

THE PORTRAYALS OF AMISTAD CASE IN *AMISTAD* (1997) FILM: A NEW HISTORICISM STUDY

Anisa Amalia^{1*}, Fatimah Muhajir², Eka Pratiwi Sudirman³

^{1,2,3}English Literature Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences

Mulawarman University

E-mail: anisaamalia2001@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Hollywood cinema during the late 20th century started to re-create the historical events of African-American's past, make it a historical films genre, and deliver the history of Amistad case about Mende's mutiny in *Amistad* film. The film becomes receptive to addressing another side of Africans slavery history in the western country. To understand the historical event, the researcher sees it through the New Historicism's lens as an approach of this research. This research uses a qualitative method through collecting the data from audio-visual materials and document analysis to answer the research questions. The research questions of this research are; first, how is the comparison of the Amistad case event in the *Amistad* film and historical records. Secondly, why does the *Amistad* film portray a different angle of the Amistad case. Seeking the answers, the researcher compares the representations of the past event and found the contradictory the *Amistad* film and the historical. The results of this research indicate that *Amistad* film presents events about the Amistad case differently to opposed the historical records and get positive results through adding moral values from historical events.

Key words: Amistad, Mende, New Historicism, Post-Structuralism

ABSTRAK

Sinema Hollywood pada akhir abad ke-20 mulai mengkreasi ulang peristiwa sejarah masa lalu orang Afrika-Amerika dengan menjadikannya genre film sejarah, dan menyampaikan sejarah kasus Amistad tentang pemberontakan Mende dalam film Amistad. Film ini menjadi reseptif untuk membahas sisi lain dari sejarah perbudakan Afrika di negara barat. Untuk memahami peristiwa sejarah, penulis melihatnya melalui kaca mata New Historicism sebagai pendekatan penelitian ini. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui pengumpulan data dari bahan audio visual dan analisis dokumen untuk menjawab permasalahan penelitian. Rumusan masalah penelitian ini adalah; pertama, bagaimana perbandingan kasus Amistad dalam film Amistad dan catatan sejarah. Kedua, mengapa sutradara, produser, dan penulis naskah menampilkan sudut pandang cerita film Amistad yang berbeda dari catatan sejarah. Untuk menjawabnya, penulis membandingkan representasi peristiwa masa lalu dan menemukan kontradiksi antara film Amistad dan catatan sejarah. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa film Amistad menyajikan peristiwa tentang kasus Amistad secara berbeda untuk menentang catatan sejarah dan mendapatkan hasil positif melalui penambahan nilai moral dari peristiwa sejarah.

Kata kunci: *Amistad, Mende, New Historicism, Post-Strukturalisme*

A. Introduction

History by far has been defined differently by diverse accomplishments, explained as something that ever happened with the fact that it can connect between the past and the present. Along with the time, history carries the burden of human progress as it is passed down from generation to generation and from society to society justifying the essence of continuity (Nayak 4). History has become evidence of historical events that particularly in this research is the Amistad case about the mutiny of Africans. Hence, to describe history from the past, literary work is often used as a weapon within the understanding of the historical event. It leads to the fact that those historical events are already common to be converted or made into a film, as the historical film in Hollywood cinema is equipped within their media's power in shaping the history in artistic form.

Amistad is a 1997 historical film based on many historical references including historian Howard Jones's history book *Mutiny on the Amistad* in 1987 directed by Steven Spielberg. *Amistad* film is an event that happened on a ship called *La Amistad* which carry Mende people from one Cuban port to another where they revolted for their freedom and then it became a case to proceed to the Supreme Court in 1839.

Many audiences and critics think the portion of *Amistad* film not portrayed the event accurately and have altering the story in a different way than the actual history. *Amistad* film contains some imbalance that appears between the historical records, those dissimilarities of things that are compared and interesting to explore more deeply.

However, literary criticism like New Historicism is used to analyze history even more because there are many forms of literary work based on historical moments that may have different aspects to make it more commercial or miss the important part of history. It can tell us a lot about a place and time through understanding discourses and intertextuality in New Historicism to understanding the context. Other than the main idea of the difference between historical records and representation, in *Amistad* film, there is some difference that needs to be looked deeper like the roles of director, producer, and scriptwriter in portraying Amistad case in a different angle. The researcher tried to find some facts about the by implying post-structuralism in New Historicism in this research through the director, scriptwriter, or the producer background why they produced a new history and suppresses what had been written in history which is actually an act of disruption.

Based on the background above the aims of this studies are (1) to know the way Amistad case compared in the *Amistad* film and historical records and (2) to find out the agendas of the director, producer, and scriptwriter portraying different angle of Amistad case in *Amistad* film

B. Review of Related Literature

1. Literature and Film

The relationship between literature and cinema or film has been the subject of numerous reflections and analyses. Despite their diversity, most of the research has a common starting point. Both literature and cinema have been regarded essentially as *modes of expression*, sites and ways of manifestation of an ability to give shape to ideas, feelings, and personal orientations. In the case of literature, books or novels are the forms of literary

works which are different things as modes of expression with film or cinema (Stam and Raengo 81-83).

2. Literature and Companion to the History

'Literature' and its derived adjective 'literary' are highly loaded and historically relativistic terms. As Raymond Williams notes in the seventeenth century, 'literary' had the same neutral sense of the present-day 'literate', and was used interchangeably. Besides, literature plays an important role as an introduction to history about past events, delivered to the next century recorded through literature and writing to designate fictional and imaginative writings, poetry, prose fiction, and drama (Abrams and Harpham 199).

Literary study today is pervasively historical. According to Abrams and Harpham on *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, they express that "modern critical movements, aiming to correct what is seen as historical injustices, stress the strong but covert role played by the gender, race, and class in establishing what has, in various eras, been accounted as literature, or in forming the ostensibly timeless criteria of great and canonical literature, or 'high literature' and the literature addressed to cultural studies which include any other criticism as well as New Historicism criticism (200).

3. New Historicism

New Historicism emerged in the early 1980s as a literary theory in North America. Stephen Greenblatt, an English Professor at Harvard University, was the leading figure in this new movement. It was a kind of reaction against traditional approaches. Influenced at once by Foucauldian and Marxist theories of history, the New Historian focuses on issues of power with a particular interest in the ways in which power is maintained by unofficial means (Rivkin and Ryan 506). Therefore, according to Leitch, new historicists do not study the literary work autonomously. On the contrary, they build a bridge between literary and non-literary texts and forms so as to evaluate the literary work as a product of specific political, cultural, and social contexts (27).

Greenblatt lays down four "enabling presumptions" of New Historicism in his book *The Forms of Power and the Power of Forms in the Renaissance*, which have acquired the force of law. They are:

- a. Literature has a historical base and literary works are not the products of a single consciousness but many social and cultural forces. In order to understand literature, one has to take recourse to both culture and society that gave rise to it in the first place (qtd. in Mukesh 11).
- b. Literature is not a distinctive human activity hitherto believed, but another vision of history. This has obvious implications for both literary theory and the study of literary texts (qtd. in Mukesh 11).
- c. Since literature and human beings are both shaped by social and political forces, it is not possible to talk of an intrinsic human nature that can transcend history. And since history is not a continuous series of events but ruptures, there is no link between one age and another or between men belonging to different ages. This being the case, a Renaissance man is rooted in his Renaissance idiosyncrasies just as a modern man is rooted in his. A modern reading of a Renaissance text cannot be the same as a Renaissance reading. At most a literary interpretation can reconstruct the ideology of the age through a given text' (qtd. in Mukesh 11).

- d. Caught in his own historicity, a historian cannot escape the social or ideological constraints of his own formation. And, therefore, he cannot fully understand the past objectively on its own terms (qtd. in Mukesh 11).

The four presumptions basically imply that New Historicism does not try to retrieve the original meaning of a text but locates the original ideology that gave rise to the text, which the text disseminates, within the boundaries of culture and sometimes beyond it (Mukesh 118).

a. Intertextuality in New Historicism

Intertextuality is an observation of the relationship between texts that places the generation of meaning in the dynamic conversation between text, intertext, or reader (Giere 3). Rather than erasing the problem of textuality, one must enlarge it in order to see that both social and literary texts are opaque, self-divided, and porous, that is, open to the mutual intertextual influences of one another (Howard 27).

The ideas of history or literary views are expressed in such cultural institutions that are inseparable from one and another or intertextually. The newness of this theory is engagement with history, consisting of the attitude to history in relation to literary and intertext of cultural texts relating to the study of one topic and involving several discipline subjects. Understanding 'history' as discursively produced allows one to consider the source of a given discourse. New Historicism distinguished itself from its antecedents largely because of the way in which the concept of history it assumed had passed through post-structuralist critique. What such a critique makes explicit is the textuality of history, how history is only available as a collection of discourses (Rivkin and Ryan 505).

4. Post-Structuralism in New Historicism

Post-structuralism is the name for a movement in philosophy that began in the 1960s. This movement remains an influence not only in philosophy but also in a wider set of subjects, including literature, politics, art, cultural criticisms, history, and sociology. Post-structuralism was created to challenge structuralism ideas with their perspective that the limits of knowledge play an unavoidable role at its core (Williams 1).

The criticism of this distinction takes post-structuralism well beyond structuralist views, poststructuralists trace the effects of a limit defined as difference. Here, word "difference" is understood in the sense of open variations. The work of the limit is to open up the core and to change our sense of its role as stable truth and value. To look at something from different perspectives, to take in different patterns, and to make it result in a different way. Post-structuralism sees the word disruption as a positive word. It is not only that there is work against a settled core. It is rather that there is an affirmation of the power of the limit as a source of a never ending production of new and worthwhile transformations and differences. The reason for the disruption of existence is for the affirmation of an inexhaustible productive power of limits. It is for resulting positive disruption of settled oppositions because post-structuralist thought that the simplicity is illusory and very damaging (Williams 3-5).

C. Research Method

In this research, the researcher uses qualitative research as a procedure of inquiry used for social sciences with qualitative designs focused on data collection, analysis, and writing. Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem (“Qualitative inquiry and research design” 15).

The researcher chose descriptive explanation when processing the data. Every data from document analysis, audio-visual material, and published interviews are obtained and described in the form of language and words.

There are several stages passed when analyzing data that the researcher applies the methods as new historicists according to Peter Barry in his book *Beginning of Theory* the researcher doing this research as follows:

1. Juxtapose between literary and non-literary texts, reading the former in the light of the latter
2. Try to 'defamiliarize' the canonical literary text, detaching it from the accumulated weight of previous literary scholarship and seeing it as if new
3. Focus on the attention (within both text and co-text) on issues of state power and how it is maintained, on patriarchal structures and their perpetuation, and the process of colonization, with its accompanying 'mind-set'
4. Try to use, in doing so, aspects of the post-structuralist outlook, especially Derrida's notion that every facet of reality is textualized, and Foucault's idea of social structures as determined by dominant 'discursive practices'. (25)

D. Finding and Discussion

1. The Portrayals of Amistad Case in *Amistad* Film

a. Adams's Closing Speech at Court During Amistad Case in *Amistad* Film

Adams's speech in the *Amistad* film was based on history, but not following the actual event that happened like what had been written in historical records during the era.

Adams opened his closing speech during the case:

This man is black. We can all see that.

But can we also see as easily that which is equally true?

That he is the only true hero in this room.

If he were white, he wouldn't be in this court, fighting for his life.

If he were white and his enslavers British, he'd be weighed down by the medals and honors we would bestow upon him. Songs would be written about him. The great authors of our times would fill books about him. His story would be told and retold, in our classrooms. (Franzoni 40)

Adams speaks like he was representing Cinque about Cinque who is a black person through his perspective that makes the Justice and people realize the inequality and the treatment which at that time was based on their skin color. Adams opened the eyes of the people to give awareness through inequality, the privilege of being born with white skin color, and how nations or the public give a response differently just because someone is born with a certain color.

Further, in Adams's last sentences he becomes a heroic liberal in the center of two races with his persuasive conclusive words:

We've been made to understand, and to embrace the understanding that who we are is who we were.

We desperately need your strength and wisdom to triumph over our fears, our prejudices, ourselves. Give us the courage to do what is right. And if it means civil war, then let it come.

And when it does, may it be, finally, the last battle of the American Revolution. That's all I have to say. (Franzoni 42)

The way Adams involved the words like civil war and the battle of the American Revolution over the Amistad case showed his strong will and how eager he is to close and solve the Amistad case. Adams showed superior morals through his efforts to convince the Justice with his persuasive words mentioning his American ancestors and showing his strong bonds with Cinque who is an African.

b. Black Abolitionist Character Joadson During Amistad Case in *Amistad* Film

In the *Amistad* film, the director delivered a character that is quite attention-grabbing because of how veiled the character is. The *Amistad* film presented a black abolitionist character named Theodore Joadson. Joadson is one of the abolitionists who handled the Amistad case along with Lawyer Roger S. Baldwin and abolitionist Lewis Tappan as Amistad committees in the film. The character was depicted in the film as an abolitionist that later known as an ex-slave. Joadson's background character was first identified in the scenes that showed his conversation with Adams.

Adams : Mr. Joadson, you're from where originally?

Joadson : Why, Georgia, sir.

Adams : Georgia.

Joadson : Yes, sir.

Adams : Does that sum up what you are? A Georgian? Is that your story? No.

You're an ex-slave, who's devoted his life to the abolition of slavery, and overcoming great hardships along the way, I should imagine.

(Franzoni

20)

In Joadson's role as a black abolitionist, he was depicted as someone with high prestige that never lowered his head. It is illustrated in the way the *Amistad* film wants to show Joadson now as an African-American has a personality that is respected because of his knowledge. As Adams says that Joadson is quite a scholar and historian (Franzoni 8).

In addition, there is another moment of Joadson character depicted in the *Amistad* film.



Figure 1

The film illustrated how Joadson faces a Mende who talks to him in Mendi, an African tribe language. The footage shows when Joadson, Baldwin, and the translator Professor Gibbs come to the place where Mendes is collected, to get more information about their identity during the Amistad case. And then, suddenly a Mende comes to Joadson and forcibly asks Joadson, but Joadson himself is unable to catch up conversations with him because of the language. Joadson looks at the Professor asking for help what this Mende tries to say, but unfortunately, the professor himself was not sure about the utterance and makes Joadson feel sorry.

c. Mende's Return after the Amistad Case Resolved in Amistad Film

The climax moment of the Amistad case leads the audiences to the ending of the film as the end of Mende's journey and back to their homeland Africa. Their return was marked by the separation between Cinque as chief of the Mende tribe and Lawyer Baldwin, one of the figures who contributed the most in the completion of the Amistad case.

After the case resolved, the film takes the audiences to sail together in the setting of a ship on a sunny day with a touching moment supported by the soundtrack of the *Amistad* film "*Dry your Tears, Africa*".



Figure 2

Cinque, the sailor, abolitionists, and his fellow Mende people sailed back to Africa after the case resolved. Mende's homecoming in the last minute, just after the case ended with no struggle or director adding any dramatic scenes. The moment of Mende's return is quite short, the film utilizes the power of visuals as the scenes that align with the soundtrack, delivering the story through setting, soundtrack, and expression without dialogue only full of the extraordinary sense of relief, of freedom on their return to Sierra Leone, Africa.

2. The Records of Amistad Case in History

a. Adams's Closing Speech at Court During Amistad Case in History

Joseph Quincy Adams closed the last court in February 1841, with a speech. Therefore, the researcher selects some parts of speech that are considered important which have contradictory context with a closing speech in the *Amistad* film.

Adams opened his speech with words that are more into personal stuff and did not mention directly into the Amistad case, nor Mende:

May it please your Honors: On the 7th of February, 1804, now more than thirty-seven years past, my name was entered, and yet stands recorded, on both the rolls, as one of the Attorneys and Counsellors of this Court. Five

years later, in February and March, 1809, I appeared for the last time before this Court, in defence of the cause of justice' and of important rights. ("Argument of John Quincy Adams, Before the Supreme Court of the United States")

Adams took the Amistad case by the age of 73 as the defender of Mende. He has a long career in court besides becoming the former U.S President. After Baldwin came to reassure Adams at his house, Adams agreed and believed this case will be his last great case in his career which is already 31 years long since the last time he appeared in court. Moreover, in his career as a Lawyer and Diplomat Adams was often having a dramatic fight in court against slavery expansion and was significantly opposed to slavery ("The legal career of John Quince Adams").

Moreover, Adams also took the chance to mention American figures who were meritorious and have contributed to the history of stopping activities and justice for African slavery:

Marshall—Cushing—Chase—Washington—Johnson—Livingston—Todd—Where are they? Where is that eloquent statesman and learned lawyer who was my associate counsel in the management of that cause, Robert Goodloe Harper? Where is that brilliant luminary, so long the pride of Maryland and of the American Bar, then my opposing counsel, Luther Martin? Where is the excellent clerk of that day, whose name has been inscribed on the shores of Africa, as a monument of his abhorrence of the African slave trade, Elias B. Caldwell. ("Argument of John Quincy Adams, Before the Supreme Court of the United States")

Adams mentions the names to notify and remember the great Americans that are interested in the unfortunate Africans in the name of Justice and the Christian faith.

b. Abolitionists During Amistad Case in History

Based on the historian Howards Jones's book *Mutiny on the Amistad*, Cinque and his Mende people came at the right time when the abolitionists movement started to surface in the US. Abolitionists stated slavery is a symbol of all that was wronged in the United States and living proof of the hypocrisy of a people who could proclaim the unalienable rights of mankind while practicing slavery and racial discrimination. The abolitionists decided that the time had come to rid the nation of slavery and African of the Amistad were victims of the situation in Cuba (Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad* 31).

According to Jones, abolitionists that were involved during the Amistad case were Lewis Tappan and Theodore Sedgwick with other black attorney fellows. Abolitionists recognized that the Amistad affair had the potential for causing an emotional debate over slavery in the United States (*Mutiny on the Amistad* 31). Historically, all abolitionists who were involved in the Amistad case were white abolitionists during the 1830s and the majority of abolitionists were Northern white churchgoers and their clergy (Wyatt-Brown).

Abolitionists insisted, "color cannot alter the rights or liabilities of the accused", and Africans had to stand before the courts in the same way Europeans or Americans would stand. These people could be regarded only as persons, as moral agents, owing allegiance to this law of nature when on the high seas, and liable to be dealt with for its violation by any jurisdiction within which they may afterward be found (Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad* 31).

Therefore, abolitionists realized the Amistad case could be the way to spread more about their anti-slavery movement. Thus, they hired a young Lawyer Roger S. Baldwin.

Baldwin originally came from New Haven and had been known as a defender of justice for the less fortunate in America, his life background makes abolitionists insist to hire him through many abolitionists (Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad* 37). Further, Tappan chose former President John Quincy Adams as defender because he believed the affair could attract other citizens or even national politics besides the involvement of Spanish and England in the Amistad case.

However, in historical records, the most well-known black abolitionist in America named Frederick Douglass and the most photographed American man in the 19th century. According to Noelle Trent, Douglass attended a Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society convention where Douglass's extemporaneous speech at that time and recruits as an agent for the group happened in Nantucket in the summer of 1841 ("Frederick Douglass").

c. Mende's Return after the Amistad Case Resolved in History

The Amistad case was resolved on March 9, 1841, but new problems surfaced. Their journey is still not the end, the day when Mende should be returned to their hometown Sierra Leone Africa is always delayed until an uncertain time.

In the meantime, stories circulated that the Mende were suffering ill-treatment in Westville. In mid-March, Amistad captives wrote a letter to Baldwin, saying that the jailer, Colonel Stanton Pendleton, was not a good man. The New Haven, Herald reported that arrangements had been made for the blacks' protection by moving them to an interior town. An order for their release had gone to the marshal. But problems developed over custody of the three girls in New Haven on March 16, Baldwin, who appeared on behalf of Townsend, applied to Judge Samuel Hitchcock for a writ of habeas corpus to win custody of the girls. As a plaintiff, Townsend contended that the probate court had appointed him their guardian. After some trial by the effort of another African, Cinque, and Tappan, the girls expected back to Amistad captives which then relocated the Mende from Westville to Farmington (Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad* 200-2002).

The delay might be because the abolitionist groups responsible for their freedom have not found their way back after the Supreme Court's decision. Therefore, abolitionists decided to gather money and donations which the Amistad committee soon arranged to publish two thousand copies of Baldwin's argument. As Leavitt told Adams, they had to make the most of it in establishing great principles (Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad* 197). They needed to do that because the schooner and cargo all belonged to Spanish subjects and Mende as other parties could not claim the property according to the courts.

On November 27, 1841, the thirty-five black from fifty-three of them that survived during the Amistad case, including the three girls, along with James Covey, an African sailor that helps Mende', departed New York for Africa on the barque Gentleman. Mende was capable of returning to Freetown in November 1841, and according to Linder Gentleman the ship was chartered for \$1840 to carry the Africans back to Freetown (7).

Money to support the voyage comes from private donations, public exhibitions, and the Union Missionary Society. Therefore, for Mende's homecoming, the Governor of Sierra Leone said the group would be met and guided on a four days journey to Mende land. Then, the American vessel reached its destination in mid-January 1842, after a fifty-day voyage nearly three years after the blacks had left their homeland (Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad* 205).

3. History and Discourse of the Amistad Case Event

Events and stories about the Amistad case are summarized in history books and journals from western writers and historians that have a different version than the *Amistad* film directed by Steven Spielberg. The film focuses on representing the tense historical events of the slave ship and the drama of the Mende tribe facing the greatest trial of the century.

Related to the topic of this research, the sentiments of historical events generally seem astonishing. From historical records side into literary works or film regarding Adams's speech, abolitionists, and Mende's return to Africa which was already explored. The events of the Amistad case are needed to examine their relevance based on historical discourse and intertextuality, glasses from several other views which have different versions to the bloody incidents and Mende's endeavors in the name of freedom. However, for board discoveries the researcher could not find notes or published interviews from the survivor and descendants other than notes by historians collected from official sources or newspapers.

The *Amistad* film does not contain the closing speech of Adams during the last Supreme Court in 1840 like what has been referenced by historians. Likewise, Adams's speech during the Supreme Court trial, the discourse of his speech absence in the history book *Mutiny on the Amistad* by Howard Jones, as well in the history book *The Amistad Rebellion* by Robert Rediker, but Adams's arguments and speech showed completely in *Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy* in 1841 by Lieut Gidney.

However, in Rediker's book, Adams pointed repeatedly to the courtroom copy of the Declaration of Independence, emphasizing the principle of equality is crucial to the case (Rediker 92). And while Adams' closing speech is not included in the book *Mutiny on the Amistad*, the book does include numerous arguments made by Adams as a defender of Mende. In contrast with the *Amistad* film, in Jones's book before the trial, Adams felt enormous pressure in preparing his argument. Baldwin's brief was extensive and complicated, but it gave Adams the material for his core argument, which was in support of the Declaration of Independence's fundamental rights and principles of natural law (Jones 157).

Thus, Jones also explained that Adams's argument did not appear in published reports at that time. Contemporaries who wanted to read Adams's comments had to wait until they were published as excerpts from newspaper reports or as abolitionist treatises. And non-abolitionists or civilians would have had no idea about Adams's accusations during the case. The case focuses on legal issues and states that because the majority are black, the courts do not need to determine whether the US government has the right to intervene in the case (Jones 192).

Besides the different narrative from what had shown in the *Amistad*, a critical article founded circled in Adams's character in the film. A historian and biographer named Paul C. Nagel wrote an article entitled "*The 'Amistad' Case: Movies as History*", where he provides a firm critique and appraisal of the interpretative of Adams in which Nagel resumed that the production tried to deal with some of the complexities of Adams. Nagel consent that:

Adams' motives were complex when he rose before the Supreme Court to defend the Amistad captives. For the audience to grasp even a little of this

heightens the drama, and also teaches that events and personalities of history are invariably intricate. (Nagel “The Amistad Case: Movies as History”)

Emphasizing “personalities of history are invariably intricate” by Nagel. The history depicted in the *Amistad* film of how the Amistad case took place and the involvement of Adams is a complicated matter. For this reason, the *Amistad* film cannot be understood as the single truth to fully understand the Amistad case event that occurred in 1839, decades ago. Those complexities need discourses to understand the event as New Historicism sees history as a collection of discourse.

However, as the plot unfolds in the *Amistad* film. There are new discourses that appeared through a character named Theodore Joadson who is an ex-slave and black abolitionist who is not found in history books or journals besides the *Amistad* film. Likewise, the people who know about the history of Amistad consider him a ‘fictional’ character because of his absences in other discourses. But there is a high possibility that Joadson's character was inspired by a real figure named Frederick Douglass, considering the similarities in his life's background.

In terms of character, in the history books compiled by Rediker and Jones, apart from Lewis Tappan and Baldwin, the name that often appears is Theodore Sedgewick who is also a white abolitionist and Amistad committee. Nevertheless, Sedgewick figures absences in the *Amistad* film version. Sedgewick has the first name ‘Theodore’ as Joadson and their roles, making them indirectly related in each version of the historian's book and the *Amistad* film.

Furthermore, regarding Mende's return, it is sufficient to explain the different perspectives of the *Amistad* film and historical sources. In the historian Jones's version of Mende's return, he composed immensely of stories and struggles, compared to the *Amistad* film version that portrayed it hastily with no dialogue or adding more drama. It can be said that the narrative about the Amistad case between the two is contested.

Other than that, if looking at different discourse such as history books compiled by Rediker. Again, there is a significant discourse, seeing how in Rediker's book there is a story about Mende's return absence from the Jones book or the *Amistad* film version. Rediker compelled the returns of Mende and how unusual their return to be, where homecoming excitement was not theirs alone. Communications with political and religious officials in Freetown had prepared the way, and many port city residents had been alerted to the imminent return of the sons and daughters of African (Rediker 106).

Thus, from different discourses about Adams, black abolitionists, and Mende's return where they are all contested, it is also important to know once again that in New Historicism in presenting the event, history books or *Amistad* films both are representations of past events and both have the same weight and are parallel.

Apart from what this research discovered before, regarding the Amistad case discourse that occurred in 1839-1841. Eric Foner, a historian, and a DeWitt Clinton Professor Emeritus of History at Columbia University, voiced his opinion on the subject of the Amistad case and the *Amistad* film itself. Foner expresses his concerns about the *Amistad* film being the main reference for understanding the history of the Amistad case in schools. Foner stated:

The film's historical problems are compounded by the study guide now being distributed to schools, which encourages educators to use *Amistad* to teach about slavery...If the authors of the study guide really want to promote an

understanding of slavery, they should direct students not to this highly flawed film, but to the local library. (Foner “The Amistad Case in Fact and Film”)

Stem from what Foner said, it can be noted that the *Amistad* film cannot be understood as the sole truth of the events of the Amistad case. Installing history in schools through a film without seeing other discourses from historians' books is not justifiable. Foner firmly opposes the idea that history is oriented towards literary works, or in this case films cannot be used as a single reference. Principally, there is a high possibility of post-structuralism practice when displacement and disruption of history is unavoidable.

4. *Amistad* Film Portray Different Angle of Amistad Case from the Historical Records

Amistad film was the next Hollywood film project of Spielberg after he won Oscar for his *Schindler's List* film in 1994. With David Franzoni as a scriptwriter, co-producer Colin Wilson, Debbie Allen, and composer John Williams for music soundtracks. However, with Hollywood cinema as home production, *Amistad* film was able to cast big names such as Anthony Hopkins as former President John Quincy Adams, Matthew McConaughey as Lawyer Baldwin, and fictional black abolitionist Theodore Joadson played by Morgan Freeman (“Amistad, the motion picture”).

In making the *Amistad* film the director gathered more than one historical reference including one book from a historian Howard *Mutiny on the Amistad* in 1987. Jones wrote about his experience:

London Times who after the introductions, asked if my book was the basis of the movie. I referred him to Debbie, who responded that they had used more than one book in making the movie but that *Mutiny on the Amistad* was the best scholarly work. (Jones, *A Historian Goes to Hollywood*)

Jones's book is a history book about the event in which it tells the event by gathering provable information of Mende's mutiny thoroughly, unlike a novel account. Moreover, like what has been discussed, the director already provided with some historian books, they managed to deliver the history from a different angle.

a. Convey Morality and Giving Honor

David Franzoni is the official scriptwriter for *Amistad* film. He contributes to writing the plot idea directed by Steven Spielberg, especially for Adams's closing speech. Thus, based on the portrayals, Franzoni released new history in Adams's speech and contradicted the historical records. Working with Franzoni, Spielberg gives reasons why his scriptwriter depicted the closing speech that way:

There were some very important moments of the moral conscience that I think our writers use that as an emotional plea to the to the jury, as opposed to a technical plea. (BBC1, “Barry Norman talk to Steven Spielberg” 1998)

Spielberg thinks Adams's closing speech during the Amistad case is the perfect moment to illustrate what should be portrayed by the media. The content of Adams's speech is to show equality which expressed that the case was not a matter of skin color with his savior convincing words. Franzoni uses a pleasant emotional appeal in front of the Justice Court which evidently on previous findings like what Spielberg said, opposed technical pleading structuralism in historical records in the name of decency to convey morals of social ethics.

Furthermore, David Franzoni released his personal opinion in the making of Adams's closing speech through *Los Angeles Times* newspaper. Initially, Franzoni took this chance to put his rhetorical agendas upon privileged as the scriptwriter. Franzoni explained:

I needed a speech for our Supreme Court scene that would embody every bit of my passion for Adams and I determined to hit the major points of his actual speech, yet make it accessible. (Franzoni, "Giving Credit Where It's Due in 'Amistad'" 1997)

Therefore, Franzoni took this chance to write about Adams' life background and why he deeply honors this former American President. Franzoni starts his words when Adams was a kid with his father John Adams watched the birth of America, was educated in Paris, London, and at Harvard, fluent in six languages including Latin and Greek. Adams has done a contribution as President, when he was promoted recognition of the new South American republics, scientific exploration, limiting American expansion, honoring Native American rights, and abolishing slavery (Franzoni, "Giving Credit Where It's Due in 'Amistad'" 1997). Franzoni makes the best of Adams's speech, by seeing his gratitude towards Adams and knowing the past life of Adams, he is portraying Adams differently from the historical records because he is deeply aware of Adams's life background and undoubtedly as an American. Franzoni explains that he wanted to give credit where it's due:

I would like to take advantage of this space to clarify the process a bit and to give credit where credit is really due. (Franzoni, "Giving Credit Where It's Due in 'Amistad'" 1997)

Brings about the history, Adams's speech in *Argument of John Quincy Adams, Before the Supreme Court of the United States* by Linder was more tends as his reflective personal career. Adams went to another focus assertion without showing any bound with Mende in his speech, focusing on African slavery overall and the expediency of Justice for America regarding the case in defending freedom.

b. Changing Stereotypical and Express Conflict

Debbie Allen as one of the producers and the black voice in the project wanted this *Amistad* film to be a strong African-American film. Therefore, for Allen's purposes, she made this fictional black abolitionist character appear during the Amistad case event. Through her interviews Allen explained:

As the producer of the project and the black voice, there were certain things that were important to me. I insisted on the Morgan Freeman character early on. I didn't want to see a stereotypical situation where you have white people rescuing blacks. There were wealthy educated black men at this time. And hundreds of them were involved in the abolitionist movement. (Longsdorf, "'Amistad' a Dream Work for Debbie Allen" 2018)

Thus, Allen created a different version as an effort to avoid the stereotypical in the *Amistad* film where usually the society portrays black as uncivilized, uneducated, and rude. While the whites are more civilized and have control over their domination in America that allowed them to take control in everything including rescuing. Allen tries to embody the condition when *Amistad* film was released not the time when Amistad case took place in 1839, but in the late 20th century for *Amistad* film release when many scholarly black men join in abolitionists movements.

As it compelled, Allen wanted to broke that stigma through creating black abolitionist character Theodore Joadson who's educated, scholarly, and full of dignity as material improvements of black and an emerging to reconstruct public perspective towards African through the *Amistad* film.

As for Spielberg who approved the idea of the *Amistad* case, he highly wanted to include the character because he thought it was important as Spielberg said:

But I really felt it was important to see the conflict early African American man would have...For me, it was an interesting, I guess, epiphany that Morgan Freeman character has when he looks into Mende eyes, and Mende starts talking to him in the Mendi dialect...Morgan Freeman doesn't remember any African from his childhood and doesn't know what he's talking about and feels shame that this man who is his brother, he cannot communicate with him. (BBC1, "Barry Norman talk to Steven Spielberg" 1998)

The way Spielberg depicted Joadson in handling the situation that Joadson is aware that Mende chooses to talk to him because they looked the same, that they have the same race and same origin.

Spielberg wanted to express the conflict when Joadson cannot reply to Mende in any African language as he had already forgotten how to because he was a slave when he was a kid a long time ago and been maintaining living in America, absorb and using English with American. Spielberg wants to imply the reality of early African-American that at the time when there's an ex-slave but there's also always some Africans who were forced to be a slave. And what differentiates them is the one already assimilated with American life as he becomes America's civilian.

c. Reduce Painful Subject

Mende's journey was portrayed visually in Spielberg's hands until their last journey of the *Amistad* case that marked them returning to their home Sierra Leone. Unlike what was written in historical records, their homecoming in the film was portrayed without any side story nor it inserts any dialogue, which Spielberg has his vision and reason as the director who briefly directs the moments. He revealed this to Barry Norman while being interviewed for the process of his latest '98 films.

I just believe, I was always very believed in images and being able to tell a story, you know, through pictures...without bringing in dialogue. (BBC1, "Barry Norman talk to Steven Spielberg" 1998)

Spielberg strongly believed in images that deliberately voice over through the emotional impression, expression, setting, color, visually. In the bright weather and peaceful expression of Mende were they sailing back to Africa, emotionally delivered with *Amistad* film's soundtrack which visual and audio are the power in portraying the event.

Likewise, the contradiction between the film and the historical records cannot separate from the scriptwriter. Franzoni had an unforgettable experience, a meaningful conversation with Allen while arranging the story, affecting the way he defines the historical events and omitting the struggles of Mende's return.

Thus, when Franzoni wrote the mutiny on board *Amistad*, it was Allen who led him to the vision of violence that was so brutal and genuine that the act embodied with a single roar the timeless black American rage. When Allen and Franzoni deliberated the middle passage scene, she reached down into the freezing Atlantic and from the muck and centuries

resurrected for him the thousands and thousands of African souls who had perhaps until this film been lying unheralded and even unknown in anonymous graves (Franzoni, "Giving Credit Where It's Due in 'Amistad'" 1997).

Spielberg also voiced his thought about these subjects when Norman asked about what he thinks that slavery is still very uncomfortable to white Americans.

I think not just white America, I think all of America, you know, is uncomfortable with many painful subjects about the past. (BBC1, "Barry Norman talk to Steven Spielberg" 1998)

Spielberg himself thinks that the subject of slavery is still uncomfortable for all Americans including African-Americans. Undoubtedly, slavery is a painful subject, it is history that involves two races. An event that still gives a guilty feeling for Americans and sorrow for African-Americans in the past or the present.

Moreover, the researcher noted that the director, producer, and scriptwriter of *Amistad* film opposed the historical records by oversimplifying Mende's return. The purpose is to deliver their agendas, because besides it was Spielberg's visions about cinema, it also to show the importance of moral consciences. By omitting the misery of the actual event, the director concerning realistic with the fact slavery is still an uncomfortable subject to retell until now. Therefore, it is portrayed in a sufficiency perspective to project respectability and from the director, producer, and scriptwriter background, to reduce painful subjects over the past.

From the whole, regarding the depiction in *Amistad* film starting from Adams's speech, Theodore Joadson, and Mende's return, evidently all of the narration is influenced by the creator's discursive practice.

In closing, Debbie Allen once said in *Los Angeles Times*:

Whether you're talking about art, or literature, or music, the real history has just been castrated—left out—and great historians have done it. It's . . . one culture wanting to be dominant, and not really acknowledging the contributions of a culture that was far beyond and centuries ahead. (qtd. in Rosen "Amistad and the Abuse of History")

Without reducing the understanding of post-structuralism and New Historicism. Allen's opinion can be understood that historical distortion is not only from her, the director, or the scriptwriter who portrayed different angles of the *Amistad* case through the media film but also acted by historians.

History did not display perfectly in the present or in any media, and the *Amistad* film is not a single truth for the *Amistad* case event. Thus, what the director, producer, and scriptwriter do can not be concluded as wrong or right. And related to the different angles portrayed in the *Amistad* film, all of the findings involved are solely done for positive results which is the formulation of post-structuralism practices.

5. Discussion

New Historicism guides this research into finding how the *Amistad* case was recorded in *Amistad* films and historical records. From juxtaposing both records, the researcher found there are contradictories as the director, producer, and scriptwriter of *Amistad* film try to involve their agendas in which the researcher concluded that they have adhered to post-structuralism. In fact, the depiction of history itself cannot be separated from post-structuralism practice, including history books or journals that already exist from historians

because of their power and perspectives. Therefore, for this research, the researcher only focuses on *Amistad* film as the researcher discovers their-post structuralism practice.

In the findings, starting from the *Amistad* film portrayals, the researcher found that *Amistad* portrayals of Adams's closing speech delivered a different closing speech from the historical records. Later know that the difference was affected by the scriptwriter Franzoni's circumstance. As revealed by, Franzoni tried to deliver his agendas in the new closing speech for moral conscience which could embody his patriotism passion. Franzoni depicted Adams's closing speech illustrated how eager Adams was while releasing his superior morals towards Mende in persuading the Justice at Supreme Court. Franzoni believed the actual closing speech did not portray Adams truly, which made him want to clarify the process with his background knowledge of Adams's life and to give credit where credit is due.

Further, another finding is the portrayals of black abolitionists during the case in *Amistad* film that was found to be a fictional character, while in the historical records, the character did not exist. Hence, for the contradiction, the researcher found Debbie Allen as an African-American co-producer of the *Amistad* film. Allen intentionally made Theodore Joadson's character depicted as an ex-slave and scholarly black man. Allen insisted on agendas to change the stereotype of Africans who depend on and are always rescued by white people and made the character because it is necessary to have an influential black character and deconstruct stereotypes about Africans in media or society.

Besides the findings of altering closing speech and creating a fictional character, the researcher also found a contradiction from the *Amistad* films and records of history in portraying Mende's return after the case resolves. In historical records, there was Mende's that made every endeavor to obtain their homecoming to Africa which beyond the portrayals of *Amistad* film. Therefore, *Amistad's* film tells the opposite way, the film did not show any struggles and the story behind their returns as they depicted their return hastily with no dialogue.

Notably, the contradiction of Mende's return in *Amistad* film was made by the director, producer, and scriptwriter of the film as agenda to project respectability towards African and African-Americans. Likewise, Spielberg wants to conduct hope and confidence of Mende in their sailing back that portrayed as happy ending of *Amistad* film by omits their struggles. In which, an act to reduce the painful subject of the past, with the fact the slavery themed film such *Amistad* film is still uncomfortable and imprint American guilty and African grief.

The main findings of this research are the *Amistad* case in *Amistad* film is defined differently in terms of post-structuralism. Through the *Amistad* films director Steven Spielberg, co-producer Debbie Allen, and scriptwriter David Franzoni open the core of the history of the *Amistad* case with more variations to change the audience's sense. They put value to looking at the *Amistad* case event from different perspectives by opposing the scholarly previous works and emerging to uplift African-American films with their social ethics senses.

E. Conclusions

The researcher has analyzed the *Amistad* case of Mende's mutiny in *Amistad* film in terms of a New Historicism study. Therefore, the researcher draws conclusions as follows:

First, there are contradiction in the representation of the Amistad case regarding Mende's mutiny in *Amistad* film portrayals and what was recorded in historical records. From juxtaposed of both works the researcher noted that in *Amistad* film, the film framing former President has superior morals towards Mende during his closing speech, creating a fictional black abolitionist character that appeared during Amistad case, and portraying Mende's sailing back to Africa with no struggle. Meanwhile in historical records, the representation of the Amistad case showed structuralism of the event, Adams's closing speech which is more into a personal reflective career, white abolitionists during the Amistad case, and the struggle that Mende must face for coming back to their homeland Africa.

Second, what had been portrayed in *Amistad* film and historical records had left an ambivalence impression. Thus, *Amistad* film can not be understood as a single truth of the Amistad case past event. Uneventfully *Amistad* film made new history in the way they portrayed the event which cannot be separated from the director, producer, and scriptwriter circumstances.

Third, the director, producer, and scriptwriter put their sense and concerns in making the *Amistad* film and adhered post-structuralism practice. The film portrayed different angles because they want to disrupt the event for positive results such as an idea to convey morality and giving honor, change the stereotypical Africans and express conflict and reduce painful subjects over the past from the scenes portrayals.

Therefore, it is proven that there are contradictions between the *Amistad* film and the historical records in representing the Amistad case event. Notably, they made *Amistad* film to be the newness of the Amistad case history for shaping audience awareness and resulting moral consciences in society.

References

- "*Amistad, the motion picture.*" LII / Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School. Web. 15 July 2021.
- "*Argument of John Quincy Adams, Before the Supreme Court of the United States: in the Case of the United States, Appellants, Vs. Cinque, and Others, Africans, Captured in the Schooner Amistad; 1841 by Lieut Gedney.*". Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. Web. 12 June 2021.
- "*Frederick Douglass.*" Encyclopedia Britannica. Web. 22 July 2021.
- "*The Legal Career of John Quincy Adams.*". Akron Law Review, The University of Akron. 2015. PDF.
- Abrams, M. H., and Geoffrey G. Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005. PDF.
- Amistad*. Dir. Steven Spielberg, DreamWorks Pictures, 1997. DVD
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002. PDF.
- BBC1. "Barry Norman talks to Steven Spielberg (Film 98 Special, 1998)." 21 Feb. 1998, *YouTube*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=LV5mXNoBXUQ&t=63s. Accessed 12 August. 2021.
- Foner, Eric. "*The Amistad Case in Fact and Film.*". History Matters. Web. 20 March 2021.
- Franzoni, David. "*Giving Credit Where It's Due in 'Amistad.'*" Los Angeles Times, 15 Dec. 1997. Web. 22 August 2021.

- Giere, Samuel D. *A New Glimpse of Day One: Intertextuality, History of Interpretation, and Genesis 1.1-5*. Walter de Gruyter, 2009. Web. 22 July 2021.
- Howard, Jean. 'The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies'. *English Literary Renaissance* 16 (1986): 13-43. PDF.
- Jones, Howard. *Mutiny on the Amistad: The Saga of a Slave Revolt and Its Impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy*. Oxford UP, 1997. PDF.
- . "A Historian Goes to Hollywood: The Spielberg Touch | Perspectives on History | AHA." *AHA*. 1997. Web. 15 July 2021.
- Leitch, V.B., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, New York*, W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2001. PDF.
- Linder, Douglass. "The Amistad Case." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2007. PDF.
- Longsdorf, Amy. "'Amistad' a Dream Work for Debbie Allen". *The Morning Call*, 2018. Web. 13 May 2021.
- Mukesh, W. "New Historicism and Literary Studies": No. 1 Vol. 27 (2003) *Journal of General Studies*. PDF.
- Nagel, Paul C. "The Amistad Case: Movies As History". *Tampa Bay Times*. 23 Dec. 1997. Web. 10 January 2022.
- Nayak, Jyotrimayee, et al. "Syllabus Education Paper 5 History." *Utkal University, Bhubaneswar*. PDF.
- Rediker, Marcus. *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom*. Penguin, 2012. PDF.
- Rivkin, Julie, and Michael Ryan. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Malden (Mass.). Blackwell, 2004. PDF.
- Rosen, Gary. "'Amistad' and the Abuse of History". *Commentary Magazine*, 3 Sept. 2015, Web. 15 August 2021.
- Stam, Robert, and Alessandra Raengo. *A Companion to Literature and Film*. Hoboken: Blackwell, 2004. PDF.
- Williams, James. *Understanding Post-structuralism*. Routledge, 2005. PDF.
- Wyatt-Brown, Bertram. "American Abolitionism and Religion, Divining America." *National Humanities Center*. PDF.