher for the work due to the vernacular dialect she used (Panovka); the clashes of interest with the emerging black middle class hindered the monograph's publication and coincided with Hurston's frustration. The Great Depression period of the 1930s was not the best year for publishing a new book (Plant, 2018: xx-xxii). The manuscript failed to find a publisher at the time of Hurston, partly because it was written in vernacular and partially because it revealed the inconvenient truth about the involvement of other African people in the business of the Atlantic slave trade. Black writers Richard Wright and Alain Locke criticized Hurston's presentation of African Americans "as incompatible with the social realist fiction of protest and anger" and "ultimately damaging to opportunities for change" (Seymur-Smith and Kimmens 22). Her research finding was published as "Cudjo's Own Story of the Last African Slaver" in the October 1927 issue of *The Journal of Negro History*. Then, she started to work on the *Barracoon* beginning in 1930. After the publisher rejections, Hurston mentioned the Kossola material in the 1940s in her autobiography and then in a short article for the *American Mercury*. Although she celebrated black dialect in multiple works, she never again tried to publish *Barracoon* (Panovka). *Barracoon: The Story of the Last 'Black Cargo* was posthumously published under the editorship of Deborah G. Plant in 2018. Plant is a literary critic and historian specializing in the life and works of Zora Neale Hurston. The publication of *Barracoon* signifies the latest stage in the project Alice Walker inaugurated, which revitalized Hurston's works (Panovka). *Barracoon* was published by the Amistad, an Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, with the copyright of The Zora Neale Hurston Trust ("Zora Neale Hurston Trust"). Amistad Books has been dedicated to publishing Black voices for nearly forty years and is devoted to honoring the legacy of Black-centered (his)stories and literature of the diaspora ("Amistad"). The posthumous publication is part of Hurston's legacy and the aftermath politics of memory that I will outline later in the essay.

Zora Neale Hurston's methodology in cultural anthropology, particularly during the Jim Crow era, is a pioneering yet controversial fusion of ethnography, folklore, and literary narrative. In Harlem, Hurston became one of a core group of "the younger Negro artists," whom she and Wallace Thurman ironically called "the Niggerati." Hurston's New York flat was often a gathering place and sometimes

8 *Barracoon* begins with the following dedication on page 1: "To Charlotte Mason, My Godmother, and the one Mother of all the primitives, who with the Gods in Space is concerned about the hearts of the untaught." According to Rebecca Panovka, it is undeniable that *Barracoon* bears Charlotte Mason's mark. "It was written on her schedule, under pressure, and with her money" (Panovka). The complexity and the controversial issue of white patronage in the Harlem Renaissance will be a continued topic of my research.

a home for the changing members of the group including Langston Hughes, Dorothy West, Richard Bruce Nugent, Countee Cullen, Gwendolyn Bennett, Aaron Douglass, and Augusta Savage among others (Plant "Zora Neale Hurston," 36) Her approach and its legacy illustrate not only a resistance to dominant racial narratives but also a form of memory politics to preserve the cultural histories of the African-American Diaspora through storytelling and ethnographic presence. Hurston became interested in anthropology.[9] She attended Howard University from 1921 to 1924 and, in 1925, won a scholarship to Barnard College. She graduated from Barnard in 1928 and pursued graduate studies in anthropology at Columbia University for two years. Franz Boas was her mentor. Boas recognized Hurston's talent. He anticipated the contributions she could make in the field of anthropology and began to cultivate her skills. By the summer of 1926, Hurston was conducting fieldwork in Harlem (Plant "Zora Neale Hurston," 36).

Hurston adopted Boas's methodology and theory of cultural relativity but altered it to fit her research agenda. In 1927, after her second interview with Kossola, Hurston abandoned Boas's objective-observer method of collecting studies for the participant-observer approach to gradually remove social barriers (Plant "Zora Neale Hurston," 43). She conducted field research by blending literary narratives and anthropological observations. In her black vernacular culture-centred research, she studied communities as an observer and a participant. She interviewed Oluale Kossola (c. 1841 – 1935), also known as Cudjo Lewis, one of the last survivors of the Atlantic slave trade between Africa and the Americas. Hurston was accused of plagiarizing Emma Langdon Roche's 1914 previous work on the topic and Kossola's and other Clotilda survivors' story entitled *Historic Sketches of the South.*

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9 See more about Hurston's life in Martin Seymur-Smith and Andrew C. Kimmens. "Biography of Zora Neale Hurston". In: Sharon L. Jones (ed.). Critical Insights. Zora Neale Hurston. (Ipswich, Massachusetts: Salem Press, 2013), 18-25. While attending Barnard in 1927, Hurston got a fellowship to conduct anthropological field studies. In 1927 *The Journal of Negro History* published some of her research findings, including the story of Cudjo Lewis. Mrs Rufus Osgood Mason funded her research trips to the South up until 1931. Upon graduation from Barnard in 1928, she earned a fellowship from the Rosenwald Foundation for two years of graduate work in anthropology at Columbia University. In 1935, Hurston was considering studying for a doctorate in anthropology at Columbia, but the change of her interests and financial issues kept her from this commitment. In 1939, Hurston was awarded an honorary doctorate from Morgan State College. In 1947-48, Hurston travelled to British Honduras (now Belize) to research black communities that served as the foundations of her fictional and non-fiction works. She was critical of the civil rights movement and supported the Republican Party. Her ideas on the emancipation of black people were often criticized and misunderstood. After suffering a stroke in 1959, she entered St. Lucie County Welfare Home. She died there of heart disease and was buried in an unmarked grave. Her unpublished papers are treasured in the University of Florida Library and the Beinecke Library at Yale University.

Interestingly, Hurston does not credit Roche's Historic Sketches as a secondary source, and there is no direct reference to Roche's book within the body of the article itself (Plant "Introduction", 118-120). Hurston writes about her plagiarism in her autobiography by showing her respect towards Boas, whom she called Papa Franz and her happiness on getting a second chance with the financial funding from Mrs R. Osgood Mason: "I was extremely proud that Papa Franz felt like sending me on that folklore search" (Hurston, Dust 101). And about her plagiarism, she confesses:

> I stood before Papa Franz and cried salty tears. He gave me a good going over, but later I found that he was not as disappointed as he let me think. He knew I was green and feeling my oats, and that only bitter disappointment was going to purge me. It did. What I learned from him then and later, stood me in good stead when Godmother, Mrs. R. Osgood Mason, set aside two hundred dollars a month for a two-year period for me to work. (Hurston, *Dust* 114.)

According to Plant, in her use of Roche's work, Hurston made a good-faith effort in *Barracoon* to document her sources, and she never plagiarised again (Plant "Afterword," 127).

Barracoon is telling Kossola's story as a kind of oral history. Hurston was much ahead of her time. She even experimented with filmmaking about Kossola and rural black life. She used the camera as an anthropologist tool. In a series of trips to the South, Hurston shot a 16mm film of rural Black people and culture and 85 minutes of footage that she shot and directed ("Zora Neale Hurston, In Her Words"). As the website of the Oral History Association defines: "Oral history is a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events" ("Oral History: Defined"). She conducted anthropological work for the sake of cultural preservation of African American oral traditions, folklore, and religious practices (hoodoo and voodoo) as a form of resistance to racism ("Zora Neale Hurston"), emphasizing the African diasporic culture.

The African American oral tradition was a consequence and a response to the powerlessness of enslaved people. Story-telling passed from generation to generation has healing power, channeling intergenerational memory and expressing subversion (Ciment 64). The following section presents Hurston's non-fiction narrative *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"* by highlighting its publication history and narrative strategies, e.g. the recurring theme of silence.

3. "P[p]oetical old gentleman . . . who could tell a good story:" *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"*

Barracoon tells the story of Kossola through the different stages and milestones of his life, from his childhood and young age in Africa through his kidnapping and selling as an enslaved person, via the in-between liminal space of the barracoons, his status as a slave, to his life after the abolishment of slavery in 1865. Then, the narration continues with his life of "freedom," working in a community and a church, building his own house, and loving his family. Kossola remembers his joy over emancipation: "After dey free us, you understand me, we so glad, we make de drum and beat it lak in de Affica soul" (Hurston Barracoon 65). The deaths of his family members, his loneliness and being uprooted in a still foreign land, and his longing for Africa all contributed to his peculiar "poetical" worldview (Walker "Foreword," xi). Deborah G. Plant, the editor of the volume, outlines Kossola's life, the publication history of *Barracoon*, Hurston's methodology for the research and the reception of work in a historical timeframe with an Introduction and an Afterword.

Hurston characterized Kossola as a "Poetical old gentleman…who could tell a good story." (Plant "Afterword,"117.) Kossola was born circa 1841 in Bantè in West Africa and was around 86 years old when Hurston interviewed him. His mother named him Kossola, meaning "I do not lose my fruits anymore" or "my children do not die any more." (Plant "Introduction" xv). Hurston consequently called Lewis by his African name, Kossola. When she addressed him that way, he told her with tears of joy in his eyes: "Nobody don't callee me my name from cross de water but you. You always callee me Kossula, jus' lak I in de Africa soil!" (Hurston "Barracoon," 17). Hurston calls him Kossola to symbolize remembering his heritage and spirit. Meanwhile, the American name "Cudjo" is a reminiscence of slavery.

By age fourteen, Kossola became a trained soldier and was initiated into the secret male society called oro, responsible for the town's justice and security. In 1860, his village was attacked by the warriors of the Dahomey kingdom as an annual raid for slaves (Hurston "Cudjo's Own Story," 649). He was taken with other captives to the slaving port of Ouidah and sold to the Captain of the Clotilda, an American ship (Plant "Introduction," xvi-xviii). As Plant argues, Kossola was kept for weeks in the barracoons at Ouidah. In the barracoon, as in Africatown later, Kossola was stuck between two worlds, fully belonging to neither (Plant "Introduction,"

xix). After his emancipation, he lived in Africatown[10] (Plateau) that the *Clotilda* survivors established after the abolishment of slavery (Plant "Introduction," xiii). In the bonds of barracoons and later with the establishment of Africatown, the African Dream was manifested, not the American Dream (Plant "Introduction," xiii).

The authenticity of the narrative is provided by Hurston by transcribing Kossola's story, using his vernacular diction, and spelling his words as they are pronounced. Sentences follow his syntactical rhythms and maintain his idiomatic expressions and repetitive phrases as it is "rooted 'in African soil'" (Plant "Introduction" xiii). For example, the repetitive expressions of "you unnerstand me," "Americky soil," or "Affica soil" are recurring elements of the narrative (Hurston "Barracoon," 20-21). His corporeal in-betweenness is plausibly represented by the photograph of Kossola[11] in front of his home in Africatown (Plateau), Alabama, circa 1928, inserted into the narration of the edited volume on page 115. For the sake of this photograph taken, Kossola dressed in his best suit and removed his shoes: "I want to look lak I in Affica, 'cause dat where I want to be" (Hurston 115). This barefoot image is a symbolic representation of Kossola's life story. The question arises whether it was his intention or arranged for the sake of the photograph. Kossola's body became the axis of two worlds, symbolizing his African roots in the United States, where he still felt like a stranger even after so many years. Constructing his personal history via his body can be interpreted as an act of agency and empowerment as he becomes the subject of his non-written history. Hurston, by representing Kossola's life narrative, following Patricia Coloma Penate's argumentation, represents the previously ignored subjectivity of marginalized people and acts as a way of political self-recovery (Coloma Penate 97). Using Fernando Ortiz's term, Kossola's life narrative can be interpreted via transculturation, which corresponds to the cohesion of elements, adopting already established forms and creating new formations (Malinowski xi). Following Coloma Penate's lines of thought on the formation of transcultural identity, Hurston's depiction of Kossola reflects the construction of a transcultural identity and memory by revitalizing the shift from national-cultural memory towards movements, connections and traces of memory (97). Through the representations of Kossola's African-based culture and origin, Hurston also

10 As Hurston writes in her Introduction to *Barracoon*: "The village that these Africans built after freedom came, they called "African Town." The town is now called Plateau, Alabama. The new name was bestowed upon it by the Mobile and Birmingham Railroad (now a part of the Southern Railroad System) built through [the town]. But still its dominant tone is African" (15).

11 Kossola's barefoot photograph is available in the McGill Studio Collection; The Doy Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of South Alabama and available at: https://ibw21.org/commentary/witnesses-for-the-future/attachment/cudjo-lewis/

expressed her political ideas regarding race and culture. According to Coloma Penate, Hurston resisted the dominant ideology and presented transculturation from within, that is, through her discourse and anthropological standpoint. She allowed Kossola define himself via his story-telling and the way he perceived and defined reality (47).

Hurston, as an anthropologist, integrated culture and cultural landscape into her works and established an aestheticized cultural universe "which can be directly linked to existing cultures outside it, to Caribbean, Floridian, Southern, American, and European traditions" (Gaál-Szabó "Cultural Geography", 113). In his excellent study "Interkulturális dinamika Zora Neale Hurston fekete kulturális tereiben" ("Intercultural dynamics in Zora Neale Hurston's Black Cultural Spaces") (26), Péter Gaál-Szabó calls Hurston's world "a repository of intercultural diversity," in which the writer's collage technique lends a special impetus to the cultural space (Gaál-Szabó "Interkulturális," 26). Following the line of Péter Gaál-Szabó's argument, I would further consider Kossola's constructed world in Hurston's writing and emphasize the prominence of the transcultural dimension in my analysis. The concepts of intercultural and transcultural are related but have distinct focuses. Intercultural refers to interactions between separate cultures, emphasizing their relationships and dialogue. On the other hand, the transcultural dimension explores cultural elements that transcend or go beyond specific cultures, highlighting the interconnectedness and fusion between cultures by creating a new one. In my opinion, this transcultural identity is manifested in Kossola's life narrative, which Hurston depicts and resonates with the symbolic interpretation of his barefoot photograph.

As the editor Plant argues, Hurston "would alternately title the work '"Barracoon: The Story of the Last 'Black Cargo'" and "The Life of Kossula"' (Plant "Introduction," xiv) by highlighting the personification of barracoon with the life narrative and in-between position of Kossula. The work's title, *Barracoon*, originates from the Spanish word "barraca," as defined by the editor Plant, which is translated as "barracks" and is and means "hut." This place was an in-between liminal space separating enslaved people from their homeland and the Atlantic Ocean. Enslaved Africans were held in these barracoons who had been captured in local wars and raids ("Barracoon"). Alice Walker comments on the intergenerational memory and trauma of African ancestors by highlighting the fact that African chiefs deliberately captured Africans from neighbouring tribes to provoke wars of conquest for the sake of the slave trade and considers Hurston's

work as a performative act by arguing that "We are being shown the wound"[12] (Walker x). As part of the slave trade, it belonged to the white slave traders' policy to instigate the tribes against each other (Hurston "Barracoon", 9). Many enslaved Africans died in the barracoons due to the harsh conditions, and it could take three to six months for a ship to fill, which phase was called the "coasting" period ("Barracoon"). As I view it, Hurston's book can be interpreted as Homi Bhabha's Third Space concept that presents a liminal, in-between space where cultures meet, fuse and create dialogues, resulting in hybrid identities and new forms of cultural expression. As Bhabha argues, "t(T)he non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space - a third space - where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates tension peculiar to borderline existences" (218). Temporality and the spatial dimension are crucial organizing principles of the narrative.

The next phase of the Middle Passage was the journey on the slave ship. In the context of the transatlantic trading system, the shipment of slaves from Africa to the American continent was named the Middle Passage, one phase of the triangular trade. Conditions aboard were horrendous; the death rates for slaves in the Middle Passage were high, 15-20 percent in the beginning (Ciment 28-30). As Kossola describes the deplorable conditions on the ship:

> De boat we on called de Clotilde. Cudjo suffer so in dat ship. Oh Lor'! I so skeered on de sea! De water, you unnerstand me, it makee so much noise! It growl lak de thousand beastes in de bush. De wind got so much voice on de water. Oh Lor'! Sometime de ship way up in de sky. (…) One day de color of de water change and we see some islands, but we doan come to de shore for seventy day. (Hurston "Barracoon," 55)

After the months-long voyage, the vessel arrived at the port. Enslaved people were put on sale by giving them water and meat so that they could appear healthier and become more valuable (Ciment 31). After the end of the Civil War and the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified on December 6, 1865, that abolished slavery, the Clotilda survivors became free. Interestingly, Kossola tells how he and the other Clotilda survivors started to worship on Sunday in an

12 See more about the relations between trauma and literature and "giving voice to the wound" in Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996). Caruth explains the origins of the word trauma coming from the Greek trauma, or "wound," inherently referring to an injury inflicted on a body. Later on, particularly in the medical and psychiatric literature, and primarily in Freud's writings, the notion of trauma is interpreted as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind (3).

"African" style. When Kossola and the other Clotilda survivors later established their town (Africatown), they refused to worship with the African Americans who had ridiculed them before (Stewart 83).

According to András Tarnóc, the slave ship was a tangible manifestation of the slave trade (Tarnóc "The Slave Ship," 169) and functioned as a chronotope of time and space compression. Following Tarnóc's line of thought, "the chronotope as a literary tool assists in a more profound understanding of the slavery experience" (Tarnóc "The Slave Ship," 178). Moreover, the slave ship represents victimization, objectification, and displacement. At the same time, it connects different cultures and functions as a vehicle or means of cultural exchange. The term also strengthens the ability of "enslaved persons to maintain a temporal and spatial perspective and offers a strategy for coping with the trauma brought on by the forcible removal from one's home and culture" (Tarnóc "The Slave Ship," 178). Tarnóc relies on Toni Morrison's usage of Pierre Nora's *lieux de memoire* concept by arguing that the Atlantic Ocean and the slaveship, the site of the black community's original trauma, serve as a lieux de memoire ("The Slave Ship", 175-175). As Morrison argues, all water functions as an emotional memory or a site of memory (Morrison 99). The following section scrutinizes the genre of *Barracoon* and the politics of memory in the narrative.

4. "jus' lak I in de Affica soil!:" *Barracoon as an Alternative* Form of Memory Politics about the Jim Crow Era

According to Plant, "Barracoon is a counternarrative that invites us to break our collective silence about slaves and slavery, about slaveholders and the American Dream" ("Afterword," 137). One of the legacies of the book is the questions it raises about slavery and freedom, which are also crucial in the contemporary era (Plant ("Afterword," 137). Kossola, as the last surviving victim of the African slave trade and a direct oral historical source of the trauma, was considered to be a kind of "holy grail for anthropologists" (Panovka "A Different Back Story"). His memories had been recorded several times. Mrs Mason had also sent not only Hurston but him monthly financial support since February 1928, which made him more willing to open up about his most traumatic memories (Panovka "A Different Back Story").

The significance of the slave narrative is to provide an authentic description of enslavement and its social, cultural and psychological impacts with a self-emancipation intent (Tarnóc "I let down" 52). Its corpus consists of accounts of enslaved people, primarily of African descent, in the Western Hemisphere (Tarnóc "A rabszolga-narratíva," 240). It is considered one of the primary forms

of American autobiographical literature. Its significance lies in that it chronicles the slave's becoming a person, his exit from objectification via self-education as a tool for self-emancipation (Tarnóc "A rabszolga-narratíva," 241). The conventions of the genre included that the slave narrative served the goals of the abolitionist movement (Tarnóc "A rabszolga-narratíva" 250).

Barracoon does not fall into the genre of classic slave narratives in several ways. Kossola was born in Africa. And because he was not born in the United States, he had to obtain citizenship through naturalization. Barracoon does not articulate an explicit political agenda about the cause of abolition, racial equality and women's rights (Sexton 192). Unlike conventional slave narratives, e.g. those produced by Harriet Ann Jacobs or Frederick Douglass, Kossola's narrative does not contain Biblical allusions; rather, it expresses his homeland's spiritual traditions and customs. The centrality of ancestral reverence and intergenerational memory related to story-telling is crucial to the narration. His retrospective memory does not present the journey forward into the American Dream. As Plant emphasizes, it is a kind of slave narrative in reverse, retrospectively travelling backwards to sites of memory manifested in the location of barracoons, and the tangible freedom and a sense of belonging meant for Kossola was his homeland in Africa (Plant "Afterword," 129-130).

Genevieve Sexton raises the question of whether *Barracoon* can be interpreted as testimonial text. As she argues, despite *Barracoon* being written long before the emergence of the contemporary field of testimony, it shares many of the characteristic features of a testimonial narrative. Hurston wanted to provide an authentic recording of Kossola's testimony, shed light on the trauma of slavery, and give voice to "those who had been silenced because of the institution of slavery" (Sexton 191). In my interpretation, Hurston's manuscript is more like an oral history project, a combination of ethnography, oral history and literary biography.

Silence is a recurring theme of the narration. In my interpretation, Hurston, by verbalizing the intergenerational memory of slavery in its own distinctively discursive way via Kossola's life narrative - using the possibility of silence as a text-organizing element, interpretative and narrative strategy - combines a unique way of self-healing through trauma with the construction of agency. The photographs, e.g. the above-mentioned Kossola image inserted into the edited volume - based on Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory[13] - also function as markers of

13 See more about the socio-cultural impact of story-telling in contemporary life narratives, the connections of Hirsch's concepts of intergenerational memory and postmemory and ethnic subjectivity in Mónika Fodor's 2020 book *Ethnic Subjectivity in Intergenerational Memory Narratives. Politics of the Untold* (New York and London: Routledge).

empty spaces of remembrance and silence. Focusing on the remembrance of the Holocaust, Marianne Hirsch introduces the notion of postmemory and its reliance on photography as a primary medium of transgenerational transmission of trauma. Postmemory presents the relationship of the second generation (like Hurston and the contemporary generation) to the memory of traumatic experiences that preceded their births, which were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right (Hirsch 103). In my interpretation, by incorporating photographs into the narration, the readers obtain a shared experience of witnessing the past, a "sense of living connection" (Hirsch 104) since the phenomenology of photography is a crucial element in the conception of postmemory that connects generations (Hirsch 107).

As Stewart highlights, gaps occur in the narration when the trauma of enslavement, which Plant refers to as the "mafia," causes the conversation between Hurston and Kossola to dissolve into silence (80). In the narration, different types of silences are repeated following the Freudian compulsion to repeat: the silences to answer further questions about slavery or a decision on the part of Kossola to end the conversation (Stewart 80) abruptly:

> Then he sat and smoked his pipe in silence. Finally he seemed to discover that I was still there. Then he said brusquely, "Go leave me 'lone. Cudjo tired. Come back tomorrow. Doan come in de mornin' 'cause den I be in de garden. Come when it hot, den Cudjo sit in de house. (Hurston "Barracoon," 24)

In my view, these representations of silence are part of the author's metanarrative procedures, through which the limits of the linguistic representation of the traumatic memory and the various mechanisms of repression become visible. Following the lines of thought of Edit Zsadányi, "any kind of silencing presupposes an active reading behaviour, forcing the reader to confront the emptiness of the silenced part" (Zsadányi 22). Therefore, in my view, by transcending the invisibility of marginalized black life paths, Hurston's work also gives voice to the manifestation of the trauma of slavery and articulates a kind of history from below.

The delayed appearance of the trauma as manifested in the silences of the narration, following Cathy Caruth[14]'s line of thought, is more than a pathology of a wounded psyche: "It is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4). This idea resonates with the motto of Hurston 's historical novel/fiction, *The Life of Herod the Great* published posthumously in 2025, emphasizing: "There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you" (Hurston "The Life of Herod," 4).

The trauma of slavery corresponds to the expression Maafa, which means the violent uprooting of African people and the commercial exploitation of the African continent from the fifteenth century to the era of Western globalization in the twenty-first century (Plant "Afterword," 129). Maafa is a Ki-Swahili term that means disaster and the human response. Conceptually, the phenomenon of the African Maafa is comprehensive in that it highlights the extensive and continuous devastation of the African continent and its inhabitants and the continuous exploitations that extend the trauma due to the transatlantic slave trade. (Afterword, 132-133).

An alternative form of "politics of memory" resonates in Hurston's *Barracoon*, which presents the collective trauma of slavery in the Jim Crow Era. Alice Walker's Foreword and Deborah G. Plant's Introduction, Editorial Notes and Afterword highlight how Maafa is still persistent in American Society and how these collective memories of the past shape contemporary society's political and social atmosphere. The chapter titled "Kossola Learns About Law" (Hurston 77-81) details the brutal prejudice of the legal system against black people, presenting both its physical and discursive violence. After the death of Kossola's son, the deputy sheriff who murdered him was never punished. As Kossola remembers this personal trauma:

> Dey doan do nothin' to de man whut killee my son. He a deputy sheriff. I doan do nothin'. I a Christian man den. I a sick man, too. I done git hurtee by de train, you unnerstand me (Hurston 77).

As this quote highlights, *Barracoon* shows deep political resonances with 21st-century racial inequalities. In my interpretation, Hurston's unpublished and neglected manuscript resembles the project of the Civil Rights Movement.

14 See more about the representation of trauma in Hungarian literature in Tamás Kisantal. *Az emlékezet és felejtés helyei. A vészkorszak ábrázolásmódjai a magyar irodalomban a háború utáni években* [Places of Memory and Forgetting. Representations of the Holocaust in Hungarian Literature in the Post-War Years] (Pécs: Kronosz Kiadó, 2020). Kisantal highlights and explains the differences in the historical trauma interpretations as defined by Cathy Caruth and Jeffrey C. Alexander on page 46. According to Kisantal, Caruth represents the psychoanalytic trauma theory; that is, he considers the approach related to individual trauma to apply to the study of collective historical phenomena. Jeffrey C. Alexander follows the sociological interpretation by interpreting common trauma as social construction.

Alexandra Alter refers to Lois Hurston Gaston, a grandniece of Hurston's and one of the trustees, in her *The New York Times* article "A Work by Zora Neale Hurston Will Finally Be Published" and quotes her as the following:

> *Racial issues have not gone away in our country, and we felt that this was an opportune time to publish 'Barracoon',"* Ms Gaston said. *"It's an important time in our cultural history, and here we have the story of Cudjo Lewis to remind us of what happens when we lose sight of our humanity.*

As Lindsey Stewart points out, the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, a global pandemic, and its economic and social consequences have brought new perspectives for self-reflection. For instance, we can also experience a dramatic revitalization of Hurston's ethnographic refusal of neo-abolitionism in her edited and posthumously published work *Barracoon* (Stewart 117).

5. Conclusion

This paper invites readers to a journey into Kossola's life narrative and rethinks Zora Neale Hurston's legacy and the memory politics of her posthumously published *Barracoon: the Story of The Last "Black Cargo*" by the Amistad in 2018. The volume was edited by Deborah G. Plant, an acknowledged scholar specializing in African American literature and, more precisely, in Hurston's oeuvre. Alice Walker's Foreword presents the final phase of her revitalizing project of Hurston's *Barracoon*. It frames the narration by giving voice to the traumatic wound of slavery that resonates with the contemporary issue of racism and racial prejudice that are still persistent. This paper introduced Hurston's non-fiction narrative *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo*" by scrutinizing its publication history and narrative strategies, e.g. the recurring theme of silence. Moreover, the paper focused on Hurston's methodology of cultural anthropology, the purpose and reception of her research in the Jim Crow Era, plus the current interpretation of her work as an alternative form of memory politics. The paper presented Hurston's dedication to her research, her inherent intellectual curiosity and drive for asking questions, telling untold stories, the afterlife of slavery in the Jim Crow era and its impact on the contemporary politics of memory through the revitalization of Hurston's oeuvre via her posthumously published works.

It is explicit in *Barracoon* that Hurston rejected the objective-observer stance of Western scientific inquiry that she learnt from a participant observer stance. Hence, she ate and shared food with Kossola during their conversations. While she was conducting research, she was also learning. The interviews with Kossola

significantly impacted the formation of her distinct discursive methodology in research and her fictional writing. Hurston was ahead of her time and experimented even with film-making. In my interpretation, her work *Barracoon* is more like an oral history project, and the posthumously published edited volume serves as a site of memory for the postmemory of slavery and resonates with the memory politics of the contemporary era.

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