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YEARNING FOR FREEDOM:
AFRO-DESCENDANT WOMEN WRITERS AT THE EDGE OF TRANSATLANTIC SLAVERY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this doctoral dissertation is to reconsider nineteenth century European literature through the study of non-canonical texts written by Afro-descendant women during the transatlantic slavery, in English, Spanish and Portuguese. It advances the thesis that the writings of the "minor subjects" in modern Europe put forth an innovative idea of freedom, which can help us to reconsider not only our understanding of gender identities but also our notion of Europe. The literary texts selected for this study are the following: the slave narrative written by Mary Prince, a former slave from the British colonies in the Caribbean and entitled *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave Related by Herself* (1831); a collection of Cuban poems written by Maria Cristina Fragas (Cristina Ayala), *Ofrendas Mayabequinas* (1926); and *Ursula* (1859), a novel by Maria Firmina dos Reis, a woman of African descent born in the Portuguese colony of Brazil. These works are useful examples in order to re-examine European identity in the light of the important historical event of the transatlantic slave trade, given the role that slavery and colonialism played not only as historical facts but also as ideologies. The study hereafter presented is structured in five chapters, with an introduction and a concluding section. The introduction draws a general outline of the dissertation. In the first chapter, the topic of the research and its rationale are discussed, explaining the hypothesis and the objectives of the work and presenting a review of the existing literature on the topic. In particular, I establish the framework for the methodology of the research, locating the idea of desire (*Eros*), of women's literature, of post-colonial and de-colonial literature and the category of gender. The second chapter examines the way in which the historical and cultural background of the nineteenth century influenced my corpus of primary texts. Subsequently, in the following three chapters, I examine each work individually: *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave Related by Herself* in the third chapter; *Ofrendas Mayabequinas* in the fourth; and *Ursula* in the fifth. Finally, the conclusion is devoted to the interpretation and comparison of the studied texts. The re-discovery and research of minor voices in European literature and, in particular, of women and slaves, goes hand in hand with the necessity for a new Europe that must rethink the notions of otherness and freedom as a way to reframe its human and political relationships.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines non-canonical literature written by women of African descent in the nineteenth century in English, Spanish and Portuguese languages. The literary texts are: the slave narrative of Mary Prince, a former slave from the British colonies of the Caribbean entitled *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave Related by Herself* (1831); a collection of poems written in Cuba by Maria Cristina Fragas (alias Cristina Ayala) entitled *Ofrendas Mayabequinas* (1926); and the novel *Ursula* (1859) by Maria Firmina dos Reis, a woman of African descent born in the Portuguese colony of Brazil. While few studies have been conducted on any of these literary texts individually, these works have never been investigated in relation to one another.

In particular, the aim of the study is to understand how the selected authors have defined the relation between freedom and slavery together with their identity as women throughout their literary works. This study pertains to the area of literary criticism, inasmuch as it will investigate the aesthetic traits of the works studied, and their relation with various literary canons.

The significance of this research lies in the fact that to compare non-canonical literature written by Afro-descendant women during transatlantic slavery in different Atlantic countries means to look at a complex of world relations long ignored. It implies composing a jigsaw puzzle that many political movements today are decontructing in order to perpetuate racism and oppression. Against these nationalist narratives, I highlight transnational links at cultural and historical level and claim global responsibilities for the significant historical event that was the transatlantic slave trade.

The very nature of the topic requires a comparative approach, given the multifaceted and varied reality of the transatlantic slave trade in Europe and its colonies. Accordingly, the decision to focus on English, Spanish and Portuguese colonies derives from the decisive role these countries played in the context of the transatlantic slave trade.[1]

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[1] France and other European countries also played a great part in this historical event, but I had to limit my field of study, so I shall leave the inclusion of French literature to further research.

The theoretical frames that guide and provide the toold of this research comprise feminist theory and feminist literary criticism, post-structuralism, post-colonial and de-colonial studies, as well as relational comparison.

The dissertation will be structured in five chapters, including the present introduction and a concluding section. The first chapter will be divided into two parts. By way of introduction, I will focus my attention on the rationale of the study, which relate to European culture and history, together with my positioning. Then, I will clarify the specific meanings of the critical terminology employed throughout the dissertation. In particular, I will frame my work, presenting an interpretation of the following key words: "minor subject" and "minor literature", "subjugated knowledges", "counter history", "Afro-American", "Afro-Cuban", "Afro-Brazilian" and "women writing". In part two, I present the theoretical approach employed to examine more closely the literary texts selected, following the perspectives of feminist literary criticism, post-colonial and de-colonial studies, and comparative literature.

Chapter II will outline the historical background of the literary texts studied to establish a chronological and political framework for each specific country with special attention given to the nineteenth century abolitionist movements that arose in Great Britain, Spain, Portugal and their associated colonies. This frame of reference will be critical to the understanding of the literary works studied, which are themselves part of the historical and social movements in which they were written.

The third Chapter will set out a critical analysis of the *History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by herself* (1831) and it will be divided in two sections. Initially, I will demonstrate why Mary Prince's text is not just an historical and personal record but it is a literary work, even if it is not part of the English literary canon, and discuss how it enters into dialogue with its cultural context of belonging. In the second section, I will analyse this slave narrative with the lens of feminist criticism, focusing on female desire and freedom and looking at how they emerge in the story.

Chapter four will be devoted to the examination of Cristina Ayala's poetry, first by providing the existing biographical information on the author and the framework of her historical and literary background. Secondly, I will make a comparison

between the proto-feminist writers of Spain and Latin America during the nineteenth century in order to critically understand Cristina Ayala's poetry. Finally, in the last part of the chapter I will close read Cristina Ayala's poetry, giving prominence to the lyrical representations of freedom, slavery, and women, as they urgent themes in her work.

The fifth and final chapter will be structured in five parts. Firstly, I will illustrate the life and works of Maria Firmina dos Reis and the events that led to her novel's discovery. Moreover, I will discuss the relationships between the Brazilian literary canon and the work of Maria Firmina, highlighting the innovative aspects of her writing. In the third and fourth sections, the novel *Úrsula* will be analysed with a focus on the relationship between cultural belonging and gender, along with the specificity of the novel's characters. Lastly, I will focus on how Maria Firmina expresses a specific collective and revolutionary desire for freedom that grounds for radical social and cultural change.

Chapter I

Theories, Tools and Methodology

Introduction

In this first chapter, I will focus my attention on the reasons that led me to the development of the research together with the theoretical background and the methodology employed to read these literary texts. Therefore, this chapter is intended as a preliminary introduction that positions the dissertation within the context of contemporary international critical discourses and elaborates its potential contributions.

The chapter will be divided into two parts. In part one, I will focus my attention on the reasons underlying the development of the study which relate to European culture and history together with my location. Indeed, as the writer Adrienne Rich emphasized in her avant-garde speech, *Notes Towards a Politics of Location* (1984), the politics of location is a radical feminist practice that must be addressed for the researcher to prove to be accountable for their work. Furthermore, I will clarify the specific meanings of the critical terminology employed throughout the dissertation, by outlying the main standpoints of my work, introducing the following key-words: "minor subject" and "minor literature", "subjugated knowledges", "counter history", "Afro-American", "Afro-Cuban", "Afro-Brazilian" and "women writing". Lastly, in part two, I will discuss the methodology used for the analysis of the literary texts selected using the perspectives of feminist literary criticism, post-colonial and de-colonial studies, and comparative literature.

1. Rationale for the study

The aim of this doctoral dissertation is to explore non-canonical literature written by women of Afro-descent during the transatlantic slavery period, particularly in the nineteenth century, stemming from the linguistic areas of English, Spanish and Portuguese. The chosen literary texts are the following: *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave Related by Herself* (1831): the autobiography of Mary Prince, a former slave from the British colonies of the Caribbean; *Ofrendas Mayabequinas,* a collection of poems written by Maria Cristina Fragas (alias Cristina Ayala) in Cuba in 1926, and the novel *Ursula* (1859) by Maria Firmina dos Reis, a woman of African descent born in the Portuguese colony of Brazil.

Although it is important to distinguish that Mary Prince was a slave whereas Maria Cristina Fragas and Maria Firmina dos Reis were daughters of slaves, each of them avidly interrogate the relationship between slavery, gender, and freedom. Given that these authors have very rarely been studied, this research aims to both broaden the horizon of literary critique, and contribute to contemporary culture and politics, as I would like to highlight in the next section.

1.1. State of Art

In the past two decades, there has been a growing body of anthological works dedicated to Afro-Cuban, Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Caribbean women's literature of the nineteenth century. Miriam DeCosta-Willis's *Daughters of the Diaspora: Afra-Hispanic Writers. Kingston: Randle* (2003) has proved to be one of the first comprehensive anthologies on Afro-Cuban women's literature, which, together with other historical studies such as María Mercedes Jaramillo and Lucía Ortiz's *Hijas del Muntu: biografías críticas de mujeres afrodescendientes de América Latina* (2011), Daysi Rubiera Castillo and Inés María Martiatu Terry's *Afrocubanas, historia, pensamiento y prácticas culturales* (2011), and Paula Sanmartin's *Black Women as Custodians of History: Unsung Rebel (M)Others in African American and Afro-Cuban Women's Writing (2014),* helped to paint the picture of Afro-Cuban women's life and culture.

Eduardo de Assis Duarte wrote extensively on the development of the Afro-Brazilian canon with a special focus on Afro-Brazilian women writers in works such as *Literatura Afro-brasileira: 100 autores do século XVIII ao XXI* (2014) and *Falas do outro: literatura, gênero, etnicidade* (2010). Andrea Fernandes collected the work of many Afro-Brazilian writers in *Contos do mar sem fim: antologia afro-brasileira* (2010). Also, Edmilson de Almeida Pereira, *Survey of African-Brazilian Literature* (1995) has studied the evolution of the male and female Afro-Brazilian canon.

There is a growing body of studies on nineteenth century Afro-American women's literature, such as Brenda Wilkinson's *African American Women Writers* (1999), William Andrews' *Six Women's Slave Narratives* (1988), and *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature* (2009), edited by Angelyn Mitchell, and Danielle Taylor, to mention just a few. However, little attention has been devoted specifically to Afro-descendant literature in British territories during the nineteenth century.

Although significant contributions have been made to the studies on poetry from the African Diaspora across national boundaries, such as James Weldon Johnson's *Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), Nancy Cunrad's *Negro: An Anthology* (1934), Lilyan Kesteloot's *Anthologie Négro-Africaine* (1976), and Monique-Adelle Callhan's *Between the lines* (2011), there does not exist a comparative study on Afro-descendant literature among Spanish, Portuguese and English languages in the nineteenth century both in regard to Afro-descendant men and women writers.

Overall, this dissertation has proved to be the only comprehensive study that takes in to account (1) three Afro-descendant women writers of the nineteenth century from European colonies in the New World, (2) whose works pertain to different literary genres, (3) that addresses the legacy of transatlantic slavery, and (4) regards the social meanings of gender relations in society.

1.2. Aims and scope

Europe as a political entity has become one of the most influential powers of the world[1]. Born out of the Second World War, it was constituted mainly to address the

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[1] See: Nugent N., 2011, *Organizzazione politica europea*, Bologna: Il Mulino.

need for peaceful coexistence among countries. The creation of a common market –
enshrined within the Treaty of Rome, in 1957, during the Cold War – stimulated the
economy of Member States and limited consumer taxes. Then with the Lisbon
Treaty, Europe became a political and social project, which aimed not only at a
peaceful coexistence among its members but also at the construction of shared
institutions. This new Europe was intended to identify common values and shared
citizen rights for its Member States.[2] The challenge of forming a common
identitarian space was additionally addressed by founding academic exchange
programs among countries (the Erasmus project, master programs, PhD courses –
including mine –, job careers, etc.), via the signing of several Treaties, and the
realization of shared security policies and institutions among member states. Yet, the
arrival of such challenges as the global economic crisis of 2008, climate changes,
controversial defence policies, religious extremism, terrorisms and unconvincing
austerity policies, allowed the consolidation of Euroscepticism and anti-Europeanist
parties as important political forces[3]. Those parties, together with the re-emergence
of nationalisms, are putting at risk the very idea of a "European Community", as is
now occurring with Great Britain, as it detaches itself from the collective Europe via
the so-called "Brexit". In this scenario, the historical narrative of Europe as a unit is
crucial to its survival. Yet, in order to respond to nationalist and separatist
sentiments, it is important to keep in mind that such narratives are a direct
descendant of European history itself.

In his inspiring book *Nonostante Auschwitz* (2010), philosopher Alberto Burgio
promotes the thesis that the racist[4] episodes against migrants that are currently taking
place on a daily basis in Italy and in all around Europe[5], together with the rise of

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[2]See: Desmond Dinan, 2004, *Europe recast: a history of European Union*, London: Palgarve
Macmillan and Ali M. el-Agraa, 1998, *The European Union: history, institutions, economics and
policies*, London: Prentice Hall.
[3]See: B. Leruth, N. Startin, S. Usherwood, 2017, *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*,
London: Routledge; Ronald Tiersky (ed.), 2001, *Euro-skepticism: A Reader (Europe Today)* ,
Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; Catherine E. De Vries, 2018, *Euroscepticism and the Future of
European Integration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[4] A more specific account of how words like race and racism will be employed in this dissertation will
be given later on in this chapter.
[5]See   for   instance: https://www.theguardian.com/global/2018/aug/03/warning-of-dangerous-
acceleration-in-attacks-on-immigrants-in-italy (last accessed 29/08/2018);
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/06/attacks-on-immigrants-highlight-rise-of-fascist-
groups-in-italy (last accessed 29/08/2018);

extreme right political parties, are the inevitable outcome of Modern European history as they concurrently form part of its very constitution. On the strength of this evidence, Burgio argues that the racist and extremist attitudes that we are experiencing are not merely a contingent reaction to recent historical events (such as the neoliberal system of globalization, explosion of migratory fluxes, insecure job conditions, and wars in the Gulf, Balkans and Middle East).

Burgio's analysis contradicts the narrative based on an optimistic view of Modernity, which considers State racism and its horrors as exceptional events in our history, the norm of which is supposed to be the respect for diversity and the promotion of egalitarian attitudes (Burgio 10). Conversely, Burgio argues that we must reassess the relationship between racism and modernity, starting from the eighteenth century. By doing so, it becomes clear how racism is not a perverse effect of globalization or an exception in history, but rather a fundamental component of Modern Europe and "its congenital tare, its normal pathology" (Burgio 10).

Slavery and the slave trade together with the ideology that supported them in many European nations (including England, Spain, Portugal, France, the Netherlands and Denmark, to mention just a few) are crucial historical facts for the understanding of European racism, although they have long been omitted from European memory. Surprisingly, the history of slavery and slave trade, as Gilroy reminds us (Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 116), is still today referred to as a special "black" affair, instead of a fundamental part of the ethical and intellectual heritage of the West in its entirety.

An ignored tradition of black American studies[6] has already invoked a black re-writing of modernity (and of European modernity in particular), showing how Afro-American radical political thinking challenged common representations of Western modernity. In particular, both Cedric Robinson (1983, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*) and Paul Gilroy (1993, *The Black Atlantic)* pointed to

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https://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/cronaca/caserta_immigrati_feriti_spari_salvini-3806814.html (last accessed: 29/08/2018) and
https://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/18_luglio_27/otto-episodi-45-giorni-l-ipotesi-dell-emulazione-pista-razzismo-9e69a460-91d6-11e8-9a85-e773adbfcd34.shtml (last accessed 29/08/2018).
[6] Cedric Robinson (1983, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*) and Paul Gilroy (1993, *The Black Atlantic)* were among the first to interpret the political culture of the Black Atlantic as a critique of Western modernity. Although having started from different perspectives – the first from a critical review of European Marxism, the second from the debate on postmodernism and the specific declination it took in Great Britain within the so-called cultural and post-colonial studies – Cedric Robinson and Paul Gilroy have in fact posed the same theoretical and methodological problem.

a critical review of the history of European culture, beginning with its colonial power, questioning the rhetoric that divided the unified space of the Nation-State and the colonial spaces, characterized by slavery and racial hierarchization. Similarly, the re-introduction into history of forgotten stories such as those of the slave trade, allows the reframing of the Modern history of nation-states, not as ethnically isolated entities but as always in relation with other nations and different cultural identities. Furthermore, such stories support the understanding of those power relations that characterized Europe before its own foundation, since through the voices coming from cultures that have been intermingled with Europe — yet which differed radically from it — a better understanding of our present can be forged.

The poetics of these relations, which will emerge trough the present research, will challenge also the idea of Europe as a Fortress[7]. The motivation that drives me to carry out this research, consequently, lies above all in the need to disclose how Europe has always been in contact with different cultures, which are part of it in a crucial and controversial way. By showing some of the transatlantic tides of history and literature that involved Europe in the nineteenth century, therefore, this PhD dissertation intends make a genuine contribution to our modern idea of European culture.

As feminist thinker Rosi Braidotti points out in her writing on *The Becoming Minoritarian of Europe* (Buchanan and Parr), the European Union today theoretically shares the challenge to fixed ideas of self, identity, and nation state, since its "postnationalist project […] rejects the idea of Europe as a world power driven by a form of universalism that has implied the exclusion and consumption of others" (243). Although the European Union could evolve in a potentially creative new form of power, an us-and-them logic that has been at the heart of European identity for centuries (reaching its peak during imperialist times) mines this eventuality. The ideology of imperialism imagined Europe as the only civilized culture, in opposition to its others[8]: Africa, in the first place, depicted as the country that required

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[7] For a critical understanding of the idea of "Fortress Europe" see: *Nous, citoyens d'Europe? Les frontières, l'État, le peuple* (2001), and *Europe, Constitution, Frontière* (2005) by French philosopher Étienne Balibar.
[8] See: Abernethy, David P. *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1425–1980* (Yale UP, 2000); Bush, Barbara. *Imperialism and Post-colonialism (History: Concepts, Theories*

investment in and assistance from the missionary forces of civilized European countries, obviously through colonialism. Racism, then, is not only compatible with Western rationality; it is also its accomplice (Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 162).

Modern rationality, indeed, still contains/incorporates the principles that once legitimated slavery (Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 325). Thus, in order to face the challenges of the present, we must envisage new futures, a new "social imaginary that adequately reflects the social realities we already experience of a post-nationalist sense of European identity" (Braidotti, *The Becoming-minoritarian of Europe* 243). However, such a sense of identity "requires extra effort in order to come into being, as it raises the question of how to change deeply embedded habits of our imagination" (243). Otherwise, our European values will not be coherent with the reality and will remain little more than mere slogans. In particular, as Leopold Von Wiese (1960) maintains, we should learn "how destroying valuable national forces [can] create a non-aggressive but effective unity within our cultural area" (2). The stakes are high, since a failure to achieve these goals could signify the demise of the European Union itself.

Consequently, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the re-thinking and re-shaping of our cultural and historical values, starting from our idea of freedom. I believe indeed that the literary texts examined here constitute an active process of composing history; they are not simply historicized. They give name to the nation and compose a historical narrative for its denizens. They are literary artefacts, bearing the vestiges of the past while provoking new interpretations. Ultimately, as visionaries and composers of New World history, Mary Prince, Maria Cristina Fragas and Maria Firmina dos Reis are part of a larger process of conceptualizing freedom in the New World and in Europe that intertwines their literature.

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and Practice), Longmans, 2006 and Darwin, John. *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400–2000,* Penguin Books, 2008.

2. Notes on a critical lexicon

2.1. Critical Genealogies

During his course at the College de France in 1975-6, *Society Must Be Defended*, Michel Foucault[9] claimed that the critical task of genealogy is to discover the "plural aspect of knowledge" (4). This implies a refusal of linear narrations of facts in order to discover "knowledges", in the plural. The "plurals" here are crucial, for the plurality of insurrections and of subjugated knowledges should be kept always alive in order to resist new hegemonic unifications and hierarchizations of knowledge.

Plurality allows us to understand that alongside the primary narration of history, other "minor" stories are always present, though perhaps left in shadow. The critical opposition to the monopolization of knowledge-producing practices involves what Foucault calls "an insurrection of subjugated knowledges". When it comes to knowledge of the past and the power associated with it, "this battle involves resisting the omissions and distortions of official histories, returning to lost voices and forgotten experiences, relating to the past from the perspective of the present in an alternative (out-of-the-mainstream) way" (Medina 13). For Foucault, to talk about subjugated knowledges means to refer:

> to a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as non-conceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naive knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity. [...] it is the reappearance of what people know at a local level, of these disqualified knowledges, that made the critique possible. You might object that there is something very paradoxical about grouping together and putting into the same category of "subjugated knowledges," on the one hand, historical, meticulous, precise, technical expertise and, on the other, these singular, local knowledges, the non-commonsensical knowledges that people have, and which have in a way been left to lie fallow, or even kept in the margins. And so we have the outline of what might be called a genealogy, or of multiple genealogical investigations (Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* 8)

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[9] Paul-Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) theories address principally the relationship between power and knowledge, and how they are used as a form of social control through societal institutions. Among his most influential works there are: *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (1964), *Les Mots et les Choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (1966), *L'Ordre du discours* (1971), *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (1975), *Histoire de la sexualité* (1976, 1984, 2018).

On that account, critical genealogies[10] help to unravel counter-histories that were already there although they previously remained unknown and unheard, due to their omission from official histories. Critical genealogies, then, should achieve an epistemic pluralism that allows for insurrectionary struggles among different power/knowledge frameworks that existed in a given period.

Likewise, I consider my work to be a sort of critical genealogy, one that intercepts previously unheard voices from the historical events of the slave trade: first-person voices recounting minor stories that were never included in the canonical history of literature. This is the aim of the dissertation: to explore the counter-memories produced during the slave trade, uncovering the lives of those who were subjugated (namely, the slaves), and listen to their voices, thus challenging the historical canon with the stories of those who have long remained voiceless. This new material, once subjugated, is not a supplement that would come to fix the primary discourse, adding something that was left out. Rather, it is "an effective and necessary means of transforming discursive practice" (Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* 135). It influences our practices directly; that is to say, our critical agency and our resisting powers.

Furthermore, to consider three language areas (Spanish, Portuguese and English) means to enlarge the vision of the Black Atlantic as a transnational phenomenon, not limited to the Anglo-American area, as Paul Gilroy implicitly intends it.[11]

2.2. Listen to silences

How do we learn to listen to those silences, then? According to Foucault, the only way to achieve this is to become sensitive to exclusion; to go back to the origins and

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[10] Foucault's idea of genealogy is highly influenced by the work that Nietzsche has done on morals and powers, as shown in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, written by Foucault (1977). Nonetheless, genealogy is a concept collateral to that of archaeology. While the former belongs to the first stages of Foucault's thought and focussed more on the analysis of *epistemes*, the latter appertains to the second period of his work when he dealt with *dispositifs*. For more information on that, see: Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); J. G. Merquior, *Foucault* (University of California Press, 1987); Sara Mills, *Michel Foucault* (London: Routledge, 2003).
[11] On the influence of the category of "Black Atlantic" see: L. Di Fiore, M. Meriggi, *World History. Le nuove rotte della storia*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2011; M. Battistini, *Un mondo in disordine: le diverse storie dell'Atlantico*, in «Ricerche di storia politica», n. 2, 2012, pp. 173-188.

to develop the capacity to discern between the shadows and the lights left by knowledge in a given time. In her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), Gayatri Spivak poses the question of visibility and invisibility of the so-called subalterns, a Gramscian category understood in the context of Marxist-Althusserlian ideology. Spivak agrees with Foucault that to make the invisible visible means to go "beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Spivak 76). Nonetheless, she stresses the fact that providing visibility does not imply letting the individual become vocal. As a result, for Spivak, intellectuals can render subalterns visible, but subalterns can never directly speak for themselves. Accordingly, with reference to Foucault and Deleuze, she underlines that "On the French scene, there is a shuffling of signifiers: 'the unconscious', or 'the subject-in-oppression' clandestinely fills the space of 'the pure form of consciousness'" (Spivak 81).

Consequently, Spivak emphasizes that between the recovering of the knowledge produced by a subaltern class and its consciousness exists the presence of the epistemic violence of imperialism and the international division of labour that influences subjects' desires, in some cases making them go against their interests. Despite Spivak's critique having formulated paradigms for subject, subjectivities, and power that differ markedly from the ones of Foucault, it is important to consider it, in order to stress the fact that to listen to the silence (or, in other words, to reconsider the notion of subjugated knowledge as a feminist project), does not mean to automatically attribute consciousness to the subjects involved. It suggests instead the consideration of all people as legitimate subjects for the production of knowledge at an epistemic level.

Therefore, to study the voice of invisibilized subjects implies neither to give them political representation, nor that their voices are more exceptional than others. In contrast, it suggests entitling subjects to speak who, historically, have not been considered a legitimate subjects for the production of knowledge. In this regard, the dichotomy between visibility and invisibility helps us to understand that in each historical period, all subjects spoke, yet only few were heard.

As a result, in order to recover the plurality of voices, it is imperative that we should go to another level, as Foucault claims, the level of what has been considered illegitimate and excluded from the canon and from the "scientific hierarchization of

knowledge" (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 85) in a given historical period.

2.3. Counter memories

The new history that emerges from the work of genealogy should disinter something that has been hidden, not simply due to neglect, but also due to a careful and deliberate process of misrepresentation. This new history is defined by Foucault as counter-history, namely the discourse of the people who had no glory, who find themselves in darkness and silence. As a consequence, unlike the official narrations of history, full of odes to the powers, counter-histories will tell a disruptive speech, an appeal that recites: "We came out of the shadows, we had no glory and we had no rights, and that is why we are beginning to speak and to tell of our history" (Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* 70). In this way, memory in counter-history acquires a completely different meaning:

> The role of history will be to show that laws deceive, that kings wear masks, that power creates illusions, and that historians tell lies. This will not, then, be a history of continuity, but a history of the deciphering, the detection of the secret, of the outwitting of the ruse, and of the re-appropriation of a knowledge that has been distorted or buried. It is to demand rights that have not been recognized, or in other words, to declare war by declaring rights. (Foucault *Society Must Be Defended* 71)

Through the quest for rights, the subjects of counter-histories demand recognition and unveil the power devices that allowed their silence and their seclusion in the dark for a specific time in history. Counter-histories counterpoise binary oppositions of what is perceived in society: them and us, the unjust and the just, the masters and those who must obey them. However, counter-history can be used by oppressed as well as by dominators to disqualify colonized sub-races: "this is, then, a mobile discourse, a polyvalent discourse", as Foucault remarks (*Society Must Be Defended* 77).

Subsequently, historically, the counter-histories that emerge are characterized by a feeling of resentment[12] which relies on an us-and-them logic. Yet, Third Wave feminisms and post-colonial thinkers suggest going beyond these binary divisions

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[12] In reference to what German philosopher Friederich Nietzsche (1844-1900) defined *ressentiment* in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887).

and this sense of rivalry in order to view/perceive our "enemies in within," as bell hooks calls them, namely the heterogeneous aspect of power that develops on many different and intersecting axes. Finally, this shift made by critical theory, from a Manichean production of knowing to the recovery of the plurality of knowledge that aims to understand simultaneously several distinct power devices, is the starting point of this research. By applying the tools of Third wave feminism, my research focuses on inferior literatures, or literatures written by minor subjectivities, and that, therefore are able to lead to deterritorialization[13].

2.4. Minor Subjects

The production of counter-histories as a practice of resentment has been the outcome of the modern European manner of viewing the subject and its others through the lens of domination. Is it possible, then, to allow the existence of the alterity without trying to dominate it? Can we regard the "other"[14], in its alterity, in its being something other than us, not as a threat but as an asset? According to Deleuze and Guattari, the Other, can be positively recognised as subject, only if we embrace the idea of subjectivity as becoming, and when Deleuze discusses becoming, he always implies a "becoming-minor" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateau*).

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[13] Deterritorialization (in French: *déterritorialisation*) is a concept ideated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and further developed in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). The term that indicates one of the phases of the process of territorialization-deterritorialization-reterritorialization, which is triggered within a territoriality (understood as a completed state that corresponds to a codified set of relations), generating a crisis. Then, the de-territorialization is a revolutionary force and a way of resisting to capitalist processes. For a critical understanding of the term, see: Brian Massumi, 1992. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari. Swerve editions*. Cambridge, USA and London: MIT.

[14] The idea of "the Other" has been developed within phenomenology, to explain the process of formation of a "Self", which is usually defined by the relation with something dissimilar to (namely, an "other") itself. In particular, in the late eighteenth century, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) introduced the concept of "the Other" as a stage of self-consciousness which complements the propositions about self-awareness (*The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807). The concept was then differently employed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938; *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, 1931), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980; *L'être et le néant*, 1943), Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986; *The Second Sex*, 1949), Emmanuel Levinas and Jan Jeaque Lacan. The term has been recently used by imperialism and colonialism critics, as well as by feminist thinkers to interpret colonial, racial and sexual relations of power in different societies. See: *Embracing the Other: Philosophical, Psychological, and Historical Perspectives on Altruism*, by Pearl Oliner, Samuel P. Oliner, Lawrence Baron, Lawrence Blum (1992).

In order to understand this concept, it is important to establish, as Deleuze does, the difference between minor subjectivities and minority groups. A minority group is in fact a quantitative aggregate of people or a State: for example, Jews, Gypsies, and Kurds can be minorities, but this does not make them minor subjects.

To be minor always implies a process of becoming minor, since solely forming part of/belonging to a minority group does not automatically imply a process of becoming. Similarly, in many societies, the becoming-minor of subjects includes women, for instance, whom are not a minority, numerically speaking. Women, for Deleuze and Guattari, are minor subjects in respect to the major subject, namely the man. The number of men in the world does not express in itself their status as majoritarian subjects, but rather they are majoritarian (or "moralr") inasmuch as they determine a socio-cultural standard to which all other subjects must adapt, thereby exercising a form of domination. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari:

> The notion of minority is very complex, with musical, literary, linguistic, as well as juridical and political, references. The opposition between minority and majority is not simply quantitative. Majority implies a constant, of expression or content, serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate it. Let us suppose that the constant or standard is the average adult-white-heterosexual-European-male-speaking a standard language (Joyce's or Ezra Pound's Ulysses). It is obvious that 'man' holds the majority, even if he is less numerous than mosquitoes, children, women, blacks, peasants, homosexuals, etc. That is because he appears twice, once in the constant and again in the variable from which the constant is extracted. Majority assumes a state of power and domination, not the other way around. It assumes the standard measure, not the other way around. (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateau* 105)

In this sense, women, children, colonized persons, animals and plants are minor subjects. The majoritarian subjects respond to a "molar" paradigm[15], inasmuch as it is not involved in a process of becoming, being rather sedentary and structurally closed. Its specific nature is static, defined by the formula "I am different from.

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[15] As masterfully explained by Nicolas Thoburn (10: 2003, London: Routledge), in *Deleuze, Marx and Politics*: "If the major if *denumerable* and in relation to a standard, the minor is *non-denumerable* in so far as it is a relation not of identity but of variation and becoming which deviates from any major axiom or standard, and where in each connection or subdivision the set changes in nature. In a sense, the molar identitarian form comes first, since one always finds oneself in a stratified, identified molar configuration – a configuration where relations are determined between identities which exist in relation to an abstract standard – and it is against this configuration that politics emerges. However, the abstract standard exists across the plane of life to judge and determine the configurations of life and in this it is necessarily 'nobody' – it is an abstract type which induces the world to conform to a model, but which in itself cannot fully exist in concrete form. The minor, on the other hand, is found in concrete moments of deviation from the model".

Given this scheme, difference serves only to reinforce the supremacy of the male normativity system.

Importantly, redefining human consciousness through the philosophical paradigm of becoming-minor emphasizes the liberating potentials of which each of us is bearer, in opposition to the staticity of the "molar" subject. The deconstruction of the Subject serves to relocate identity in multiple belongings, which is ultimately the expression of the transformative power of all marginalized and oppressed.

By developing further this concept under Rosi Braidotti's "post-human" paradigm[16] we can say that in order to turn into a minor subject, it is not enough to belong to a minority; it is necessary to disrupt majority-minority dualism and to create an affirmative passion for transformative flows that destabilize all identities (Braidotti, *The Posthuman*). The becoming is therefore rhizomatic: it is a multiplicity not defined by its elements and that does not have a centre of unification; rather, it is defined by the cumulative number of its dimensions. Following this view, the heterogeneous elements of the becoming have the line of continuity in the subject, which is the fibre of conjunction among the multiplicities. According to this formulation, bodies are designated by their own affections, which is to say by the intensity that crosses them; they are neither organs and functions nor simple characteristics of a species or genus. The body is not determined by its organs, but by its dimensions (longitude and latitude).

In addition, minor subjectivities have as a goal the production of counter-histories, inasmuch as counter-memories and counter-histories play a crucial role in destabilizing the "molar" categories of the majoritarian subject, therefore redefining the notions of identity and identity politics at all levels. According to Deleuze and Guattari:

> What constitutes arborescence is the submission of the line to the point. Of course, the child, the woman, the black have memories; but the Memory that collects those memories is still a virile majoritarian agency treating them as "childhood memories", as conjugal, or colonial memories. It is possible to operate by establishing a conjunction or collocation of contiguous points rather than a relation between distant points: you would then have phantasies rather than memories (*A Thousand Plateau* 107).

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[16]See: Rosi Braidotti, 2013, *The Posthuman*, London: Routlege.

Following Deleuze and Guattari, the rehabilitation of minor knowledges and memories has been expressed in the literary field by the idea of minor literature. Minoritarian literatures are those that express the de-territorialisation to which minoritarian subjects are exposed and that they entitle. This is what happens with the literatures from the slave trade, for instance.

2.5. Minor Literature

Minor literature is the creation of a minor subjectivity. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari define minor literature in their essay *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975), by saying that a minor literature does not come from a minor language; it is rather a construction by a minority within a major language. The label "minor literature" consequently does not refer to marginal literatures (the literature of linguistic, ethnic, cultural minorities, etc.) or secondary literatures (that of a minor nation or movement in relation to a wider tradition) but to all those literatures that are capable of questioning the language they use, changing it through new political meanings.

In writing minor literature, Deleuze and Guattari see the writer as a visionary of potential futures, nations yet-to-be. So far, writing is creation, it is becoming, and that is what makes it so revolutionary. By emphasizing the revolutionary nature of minor literature and its role in envisioning and thus in creating new futures beyond differentiating factors (such as the nation or race), the idea of minor literature is thereby less problematic than terms such as the literature of the "Third world" or even "post-colonial literature".

In order to give a better understanding of this definition, the authors delineated three main characteristics of minor literature, which I will briefly illustrating hereafter. The first characteristic of minor literature is that its language is affected by a "high coefficient of deterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 16). In a proper post-structuralist pattern, Deleuze and Guattari argue that a territoriatized language can undergo a process of de-territorialization through the rejection of the concept of words as signifiers. Freed from the bonds of signification, language can enter the process of "becoming"; a process that "directly connects the word to the

image" (23). This process of linguistic becoming echoes for Deleuze and Guattari the goal of all minor literature; a process of individual/political/national transformation that decodes all fixed identities and breaks down the boundaries between them.

Deleuze and Guattari employ the literature of Franz Kafka (1883-1924) as an example of minor literature. Kafka was a Jew who was born in a German-speaking family in Prague, the capital of the Kingdom of Bohemia, where most people spoke Czech. In short, Prague German was a de-territorialised language, appropriate for peculiar and minor uses. Kafka's language was consequently marked by the impossibility for German Jews to engage with literature. His language altogether expresses the difficulty of not writing, of writing in German and of writing differently from the canon.

This same impracticality distinguishes the works written by enslaved women or Afro-descendants under the legacy of slavery in the Atlantic world. The criticality of writing in the conqueror's tongue, accompanied either by a political statement or by the altered knowledge of the vocabulary, makes their language a minor one. The authors' language indeed challenges in subversive ways the semantic of the colonizers, by allowing it to enter in a process of becoming, indeed, as Deleuze and Guattari clearly explain:

> Minor languages are characterized not by overload and poverty in relation to a standard or major language, but by a sobriety and variation that are like a minor treatment of the standard language, a becoming-minor of the major language [...] Black Americans do not oppose Black to English, they transform the American English that is their own language into Black English. Minor languages do not exist in themselves: they exist only in relation to a major language and are also investments of that language for the purpose of making it minor [...] That is the strength of authors termed "minor", who are in fact the greatest, the only greats: having to conquer one's own language, in other words, to attain that sobriety in the use of a major language, in order to place it in a state of continuous variation (the opposite of regionalism) [...] Minor authors are foreigners in their own tongue [...]. It is certainly not by using a minor language as a dialect, by regionalizing or ghettoizing, that one becomes revolutionary; rather, by using a number of minority elements, by connecting, conjugating them, one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming. The major and minor mode are two different treatments of language, one of which consists in extracting constants from it, the other in placing it in continuous variation (*Kafka* 18).

Likewise, minor language is the language of a nomadic, displaced, and de-territorialized subject and it participates directly in the process of becoming-minor.

The second aspect of minor literatures is that everything in them is political, contrary to canonical literary works in which the question of individuality is central

and the social question remains somehow in the background. In minor literature, every subjective element is immediately grafted onto politics. The individual fact thus appears more necessary and indispensable the more a broader story is caught up in it. It is precisely in this sense that the family triangle connects to the other triangles (commercial, economic, bureaucratic or juridical triangles) which then determine its values. Consequently, in minor literature, the individual proves to be political; since "its narrow space compels every individual intrigue to immediately connect with politics" (17).[17]

The third aspect of minor literature is related to "collective utterance" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 65), since everything in these texts has a collective value. In fact, precisely because of its linguistic inaccuracy, the conditions of an individuated enunciation are not present. This could be, for example, that of a narrator that serves as a teacher to the readers, telling them what is right or wrong. The relative uncertainty of minor texts leaves spaces for the creation of a different literature than that of masters: in those cases, what the writer says alone is already a common action and what they say or do is necessarily socially engaged.

Above all, the political field in minor literature contaminates every sentence. Since the collective or national consciousness is "often inactive in external life and always in the process of disintegration" (17), minor literature is positively taking on the role and function of collective enunciation. Therefore, this literature produces an active solidarity, despite scepticism. Even when the writer remains on the margins, or outside of their community, this helps them even more to envisage another potential community, to forge the instruments of new conscience and sensibility. The literary machine indeed reverts into a revolutionary machine to come, thanks to its ability to satisfy the conditions of a collective enunciation that are not present anywhere else: literature is ultimately the people's affair.

Considering all of that, it is reasonable to argue that the literary texts from Afro-descendant women that I am presenting are minor literature in this very sense: a de-territorialization of the language happens within it; the individual and the political

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[17] The connection to Fredric Jameson's conception of "Third world literature" (*Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,* 1986) as a form of national allegory cannot be overlooked. Yet, the key distinction between Jameson and Deleuze and Guattari is the latter's desire to bestow political and national consciousness on writers from anywhere in the world, not only from the so-called "Thrid World literature".

are strongly connected in them; and they are characterized by a collective arrangement of utterance. The study of minor literary works from minor subjectivities then allows us to rethink our European history, languages and literature. This research will adjoin nomadic configurations of identity in the European historical context, which will help us to understand contemporary movements such as international migration and borderlines, throughout the reflections that Afro-descendant women writers have done on their desire for freedom.

As a "literary space, language was a contested system where freedom and slavery coexisted and where new histories and identities have been generated" (Callhan 114). Thus, it is paramount to study Afro-descendant literature. As Monique-Adelle Callhan argues in the introduction of her inspiring study, *Between the lines* (2011):

> Nineteenth-century *afrodescendente* literature has evolved in the shadow of New World slavery. During the nineteenth century in particular, African descendants in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States faced the challenge of defining freedom for themselves. The process of defining freedom was not just political it was also literary. It called for a culling of metaphors, symbols, and tropes to create the stories afrodescendentes would tell about their individual and collective lives. In its various forms and modalities, nineteenth-century *afrodescendente* literature problematized freedom and examined the relationship between freedom and slavery. It recognized the literary aspect of history and identity and the ways in which language could be used as a tool to construct it. (114)

However, contrary to what Monique-Adelle Callhan claims, I do not believe that these texts put forth a pure notion of transnational literature.

2.6. Transnational literature

To begin with, the texts chosen do not indicate any form of transnational racial solidarity on the part of the writers. Mary Prince, Cristina Ayala and Maria Firmina dos Reis indeed do not show an awareness of transnational ties with Afro-descendants of other countries since, especially in the case of Maria Cristina Fragas and Maria Firmina dos Reis, the writers were facing the rising of nationalist movements rather than transnational crossings. Consequently, my comparative strategy does not ignore the differences among these writers, but accounts for them by attending to the nuances of each individual text through close literary analysis and

extensive contextual readings. This is also the reason why I will devote a chapter to each author, bringing them all together in the conclusion.

Lastly, in the final section, I will underline the common references for all the three texts, as for all the landscape of freedom's desire that they highpoint, since they all sprang out from the legacy of slavery and the slave trade. These authors wrote under specific circumstances, in this case, slavery; namely the condition or fact of being entirely subject to, or under the domination of, some power of influence. This condition manifested itself in the inscribing of race and gender onto individual and national bodies. In their own way, writers stepped into a literary tradition born out of the legacy of transatlantic slavery in the New World. Their writings demonstrate how language itself – indentured poetically, imbibed politically – became the battleground on which to fight a failing syntax of individual and national identity.

"To compare" (to bring together) does not imply an intrinsic similarity between compared objects, but rather emphasizes the act of bringing them together. The aim of this comparison is to question specific relations of power: to bring these texts together implies to go against a separation kept, to date, by historians and literary critics. Firstly, to look at the literary testimonies from Afro-descendant women in different European colonies exclusively as part of a national tradition dissimulates the global dimension of slavery and therefore of the stories about transatlantic slavery. In addition, the failure to see the interconnectedness of the texts written mostly in the New World and Europe allow Europe nations to close their eyes on their historical responsibilities in regard to transatlantic slavery. Overall, to bind the narratives of the Afro-descendants who dealt with the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade to national narratives from American countries reduces their political value. These three authors, in fact, despite the geopolitical territoriality of their writings and the clear references to the processes of nationalization in which they take part (especially for the Brazilian and Cuban authors), always have a clear critical reference to Europe as the centre of oppressive powers.

The objective of this research, then, is to reconnect these narratives, in order to spark interest in global responsibilities on a story that cannot be bound to individual national contexts. This is also the reason why I refer to these texts as parts of broader traditions than merely the national ones, like Spanish-Cuban, Brazilian-Portuguese

and British-Caribbean. I therefore ask the readers to interpret this choice as a serious reminder of the effective links among different literary experiences that recall globally transatlantic slavery, for which many European countries have still not taken historical responsibility.

As a case in point, whereas England (together with the United States and partially France) has taken responsibilities for its involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, (as the inspiring study edited by Franca Dellarosa, *Slavery, Histories, Fictions, Memory, 1760-2007* shows), other European countries such as Spain and Portugal had "una política de la memoria histórica incapaz de promover entre la sociedad civil española la asunción del reconocimiento de la tragedia humana que supuso la trata trasatlántica"[18], as underlined by José Antonio Piqueras en *La esclavitud en las Españas. Un lazo trasatlántico* (15).

Eventually, I would like to bring Afro-descendant literature back into the field of European literature. This ambitious transition stems from the fact that Afro-descendant texts force us to cross national and Atlantic borders, allowing us to rethink European literature in the context of transatlantic slavery's legacy. As Paul Gilroy (*The Black Atlantic*, 1990) suggests there is, in fact, what he calls a Black Atlantic area that connects, through global studies, the experiences of African-American trafficking to Europe, the founder and promoter of such experiences. Nevertheless, Paul Gilroy's work itself, coming from a UK-centric post-colonial perspective, is limited to the English linguistic and cultural context. Therefore, my goal is to expand the North Atlantic to the whole Atlantic, including the South. In fact, "global" is too often understood in critical theory as "global North" or "global South"[19], while I believe there is a need to rethink North and South together, combining post-colonial and de-colonial studies in North and Latin America.

Through a blend of hermeneutical approaches that combine structuralism and historicist readings of the literary text, a reading of the forms and meanings of this trans-hemispheric exchange will be made possible. Even if the texts are not unified by one single aesthetic or literary genre, they engage in a dialogue with each other as

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[18] Transl. mine: "A policy of historical memory unable to promote among Spanish civil society the recognition of the human tragedy that transatlantic trafficking entailed".
[19] On the meaning of the world "global" and how it relates to concepts of "Global Soth" or "Global North", see: *Encyclopedia of Global Studies,* Helmut K. Anheier, Mark Juergensmeyer (2012).

they represent either the beginning or the end of the formation of a collective identity, with the common traits being the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade and the experience of slavery.

In this case, literature is only one – and certainly not the most important – of the many aesthetic expressions that have contributed culturally to this process. We know, in fact, that music and dance played a leading role in the slave and Afro-descendant communities.[20] This is partially responsible for why we have so few literary testimonies.

Literature in the colonial context was the tool of the educated audience, even among the settlers themselves. The illiteracy rate was very high in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in comparison to the English ones[21]. As Stephen Jay Greenblatt argued in *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (1992), literature turns out to be, in the American colonial context, a powerful tool for the creation of hierarchies. As a result, although literature was not the privileged form of Afro-descendant communities, it was probably the only form that targeted a more variegated readership (including Europeans, masters and mistresses), allowing the 'other' to speak aloud. Conceived as such, this literature also involved a definition of writers' identity since it was a way of displaying their stories to the world. In their relationship with the external world, the examined writers generated a dialectic of self-definition and naming. In this way, their texts helped and contributed to the construction of a historical memory.

Retrospectively affirming a global link between these authors, and therefore highlighting the common experience of Afro-descendants in different colonial and national contexts, can thus take place not through direct confrontation but by starting a dialogue that brings out the common aspects of these experiences, aspects that have, until now, been ignored.

The first step for this to happen is to restore the literary dignity of these texts, which have been historically excluded from any national or international literary

[20] See: Romare Bearden, Harry Henderson, *A History of African-American Artists. From 1792 to the Present*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1993 and Cimbala, Paul A. "Black Musicians from Slavery to Freedom: An Exploration of an African-American Folk Elite and Cultural Continuity in the Nineteenth-Century Rural South." *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 80, no. 1, 1995, pp. 15–29..
[21] See: Jennifer Monaghan, E. L. Barry, Arlene, 1999, *Writing the Past: Teaching Reading in Colonial America and the United States, 1640-1940.*

canon. This research indeed could also contribute to the reconfiguration of literary canons defined on national lines.

When I employ the term "canon", I refer to the definition given by Ann Thompson in the article entitled "The literary canon and the classic text" (1988), in which she affirms that:

> The literary canon can be narrowly defined as that which is accepted as authentic (as for example in the context of distinguishing canonical from apocryphal works in relation to the Bible or to Shakespeare), but it is usually defined more broadly as that which is assumed to be 'good' literature, in fact the 'best' literature: that which is worth preserving and passing on from one generation to the next. (60)

The literary canon, intended as the core of the fictional works considered intrinsically or extrinsically study-worthy, is then defined indirectly by the attention that a text obtains in a specific culture.[22] Influential critics, museum directors, literary critics and academic scholars and professors are chief enforcers of the canon. Additionally, the selection done by editors to include or not include a creative narration in eminent anthologies constitute part of the process of the formation of the canon. Hitherto, to appear in the major anthologies of international publishers means to have achieved status and accessibility to a reading public, a status that none of the selected authors of this dissertation have so far achieved.[23]

2.7. Choosing labels: Negro, Black, Afro

As a trilingual project and a theory of reading that links literary comparison and translation, this research brings about a unique set of complications. Many complications also arise through the use of the lexicon. Seeing as the topic is highly

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[22] For further insight on the idea of the literary canon, see: Jeremy Hawthorn, "Canon," in Hawthorn, *A Glossaryof Contemporary Literary Theory* (London: Edward Arnold1922, 26; also Paul Lauter, *Canons and Contexts*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Herbert Lindenberg, *The History in Literature: On Value,Genre, Institutions* (New York: Columbia University Press,1990).

[23] As a matter of fact, the name of Mary Prince has becoming to enter the British academy, since Mary Prince is anthologized in both *Pickering & Chatto Women's Studies Collection I* and in *Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, and Others: Early Black British Writing*, edited by Alan Richardson and Debbie Lee (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004); as well as in Karina Williamson ed., *Contrary Voices: Representations of West Indian Slavery, 1657-1834* (University of the West Indies Press, 2008).

sensitive and has only recently been considered of global interest[24], there is still an emergent terminology, which differs for each national tradition, rendering the translation of some of these terms into English approximate. Most of the time, I have tried to make choices in the interest of clarity. For example, I have decided to employ the word "slave", even though the word "captive" is often preferred by Iberian scholars.

For political reasons, I have generally avoided using the word 'black', preferring the word "Afro-descendant" in an attempt to account for a wider range of systems of racial categorization in the New and Old World, while at the same time linking them to a common history of transatlantic slavery.[25] Contextually, I have tried to elude any kind of distinction between mulattoes, blacks, or any other categorization emanating from racial hierarchies, common in colonial and European territories[26], usually with highly negative connotations. For instance, the word "mulatto" is the Anglicised translation of the Portuguese and Spanish word *mulato*, which was often used in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries to mean "mule". Accordingly, labels uch as "black" and "negroes" have additionally been avoided, given their potentially

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[24] Among many others, see: "What's in a name? Negro vs. Afro-American vs. Black", *Ebony*, 23, 1967, pp. 46-54; Smith, Tom W. "Changing Racial Labels: From 'Colored' to 'Negro' to 'Black' to 'African American.'" *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 56, no. 4, 1992, pp. 496–514; Martin, Ben L. "From Negro to Black to African American: The Power of Names and Naming." *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 106, no. 1, 1991, pp. 83–107; Agyemang C, Bhopal R, Bruijnzeels M Negro, Black, Black African, African Caribbean, African American or what? Labelling African origin populations in the health arena in the 21st century Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health 2005;59: 1014-1018. It could be also interestingly to review popular media attention to the matter:
https://edition.cnn.com/2014/02/19/living/biracial-black-identity-answers/index.html
https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/02/us/racial-terms-that-make-you-cringe.html (last accessed 31/08/2018)
[25] The term "black" has undergone considerable change since the 1950s. The North American Civil Rights Movement challenged the term's earlier negative connotations. Relevantly, it was employed in crucial political struggles against white racism in the USA, such as by the Black Panthers (with their famous motto "black is beautiful") and more recently by "black life matters" movements, among many others. However, it has recently been challenged as being particularly divisive and unhelpful (see: Ben L. Martin, From Negro to Black to African American: The Power of Names and Naming, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 106, No. 1 (Spring, 1991), pp. 83-107. As for the aim of this dissertation I find more adaquate to employ the definition of "Afro-Americans", inasmuch as it serves to emphasize the African ancestry of the subjects involved as related to transatlantic slavery.
[26] See: López Beltrán, Carlos: «Pureza y mestizajes en las sociedades de castas americanas», artículo en el sitio web Filosóficas, de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; Davis, Kingsley (1978). "Casta, clase y estratificación", in *La sociedad humana*, Buenos Aires, Eudeba, pp. 355-382. Ares Quejia, Berta y Alessandro Stella, coordinadores (2000). Negros, mulatos, zambiagos: derroteros africanos en los mundos ibéricos. Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos; Navarro García, Luis (1989). *El sistema de castas. Historia general de España y América: los primeros Borbones*. Ediciones Rialp; Steven J. Gold, "From Jim Crow to racial hegemony: Evolving explanations of racial hierarchy", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 27: 6, 2004, pp. 951-968.

depreciative quality when applied to human beings. For this reason, I preferred to refer to the subjects' ancestry (using the word Afro-descendant) rather than to a particular idea of racial belonging.

I use the term Afro-descendant to refer to a broadly imagined community of African descent. Such imagined communities were constructed not only politically but also through literature, which I define here as the craft of telling stories and constructing narratives using the imagination. These imagined communities relied on poetic elements to create collective fictions about their history. The term Afro-descendant replaces exclusively specific nation based terms also largely employed in this dissertation, such as Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Cuban or African-American, not as a means of conflating them but as a way of placing them under a broader umbrella.

As a matter of fact, the word "Afro-descendant" (like Afro-Americans, Afro-Cuban, Afro-Brazilian, and so on) has too been criticized by some scholars[27] inasmuch as it could express a condition of marginalisation of the people of African ancestry in the New world, and therefore it could represent a failure to integrate and accept them into society. However, for the time (the nineteenth century) and the literary works I am referring to, to claim African ancestry was usually a strong political act of agency, and it is following this symbolic significance that I am choosing those words.

"Race" is also a highly controversial term cautiously used, since I generally agree with the political position of Paul Gilroy (*Against Race*, 2000) who attacks "essentialist" ideas about race, i.e. scientific, political or ideological definitions of race that are absolutist.[28] However, the writers themselves frequently explicitly use both the terms "race" and "negro". This is especially the case of Maria Cristina

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[27] See for instance: Erica Hall, *Whites view the term "African-American" more favorably than "black"*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/gdpr-consent/?destination=%2fnews%2fwonk%2fwp%2f2014%2f11%2f18%2fwhites-view-the-term-african-american-more-favorably-than-black%2f%3f&utm_term=.1199b2b78829 (last accessed 31/08/2018) and Enrico Pitzianti, *No, non dite Afro-Italiani*, https://www.glistatigenerali.com/africa_immigrazione/no-non-dite-afro-italiani/ (last accessed 31/08/2018).

[28] As a matter of fact, that "race" is a cultural concept with no biological foundation is a fact ascertained by genetic research - despite persisting attempts to suggest otherwise. https://www.americananthro.org/ConnectWithAAA/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=2583 (last accessed 28/01/2019). See also: Laura Chrisman. "The Vanishing Body of Frantz Fanon in Paul Gilroy's *Against Race* and *After Empire*." *The Black Scholar*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2011, pp. 18–30 and Aronowitz, Stanley. "Contemporary Sociology." *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 30, no. 6, 2001, pp. 559–561.

Fragas (alias Cristina Ayala, *Capter IV*), who clearly refers in her poetry to the *raza negra*. Writing in a time when the idea of race was only starting to take shape in scientific and public discourses, the meanings given to these terms of course have to be contextualized in the time in which they were employed.

A number of scholars have defined specific definitions and manifestations of race in Brazil[29], Cuba[30] and the United States and the importance these terms have for the culture in which they born. However, race is not the lens I want to employ in order to look at the texts, since this is not a comparative study of people or culture, but a comparative analysis of literary texts. The study of these texts requires a particular theoretical framework whose contours are delineated in the next section, as well as in the following chapter.

3. Methodology employed for the analysis of the texts

3.1. Feminist studies on literature: possible methodologies and approaches

Feminist criticism plays a central role in addressing the creative task of envisaging new futures. Having existed in Modern times as one of the contradictions of democratic values, feminisms have repeatedly been a source of innovation and a driving force for change. As Joan Scott claims in her inspiring book, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (2011), feminism is a restless critical operation whose "historical specificity comes from the fact that it works within and against whatever are the prevailing foundational assumptions of its time. Its critical force comes from the fact that it exposes the contradictions in systems that claim to be coherent" (Scott 35).

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[29] The work by Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987) is among the most famous reflection on races in Brazil. In books such *Casa-Grande & Senzala* (1933) and *Sobrados e Mucambos* (1936), he argued that the racial mixing of miscegenation in colonial Brazil defined the relationship between enslaved African and their Portuguese masters. This practice of miscegenation, Freyre maintained, produced a more fluid system of racial categorization in Brazil, described by the term "racial democracy". Frank Tennenbaum (*Slave and Citizen*, 1946) and Carl Degler (*Neither Black nor White*, 1971) have also argued against the binary distinction between black and white in Brazil. Each of these theories have been challenged over the past decades. Luiz Alberto Oliveira Goncalves (2003) noted an ideological fusion between slavery and race.
[30] Some influential authors on concepts and definition of races in Cuba include Ethnomusicologist and scholar Fernando Ortiz (*Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, 1940), who devised the term "transculturation" to describe various cultural phenomena in Cuba. The same concept is put forth by Cuban poet Nancy Morejón ("Race and Nation", 1993).

Feminisms serve to de-familiarize the terrain of other historians (Scott 36). Both Rosi Braidotti and Joan Scott[31] talk about de-familiarization as the activity of questioning "the meanings taken for granted, the terms by which historians had explained the past, the lists of so-called appropriate topics for historical research [...] shown to be neither as comprehensive nor as objective as had previously been believed" (Scott 36). This goal has been pursued via an interdisciplinary perspective that, in the words of Joan Scott, is not:

> An anarchic refusal of discipline, but a subversive use of its methods and a more self-conscious willingness to entertain topics and approaches that were once considered out of bounds. It's what we don't know that entices us; it's new stories that we yearn to tell, new memories that we seek to reveal. Our passion for women's history was a desire to know and this what had hitherto been unthinkable. Passion, after all, thrives on the pursuit of the not-yet-known. (Scott 40)

In the present work, I will look at the past via the study of literature of marginalized subjects from the slave trade in English, Spanish and Portuguese languages in order to move towards a critical rethinking of the present and of possible futures.

3.1.1. A Feminist toolbox

Feminist literary criticism is not a unitary or coherent system of analysis or a unified system of methodologies. Yet, its ever-changing nature is what made possible for it to confront with postmodern and multicultural issues and to evolve in time.

The essay *When We Dead Awaken. Writing as Revision* written by Adrienne Rich in 1972, can be considered as the milestone of the feminist literary criticism, which shaped the critical tendency of the seventies in the United States. It put forth the idea of studying literature by re-visioning male works from a female historical perspective and by dismantling gender stereotypes infused all around narratives, with the aim to re-evaluate women's writings. The process of revision, as Rich described it, does not imply an ideological reading of literature, it represents instead the proposal of a new epistemology, able to question the canon, by introducing new aesthetic criteria and interpretative strategies. Thus, what is put in to question is the neutral formation of the canon, revised through a feminist perspective, which means underlining its

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[31] See: Joan Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (2011) and Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (2011).

prejudices and the zones of silence it created. The revision of the canon leads to a redrawing of literary history, changing the historical divisions of time and movements, by showing how language, styles, literary conventions and literary genres, as well as the same act of reading[32] have had specific male connotations (Corona 128).

In particular, a reflection on literary genres has been advanced by feminist authors such as Mary Eagleton ("Gender and Genre", 1989), Philip Cox (*Gender and Genre and the Romantic Poets*, 1996) and Nancy Armstrong (*Desire And Domestic Fiction A Political History Of The Novel*, 1987). Their studies unravel the gender stereotypes present in the categorization and study of literary genres. For instance, Mary Eagleton highlights the difficulty for women writers to gain access to the major genres, such as epics, poetries and tragedies, but also their involvement in popular forms of writing such as romance fiction, diaries, or women's rewritings of man-dominated forms, like detective stories or science fiction (Eagleton). Furthermore, Philip Cox presents an exploration of the relationship between gender issues and genre choice in the work of the canonical male poets of the Romantic period, showing how such poetic genres as pastoral, sonnet, ode, epic and drama are deployed. All of their critical works have inspired my choice to put together different literary genres in a single study in order to prove how Afro-descendant women writers have been involved in their development.

In addition to these critical readings, starting from the 1970s, there have been also a series of studies focused on the use and acquisition of language, such as Julia Kristeva's *La révolution du langage poétique* (1974), Tillie Olsen's *Silences* (1980), and Adrienne Rich's *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (1979).[33] These became an important strand of feminist thought that was then re-problematised with the study of the political value of language (as in the work of Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech. A politics of the Performative*, 1997), above all from a (post) colonial perspective, as

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[32] For the attention given to female readership see the pioneering books: S. Felma, 1993, *What does a woman want? Reading and Sexual Difference*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; and J. Fetterly, 1978, *The Resisting reader. A Feminist Approach to American fiction*, Bloomington: Indiana UP.
[33] See: D. Cameron, 1990, *The Feminist Critique of Language*, New York: Routledge and M. Humm, 1994, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Criticism*, New York and London: Hervwster Wheatsheaf.

done by Chantal Zabus in *The African palimpsest. Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel* (1991).

The complex revision of literary tradition undertaken by feminist literary researchers redesigns the historical periodisation and launches the construction of new aesthetic and critical canons. It also adds new interpretative strategies for the construction of an independent criticism and a strong theory along with it. Moreover, this effort to search for women's writings led to the rescue of a varied but not discontinuous female literary tradition. For instance, the study *No Man's Land* (1987) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar read the twentieth century literary history in regards to sexual conflict, from a postmodern perspective. Furthermore, in North America, the search for creative and critical women's works led to a renewed interest in popular culture[34], with particular attention given to the intersection of race and class. The intersection was highlighted mainly thanks to the uprising of Afro-American and 'Third World' feminisms, which put post-colonial issues of race and class at the centre of the debate from the 1980s onwards.[35]

3.1.2. The four branches of feminist literary criticism

Overall, the feminist literary criticism is an interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary field in which anthropology, history, philosophy and sociology are intertwined. It has had, since its first moves, a privileged relationship with psychoanalysis, both for the many studies on the topic of the relation between subjectivity and writing and for the conceptual elaboration of sexual difference. As Daniela Corona suggests, there are various methodologies that have been proposed for the development of feminist literary criticism. Looking back at the history of feminist literary criticism, Corona

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[34] See: L.S. Robinson, 1978, *Sex, Class and Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press and Susan Friedman, 1996, "Beyond Gynocriticism and Gynesis", *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literatures*, 15.

[35] See the pioneering studies: B. Christian, 1980, *Black Women Novelist. The Development of a tradition 1892-1976*, Westport: Greenwood Press; B. Christian, 1985*, Black Feminist Criticism*, New York: Pergamon; K. H. Katrak, 1989, "Decolonizing Culture. Toward a theory for Post-colonial Women's Texts", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 35.1, pp. 157-179; C. Moraga and G. Andaluz, 1981, *This Bridge called my Back. Writings by Radical Women of Colour*, Watertown: Persephone Press; B. Smith, 1997, *Toward a Black Feminist Criticism*, New York: Crossing Press; V. Smith, 1989, "Black Feminist Theory and the Representation of the Other", in A.C. Well (ed.), *Changing our own words*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press; and G. Ch. Spivak, "Three Women's text and a Critique of Imperialism", *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1.

identifies four main currents, each with a specific methodological framework that evolved over time: Anglo-American, sexual difference, post-feminist, and post-colonial or black.

The Anglo-American current has Elain Showalter as its main theorist[36]. Showalter proposed a critique of literary productions on the basis of what she called *gynocriticism*. Gynocriticism is for Showalter a way to question literary canons from which women were often excluded in order to create a tradition of women's writers. Gynocriticism as such is then combined with *gynesis*, meaning textual analysis based on gender as the main cultural variable, often considered from a psychoanalytic perspective. Therefore, while gynocriticism is the historical study of women writers as belonging to a different literary tradition from men, gynesis is the theoretical reading of the feminine as an outcome of discursive practices that change the master narrative in Western societies[37].

In *A literature of their own. British women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1976), Showalter makes a further distinction between women writers and feminist writers. The latter, in fact, is an approach to writing as a collective and conscious work with the final goal of the sharing of female experiences, ideally leading to an autonomous representation of female subjectivity (Showalter, *A Literature Of Their Own* 10). Showalter maintains that women of every generation have faced that lack of a historical tradition, and have therefore always had to re-build an unknown past. Women writers, studied in relation to women of both their times and of the past, in public and private life, have consequently slowly built a subculture with their own values and experiences which Showalter analyses in regards to English literature.

A different approach to women's literature comes from the French theorists of sexual difference, also known as the theorists of *écriture feminine* (women's writing). This theory unravels the relationship between the cultural and psychological inscription of woman's body and the difference between women and men in language and text. Theorists such as Hélène Cixous, Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray,

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[36] By Elein Showalter see: *A literature of their own. British women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977, Princenton-Guildford, Princenton UP), "Towards a Feminist Poetics" (1979, in M. Jacobus, *Women's Writing and Writing about women*, London: Croom Helm), "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (in *The New Feminist Criticism*, New York: Pantheon) and *Speaking of Gender* (1989, New York: Routledge).

[37] See also: Alice Jardin, 1985, *Gynesis. Configurations of Woman in the Contemporary Imagination*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Chantal Chawaf, Catherine Clément, and Julia Kristeva initiated this strand of criticism in France in the early seventies[38]. These theorists insisted on the embodiedness of sexual difference and on the subsequent relation between body and language, by proposing the idea that language itself is sexually connoted and needs to be accounted for and analysed. For instance, Adriana Cavarero in *Per una teoria della differenza sessuale* (1987) stresses the fact that women do not possess yet an original language; thus they have to use a foreign language, which is that of men. In this experience of a missing language, lines of escapes and silences find place. Whereas in philosophy women are silent, the poetic and narrative discourse offers more flexible tools to evoke the possible signs of our missing female language using the male foreign tongue (Rastaino and Cavarero 193), also suggested by Julia Kristeva in her pioneering book, *La Révolution Du Langage Poétique* (1974).

During the nineties, both the theoretical positioning advanced by philosophers of sexual difference and by the gynocriticism/gynesis approaches have been highly criticized, inasmuch as they assumed sexual difference to be binary (namely, as the opposition of female-male subjects). Even though sexual difference is questioned by theorists of both strains in its essentialism and in its biological nature, subjects that do not fit into male or female categorizations struggled to find themselves within these theories.[39] Therefore, lesbian, gay, queer and transgender studies have helped to reshape the concept of sexual difference through the notion of gender fluidity and sexual orientation.

Another important contribution to feminist literary methodology has come from African-American and post-colonial studies from the eighties onward. Female African-American literary criticism was initiated by Valerie Smith, Audre Lorde, bell hooks and Barbara Smith[40], who insisted on the representation of the female

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[38] Their millstone works have become classics in the feminist movement: Hélène Cixous, *Le rire de la Méduse* (1975); Monique Wittig *L'Opoponax* (1964); Luce Irigaray *Speculum. De l'autre femme* (1974); Chantal Chawaf, *Cercœur* (1975), Catherine Clément, *Bildoungue ou la vie de Freud* (1978); and Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution Du Langage Poétique* (1974).

[39] In particular the critical works by Donna Haraway, Teresa de Lauretis, Rosi Braidotti, Judith Butler and Christine Battersby have been highly influencing.

[40] Among their most influential works there are: Barbara Smith, 1997, *Toward a Black Feminist Criticism*, New York: Crossing Press; Valerie Smith, 1989, "Black Feminist Theory and the Representation of the Other", in A.C. Well (ed.), *Changing our own words*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press; bell hooks, 1984, *Feminist Theory. From Margin to Center*, Boston: South End Press; Audre Lorde, 1984, "The Master's Tool Will Never Dismantle the Master's House", in *Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches*, New York: Crossing Press, pp. 110-113.

body in literature, not only in terms of the analysis of gender roles but also considering race and class relationships. The standpoints of Afro-American feminists redefined the study of literary texts through the political inclusion of slavery and the abused bodies of black women in literary studies.

This feminist Afro-American literary tradition deals with questions of orality and writing, the relations between margins and centres, and the subversion of literary genres operated by black women, even in relation to white women. By proposing a new epistemology, Afro-American feminists of the seventies and eighties have intertwined categories of belonging, the female body in slavery, and abuse of Afro-women's bodies in American history. For instance, Barbara Christian ("Fixing Methodologies, *Beloved*", 1993) studies Toni Morrison's *Beloved* not only with psychoanalytic instruments but also in the light of African cultural traditions and the experience of the middle passage. Beyond the construction of the canon, literature is seen in this tradition particularly as a site of resistance and opposition[41], reinventing the literary genre while producing specific fictional texts, poems and oral testimonies[42].

3.1.3. The standpoint of "interactive readings"

Among these various methodological approaches, the most consistent with the study of the selected author is based on the "new geography of identities", as Susan Friedman calls them in *Mappings: feminism and the cultural geographies of encounter* (1997). In order to account for the recent critical stances proposed by post-colonial studies, multiculturalism, interculturalism and anthropology, Friedman proposes to centre feminist literary criticism on space, namely on the geography of mappings and re-mappings and on the ever-changing cultural formations. The location of identity implies a shift from the Romantic literary paradigm to the postmodern one and from feminism to post-feminism. Indeed, the new geographies of identity have addressed the need inside feminist literary criticism to operate a change from "gender" as the main category for textual analysis to locational

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[41] See: C. T. Moahnty, 1984, "Under Western Eyes", *Boundary*, 2, pp. 12-13.
[42] See: D. Sommer, 1988, "Not Just a Personal Story. Women's Testimonios and the Plural Self", in C. Schenck, B. Brodzi (ed), *Life/Lines*, Cornell UP, pp. 107-130.

feminism, namely to a feminist analysis with a strong geographical component that goes beyond gender.

As discussed above, gender was the first and sometimes the only category of analysis in feminist literary criticism, which served both the practice of gynocriticism and gynesis. Conversely, Friedman proposes to complicate the discourses on gynocriticism and gynesis, based mainly on women-man dualism, by mixing gender with the new geographies of positionality. She suggests doing so by pluralizing gynocriticism with traditions of Afro-American, Asian-American, and other non-European women writers.[43]

In the North-American theories, what led to the shift from a gender-based paradigm to a locational-based one, according to Friedman, were six different strain of discourses. The first one is the discourse on identity as characterized by multiple oppressions or "double jeopardy", which developed in the 1970s and 1980s[44]. The second critical standpoint involves the idea of identity as a combination of differences, but not necessarily of oppressions[45]. The third one considers contradictory subject positions[46], whereas the fourth approach insists on relationality.[47] Furthermore, situational approaches represent the fifth discourse on identities.[48] Lastly, there are discourses on hybridism that come from ethnic, post-colonial, and Diaspora studies[49] which think of identities as hybrid spaces produced by migrations, exile, and frontiers.

The six discourses mentioned above lead to the definition of a new practice for gynocriticism based on locational feminism. Friedman claims that to reconfigure our

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[43] However, since Susan Stanford Friedman's context of the production of her theory is North America, we should also keep in mind the geographical location of her theory.

[44] By underlining the differences among women, the aim was to define identity not only in terms of gender but also to unveil other forms of simultaneous oppressions that a woman can experience due to her race or class. This was defended by theorists such as Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Barbara Smith, Chandra T. Mohanty, Gloria Andaluza, Adrienne Rich.

[45] Including the works of Gloria Andaluza, Sheila Benhabib, Teresa de Lauretis, Donna Haraway, Sarah Harding, Adrienne Rich, Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty.

[46] From this standpoint, contradiction is the main subject's feature (for instance, an oppressed woman on the side of gender can be a privileged subject for class to which she belongs). In this instance, the global distribution of power cannot simply be understood using categories such as the oppressor/the oppressed, and instead is much more complicated.

[47] Namely that epistemological is a standpoint for identity, according to which subjectivity is not only multiple and contradictory but also relational. Therefore, fluid identities are made by different axes of differentiation related between them.

[48] According to this point of view, different axes of differentiation for subjectivities acquire diverse meanings and values depending on the context in which they arise.

[49] Such as Gloria Andaluza, Hong Kingstone and Rushdie.

literary criticism through these new geographies means to engage in "interactive readings", or readings that are not based on gender only, isolated by other factors. Talking about James Joyce's *Ulysses*, for instance, Friedman affirms:

> Gynocriticism and gynesis do not have sufficient flexibility to explore the negotiation of multiple and interlocking cultural narratives in *Ulysses*. The new geographics of identity calls into question readings of gender in isolation from other cultural narratives based in anti-Semitism, heterosexism, and the colonization of the Irish; instead, they foster interactive readings that demonstrative how these cultural narratives function as symbiotic and interdependent systems. (Friedman 31)

To go beyond gender could be perceived as unsettling for feminist thinkers, in the view of the fact that gender was the main focus of academic feminism's intellectual inquiry since its inception (Friedman 18). However, what Friedman is suggesting is a feminist critical work rooted in gynocriticism and gynesis but modified by these new geographies of identity (31). Accordingly, the methodology she is proposing and that I am following considers the vitality of gynocriticism and gynesis as a pre-condition for the development of integrative analysis of the various constituents of identity (Friedman 33).

Literary criticism, as any other production of knowledge, implies "the foregrounding of certain categories and the muting of others", inasmuch as "bringing one set of phenomena into focus depends upon allowing others to go out of focus" (Friedman 32). For instance, in relation to a piece of literature, we can consider the literary movement (Naturalism, Romanticism, etc.) in which it has its place, the ethnic and national traditions (American, Chinese, etc.) behind it, the genre (poetry, play, novel), or the identity historical group (like Afro-American) to which the author belongs. Therefore, the need to include in each of the chosen focuses the analysis of gender relations is based on the fact that:

> A gynocritical reading of women writers in the context of a female literary tradition makes visible such patterns as mother-daughter relations, resistance to the marriage plot, and the double jeopardy of identities formed in between race and gender—patterns that did not come into focus by reading these women in the context of categories like the Victorian novel, modernism, or the Harlem Renaissance. A gynetic probing of the linguistic processes and effects of gender as distinct from other constituents of subjectivity can bring to the fore the binaries of body and desire as they shape and are shaped by language—issues that went unexamined in poetics that ignored a consideration of gender. (Friedman 32)

Likewise, to engage in a gynocritical reading of female writers helps to disentangle important gender elements that would not come up otherwise. Given that epistemology is political and that knowledge is situated, politically, it is still very important to contest the patriarchy and sexism which still exist today (in spite of their modifications). Therefore, "it is politically imperative that the discourses of gynocriticism and gynesis continue as long as women writers and the issue of the feminine is trivialized or marginalized"; after all, "the feminine exists under constant threat of erasure or appropriation" (Friedman 32).

Consequently, for the aim of this dissertation, the reading of Mary Prince, Cristina Ayala, and Maria Firmina dos Reis' works will be based on interactive readings, insofar as texts and authors will be studied in their historical and cultural contexts of belonging (colonialism, slavery and the slave trade) and in their genre (life narratives and novels), but they will always be intersected by gynesis and gynocriticism. In addition to these focuses, the assumption that they belong to what Deleuze and Guattari called "minor literature" will be tested by the analysis of the language employed in the novels.

How is textual analysis configured according to interactive readings proposed by Friedman, then? Firstly, as far as the writer is concerned we must account for the fluidity of gender and of identity of authors when we study them in the context of the text. Politically, it is not possible from a locationalism perspective to ignore it, as Barthes and poststructuralism would like, for we must account for the positionality of the writer (Friedman 27). At the same time, the writer should not have absolute power; instead, they will be always considered in relation to the text, highlighting their embodiment without, however, privileging gender issues over other factors. As underlined, critics who joined gynocriticism and gynesis dismantled gender issues but sometimes marginalized other aspects of identities. This is why for the aim of this research I am not focusing solely on the gender of the author, but I am also taking into account this new geography of identities by considering the author's identities as fluid entities in which class, ethnicity and historical positioning have eminent roles. As Friedman said:

> The new geography of identity insists that we think about women writers in relation to a fluid
> matrix instead of a fixed binary of male/female or masculine/feminine. In so doing, the

justification for focusing on women loses its cogency. Instead, the interactional, relational, and situational constituents of identity for both male and female writers should be read together. The multiple and contradictory subject positions of writers need to be accounted for, and the very presence of hybridity undermines the gynocritical predisposition to single out gender. (Friedman 28)

Accordingly, it follows that what is valid for the identity of the author will similarly be employed for the analysis of the characters' identity, together with the analysis of the place that those subjectivities occupy in systems of power and oppressions. Therefore, an interactional analysis of different constituents of identity (fluid interaction of race class sexuality) and national origin, along with gender, will be done for characters as well with special care not to privilege one aspect (i.e. gender) over the others (i.e. oppressor, slave, colonized subject).

Second, special attention will be given to cultural narratives, which is to say to "all circulating discourses on subjectivity and alterity" and not only gender (Friedman 30). The themes analysed in the novels or life narratives will be related to the cultural history and politics in which they arose. Hence, a central question we will try to answer is how cultural narratives are negotiated in the texts and which kind of cultural role they perform when they enter the literary domain (Friedman 29). According to Friedman, cultural narratives "exist consciously or unconsciously as a vertical dimension within the horizontal narrative space and time the characters inhabit" (Friedman 30).[50]

To accomplish these tasks, it is necessary to shift from a gender-only based analysis to interactive readings, even in respect to dichotomies such as "black/white" or "us/them", as they promote a narrative of relational positionality. This term means to consider identity as a crossroads of different systems of alterity and stratifications; in other words, an interlocking system of oppression. By recognizing the multiplicity of fluid identity against pluralism and identity politics, is ultimately possible to to analyse the movement of power not as a unidirectional imposition, but as a net (as

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[50] Friedman asks: "Are, for example, these cultural narratives textual sites of contradiction, clashing against each other, or do they intensify each other in collaboration? Which ones are privileged and which ones are marginalized by the writer or the text as a whole? Do they function progressively or regressively? Do different readers bring different readings to these cultural narratives depending on their own epistemological locations?"

Michel Foucault suggested). This means to concentrate not only on subjectivities' differences but also on their shared values and communalities.

Friedman (87) recalls James Clifford's idea of "travelling cultures" in order to emphasise the need to study the roots of cultural traditions, but always in relation to the intercultural routes that the same traditions symbolize. This idea has been expressed also by Paul Gilroy with the depiction of "the Black Atlantic", in which the ship represents a trope for the black Diaspora, characterized not only by its routes but also by contact points. Encounters and exchanges represent the two key words for the setting of the essential feature of interactive readings, which is the development of geopolitical literacy.

How are intercultural encounters and exchanges expressed? Following Friedman:

> The ethnographic encounter in that space involves a further movement back and forth between alterity and mimesis, between the sameness and difference […] also constitutes *a* (not *the*) propelling force in narrative. Desire of some kind certainly underlies a part of this story. But the contradictory tensions between sameness and difference cannot be explained solely in terms of oedipal and post-oedipal plottings of desire, however much these stories may be a part of the narrative. Thus, a dialogic, spatial model of narrative displaces the exclusivity of developmental, temporal models that characterize some narrative theory. The interactive oscillations between alterity and mimesis supplement the kinetic force of *fort/da*, Eros and Thanatos, underlying the family romance plots of psychoanalytic theory. (Friedman 144)

Subsequently, instead of examining interactions and encounters exclusively on a narrative analysis that relay oedipal desire, for Friedman the tensions of Eros/Thanatos must be *supplemented* with a new spatial geography. However, there is another option, methodologically, which is to change our definition and idea of desire, since is not effective to analyse geopolitical encounter through psychoanalytic paradigms. What I am claiming is that desire can still be the main category for an examination of intercultural encounters, although, as Friedman suggests, it cannot be intended as psychoanalysis does.

In particular, to understand intercultural encounters within the larger framework of desire we should relinquish oedipal theories of desire, inasmuch as they are based on temporality (family romance, repetition and discontent), and they do not address the dimension of space, which often function only as a trope for cultural location. This will help us to address the central question we will pose to the texts:

How does the narrative get from one cultural location to another? What propels its motion, its travel? What role does the excitement, pleasure, and/or anguish of intercultural encounter play in this kind of movement? How does each space reflect the cultural production of spatialized meaning? Or, determine the nature of or changes in character? Or, provide the conditions within which the agency of the characters must maneuver? (Friedman 139)

Feminist criticism was one of the first to question the psychoanalytic framework of desire and to envision new paradigms for desires and encounters, together with Deleuze and Guattari theories. This will be the topic of the next paragraph, which will help us to understand in what direction we must go for the definition of desire as a framework for intercultural encounters, as they emerged also in the selected texts.

3.2. Encounters

The theorization of desire as non-Oedipal started from the feminist criticism[51] and from philosophy of immanence[52]. This inquiry of desire is based on the idea that desire is not as a lack but an active agent, an overabundance, the possibility of the encounter with alterity, which means, the site of the intercultural encounter, which initiates geopolitical literacy.

3.2.1. Critiques to the idea of sexes as merely biological

In her pioneering work, entitled *The Second Sex* (1949), Simon de Beauvoir underlines how the biological determinations of masculine and feminine are of extreme importance for the understanding of the condition of women, due to the fact that the body is the instrument for our contact with the world. Yet, De Beauvoir also points out that biological evidence is not a destiny, that is to say, that it is not sufficient to define a permanent hierarchy between the sexes, or to explain why women have been defined as "the other" in our society.[53]

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[51] Through the works of thinkers such as Simon De Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Helén Cixous, Rosi Braidotti, bell hooks and Gayatri Spivak (to mention but a few), as will be discussed later on in this section.
[52] The "Philosophy of immanence" is commonly understood as the theoretical standpoint according to which the world is entirely material, in contrast with the philosophy of transcendence. Gilles Deleuze qualified Baruch Spinoza as the "prince of philosophers" for his theory of immanence. Gillez Deleuze developed further this therethical frameworks with the idea of reality as a "plan of immanence".
[53] As Hélèn Cixous magistrally underlined in her essay "Sorties out and out", the "other" or "alterity" has been clearly define by Helgel: "With the dreadful simplicity that orders the movement Hegel

Following the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*Phénoménologie de la perception*, 1945), according to whom "man is not a natural species but a historical idea"[54], De Beauvoir underlines how to be a woman is a becoming (with her notorious sentence: "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", xv). In fact, sexual identities are not a fixed reality, and only in relation to the fact that women's condition changes through the time, it would be legitimate to compare it to that of men (namely, to measure their opportunities in society, what they can do and what they are capable of). The attempt to reduce the condition of a woman in the world to what she has been in the past or to what she is today falsifies the discussion on sexual difference in society because it means to assign her a destiny:

> Woman's enslavement to the species and the limits of her individual abilities are facts of extreme importance; the woman's body is one of the essential elements of the situation she occupies in this world. But her body is not enough to define her; it has a lived reality only as taken on by consciousness through actions and within a society; biology alone cannot provide an answer to the question that concerns us: why is woman the Other ? The question is how, in her, nature has been taken on in the course of history; the question is what humanity has made of the human female. (De Beauvoir 71)

Therefore, according to Beauvoir, sexual differences do not stem from biology, as far as a society is not a species. Biology indeed does not mean a social destiny: the balance of the productive and reproductive forces can take various forms, according to the different economic moments of human history, which determine the relationship between the masculine and the feminine. Following this perspective, to understand the condition of subalternity in which women found them; one must understand how nature has been reworked in them throughout history. Psychoanalysis has been helpful in achieving this task, by adding to the object-body of the scientists, the body experienced by the subject. However, psychoanalysis,

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erected as a system, society trots along before my eyes reproducing to perfection the mechanism of the death struggle: the reduction of a "person" to a "nobody" to the position of "other"– the inexorable plot of racism. There has to be some "other"– no master without a slave [...]. They assemble the machine and keep the alternator supplied so that it reproduces all the oppositions that make economy and thought run. The paradox of otherness is that, of course, at no moment in History is it tolerated or possible as such. The other is there only to be reappropriated, recaptured, and destroyed as other. Even the exclusion is not an exclusion. Algeria was not France, but it was 'French'." (7)

[54] For an insight on Merleau-Ponty philosophy and Simon De Beauvoir, see also Sara Heinamaa, 2004, "The Soul-Body Union and Sexual Difference: From Descartes to Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir", in Lilli Alanen, Charlotte Witt, *Feminist Reflections on the History of Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

since the work undertaken by its pioneer Sigmund Freud[55], was not concerned specifically about the fate of the woman, tracing it entirely on that of man.

3.2.2. Freud's libido

Freud indeed described identically the functions of desire (called by him, "libido") for both man and woman. Therefore, De Beauvoir, as well as Luce Irigaray, Helén Cixous, and many other feminist thinkers devoted some of their criticism and analysis to the description of the libido proposed by Freud, which they try to re-work in the light of sexual difference.

The Latin term "libido", which stands for desire, is used in psychoanalysis with a specific meaning: in Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)[56], it indicates a form of vital energy that represents the psychic aspect of the sexual drive, susceptible of being invested (or directed) towards oneself or an external object. The concept of libido as a life force, a desiring push, although very ancient, acquires then a complete elaboration in the Freudian model. It indicates a psychophysical energy, quantifiable but not measurable, composed of loving and hostile impulses, provided since birth and which each of us administers in different ways. In Freud's work, the libido has no sex, however, being an active force, Freud considers it to be masculine: "The realisation of the biological goal is in fact entrusted to the aggressiveness of man and made within certain limits independent of the consent of the woman" (Freud, *Three essays on the theory of sexuality* 237).

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[55] Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis. Freud is known for having elaborated the psychoanalytic theory according to which the unconscious psychic processes influence thought, human behaviour and interactions between individuals. Starting from a medical education, he tried to establish correlations between the vision of the unconscious, symbolic representation of real processes, and its components with the physical structures of the mind and the human body. Among his most famous and influential works there are: *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899); *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905); *Totem and Taboo* (1913); *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920); *The Ego and the Id* (1923); *The Future of an Illusion* (1927).
[56] One of the first definitions of Sigmund Freud's concept of "libido" is given in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905); however, the concept was greatly expanded by Sigmund Freud after 1914, when he began to investigate the vast field of neurosis and psychosis by saying for example that the libido was not aimed at satisfying only the sexual drive of the individual, but also other basic partial drives, like food, survival, death, religion and art (*Totem and Taboo*, 1913; *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* 1915-17; *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920).

Consequently, Freud[57] conceives desire as absence or lack of the desired object (I desire what I do not have or what does not exist). Desire then has an unconscious nature. Libido is an energy that has a sexual nature, which seeks fulfilment and is constantly subjected to increases and decreases. Accordingly, it is at the basis of the transformations of drives, which are dynamic psychic processes (not hereditary instincts), which have their source in the excitement that is generated in a specific organ of the body. This excitement provokes a state of tension, a kind of impulse that leads to a goal, which consists of the erasure of the state of tension itself. The goal can be reached by possessing the object toward which the drive tends, or by the object itself.

For Freud, the objects of desire are not identical for everyone, but differ in relation to individual stories and from the sources from which they may depend. The libido and its impulses can move from time to time on privileged areas of the body, the so-called erogenous zones, to each of which correspond unconscious particular fantasies. When people desire, they want what they do not possess. The psychic dimension is therefore ruled by lack. Desire foresees interval between what I desire and the object of my desire and it is in this interval that psychic life is built.

Likewise, in the opinion of Freud, when the child is born, he does not experience this distance between desire and his satisfaction (if he is hungry he eats, etc.) and the immediate satisfaction of desire is defined by Freud as the principle of pleasure[58]. In adult life, however, this principle clashes with the impossibility of immediately achieving what we want, therefore the principle of reality intervenes, which allows us to reach the object of desire through a psychic work and not in immediacy.

Furthermore, according to Freud, the libido has no gender distinctions since it is supposed to be the same for men and women. However, while in men the libido has

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[57] The same idea is present in the work of Jacques Lacan (1901-1981). He was a French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist. Giving yearly seminars in Paris from 1953 to 1981, Lacan influenced many leading French intellectuals in the 1960s and the 1970s, especially those associated with post-structuralism. His ideas had a significant impact on post-structuralism, critical theory, linguistics, 20th-century French philosophy, film theory, and clinical psychoanalysis. Lacan has resorted to the various knowledge of knowledge to elucidate what Freud had called the unconscious, and that, according to Lacan, is closely related to language. His teaching, pursued for more than thirty years, is transmitted in the volume of the *Ecrits*, and the series of the different volumes of his *Séminaire*, not all yet published.

[58] See Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920. For a critical understanding of Freud thought, you may want to look at *The Cambridge Companion to Freud* (1992) edited by Jerome Neu and *The Freud Reader* edited by Peter Gay (1989).

active goals, in women desire has passive goals. To understand why it's necessary to explain that in Freud's thought, masculinity and femininity cannot be described solely through the biological identifications of male and female sex, but also through psychic characters. In particular, masculinity is identified with activity and femininity with passivity. In this regard, Freud argues that the woman is passive as she tends to passive goals, and this happens for two reasons. First, due to her biological nature, that is, for the role she has in sexual function, and secondly as a consequence of social norms, that is, for the fact that social impulses impose on her the repression of her life-drive. Not being authorised by social norms to be aggressive and destructive, the woman turns into a masochist. For Freud, still, femininity remains a mystery, and psychoanalysis can describe not what the woman is but how she converts so.

3.2.3. The review of Freud's idea of libido by feminist critics

Freud's description of sexual difference is intended to explain how the woman becomes passive in her growth whereas the man grows active. Freud claims, both sexes go in the same way through the early stages of libidinal development (the sadistic-anal phase), however, the female child is presented as a little man predestined to a more difficult evolution. As Luce Irigaray suggested in *Speculum. De l'autre femme* (1974), in Freud's theory, the woman is conceived as a disadvantaged little man because her genital organ is a small penis. Therefore, while in a man the development from childhood to adulthood is linear, the woman has to deal with the castration complex and the consequent complex of Electra.[59]

According to Irigaray, the libidinal economy of the woman, as described by Freud, is defined in terms of lack, envy, as the reverse, or the inverse, of male sexuality, as it revolves altogether around the "envy of the penis" (45). Envy of the penis means nothing but a distaste for one's own pleasure. For Freud, ultimately, women are what remains from the active masculine drive, they represent the total reduction of the excitation's drives (of the reassurance of death), and they are the rest

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[59] Female sexuality is addressed by Freud extensively in *Female Sexuality* (1931), for more information see the volume edited by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, entitled *Freud on Women: A Reader* (1992).

of the warrior, of the vitality (89). Thus, Freud, in order not to lose the domain of the phallus, says that all the impulses submit to the sexual function which is in turn subordinated to the penis (as an organic element which guarantees the continuation of the species). Following this perspective, the pleasure of women is never really taken into consideration.

In response to Freud's work, many feminists have stressed the need to account for a specific female libido and desire. Among them, De Beauvoir vividly argued that:

> Freud was not very concerned with woman's destiny; it is clear that he modeled his description of it on that of masculine destiny, merely modifying some of the traits. Before him, the sexologist Marañón had declared: "As differentiated energy, the libido is, one might say, a force of virile significance. We can say as much for the orgasm." According to him, women who attain orgasm are "viriloid" women; sexual fulfillment is a "one-way street" and woman is only at the halfway point. Freud does not go that far; he accepts that woman's sexuality is as developed as man's; but he barely studies it in itself. He writes: "The libido is constantly and regularly male in essence, whether in man or in woman." He refuses to posit the feminine libido in its originality: he will thus necessarily see it as a complex deviation from the human libido in general. (74)

In contrast, according to De Beauvoir, to account for female desire we must overcome the definition of libido as energy, comparing the sense of sexuality with that of other human attitudes. In fact, for De Beauvoir, the sexual drive is not an irreducible fact; since it represents only one of the many aspects of human life. Sexuality, according to this existentialist perspective, is only one of the particular ways of capturing an object. Reintroducing the idea of choice, De Beauvoir proposes a different way of thinking woman's destiny, inasmuch as she situates the woman in a world of values and gives to her behaviour a dimension of freedom. Unlike psychoanalysis, therefore, De Beauvoir tries to explain the individual not only in his/her link with the past but in terms of a future to which he/she projects himself/herself (85). Definitely, "the woman is a human being who seeks her values in a world of values which is essential to know the economic and social structure" she must be therefore studied "from an existential point of view in her total situation" (85).

3.2.5. A new understanding of desire

In order to account for a different paradigm of desire, able to express human encounters and sexual differences, as positive forces rather than as lack or appropriation, I suggest considering Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's understanding of desire (further elaborated from a feminist perspective, by radical feminist thinker Rosi Braidotti).

Deleuze and Guattari in the *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) advance three main critiques to the psychoanalytic view of desire. First, according to Deleuze and Guattari the unconscious is a site of production, not a static stage. In Freud's work, the relations that we have established with our parents shape the unconscious in childhood and remain almost unchanged in adult life, therefore the psychoanalytic standpoint describes the unconscious as a theatre where the role of Hamlet or Oedipus is recited indefinitely. Conversely, for Deleuze and Guattari the unconscious is a place of creation and constant changes, in which desires from the past come together with present and future wishes.

Second, Deleuze and Guattari criticize Freud's view of psychosis, which for Deleuze is strictly connected with desire, inasmuch as for them to desire is to rave. Contrary to what psychoanalysis argues, delirium is not related to the mother or the father, or to the Oedipal complex simply, but it concerns the whole world. People are delirious about history, geography, the tribes, the desert, the peoples, the races, and the climate. Importantly, it has a geographic-political and collective dimension, while psychoanalysis leads delirium back to family determinations only.

The two mentioned stances led to the last revise of psychoanalysis, since the third point they made, it is that desire is always established in a chain and always builds chains, by putting various factors at stake. By insisting on bringing the libido back to a single factor (namely the father, the mother, the phallus), psychoanalysis completely ignores the manifold, constructivist and chaining nature of desire. Since it has talked abstractly about desire, it theoretically supposed an object as the goal of desire (i.e. "I want a dress") and investigated in one's unconscious where this desire came from. Conversely, Deleuze and Guattari convert this scheme, by arguing that desire is never regarding a single object, since it is always concerning a broader context. Therefore, people do not simply aspire at their object of desire (i.e. "I want a

dress"), since their drive subsumes a vaster landscape of wishes (i.e. "I want that dress, for this party, to wear it with…"). So far, to desire is to create a chain, to build a linkage, not to want something isolated.

Afterwards, the concatenations that we build through desire are for Deleuze and Guattari, always connected to the terrain of the *socious*.[60] This is one of the biggest differences with psychoanalytic theory, which considers desire mainly connected to the individual and its singularity. The intimate connection between desire production and social production is recovered by Deleuze and Guattari through the famous image of the "Body without organs". The "Body without organs" constitutes the (social) body to which desire connects in a movement of union and disunion. However, it is also the invisible body of capital (capital as proliferation: money that still produce money. Desire literally moves on the points of disjunction or intensity on the terrestrial network. By emerging from the social field, desire is no longer an individual factor, and then through it, it becomes possible to unveil some of the most cogent social and individual dynamics.

Subsequently, going against the traditional philosophical and psychoanalytic idea of desire as a lack, Deleuze and Guattari produce a positive concept of desire as an affirmative and productive force. Conversely, if desire is elaborated as a lack, it is immediately separated from reality, as the object of desire is what is lacking in the real experience of the subject, and desire can therefore only be productive in the field of fantasy. In their vision, instead, the object of desire is the "real" in itself and for itself. As a result, desire is not resulting from a perceived lack in reality but it, in itself, produces reality. Likewise, desire immediately invests the realm of social invention so that any instance of material production is simultaneously an instance of desirable production. The way we desire, in fact, will influence or determine our relationships but also the types of collective existences that are formed.

Lastly, how is this new shaped desire connected to sexual difference and subjectivities? New materialist feminism has critically re-elaborated the problem of

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[60] In the work of Deleuze and Guattari "socious" is a word used to indicate all the principles required to a subject, in order to express any kind of judgement on reality. In contrast with traditional philosophy (which relied overwhelmingly on the operation of transcendental principles necessary to make claims possible, as well as moral aesthetic judgements), Deleuze and Guattari consider also transcendental principles, perhaps less widely acknowledged than the ones that underlie traditional philosophy, which subtend the constitution of the social order.

identity and representation from the perspective of women/gender. As Rosi Braidotti points out in her chapter on *Discontinuous Becomings: Deleuze on the Becoming-Woman of Philosophy* (2011), overcoming the molar dualism of the modern subject, as Deleuze and Guattari have done, can be dangerous for people who have never been in the position of using these privileges to affirm their presence, namely for all the minor-subjects that historically have never been fully recognised. Speaking about what Deleuze and Guattari's theory implies for women she argues: "Women, [*in Deleuzian theory, ed.*], can be revolutionary subjects only to the extent that they develop a consciousness that is not specifically feminine" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 252). As for new-materialist Deleuzian theory, bodies are de-essentialised and they thus consist of the outcome of the complex relations between social and symbolic forces, a surface for becoming. Nevertheless, this means that the minor subjects, as well as the majoritarian ones, should dissolve their identities in an "impersonal multiple mechanic subjects" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 252). On account of this, both for post-colonial theory and for feminism, the pivotal question is if the above move leaves space to indigenous politics and to the production of situated knowledge.

Braidotti herself underlines that "this Deleuzian notion of becoming in fact may itself be sex-specific, sexually differentiated and, consequently, take different gendered positions" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 259). The Deleuzian theory is therefore "determined by its location as embodied male subject for whom the dissolution of identities based on the phallus results in bypassing gender altogether toward a multiple sexuality" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 259). In opposition and in response to this tricky outcome of new-materialist theory, Braidotti proposes a feminist perspective that involves a strategic essentialism, that is not a recrimination of identities from Molar standpoints, rather it offers the possibility of theorising a becoming for the subject that maintains its roots within its situated history and memory. In particular, the point that she underlines is that embodied memories, together with the politics of location, could allow identity politics without recreating fixed ideas of identity, by "relocating identities on new grounds that account for multiple belongings" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 69). In other words, Braidotti's

attempt is to "make a politically affirmative use of Deleuzian philosophy" (277) by mixing it with feminist and post-colonial theories.

Overall, the research that I have conducted has proven to show that all the three Afro-descendant women writers studied, put forth a desire for freedom intended as a revolutionary desire. Their desire is revolutionary inasmuch as it is not aimed at the filling of a gap, but as a force able to change the reality because it projects new possible futures. The desire for freedom of Prince, Fragas and dos Reis indeed accounts for the change of reality in a broader sense than the simple achievement of a legal status as liberated women.

Afro-descendant women and men's desire for freedom is presented by these authors as the desire for a entirely new society and culture in which identity politics do not recreate fixed ideas of identity, relocating them on new grounds that encompass multiple belongings. The desire that authors express in their texts, thus, is exactly the type of revolutionary desire described in the Deleuzian and Guattarian paradigm as it allows the formulation of resistance strategies, as will be shown in the next chapters through the study of their literary works.

3.3. Post-colonialism and de-colonialism

"The post-colonial", as a term and as a concept, arose from the decolonisation of the African and Asian colonies after the Second World War, and it refers to a theoretical approach, applied to various disciplines, concerned with the lasting impact of colonisation in former colonies.[61] Despite its claim to be global, this standpoint has

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[61] Post-colonialism or post-colonial studies is the academic study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonised people and their lands. The term *post-colonial studies* may be preferred for this reason. Since it encompasses a wide variety of approaches, and theoreticians may not always agree on a common set of definitions. For a critical understanding of "post-colonialism" as a theoretical approach, see: Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, London: Routledge, 2000; Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, London: Routledge, 2002; Iain Chambers, Lidia Curti, *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, New York and London: Routledge, 1996; Robert J.C. Young, *Post-colonialism: A Historical Introduction;* Anne McClintock, "The angel of progress: pitfalls of the term 'post-colonialism'", in *Colonial Discourse/Post-colonial Theory*, edited by M. Baker, P. Hulme and M. Iverson (1994). Some groundbreaking critical studies on post-colonialism have been published also in Italian Ascione, Gennaro, *A sud di nessun Sud. Postcolonialismo, movimenti antisistemici e studi decoloniali*, Bologna: Odoya, 2010; Bassi Shaul e Andrea Sirotti (a cura di), *Gli studi post-coloniali. Un'introduzione*, Firenze: Le Lettere,

been characterised by a strong regionalist approach, in so far as historically post-colonial studies have focused mainly on British Colonialism and on Anglophone texts[62]. As Fernando Coronil indicates in his inspiring article "Latin American post-colonial studies and global decolonisation" (2013), many of the post-colonial thinkers ground their research in powerful metropolitan universities, and their work usually includes only Anglo-American colonialism as historical background.

The genealogy of post-colonial thought can be traced back to four historical processes: the end of the socialist utopia, the failure of development projects in the "Third World", the birth of conservative politics in Western States and the increasing power of neoliberal capitalism. Indeed, although it arose in metropolitan academies, post-colonialism had an anti-imperialist aim. In this outline, colonial countries such as Latin America, were considered by post-colonialism as part of a generic "Third World", even though Latin American countries had started processes of decolonisation already in the nineteenth century, developing their own theoretical frameworks, often completely ignored by the so called "post-colonial thinkers". Fernando Coronil gives several examples of this post-colonial theory's regionalism:

> Given this genealogy, it is remarkable but understandable that debates and texts on or from Latin America do not figure significantly in the field of post-colonial studies as it has been defined since the 1980s […] Said's canonical *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) is emblematic of this tendency: it centers on British and French imperialism from the late nineteenth century to the present; its geographical focus is limited to an area stretching from Algeria to India; and the role of the United States is restricted to the post Second World War period […]The major Readers and discussions on post-colonial studies barely take Latin America into account. […] *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literature* (Aschroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989), acknowledges a focus on Anglophone literature. […] The first general anthology of post-colonial texts, *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory* (P. Williams and Chrisman 1993), whose thirty-one articles include no author from Iberoamerica. Published two years later, *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (Aschroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995), reproduces the Anglocentric perspective […] *Leela Gandhi's Post-colonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (1998) does not discuss Latin American critical reflections or include even a single reference to Latin American thinkers in its extensive bibliography. While *Relocating Post-colonialism* (Goldberg and Quayson 2002) […] maintains the exclusion of Latin America. (180)

2010;Albertazzi, Silvia, *Lo sguardo dell'altro. Le letterature post-coloniali*, Roma: Carocci, 2000; Albertazzi, Silvia and Vecchi, Roberto (a cura di), *Abbecedario post-coloniale I-II*, Macerata: Quodlibet, 2004.
[62] This is true in respect to most of the studies targeted as post-colonial, like for instance: *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) by Franz Fanon, *Orientalism* (1978) by Edward Said, *In Other Worlds* (1987) by Gayatri Spivak, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft et al, *Nation and Narration* (1990) by Homi Bhabha, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) by Edward Said and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Under Western Eyes* (1991).

Post-colonialism summons a wide range of theories and theorists[63]. As far as it has born in metropolitan Anglo-American academies in the 1980s and 1990s, it studied mainly the colonial legacies of the British Empire. Therefore, to apply it to different colonial contexts could be problematic or unhelpful for the understanding of different geopolitical realities.

Hitherto, a reflection on the colonial legacy, not related to the British Empire, was undertaken by the so-called "de-colonial theory", which focuses its theoretical and socio-economic analysis on the Spanish Empire in the Americas, from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. As Fernando Coronil explains, the social Latin-American though had as keyword the concept of "dependence" instead of the one of colonialism/post-colonialism. The political idea of dependence was addressed in the 1960s by social theorists[64] who were opposing modernisation theory (that saw in capitalism an alternative to socialism). Dependence theorists underlined that global development and underdevelopment were the two faces of global capitalism. Therefore, instead of trying to modernise the peripheries of the world, in this case, Latin America, theorists must attempt to change the binary logic of global capitalism.

Overall, the main differences between Anglo-American post-colonialism and Latin American de-colonial theories lie in the interpretation of the relation between modernity and colonisation[65]. First of all, many post-colonial thinkers assume that modernity began with British imperialism and industrial revolution, while decolonial theorists argue that colonialism and modernism are the same outcome of the "world system" originated already in the sixteenth century. According to Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano "it was in the XVI century that there was a

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[63] Post-colonial theory has been characterised by different theoretical and geopolitical agendas. For instance, on the one hand there are the "subaltern studies", directly linked to India, which have had mainly a Marxist and Gramscian theoretical background, like the works of Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1999), Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* (1993), and Dipesh Chakravarty, *Provincializing Europe: Post-colonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000). While on the other hand in the North American academies have developed a linkage between political and intellectual struggles (as in the works of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Edward Said) centred on civil rights, immigration and multiculturalism. For a comparative study of Said's concept of "Orientalism" in literature see: Elena Spandri, *Wideworlds: l'orientalismo nella letteratura inglese e americana, 1760-1820*, Pacini Editore, 2009.
[64] Among the most known social theorists there are: Prebisch, Cardoso, Faletto and Quijano.
[65] See: Santiago Castro-gomez, Eduardo Mendieta, 1998, *Teorias Disciplina. Latinoamericanismo, Poscolonialidad Y Globalizacion En Debate*; and Santiago; Grosfoguel, Ramón Castro Gómez, 2007, *Giro decolonial. Reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica más allá del capitalismo global* and J.G. Ramos and T. Daly (eds.), 2016, *Decolonial Approaches to Latin American Literatures and Cultures*, Palgarve.

racial/international division of labour, a taxonomy of the world population, which would mark the subsequent history of the world system" (*Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America*, 534).

Another important feature of de-colonial theory has been the focus on the epistemic dependence of contemporary social thought to the Western modern system of thought. Accordingly, models that engage with different and non-European systems of thought have been privileged in order to contrast the colonisation of knowledge (Ramos and Daly). Nevertheless, de-colonial theory itself has done important and dynamic work to incorporate a range of different traditions and scholars into their dialogues. To cite some examples, in Ramón Grosfoguel's and Nelson Maldonado-Torres's written work and lectures, both constantly make reference to Western traditions not as "the enemy" but simply as one model of knowledge among other possibilities.

Therefore, different genealogies characterise decolonial thought and post-colonialism. In particular, decolonial theory do not move from the premises of post-structuralism and post-modernism, as post-colonialism does, but trace its first step back to Andinian thinkers such as José Carlos Mariátegui and Rodolfo Kusch, and Latino American critical thought, such as the theory of dependence and the philosophy of liberation (Castro-Gómez and Mendieta).

Yet, according to Coronil, a dialogue between post-colonialism and Latin American decolonial theories, is needed, inasmuch as:

> A wider focus, spanning from Asia and Africa to the Americas, yields a deeper view, revealing the links between the development of modern colonialism by Northern European powers and its foundation in the colonisation of the Americas by Spain and Portugal. This larger frame modifies prevailing understandings of modern history. Capitalism and modernity, so often assumed both in mainstream and in post-colonial studies to be a European process marked by the Enlightenment, the dawning of industrialisation, and the forging of nations in the eighteenth century, can be seen instead as a global process involving the expansion of Christendom, the formation of a global market and the creation of transcontinental empires since the sixteenth century. A dialogue between Latin American and post-colonial studies ought not to be polarising, and might range over local histories and global designs, texts and their material contexts, and subjective formations and structures of domination. (416)

The question then is how to recognise the global condition that allows the production of knowledge, bearing in mind that the critical thought always has a vivid relation

with its historical context of production (Castro-Gomez and Mendieta). If post-colonialism presents itself as the more evolved examination to colonialism, it obscures all the other critical standpoints. The inclusion of Spanish and Portuguese literature, in comparison and in association with the English one, has its main goal in the advancement of post-colonial theory toward a more inclusive perspective, able to deepen theories on colonisation and decolonisation, helping creative theories and historical analysis to develop. As sustained by Williams, and stated by Coronil in the quoted text, I too believe firmly that in order to understand processes of modernity and capitalism we must not focus on industrialisation and Enlightenment only, but we must go back to the global market of slavery and colonialism, starting from Spanish and Portuguese expansion in the New World.

Accordingly, the aim of this dissertation is to give account of those different standpoints, which characterise the evaluation of the colonial power, through the studied texts. The methodology employed then will not be the one of post-colonial studies only. I intend to study each text in its socio-cultural context, with the methodology given by theorists that have considered colonisation in the specific geopolitical area in which the text was written.

Finally, this dissertation also proposes that the practices of reading and writing can be "de-colonial" not only in the selections of texts and materials we choose to read, teach, or look at but also the ways in which we read them. Such strategies need not be prescriptive but rather entail looking for the ways in which texts resist the very society that enable them to be produced. I will do so by drawing attention to the linkages between intra-national and international geographic spaces, which have the European roots of their colonising countries in common.

3.4. Relational Comparison

The dissertation will be focused on three different works of literature, analysed through a comparative methodology, defined as relational comparison. The reason why I chose this approach to the topic of women's slave literature is due to the need to develop geopolitical literacy, as Susan Friedman defined them. Drawing this definition on Spivak's description of "transnational literacy", Friedman invites us to

document and attest the world's heterogeneity (Friedman 130), yet avoiding "the worlding of the third world others" (Spivak, *Three women's texts* 243). The development of comparative studies on literature is then one of the main pillars of the production of geopolitical literacy. Comparative perspectives, juxtapose different location, giving attention to the local creation of knowledge, by doing so they are able to highlight the connections between the local and the global, problematising fluxes and relations of power in their special and geopolitical dimensions (Friedman).

Shu-mei Shih, in her insightful essay, *Comparison as Relation* (2013), has defined relational comparison as the act to look at "subterenean convergences" and at "the worldwide confluences of cultures". According to Shu-mei Shih, relational comparison consists of the convergence of two critical perspectives: that of world literature and that of the theory of relation.

Theorists of world history such as Jonet Abu-Lughod (*Before European Hegemony*, 1991), John Hobson (*The Eastern Origin of Western civilization*, 2004) and André Gunder Frank (*ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*, 1998) claim that the world was globally integrated both culturally and economically well before the period pointed by the modern world system theory[66]. These integrative world historians sustain that a global "macro-history" had already started in the sixth century. This critical perspective unsettles the ideology by which the "East" and the "West" are two historically separated entities (Abu-Lughod 1991). Accordingly, the separation between East and West was functional both to the construction of the European literary exceptionalism and to the building of Eurocentric historical studies. Shu-mei Shi claims the necessity to "consider a model of world literature similar to that of integrative world history that sees instead of discreet national literatures, all literatures as participating in network of power-inflected relations, with the task of the world literature scholar to excavate and analyse these relations" (84). Therefore, she affirms the possibility and the necessity to outline global historical studies of literature, following the study of world history and economy[67].

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[66] See: Arrighi G. (1994), *The Long 20th Century. Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*, London, New York: Verso.
[67] Shu-mei Shih underlines how the already existing studies on World literature, such as Franco Moretti "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000), Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of*

On the other hand, the theory of relation, proposed by Martinican writer Édouard Glissant in his astonishing book *Poetics of Relation* (1990), presents an effective way to bring together geo-cultural and socioeconomic history. Glissant reformulated the relation between the text and the world, affirming that the first is not only organic to the world but also interconnected to it. Relation, then, according to Glissant, has a double value: first, it is a phenomenological description of the world; a way to understand our globalized world (or the "infinite interactions of cultures"). Second, relation is an act able to change the elements of the relation. In this sense, it is a process or a movement, and therefore:

> To do the work of Relation as an exercise in poetics – that is, Relation as method-is to relate here and elsewhere to explore the inexhaustible and unpredictable entanglements and confluence among cultures and histories. […] The West Indies is as exemplary as the place from which to theorize as any other place, as the point is not to elevate the specific to the universal but to deconstruct the universal altogether by way of interrelations among places and cultures (Shu-mei Shih: 85)

Glissant assesses that process of relation is exemplified by the entire world, intended as an infinite process of creolisation[68]. As a result, our methods should also be miscegenated, in contrast with any attempt to make static description or competitions. Consequently, relation, understood as such, is the poetics of exploring the inexhaustible and unexpected entanglements and confluences among cultures and stories.[69] Accordingly, to engage in relational comparisons means "to deconstruct the universal altogether, by way of interrelations among places and cultures" (Shih 84).

Practically, in this research, the texts will be examined and studied separately. The analysis of each specific work will rely on the historical and cultural analysis of the context in which the work arose (colonialism and the slave trade, canon and national

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Literature (2005) and David Damrosch, *What is World Literature* (2003), are still quite Eurocentric (Shih: 83).

[68] Creolisation is a keyword in Glissant's thought. Creolisation seeks to manifest a "relationship", sharing, or cultural exchange among people. In *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (1996) Glissant affirms that "Creolisation says [that] cultural elements brought together must be 'equivalents in value' for this creolisation to actually take effect. This means that if in the cultural elements some of which are under-represented compared to others, creolisation does not really evolve. It happens, but in a hybrid mode and in an unjust manner".

[69] Relation work is the opposite of relativism, because relativism is premised on reductive understanding of cultures and assumes essentialism of cultures, as if each culture has a direct boundary that another culture cannot cross (see: Glissant, *Poetic of Relations*, p. 135).

identities) together with a thematic investigation of the text (desire, gender-related issues, language).

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Introduction

The following chapter will give a general outline of the historical and social background of the literary texts by women writers. Due to the vastness of subject of the slave trade, it seems appropriate to provide first a general outline of the main features of the transatlantic slave trade and of slavery, which will be the topic of discussion of the first section of this chapter. In part two, a historical and political framework of each specific country will be provided. It will trace the historical background of slavery, focusing then on the nineteenth century abolitionist movements that arose in Great Britain, Spain, Portugal, and their associated colonies. This framework is critical to the understanding of the studied literary texts which are themselves part of the historical and social movements in which they were written.

In particular, as new historicism suggests[1], literary texts are directly involved in history and represent an essential means for its understanding. Far from being detached from the time and place from which they originated, such texts are inevitably intermingled with ideologically charged discourses from those times. Consequently, literature does not exclusively reflect the power relations of its time, but also actively participates in the establishment of discourses, both at an individual and collective level. Literary texts then are immersed in a net of power and culture that, in turn, contribute to transform. Therefore, the study of literary materials is an essential tool for exploring the relations of power of a given historical period. The works in question are significant irrespective of their status as religious, political or historical texts, as produced from a marginal subculture that had so far been ignored. Likewise, focusing on hidden and minor literary sources, such as those written by Mary Prince, Cristina Ayala, and Maria Firmina Dos Reis is precious, inasmuch as they contribute to disclose the mechanisms of exclusions and inclusions of a given discourse.

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[1] Among the pivotal studies of New Historicism there are: Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Chicago U.P., 1980; and Orgel, Stephen. *The Authentic Shakespeare*. Routledge, 2002. For a critical understanding of the New Historicist movement, you may look at: Felluga, D. 2015, *Critical Theory: The Key Concepts*; Murfin, R. & Ray, S 1998, *The Bedford glossary of critical and literary terms*, Bedford Books, St Martins; Parvini, Neema. *Shakespeare and Contemporary Theory: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*. Bloomsbury, 2012; Rice, P. & Waugh, P. 1989, *Modern literary theory: a reader,* 2nd edn, Edward Arnold, Melbourne; and Veeser, H. Aram (Ed.). *The New Historicism*. Routledge, 1989.

Finally, by adopting the new historicist methodology, instead of viewing history and literature as distinct or unrelated topics, I aim to consider the cultural matrix of a given period as being composed of various "power-knwledge"[2] discourses that should be understood through the creation of critical genealogies.

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[2] As claimed by Michel Foucault indeed, "We should not be content to say that power has a need for such - and - such a discovery, such - and - such a form of knowledge, but we should add that the exercise of power itself creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information. [...] The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power . [...] It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power " (Interview, "Prison Talk" 51 - 52)

1. An overview on the history of transatlantic slavery

Approximately, between 11 and 20 million Africans[3] were deported across the Atlantic from Africa to the New World, from 1501 until 1875. Those who reached the Americas experienced the traumas of enslavement, loss of family and homeland, and the horrors of the Middle Passage. The great majority of those who survived to reach the Americas rebuilt their lives in territories claimed, and nominally ruled, by European countries (Landers and Robinson).

Surprisingly, despite its crucial role in Global and European history, the transatlantic slave trade was not a substantial topic of interest for historiographers until the twentieth century. As claimed by American historian Herbert Klein in the second edition of his pioneering study, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (2010), the low amount of studies on the area was probably due to a moral concern:

> The Atlantic slave trade remained one of the least studied areas in modern Western historiography until the past quarter century. This late start was not due to any lack of sources, for the materials available for its study were abundant from the very beginning. Rather, it was ignored because of its close association with European imperialism. (1)

Furthermore, the complexity of the data requiring integration led to a lack of comprehensive studies, which would involve competencies in different disciplines (demographic histories, quantitative analysis, languages, geography, history of art, anthropology, etc.) and in different languages.

The first historiographical interest was launched at the apogee of the slave trade in the middle of the eighteenth century when in the American ports more than seventy-five thousand slaves per year were shipped (Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*). Here Anglo-American abolitionists began to acquire indisputable data on the trade in order to denounce its atrocities.[4] After the victory of the abolitionist party in England,

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[3] Recently, many studies have been undertaken in order to give an account of the numbers of the slave trade. Among many others, see: David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For a comprehensive overview of available data, see the bibliographical essay by Herbert Klein in *The Atlantic Slave Trade, 2nd Edition* (2014), pp. 222-224.

[4] Among the most known English abolitionists who dealt with aspects of the trade in a series of famous pamphlets, there were James Ramsay, a Jamaican-based cleric and medical doctor; Thomas Clarkson and, William Wilberforce. A complete listing of their works can be found in Peter C. Hogg, *The African Slave Trade and Its Suppression: A Classified and Annotated Bibliography of Books, Pamphlets and Periodical Articles* (London, 1973).

however, the rise of imperialism, racism and the conquest of Africa by European countries contributed consistently to the disappearance of the interest in collecting numbers and facts on the slave trade. Accordingly, only after the First World War (1914-1918) intellectuals began to challenge imperialistic assumptions and approach the slave trade as a crime. Unfortunately, a paternalist tendency led at this stage to the reconstruction of stereotyped stories, to "a narrative filled with stories of violence and exploitation, based on a minimum of research and an ignorance of the archival sources" (Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* XVI)[5].

Consequently, the first critical studies in the area arose along in the first decade of the twentieth century and only recently new quantitative sources have been taken in to account. In particular, between the 1920s and 1930s, Gaston-Martin (*L'ère des négrieres 1714-1774*, 1931) and Dieudonné Rinchon (*La traite et l'esclavage des Congolais par les européens*, 1930) in France and Belgium, and Elizabeth Donnan (*Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America, 4 vols*. 1930) in the United States were among the first to begin a systematic study of the slave trade, gathering together much of the archival material available in French and English records.

Yet, it was the growth of a new field of African history as well as the awakening of interest in Afro-American history that, in the 1950s and 1960s, opened up a major research effort in this area. Ever since Philip Curtin publication of *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (1969), a major new impetus to slave trade studies started, which was an attempt to estimate the volume of the trade. His pioneer work gave rise to a wide debate that, in turn, generated a major focused on the unpublished sources for new numbers and new documental material to challenge or refine the numbers he provided.

Despite the huge amount of data available in archives, there is still much to clarify about the slave trade, from its beginning in the fifteenth century until its end in the

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[5] According to H. Klein (2014), this uncritical literature was responsible for the creation of a series of myths about the costs of the trade, the pattern of shipping slaves across the Atlantic, the mortality they suffered, and the ultimate gains and benefits to the Europeans. "Tight packing," mortality rates of 50 percent or more, "cheap slaves" bought for supposedly worthless beads and costless rum–all were added to the crimes list. Popular modern summaries of these ideas are found in the works of D.P. Mannix and M.Cowley, *Black Cargoes: History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1518–1865* (New York, 1962); James Pope-Hennessy, *Sins of the Fathers: A Study of the Atlantic Slave Traders, 1441–1807* (London, 1967); and most recently, Robert E. Conrad, *World of Sorrow: The African Slave Trade to Brazil* (Baton Rouge, LA., 1986).

nineteenth century, and the role it played in the European economy and in the rise of capitalism at a global level. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw a general outline on the historical structure, the economic mechanisms, the subjects involved, and the dynamics of this complex phenomenon together with the analysis of some of its historical consequences.

1.1. Slavery in Ancient times and the beginning of the Atlantic slavery

Slavery, intended as the involuntary legal condition of being subjected to the control of other human beings, has a long history, which goes along with the historical phenomenon of the slave trade, intended as the forced selling and transportation of enslaved people from one place to another. Additionally, even though slavery has existed almost in every human society and historical period, only in some societies has it been a crucial economic and social institution.

Following Herbert Klein's definition, in order to consider slavery as a basic institution and not simply a marginal aspect of a specific society, some requirements must be fulfilled. First, slavery must constitute a consistent market economy at the national or international level; second, the work of slaves must be essential for the production of goods in a specific area (in the case of transatlantic slavery, for instance, agriculture); and third, slave work must be a primary workforce, on which most of the country's economy relay:

> While slavery was an institution known to many complex societies, slavery as a system of industrial or market production was a much more restricted phenomenon. Most scholars now date its origins for Western society in the centuries immediately prior to the Christian era in the Greek city-states and the emerging Roman Empire of the period and argue that, for slavery to become a dominant factor in society, it was essential that an important market economy at the local and international level be developed, that a significant share of the agricultural production for that market come from non-peasant producers, and that slave labor become the major factor in that production. All these conditions, it is now assumed, were only met within our historical memory in the two centuries before the Christian era under the Romans. (Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* 5)
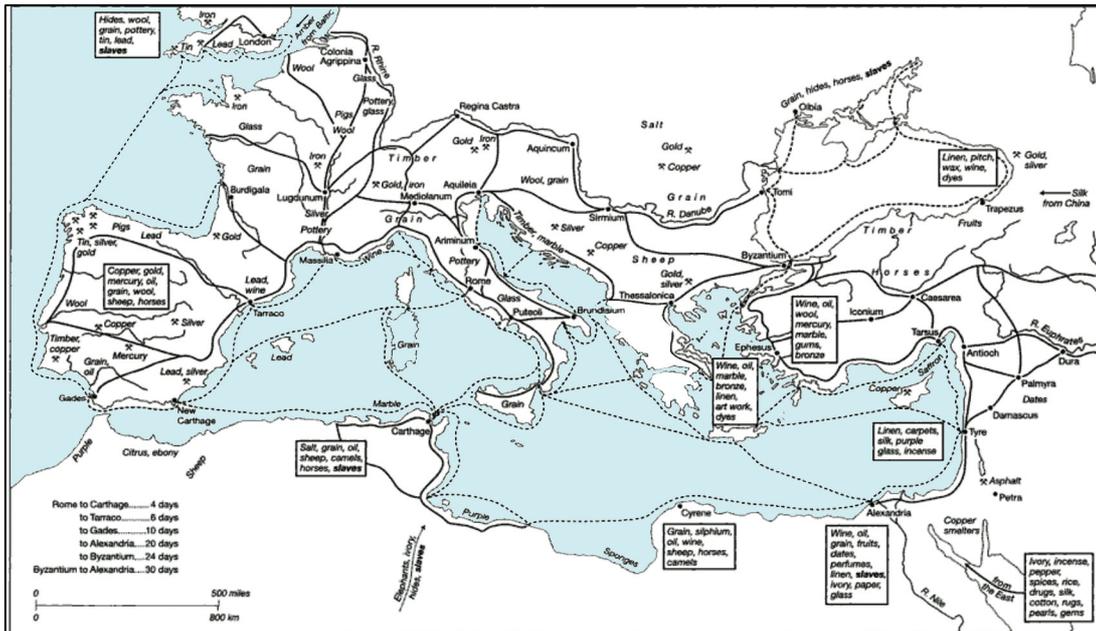
Map 1 Trade and slave routes in the Roman Empire
From: Robinson Jr. C. A. (1952) *Ancient History: From Prehistoric Times to the Death of Justinian*, p. 565.

Slavery, intended as a critical economic and social institution, first arose in the Roman world during the second century B.C., when slaves constituted 30-40% of the Roman population and were traded along with other commodities (see Map 1). All people from different social classes possessed slaves, who often organised revolts and rebellions.

Although sometimes slaves had the right to their own goods, the law defined the master as the owner of all slave's rights.[6] The status of slaves as defined by Roman law notably influenced American slave societies. The institution of slavery in the Roman Empire ended with the fall of the Empire itself (from the fifth to the eighth century) as in the forthcoming feudal societies slaves became servants, namely people who willingly left their freedom in order to gain protection. Consequently, at the end of the Medieval period, slavery was not widespread in Europe. In fact, it was mostly isolated to the southern fringes of the Mediterranean, especially along the frontiers of Christendom. In those places where it existed, the physical labour of slavery was the preserve of social and religious "others". Consequently, Iberian Christians enslaved primarily Muslims, but also Jews, Gypsies and Slavs. As

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[6] See: William D. Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Atlantic Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

"infidels," Jews and Moors were considered incapable of redemption and therefore doomed to marginal, enslaveable status.

In turn, from the eighth until the thirteenth century (see Map 2), the Muslim Empire widened its area of influence and Christians were enslaved by Islamic people, while with the Crusades (from eleventh to thirteenth century), Christians began to exploit slaves, most of them Slavic (the word "slave", in fact, originates from the term "Slavic"). They were employed in sugar plantations in Palestrina, Sicily and Southern Spain (Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* 26). Later on, in America, sugar plantations would indeed reproduce the organization engaged in these Alto-Medieval plantations of the East Mediterranean coasts (See Map 2).

Map 2 The Migration of Sugar Cultivation from Asia into the Atlantic
From: David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (2010).
Also available at: http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/intro-maps.

Also in the African continent slavery existed even before the arrival of the Europeans (an evidence used as justification for the slave trade by many pro-slavery parties). In most of the African countries, however, until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it did not represented an essential economic and social institution of African societies. Accordingly, slaves did not have legal obbligations with their owners and their children were born free. An international flux of slaves began around the fifteenth century and took place primarily in East Africa, with the main routes crossing North Africa, the Red Sea, and some countries of East Africa (see Map 3). Among these forced migrants, there were also women and children, employed for domestic and social works.

The Portuguese went ashore in Sub-Saharan Africa at the beginning of the fifteenth century, with the purpose of purchasing gold, for which they traded slaves. After the fifteenth century, however, the trade in human beings increased as it became a business in itself. Guinea came to be the main storage site for slaves, which were later brought to West India coasts by the Portuguese (see Map 4). By the turn of the seventeenth century, the slave trade to the Americas had already exceeded the one to North and East Africa (Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* 35).

1.2. Transatlantic slavery and slave trade

Until the sixteenth century, large numbers of slaves travelled from Africa to the Iberian Peninsula, arriving in the ports of Seville or Lisbon, via the West Mediterranean route. Many of them remained in Europe, although their presence has been often underestimated by European historiography (Cesares and Gómez).

For instance, according to notary's archives, from 1501 to 1525 there were 5,271 slaves in Seville, almost 4,000 of whom were listed as "blacks" or "mulattoes" (Landers and Robinson 2). The work of anthropologist Aurelia Martín Cesares (*La esclavitud en Granada en el siglo XVI*, 2000) has been of primary importance in revealing the role that enslaved African played in Spanish society and economy. Far from being luxury items, slaves were the propriety of every class in Spanish society, including common folk, merchants and priests. Slaves consistently helped the Spanish economy, performing labour for painters, artisans, in the textile industry, and

as domestic workers. Women in particular worked in the domestic field as washerwomen, nurses and nannies. Moreover, they were employed to breastfeed their masters' children, and therefore they were worth more money if they were pregnant (Cesares and Gómez 80). In modern Spain, there were activities available that provided a small profit margin for slaves, such as handcraft works for men and *esclava cortada* for women (namely, slave women rented to other people by their masters). The latter was the first step towards the *coartación* in Hispanic America, that is to say the right for the slave to buy his/her freedom, introduced in the eighteenth century Iberian colonies (Cesares and Gómez 63).

Nevertheless, at the end of the sixteenth century, the West Mediterranean route underwent a consistent change, since new Atlantic ways started to be opened by the Portuguese towards the Atlantic (see Map 5). Accordingly, until the 1630's, the Atlantic routes that slaves had travelled were principally Hispano-American. From this era onwards, however, the Portuguese had enough income to invest in the slave trade so that in 1650 slaves in Brazil surpassed those of Hispano-America. By contrast, Northern European nations did not yet possess enough raw materials and gold to pay for slaves' importation in the colonies, and had low-cost workforces already available in their countries. Great Britain and France, for instance, during the crises of the 1600s, used a debt system to send their peasants to the American colonies. When the crisis was over, however, they began to employ slaves, reaching the point where the importation of slaves from France and Great Britain was much higher than that of Portugal or Spain, which had remained relatively constant throughout time (Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* 47, see Table 1).
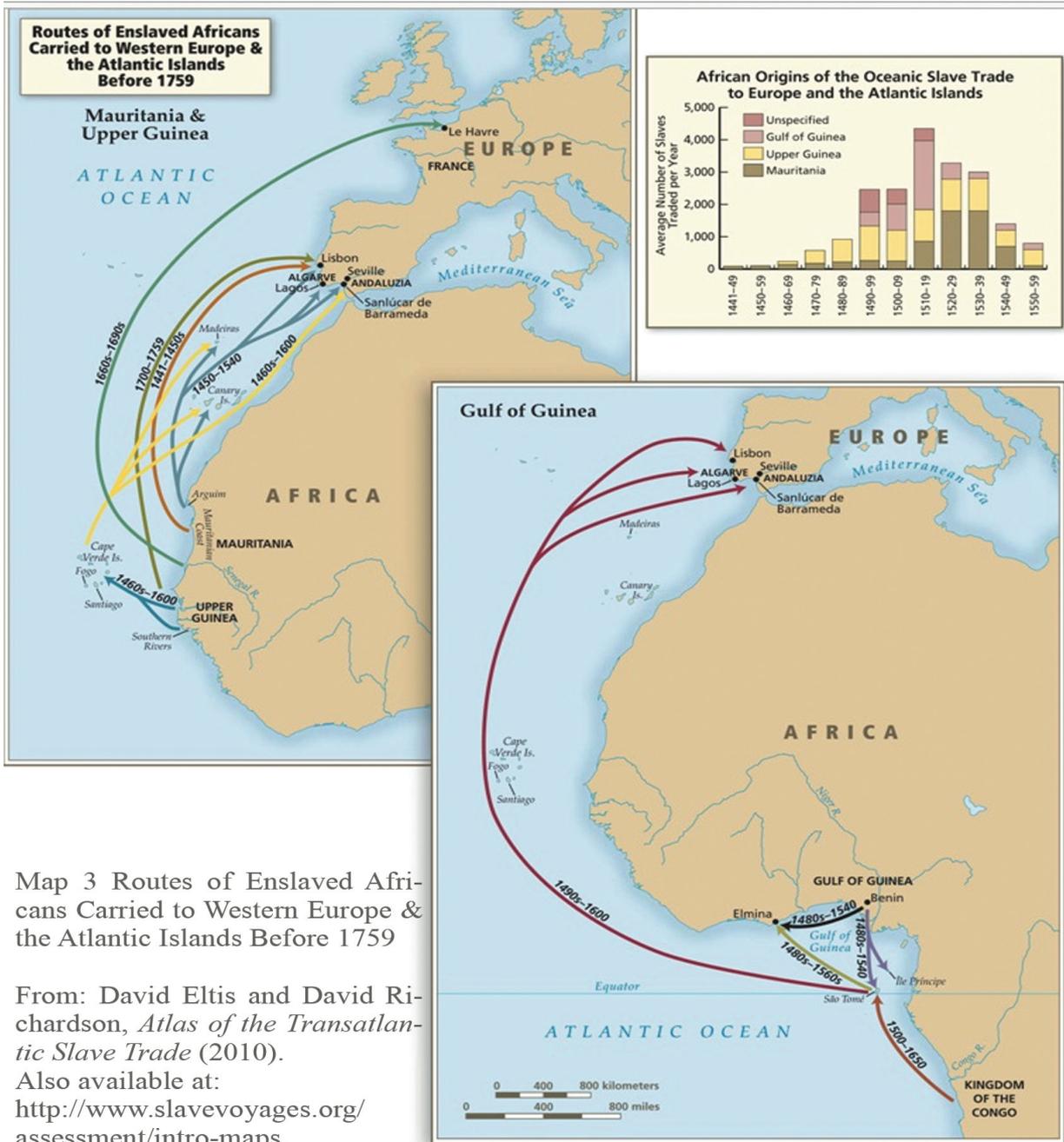
Map 3 Routes of Enslaved Africans Carried to Western Europe & the Atlantic Islands Before 1759

From: David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (2010).
Also available at:
http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/intro-maps.

The Dutch also played a relevant role in both the trade of goods and slaves; as they founded the Dutch West India Company, in 1621, conquering the Portuguese's monopolies in the Americas and Africa and initiating a rivalry with them since the end of sixteenth century. After being sent away from the Brazilian colonies[7], the

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[7] From 1630 onward, the Dutch Republic conquered almost half of Brazil's settled European area basing their capital in Recife. The Dutch West India Company (WIC) set up its headquarters in Recife. The Governor, Johan Maurits, invited artists and scientists to the colony to help promoting Brazil and increasing immigration. However, the tide turned against the Dutch when the Portuguese

Dutch went into the West Indies to help French and English peoples in the sugar plantation, selling them slaves on credit.[8]

	Spain / Uruguay	Portugal / Brazil	Great Britain	Netherlands	U.S.A.	France	Denmark / Baltic	Totals
1501-1525	6,363	7,000	0	0	0	0	0	13,363
1526-1550	25,375	25,387	0	0	0	0	0	50,762
1551-1575	28,167	31,089	1,685	0	0	66	0	61,007
1576-1600	60,056	90,715	237	1,365	0	0	0	152,373
1601-1625	83,496	267,519	0	1,829	0	0	0	352,844
1626-1650	44,313	201,609	33,695	31,729	824	1,827	1,053	315,050
1651-1675	12,601	244,793	122,367	100,526	0	7,125	653	488,065
1676-1700	5,860	297,272	272,200	85,847	3,327	29,484	25,685	719,675
1701-1725	0	474,447	410,597	73,816	3,277	120,939	5,833	1,088,909
1726-1750	0	536,696	554,042	83,095	34,004	259,095	4,793	1,471,725
1751-1775	4,239	528,693	832,047	132,330	84,580	325,918	17,508	1,925,315
1776-1800	6,415	673,167	748,612	40,773	67,443	433,061	39,199	2,008,670
1801-1825	168,087	1,160,601	283,959	2,669	109,545	135,815	16,316	1,876,992
1826-1850	400,728	1,299,969	0	357	1,850	68,074	0	1,770,978
1851-1875	215,824	9,309	0	0	476	0	0	225,609
Totals	1,061,524	5,848,266	3,259,441	554,336	305,326	1,381,404	111,040	12,521,337

Tab. 1 Estimates of embarked slaves
From: http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates

won a significant victory at the Second Battle of Guararapes in 1649. On 26 January 1654, the Dutch surrendered and signed the capitulation, but only as a provisional pact. By May 1654, the Dutch demanded that the Dutch Republic was to be given New Holland back. On 6 August 1661, New Holland was formally ceded to Portugal through the Treaty of The Hague.
[8] For an historical understanding of the Dutch presence in the New World in both its monopoly and free-trade periods is masterfully analysed by Johannes Postma, in *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (1990).

Between 1620 and 1640 French and English began to populate the regions of the Antilles and the Amazonas with indentured workers from Europe, who were employed in the tobacco, indigo and sugar plantations. Yet, an evident change occurred when, thanks to the Dutch, they began to invest in the sugar business. In the English Barbados, for instance, the number of blacks in 1700 became more than three times that of whites. Great Britain and France had overtaken the monopoly on the slave trade over Portugal and Spain. Between 1700 and 1808 the British transported more than 3.1 million enslaved African to the Americas, and the French over 1 million (see Table 1). However, Spanish and Portuguese colonies were the only ones with a considerable number of freed slaves, which were more than a quarter of the entire slave population, due to the absence of laws against manumission. Cuba was the main slave colony of Spanish America and revolts organized by slaves were very common (Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*).

When the European Spanish and Portuguese *conquistadores* arrived in the Americas in the sixteenth century, they could have employed Indigenous people or take advantage of the demographic expansion of poorer classes as workforce in their colonies. Nonetheless, they chose instead to enslave and import people from Africa, mainly for practical reasons.

In 1400, Spain was experiencing an incredible urban development, as its population reached nearly eight million inhabitants. Part of this new population, constituting of free peasants, began to exploit new areas for agriculture, while a considerable portion of Spaniards were committed to the recently-born professional permanents armies of Europe (Klein, *The Atlantic Slavery, 2nd ed.,* 17-19). Hence, the rising of new areas of economic development did not allow for a massive Spanish emigration into the Americas. On the other hand, indigenous peoples were employed to extract minerals, but European diseases literally decimated them; additionally, the Spanish government was against the enslavement of Amerindian people, who were exploited through pre-existing political and religious hierarchies (Miller).

Portugal, on the other hand, had a very low demographic density, not even reaching one million inhabitants. Those who were willing to emigrate usually went to African and Asian colonies (Guinea, Angola, Mozambique, India or China for instance), which were more remunerative than those of the Americas.

Furthermore, the sixteenth century was the era in which arose the plantation system in the New World, firstly in Brazil, through which the sugar distributed in all of Europe by the Dutch was produced. The plantation system caused a high rate of high mortality that in turn uplifted the need for slave labour.[9]

Lastly, Spanish and Portuguese colonizers, preferred to employ slaves instead of Indigenous peoples for two additional reasons: first, they had no family ties, so they resulted as subjects that could be more easily relocated. Second, as they all came from different parts of Africa, they spoke different languages, making it difficult for them to create communities yet aiding in their acquisition of the language of the dominators. These two factors, which express the radical condition of rootlessness for enslaved as direct outcomes of their de-territorialisation and displacement, became then a decisive obstacle to their emancipation, while at the same time the first aspects to be overcome in the exercise of resilience.

There has been significant and long-going academic debate about whether the enslavement of peoples of African descent in the American colonies was a choice dictated mostly by economic reason or whether matter of race came in to play since the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade. In turn, many studies tried to identify the historical moment in which the equation between "slaves" and "Africans" started to take shape.[10] Since to give a full account of this complex historical debate would be way too ambitious, I will just try to trace some lines of investigations that have been undertaken until now.

The radical thinker William Du Bois started to investigate the origins of racism already in his Ph.D dissertation, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade* (1896),

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[9] The sugar plantation system relied on the export market, and the Caribbean one was unique in its economic, political and social features. Usually, the farm and factory were on the same plantation: for instance, in the case of the sugar plantations, the sugarcane was grown, manufactured and sometimes distilled to obtain rum in the same place. The proprietors occasionally left European overseers to look after the property while they were travelling. The owners' houses were usually distant from slave villages, which were similar to African mud houses. When slaves were not working, they had to grow their own food to supplement the insufficient provisions they received from the plantation. Sometimes they could engage in an informal economy through the exchange of goods managed by women traders, called *higglers*.

[10] For more recent studies on the matter see for instance: C..M. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1551* (Cambridge, 1982), 37-38. D. Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.224-226; P. Manning, *Slavery and African Life. Occidental, Oriental and African Slave Trades*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 25; J. Sidbury, *Becoming African in America. Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007.

coming to the conclusion that the relationship between white and black people in the Atlantic space had not been immediately associated with racism. Established on a first religious and then scientific level, he argued that racism had formed since the seventeenth century, due to the need to legitimize the employment of slave labor force imported from Africa. According to Du bois, therefore, the initial character of the first contact between Europeans and Africans was not of a racial nature. A similar thesis was advanced also by Eric Williams according to whom black slavery was only a solution, in historically determined circumstances, to the problem of work force in the Caribbean (namely, to cope with the difficulty of employing white and indigenous labour in the plantation system). Giving this perspective, therefore, it was a specific economic interest to have generated the idea of the natural predisposition of the black people to slavery and to have thus rendered "the recognition and reproduction of the so-called "race distinctions" the economic foundation of the modern world. An aspect highlighted also, in 1911, by Hubert Harrison, among the most important political figures of the New Negro Movement and the Harlem Renaissance.

Partially different is the interpretation given by Cedric Robinson (9-28), according to whom racism was born in Europe between the Middle Age and Early Modern Age, as functional to the inferiorization of the European underclass. Consequently, Robinson placed the invention of "whiteness" before the birth of the Atlantic line. There would therefore be no break but continuity between pre-modern Europe and the full affirmation of what Robinson called "racial capitalism" during the Modern Age.[11]

However, as David Brion Davis has stressed,[12] the basic contours of slavery in Portugal, Spain, and their American colonies are sometimes given brief treatment in studies on slave labour and racism. In this regard, James Sweet (*Spanish and Portuguese Influences on Racial Slavery in British North America, 1492-1619*, 2003) underlined how when the Atlantic slave trade began, in the fifteen century, most Africans were already placed into an entirely new and different category of

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[11] See T.W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, II Vol., New York, Verso, 1994

[12] See: *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY, 1966), but more specifically the recent American Historical Review Forum, "Crossing Slavery's Boundaries." Davis' article, "Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspectives,", followed by responses from Peter Kolchin, Rebecca Scott, and Stanley Engerman. *American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 451-484. 2)

enslaveable peoples. On the one hand, Africans were considered "gentiles," theoretically capable of conversion to Christianity and even integration into the emerging nation-state (whose subjects were defined primarily by their Christian identity). On the other hand, they were considered so "barbaric" that their human capacities were often called into question. As an instance of that, Sweet presents the report of the royal chronicler Gomes Eanes de Zurara (1410-1474) who, describing the first enslaved African taken by the Portuguese via the Atlantic, noted that they were "bestial" and "barbaric" (Sweet 5). Likewise, Hernando del Pulgar (1436-1493), appointed royal historian of Spain in 1482, wrote that the inhabitants of the Mina coast were "savage people, black men, who were naked and lived in huts" (Sweet 5).

Despite the difficulty of defining the relationship between the Atlantic trade and the birth of European racism, it is conversely possible to identify the period in which the definitive racialization of slavery and the progressive limitation of the rights of free blacks produced a politicization of the race such that it is at that moment that a specific black subjectivity begins to emerge. Although the original belonging to the main populations of West and Central Africa most affected by the Atlantic treaty –

Map 4 Mercantilist World-Economy, ca. 1530-1776
From: Eric Ross, *Mapping the Mercantilistic Economy*, available at:
https://ericrossacademic.wordpress.com/2015/10/18/mapping-the-mercantilist-world-economy/
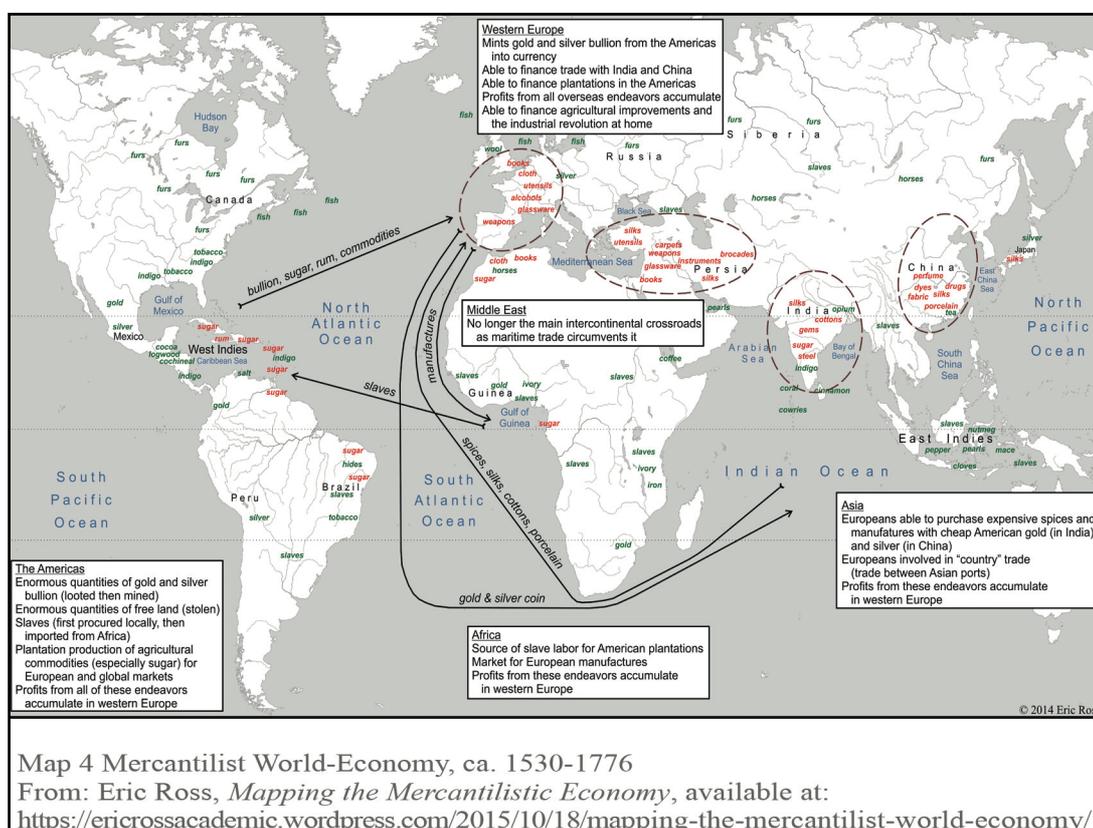
Kongo, Mande, Wolof, Yoruba, Igbo, Akan, Fula – continues to be relevant linguistically, culturally and politically, slaves and free blacks in the Americas start to represent themselves as one "people", the "black people" or "African", from the second half of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century onwards.[13]

1.3. The Middle passage

Initially, states financed the slave trade with monopolistic companies based on the model of the British and Dutch East Indies Company, which gradually turned into liberalization. The route from Europe to Africa remained for most of the countries under a monopoly, whereas the trade route from Africa to the Americas was under free commerce rules. Normally, the companies who managed the voyages actuated a diversification of risk, transporting not only slaves but also goods. Sailors on the ships were repeatedly maltreated. Still, there were as many sailors as slaves, and some were even slaves themselves.

Enslaved people were expensive to buy.[14] The African marked obliged the French, British, Spanish and Portuguese to import foreign goods in order to buy slaves (see Map 4). The most requested items were textile goods from the East Indies, cowry shells from Asia, weapons and gunpowder, alcohol, tobacco, and iron sticks. The fact that most of these products were not fabricated in their countries of origin made the slave trade the most expansive overseas trade of all time for all European countries (Klein, *The Atlantic Save Trade* 119).

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[13] See: *Black Cosmopolitanism Racial Consciousness and Transnational Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Americas* by Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo.

[14] The buying and selling of slaves is a subject that just recently has become a major theme of study with the issue of prices the most advanced of the areas examined, while the mechanism of credit, purchases, and internal shipment must be pieced together from a whole range of works and is still better studied from the African and European side than from the American viewpoint. The best current price information on the cost of African slaves on the western African coast has been gathered together and analyzed by David Richardson, "Prices of Slaves in West and West Central Africa: Toward an Annual Series, 1698–1807" Bulletin of Economic Research, 43, no.1 (1991): 21–56; and the most complete set of American prices is found in Laird Bergad, Fe Iglesias,and Maria del Carmen Barcia, *The Cuban Slave Market, 1790–1880* (Cambridge, 1995), and Laird Bergad, *Slavery in the Demographic and Economic History of Minas Gerais, Brazil, 1720–1888* (Cambridge, 1999).

The travel from Europe to Africa took at least three or four months and usually involved several stopovers.[15] Once the ship arrived in Africa, it would stop from six up to twelve months to locate people to enslave. During this time, many enslaved Africans died, amounting to more than the 5% of the total cargos. The enslaved people were prisoners of war, kidnapped people, and forced migrants.

Although the slave trade was a well-established practice that already existed in Africa even before the arrival of the Portuguese, the increase in European trade reached such a point that in the second half of the eighteenth century the local economies of Congo, Angola and Biafra were entirely dependent on the slave trade. People were enslaved through raids in the Biafra Gulf, Congo and Angola. Moreover, large-scale African civil wars had been started in order to enslave defeated peoples. Ecological changes in East Africa produced slaves as well, indeed as Klein explains, "severe periods of drought usually led to the destruction of local economies and state" (Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* 12), making people more vulnerable to enslavement.

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[15] There are few recorded experiences of the slave trade itself; one of the most comprehensive is by Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Written by Himself* (1789). On the other hand, we have detailed accounts by slave captains of their experiences in the trade. The single most important source will be found in Great Britain (House of Commons, *Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Sheila Lambert – Wilmington, DL, 1974 -, vols. 67–76 and 82), covering the testimony given to Parliament in 1788 to 1790. Specific studies have been conducted on the issues of disease transmission and the slave trade and are discussed in Kenneth F. Kiple and Virginia H. King, *Another Dimension to the Black Diaspora: Diet, Disease and Racism* (Cambridge, 1981); Kenneth F. Kiple, *The Caribbean Slave: A Biological History* (Cambridge,1984); and Frantz Tardo-Dino*, Le collier de servitude: La condition sanitaire des esclaves aux antilles franc¸aises du XVIIe au XIXe si`ecle* (Paris, 1985); additionally, on rate mortality on the ships: H. Klein, *The Middle Passage* (1978); Richard L. Cohn and Richard A. Jensen, "The Determinants of Slave Mortality Rates on the Middle Passage", *Explorations in Economic History* 19 (1982): 269–82; David Eltis, "Mortality and Voyage Length in the Middle Passage: New Evidence from the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Economic History* 44 (1984): 301–18; Raymond L. Cohn, "Deaths of Slaves in the Middle Passage," *Journal of Economic History* 45 (1985): 685–92; Richard H. Steckel and Richard A. Jensen, "New Evidence on the Causes of Slave and Crew Mortality in the Atlantic Slave Trade," *Journal of Economic History* 46, no.1 (1986):57–77.
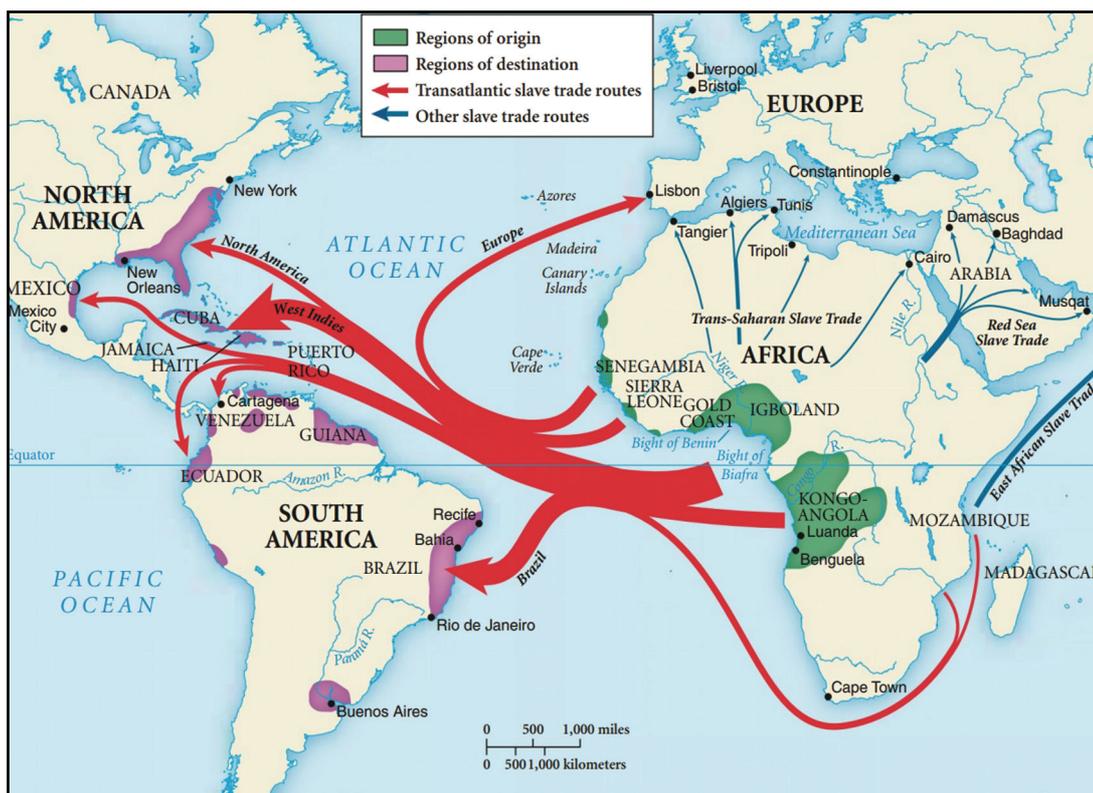
Map 5 Routes of the Slave Trade
From: Robert W. Strayer, Eric W. Nelson, *Ways of the World: A Brief Global History with Sources*, Combined Volume, 3rd Edition (2015)

The journey to the Americas lasted at least fifty days. The trip from Africa to Brazil was shorter and took about one month, in contrast to the two-month voyage from Africa to Caribbean and North America. The Peruvian route was the longest and most difficult one, as it could take from four to five months with double the mortality rates for the enslaved (Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* 49). From Africa (Senegal, Nigeria, Congo or Angola), the enslaved were brought to the Caribbean coast of South America (Cartagena) where they were carried inland down to the Pacific Ocean to Callao, a port near the Peruvian capital of Lima.

On the ships, men, boys and women with children were separated and those who fell sick were isolated. Slaves were chained together at night, but during the day they were free and made to do exercises with African music in the background. They were all washed with seawater and there was always a physician on board who, realistically, could not prevent the high rates of mortality and diseases. Once slaves arrived in the country of destination, they passed through sanitation checks and were then sold. The timing of the sale changed for each company. In the eighteenth

century, the British in Bermuda used to sell their cargoes in two or three days. Additionally, there were places like Santo Domingo where free black women bought sick Africans in order to cure them, re-selling them for a higher price.

Generally, there were complications with payments since the accorded price for the selling was given in part through deposit. The rest had to be corresponded in 18-24 months, usually in the form of colonial goods. Then, after 15-18 months, the slave-ship returned to Europe with a different and modest cargo. Contrary to the popular vision of the slave trade as a triangle, the stage between America and Europe was the least important stop of the whole expedition. Slave-ships did not have a significant impact on the supply of the European market with slavery-connected goods (Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* 133).

The myth of the triangular trade assumed that there was a strong correlation between the sending in Africa of European goods to purchase slaves and the shipping in the European markets of enslaved people's products; it imagines that every ship contributed to each stage. However, this image is inaccurate, since the products from the West Indies were shipped to Europe on large vessels rather than slave ships, as Klein explains:

> As was noted earlier, the fact that these slave-trade vessels were much smaller ships than Europeans used in either the West Indian or East Indian trades, goes a long way to explaining why the belief in a triangular trade (European goods to Africa, slaves for America, and sugar for Europe all on the same voyage) is largely a myth. The majority of American crops reached European markets in much larger and specially constructed West Indian vessels designed primarily for this shuttle trade; the majority of slavers returned with small cargoes or none at all; and in the largest slave trade of them all – that of Brazil – no slavers either departed from or returned to Europe.

Overall, the following Maps (6 and 7) and Graphs (1 and 2) show the paths of the Atlantic trade and its wide-ranging numbers:
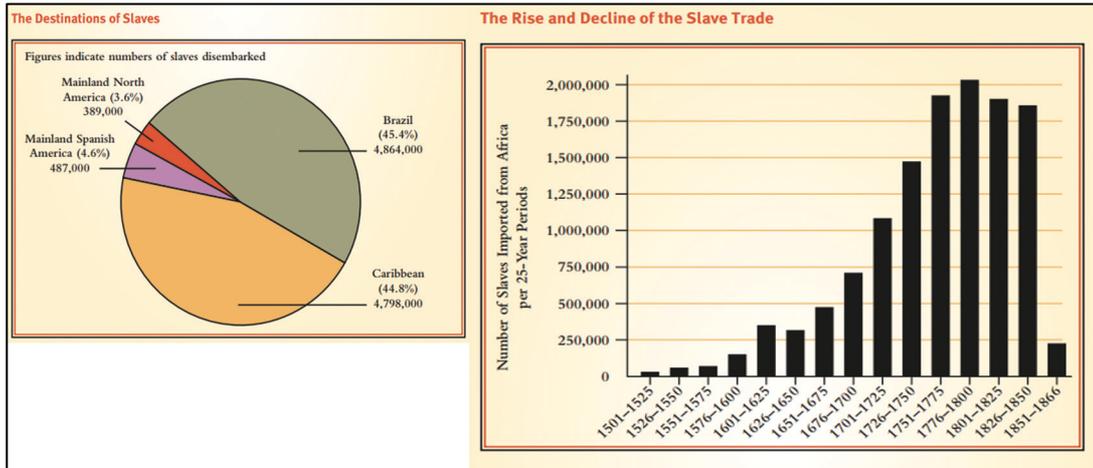
Graph 1 The Rise and Decline of the Slave Trade
From: Robert W. Strayer, Eric W. Nelson, *Ways of the World: A Brief Global History with Sources*, Combined Volume, 3rd Edition (2015)

Graph 2 The Destinations of Slaves
From: Robert W. Strayer, Eric W. Nelson, *Ways of the World: A Brief Global History with Sources*, Combined Volume, 3rd Edition (2015)
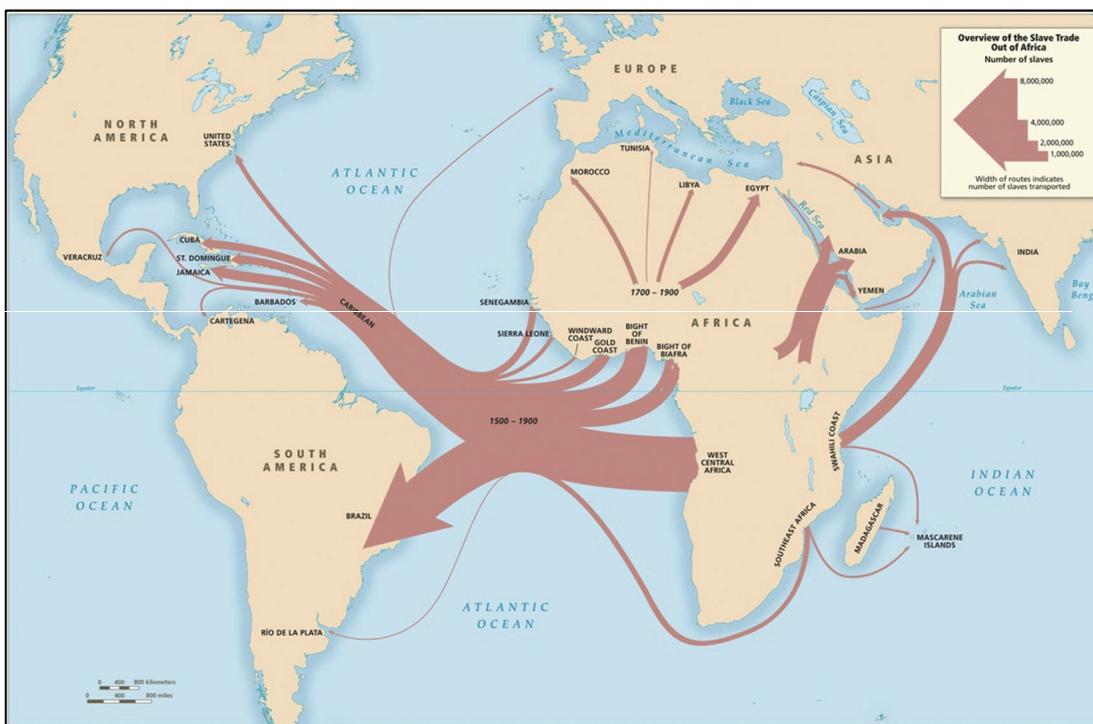
Map 6 Overview of the Slave Trade Out of Africa
From: David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (2010). Also available at: http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/intro-maps
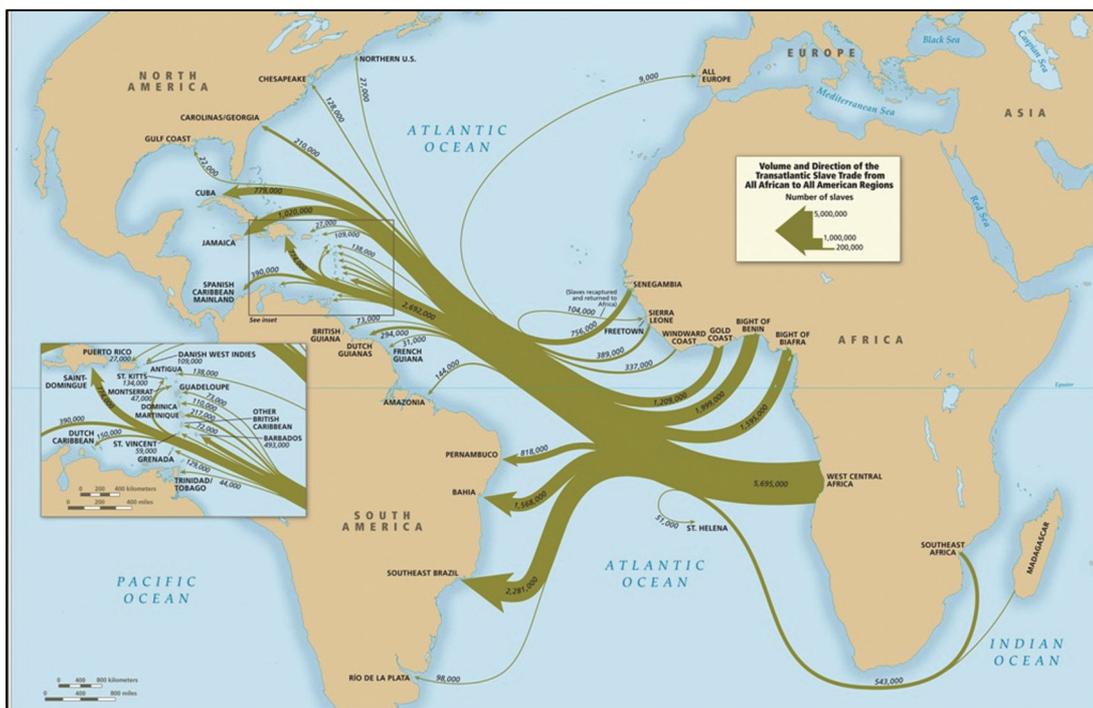
Map 7 Volume and Direction of the Transatlantic Slave Trade
From: David Eltis and David Richardson, Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade (2010).
Also available at: http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/intro-maps

1.4. Slave rebellions

Since the beginning of the employment in the New World of forced labour, slave rebellions occurred. The first account of organized rebellion can be traced back to 1521 in Hispaniola, the modern Santo Domingo, that the Spaniards had decided to populate with *bozales* slaves[16] only, as they were thought to be more pacific than the acculturated African *ladinos* (Landers and Robinson 49). Nevertheless, they rebelled against the island's governor, Diego Colón (Christopher Columbus's oldest son). The rebels ended up hanged along the pathways that lead to the sugar plantation as punishment (Galeano 99). Yet, many more rebellions spread in almost every sugar

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[16] The Christianized blacks mentioned in the sixteenth-century documents issued in Spain, La Española and the rest of the Spanish empire were known as *ladinos*, and the term referred in general to the blacks who were familiar in general with the religion, cultures, and languages of Castile or Portugal (either because of having been born and raised in those territories or due to long contact with or exposure to these cultures). Conversely those blacks with no familiarity with the Iberian cultures and languages, typically those brought straight from Africa, were called *bozales*. As indicated here, during these first years of the colonization, the Spanish Crown tried to limit the arrival of blacks into the Americas to *ladinos*, but the restriction lasted only a short time.

island in the Caribbean and in every American colony. In Jamaica, conspiracies and revolts increased in 1760-1 when four hundred slaves rebelled on the north coast (Thomas 27). Two centuries after the rebellion against Diego Colón on the other side of the same island, runaway slaves fled to the woods of Haiti re-enacting African traditions and living as free people.

The Haitian Revolution had a great impact on the debate on French and British abolitionism and on politics towards slaves. It started in 1791 and by 1803, slaves succeeded in ending both slavery and French control over the colony.[17] In 1804, the independence of Haiti was effective, and it became the first black republic of the world. However, France recognized Haiti's independence only in 1825, and only through the payment of a large indemnity.

In 1789 the population of Saint-Domingue consisted of about 465,000 slaves, of which a significant part were the so-called *bossales*; 31,000 white people, divided between *petit blancs* – the non-proprietary class consisting of sailors, traders, artisans and plant administrators – and *grand blancs* – large landowners, army officers, governor, intendant and other officials -; 28,000 free colour (*gens de couleur libres*), divided between *affranchis* and *mulattos* born free. Moreover, especially from the second half of the eighteenth century, the colonial authorities of Saint-Domingue, and in a similar way those of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyana – issued a series of regulations that drastically limited the rights of free Afro-descendents[18]. In 1789,

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[17] A renewed interest in the Haitian revolution have taken place recently, with studies such as Aimé Césaire, *Toussaint Louverture ; La Révolution française et le problème colonial*, Club Français du Livre, Paris, 1960; Jean-Louis Donnadieu, *Toussaint Louverture – Le Napoléon Noir*, Belin, 2014; Alain Foix, *Noir, de Toussaint Louverture à Barack Obama*, Galaade, 2008; D. Armitage, S. Subrahmanyam (eds.), *The Age of Revolution in Global Context, c. 1760-1840*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. C.E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti. The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*, Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1990; L. Dubois, *Avengers of the New World. The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 2004; S. Fischer S., *Modernity Disavowed*, cit.; D.P. Geggus, N. Fiering (eds), *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2009; J.D. Popkin, *You Are All Free: the Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011; A. Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

[18] In theory the rules governing the relationship between master and slave were still established by the *Code Noir* of 1685. Written according to a Romanesque system, the edict of Louis XIV gave no juridical quality to race diversity and recognized only the distinction between free and slave, defining the status of movable property of slaves and establishing the rights and duties of the owners24. It was thus a set of rules that aimed to affirm greater political control of the Crown over the colonies and to regulate the conduct of slaves and masters. In reality, the code was scarcely applied by magistrates and, subsequently, completely bypassed by local regulations, in open. contradiction with Article 59 of *the Code Noir*, which instead recognized the freed slaves "the same rights, privileges and immunities enjoyed by persons born free"

the free people of colour were excluded from any major public office, they could not practice medical professions, freely possess weapons, keep the surname of the father if the latter was French and not even wear luxurious jewellery and European attire.

The event that marked the start of slave uprising in Haiti is commonly identified with the voodoo ceremony celebrated on 14 August 1791 at Bois-Caïman (Bwa Kayiman), near Cap-Français, by Dutty Boukman, born in Jamaica and recognized as *houngan*, or voodoo "priest", and by the priestess (*manbo*) Cécile Fatiman. Convened to decide a general mobilization against the masters aimed at demanding three days of weekly leave, the ceremony brought together some of the main leaders of the slave communities of the northern province. In the night between 22 and 23 August the rebellion began: about 2000 slaves killed white masters and set fire to the properties in the parish of Acul, moving then in the plantations of the surrounding parishes (Limbe, Limonade, Port Margot, Plaisance, Petit Anse), to arrive on August 25 at the gates of Cap-Français. In November, the revolt had spread throughout the North and involved more than 100,000 slaves.

After the first years of rebellion (1791-1794), the figure of François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture appeared (James). Louverture united the insurgents by organising an army loyal to the Republic and later became the main political authority of the colony. The rebellion ended in 1804 with the independence of the colony and the consequent formation of the only state that had been established in an independent nation, thanks to a slave revolt (James, Blackburn).

The affair of Haiti had a long impact on slave power, on the abolitionist debate and on the concrete struggles of slaves. First, it brought about a transformation of the economic and geopolitical structures of the Atlantic space. Obtained by Spain in 1697 with the Treaty of Ryswick, in 1789 Saint-Domingue had become the richest colony of the Americas, also called the "pearl of the Antilles". In the island has been produced about half of the sugar and coffee traded throughout the Atlantic. The sugar produced in Haiti was exported above all to France and then resold thoughout in Europe. It guaranteed substantial profits and tax revenues for the French economy and state, already weakened by famine and financial disruption. The loss of the colony was, therefore, an economic disaster but it also determined the end of

Napoleon's imperial project in the Americas, sanctioned in 1803 with the sale of Louisiana to the United States government presided over by Thomas Jefferson.

This proved to the European and American élites the vulnerability of the plantation system and in particular of the colonies inhabited by a clear majority of slaves. The success of the revolution was followed by a climate of "terror" as a turning point in the debate on slavery. During the first decade of war between France and England (1793-1803), the communication networks of the transatlantic abolitionist movement loosened, and the debate on abolition in the English Parliament was interrupted. However, after the defeat of Napoleon, the abolition of the Atlantic trade turned out to be a choice that could have avoided a new mass rebellion on the model of Haiti and, moreover, would have conferred an image of moral superiority. The suppression of the slave trade was thus assumed by the British Empire as a tactical objective within a broader strategy of hegemonic control of the Atlantic (Blackburn).

Furthermore, the events of Saint-Domingue exercised on slaves a powerful stimulus to rebellion. Among the various examples it is worth mentioning five revolts located in different contexts and directly inspired by the revolution: the revolt of May 1795 in Coro, Venezuela, instigated by black sailors José Leonardo Chirinos and José Caridad Gonzalez; that in the Dutch colony of Curaçao, led by the slave Tula in August 1795; the attempt at rebellion organised in October 1800 in Richmond, Virginia, by Gabriel Prosser; the imposing rebellion in New Orleans in 1811 and, finally, the conspiracy of José Aponte in Cuba in 1812.

Lastly, the affair of Haiti marks the affirmation of "black people" as an autonomous political subject, as mentioned before. More precisely, racism and slavery were subverted by transforming race into the element of the definition of a subjectivity that imposed itself through a war of liberation. This element would influence all the culture of the Black Atlantic and especially African American radicalism.
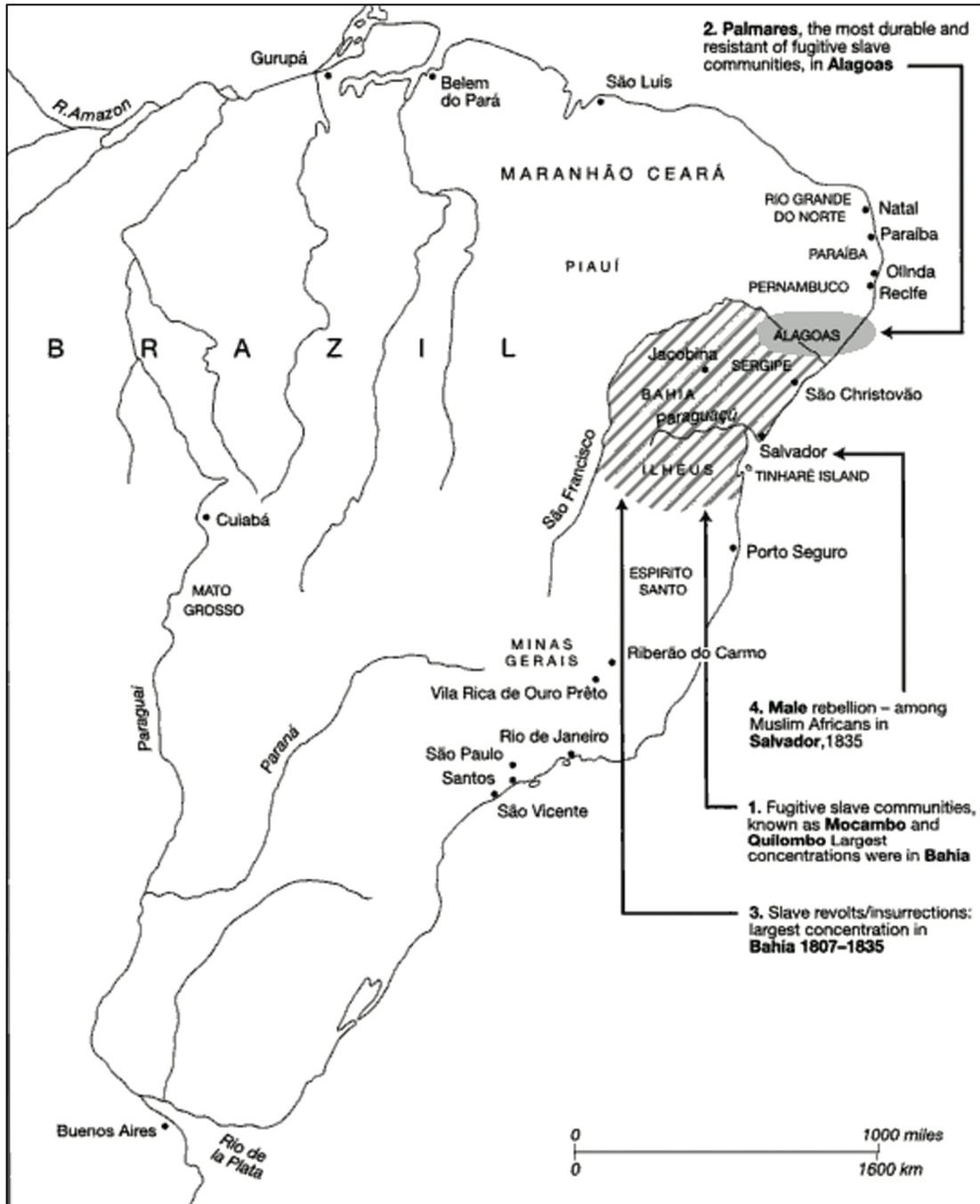
Map 9 Brazil: slave revolts and fugitive slave communities
From: Schwartz, S. B. (1985) *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550-1835.*

Map 8 Major Caribbean Slave Revolts
From: Rogozinski, J. (1994), *A Brief History of the Caribbean: From the Arawak and the Carib to the Present*.

1.5. European involvement in the transatlantic trade

The economic effects of the transatlantic slave trade on European countries are profound.[19] Merchants and businessmen from Iberian and Northern European countries were involved in the trade as suppliers of goods, as slave ship owners, and as dealers of the commodities produced by slave labour on the colonial soil. The Atlantic system of trade produced rivalled entrepreneurial expertise and capitals, to the extent that, according to Eric Williams (*Capitalism and Slavery*, 1944), the European control of the Atlantic world provided the means for a future world

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[19] There is a considerable debate in relation to the distribution of relative costs and benefits in the slave trade. The most systematic work in this area is that of David Eltis, "Trade between Western Africa and the Atlantic World before 1870: Estimates of Trends in Value, Composition and Direction," Research in Economic History 12 (1989): 197–239; and David Eltis and Lawrence C. Jennings, "Trade between Western Africa and the Atlantic World in the PreColonial Era," American Historical Review 93 (1988): 936–59. Researchers have also debated about the economic motivation behind the campaign and the supposed crisis in the West Indian economy: L. J. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763–1833* (New York, 1928); Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (1975); and three works by Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh, 1977), *Capitalism and Anti-Slavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (New York, 1986), and *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York, 2002).

dominance. The trade allowed for an unprecedented expansion of towns such as Bristol, Liverpool, Nantes, Bordeaux, Seville, and Lisbon (Map 10).

Williams also claimed that profits from slavery and the slave trade directly financed enterprises such as Barclays Bank; the banking and insurance houses "Lloyds of London", together with the steam engine invented by James Watt, who was used by West Indian slave owners. Santander and Bilbao banks also expanded their capital as a result of profits from the slave trade (Fraginals, *El Ingenio* 219-224). Moreover, the credit agreements used to finance the slave trade were the most sophisticated ones among all the economic tools used for long-distance trades, and, in England, the credit sales created credit institutions that continued to work even after the abolition of the slave trade.[20]

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[20] For more recent researches and data you may want to look at "Legacy of British Slave-Ownership", available at https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/commercial/ (last accessed 29/01/2019).
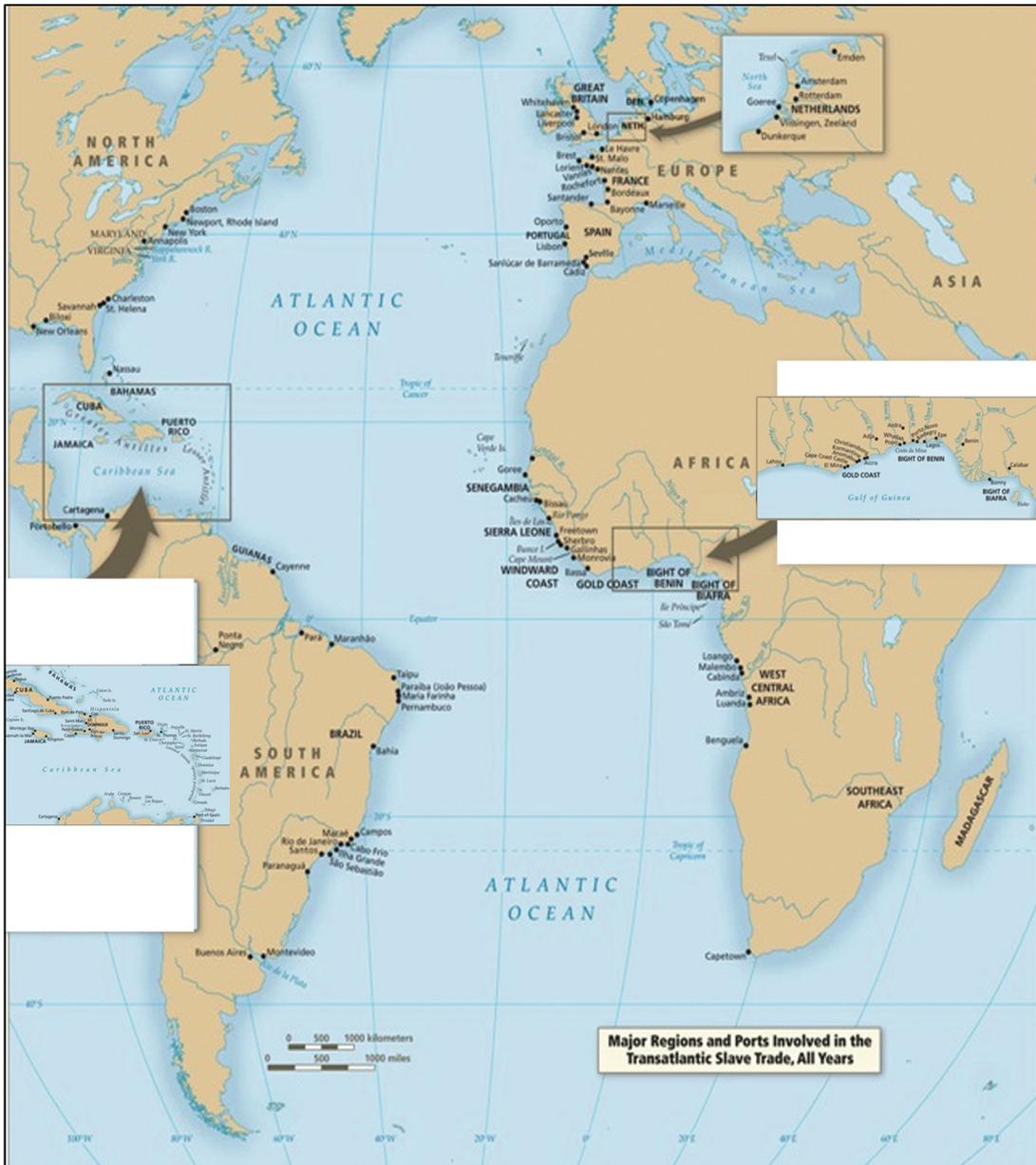
Map 10   Major Regions and Ports involved in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, All Years
From: David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (2010).
Also available at: http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/intro-maps

2. Colonialism, de-colonialism and literacy in the British Caribbean, the Spanish Cuban and the Brazilian territories

The experience of slavery in the colonies varied with respect to the different politics it was subjected to, and to the different ways Afro communities were formed in those spaces. Accordingly, I find it extremely important to outline in the next section the

general shape that slavery, colonialism, and abolitionism have taken in each specific country or European power that functioned as a background of the studied literary texts.[21]

2.1. The Britons in the Caribbean

In 1770, Britain had the most productive colonies of slaves: 878,000 slaves in total, of which 450,000 in North American British colonies and 428,000 in the British Caribbean, which in 1807 reached a population of 750,000 slaves. The majority of slaves in the British Caribbean colonies were coming from Liberia (WindWard), Ghana (Gold Coast) and Togoland (Slave Coast).

At the time Mary Prince was born, Bermuda was a self-governing British colony lying about 600 miles from the coast of Virginia in the western North Atlantic Ocean. Its representative government, mainly composed by a kind of élite dependent on the United Kingdom, ruled the British Caribbean and it was proclaimed a Crown colony in 1684. Despite its geographical isolation, its strategic proximity to important routes made it popular with long distance travellers as flue and rest stop.

Until Mary Prince's birth (1788 c.), its major industries were shipbuilding and salting. Turk Island, the focus of the Bermudian salt industry, lied 720 miles south in the remote Caicos group. Lacking good soil and abundant natural resources, Bermuda never became a plantation colony.[22] In 1788, less than 200 acres of land were being cultivated and the population numbered between 10.000 and 11.000 people of whom 5.000 were slaves.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Afro-descendants (free and enslaved) of the Island started to organise slave revolts. Between 1720 and 1730 several

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[21] In fact, only recently has it been understood that the status of Afro-Americans was not a generalised American experience but was unique to the United States. This is also one of the main reasons why I found it interesting to focus on the experiences of Afro-descendants in different countries of the New World (and not in North America), through the study of their works. See also: Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights* (London: Verso, 2013), for a genuine global approach to the issue of slavery.

[22] See: Henry Wilkinson, *Bermuda from Sail to Steam: The History of the Island from 1784-1909*, vol. 1-2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); Walter Hayward, *Bermuda Past and Present: A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Somers Islands* (New York, 1911) and for all discussions on slave rebellions and conditions in Bermuda see: Cyril Packwood, *Chained on the Rock: Slavery in Bermuda* (New York: Eliseo Torres, 1975)

remarkable poisoning plots, which involved slave knowledgeable about plants occurred, and an old slave named Sally Bassett was burnt at the stake for being considered a ringleader. In 1761, an island-wide conspiracy by over half the black population (approximately 4000 were prepared to rebel against almost 5000 inhabitants) led to the "Watch Law" being enacted in 1762 that called for extensive vigilance over black people, especially at night: if slaves were not found in their beds by night they would receive a 100 lashes. Since many white people thought free black people were responsible for these plots, regulations against them were tightened.

Already in 1711, the Bermuda Assembly passed a law that forbade masters from allowing their slaves to wear any silk, lace, ribbons, rings, bracelets, buckles, nor other ornaments (Prince 3), since many slaves wore fine clothing and fancy dresses to their own balls and gatherings. These "merry meetings and midnight festivals" reflected a synthesis of European fashion and African and Native American traditions perhaps best exemplified by the costume, dance, and music of *gombey* dancers. Despite the reforming efforts of the Assembly, numerous clandestine public houses served rum and *bibby* (a liquor made from fermented palmetto sap) to the black clients, sites where slave sailors could relax after months at sea.

Goods and spices flowing in Bermuda's internal slave economy testify to the success of Bermudian slave sailors in obtaining creature comforts for themselves and for the slave community as a whole, while their celebrations and rituals reveal their ability to create and maintain cultural traditions independently expressed from that of the white families with whom they lived.

Conversely, Antigua was the most attractive island for any slave actively thinking of freedom. Free black men were permitted to vote there, and, although this law did not apply to Mary Prince since she was not free, its relative liberality in the Caribbean islands was symbolically significant. More than an expansion of the franchise, the law implicitly recognised that all slaves were potentially entitled to civil rights and weakened owner control.

In 1783, after the Treaty of Paris ended the American War of Independence with Great Britain, the national geography of North America was re-written in British eyes, inasmuch as from the Royal Navy came the new order. Operations off and in

Bermuda came under the River St. Lawrence and Coast of North America and West Indies station. The loss of most of the American colonies in the American Revolution left Bermuda as the only British port between Halifax and the West Indies: an ideal location for a Royal Navy dockyard.

2.2. Spanish colonialism, Cuban independence and the circulation of knowledge

The abolitionist movement indeed has taken different shapes in England, Spain and Portugal and in their respective colonies, since whereas the Anglo-American abolitionist movement has been the promoter of many publications of writings by Afro-descendants; this movement has not assumed the same dimensions and importance in countries like Spain and Portugal. Among the many historical explanations that could be drown in order to explain the differences in these movements; the aspect that I would like to emphasise is connected to Spanish illiteracy rates, which can explain why English-speaking countries had a more abundant Afro-descendant literary production during the nineteenth century than the Spanish or Portuguese.

In particular, as Professor Maribel Arrelucea Barrantes has suggested to me, the different literacy rate of Spanish (and Portuguese) settlers compared to the English ones can be astonishing. In fact, if we look at the data of literacy in Spain from the eighteenth century onwards and we compare them with those of England, the statistical difference is immediately pressing. According to estimates (see Graph 3)[23], in 1650, the United Kingdom had a 53% literacy rate, whereas Spain had a 5% rate.

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[23] An overview of the academic literature on the historical origins and spread of literacy can be found in Easton, P. (2014). *Sustaining Literacy in Africa: Developing a Literate Environment*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Paris, France. Buringh, E., & Van Zanden, J. L. (2009). Charting the "Rise of the West": Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe, A long-term perspective from the sixth through eighteenth centuries. *The Journal of Economic History*, 69(02), 409-445. All data before 1800 are taken from Buringh, E., & Van Zanden, J. L. (2009). Observations before 1800 are plotted at the midpoint of the given time range (1475 refers to 1451–1500, 1550 refers to 1501-1600 etc.). Data for 1820 and 1870 (except for the US) are taken from Broadberry and O'Rourke (2010) – *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Europe*: Volume 1, 1700-1870. The data for world average literacy are from van Zanden, J.L., et al. (eds.) (2014), *How Was Life?: Global Well-being since 1820*, OECD Publishing. All data for all countries after 2000 are taken from the *CIA World Factbook* and refer to both sexes (15 and older) and from OxLAD – *Oxford Latin American Economic History Data Base*.
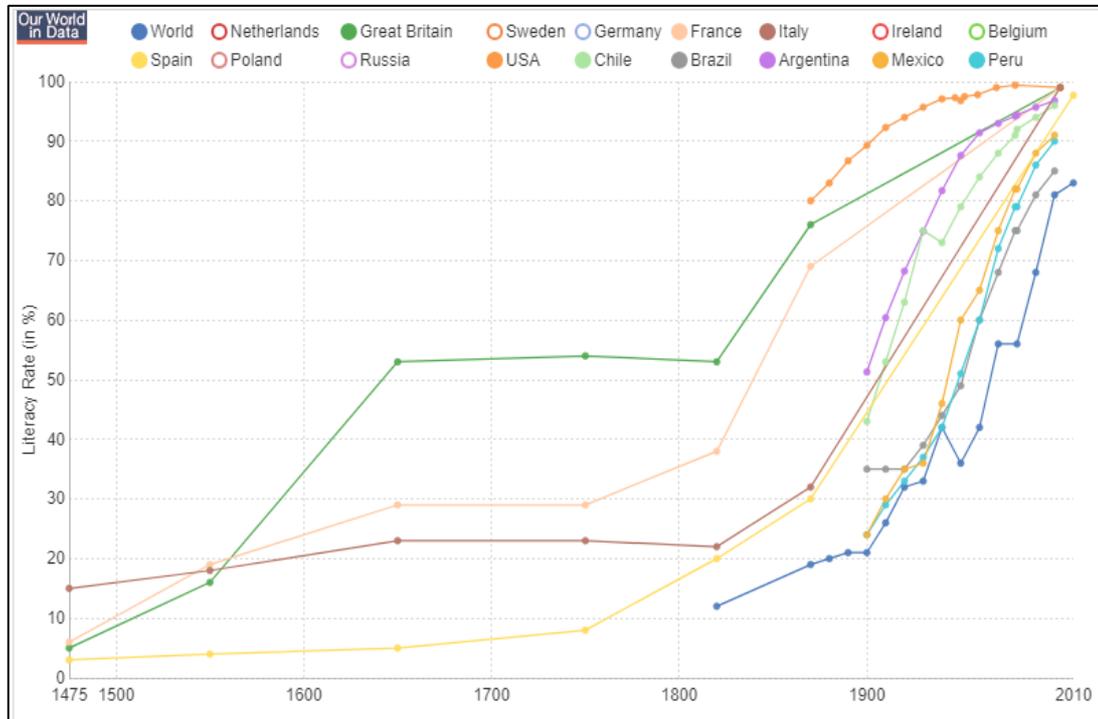
In 1820, the frame did not radically change since the British literary rates were still around 53%, while in Spain it did not increase much, reaching the 8%.

Accordingly, it is understandable how the literary production was less consistent in the Spanish colonies, including that of slaves. However, this did not prevent slaves from asserting their rights, for instance, as demonstrated in the interesting book by José Ramón Jouve Martín, *Esclavos de la ciudad letrada* (2005), writing was not a decisive element for going to court. In nineteenth-century Cuba, for instance, Cristina Ayala herself used to read her poems in public events to nonilliterate people, thus increasing the circle of beneficiaries of her works.

The circulation and reception of literary production in this way was not limited to individual and silent readers. On the contrary, the public readings in clubs and recreation associations, in addition to street proclamations and to readings in tobacco factories, contributed to the dissemination of revolutionary texts and encouraged the feeling of national community in Cuba. By being invited to read her texts at rallies and political meetings, Cristina Ayala was able to develop a public profile by making her poetry reach both the literate public and the illiterate. The genre of poetry also

probably facilitated the process of reading in public, to the point of placing her lyrical compositions at the service of gender and cultural empowerment by turning the Afro-descendant community into the subject of her poetic enunciation.

Additionally, on a political and legislative level, the condition of slaves in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies was slightly different than in other regions, and this allowed the creation of different communities of Afro-descendants in the Latin American territories compared to those of North America and the Caribbean.

According to the thirteenth century Iberian code, *Siete Partidas*, slavery was recognized as an institution which was "against natural reason" (Partida IV, Titulo XXI, ley I), "because with it a human being, who is the most noble and free creature, among all creations that God made, is placed in the power of another human being" (Partida IV, Titulo V). This, of course, did not mean that the state would not legitimize any contract of sale or ownership of slaves. Nonetheless, it recognized slavery as a necessary evil, holding that the state and its judicial institutions should guarantee certain minimal rights to slaves.

Of the three basic rights recognized by Iberian law, that which related to personal liberty was automatically sacrificed under slavery. Nevertheless, other primary rights, such as personal security and the right to property, were still effective. In terms of protection for personal security, both the thirteenth century *Partidas* by Alfonso X of Castile and the elaborated slave laws of Portugal's early sixteenth century *Ordenagoes Manuelinas* stated that the killing of slaves by their masters or anyone else was a crime punishable by death. While few (if any) masters in the Iberian Peninsula were actually executed for this crime, there were a fair number of cases of masters being exiled or forced to pay major fines for such acts.

Still, the Spanish codes on slavery did not translate automatically or without changes in the New World Iberian territories, since they were intended mainly for domestic service rather than plantation slavery. Furthermore, many of the rights granted to slaves in the colonies were automatically suppressed in the instance of rebellions or crisis. Overall, in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, slaves had the right to keep the harvest of their small farms as well as part of the gain if they were rented to different masters. They could also work on Sunday as a legitimate form of earning money, accepted also by the church.

Furthermore, slaves in the Iberian territories had the possibility of buying their own freedom, a practice less common in other colonies of the New World. This legal right, effective in the case of both Cuba and Brazil, facilitated the growth of a major free coloured population well before the period of emancipation in those territories.

In Latin American judicial archives, it is common to find court cases that determine if the price set by the owner to let the slave buy his/her own freedom was fair. Some of them are also collected in the volume *Afro-Latino Voices: Narratives from the Early Modern Ibero-Atlantic World, 1550-1812*, edited by Kathryn Joy McKnight and Leo Garofalo (2009). *Coartación* (namely, manumission) was constantly expanded and reinforced in the Iberian colonies from the early colonial period until the nineteenth century. Additionally, slaves who had made an insufficient payment on their purchase price could not be sold or transferred from their residence, and they could also appeal to the authorities to protect their rights at any time. Of course, despite these customary and legal rights, many slaves were at the arbitrary will of their masters and overseers. Apart from freeing their slaves with notarial deeds, masters could also manumit slaves at baptism. This was for instance the usual route for fathers to implicitly recognize their illegitimate offspring and in this case, liberation required only the declaration of parents and godparents to set a child free (Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* 228).

In Peru, procedures of slave ownership developed into a model for all of Spanish America. First, it became very common to rent slaves in the cities (a less common practice in rural areas). In urban contexts, qualified or semi-qualified slaves were often rented alone by paying both them and their masters. In general, slaves in urban areas were therefore a very mobile and flexible work force, to the point that in case of emergency they were also rented by the Spanish Crown for the building of fortifications, the fleet, or the shipyards. Furthermore, in every region, both urban and rural, and in every workplace, there were always free Afro-descendents. Some of these mixed-race had arrived from Spain with the conquistadors and, although racially discriminated against by whites, they were present in all kinds of jobs. Around 1600, Afro-descendants and free mixed-race made up between 10 and 15% of the coloured population in most Spanish colonial cities, a percentage that

increased throughout the century (Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* 32).

Of the Spanish colonies, the last region where slavery prospered was Cuba, which had experienced a boom in the production of sugar, coffee, and tobacco due to a series of crucial historical events from the mid-eighteenth century onwards.

First, as part of the Seven Years War (1756-1763), from March to August 1762, the British Government undertook military action known as "The Siege of Havana", capturing the city of Havana with the aim to deliver a serious blow to the Spanish Navy. Although the British occupation lasted only few months, ending with the *Treaty of Paris* in 1763, it was enough to open the Cuban island to international commerce (Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* 62). In five months the Britons imported more than 10.700 enslaved African in the island, increasing fivefold the number of slaves that the Spanish crown allowed to transport annually. With the growing slave population and labour, the production of coffee and sugar notably increased. In 1763, when the Spanish took back the control of Cuba, they favoured the industrialization process by buying machines for sugar production and encouraging Spanish immigrants in Cuba to exploit virgin lands with plantations. At the end of the eighteenth century, then, Cuba had turn into one of the Spanish colonies with the largest amount of slaves.

Moreover, when the slave trade (1807) and slavery (1834) were abolished in England, many English planters moved their possessions to the Spanish Antilles and to Cuba, bringing their slaves either forcibly or with false promises. For British West Indian planters Cuba offered the perfect escape to British abolitionist politics. Even after Spain and Britain signed the *Treaty for the Suppression of the Slave Trade* in 1817, the slave trade business increased considerably. The number of slaves in Cuba swelled from 38,879 in 1774, to 286,942 in 1827, reaching 436,495 in 1841, a time when they represented 43.3% of the total population.[24]

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[24] While there was an initial reduction in the number of slaves imported in the years immediately following the implementation of the *Treaty and* with an accompanying increase in prices in the Cuban slave market, British naval cruisers' attempts to prevent the transportation of slaves from Africa to Cuba seem to have been largely unsuccessful. Between 1835 and 1865, a mere 20,000 of the almost 400,000 slaves imported into Cuba were captured in this way. Even though the cruisers were a perennial inconvenience for the slave-traders, so ineffectual was their presence that far from continuing to force up the value of slaves in Cuba, their price was actually reduced during the 1830s and 1840s. It was a long-held complaint of British representatives in Cuba that the very local

Another crucial historical event that influenced the history of Cuba was the slavery upraise in Haiti, in 1791, which caused the exit of the first sugar and coffee producer in the world from the market. Consequently, the international prices of coffee and sugar rose considerably, and other producers such as Cuba, Jamaica, Bahia (Brazil) and Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) suddenly tried to meet the new market demands. However, the uprising also entailed a tightening in the control of slaves, since more restrictive laws were promulgated from the North American Virginia to the Rio Grande of the South and less tolerant attitudes towards free blacks started to spread[25]. In Cuba and Puerto Rico, the white upper class preferred to remain loyal to the Spanish crown, while in other parts of Spanish America, the rebellion from their homeland involved a more rapid process of the abolition of slavery (as it happened in Venezuela).

Accordingly, in the period from the 1830s to the 1860s, the sugar plantation regime in Cuba entered a new phase of technological revolution. The first *ferrocarril* of all Latin America was constructed and subsequently reduced the cost of transportation, allowing the expansion of cultivated land. Steam energy started to be employed, revolutionizing the *molienda* (the mills) by optimizing the production twenty-four times its previous output. As the demand for sugar and coffee from Europe was growing, the demand for labour increased as well, to the point where during the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, and before the abolition of trafficking, planters imported hundreds of Mayan Indians of Yucatan (enslaved after having rebelled) and more than 100,000 Chinese workers together with massive numbers of enslaved Africans.[26]

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authorities charged with overseeing and enforcing the antislave-trade laws were themselves benefiting from that trade. Such corruption was seen to begin with the Captain General (or Governor) himself, who could expect to receive from half to one ounce of gold for every slave imported, and worked its way down to local officials who would be expected to turn a blind eye to what was going on. Also, according to Curry-Machado, this led to a kidnapping of British citizens in the Caribbean colonies, brought as slaves in Cuba. On the kidnappings by the Britons, see: Johnatan Curry-Machado, 'Catalysts in the Crucible: kidnapped Caribbeans, free black British subjects and migrant British machinists in the failed Cuban revolution of 1843', in Nancy Naro (ed.), *Blacks and National Identity in 19th Century Latin America*, London: ILAS, 2003.

[25] See for instance the study conducted by Michele Reid-Vazquez, The Year of the Lash, Free People of Color in cuba and the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World (2011), University of Georgia Press.

[26] See, M. Moreno Fraginals, *El Ingenio , 3 Vols.* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978); F. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the 19th Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970); Ramiro *Guerra y Sanchez, Azúzcar y población en las Antillas* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1970).

Overall, Cuban slaves were a moderate-sized population in the nineteenth century, especially if compared to that of the United States, Brazil or Santo Domingo, given that slaves made up approximately 370,000 out of half a million Afro-descendants and mixed-races in Cuba. Furthermore, in 1861, a third of these slaves lived in urban areas.

Cuba ended its participation in the slave trade in 1867, and slavery was abolished by a Spanish royal decree on the 7th of October, 1886. In 1868, Cuba started its process of independence from Spain with the Ten Years War (*Guerra de los Diez Años*, 1868-1878), followed by the Little War (*Guerra Chiquita*, 1879–1880) and the War of Independence (*Guerra de Independencia Cubana*, 1895–98).

The fiscal pressure imposed by Spain and its monopolies on *banda* – textiles and tobacco — drowned the economy of the island, especially for middle classes and rural landowners. In 1892, José Martí created the Cuban Revolutionary Party with the intention of expelling the Spaniards from the island. On February 24, 1895, a very irregular war for Cuban independence began. On the 22nd of October, the Cubans launched the invasion of the island invasion, fighting against the Spaniards by using techniques of open confrontation and guerrilla warfare due to their numerical and logistical inferiority. With this strategy, the insurgency managed to take control of the entire island. In view of the dimensions of the conflict, the Spaniards decided to redouble their efforts to win the war, as they gave Valeriano Weyler, General Captain of Cuba, the power to crush the Cuban insurrection at whatever price in February of 1896.[27]

Despite having *carte blanche*, Weyler was not able to defeat the insurrectionists completely. As a fight against an irregular adversary, he tried to end popular support for independence. To achieve this, he set numerous *Reconcentration* camps in place where civilians suspected of aiding rebels were detained. In these spaces, around 200,000 Cuban peasants died of hunger and diseases.[28]

In 1898, the war was stuck. At that moment, the United States came on the scene, looking for an opportunity to intervene in the war in their favour. On February 15th,

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[27] See: Navarro, José Cantón: *History of Cuba,* Havana, Cuba, 1998; *Los Ultimos Dias del Comienzo. Ensayos sobre la Guerra Hispano-Cubana-Estadounidense.* B.E. Aguirre and E. Espina eds. RiL Editores, Santiago de Chile; and Sheina, Robert L., *Latin America's Wars: The Age of the Caudillo, 1791–1899* (2003).

[28] For further information, see: John Lawrence Tone. *War and Genocide in Cuba 1895–1898* (2006).

1898, as the American battleship "Maine" exploded in the port of Havana, the American government considered the Spanish army responsible for the action and declared war on Spain. A second phase of the Cuban War of Independence began, featuring Spain and the United States as the main protagonists.[29]

Spain sued for peace on the 17th of July, 1898. On the 10th of December, 1898, the United States and Spain signed the *Treaty of Paris*, recognizing Cuban independence. Although the Cubans had participated in liberation efforts, the United States prevented Cuba from participating in the Paris peace negotiations. After all, the treaty set no time limit for the United States' occupation of Cuba.[30]

2.3. The independence of Brazil and the feminization of culture

The first half of the nineteenth century was a time of economic and cultural growth for Brazil, due mainly to the arrival of the Portuguese royal family which drastically changed Brazilian culture and habits. In 1808, the royal family moved its residence to Rio de Janeiro, escaping from Napoleon war in Europe. The arrival of the royal family enhanced the metropolitan life of Brazil, now no longer only a peripheral area of the Portuguese Empire. Emperor Pedro I became the king of the newly christened Brazilian country in 1822, increasing Brazilian centrality.

The new habits employed by the court of João VI triggered an increase in the production of performances, theatrical pieces, and operas, facilitating the spread of books among the population. This change was felt mainly in the industrial outbreak which involved the number enhance of factories, banks, shipping companies, railways, urban transport, gas lighting, mining exploration, and the democratization of education, thus extending to women a privilege previously reserved only to men.

On 7th September, 1822, Pedro declared Brazil's independence and, after waging a successful war against his father's kingdom, was acclaimed on 12 October as Pedro

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[29] See: McCartney, Paul T. (2006) *Power and Progress: American National Identity, the War of 1898, and the Rise of American Imperialism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 87–142; Rice, Donald Tunnicliff. *Cast in Deathless Bronze: Andrew Rowan, the Spanish–American War, and the Origins of American Empire*. Morgantown WV: West Virginia University Press, 2016.

[30] See: Grenville, John A. S. and George Berkeley Young. *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873-1917* (1966) and A History of the Cuban Revolution, by Aviva Chomsky (2015).

I, the first Emperor of Brazil. Subsequently, a military overthrow in 1889 gave rise to the First Brazilian Republic.

The need for women's education was directly linked to the project of modernizing society, since female schools aimed to shape women into mothers and, consequently, submissive wives to please and serve their men. The first legislation on women's education in 1827 was part of the "Lei das Escolas de Primeiras Letras". Up to that point, schooling was carried out in convents, in rare private schools, or in the house. As Brazilian scholar Nadia Battella Gotlib (2004) affirms in her chapter on female Brazilian writers, female and male education was carried out differently[31]:

> Havia também, a possibilidade de autodidatismo, forma de educação não formal, em ambiente doméstico. E ainda em território doméstico, havia a distribuição da matéria de acordo com o sexo. De modo geral, ao homem era de praxe se ensinar a ler, a escrever e contar, e a mulher, a coser, lavar, a fazer renda e todos os misteres femininos, que incluía a reza. Se muitas mulheres, sobretudo irmãs fêmeas e sem dote, eram depositadas em conventos, muitas também passaram a manter escolas no próprio espaço privado, ai ensinando leitura, música, corte e costura. (Muzart 27)[32]

Notwithstanding the qualitative and quantitative differences between female and male education, female schooling was the starting point for the formation of a socially and politically informed women's identity. Women's schooling, although precarious, promoted by the empire and the consequent feminization of the profession of teaching, enabled women (although they were few until the middle of the nineteenth century) to oppose the idea that they did not need to learn how to read. Women opened schools, published books, founded newspapers and wrote articles in defence of the right to enter the public sphere. Since its inception, in 1852, the issue of female education has been the flagship of these journals, initially defended through the perspective of women's positivist ideas as the guardian of family morals, responsible for the instruction of children and therefore for the character of men. Later on, women's newspaper articles dealt with other issues such as the criticism of

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[31] On the same topic, see also Quintanero T. (1996), *Retratos de mulher*, São Paulo: Vozes 1996, p. 171.

[32] Transl. mine: "There was also the possibility of self-learning, a form of non-formal education, in a domestic environment. And even in the domestic area, there was a differentiation of subjects, according to sex. In general, it was customary to teach to man to read, to write and to count, and to woman, to sew, to wash, to make income and all the feminine mysteries, which included praying. If many women, especially female sisters without dowries, were sent in convents, many also began to maintain schools in their own private space, where teaching reading, music, cutting and sewing".

marriage by interest, denial of the role of slave as property of man, defence of divorce and female suffrage, and the abolition of slavery.

Maria Firmina dos Reis' novel *Úrsula* was written in a historical period when women were educated for specific roles, mostly related to housekeeping, and were denied a superior culture, employment, and career. Writing, reading, and thinking were actions that did not compete with the feminine world, being in various cases considered harmful to their mental health.

As researcher Tania Quintaneiro (1996) in *Retratos de mulher* claimed, it was common practice to hide women in nineteenth century Brazil as an assurance of their honourability. For that reason, few women received formal education. Similarly, few of them became writers, and the ones who did were obscured by the male canon. However, if society was unfriendly with women, the Afro-Brazilian population faced even more barriers, since they had little access to school and literary production, since the colonial period.

The education offered to Afro-Brazilians did not change much, for after the abolition in Brazil was declared (1888), slaves and their descendants were thrown to their fate and faced the greatest difficulties of survival, seeing as finding a job that gave them a positive return was an arduous task[33]. Yet, through the support of figures such as fathers and mothers or other interested parties, some were able to attend school.

In the region of Maranhão, the conditions of Afro-Brazilians were even more problematic. In 1831, the people of Maranhão rebelled against the Portuguese government, giving birth to a conflict called *balaiada* that lasted until 1841 when the Duque de Caxias, envied by Emperor Pedro II, ended the revolt with truce violence[34]. The "balaiada" distinguishes itself from the other revolts that broke out in the regulative period because it was an eminently popular movement against the

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[33] For an overview of the condition of freed slaves after emancipation in Brazil, see: Robert Conrad, *The Destruction of Brazilian Slavery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), and Robert Brent Toplin, *The Abolition of Slavery in Brazil* (New York: Atheneum, 1972). In the British colonial areas, see: Marika Sherwood, *After Abolition: Britain and the Slave Trade Since 1807*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).
[34] For further information on the revolt see: Dias C. M. M. (2002) *Balaios e Bem-te-vis: a guerrilha sertaneja,* Teresina: Instituto Dom Barreto; De Lourdes Mônaco Janotti M. (1987), *A Balaiada*, São Paulo: Brasiliense; Otávio R (1942) *A Balaiada*. Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional; Otávio R. (2001) *A Balaiada 1839: depoimento de um dos heróis do cerco de Caxias sobre a Revolução dos "Balaios"*. São Paulo: Siciliano; Villela Santos M. J. (1983), *A Balaiada e a insurreição de escravos no Maranhão*. São Paulo: Ática.

great landowners of the region. The causes of the revolt were related to the conditions of misery and oppression to which the poor population of the region was subjected.

At this time, the agrarian economy of Maranhão was going through a period of great crisis. The province's main source of wealth, cotton, suffered against strong competition in the international market and, with this, the product lost both value and buyers abroad. The social strata that suffered most from the situation were the free workers, peasants, cowboys, *sertanejos*, and slaves. Misery, hunger, slavery, and ill-treatment were the main factors of popular discontent that motivated the mobilization of these social strata for the struggle against social injustices[35].

The terror experienced as a consequence of the uprisings of Maranhão gave birth in São Luís to some collective efforts that generated great results later — among them, the creation of schools[36]. From this historical episode, Maranhão's society oscillated between the old and the new and now needed to make the necessary adjustments to rebuild itself. It was during this period that São Luís became the Brazilian Athens as it brought together the great intellectuals of the country. In particular, it brought together a group of five great Brazilian thinkers who taught at the Liceu Maranhense, among them the Brazilian poet Goncalves Dias (1823-1864); the Brazilian mathematician Gomes de Sousa (1829-1864); the Brazilian grammarian and philologist Sotero dos Reis (1800-1871); and the specialist in ancient languages, Odorico Mendes (1799-1864).

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[35] See: Assunção M. R. (1999), "Elite Politics and Popular Rebellion in the Construction of Post-colonial Order. The case of Maranhão, Brazil (1820–41)", in *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 31:1, pp. 1-38.

[36] To understand the socio-cultural context of the Maranhese region, see: Ferreira Martins, R. A. (2010), "Breve panorama histórico da imprensa literária no maranhão oitocentista", in *Animus – revista interamericana de comunicação midiática*, pp. 107-129; Gadini S.L., Reis T. A. (2017), "Breve panorama da cultura nos jornais maranhenses do século XIX" in *Fragmentos De Cultura, Goiânia*, 27: 1, pp. 148-155; Do Nascimento D. (2011), "Nosso céu não tem estrelas: o campo intelectual Maranhense na primeira república", in *Anais do XXVI simpósio nacional de história*, Anpuh: São Paulo; Oliveira, E. G., "Os novos atenienses: saudade e poesia como invenção do Maranhão", in *Ciências humanas em revista*, 5, pp. 135-144; Meireles M. M., *Panorama da literatura maranhense*, São luís: Academia Maranhense de Letras, 1954.

3. The end of the trade and the end of transatlantic slavery

The campaign for the abolition of the slave trade is now considered the first large-scale pacific movement in history to be based on modern propaganda systems. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, slavery was already condemned by Adam Smith, Montesquieu, Hutcheson, Rousseau, the Quakers, the Protestants, and the Evangelicals. Nonetheless, according to some Cuban, Spanish, and Brazilian historians, the abolition campaign that Britain started in the 1800s, especially after 1834, was due primarily to economic reasons, and in particular, to fear of competition.

On this matter, Eric Williams (*Capitalism and Slavery*) claims that the institution of slavery in the colonies was inefficient even before its abolition and that already at the end of the eighteenth century, British plantations were not as productive as the French, Spanish and Brazilian ones. Conversely, other studies show how the abolition of slavery lead to a breakdown of a thriving economy. The thesis of Eric Williams has been also challenged by the critical work carried out by Seymour Dresher (*Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition*, 1977). What is known for sure, however, is that the abolitionist campaign was never solely based on the interest of racial equality. As John Oldfield stated in a BBC article indeed:

> In the British case slavery flourished because West Indian planters were effectively subsidised by the British taxpayer. By the late 1820s, when many Britons began to see the benefits of a world economy untrammelled by restrictions and controls, such privileges seemed outmoded and frankly unwarranted. Indeed, it is probably true to say that the British slave system was 'not so much rendered unprofitable, but by-passed by the changing economic and social order in Britain'. (Oldfield, *British Anti-Slavery*)

The bill to abolish the slave trade passed in England in 1807, coming into effect in 1808. From that moment onwards, the British launched international campaigns in order to induce all the other countries to adopt an abolitionist stance. Thus, at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, all of the countries present agreed on the abolition of the trade except for Spain and France. Still, after the defeat in Waterloo (in 1815), France was forced by Great Britain to become an abolitionist country.

Whilst Spain and Portugal were forced to enact a bill for the abolition of the trade, they did not actually abolish slavery until 1888 in Brazil and 1886 in Cuba. Consequently, the last slave ship docked in Cuba in 1867 while the United States of America was occupied with the Civil War.

Contextually, the European demand for coffee, cotton, and sugar remained constant for all of the nineteenth century. During this century, more than three million enslaved Africans were sent to the Americas, even though the demand for slaves had diminished due to the reproduction of the existing slave population.

As stressed in *A Global History of Anti-Slavery Politics* (Bric and Mulligan), there is not a singular or unique historical position regarding the analysis of the abolitionist movement, as long as "whereas the history of slavery is the study of an economic institution and migration, the history of abolitionism is largely a study of ideas and popular politics," so "it is more difficult to assess the spread of ideas across global networks" (3). Furthermore, whereas it is more common to encounter comparative studies on slavery, it is less likely to find comparative historical studies on the abolitionist movement. Pioneering surveys however have been undertaken recently, such as the one by John Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution: An International History of Anti-slavery, c.1787-1820* (2013), which highpoint to the transnational tides of the abolitionist movement. With the spread of Enlightenment in the second half of the eighteenth century, the institution of slavery contradicted all of the following: religious ideas of brotherhood, the principles of free market, and universal equality. The transatlantic dimension of the trade allowed for alliances on a political but also literary and cultural level, so it is useful to define the three different national and transatlantic contexts in which abolitionist movements have emerged, accompanied by specific description of colonialism featured in each country politics.

3.1. The British Abolitionist movement

In the United Kingdom, the Quakers (a religious group also known as *The Society of Friends*) were the first group to be concerned about the slave trade in the United

Kingdom, as they started to express their official disapproval in 1727, promoting reforms to abolish slavery. Quaker colonists in the Americas began questioning slavery already in Barbados in the 1670s, but first openly denounced it in 1688. By the midst of the eighteenth century, Quakers of both sides of the Atlantic considered the engagement in slave trading an act of misbehaviour for believers.[37]

Debate, however, became widely of public interest for Britons only in 1772, when William Murray (known as Lord Mansfield, 1705-1793) ruled that "no master ever was allowed here to take a slave by force to be sold abroad because he deserted from his service" in respect to the Somerset case, implying that slaves on English soil were to become automatically free.

The Somerset's case (also known as *Somerset vs Steuart*, 1772) is a famous judgment, which declared that slavery was illegal in the English soil, although the position elsewhere in the British Empire was left ambiguous. James Somerset, an enslaved African, was purchased by Charles Stewart (also spelled as Steuart) in North America. The slave was taken by Stewart to England in 1769, but in 1771 he escaped. After he was recaptured, Stewart imprisoned him and tried to sell him again, to work in the colony's plantations. A court cause started, questioning whether Somerset's imprisonment was lawful. In this regard, Lord Mansfield decided that:

> The state of slavery is of such a nature that it is incapable of being introduced on any reasons, moral or political, but only by positive law [statute], which preserves its force long after the reasons, occasions, and time itself from whence it was created, is erased from memory. It is so odious, that nothing can be suffered to support it, but positive law. Whatever inconveniences, therefore, may follow from the decision, I cannot say this case is allowed or approved by the law of England; and therefore the black must be discharged. (1)

Lord Mansfield's judgment was limited to the issue of whether a person, regardless of being a slave, could be removed from England against their will, and said they could not. However, since slavery had never been formally authorized in the English and Wales soil, Lord Mansfield's decision found it also unsupported in common law.

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[37] See: Brown Christopher Leslie (2006). *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; Carey, Brycchan and Geoffrey Plank, eds (2014). *Quakers and Abolition Champaign:* University of Illinois Press; Drake, Thomas E. (1950). *Quakers and Slavery in America.* New Haven: Yale University Press; Frost, J. William (1980). *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery.* Norwood, PA: Norwood Editions; Soderlund, Jean (1985*). Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

This sentence, therefore, became one of the most significant milestones in the abolitionist campaign.[38]

Then, in the wake of the Age of Sensibility (1750-1798) and at the beginnings of English Romanticism (1798-1837), interest in the treatment of the colonised subjects of the British Empire started to gain a place of primary importance[39]. In 1787, the *Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade* was founded which inspired many writers, especially poets, to join the campaign. *The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (also known as *The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade*) was a British abolitionist group, founded in 1787. Grenville Sharp (1735-1813), John Wesley (1703-1791), Bishop Porteus (1731-1809), Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846), William Wilberforce (1759-1833) and many other intellectuals and artists, such as Olaudah Equiano (also known as Gustavus Vassa, 1745-1797), Ottobah Cuguano (1757-1791), Hannah Moore (1745-1833), and William Cowper (1731-1800) participated as active members of the *Society*. Even more took up the cause as abolition became widespread, including Zachary Macaulay, Elizabeth Heyrick, and Mary Prince.

Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846) was one of the first activists of the English movement against the slave trade and against slavery in the colonies. After the publication of *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1786), he became acquainted with Granville Sharp and William Wilberforce.[40] In 1787, they formed the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. That same year, Clarkson collected in his pamphlet *A Summary View of the Slave Trade and of the Probable Consequences of Its Abolition* (1787) data on the slave trade, from British ports. Wilberforce persuasively used that evidence in the antislavery campaign led by in Parliament.

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[38] Some historians believe the case contributed to increasing colonial support for separatism in the Thirteen Colonies of British North America, by parties on both sides of the slavery question who wanted to establish independent government and law. The southern colonies wanted to protect slavery and expanded its territory dramatically in the decades after independence was won.

[39] See: *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire* (1780-1830) edited by Tim Fulford and Peter Kitson, 1998.

[40] William Wilberforce, (1759-1833) was a member of the House of Commons and a fervent evangelical Christian, whose spiritual adviser was John Newton (a repented slave trader). Together with Wilbeforce and Clarkson, another public figure that firmly supported the abolition of the trade was Granville Sharp, (1735-1813), a philanthropist and a reformer. See: Brahm, Felix, and Eve Rosenhaft, editors. *Slavery Hinterland: Transatlantic Slavery and Continental Europe, 1680-1850*. NED-New edition, Boydell and Brewer, 2016.

The committee was involved mainly in the distribution of abolitionist books, pamphlets, prints, and artifacts. More importantly, it engaged in the creation of its own network of local contacts (agents and country committees) scattered across the length and breadth of the country. Thomas Clarkson provided a vital link between London and the provinces, organising committees, distributing tracts and offering advice and encouragement to hundreds of grassroots activists. These different activities culminated in two nationwide petition campaigns, the first one in 1788 and the second and more extensive one in 1792.

Through the means of mass petitioning, William Wilberforce, who led the campaign in the Parliament, tried to exert pressure to abolish the slave trade. However, the revolution in France inevitably and the slave rebellion in Haiti slowed the achievement of slave trade's abolition. After renewing the campaign in Parliament in 1804, and in 1805, abolitionists achieved the final victory with the outlawing of the British Atlantic slave trade in 1807.[41]

After 1807, British anti-slavery entered a new phase. The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade gave way to the "African Institution", whose purpose was to make other countries followed Britain's example, a task that was not without effort.[42] Also, since the reports from the West Indies suggests that work conditions in West Indies had not changed since the abolition of the trade, political activists became involved in the attempt to abolish the institution of slavery itself. Slavery was then abolished by British Parliament in the British Empire in 1833, with a gradual reform and compensation measures for planters.

3.1.1. English women writers and the abolitionist campaign

British women writers played an important role in fostering the cause of abolitionism (Baiesi 33-49). Aphra Behn (1640-1689) was the first English novelist to deal with the issue of colonial slavery (*Oroonoko*, 1688), who generated a paradigm for British colonialist discourse that would endure until even after the Emancipation Bill (1807).

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[41] See: Blackburn, Robin, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988) and Drescher, Seymour, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[42] For instance, for British politics on abolition and Portugal, see: João Pedro Marques, *The sound of silence: nineteenth century Portugal and the abolition of the slave trade*, 2006, Berghahn Books.

Yet while she created the "first important abolitionist statement in the history of English literature" (Ferguson 32), she seemed to call for a better treatment of slaves rather than abolitionism. As a matter of fact, the tendency to accept the institution of slavery whilst demanding a better treatment for slaves characterized the first hundred years of activism by Quaker women (within the Society of Friends), who argued for abolition on a religious basis. Over the eighteenth century, their position changed qualitatively as they became the first unified group of British men and women to demand abolition and emancipation. However, their demand for emancipation was strictly connected to their own desire for social reintegration and recognition, since from 1662 they were a persecuted category as well.

Sentimentalism reached the public scene as early as 1660. It enabled women to tap "an unexpected outlet that doubled as a political platform. They went places with piety, feeling and philanthropy" (Ferguson 76), and slavery resembled any other charity. The fact that women had begun to write romances and the change in British economy[43] defined the representation of slaves: what was at stake was charity instead of actual equality. Engagement in the anti-slavery campaign permitted British female middle-class authors to intensify their philanthropic attitudes. The primacy accorded profit blended into female identification with sentiment and moral order produced a new secular protagonist: "the male colonialist entrepreneur imbued with 'female' sentiment" (Ferguson 92).

During the eighteenth century, the abolitionist rhetoric was further enriched by sentimental morality, which had at its core the concept of "sympathy", intended as a "fellow-feeling; mutual sensibility; the quality of being affected by the affections of another" (Johnson).[44] In his insightful study, Brycchan Carey defines sentimental rhetoric and charts the way it was deployed in the abolition debate. This rhetoric

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[43] Between the 1730 and the 1775 the value of British exports to Africa increased by some 400 percent (Ferguson 2014: 92)

[44] Sentimental morality rose as a reaction to the individualistic theories advanced by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733) and John Locke (1632-1704), Scottish philosophers tried to prove that humans were social and moral beings. In particular, Anthony Ashley-Cooper, III Lord of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) founded a moral philosophy – based on Locke's idea of the mind – according to which humans have an inner (and innate) moral sense, similar to hearing, sight, taste and touch. Among Scottish moral philosophers, one of the most known is Adam Smith, who in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) identifies the moral sense with the sympathetic imagination: humans avoid to do harm because they image how it would be to receive it. According to Smith then, ethics is not a consequence of religion or faith, rather it is the direct outcome of emotions and feelings (from which came the definition of his ethic as "sentimental moraliry").

basically attempted to persuade an audience that a person or group of people was suffering and that such suffering should be diminished or relieved entirely. Accordingly, "central to the rhetoric is a belief in the power of sympathy to raise awareness of suffering, to change an audience's view of that suffering, and to direct their opposition to it" (2), to the point that "the physical and emotional suffering caused by the slave trade was high on the list of the abolitionists' objection to the trade" (2). In the view of that, the rhetoric of sympathy was extensively employed by abolitionist writers, regardless of the literary genre of their texts. For instance, Sarah Scott's *History of Sir George Ellison* (1766), Henry Mackenzie's *Julia de Roubigné* (1777) and Thomas Day's *The History of Sandford and Merton* (1783-1789) in their abolitionist or ameliorationist passages largely make use of sentimentalist rhetoric (Carey 16). The same occurred, for instance, with the poetic works of Helen Maria Williams ("A Poem on the Bill", 1788); Anna Laetitia Barbauld ("Epistle to William Wilberforce", 1791) and Amelia Opie ("The Black Man's Lament or How To Make Sugar", 1826).[45]

In addition, after the French Revolution, radical writers started to use the language of natural rights and equality in regard to slaves, promoting the Abolition Bill, as for instance was the case of Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Men,* 1790; *A Vindication of the Rights of* Woman, 1792), Anna Laetitia Barbauld (*Epistle to William Wilberforce,* 1791) and Mary Hays (*Correspondance*, 1794-1797). The radical point of view of these authors was highly contested after the San Domingo revolt in 1791, as it was perceived to be too threatening for the conservative British establishment.

Accordingly, the evangelic fight, led by Hannah Moore (*Cheap Repository Tracts*, 1795-1817) was the most accepted abolitionist position at the time. It stressed the

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[45] For an insight on the relations between abolitionism and sentimentalism in English literature see: Serena Baiesi, "Romantic Women Writers and the Abolitionist Movement: The Economics of Freedom" in *La Questione Romantica,* n. 18/19 "Imperialismo/Colonialismo", Liguori 2009 and Ellis Markman, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel*, Cambridge UP 1996. Furthermore, for a deep understanding of sensibility in English literature in the Romanticism see: Crisafulli L.M. (2010) 'Women and Abolitionism: Hannah More's and Ann Yearsley's Poetry of Freedom'. In: Kaplan C., Oldfield J. (eds) *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery*. Palgrave Macmillan, London; L.M. Crisafulli and C. Pietropoli (eds.), *Romantic Women Poets. Genre and Gender, Amsterdam,* Rodopi 2007*;* Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*, Ashgate 2012; J.Todd, *Sensibility. An Introduction*, Methuen 1986; and John Brewer, "Sentiment and Sensibility" in James Chandler (ed.), *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, Cambridge UP 2009.

need for the slaves to be saved, maintaining the social hierarchy untouched while calling for the cessation of the commerce of slaves. This point of view was enlightened by a gender perspective, as its main arguments concerned the importance of women to remain united with their families, and the condemnation of the inhuman treatment reserved to women in slavery. This sort of gendering of middle-class values remained a trait of many female British abolitionist productions, especially in the discourses on home and family, where the Christian model remained unchanged even when focused on economic factors, as in Maria Edgeworth's *The greateful Negro* (1804). Other central gender-related topics of discussion were introduced by Elizabeth Heyrick, who, in *Immediate non gradual abolition* (1824), dealt with the issues of sexual abuses and the trope of female flogging.

Ultimately, Harriet Martineau (*Illustrations of Political Economy*, 1832), a radical non-evangelical author, continued to write about slavery even after the *Emancipatory Bill* became law (1834), proposing an analysis of slavery based on economic principles, following economist such as Adam Smith (1723-1790), David Ricardo (1772-1823) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). According to Martineau, "freed workers increased the nations' profits" and "emancipation [would] promote imperial control in a more human form" (Ferguson 274-275). She extended the discourse on slavery to the liberation of women in general and to broader female empowerment. The tendency to compare slavery to the female condition would continue in the following years, preparing the ground for female emancipation (Ferguson).

As Moira Ferguson argues in her illuminating study, *Subject to Others* (2014), the role of female literature in the abolitionist movement in Great Britain was of primary importance and merits specific attention, since the condition of white middle-class women's lives set the terms of the anti-slavery debate.[46] Yet despite their fundamental role in the battles for emancipation, they wrote and spoke of slaves as something essentially different from themselves, "as a totalized, undifferentiated mass" (Ferguson 4) that could not represent itself. Hence, they created a colonial discourse on slavery, to which Ferguson refers as "Anglo-Africanist rhetoric", which

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[46] See also: *Women's rights and transatlantic antislavery in the era of emancipation*, edited by Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Stewart, New Haven, CT ; London : Yale University Press (2007)

helped propagate the energizing myth of British imperialism in the Victorian age. At the same time, their engagement in the abolitionist party was crucial for the political victory of the abolitionist movement.

3.2. Spanish Abolitionism and the end of slavery in Cuba

The Spanish abolitionist movement arose in the sixties of the nineteenth century, quite late when compared to the American, English and French contexts. In 1864, the Puerto Rican Julio Vizcarrondo (1829-1889) and his American wife Harriet Brewster (1813-1894), with the help of Antonio Carrasco (1842-1873), Carolina Coronado (1820-1911) and Horatio Justus Perry (1824-2892) founded the "Sociedad Abolicionista Española". The Spanish abolitionism became a sort of club for foreign people in Spain, along with Protestants and Masons. Vizcarrondo, Carrasco and Perry, the founder of the Society, were themselves Protestants with strong relations to the Masonry and with both European and North American abolitionist movements.

Julio Vizcarrondo was born in Puerto Rico, in which he returned after having studied in Paris and Madrid. Due to the free expression of his liberal ideas in his job as journalist, he was exiled in 1850 to the United States, where he became familiar with the American Romantic reformism movement, of which his, wife Harriet Brewster, was part. Harriet Brewster, a Quaker, married Vizcarrondo and went with him to Puerto Rico in 1854, then later to Spain in 1863. They engaged with many philanthropic initiatives in both countries, including the gathering of Antillean people in Spain in order to fight against slavery in the Spanish colonies. They founded the "Revista Hispano-Americana" in 1864 and began to organize an abolitionist net, which was strongly connected with the North American one. Other prominent figures of the movement were the writer Carolina Coronado and her husband Horation J. Perry, the secretary of the American legation in Madrid, who organized meetings in their home to promote the abolition of slavery.

When the Society was founded, both women and men took part in it, all inspired by ideas of social reformism. Their objective was to promote the abolition of slavery through reunions, meetings, petitions and the publication of pamphlets and articles. In 1865, they would edit *El Abolicionista Español*, the first journal of the Society.

The movement was strongly connected to Spanish Romanticism[47] and literature, as they organized a poem contest in 1866 against slavery. In the same year the insurrection against Queen Isabel II, led by reformist and democratic parties, entailed the exile and the persecution of many abolitionists. The Abolitionist Society was banned as well as its periodical.

When the Society reorganized in 1868, the participation of women as writers and journalists was a well-evident reality; hence, social reformist women had an important place in the Spanish abolitionist movement, such as Concepcion Arenal (1820-1893) and the Contess of Espoz and Mina (1805-1872). The political program of the Society was then included in the political program of the Partido Republicano, from 1873 until the abolition of slavery in Cuba in 1886.

A literary engagement with the antislavery position had taken place in Spain even before the creation of the Society for the Abolition of Slavery, in particular with the theatre play by María Rosa Gálvez (1768-1806), *Zinda* (1804), and with publication of the first court novel against slavery, *Sab*, by Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda (1814-1873). *Sab* was published in 1841 in Madrid, ten days before the publication of the famous American antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), written by Harriet Beecher Stove (1811-1896). *Sab* did not have much resonance and there were not many publications made. Furthermore, in 1845 censorship prohibited circulation of the novel in Cuba, the country of origin of Gertrudis Gomez Avellaneda (1818-1873, although she lived in Spain from 1836 to 1839) (Cesares and Gomez 185).

3.3. Brazil, the last American country that abolished slavery

In 1761, Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, known as the Marquis of Pombal (1699-1782) abolished slavery in Portugal with a charter which prohibited the transportation of slaves from the Portuguese empire (Africa, Asia, America) into the kingdom (Portugal). Consequently, the slaves brought to Portugal would have to turn free automatically on arrival. The decision was the outcome of humanitarian

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[47] For an account of Spanish Romanticism see: Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas: Women Writers and Subectivity in Spain, 1835-1850* (1989); P*anorama crítico del romanticismo español*, Leonardo Romero Tobar, Madrid, Castalia, 1994; Flitter, Derek, *Spanish Romantic literary theory and criticism.* New York, Cambridge University Press, 1992; and Gies, David, *The Cambridge Companion to Spanish Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.

concerns as well as economic interests. Humanitarian works, such as those of the Jesuit priests António Vieira (1608-1697) and Manuel Nóbrega (1517-1570), had already shaped the opposition to slavery. Nonetheless, the Marquis was the member of a monopolist state-owned company that traded with slaves and owned many sugar plantations in Portuguese-American colonies. The charter was then probably a way to redirect the flow of slavery from Lisbon to the Brazilian colonies.

During the early nineteenth century, then, as João Pedro Marques argued in his insightful book on Portuguese abolitionism, *The Sounds of Silence* (2006) a secular critique of slavery was born, demanding the gradual abolition of the institution. This movement was impervious to Anglophone abolitionism and its immediate Protestant militancy for nationalist reasons as well. In conflicts with the British over interdiction, "tolerationism" became obstructionist and for some elites served to dissemble proslavery agendas by advancing charges of British self-interest and claims of superior Portuguese civilizing efforts in Africa (Marques).

Beginning in 1807, the Portuguese had to reckon British pressure to end the trade. Furthermore, when Brazil became independent in 1822, the slave trade effectively became illegal, as earlier treaties prevented the Portuguese from trading in slaves with foreign countries, even though slavery was still lawful. Yet, Portuguese leadership resisted abolition, instead engaging British diplomats with promises and protests over confiscations. Despite, in 1826, the government recognized the need to end the trade, any potential for abolition remained mired in resentment of British encroachment and fears (whether founded or not) of a reaction by slaving interests in the African colonies.[48] This scenario began to change only in 1836 with the liberal leader and Prime Minister of Portugal, Bernardo de Sá Nogueira de Figueiredo, first Marquess de Sá da Bandeira (1795-1876). Sá da Bandeira indeed not only introduced a law that prohibited the trade, but also transformed the related political discourse by linking abolitionism to an imperial future and "national honour," denying that British pressure had anything to do with the ban.

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[48] José Capela, *Escravatura: a empresa do saque. O abolicionismo, 1810-1875*, Afrontamento, Porto, 1974 and *As burguesias portuguesas e a abolição do tráfico da escravatura*, Afrontamento, Porto, 1979; Alexandre Valentim, "Portugal e a aboliçao do tráfico de escravos 1834-1851, *Análise Social*, 26, 111, 1991, pp. 293-333.

The case of Brazil was quite different. Colonial Brazil was the last country to abolish slavery and the slave trade. The composition of Brazilian population at the time of its independence was complex, since it comprised a multifaceted combination of races, skin colours, and socioeconomic statuses. In 1872, free Afro-Americans and mixed-race composed almost half of the population, and there were more than four categories to differentiate those different identities: African-born slaves, African-born ex-slaves, Brazilian-born slaves, and Brazilian-born ex-slaves.

The abolitionist campaign in Brazil gained strength especially in the second half of the 19th century, after the Paraguayan War (1864-1870). The 1870s were marked by several actions that are important for the understanding of the context of abolitionism in the country. The creation of the Republican Party, the Emancipation Society in Rio de Janeiro, and the Emancipating Society of the Servant Element are important events of the period. In addition, the Free Belly Law–of 1871 was an important element in the struggle to end slavery; it was understood at the time as a method of calming the opposition, although it did not solve the problem of the exploitation of slave labour.

The "Rio Branco Law" of 1871, which freed children born of slave parents, was a turning point for the abolitionist struggle. While the Northern provinces adhered to the legal proposals immediately, those in the Southeast – especially in the industry of coffee production – showed resistance and a clear division of interests. The 1872 census pointed out that the northern region of the country had only 37% of the slaves while 59% were in the coffee-producing provinces. The posture of the owners of the Northeast displeased the coffee farmers of the Southeast. In addition, 74% of the black population was already free in the 1870s, further shaking the legitimacy of slavery. Recognizing the existence of slave families, and not just individuals, the Free Womb Law organized emancipation funds. Slave registrations were fundamental and separated families from individuals, thereby obliging masters to present the registration of his/her slaves as without it, any person of colour was considered free. The bureaucratic nuisance further discontented the masters, who did not always possess the proper license plates. In this way, the state began to mediate these relations, damaging the interests of the rural elites. This movement opened the

possibility of organizing the first abolitionist movement in the courts of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Yet the abolitionist movement still had to wait. It was necessary to avoid a civil war (like the War of Secession in the United States, 1861-1865) or a rebellion of captives such as the one in Haiti. The idea was to delay the measure to the maximum, at least until the end of the Paraguayan War, to dispose of the troops in the country. The 1870s and 1880s were therefore crucial periods for the abolitionist movement.

Though the abolitionists were divided between moderates and radicals, they took to the streets and the press, circulating their ideals and gaining adherents, especially in cities like Rio de Janeiro, the then-capital of the Empire and future capital of the Republic. Newspapers such as the "Jornal do Commercio" or the "Gazeta da Tarde" featured on their pages inflammatory texts about abolitionists such as the moderate Joaquim Nabuco and radical José do Patrocínio, who published "The Abolitionist". Figures like Castro Alves, who published *The Slaves* in 1883, are examples of this movement which took over the country. At this time, the abolitionist societies in the country were several, and slave refugees in urban areas were becoming more and more common. Fugitive slave communities, called *quilombos*, spread through Rio de Janeiro and the Paraíba Valley in the region of São Paulo. Some are still famous today, such as Quilombo do Jabaquara and Quilombo do Leblon, which is known in particular for its association with the camellia flower. Cultivated by inhabitants of the quilombo, the camellia came to carry symbology around the abolitionist campaign; its fragility was associated with the fragile freedom for which the fugitive slaves fought. At this time, planting camellias or carrying them on lapels had political significance and thus flowers became part of abolitionist propaganda. Only with the Golden Law, established in May of 1888, was slavery finally abolished in Brazil.

CHAPTER III

BRITISH-CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to investigate at *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave* (1831), a literary testimony written by Mary Prince (1788-1833), an Afro-descendant woman who lived most of her life in slavery in the British Caribbean colonies. The narrative of Mary Prince is the only-known testimony left by a slave woman written in England within the English abolitionist and anti-slavery movement, and it pertains to the genre of "slave narratives". Mary Prince's narrative was dictated orally to a white English woman, Miss Susanna Moodie Strickland (1803-1885)[1], a poet and an abolitionist. Thomas Pringle (1789-1834)[2], a white English man, at the time secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society in London, was the editor of the book.

Slave narratives are testimonies by enslaved (or ex-enslaved) Africans in Great Britain and its colonies, comprising the later United States, Canada, and Caribbean nations and they thereby form a definite literary genre. Up to date, about six thousand former slaves from North America and the Caribbean during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries left their testimonies, as for one hundred and fifty narratives

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[1] Susanna Strickland (1803-1885) was English-born Canadian pioneer and author who wrote realistic, insightful, often humorous accounts of life in the wilderness. Her most important work is *Roughing It in the Bush; or, Life in Canada* (1852), a book of instruction for future pioneers based on her own experiences. While in London, she was affiliated with the Anti-Slavery Society for which she wrote two antislavery tracts, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (1831) and *Negro Slavery Described by a Negro* (1831). She emigrated to the Upper Canadian wilderness in 1832 with her husband, a British army officer (John Wedderburn Dunbar Moodie), and her sister, Catherine Parr Strickland Traill, who was also a writer. Moodie's initial distaste for the hardships of "roughing it"gradually changed to an earnest commitment to Canada's future. See: Rosemary Mitchell, 'Strickland, Agnes (1796–1874)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004

[2]Thomas Pringle (1789-1834) was a Scottish writer, poet and abolitionist, known as the father of South African Poetry, the first successful English language poet and author to describe South Africa's scenery, native peoples, and living conditions. Without a livelihood, and with debts, Thomas returned and settled in London. An anti-slavery article that he had written in South Africa before he left was published in the New Monthly Magazine, and brought him to the attention of Buxton, Zachary Macaulay and others, which led to his being appointed Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society. He began working for the Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society in March 1827, and continued for seven years. As Secretary to the Anti-Slavery Society he helped steer the organisation towards its eventual success; in 1834, with a widening of the electoral franchise, the Reformed British Parliament passed legislation to bring an end to slavery in the British dominions - the aim of Pringle's Society. Pringle signed the Society's notice to set aside 1 August 1834 as a religious thanksgiving for the passing of the Act. However, the legislation did not came into effect until August 1838, and Thomas Pringle was unable to witness this moment; he had died from tuberculosis in December 1834 at the age of 45. See: Finkelstein, David (May 2009) [2004]. "Pringle, Thomas (1789–1834)". *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online ed.). Oxford University Press

were published as separate books or pamphlets.[3] Male authors wrote the majority of such narratives[4], including the works of Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or GustavusVassa*, published in London, in 1789); Frederick Douglass (1818-1895, *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, published in Boston, in 1846); and Solomon Northup (1807-?, *Twelve Years a Slave,* published in New York and London, in 1853)[5]. Women have also written their testimonies of slave life, such as those by Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), entitled *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, a Northern Slave*, published in Boston, in 1850; and by Harriet Jacobs (1813-1897), *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published also in Boston in 1861.[6]

Literary critics consider slave narratives to be a specific genre inasmuch as the authors follow precise conventions.[7] The narrative usually opens up with a title page that includes the claim as part of the title (such as "written" or "related by him/herself") and sometimes an engraved portrait signed by the author. Before the story starts, there is a preface written by the white abolitionist editor, who is, in effect, responsible for the text. Next, the actual narratives commences, often with the sentence "I was born", specifying a place but not a date of birth and giving a sketchy

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[3]See: Audrey Fisch, *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Andrews, William L., ed. *African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1993; Davis, Charles T. and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds. *The Slave's Narrative*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991; Fisher, Dexter and Robert B. Stepto, eds. *Afro-American Literature: The Reconstruction of Instruction*. New York: MLA, 1979; McDowell, Deborah E. and Arnold Rampersad, eds. *Slavery and the Literary Imagination*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989; Sekora, John and Darwin T. Turner, eds. *The Art of Slave Narratives: Original Essays in Criticism and Theory*. Macomb: Western Illinois University Press, 1982.

[4]See: William L. Andrews, *Classic African American Women's Narratives*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

[5]Among many others, critical Studies on slave narratives are: Andrews, William L. *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760–1865*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986; Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris, eds. *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; Bland, Sterling Lecater, Jr. *Voices of the Fugitives: Runaway Slave Stories and Their Fictions of Self Creation*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000. Bruce, Dickson D., Jr. *Black American Writing from the Nadir: The Evolution of a Literary Tradition, 1877–1915*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989 and by the same author: *The Origins of African-American Literature, 1680–1865*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001.

[6] On female slave narratives' literary critique, see: Braxton, Joanne M. *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition within a Tradition*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989; Carby, Hazel. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987; Beaulieu, Elizabeth Ann. *Black Women Writers and the Neo-Slave Narrative: Femininity Unfettered*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999.

[7]See note number 3.

account of parentage followed by the story of the events experienced by the authors. Furthermore, the narrative is accompanied by appendices, composed by documentary material and appeals to the reader for funds and moral support in the battle against slavery. Language is typically colloquial, filled with vernacular expressions. Accordingly, Mary Prince's narrative combines some aspects of such eighteenth and nineteenth century British and American narrative.[8]

In particular, I took into account the debate launched by Mary Louise Pratt and Helen Thomas, who imagined English Romanticism as growing out of the "contact zone" between Europe and its colonies (Thomas 5). The hypothesis I share with them is that colonialism and slavery were at the centre of the English Romantic movement together with French and American revolutions, even in respect to the emergence of the autobiographical genre (Thomas). Framing English Romanticism through a critical understanding of colonialism and slavery means, then, to look at the shadows that canonical English literature created in such period**.** In particular, this chapter will analyse the *History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by herself* (1831) as part of the obliterated literary heritage of the English literary canon. It will be underlined also, why, despite its exclusion, this narrative deserves to be considered and studied as part of English literature, although as minor literature[9].

The chapter will be divided in two sections. In the first part, I will demonstrate why Mary Prince's text is a piece of literature, even if it has not been included in the English canon for centuries, and how it enters into dialogue with the cultural context it belongs. In the second section, I will look at the narrative using the methodological analysis derived from feminist criticism, focusing on female desire and freedom and looking at how they emerge in the story.

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[8] According to Moira Ferguson introduction to *The History of Mary Prince* (1997), Mary Prince's text is also related to "the format of cases reported in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, the press organ of the Anti-Slavery society, of which Pringle was secretary, Through the reporter and elsewhere, the cases of such abused and exploited female slaves as Kitty Hylton, Grace Jones and Kate had become notorious cases célèbres" (24). However, the literary genre of Mary Prince narrative is that of slave narrative.
[9] See Chapter I.

1. Mary Prince narrative and its status as literature

1.2. Mary Prince's biography

Most of the information about Mary Prince's life comes from her slave narrative, although it has only been partially confirmed by historical sources. Therefore, as Mary Prince's biographer Moira Ferguson highlights, other insights on the author's life can be "reconstructed from Bermudian archives, additional historical facts, and conspicuous gaps in her narrative" (Ferguson 1).

The Christian name of Mary's father was Prince, being a slave he was owned by Frances and David Trimingham. Interestingly enough, Mary takes her surname from her own father's Christian name, perhaps as a form of self-conscious bonding of family members in the context of colonial slavery. When Mary was approximately one or two years old, she was bought as along with her mother by "old" Captain George Darrell in 1787-1788. Both were given to his granddaughter Betsey Williams as a gift. In 1805, Mary was sold to Captain John Ingham (referred in the narrative as Capt. I–)[10] and Mary Spencer Ingham of Spanish Point. Around 1802-1806, she was then purchased by Robert Darrell (referred in the narrative as Mr. D–) to work on Gran Turk Island in the salt pond. In 1812, when she was about 24 years old, Robert Darrell took her with him to Bermuda, and in 1815 she moved to Antigua with John Wood, her new master. In December 1826, she married a free black widower, Daniel James, and two years later, in 1828 – at the age of 40 –, she went to England with Miss and Mrs Wood. The same year, as a free person in the English country[11], she

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[10] In the preface, Pringle attests that every master's names of the narrative should be omitted, except that Johan Wood (that was already of public domain, due to the trials in which he was involved in England because of Mary Prince). We know who Captain I- was thanks to an article that appeared on *Paradise Found-Almost,* by Vernon Jackson, titled "But Who Was Captain I–?"(Bermuda: Globe Press, 1994, pp. 67-68), re-printed also as Appendix 13 in the edition of Mary Prince text edited by Moira Ferguson (1997: 165-166). Many of the proper nouns—the names of people and places – are spelled incorrectly in Mary's slave narrative. This is probably because Susanna Strickland, who compiled Mary's story, and Thomas Pringle, who edited the manuscript, heard what Mary told them, but they were unfamiliar with Bermudian and Antiguan place names and surnames. Using archival records as my sources, I have indicated the correct spelling of these proper nouns when they are first used on this website by placing the correct spelling in parenthesis. After making a correction once, I only use the correct spelling thereafter.

[11] See Chapter II. After the Somerset case (1772), when slaves arrived in England, they were legally free.

left Mrs and Mr Wood's house and in 1829 went to work for Thomas Pringle, the secretary of the Antislavery Society in London.

Since the will of Mary Prince was to return to Antigua as a free woman, Pringle used his social and political connections in Antigua (in particular, Governor Patrick Ross and Moravian pastor Joseph Newby) to pressure John Wood to manumit Prince, but by means of Wood's 20 October 1830 letter to Ross's Secretary Taylor, it was firmly refused. Therefore, Thomas Pringle published *The History of Mary Prince* in February 1831, reprinted two other times that same year.[12] In an addendum to the preface of the third edition of the narrative, Pringle attests that Mary Prince was almost blind and in bad health conditions. In 1833, she appears as witness in the *Pringle vs Cadell* court case on 21 February and in a second court case, *Wood vs Pringle*, on 27 February, 1833.[13] From that year onward, there is no further information on Mary Prince and we do not know the exact date and place of her death.

1.2. The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself

1.2.1. The story of a life in slavery

The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself opens with a title page that includes the claim as an integral part of the title: "Related by herself". It then has a preface (and in the second edition, a post-script) written by the white

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[12] The critical edition used as reference for this work is Mary Prince's text edited by Moira Ferguson in 1997. In regard to the first three editions of the text (1831), they are not easily available. In the appendix of Moira Ferguson edition, a letter identifies Strickland as the "lady who wrote down in this house the narratives of Mary Prince and Ashton Warner." The letter is addressed to Mrs. Townsend (Lucy Townsend), one of the secretaries of the Birmingham Ladies' Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves. It describes extensive scarring on Prince's body from past floggings. There is scarring on the back of Prince's body, as well as on other parts of her body. The scarring corroborates the episodes of torture narrated. Because only six days separate the letter from the postscript, it is probable that the letter was also added in the second edition, but it may, however, have been added in the third. Perhaps, in the future, digitized copies of the second and third editions of The History of Mary Prince will be available. The Library of the Society of Friends in London, has a copy of the third edition, and that it is on microfilm. If, and when, they are made available, we will be able to download the different editions and analyze their similarities and differences.

[13] The first was a liable case between Thomas Pringle and Thomas Cadell, the London publisher of *Blackwood's Magazine*. James McQueen, a pro-slavery advocate,had written maliciously about Thomas Pringle in *Blackwood's*. The *Pringle v. Cadell* case was heard 21 February 1833. James McQueen was conveniently unavailable to appear in court, so Thomas Cadell stood in. Pringle won the case. He was awarded£5, plus costs. Cadell paid him £160. Wood charged Pringle with libel, and the *Wood v. Pringle* case was heard 27 February 1833. The judge, Sir James Scarlett, found Prince's story exaggerated. Wood was awarded£25 but not costs.

abolitionist editor of the text, Thomas Pringle, attesting that "the idea of writing Mary Prince's history was first suggested by herself" and that therefore, "no fact of importance has been omitted, and not a single circumstance or sentiment has been added" (Prince 55).

The voice of the white male provides legitimacy to the text, giving it an aura of authenticity and trustworthiness. The end of the narrative is also accompanied by appendices composed of documentary material – which attest once again to the reliability of the narrative – and appeals to the readers for funds and moral support in the battle against slavery. The first sentence specifies a place but not a date of birth and an uncertain account of parentage: "I was born at Brackish-Pond, in Bermuda, on a farm belonging to Mr. Charles Myners" (Prince 57), underlining the veracity of the story. The narration of Mary's experiences then begins, depicting narrow escape, cruel masters, and reflections on slavery. Prince describes her domestic world as filled with mothers and children, where men are mentioned though remain largely absent from the main picture (Baumgartner). The structure of the narrative is therefore representative of the genre in question.

Mary Prince narrates that she was born in slavery in Antigua around 1788, but when she was an infant, she was sold to the Williams family together with her mother and siblings. Prince spent her first years with the daughter of her master, Betsey William, who was of the same age as her. At the age of twelve, around 1800/1801, Mary and her family were sold to different owners. The sale of human beings is the first example that Mary Prince gives of dehumanization perpetrated by whites, as she and her sisters are "offered for sale like sheep or cattle" (Prince 62). Then, Mary is bought by Captain I—, whose wife mistreated her. After a particularly vicious beating by Captain I—, she ran away to find her mother. When her father learned of her escape, he took her back to Captain I— and his wife, with whom she stayed for five years. Around 1806, she was sent to Grand Turk Island to work in the salt ponds where she is bought by Mr. D—. She described the gruesome labour conditions and the excruciating pain of working in the salt water all day as well as the boils and crippling rheumatism that ensued from her time there. She implied that Mr. D— also sexually abused her, describing him as an indecent man with an "ugly

fashion of stripping himself quite naked and ordering me then to wash him in a tub of water" (Prince 77).

Around 1813-14, she asked and succeeded in being sold to Mr. John Wood, who was moving to Antigua. During the time in which she stayed with the Woods, a period of almost fifteen years (c. 1813-1829?), Mary Prince received harsh treatment, which she describes in the narrative together with her prolonged battle with rheumatism, her conflict with her owner's wife, and her attempts to buy her freedom with the assistance of men like Captain Abbot. This is also the time when she first became involved with the Moravian church, met and married Daniel James, a free black man, and made, on her request, the journey with the Woods from Antigua to Britain. After arriving in Britain, Mary left the house, but as a free woman she was left with no means for supporting herself. She narrates that she received assistance from Mr. and Mrs. Mash, a black couple in London, who introduced her to the Moravian Missionaries and the Anti-Slavery Society. She tried again to gain manumission from the Woods, but they were unwilling to allow her to return to Antigua as a free woman. The narrative ends with Mary's criticism of British hypocrisy and inhumanity in the colonies and with an impassioned plea for the freedom of all slaves in British lands.

As Sandra Pouchet Paquet argues in her insightful article, *The Heartbeat of a West Indian Slave: The History of Mary Prince* (1992), problems of voice and identity are complex in Mary Prince's text. In fact, Thomas Pringle's interventions in the text are chiefly intended to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the story (paradoxically mined by Pringle's intrusions as well). Pringle attests right from the beginning of the preface, which accompanied Mary's text since its first edition, that the story is "taken down from Mary's own lips" and contains her "exact expressions and peculiar phraseology" (55) without any omitting of important facts or context. After having taken it down, Pringle assures he reviewed Mary Prince's story, "examining her on every fact and circumstance detailed" (55) with the help of Mr. Joseph Phillis, a white English resident of Antigua. Later on, Pringle intervenes in the text with notes, attesting to the veracity of Mary Prince's story. Furthermore, Pringle adds an appendix to the text: a previous published story of a "negro woman" sold in Cape of Good Hope for the reader to compare her account of being sold with

the one given by Mary Prince (132). Finally, Pringle underlines the genuineness of Mary Prince's expressions "given verbatim as uttered" (64); and stresses that, especially the last paragraph, it "is given as nearly as was possible in Mary's precise words" (93).

Despite that, most critics[14] agree that Thomas Pringle had substantial influence in the editing and publishing of the *History*, and worked to maximize its usefulness for the abolitionist agenda of the Antislavery Society. For instance, Moira Ferguson, editor of the first modern edition of Prince's narrative, suggests that:

> His [*Pringle's*] use of footnotes to "explain," "decipher," and "elaborate" on Mary Prince's autobiographical narration certifies his desire to present and produce her narrative as emancipationist evidence in 1831 of the "civilizing mission"—to "Europeanize" people of African descent, "for their own good." Her testimony corroborates his authority and vindicates his values—or superficially seems to do so. (Ferguson 283)

Nevertheless, Ferguson, as many other critics who studied Mary Prince's text, (Paquet, 'The Heartbeat of a West Indian Slave'; Baumgartner, Simmons) agrees on the trustworthiness of Prince's experiences of slavery since it contains detailed accurate information concerning torture and dehumanization, in consensus with other slave narratives. At the same time, it is important not to overlook that the format of slave narratives is a highly mediated genre, serving as much of a political purpose as it does as an eye-witness account.

The controversy regarding the authenticity of the text could be relevant within the political debate on slavery and its abolition, as shown by the fact that trustworthiness was the main topic of discussion with reference to the text at the time it was published. At the same time, however, at a literary level, authenticity must not be the central issue in answering the question regarding the status of Mary Prince's narrative as literature. As with all literary works, in fact, the credibility of the story is not a required element for the text to be part of the literary domain. Conversely,

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[14] See: Ferguson 1997, Baumgartner, Barbara, 2001, "The Body as Evidence: Resistance, Collaboration, and Appropriation in *The History of Mary Prince*", *Callaloo* 24 (1), pp. 253-75. PouchetPaquet, S., 1992, "The Heartbeat of a West Indian Slave: The History of Mary Prince", in *African American Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (Spring 1992), pp. 131-146. Simmons, Merinda, 2009, "Beyond 'Authenticity': Migration and the Epistemology of 'Voice' in Mary Prince's History of Mary Prince and Maryse Condé's I, Tituba", *College Literature* 36 (4), pp. 75-99.

authenticity acquires importance only if we do not consider this slave as proper literature.[15]

1.2.2. Accusations and testimonies: Mary Prince as a public figure

The response to the publication of the *History of Mary Prince* by the British pro-slavery party was quick: soon, in November 1831, after less than one year from the first publication of Prince's volume, James MacQueen (1778-1870)[16] published an article in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* entitled "The Colonial Empire of Great Britain"[17]. In the article, MacQueen discredited the authenticity of the narrative by claiming that Thomas Pringle had manipulated Mary Prince to make her write a fake story for anti-colonial reasons. MacQueen counts *The History of Mary Prince* among the many "hideous falsehoods and misrepresentations which are advanced against the colonists by their enemies in this country" (McQueen 744). Likewise, it was attested that Thomas Pringle had allegedly fabricated the story in order to address anti-colonial ideas:

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[15] The problem of authenticity may also be relevant compared to the discussion on the literary genre. For example, it could be considered one of the minimum requirements (on which however there is no unanimous agreement within the academic community and literary criticism) for a text to fall into the autobiographical genre. However, my discourse refers to a categorization still antecedent, i.e. the possibility of the text to fall within the realm of literature or not (regardless of what genre of literature). For a text to be considered literary, according to Olney, it must have a chronological and a configurational dimension, it must not tell true facts. What I demonstrate in the next sections is therefore how the text of Mary Prince has both the chronological and the configurational dimensions. Then, if the narrative in addition to belonging to the genre of the slave narratives may also belong to the autobiographical genre (in which the authenticity of the facts narrated is relevant) would be a different critical discussion, which I choose at the moment not to face. For more information on the subject of authenticity in the autobiographical genre, see: Lejeune P., *On autobiography*, U. of Minnesota press, Minneapolis, 1989; Olney J., *Metaphors of the self,* Princenton U. P., 1981; Smith S., *A poetics of Women's Autobiography*, 1987.

[16] James MacQueen (1778-1870) was a Scottish geographer, statistician, political campaigner, pro-slavery and pro-Empire activist, banker and businessman, noted for founding the Colonial Bank and the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company. An expert on African geography, he advocated the colonisation of the continent many decades before the so-called "Scramble for Africa" (1881-1914). He was co-owner and editor of the *Glasgow Courier,* wrote in London about politics, geography, economics, and general literature, and founded a bank in Mauritius. Although MacQueen had no academic education, professional training, or qualifications, his amateur energy and enthusiasm, in several fields, made him a prominent, and controversial figure. He had extensive correspondence with the Royal Geographical Society, and many of his memoirs were published in its *Journal* and *Proceedings*. See: *The Human Tradition in the Atlantic World*, 1500–1850 edited by Karen Racine, Beatriz G. Mamigonian, Chap. 15: "James MacQueen (1788-1870): Agent of Imperial Change in the Caribbean and Africa", by Jeff Pardue, p. 209-223.

[17] The full article by James MacQueen is available online at the link: http://server.fhp.uoregon.edu/dtu/sites/prince/texts/empire.html (last accessed: 23/08/2018)

in their pretended history of their despicable tool, MARY PRINCE, compiled and published by an individual named, to use, and to retort emphatically, his own words, "*the well known*" Mr Pringle. This great personage, "well known" to the Colonial Office, has, in the labour of the craft by which he lives, given to the world the history of the profligate slave mentioned, for the purpose of destroying the character of two respectable individuals, her owners, Mr and Mrs Wood of Antigua. JOSEPH PHILLIPS, a man in every respect fitted to support such a cause, guarantees the authenticity of this history. [...] The limits of a monthly publication restrict me to notice only the leading points of the accusations; but if I can extract, as I trust by the aid and strength of truth to be able to do, Pringle's sting, and Pringle's venom, out of Mary's tale, all her other accusations must of necessity drop off harmless and despicable. (McQueen 744)

Then, MacQueen provided evidence of Mary Prince's sexual promiscuity, through which, according to him, she had manipulated both white and "negro" men. In particular, MacQueen reports the testimony of Martha Wilcox, another servant of Wood family who affirmed that:

> The principal cause of her [Mary Prince] ill temper was because she was not allowed to go out after bedtime; but she, nevertheless, several times, when I was there, contrived to do so, procuring the key, by sending up a little boy to Mr Wood's bedroom, and getting it from the table. [...] She let in, by this stratagem, a Captain *William,* who, she afterwards told me, slept there the whole night. [...] She took in washing, and made money by it. She also made money *many, many* other ways by her badness; I mean, by allowing men to visit her, and by selling to worthless men (McQueen 748-749)

The Martha Wilcox testimony questions the abuses suffered by Mary Prince, depicting her as an immoral person who gained money by taking advantage of her body. MacQueen also presents the witness of Daniel James (Prince's husband), who claimed that his wife had made up her experiences with Mr and Mrs John Wood, since they were kind and respected masters to their slaves. According to MacQueen, Prince's husband also stated that: "Mr Wood *never punished* Mary to his knowledge; that she lived in a house of two rooms adjoining his own; that the house was very comfortable, and no vermin in it; that Mr Wood told him he had long wished Mary to take a husband" (MacQueen 748).

Overall, both the legal actions and political debates in newspapers were directed to the proving or the undermining of Mary Prince's trustworthiness. Specifically three legal actions followed the publication of the narrative. They were reported by *The Times* and gave notoriety to the book. In June of 1829, Mary Prince unsuccessfully petitioned Parliament to help her gain manumission from the Woods

to return to Antigua as a free woman. Then, in 1833, Thomas Pringle successfully sued the publishers of *Blackwood's Magazine* for libel after they published James MacQueen's article. Later on, John Wood successfully countersued Thomas Pringle for libel because of his involvement in getting Mary Prince's story published.[18] The legal controversies, reported in the *Times*[19], heightened people's interest in the story, which was already piqued by the fervent debate it was receiving in pro- and anti-slavery circles. *The History of Mary Prince* was so popular (largely due to interest in the legal actions connected to it) that it went into a second and a third printing within the first year of its release (Prince).

Yet, when Prince testified as a witness for the defence in the *Wood vs Pringle* lawsuit in London (March I, 1833), she revealed that there were many details of her life that had been left out of the narrative (though she had told Susanna Strickland about them) and that she had had several relationships with both white and black men during her time as a slave (Prince 140). This admission led pro-slavery advocates to further challenge the veracity of her tale and of the representation it offered of Prince as a moral, innocent, Christian woman suffering at the hands of beastly British masters and mistresses. Nevertheless, why was the *History* so important to the public opinion and what was at stake with it? To understand why the discussion on Mary Prince's story became a heated debate was so, it is necessary to look at the political debate on slavery at the time it was published by Thomas Pringle.

1.2.3. Mary Prince's narrative and the British political debate on slavery

As stressed in the pioneer study *Proslavery Britain* by Paula Dumas (2016), in 1787 both the "Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade" and the "Society of the West India Planters and Merchants of London" were founded. The latter, from 1789 onwards, promoted significant propaganda against the abolitionist campaign based on the dissemination of ideas that would favour slavery as an institution and ban abolitionist quests as dangerous. Among many other principles, they sustained that

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[18]The Court cases involving Mary Prince (*Pringle v. Cadell*, and *Wood v. Pringle*) are reported in Ferguson's 1997 edition of Mary Prince's text (Appendixes 5 and 6).
[19]See: *Times* (London), February 22, 1833, p.4, col. B.

British welfare depended on the slave trade[20], that Africans had less mental capacities and were less civilized than the Britons, and that other nations would have continued the slave trade even if the United Kingdom were to stop it. Furthermore, they interpreted historical events such as the French Revolution (1789), the British war with France (1791), and the slave revolt of Haiti (1791), as a warning against the passionate attitude of the abolitionist and anti-slavery thinkers, whose ideas could increase the risk of rebellions. Additionally, the "Society of the West India Planters and Merchants of London" defended the right to private property and cited economic, religious and moral motivations in favour of slavery. As a result, British West Indian lobbies began to develop two arguments within pro-slavery discourses: an anti-abolitionist one that focused on the negative effects of abolitionism and another discourse that promoted a pro-slavery ideology, including all the arguments in favour of the permanence of slavery, actively supporting it with religious and scientific arguments (Dumas 12).

Anti-abolition and pro-slavery lobbies used philosophical arguments, such as those of Aristotle and David Hume[21], to support the idea that some races of men were born to be slaves and others to command. On the other side, the abolitionists referred to theorists like Montesquieu (1689-1775), Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), and Robert Wallace (1697-1771)[22], who advocated the social danger of holding people in slavery and the possibility of slaves' salvation through Christianity. In general, the abolitionists pointed out the substantial spiritual and intellectual equality of Africans and denounced the destruction of the emotional bonds and marriage to which the blacks were forced into due to slavery, also attacking the spiritual

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[20] On the topic the lectures "On the Slave Trade" by S. T. Coleridge (1795) are considerably engaging.
[21] The Greek philosopher, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), was one of the first to justify slavery. He thought that slavery was a natural thing and that human beings came in two types - slaves and non-slaves, as some were naturally marked out for subjection, others for rule. People were born to rule these slaves, could use them as they pleased and could treat them as property. David Hume (1711-1776), a Scottish Aristotelian philosopherhe advanced judgments on the inferiority of the Negro, indirectly justifying their enslavement. See: Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000,* 80; Ince, OnurUlas, Between Commerce and Empire: David Hume on Slavery, Political Economy, and Commercial Incivility (May 19, 2017); Paget H., *Between Hume and Cugoano: Race, Ethnicity and Philosophical Entrapment*, in «The Journal of Speculative Philosophy», vol. 18, n. 2, 2004, pp. 129-148 and Valls A. (ed. by), *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005.
[22]See: Chitnis, Anand C. *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History*. London: Croon Helm, Ltd., 1976 and Dickinson, H. T., *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. London: Methuen & Co., 1977.

corruption of the masters who let themselves fall into lasciviousness and moral depravity in the colonies.

Moreover, Adam Smith (1723-1790), in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), had exposed economic reasons as to why abolish trafficking and slavery was necessary. These motivations were then supported by other abolitionists such as John Millar (*Observations concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society*, 1771) and Harriet Martineau (*Illustrations of Political Economy*, 1834)[23]. According to Smith, slavery was an inefficient economic system, since slaves were not incentivized to work as they were not being able to acquire property. Consequently, he argued, its abolition, together with the development of international trade, would have led to an unprecedented level of well-being for the United Kingdom.

The debate on slavery involved every field of cultural environment, since it was a topic of discussion in the clubs, in Parliament, and in the newspaper alike. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, books were still expensive, but newspapers, pamphlets, and serial publications reached more readers and entered easily the public sphere: at least 25% of the British population read these minor productions, especially in London, reaching 60% of men and 40% of women (Dumas 2016: 55). This is the main reason why so many pamphlets and short stories were published during this time, including that of Mary Prince.

Even though abolitionist and anti-slavery demands formally won in parliament, many of the arguments advanced by anti-abolitionist and pro-slavery parties remained alive in English culture and politics for many years. A clear example can be seen in how slavery ended in the British colonies in 1834: the government gave a huge amount of money to the West Indies lobby in exchange for the emancipation of slaves in 1833 (Dumas 32). By doing so, the British government acknowledged that slaves were the private property of the master by law — therefore, they were considered as a commodity as opposed to people — and that nobody could oblige the owners to release them if not by remedying with compensatory measures. The British

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[23]See: Drescher, Seymour. *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1986 and Eltis, David. *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987

state, therefore, abolished slavery in 1834, but at the same time, allowed for the equation between slaves and commodities[24].

Apart from economic and paternalistic ones, of particular interest for the purposes of this investigation are the moral and racial motivations advanced by the supporters of slavery in England, as they help us to understand the political value of the literary testimony left by Mary Prince, who responded indirectly (and sometimes directly) to these arguments. Prior to 1807, pro-slavery lobbies argued that the transition from Africa to the British colonies was an opportunity for blacks to improve their living conditions and security by promoting an idealized image of the West Indies. Later on, after 1807, pro-slavery lobbies tried to discredit the descriptions of plantation life in the colonies done by abolitionists by questioning slave narratives and slave accounts and by claiming that slaves in the colonies were better treated than factory workers in Great Britain. To do so, pro-slavery ideologists often compared the images of workers' lives in the colonies, provided with food, shelter, protection and care, with images of British workers' life in the factories. In order to endorse these images, they often presented plantation masters' testimonies in the Parliament to give examples of slave's loyalty to the master and to the crown. Their aim was to declare the descriptions that anti-slavery supporters made of the slave life in the colonies, with reference to their use of words like "slave" and "cart-whip", as false and exaggerated. In this context, direct slave testimonies represented a decisive tool for anti-slavery theorists to undermine pro-slavery representations and promote their cause, especially after the abolition of the slave trade. Therefore, it is clearer now why the text of Mary Prince had a crucial political value for the Anti-Slavery society. It is also now evident how important it was at a political level to verify and affirm its truthfulness, which was, in fact, challenged by the pro-slavery lobby both in court and in newspapers. Not by chance, at the end of her story, Mary Prince launched an all-out attack on arguments that sustained the wellness of slavery for slaves:

> I am often much vexed, and I feel great sorrow when I hear some people in this country say, that the slaves do not need better usage, and do not want to be free. Who deceive them, and say slaves are happy. I say, Not so. How can slaves be happy when they have the halter round their neck and the whip upon their back? […] and yet they come home and say, and make

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[24] See: Draper, Nicholas. *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-ownership, Compensation and British Society at the End of Slavery*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

some good people believe, that slaves don't want to get out of slavery. But they put a cloak about the truth. It is not so […] The man that says slaves be quite happy in slavery--that they don't want to be free--that man is either ignorant or a lying person. I never heard a slave say so. I never heard a Buckra[25] man say so, till I heard tell of it in England. Such people ought to be ashamed of themselves. (Prince 93-94)

Accordingly, Mary Prince showed a lucid awareness of the pro- and anti-slavery debate within which she published her text. This makes her literary testimony an all-out attack to pro-slavery and anti-abolitionist ideals.

Moreover, Mary Prince published her writing in a phase of transformation of the racial conflict, which underwent a turning point after the Haitian Revolution[26] and the abolition of Atlantic trade in the English Empire (1807) and in the United States (1808)[27]. Whereas in previous slave testimonies, such as that of Equiano and Cugoano, the theme of the race had not yet been defined, some light is shed on the issue in Mary Prince's work. The idea of blackness as a functional aspect to the formation of a political subject will then be developed by a long tradition of black militants and intellectuals who will create a new framework for African displaced identities, including Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), William Du Bois (1868-1963), Angela Davis (1944) and Paul Gilroy (1956)[28]. Mary Prince's work is placed instead in an intermediate phase. In fact, in this text, the definition of the racial theme is not yet clearly present, nor consequently is there a criticism of racism, but we begin to glimpse the awareness of belonging to an Afro-descendent community that thinks of itself as a political and collective subject[29].

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[25]Buckra is a West Indian word to indicate white English man.
[26]Among many other, see: Genovese E., *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1979; Blackburn R., *Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution*, in «WMQ», n. 63, October 2006, pp. 643-674.
[27]See: Chapter II.
[28]See: Ravano L., *Genealogia del Radicalismo Nero*, Ph.Ddissertation, University of Bologna, 2017.
[29]The intersection between the ideas of community and race, with specific reference to the Afro-American experience is a highly complex issue to deal with. This is why I am using frequently the word "community" instead of race. Yet, to address the question of race, see among many others: Crenshaw K.W., Gotanda N., Peller G., Thomas K. (eds.), *Critical Race Theory. The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, New York, The New Press, 1995; Bernasconi R., Lott T.L. (ed. by), *The Idea of Race*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 2000; Glaude E.S., JR., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2000; Hannaford I., *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996 and Sidbury J., *Becoming African in America. Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007.

1.2.4. Words in context: *The History of Mary Prince* and British society

As discussed in the second chapter, the specificity of British-American colonial slavery has historically been determined by at least four factors[30]: the rise of the transatlantic slave trade; the establishment of the plantation system (due to the high mortality rate that required a constant purchase of new workforce); the link between the condition of slaves and the European juridical institution of private property; and, in its last phase, the use of racial justifications to legitimize a form of perpetual slavery transmitted by inheritance. The transatlantic slave trade, which, between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had mainly involved Spanish and Portuguese ships, gradually increased from the eighties of the seventeenth century. At this stage, the Britons, along with the Portuguese and the French, established themselves as the main merchants of slave ships until 1807, the year of the abolition of the transatlantic trade in Great Britain and its colonies. The Africans were then initially employed together with the natives and the Europeans in the mining and constructive sector, generally organized by the States to impose their sovereignty on the American territories and expand the opportunities for economic growth. The extraction and transport of raw materials and the construction of infrastructures (land reclamation, shipbuilding, the creation of fortifications, prisons, institutional buildings and of river, road and rail transport networks) have therefore been realized using a multiplicity of forms of non-free labour, of which African slavery was the most "extreme".

What is significant for this research is precisely the progressive racialization of these different figures of work that occurred during the second phase of the transatlantic slave trade. From the second half of the seventeenth century, African labour replaced that of indigenous and European labour due to multiple factors, and perpetual and hereditary slavery established itself as a condition applied only to the blacks. As Ira Berlin wrote in his groundbreaking book *Many Thousand Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (1998), this fact led to a transition from "societies with slaves" to "slave societies"; that is, from colonial societies in which slavery was one of many forms of work to societies totally dependent on slave

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[30]See: Ravano L., *Genealogia del Radicalismo Nero*, Ph.Ddissertation, University of Bologna, 2017.

labour, in which the slave relationship influenced every aspect of associated life. This historical process is particularly interesting for the study of the literary testimony of Mary Prince, published in 1831, more than twenty years after the abolition of the slave trade in England (1807) and only four years before the abolition of slavery in the English colonies (1834). The narrative helps to understand the English debate which in the first decades of the nineteenth century quickly shifted from abolitionism to anti-slavery concerns. The theme of race, present to some extent in the text of Mary Prince, therefore characterizes the cultural background on which the text is based.

Starting from the end of the seventeenth century when slave societies were formed and the racialization of work and social hierarchies started, the necessity to justify slavery on a moral and rational level led to the formation of racial prejudices towards Africans. In England, Africans began to be depicted as a people without civilization and political organization, in particular with respect to European social norms (such as monogamy and Christian practices), and these biases were reinforced by both anti-slavery and pro-slavery lobbies to elicit sympathy and empathy in English citizens. What had been justified on a theological level from the nineteenth century began to be based on scientific studies[31]: Africans and Europeans were studied, measured, tested and compared, to determine if the human species came from a single line (*monogenesis*) or from multiple lines (*polygenesis*).

The racial theory developed on the idea of *polygenesis*, which meant that human beings were considered divisible into two races with specific characteristics and different intellectual and moral abilities; accordingly, physical characteristics were seen as indicative of a different internal nature. The West Indian lobbies used the pre-Darwinian racial theory to explain the fixity of species and slavery. For example, in responding to the bill for the abolition of Wilberforce in parliament on Monday 30, 1804, John Fuller[32] claimed that Africans had limited mental abilities and

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[31] See: Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant AtlanticWorld, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 116 and H. F. Augstein, "Introduction," in *Race: The Origins of An Idea, 1760–1850,* ed. H. F. Augstein (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), pp.ix–x and Lewis, Gordon K. "Proslavery Ideology." In *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, ed. Verene Shepherd and Hilary Beckles (Oxford: Ian Randal,2000): 544–79
[32] John Fuller (1757-1834), was Squire of the hamlet of Brightling, in Sussex, and politician who sat in the House of Commons between 1780 and 1812. He was a builder of follies, philanthropist, patron of the arts and sciences, and a supporter of slavery.

therefore belonged to a lower order of men, a theory supported by Scottish philosopher David Hume (Dumas 45). Consequently, according to Fuller, the Africans themselves were the ones who allowed the slave trade and slavery, since they were not civilized enough to oppose this traffic, and they did not have the capacity to manage freedom or emancipation. In view of that, the destruction of slaves' cultural practices and religions was necessary to maintain order in the colonies. Therefore, the connection between Africans and slaves began to have strong racist connotations so that the most accepted idea was that slaves (and therefore Africans) were, intellectually, children in an adult body, naturally suited to physical fatigue. Supposedly, natural hierarchies were thus stated to assert racial superiority or inferiority.

In this context, the narrative of Mary Prince insists in particular on the absurdity of the statement that slaves wanted to remain slaves for the reason that this was more convenient for them, as widely supported by pro-slavery ideology. For Prince, slavery is never desirable and her text serves to demonstrate how the horrors of slavery make both Britons and Africans immoral and to promote that Africans think, feel and suffer just like any other person. She seeks to make evident, therefore, that they are not a different species; that slaves cannot be considered private property but, in fact, people who deserve better living conditions. In her story, she reverses the argument that Africans do not experience feelings by highlighting the lack of sympathy and compassion towards their slaves shown by English colonizers. Prince indeed affirms: "Oh the Buckra people who keep slaves think that black people are like cattle, without natural affection. But my heart tells me it is far otherwise" (Prince 71).

Likewise, when Mary Prince describes her first selling, meaning the separation from her mother and siblings, she attests that she lived that moment with violent "grief and terror" while the white people around her could only show indifference. Mary Prince wonders, "Did one of the many bystanders, who were looking at us so carelessly, think of the pain that wrung the hearts of the negro woman and her young ones? No, no!" (Prince 62). Prince shows how while slaves are able to feel empathy and all the range of human feelings; the colonizers, by perpetuating slavery, are immoral and unable to suffer and to be compassionate: "they were not all bad, I dare

say, but slavery hardens white people's hearts towards the blacks". Men and women who colonize and enslave, or "those white people have small hearts who can only feel for themselves", for in the market "many of them were not slow to make their remarks upon us aloud, though their light words fell like cayenne[33] on the fresh wounds of our hearts" (62). While supporters of slavery denied black people's ability to share human feelings as if they were "cattles", Prince demonstrated how masters and mistresses fell below the level of humanity and looked like cruel wild beasts when they dealt with their slaves. Prince's mistress in Bermuda is indeed described as a "a fearful woman and a savage mistress to her slaves", and her master Mr. D-, in the Salt Pond, is described as a man who "would stand by and give orders for a slave to be cruelly whipped, and assist in the punishment, […] with the greatest composure. Nothing could touch his hard heart--neither sighs, nor tears, nor prayers, nor streaming blood; he was deaf to our cries, and careless of our sufferings" (72).

Mary Prince ultimately reveals how slaves were not naturally immoral; nonetheless, violent masters had shirked their morality by destroying family ties and imposing indecent practices. In West Indian colonies, slaves were in fact:

> separated from their mothers, and husbands, and children, and sisters, just as cattle are sold and separated? Is it happiness for a driver in the field to take down his wife or sister or child, and strip them, and whip them in such a disgraceful manner?--women that have had children exposed in the open field to shame! There is no modesty or decency shown by the owner to his slaves; men, women, and children are exposed alike. (Prince 92-93)

According to Mary Prince, the morality in the colonies has been dismantled for colonizers and colonized alike due to the injustices and the horrors of slavery, which transformed everyone into beasts. The masters, both male and female, are insatiable, they are never satisfied with slave labour; they are "indecent" and without any "fear of God" (75).

The pro-slavery lobby supposed that slavery was a way to pursue moral duties by bringing the light of Christianity to slaves in the English colonies. Presenting the reform of "negroes'" manners and morality as a necessity imposed by the Bible, they assumed that slavery would end only upon slaves'conversion to the Christian faith. Not surprisingly, one of the controversies regarding Mary Prince's testimony concerned her participation in the meetings of the Methodist church (which,

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[33] Cayenne was a name used for a spicy pepper, from French Guinea.

according to Prince, were always opposed and hindered by her master, and according to her master, were permitted and encouraged) that put the principle that slavery was a way to moralize the colonies in crisis. Prince said in her narrative that when she first approached the Moravian Church in Antigua she: "did not then tell my mistress about it; for I knew that she would not give me leave to go. But I felt I must go", and "I wished at that time to attend a Sunday School taught by Mr. Curtin, but he would not receive me without a written note from my master, granting his permission. I did not ask my owner's permission, from the belief that it would be refused; so that I got no farther instruction at that time from the English Church" (83).

The moralization undertaken by pro-slavery lobbies also concerned Africans' sexual mores, particularly polygamy. According to their beliefs, Christians had a duty for this to be corrected on a moral level. Nevertheless, this argument arouses controversy thanks also to Mary Prince's text, which demonstrated the absurdity of the condition of the slave, for whom British laws prohibit legal marriage with a free man. Indeed, when Prince decided to marry Daniel James, a free black, a carpenter, and a widower who bought his freedom with the money he earned as a slave, she complained that "English marriage is not allowed to slaves, and no free man can marry a slave woman" (84). Therefore, in 1826, they had to get married in the Moravian church, a fact that caused Mary Prince's owners to be "filled with great rage" (84) for, as his property, Prince could not get married without his permission. The position of Mary Prince's owner towards her marriage becomes, not by chance, contested after the publication of the text. What was in question, in fact, was whether her master and mistress were people who incentivised Christian traditions and family morality or people who were hostile to slaves' moral life. Hence Mr Woods, in a letter written after the publication of the *History*, claimed that: "I induced her to take a husband, a short time before she left this, by providing a comfortable house in my yard for them, and prohibiting her going out after 10 to 12 o'clock (our bed-time) without special leave" (Prince 155). Eventually, by contradicting Mary Prince's version of the story, Mr Woods tried explicitly to undermine her morality, especially inasmuch as by affirming that she wanted to go out after 10 o'clock, he is implying that she was working as a prostitute. In the Caribbean colonies, in fact, women who went out after dark were mainly prostitutes (Socolow 133).

The lack of colonizers' morality as presented by Mary Prince's text is also linked to the inability to experience feelings of compassion and empathy towards slaves and to recognize them as equals. Master and mistress' passion is "terrible" and out of control if dictated by anger; nonetheless, it represents a means of communication and communion with other people if declined in "com-passion", a compassion that, according to Mary Prince, could prevent the horrors of slavery and that can work only if slaves are recognized as fully human beings. The emphasis that Mary Prince places on feelings and her idea that morality should be guided by emotions (even if in the West Indies it fails to happen) puts her writing in close relationship with English Romanticism and the rhetoric of sensibility[34].

Afterwards, considering the political and cultural context in which Mary Prince's narrative is placed, it is not surprising how matters of authenticity and trustworthiness were the main topic of analysis and discussions. However, what I want to emphasize is that if we shift the focus from an examination of Mary Prince's text as a political work to an analysis of her writing as a literary piece of work, the panorama changes and the truthfulness of the facts narrated no longer stands as the main element of analysis. My goal, then, is to place the text of Mary Prince within the English literary tradition as part of 'minor' literature according to the definition given by Deleuze and Guattari and summarized in the first chapter of this thesis.

1.3. Mary Prince's writing and the literary canon
1.3.1. Spiritual Narratives

Helen Thomas' *Romanticism and Slave Narratives* (2000) is the first comprehensive attempt to associate canonical Romanticism with texts related to the African Diaspora (slave literature, works from slave owners, abolitionists and radical dissenters, between the 1770 and 1830), as it shows "how marginalised slaves and alienated radical dissenters have contributed to transatlantic debate on civil and religious rights" (5). In 1786, there were about 20,000 black people in London, including fugitives who had fought for the United Kingdom during the American War of Independence (2). According to Helen Thomas, what created a space for the

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[34] See Chapter II and also Carey B., 2005, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility Writing, Sentiment and Slavery*, 1760-1807, Palgrave Macmillan.

slaves to write and publish, in order to enter the dominant literary order was the "discourse of the spirit" initiated by radical dissenting Protestantism. As a matter of fact, slaves' entry in the literary world would have been otherwise impossible given the legal and socio-economic restrictions that black people lived under in England.

Helen Thomas defines the "discourse of the spirit" of English radical dissenter Protestantism as:

> Incorporated within the prophetic confessional writings and slave texts of the eighteenth century, the discourse of the spirit hence implicated a discourse of the self, a metaphysical thought system in which the self functioned as the first principle. In other words, it was a system in which the self was presented as the unimpeachable ground within which the whole hierarchy of meanings might be constructed. (50)

The "discourse of the spirit", initiated by radical dissenting Protestantism, facilitated the entry of the slaves in the literary arena as by adopting this discourse, the experience of slavery was interpreted through a providential design. Throughout the intertwining of the black Diaspora with spiritual conversion, this discourse created areas of cultural hybridity between Christianity and the cultures of the African Diaspora. The ability to access the English cultural and literary space through the channel of the discourse of the spirit implied important constraints for slave narratives. Firstly, the authors were obliged to present their stories in an acceptable form, that is to say, as the result of the work of the Holy Spirit, which led them to salvation. This compromise is evident in the slave narratives of Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoano, although it changed slightly in the narrative of Mary Prince.

According to Helen Thomas, "the discourse of the spirit" arose in England with the Quakers, the Evangelists and the Methodists[35]. In particular, one of the first people to employ the discourse of the spirit was George Fox (1624-1691), a Quaker and the leader of the Society of Friends, equally involved in English and American cultural life. The formal title of the movement was the "Society of Friends" or the "Religious Society of Friends" and it was born during the 1650s in Great Britain. The Quakers had Christian roots and they promoted an intensified form of Puritanism

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[35]See: John Walsh, "Religious Societies: Methodist and Evangelical, 1738–1800", Voluntary Religion, 23, 1986 , pp. 279-302 and Gilbert, A.D., Religion and Society in Industrial England, London, 1976 and Thomas F. Harwood, "British Evangelical Abolitionism and American Churches in the 1830's", *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Aug., 1962), pp. 287-306.

accompanied by the belief that in all men there is a divine principle capable of leading to freedom, making people brothers in Christ.

Evangelists were another major religious group that developed the discourse of the spirit. Among the exponents of the evangelical Anglicanism, William Wilberforce (1759-1833)[36] promoted, with great success, the concept of "spiritual renewal", both nationally and internationally. According to Wilberforce, in fact, the moral regeneration of Britain could take place only through the abolition of the slave trade; this regeneration should not only concern England but also its colonies. Wilberforce thus inaugurates a missionary ideology, uniting the idea of spiritual liberation with a liberationist discourse (Thomas 36).

Likewise, Methodism, a transatlantic movement initiated by John Wesley (1703-1791), advocated the possibility of salvation through faith and stressed the importance of "plain-speaking", meaning clear speech or "writing as we speak". The main principle he fostered was to talk about "simple truths for simple people" for avoiding all the hard-to-understand words would have helped to better express the feelings of one's heart. Literary simplicity henceforth became very important for Methodists and authors of slave narratives alike. Strongly opposed to the Calvinist principles of election and predestination, the Methodists emphasized the importance of God's personal experience and of His grace, the acquisition of which became the hallmark of their narratives.

In his famous 1817 text, *On the Causes of Methodism*, Wesley described the "new birth"; namely, how to transcend sin to arrive at grace. The story of ordinary people's personal experience of redemption became of fundamental importance for the dissemination of the Methodist message. In 1837, the details of the lives of the early Methodist preachers were published in a collection of Methodists' spiritual autobiographies previously published in the *Arminian Magazine*, providing a literary paradigm also for slave narratives (Thomas). The spiritual autobiographies were all structured in the same way: first, there was a recollection of childhood, then an

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[36] William Wilberforce (1759-1833) was an English politician known as a leader of the movement to stop the slave trade. A native of Kingston upon Hull, Yorkshire, he began his political career in 1780, eventually becoming a Member of Parliament for Yorkshire (1784–1812). He was independent of party. In 1785, he became a born-again Evangelic, which resulted in major changes to his lifestyle and a lifelong concern for social reform and progress. He was educated at St. John's College, Cambridge. See: Capter II.

account of various transgressions and sins, followed by repentance and dedication to the service of God through the gift of the spirit. The central moment of the narratives was represented by the encounter with God, which was the higher climax point of the story.

The first slave narratives published in England were those of Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species Humbly Submitted to the Inhabitants of Great Britain* (1787), and of Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, written by himself* (1789). Both narratives followed the pattern of spiritual autobiographies, in order to arouse sympathy for the miseries of slavery. As Thomas argues: "By tracing their authors' journeys towards secular and social freedom, these [*the ones of Equiano and Cugoano, ed*] early 'conversion' narratives posited the acquisition of spiritual awakening as an affirmation of divine election through the unequivocal workings of the Holy Spirit" (Thomas 2000: 183).

1.3.2. Spiritual narratives and slave narratives

Olaudah Equiano, who directed his memoir explicitly to evangelical intellectuals, traced in his testimony his conversion journey that led him to individual salvation from slavery and, the same time, requested the salvation of slave peoples from slavery. The author, as the main character of the narrative, is framed in a paradigm of divine election established by Christian providentialism accompanied by the Igbo[37] concept of chi (the personal spirit of destiny). The spirit possession and the divine guidance accorded by God to Equiano, led him to freedom as well as to the forgiveness of his sins – the sexual abuses and the violence that he too perpetuated –, finally delivering him from slavery. In this pattern, freedom comes with God's deliverance from sins, as it happens with spiritual narratives; nonetheless, this

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[37] Igbo are the customs, practices and traditions of the Igbo people of south-eastern Nigeria. It comprises archaic practices as well as new concepts added into the Igbo culture either by cultural evolution or by outside influence. These customs and traditions include the Igbo people's visual art, music and dance forms, as well as their attire, cuisine and language dialects. Because of their various subgroups, the variety of their culture is heightened further. See: *Udeani, Chibueze C. (2007). Inculturation as dialogue: Igbo culture and the message of Christ. Rodopi. pp. 28–29 and Isichei, Elizabeth Allo (1997). A History of African Societies to 1870. Cambridge University Press. p. 247.*

personal freedom is associated with the collective need of slave peoples for freedom and salvation. So far, God is the only responsible for the acquisition of personal and political freedom and this is the reason why slave peoples are associated with Jews people that had not reach the Promised Land. Yet, Mary Prince's writing changes this pattern of slave narratives; slightly detaching it from that of spiritual narratives, for in her text both personal and collective freedom are independent of God's will.

Mary Prince was part of the Moravian Church[38], which she joined in the Caribbean, as a letter from her reverend there proves. Accordingly, when she became a free woman in England it was from a religious group that she received help. However, Mary Prince's literary work, unlike the ones of Cugoano and Equiano, is not a spiritual autobiography of a slave, as shown by the fact that the figures of divinity and salvation are marginal elements in her story. God, in Mary Prince's text, is the one who "knows the thoughts of the poor slave's heart" (Prince 61), and when she was hoping to die on account of the hard work she was doing, the "hand of God was stretched over me and I was mercifully preserved for better things" (Prince 68). Nonetheless, it was not God who initiated decisive changes in her life to acquire freedom, it was her who, after having been beaten, flees for the first time and decides to leave (Prince 70). Since her first little escape, everything in her story changes. When Prince describes her transfer from Bermuda to Antigua, she says: "it was ordinate to be, I suppose; God led me there. The truth is, I did not wish to be any longer the slave of an indecent master": it is thus explicitly on her own initiative that she relocates, as part of her personal struggle for freedom. Accordingly, it does not seem that God intervenes in a decisive way to give her any salvation from slavery, as

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[38] The Moravian Church was founded in the XVIII century but its origin traces back to the Unitas Fratrum ("Unity of Brethren") of the 15th-century Hussite movement in Bohemia and Moravia. In 1734, Moravians en route to mission work in the American colonies arrived in London and made contacts that led to the formation of the Fetter Lane Society in 1738, the forerunner of churches in England, Wales, and Ireland. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, met the Moravians during his trip to Georgia in 1735–36. Upon his return home, both he and his brother Charles affiliated with the Moravians. They worked together until 1740, when the Methodist and Moravian churches went their separate ways. The former became a mass movement, while the latter, after initial success, became one of the small churches of the British Isles, with about 40 congregations and fewer than 5,000 members. The first Moravian mission in the Americas was among black slaves in the West Indies (1732). The Moravian church adheres to its original principle of the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice. It subscribes to both the Apostles' and Nicene creeds but does not have a distinctive creed of its own, believing that the various Protestant confessions have already established the chief articles of the Christian faith. See: The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Moravian Church*, available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Moravian-church, last accessed 25/08/1018.

far as it is the will of Mary Prince, which does not bear to be ruled by an indecent master, which led her to the achievement of freedom. Furthermore, she does not seem to care much about God's judgment when she contravenes religious rules, as the prohibition to work on Sundays. White masters indeed are always more guilty and sinful than their slaves: "It is very wrong, I know, to work on Sunday or go to market; but will not God call the Buckra men to answer for this on the great day of judgment--since they will give the slaves no other day" (82).

Prince joined the Moravian church; nonetheless, her encounter with the religious creed did not rescue her from despair. When Mary Prince describes her first meeting at the Moravian church, she says: "I felt sorry for my sins also […] This meeting had a great impression on my mind, and led my spirit to the Moravian church […] there were all sorts of people, old and young, grey headed folks and children; but most of them were free people". The impression she gives is that these meetings were significant to her by virtue of the fact that she could encounter free people, more than deliverance from the Moravian God. After all, being born as a slave, she evidences how at the beginning she considered her condition to be natural. Nonetheless, when she felt the great sorrow of being sold, she realised that her sufferings were rather the outcome of human cruelty; nonetheless, she hardly met free coloured people who succeeded in escaping what felt like an unnatural condition. The Moravian meetings were then, probably, vital places to find free people from whom to learn how to free herself.

When Mary finally arrived in England with her master and mistress, it was thanks to the Methodist church that she got in contact with the Anti-Slavery Society that helped her change her condition as a slave. Contrary to canonical spiritual autobiography, however, the freedom acquired and her new religious life did not guarantee her neither happiness nor satisfaction. In Thomas Pringle's house Mary prince "enjoys the great privilege of being enabled to attend church three times on the Sunday" but she "still live in the hope that God will find a way to give me my liberty, and give me back to my husband. I endeavour to keep down my fretting, and to leave all to Him, for he knows what is good for me better than I know myself. Yet, I must confess, I find it a hard and heavy task to do so" (93).

Then, the meeting with the Moravian Church in Antigua seems to be particularly important since it introduced Mary Prince to a community of free blacks for the first time, rather than because she met God's grace. In a sense, in fact, salvation had already begun for her when she decided to put a strategy in place to escape slavery in Capt I's plantation. Ultimately, the encounter with freedom and her awareness of her condition as a slave appears to be more important and decisive than her encounter with divinity in itself. Besides all of that, Mary Prince was able to publish and write her text only thanks to a Methodist editor and writer and as her being part of this community. Following Thomas's thesis, it is plausible that the only way to get inside English literary culture for slaves/blacks was through the channel of "discourse of the spirit". It is the case also for Mary Prince, although that discourse is not very significant in the narrative circuit of her story.

In other words, Many of Prince's lamentations on the horrors of slavery and calls for abolition are framed within a religious context and have a prayer-like quality to them. Nevertheless, it seems like another way for Prince to make alliances in the abolitionist movement and wipe away some of the times in her life that she (or Pringle) chooses not to include in the narrative. The references to past events in her life as sinful might be read as a sincere atonement and enlightenment through religion, or a convenient way of summing up events that would hurt her credibility as an upstanding witness against slavery (see the reception history conflict below).

However, the text of Mary Prince, as well as other slave narratives, is a complex kind of revision of the radical dissenting Protantism. They present important intersections with radical prophets and Romantic poets for the articulation of the liberated self, sanctioned and redeemed within the parameters of a spiritual discourse (Thomas 183). Both for the radical dissenting prophets, Romantics and slave narrators, the autobiography estabilishes the effort to recapture with words a lost or not yet achieved heavenly happiness, by reconciling the past self with the present one.

1.4. Between fiction and reality: notes on the literary traits of *The History of Mary Prince*

The story of Mary Prince is narrated in an autobiographical form. The debate on the status of autobiographies and literature of slave narratives was initiated by James Olney, literary critic of renowned fame for his texts on the autobiographical genre (*Metaphors of Self: the meaning of autobiography*, 1972). In 1984 he wrote the article: "*I was Born"*, *slave narratives, their status as autobiography and as literature*". In the article's introduction, Olney notes the substantial sameness that characterises the hundreds of slave narratives produced in the British colonies, stating that:

> Anyone who sets about reading a single slave narrative, or even two or three slave narratives, might be forgiven the natural assumption that every such narrative will be, or ought to be, a unique production; for so would go the unconscious argument: "Are not slave narratives autobiography, and is not every autobiography the unique tale, uniquely told, of a unique life?"If such a reader should proceed to take up another half dozen narratives, however (and there is a great lot of them from which to choose the half dozen) a sense not of uniqueness but of overwhelming *sameness* is almost certain to be the result". (Olney, 'I was born' 46)

Olney believes that slave narratives cannot be considered authentic literary creations and cannot belong to the autobiographical genre, but instead should be considered as works that precede "real" Afro-American literary production, the "thematic complexes of Afro-American writing".

To write an autobiography, according to Olney, is a "recollective/narrative" act in which the writer, from the present, looks at the past and tells how that past story led him to his/her present. This exercise of memory is not neutral and passive, since memory gives meaning to facts, without inventing them. The events are therefore not returned to the reader in a simple chronological sequence, but by following a pattern of meaning. Recalling Paul Ricoeur's thought,[39] Olney distinguished two dimensions in the structure of literary creations: one epic, and the other configurational. The epic dimension is chronological, "it characterised the story as made out of events" (Olney, 'I was born' 47), whereas the configurational dimension is non-chronological, and

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[39] Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) was a French philosopher best known for combining phenomenological description with hermeneutics. As such, his thought is within the same tradition as other major hermeneutic phenomenologists, Edmund Husserl and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

represents the meaning given to events by putting them together through a plot. The configurational dimension, in the case of autobiography, is dominated by memory that remodels the past from the present. According to Olney, in slave narratives the episodic dimension prevails, thus obscuring completely the configurational dimension. The choice to make the episodic aspect prevails over the configurational aspect is made by slave narrative's authors in order to give a greater sense of reality to their works, therefore not to alter with fictitious the political value of the text; on the other hand, however, this choice leads to the loss of the sense of a creative act (48).

Yet, a close reading of Mary Prince's work challenges Olney's theories, since in it the episodic dimension does not obscure the configurational one. In the *History of Mary Prince*, the events are chosen according to an order of meaning that is given to the story and the omissions and changes to the facts (that emerge for instance from her posthumous trial testimonies) serve to give a coherent development, at the level of meaning, to the history/plot. The chronological dimension then overlaps with that of meaning. As Paquet points out, in fact, in the text of Mary Prince besides the temporal sequence, the circular rhetoric emerges quite clearly, which counterpoises the inner development to physical slavery (140).

The chronological account of the events and the political need for their historical trustworthiness do not undermine the creative act of the auto-biographer, Mary Prince, who invents a meaningful plot that revolves around her quest for freedom. The configurational dimension has its structure, beside the chronological one, as it consists of the journey of the self towards personal and political freedom. This journey could be divided into three stages; the first one regards the experience of innocence, the self of the author is still unaware of being a slave and considers its condition as natural. The situation changes thanks to an eye opening event: the selling and the separation from her family, which makes Mary Prince aware of her condition of slavery. Following the awareness of the situation, first comes a feeling of desolations and a desire for death, resolved then by the affirmation of the will to escape or to change this condition. Finally, the self's desire for freedom leads the protagonist to the acquisition of personal freedom and the claim for collective freedom for all the enslaved. The configurational dimension then is not, as Olney

claims, absent in this slave narrative, nor is it replaced by the chronological one. Both, actually, coexist together, similarly to what happens in autobiographies.

For slave narratives, memory has a very specific and innovative meaning. It is a symbolic memory, which reconstructs experiences through imagination, therefore its use is not "inconceivable in a slave narrative" (Olney, 'I was born' 48), as it acts in originating a meaning in the plot through creativity, without however alter the truthfulness of the facts narrated. The way Mary Prince employs memory and recollects her story, makes her close to the Romantic Movement, as I will discuss later. Thereby, her text, as happens with fiction, is intended to be read and is an aesthetical act, which makes it fully belong to the domain of literature, inasmuch as both the configurational and the chronological dimension are present, as I intend to show.

After all, to create a fiction means to prioritise one framework over others and this act of creation does not measure itself on the veracity of the things narrated: fiction exists even if the things narrated are true, in this sense slave narrative are by all means autobiographies. In other slave English narratives (such as the ones of Olaudha Equiano or Ottobaugh Cugoano) the framework proposed has as climatic point, the moment of the slaves' spiritual and cultural conversion, which allows his path to freedom (and therefore to the formation of a new self). In the case in question, instead, the climatic point of the plot is the awareness of Mary Prince's condition as a slave, from which follows all the events that she puts in place to obtain freedom.

As mentioned, the first part of Mary Prince's life story, in its configurational and not merely chronological dimension, is characterised by a state of innocence. The innocence of Mary Prince, recalled with the same nostalgia of the English Romantics, gives her happiness, a happiness covered by the veil of unconsciousness. After being sold, together with her mother, as a child, she becomes the slave and the playmate of Miss Betsey Williams: "I was made quite a pet by Miss Betsey, and loved her very much […] This was the happiest period of my life; for I was too young to understand my condition as a slave and too thoughtless and full of spirits to look forward to the days of toil and sorrow" (Prince 57). Even after the death of her

mistress, when Mary Prince is sold and separated from her family, she is still "far from being sensible of the full weight of my misfortune" (Prince 60).

After the sale, which marks Mary Prince's departure from her mother, described with passionate grief ("the black morning", Prince 60-61), Mary Prince is bought by Captain I–. In Captain I–'s house she meets Hetty, an overworked and heavily mistreated slave, with which Mary Prince identifies herself and whose position she will take after Hetty's death (attributed by the other blacks to a strong beating by the master). It is in Captain I house and after the death of Hetty that the climax of the story of Mary Prince begins, that will culminate with the first attempt to escape and then with the awakening of her conscience and the tearing of the veil of innocence that had characterised it. When Hetty dies, Mary Prince says, "all slaves said that death was a good thing for poor Hetty but I cried very much for her death", she says so insomuch as she identifies herself with Hetty, feeling that she will also have the same fate. Mary Prince's diversity or distance from the common sense is even stronger when, taking the place of the deceased Hetty, she begins to be the main object of the "terrible passions" (67) of her mistress and master. Prince now starts to be fully aware of her slavery, and so far the only person she knew who got out of this condition was Hetty, through her death. Consequently, death represents the only way by which she saw someone out of slavery, and she start longing for it: "often wished that like poor Hetty I could escape from this cruel bondage and be at rest in the grave […] careless of what might happen, for life was very weak in me and I wished more than ever to die. But when we are very young, death always seems a great way off, and it would not come that night to me" (68). The desire to die slowly begins to turn for Prince in an attempt to escape, to find alternative solutions for freedom, thus the second part of the configurational narrative begins, when Mary Prince actively strives to achieve freedom.

In the case of Mary Prince's narrative, the first act of explicit rebellion is the "petit marronage", which will often be employed in various forms throughout her history and which marks the beginning of her active rebellion, and which also marks the a second phase in the configurational dimension of the fiction. Historically, slaves resistance has been expressed in a wide variety of actions, ranging from revolts on slave ships, to the practices of sabotage of agricultural production in

plantations (poisoning of livestock, destruction of work tools and strike), to the killing of masters, self-mutilation, enlistment in army and navy and escape, individual or collective, up to infanticide and suicide. James Scott has demonstrated how the resistance to the domination of a conquered population could also take "hidden" forms. Among them, behaviours of concealment, lies, passive or silent damage of those in power, summarised in the slave's saying: "play fool, to catch wise" (Scott 2-4).

After the two episodes of Captain I–'s violent beatings of Mary Prince, Mary runs away and goes to her mother who hides her for a few days in a cave until her father makes her come back to the master, asking him for forgiveness. Even if obliged to go back to Captain I– ("I was loth, loth to go back; but as there was no remedy I was obliged to submit", 70) and even knowing that her mother could not help her because she is a slave like her ("I had to run away to my mother, but mothers could only weep and mourn over their children, they could not save them from cruel masters – from the whip, the tope, and the cow-skin", 70), Mary Prince achieved a new awareness now. When she confronts her master, in fact, she says, "I then took courage and said that I could stand the flogging no longer", thus for the first time she begins to react, to oppose her resistance to the master's power. From now on, the meaning of the autobiographical fiction develops along the line of the conquest of freedom, which for Mary Prince will never reach an actual conclusion, as we shall see later.

Mary Prince begins to adopt various resistance strategies articulated around the only tools available to her, to exercise her resilience. After her "petit marronage", namely the escape from Captain I– and the refuge in her mother's place, Mary Prince manages to be sold by Captain I– in order to go under the control of Mr. D-. Mary Prince's new master, however, turns out to be a greater evil than the previous one. Prince tells of how she defended his daughter, lashed by Miss D– ("I strove with all my strength to get her away from him; for she was all black and blue with bruises", 77), and "the people gave me credit for getting her away" (77). At last, as a result of the sexual abuse and corporal punishment she suffered, Prince started to defend herself, "for I thought it was high time to do so" (78), she says. Mary insists on being

hired in Cedar Hill, in order to earn money, and actively strives for the achievement of her manumission (78).

Furthermore, Prince asks Mr. Woods several times to sell her to other masters ("I went to Mr. Burchell […] and asked him to buy me for my own benefit; for I had saved about 100 dollars, and hoped with a little help to get my freedom", 79; and also: "I went to Adam White, a cooper, a free black, who had money and asked him to buy me", 81). After all these failed attempts to buy her freedom, Mary Prince decides to join the Moravian church, to marry Daniel James. At last, when she realizes that her owner was not willing in any way to grant her liberty, she insists to go with him to England where she hoped she could get her freedom ("My husband was willing for me to come away, for he had heard that my master would free me,– and I also hoped this might prove true; but it was all a false report", 86).[40]

Having shown how Mary Prince's narrative has both dimensions, chronological and configurational, it follows that this text entirely pertains to the autobiographical genre and in the literary domain.

Yet, an essential question posed by Olney remains unanswered, that is, why are the narratives so similar to each other? I think the reason lies not in the fact that they are not fiction nor are they literature, but resides in the status of subject/object of the auto-biographer.

The paradigm of the "power of imagination" and liberation from the slavery of the self/mind, which will be a recurring symbol of the English Romantic period, is present within the slave narratives, though reinvented through an inscription of personal and collective memory (Thomas 225). The peculiarity of the slave narratives, as evidenced by the text of Mary Prince, is that the re-collecting is not confined to the individual self but it widens into the confines of a cultural narrative (in this it distances itself from the Romantics and anticipates African-African literature). If for the Romantics the memory is egocentric and solitary, for the slaves it has a collective value. This is the reason why even if slave narratives are different stories, at the end they all tell the same story.

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[40] In an interesting article, Baumgartner argues that even the physical disability of Mary Prince was used by her as a weapon of resilience and resistance of power and as a form of active agency. See: Baumgartner, Barbara. 'The Body as Evidence: Resistance, Collaboration, and Appropriation in "The History of Mary Prince"'. *Callaloo*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2001, pp. 253–75.

Noticeably, since an autobiography is the narration of an ego, if the person who is narrating does not possess the full status as subject, the literary frame unfolds more intricatingly. Consequently, what I assume generates the resemblance of all slave narratives is not the absence of the creative act, but rather it is the absence of a voice from a single defined subject. Slave narrative's writer is not fully recognised as a subject in his/her society of belonging therefore his/her writing is the expression of an entire community of people, that do not have the status of subjects.

Particularly, Olney formulates an investigation of slave narratives that arises from a Western perspective and takes canonical literature as reference; by doing so, he does not contextualize this literary production per se. What contradistinguishes slave narratives from canonical autobiographical works[41] is not the different use of memory or the absence of the configurational dimension; so far, the peculiarity of the slave narratives lies in the fact that they are autobiographies written by a collective subject, rather than an individual as author. Therefore, even if the narrator is an individual, the story he/she is telling is the story of a people, and this explains the sense of sameness by which Olney is caught when he reads slave narratives.

1.4.2. A journey of the Self: towards personal and political freedom

As claimed by Foucault, autobiographies are a Western anthropological process, a form of self-exorcism of our faults. Similarly, confession is one of the western techniques of truth production in the hermeneutic of the subject. Yet, if autobiographies are ways of solving the problems of identity, self-definition and self-existence, how do we analyse texts written by those who did not have an identity, since it had been linguistically, legally, and ideologically deleted from social order? (Thomas 177).

The author of slave narratives is a subject who is experiencing a dichotomy: the narrator has the status of a subject-object. This sense of discrepancy anticipates the focus that Romantic poets will place on the disjunction between internal and external self. Throughout the text, of Mary Prince is possible to encounter many examples of this split between subject and object.

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[41] John Olney mentions for instance the works by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Confessions, 1782) and William Wordsworth (*The Prelude*, 1805), as canonical autobiographies.

Mary Prince emphasises throughout all the text her ambivalent status, which was the suspension of her self between being and not being recognised as a person. Mary's first sale takes place as long as the master under whom she was born (Mr Myners) died, therefore a "division of the slaves and other property among the family" followed, so slaves are, since the beginning of her narrative, of the same nature as commodities. The daughter of her new mistress, of whom Mary Prince "was made quite a pet", used to lead her by the hand and call her "little nigger", associating her with a domestic animal. Moreover, on the day of her sale, Mary Prince's mother takes "little chickens to the market", and in that market, Mary Prince was placed in line with her brothers and sisters and sold "like sheep or cattle". Her buyer, according to Mary Prince, "examined and handled me in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or a lamb he was about to purchase, and who talked about my shape and size in like words as if I could no more understand their meaning than the dumb beasts" (Prince 62) This happened due to the fact that "Oh the Buckra people who keep slaves think that black people are like cattle, without natural affection" (71).

In Turk Island, her master made all the slaves sleep in a shed, split in two "narrow slips, like the stalls used for cattle", this is where Mary found out she went "from one butcher to another" (referred to the new master, 72). Disease makes them susceptible to strong violence, since when they are sick, they are seen as defective commodities, without economic value, for instance Mary Prince says: "my mistress got vexed with me, because I fell sick and I could not keep on with my work" (80), or referring to Mr. D–'s slave, 'old Daniel' that "had a lame in the hip and he could not keep with the rest of the slaves and our master would order him to be stripped and laid down on the ground and have him beaten with a rod of rough briar till his skin was quite red and raw". The contrast between the status of Mary Prince as a subject and object at the same time is evident even when she meets Daniel James, a free black man whom she wants to marry, but who cannot legally marry as far as: "English marriage in not allowed to slaves, and no free man can marry a slave woman" (84).

Mary Prince resolves this subject-object ambivalence with her awareness to belong to a community, which experiences her same feelings and situations. Throughout her text, she affirms strongly that the enslaved African are entirely

subjects, and as such, they claim their recognition as individuals and as community. By placing herself within a community that has the same problem as a whole, Mary Prince creates a collective subject, this renders the identity assumed by the narrator, collective.

In Mary Prince's fiction, the act of remembering is intrinsically connected to the construction of this collective identity. Memory is conceived in terms of authentication of subject's past, present and future self but in a collective frame. The first time Mary Prince is sold, "the slaves could say nothing to comfort us; they could only weep and lament with us" (61). In the house of Capt. I– Mary Prince meets two little slaves on which the mistress takes out her anger, she says, "my pity for these poor boys was soon transferred to myself; for I was licked and flogged, and pinched by her pitiless fingers in the neck and arms, exactly as they were" (66). The fate of a slave in a community affects everyone, as, before or after, everyone will suffer the same harsh treatment. Slaves in the community are individuals, people different from each other, yet they are connected strongly by the same fate, the same story of suffering, by the same injustices. Tears and suffering are common, they represent them all ("he was deaf to *our* cries, and careless of *our* sufferings", 72) and so do their opinions ("at least the slaves all believed and said so", 66, *emphasis mine*), and "*All slaves said* that death was a good thing for poor Hetty" (67). Suffering is collective, in this sense Mary Prince is telling her individual story but together with it she tells the story of a whole people, as she herself states at different points in the text: "Mr. D– has often stripped me naked […] Yet there was nothing very remarkable in this; for it might serve as a sample of the common usage of the slaves on that horrible island" (73). Elsewhere, she attests that "old" Daniel "was an object of pity and terror to the whole gang of slaves, and in his wretched case we saw each of us our own lot, if we should live to be as old" (74). Finally, the collective identity of slaves is visible at the end of her text, when Mary Prince underlines the shared experience of slavery: "I have been a slave--I have felt what a slave feels, and I know what a slave knows" (94).

This is also, I believe, the reason why the narrative is filled with stories of other characters, apart from the one of Mary Prince, and of their lives as slaves. Exactly due to the collective and choral nature of *The History*, it is able to narrate not the

story of a self only, but also of a people. As the author herself says, in fact, "in telling my own sorrows, I cannot pass by those of my fellow-slaves – for when I think of my own griefs I remember theirs". This is why in telling her story, Mary Prince narrates as well one of two little slave boys ("a mulatto, called Cyrus" and "Jack, an African from the coast of Guinea"), of Hetty, "a French Black", of her family – including her mother and father, brothers and sisters-in-law –, and of "old Daniel".

The use of a collective identity recalls that phase of transformation that Mary Prince narrates; in which slaves begin to acquire awareness of their condition and to react to the problem of the race that is being formed, through belonging to a black community that has as its glue the traumatic experience of transatlantic trafficking and therefore, the black Diaspora. This community, as Mary Prince testifies, has a common collective identity that is not based on national affiliations but on the condition of slavery (as emerged from the fact that even though Hetty is French, Cyrus and Jack are from the Guinea coast, they all belong to the same community of slaves).

The collective identity of which Mary Prince is part is ultimately the one of the Back Diaspora. The expression "Black Diaspora" has been defined by Paul Gilroy in the Black Atlantic as the common historical process of dispersal, fragmentation, displacement, enslavement, and transportation experienced by African people, which tied together Afro-descendants but also denies them a direct access to their pasts. In addition, according to Jim Clifford, the term "Diaspora" is not only a signifier of spatial and identity fluidity, but also the effort to define "a distinctive community" within the historical context of displacement. Therefore, the History of Mary Prince is a coral story in which the articulation of the Self only formally follows the patterns of Romanticism and spiritual narratives, since it stands for a collective Self. The collective side of the Self is one of the central aspects of what Deleuze and Guattari have defined as minor literature, to which this text pertains.

1.4.3. Language peculiarities

As stated in the first chapter, minor literature has three main characteristics, according to Deleuze and Guattari. Minor works are collective and therefore political, as we have seen with Mary Prince's work. Yet, the third aspect that

characterises them is that their language is affected by a strong coefficient of deterritorialisation. Minor literature is a revolutionary way of writing that, as Kafka foresaw, puts this kind of creations beyond the realm of the classic works and the traditional literary criticism. This approach delineates a writing that contrasts with the major literature: that of the literary canon and habited by great masters. Many literary works indeed tend to reproduce the status quo, even unconsciously, using the language in a conservative way. Minor literature instead has the power to bend the language or to deprive it of its familiarity. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, "a minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. However, the first characteristic of minor literature is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialisation" (Deleuze and Guattari 10).

The language of minor texts expresses an impossibility which in the case of Mary Prince is the impossibility of being British even though she was born and lived in British territories, the impossibility of being a coherent self even though she was a full human being, and the impossibility to freely live her relations with her dearest ones. Her language reflects this feeling of impossibility, by being not as formal as the language of canonical Romantic authors, but still being part of the national English language. The language of official literature is for Mary Prince the language of the conqueror, which she misuses in order to make the reader feel a different perspective on it, the possibility to change an official language through its creolisation, making it a cross-bred language.

Linguists have used the term 'creolisation' to describe the creation of new languages during periods of linguistic crisis in response to urgent needs for communication. In terms of cultural displacement, the key words here are self-evident: crisis, communication and 'new' ways of speaking. As a linguistic system, therefore, a creole constitutes a sophisticated development of a pidgin language, the latter being a reduced or make-shift form of verbal communication which results from an extended contact between groups of people with no language in common. The creation of 'creole' thus attests to a language system which has pidgin in its ancestry, but which is spoken natively by an entire speech community whose ancestors have been displaced geographically and/or whose own socio-historical

identities have been partly disrupted. One of the predominant causes of such sociolinguistic upheaval was the unprecedented scale of African slavery. As Africans representing diverse ethnolinguistic groups were brought by Europeans to colonies in the New World, their urgent need for communication necessitated the development of intricate linguistic systems with their own phonology, syntax and word formations amidst a highly variable, chaotic linguistic environment. This process of creolisation is still not completely understood, but for linguists and cultural theorists alike it presents a fascinating model of expansion, elaboration, and reorganisation during a period of trauma, resulting in the creation of a coherent and sophisticated verbal system.

Contemporary linguistic studies have shown that languages variously referred to as 'black English' and 'Ebonics' were developed within the complex linguistic arena of the slave plantations. As the visible repositories of African culture were either prohibited or repressed within slave societies, subtle linguistic and communicative syntheses, or "creolisations" of West African languages and English emerged. In this way the linguistic systems of pidgin, creole and Afro-American retained structural remnants of certain African languages in spite of the imposition of western linguistic models. The emergence of a pidgin' language involved a considerable reduction in the grammatical structure of an appropriated language. The emergence of a "creole" witnessed the moment at which pidgin became the native language of those who used it (Thomas 162).

Mary Prince grounds her narrative in the discursive world of the vernacular and the culture that shaped it. In doing so, she destabilised English language, revolting it against itself. As Paquet attests, the use of a modified "vernacular that preserves the tone and style of the original is now commonplace in modern Caribbean writing, but in 1831 this represents an extraordinary harmony of intention" (137). Yet, the central element of her text, however, is the fact that she did not write it directly, so many expressions were probably taken off from it in the writing. Thomas Pringle presents her language in the preface, as full of "repetitions and prolixities", and says it "afterwards pruned into its present shape; retaining as far as was practicable, Prince's exact expressions and peculiar phraseology" (55). However, Pringle attests the tale was transcribed "without any material alteration farther than was requisite to exclude

redundancies and gross grammatical errors, so as to render it clearly intelligible" to a white English audience of course.

In Mary Prince's text, the employment of the vernacular is often used to denote situations or objects closely related to slavery, as if for those objects there was not a translation in English. For instance, on the day of her sale to the market, Mary Prince's mother defines her children as "my poor picaninnies!", a term of common usage in the slave societies of central and South America. "Picaninnies" is a way to depict dark-skinned children of African descent and, from time to time, it acquired a strong racist and derogatory meaning, it is itself a pidgin word form, which may be derived from the Portuguese *pequenino*. On that "black morning" also, Mary Prince's mother gives her children the "osnaburgs", a typical slave dress in West Indies, that does not have a correspondence in British English. The same applies to the terms used to indicate the corn soup ("blawly") reserved for slaves in the salt ponds and the "shed", that is to say the great hut in which all the slave slept.

The use of the vernacular helps to underline the distance between the world of the West Indies and England which are nevertheless kept together by the same language of reference, declined in a different way according to the legacy of slavery. The whites, the colonisers, then become "the Buckra people", a category that denotes the existence of an "us" and a "them". The employment of the vernacular, typical of minor types of literature, therefore, transforms English into a minor language, advancing a revision of it from within. The revolutionary potential of this act is clear considering that the transformation of British English, designates that its meaning escapes the motherland, as far as it is no longer just the English of Britons, though also the language of slaves (and maybe this is why Pringle meticulously tried to clean up with modesty).

An additional linguistic element that characterises the text of Mary Prince and which gives it strength is the employment of repetitions that are present in the text, which is adopted, above all, to emphasise a pain that has no words to be conveyed, as it comes from a tireless work and from a restless fatigue. The repetitions represents then a narrative device able to give, like an onomatopoeia, the sensation of the meaning of the word, a word that alone is not sufficient to express the pain felt for the tireless daily work ("work, work, work"), the pain for separation from loved ones

("it is sad, sad", "oh my mother, my mother", "weep, weep, weep"), the challenges of life ("oh the trials, the trials!", "clatter, clatter, clatter", "lick-lick") and the tiredness of everyday life ("I was sick, sick of Turk's Island" e "I was very sick, very sick indeed").

A further employment of the West Indian speech is the poetic turn of phrases and metaphors, present in several passages of the text, like "many of them were not slow to make their remarks upon us aloud, without regard to our grief – though their light words fell like cayenne on the fresh wounds of our hearts" (62), where *cayenne* is a typical West Indian/Brazilian spice. Even the use of the expression "the salt water" as synonym for tears is vernacular, as well as "washed the pickle from our limbs" and metaphors and similarities such as: "the stones and the timber were the best things in it; they were not so hard as the hearts of the owners", or "on the ground like a worm". Finally, another literary distinctive trait of Mary Prince's texts is the interruption of the tale with emotive and evocative expressions, philosophical reflection and moral lessons.

William Du Bois,[42] in *The Souls of the Black Folks* (1903), introduced the concept of *double consciousness* as the specific characterisation of Afro-American identity, which was simultaneously both belonging and not belonging to the history and culture of America, being marked by the trauma of the middle passage, slavery, and segregation. However, in Mary Prince's narrative this kind of double consciousness does not emerge yet, since Prince highlights neither her African nor her British/American belonging. Hitherto, Mary Prince belonging is more connected to family tides, which give significance to places.

What is particular in the *History*, in my opinion, is Prince's embodiment, which means that the subjectivity of Mary Prince is presented as an inextricable connection between body and mind,[43] since there is no separation between her inner and outer

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[42]William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963)was an American sociologist, historian, civil rights activist, Pan-Africanist, author, writer, and editor. Born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, Du Bois grew up in a relatively tolerant and integrated community. After completing graduate work at the University of Berlin and Harvard, where he was the first African American to earn a doctorate, he became a professor of history, sociology, and economics at Atlanta University. Du Bois was also one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909.

[43]For example, if we compare it to William Blake's poem, which suggests a dichotomy between the slave's physical body and soul (*I am black, but O! my soul is white*; "The Little Black Boy", William Blake, 1789) Mary Prince's narrative shows no separation between her inner and outside identity.

world. This embodiment has an important value in terms of subjectivity for both gender and desire, which are the topics of the last section of this chapter.

2. Gender and desire

2.1. *Gynesis* and *gynocriticism* in relation to Mary Prince's narrative

By following Susan Friedman methodology[44], based on "interactive reading", I will devote the last section of the chapter to the analysis of the text of Mary Prince in terms of *gynesis*, meant as the analysis of the narrative based on gender as the main cultural variable. In the second section, instead, I will try to focus on *gynocriticism*, namely the relation of this writing with the historical study of female writers, as belonging to a different literary tradition than one of men.

One of the aspects that emerges since the beginning of Mary Prince's narrative is the importance of family relationships. Contrary to the traditional form of family that appears in the canonical literature of Prince's time, family relationships seem to be widely different from the Western patriarchal family. Mary lives with her mother and with her brothers, to whom she is extremely attached, although she is also deeply linked to her mistress, Miss Williams, who was like a sister to Mary Prince (their relation is described with this words: "My obedience to her commands was cheerfully given: it sprung solely from the affection I felt for her, and not from fear of the power which the white people's law had given her over me", 58). Likewise, in the rest of the narrative, the children she will take care of will be for her as her own children. Hitherto, slavery not only dissolves traditional patriarchal family bounds, it similarly creates new kind of affections, not legitimate by law, as if the particular one of a nanny with her master's cared children.

Another specific gender feature of slave family ties seems to be the power relations of women among themselves and of women with patriarchal power. The father of Mary Prince has a marginal role in the text, whereas Prince's mother is the centre of her family; in white families instead men seem to have all the power to make the final decisions, consenting or ignoring their duties toward their consorts. These different axes of power are highlighted by Mary Prince with much clarity and

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[44] See Chapter I.

finesse. Miss Williams is "gentle like a mother", conversely, Capt. Williams is a "harsh, selfish man" and "his wife was herself much afraid of him" as he often abandoned her "to reside in other female society" (58). Miss Williams (Miss Betsey) is actually Prince's real mistress because Prince was donated to her by her grandfather, Old Captain Darrel. Nonetheless, on the death of Miss Williams' mother, the daughter has no more power over her property, although she legally owns the slaves. Prince attests in fact that, when Mrs. Williams died:

> We had been bought of Mr Myners, as I have mentioned, by Miss Betsey's grandfather, and given to her, so that we were by right *her* property, and I never thought we should be separated or sold away from her. When I reached the house, I went in directly to Miss Betsey. I found her in great distress; and she cried out as soon as she saw me, "Oh, Mary! my father is going to sell you all to raise money to marry that wicked woman. You are my slaves, and he has no right to sell you" (60)

The complaint of Mary Prince in this passage is about being sold and the consequent separation from her mother, together with the impossibility for women in the British colonies to dispose of their properties and therefore to be autonomous from their husbands and fathers. This feeling of wives' dependency on husbands is repeated in the text even when Mary's cruel mistresses, will ask for the help of the husbands to inflict the harshest corporal punishments or make the most definitive decisions: "This was a great affront. She called her husband and told him what I had said. He flew into a passion" (80) and "she complained to her husband, and he sent me off again to look for an owner" (81).

Therefore, while men are absent from the main tale of the story, and when they appear are marginal (and often negative) characters, the female characters have a central role. Yet, a division could be made between women to whom she is attached and for which she feels a sincere affection (such as her mother and her first mistress, her sisters, or the slave Hetty) and those with whom race and power relations generate cruelty and injustice, such as Mrs. I–, Mrs. Wood and Martha Wilcox, a "mulatto girl".

The case of Martha Wilcox is particularly interesting for the analysis of inter-racial relations in the colonies. The girl, in fact, being free and beautiful, thinks she is superior to Prince as she herself refers that:

> Mrs. Wood, in the meanwhile, hired a mulatto woman to nurse the child; but she was such a fine lady she wanted to be mistress over me. I thought it very hard for a coloured woman to have rule over me because I was a slave and she was free. Her name was Martha Wilcox; she was a saucy woman, very saucy; and she went and complained of me, without cause, to my mistress, and made her angry with me. (Prince 79)

Not by chance, Martha Wilcox testified, through a letter, against Mary Prince in the trial in England. Sisterhood among women is never taken for granted in the colonial environment for it is strongly related to the positions one covers in respect to the the race and class of belonging. Being the matter of race at its formation, as I stressed, it is not investigated further in these narratives, as it will be in the work of other black female feminists, such as Audrie Lorde (*I am your sister*, 1985), Angela Davis (*Women, Race, Class*, 1981), or bell hooks (*Ain't I a Woman?*, 1982). Nonetheless, this testimony anticipates the main theme of post-colonial feminism, which underlines how sisterhood is profoundly dependent on relations of power and privilege, thus every general category of woman ignores privileges among women.

In *The History of Mary Prince*, therefore, criticism of patriarchal power is intertwined with racial criticism. To this, awareness and a subtle scrutiny of the excessive work entrusted to women in slavery is added. In slavery women are weighed more than the men, as is evident in the detailed description that Prince makes of the activities carried out by Hetty:

> She was the most active woman I ever saw, and she was tasked to her utmost. A few minutes after my arrival she came in from milking the cows, and put the sweet-potatoes on for supper. She then fetched home the sheep, and penned them in the fold; drove home the cattle, and staked them about the pond sidefed and rubbed down my master's horse, and gave the hog and the fed cow their suppers; prepared the beds, and undressed the children, and laid them to sleep. (64)

The slaves who work in the domestic field are not spared the work in the house's outside, the woman in slavery must, therefore, take on the tasks of managing the house and master's children as well as perform their general slave's activities.

Despite all of that, Mary Prince gives proof of industriousness and propensity to hard work that also concerns the sphere of production and economic gain for personal aims (in this case, the buying of her freedom). Mary Prince manages to obtain the money to ask manumission, refused by her master:

> The way in which I made my money was this. I had a good deal of time to myself, and made the most of it. I took in washing, and sold coffee and yams and other provisions to the captains of ships. I did not sit still idling during the absence of my owners; for I wanted, by all honest means, to earn money to buy my freedom. Sometimes I bought a hog cheap on board ship, and sold it for double the money on shore; and I also earned a good deal by selling coffee. By this means I by degrees acquired a little cash. (82)

As for sexual morality, in the text itself there is only one reference to the ambiguous sexual behaviour on the part of the master:

> He had an ugly fashion of stripping himself quite naked, and ordering me then to wash him in a tub of water. This was worse to me than all the licks. Sometimes when he called me to wash him I would not come, my eyes were so full of shame. He would then come to beat me. (77)

What Mary Prince insists on is linked more to the family sphere, including the story of her meeting with the husband, with whom she could not make a legal marriage as long as weddings between slaves and men free were prohibited. Consequently, it is not possible to determine whether the emphasis on abuse and family is given by the influence of Susan Strickland or not. Surely, Mary Prince has had to provide an acceptable version of her sexual history – as evidenced by the debate that emerged after the publication –, being perfectly aware that her readers would have been English women and men.

Not by chance, the public debate which emerged shortly after the book publication was focused on Prince's personality and on her credibility on the base of her sexual experience. One of the initial reactions to Prince's narrative was to challenge her moral authority to criticise slavery on the grounds that she was a "wanton" woman who had lost sexual innocence at the hands of her white owners. Pringle takes pains to assert Prince's morality and innocence despite her experiences, especially at the hands of Mr. D in Bermuda. Again, Sharpe suggests that the pro- and anti-slavery advocates shared the belief that female slaves were given to sexual encounters with their white masters, although they had different ways of interpreting the significance of this proclivity:

> To speak of the slave woman's sexual availability in terms of her consent or coercion positions her as either the consort of white men or a body to be appropriated. Advocates of slavery concealed slave women's negotiations for power behind the stereotype of their sexual licentiousness. For abolitionists, the transformation of abused slaves into decent Christian women was contingent upon viewing concubines as ignorant victims to be pitied. (Sharpe 143)

Macqueen's emphasis on Prince's sexual activity exemplifies the former attitude, while the careful portrayal of Prince as a repentant Christian who is reviled by the "indecent" actions of Mr. D supports the latter. Lastly, neither of these approaches supported a realistic female experience of slavery.

Thus, the case of Mary Prince highlighted the importance of sexual behaviour both for pro and anti-slavery lobbies. Slave women could obtain help and could be considered to be trustworthy only to the extent that they were sexual virtuous. Both pro and anti-slavery lobbies, in fact, imposed a gender performance to Mary Prince: Thomas Pringle describing her as: *well-behaved*, *mild-mannered* and *of good character*, and John Wood defining her as: *unruly* and *unmanageable* a *wild woman* without any *lady-like qualities*.

In her trial testimonies, it becomes known that this intrusion on her sexual experiences was done even in the actual narration of her story: during the trial, in fact, she reported much more sexual harassments that were omitted in the narrative, mostly due to Pringle's censorship. The pro and antislavery arguments were governed by the same assumption that a good slave was one who was loyal rather than untrustworthy, humble as opposed to defiant, a hard worker and not one who shunned his or her duties. The two positions thus complement each other even though one was intending to show Prince's sexual depravity and the other her decency (Sharpe 143).

As I have already explored, Moira Ferguson expressed the strategic role that the enslaved have played in feminism, when she claimed in *Subject to Others*, that the debate on slavery was the ground on which feminist thought in Britain has developed over a two-hundred-year period. Anti-slavery Anglo-Saxon female authors indeed provided a set of moral coordinates that permitted the articulation of white female subjugation throughout the discussion of slavery. In other words: "slavery was the road by which they constructed a paradigm of their own situation and a roadmap for its change" (Ferguson 299). Furthermore, political commitment to the abolitionist cause was a way to displace anxieties regarding their own assumed powerlessness, starting from the post-Civil War period and the French Revolution, to the Haitian Revolution and the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. Nonetheless, many women's

abolitionist texts "misrepresented the very African-Caribbean slaves whose freedom they advocate" (Ferguson 3). In this context, *The History of Mary Prince* proclaimed a vigorous sense of self, advocating for the end of slavery, as well as, first and foremost, for the recognition of slaves as human beings. The whole narrative is an effort to affirm Mary Prince's own status as a human being and as a woman through the narration of her intimate life. In this sense, the exclusion of this publication from the literary English tradition can be understood as a form of invisibilization, the expression of the power relations of the time, that uncover the interconnections between female subjugation and slavery.

The commitment of English women in the abolitionist campaign, which was of great impact, was also due to the comparison that these women made between slavery in the colonies and the status of women in England. Conversely, texts that denounced the condition of women in England referred to it explicitly as a form of slavery activated by economic, political and social institutions such as marriage. As Ferguson maintains, since the 1820s there has been a lot of women's activism against slavery, yet their request for emancipation was addressed to the "Africans", a people of slaves that were substantially different from them, presented as an undifferentiated mass, building what Ferguson defined as "Anglo-Africanistic rhetoric". In this Eurocentric representation of slavery, female abolitionists placed their own sense of social disability, by doing so, consciously or not, they unloaded their anxiety on slaves making them objects of charity and political exchanges).

Parallels with, and metaphors of, slavery in feminist writings flourish in British literature. Some examples from influential eighteenth and nineteenth-century feminists could be mentioned. For instance, much of Astell's preface to *Reflections Upon Marriage*, compares the legal and social situation of women with that of slaves, Mary Astell explicitly asks: "if all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?" (Black, *Broadview Anthology of British Literature 3*, 301). Mary Robinson in *A Letter to the Women of England* also describes women as "persecuted and oppressed" and men as "human despots" (Black, *Broadview Anthology of British Literature 4*, 67). According to Ferguson, Mary Robinson is indeed the first women author to compare explicitly the victims of forces marriages, imprisoned debtors and slaves in the Caribbean, advocating auto-determination for all human beings. Also,

Mary Wollstonecraft reacts against the "slavish dependence" of women on men in one of the pillar texts of feminism, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Broadview Anthology of British Literature, Volume 4, p. 74).

In this panorama, Mary Prince's text contradicts the popular abolitionist assumption for which the slaves "cannot represent themselves, they must be represented" (Ferguson 282). As Fanon claims in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Prince makes a "discursive guerrilla" (44-45) against the English public and white female writers, from which she detaches herself (Ferguson 29). By doing so, Mary Prince accomplishes to inaugurate a black female counteroffensive to both pro- and anti-slavery discourses, considering that no African-British slave woman before 1831 had ever published or written in the United Kingdom (Ferguson 289). Unfortunately, the subsequent suffragette debate will not take in to account this black female voice nor will the literary English canon, still Mary Prince story has allowed other similar texts to proliferate.

Therefore, on a genealogical level, the *History of Mary Prince* acquires a very special value and is of particular interest considering that it disassembles the Anglo-Africanistic rhetoric displaying the singularity of the Africans, in their being a community and dismantling social prejudices etc. Accordingly, it shows that: "Bodies and histories of the enslaved have played a critical role in giving gender new meanings, not only in the United Kingdom but also in Europe and in the United States. Therefore, if we want to study the history of feminism and female writers to produce critical genealogies and recover subjugated knowledge, we cannot forget that we could end up with a history that "obscures as much as it claims to reveal" (Mendez 46). If we do not account for how being recognised as woman or man already presupposes being recognised as a human being, we will obscure all the power that women have gained, thanks and in relation to the enslaved (Mendez). In this regard, the plurality of knowledge from slavery is the kind of subjugated knowledge that can help to unravel the power dynamics of the nineteenth century, provided that they uncover how gender comes to be racialised through such colonial relationships of power.

2.2. "To be free is very sweet"

One of the theories supported by this research is the idea that desire means to build a linkage, to chain and therefore that the chains that we build through desire are for always connected to the terrain of the *socious*. This idea of desire inspires a deep reading of Prince's narrative and is particularly helpful in analysing her desire for freedom, as it emerges in her narrative. The idea I put forth is that her desire for freedom, cannot be understood as an Oedipical desire, which is to say a desire for something that is missing; instead, it must be interpreted as an affirmative desire, as Deleuze and Guattaria grued the desire is. The desire, or the *conatus* for freedom, expressed by Mary Prince is in fact entirely connected to the plane of the *socius* in which she is living and therefore cannot be understood as an individual desire, for it has a collective nature.

Since the turning point of her story begins, we saw Mary Prince yearning for freedom, as she became aware of her condition as slave, the veil that is placed to the truth (the "cloach over the truth", as she defined it) by whites, breaks, and she feels a strong desire to seek freedom, pursued first by her escape (*petit marronage*) from Capt. I–. The desire for freedom then leads her to implement a strategy of resistance. This stratagem includes her insistence to move from one master to another, to defend physically herself, to protect Mr. D's daughter, to perform extra work to save money, to get married and being involved the Methodist church, as mentioned before.

Since her yearning for dying turns into the desire to escape, therefore, Mary Prince is driven by a strong crave that pushes her into action. However, her longing for freedom is shared and collective, not limited to individual freedom, inasmuch as it involves the whole community of slave. Additionally, the idea of freedom in Mary Prince has to do with the possibility of freely living relationships, not in the sense of libertinism but in the sense of freedom of movement and of freedom to choose effective relationships and work activities. Evidences from the texts abound: "my heart yearned to see my native place again, my mother, and my kindred" (75-76) and elsewhere "I had not much happiness in my marriage, owing to my being a slave" (85).

Chiefly, only free people can experience real pleasures. Consequently, to de deprived of freedom means not being able to feel enjoyment in relationships that are always marked by the sign of coercion, which can change at any time depending on the wishes of the owner. Conversely, being free does not only signify to hold legal freedom, yet it is a desire entirely linked to the *socius*, to the common, to a landscape that must be modified, not to a need filled at an individual level.

This is why even when Mary Prince reaches legal freedom, she is not exultant, for as her objective is not to acquire an individual freedom that guarantees neither the possibility to move, nor the chance to cultivate her social relations freely. Mary Prince's desire for freedom is not the individual desire for the acquisition of formal freedom, it is instead linked to a landscape, to an imaginary – a bit like "I have a dream" by Martin Luther King – which is a desire for a whole, not for a legal status. In fact, when Mary Prince arrives in England, despite knowing she could suddenly acquire the legal freedom, she hesitates for several months before leaving the Woods house: "I knew that I was free in England, but I did not know where to go, or how to get my living; and therefore, I did not like to leave the house" (88). Her waiting was not merely due to her fear of not being able support herself financially, since her desire for freedom was linked to the possibility of free movement and free relationships, which she could not reach if she was not allowed to come back to Antigua as a free woman.

Once freed in England, in 1828, the Antislavery society helps Mary Prince to go back as a free woman in West Indies, as reported in her narrative: "the gentlemen of the Society took me to a lawyer, who examined very strictly into my case; but told me that the laws of England could do nothing to make me free in Antigua" (91). Although Mary Prince was legally free in England, her efforts to abolish slavery for all the community of Afro-descendant in the British colonies and to go back in Antigua as a free woman, never stop. Mary Prince says that in Mr and Mrs. Pringle's house she is "as comfortable as I can be while separated from my dear husband, and away from my own country and all old friends and connections" (92). Prince's happiness can be accomplished through relationships, on the level of the *socius*, not on the level of individual freedom, contrary to the advocacy of the anti-slavery and

abolitionists, of the French revolution and the Enlightenment that based their whole battle for rights on the individual subject.

Undeniably, individual legal freedom is still not suffcient for Mary Prince: "I still live in the hope that God will find a way to give me my liberty, and give me back to my husband. I endeavour to keep down my fretting, and to leave all to Him, for he knows what is good for me better than I know myself. Yet, I must confess, I find it a hard and heavy task to do so". Mary Prince longs for the exemption of all slaves and of her own, in England, along with all its colonies and particularly in the West Indies, as evidenced by the plural she uses in her final statements: "they have their liberty. That's just what *we* want. We don't mind hard work, if *we* had proper treatment, and proper wages like English servants" (94), and it seems that she will never rest, until "all the poor blacks be given free, and slavery done up for evermore" (94).

The spatial aspect of freedom, as well as the temporal one, is particularly important then. As Panquet's article suggests, England for Prince is a means to an end, unlike Equiano, who considers it the land of freedom, or Louis Asa-asa, an American black man, whose belonging was in Africa. Mary Prince's "native place" is Bermuda, where her family lives and where she was born, and Antigua where her husband lived. National belonging by no coincidence became a contested territory at a political level: Prince's master in a letter claimed that Mary Prince was not native of Antigua and had no relationship there, thus Prince had no reason to want to return there as free woman. Instead for Prince the West Indies seem to be the "necessary site for self-identification and self-fulfilment" (34).

CHAPTER IV

SPANISH-CUBAN LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter aims to examine the collection of poems entitled *Ofrendas Mayabequinas* written by Maria Cristina Fragas (alias Cristina Ayala[1]) and published in Güines (Cuba) in 1926. This collection is one of the first published literary works written in the Hispanic America that addresses the legacy of slavery from the perspective of an Afro-descendant woman.[2]

Ayala's work had literally disappeared from Cuban and Spanish literary historiography until the acclaimed writer Nancy Morejón (1944) mentioned Ayala's work during her acceptance speech for the Cuban National Literature Prize in 2001. Currently, the only three copies of Cristina Ayala's work can be found at university libraries at Harvard University, the University of Miami, and at the public library of Güines, the municipality where Maria Cristina Fragas lived.

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[1] Unfortunately, no information is available on the origins of her pen name.

[2] Studies on Afro-descendant female literary make reference to other important female writers of African descent (antecedents to the work of Cristina Ayala) that wrote in transversal or tangential ways about gender roles and cultural belonging but never dealt directly with the legacy of transatlantic slavery. According to the work of María Mercedes Jaramillo and Lucía Ortiz (2011) and Daysi Rubiera Castillo and Inés María Martiatu Terry (2011), the oldest text written by a woman of African descent in Latin America is that of Úrsula de Jesús (1604-1666), a nun from Lima who wrote her spiritual diary in the XVII century. However, the spiritual diary was burned soon after Ursula's death because she was considered heretic. Therefore, we know about it only thanks to the work of Nancy Van Deusen (2004), the editor of a modern English reconstruction of Úrsula de Jesús' spiritual diary and life. After Ursula de Jesus's diary, one later testimony from a Spanish Latin-American afro-descendant is that of Juana Pastor (around 1700s), later called "the black Avellaneda", mentioned by Miriam DeCosta-Willis in her study on Afro-Latino women writers (2003: 27-29) and by Paul Sanmartin (*Black women as custodians of History,* 2014). She wrote poetry and prose in Havana, Cuba during the eighteenth century. Yet Juana Pastor "did not publish a book and most of her poetry is not extant, a few of her *décimas* (poems of ten-line stanzas) have survived in the introduction to an 1881 anthology" (DeCosta-Willis 2003: 28) and therefore there are not enough primary sources to investigate her literary work. Additionally, in eighteenth century Spain, the important biography of Sor Teresa Juliana de Santo Domingo (also known as "Chicaba") entitled *Compendio de la Vida Ejemplar de la Venerable Madre Sor Teresa Juliana de Santo Domingo* (Salamanca, Spain, 1752) was published. It is one of the earliest, if not the first, biographies based on an African woman written in a modern European language (McKnight and Garofalo 2009: 214). The biography was written by Father Juan Carlos Miguel de Paniagua soon after the death of Sor Teresa. Even though Father Juan Carlos Miguel de Paniagua maintained that he based his text mostly on extended conversations with Chicaba, it is not possible to consider this work a literary testimony left by a woman of African descent. Additionally, the Afro-Dominican poet Salomé Ureña Díaz de Henríquez (1850-1897) has been a true innovator of Dominican culture in respect both to poetry and to female education. However, she ignored her country's vernacular tradition (Grossman). Most of her poetry was devoted to the elegy of her nation and family, as she neither addresses her African offspring nor the issue of slavery in her country.

The difficulty in locating this writer's texts is accompanied by short and lacking critical studies on the author and her literary production. In particular, Monique-Adelle Callahan's volume entitled *Between the Lines: Literary Transnationalism and African American Poetics* (2011); Paula Sanmartin's *Black Women as Custodians of History: Unsung Rebel (M)Others in African American and Afro-Cuban Women's Writing* (2014), Miriam DeCosta-Willis's *Daughters of the Diaspora: Afra-Hispanic Writers. Kingston: Randle* (2003), and the article by Maria A. Aguilar (2016), "Heroísmo y conciencia racial en la obra de la poeta Afro-cubana Cristina Ayala" have proved to be of fundamental importance for critical analysis of Cristina Ayala's work, as well as some of the few critical studies available and accessible to the modern reader.

Furthermore, in order to introduce and discuss Cristina Ayala's poetry, some attention should be dedicated to her work, providing also the existing biographical information of the author and her historical and literary background. As the editorial project of the magazine *Minerva* played a crucial role in shaping female Afro-Cuban consciousness, it will be analysed in the last part of the first section of this chapter. Then, to critically understand Cristina Ayala's poetry, I will make a comparison between the development of abolitionism and feminism in Spain and in Latin America during the nineteenth century. Finally, in the last section of the chapter I will engage with a close reading of Cristina Ayala's poetry with a special focus on the lyrical representations regarding slavery and gender.

Image 1: Picture of Cristina Ayala as it appears in the first edition of *Ofrendas Mayabequinas* (1926)

1. Maria Cristina Fragas, alias Cristina Ayala, "La Novia del Mayabeque"

Maria Cristina Fragas' (1856-1936)[3] literary production spans from 1885, one year before *La Real Orden* of 1886 (a royal order which formally abolished slavery in Cuba[4]) and 1926, some years after the national independence of Cuba from Spain in 1898. Her only published work is *Ofrendas Mayabequeinas* (1926), a collection of poems, and it varies formally and thematically. The collection is composed of hymns, tributes of admiration and gratitude, elegies, Romantic compositions, *musa festiva* (poems written for public celebrations), scholarly and religious hymns, and some poems dedicated to the praise of the Cuban magazine *Letras Guineras*.

The greatest literary innovation introduced by Ayala is the creation of a discursive position that reconstructs the past of slavery to narrate the revolutionary vicissitudes of her country and to create an ideal vision of a future in which Afro-Cubans are integrated, by their own merits, into the rest of society. This makes her work eligible to offer a valuable opportunity to approach the experience of a woman of African heritage during the process of organizing Cuban civil society, before and after its independence from the Spanish government.

The biographical information that we have about Maria Cristina Fragas comes from historical and critical studies on the female Afro-Cuban journal in which she actively collaborated entitled *Minerva: Revista Quincenal Dedicada a la Mujer de Color*. Yet, the name of this author remained unknown to literary critics and to the public until 2001 when the writer Nancy Morejón, in her acceptance speech for the National Literature Prize in Cuba (2001), pointed out that:

> [e]ntre las elegías de Nicolás Guillén y el gesto rumoroso de la poetisa güinera Cristina Ayala, ha fluido mi voz buscando un sitio entre el violín y el arco, buscando el equilibrio

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[3] Apparently, Cristina Ayala's mother was named Juana and her father was unknown, this is why she was named after her mother's master. The information is reported by the "Círculo Güinero de Los Ángeles" in an online article on Cristina Ayala, although it has no historical reference.
The article is available at:
http://www.circuloguinero.org/contentEN/aTraves/personajesImportantes/abc/ayalaCristina.html (last accessed: 22/07/2018).
[4] See the first chapter.

In spite of this recognition, Maria Cristina Fragas (or Cristina Ayala)'s literary work has scarcely been studied, and hence merits to be analysed from perspectives that highlight its contribution to Cuban society and culture.

The daughter of a Creole slave, Maria Cristina Fragas was born as a free person on July 1856 in Güines, Cuba where, according to María del Carmen Barcia[6], she attended public school and began writing poetry at seven years of age. Fragas then worked as a teacher and actively took part in cultural meetings and public events in which she read her texts aloud to the audience[7]. Maria Fragas grew up among the *campesinos* during the Cuban struggle for independence and emancipation (DeCosta Willis 30). In 1912, she married Cecilio Larrondo and died in Güines on April 20, 1936 at the age of 79.

From 1885 until her death, she published poetry in more than twenty Cuban newspapers, including *El Pueblo Libre* and *El Sufragista.* She subsequently re-published them in the collection *Ofrendas Mayabequinas* (1926). She was a founding editor and regular contributor to the first journal devoted to women of colour in Cuba called *Minerva. Revista quincenal dedicada a la mujer de color*. The magazine was printed every two weeks and linked Afro-women from the Cuban island along with North America, where the newspaper also circulated (Montejo Arrechea).

Maria Cristina Fragas, or Cristina Ayala, was acquainted with the work of important contemporary intellectuals of Spanish, Puerto Rican and Cuban literature to whom she often dedicated her works, among them the writer Monzano Vincente Silveira (1871-1925), the poet Gregorio Delgado y Fernández, writer and poet

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[5] "Between the elegies of Nicolás Guillén and the murmuring gesture of the Güinera poetess Cristina Ayala, my voice has flown looking for a place between the violin and the bow, looking for the balance between the best of a past that submitted us without compassion to the philosophy of dispossession and an identity runs over in the search for its best definition". [Since there are not published translations of Ayala's work, all the translations of her poetry in this chapter are mine, *ed*.]

[6] See Maria del Carmen Barcia Zequeira (2009), "Mujeres en torno a Minerva", *Afrocubanas historia, pensamiento y practicas culturales*. Eds Daysi Rubiera Castillo y Ines Maria Martiatu Terry. La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales (2011), pp. 77-92; and also: Tomas Fernández Robaina (2012), "En las páginas de Minerva", *Mujeres*, 2, p. 84-88, and Carmen Montejo Arrechea, "Minerva: a Magazine for Women (and Men) of Color". In *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans ad Cubans before the Cuban Revolution*. Eds. Lisa Brock y Digna Castanesa Fuertes. Filadelfia: Temple University Press, 1998.

[7] See Maria A. Aguilar (2016) "Heroísmo y conciencia racial en la obra de la poeta afro-cubana Cristina Ayala", *Revista Chilena de Estudios Latinoamericanos*, 7, pp. 179-202.

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814-1873), and intellectual Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (1809-1844), also known as Plácido. Cristina Ayala wrote poetry using a variety of forms that stemmed from sonnets to Romantic ballads and *décimas*, a ten-line stanza of poetry that consists of forty-four lines (an introductory four-line stanza followed by four ten-line stanzas).

The topics of her poetry ranged from considerations on death as an escape from destiny ("La Fatalidad", 1909), ideas on the importance of education ("La Escuela", 1924), especially for women of colour, and Christian and biblical leitmotifs, instilled with a frequent use of Marian topology. However, the present discussion will focus especially on the following compositions: "Redención" (1889), "Piensamientos" (1889), "A mi raza" (1888) and "Canto a la raza española" (1925), as they, together with "Una Rosa después del baile" (1890), "El negro destino" (1912) and "El arroyuelo y la flor" (1893), address issues of slavery and Cuban national history.
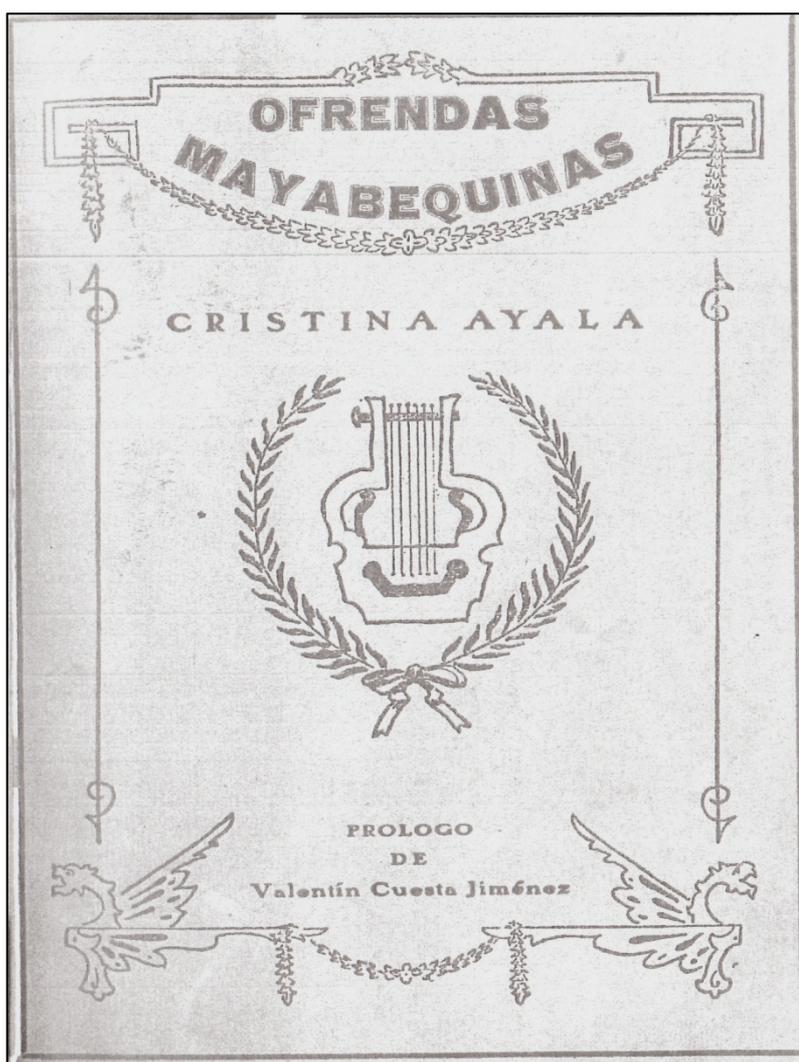

Image 2: Cover page of the first edition of *Ofrendas Mayabequinas* (1926)

1.1. On the threshold of a new era: Cuban historical context

Cristina Ayala began to publish her poems in a time of intense political, social, and cultural conflicts and transformations (Aguilar 185), which profoundly influenced her poetry. First, in the period after the "Guerra de los Diez Años" (1868-1878) and the "Guerra Chiquita" (1879-1880), Cuban social life was deeply disturbed by the consequences of revolutionary processes. Furthermore, after 1881, the economy suffered a crisis that caused the stagnation of sugar production, commercialization (the main economic support of the island) and a reduction of price (Santamaría García and Naranjo Orovio 91-95). Therefore, at the beginning of the 1890s, Cuba had the highest public debt in the world in relation to the number of its inhabitants (Moreno Fraginals, *The Sugarmill* 250). Faced with a lack of resources for investment and a shortage of labour, the island's authorities established a Spanish-American trade agreement that ended in 1895. At the same time, the Cuban Government began a campaign to bring over immigrants from Spain and the Canary Islands in order to solve the agricultural crisis and start the desired "whitening" of Cuban society (Naranjo Orovio 164-165)[8].

Also in this period, after the signing of the Zanjón Pact (1878) that ended the Ten Years' War, the first national Cuban political parties emerged, fostering the independence of Cuba from Spain. The "Partido Liberal", later called "Autonomista" (PLA), was founded in August 1878 and supported by the newspaper *El Triunfo*, which became its public voice. In response to the formation of the PLA, the "Partido Unión Constitucional" (PUC) was founded, representing the interests of the peninsular establishment and large landowners. Both parties shared the idea that Cuba should maintain its status as a Spanish colony.

Within this historical framework, the rural population, the workers and the different Afro-descendant communities, remained excluded from the government, ruled by the two major parties (Moreno Fraginals, *The Sugarmill* 256-259). This situation led to the emergence of various independent political organizations that responded to the interests of labours sectors**,** together with the founding of the

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[8] To accomplish the "whitening" of Cuba, various associations were created such as the *Comisión Central de Colonización* (1871), the *Sociedad de Colonización* (1872) and the *Círculo de Hacendados de la Ciudad de Cuba* (1878).

"Directorio Central de las Sociedades de la Raza de Color" (1892), a group that united the old fraternities and town councils under a unified program. These historical conjunctures placed Afro-Cubans at the end of the nineteenth century in a position of great political disadvantage and of great marginalization. Cristina Ayala, as a public voice and as a writer, stood in the public debate supporting Cuban national independence, yet displaying Afro-Cubans as the founders of the nation itself and not as marginal figures.

The climate of cultural turmoil was also experienced by Afro-Cuban women who, excluded from the political arena, struggled to take part in Cuban cultural life by founding the first newspaper entirely dedicated to women of colour, *Minerva*. Ayala actively contributed to *Minerva*, exposing her political ideas through poetry.

1.2. Cuban press and the female Afro-Cuban editorial project *Minerva*

In addition to the economic and social reality of the nineteenth century, other cultural changes occurred in Cuban society. First, the law on printing (*Ley de imprenta,* 1883) was issued by the Spanish government, which entailed the release of censorship. In particular, in Havana, after the law passed, more than five hundred different periodicals were printed, developing a new flourishing cultural background (Ferrer 113) in the city. This favourable background brought to public attention authors and texts that were previously censored. Thus, a "new era" for Cuban culture began, a "period of journalism and oratory, of conferences and literary gatherings" (Fornet 49). Accompanying these reforms and social changes, a new public sphere emerged in which the condition of colonial oppression was debated together with the social norms that caused the exclusion of Afro-descendants, women and Chinese immigrants from the public sphere (Brock and Castañeda Fuertes).

With the aim of integrating themselves into the building of a new independent Cuban nation, some Afro-Cuban intellectuals established a political agenda aimed at denouncing various forms of racial discrimination. Moreover, they asked a solution to state poverty and to the marginalization in which the majority of their community lived. In particular, the Afro-Cuban press – with periodicals such as *El Pueblo* (1878), *El Africano* (1887), *La Fraternidad* (1888-1890) and *La Igualdad* (1892) –

stood out and contributed to articulate a social and political community that identified itself with discourses that defended their rights and challenged the old structures of exploitation inherited from the slave system (Aguilar 186).

Additionally, an Afro-Cuban female movement arose and was based on the editorial project of *Minerva*. Among the most active collaborators were, together with Cristina Ayala, many Afro-Cuban women of letters, such as Úrsula Coimbra de Valverde, Africa de Céspedes and María Ángela Storini. These writers articulated a powerful voice of denunciation against a society that was excluded from the public sphere, a place traditionally reserved for middle and upper class white women and men.

Thanks to the publication of poems, reviews, essays, and articles written by Afro-descendant women, *Minerva* put into circulation a valuable and complex artefact that created a platform for political intervention for Afro-descendants of different social classes in the Caribbean cultural market. Cristina Ayala joined this cultural project, which showed the emergence of a female leadership that aspired to consolidate as a political pressure group[9]. The collaborators of this magazine tried to instill in their readers a sense of pride in their belonging to a group of African descendants as well as the desire to excel through education and service to their own community. In addition, the journal was targeted for a female audience of Afro-descendant origin and, by doing so, the editor of the journal gathered different female subjects under a common group, unified by their African ancestry. Under these circumstances, they promoted the consolidation of solidarity networks that unified the different Afro-descendant groups under a single journal, fighting the social and cultural Spanish and Cuban practices that differentiated between "mulatto", "brown", and "black" people.

Minerva: Revista Quincenal Dedicada a la Mujer de Color was published for the first time in 1888, two years after the emancipation of slaves in Cuba (1886) and ten years before national independence (1898). *Minerva* was published every fifteen days, from the beginning of 1888 until the end of 1889, when printing ceased due to

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[9] See Maria del Carmen Barcia Zequeira (2009), "Mujeres en torno a Minerva", *Afrocubanas historia, pensamiento y practicas culturales*. Eds Daysi Rubiera Castillo y Ines Maria Martiatu Terry. La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales (2011), pp. 77-92; and also: Tomas Fernández Robaina (2012), "En las páginas de Minerva", *Mujeres*, 2, p. 84-88, and Carmen Mntejo Arrechea, "Minerva: a Magazine for Women (and Men) of Color". In *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans ad Cubans before the Cuban Revolution*. Eds. Lisa Brock y Digna Castanesa Fuertes. Filadelfia: Temple University Press, 1998.

editors' economic difficulties[10]. In 1910, *Minerva* began its publication anew, this time, under male direction. Women, however, continued to write columns and were featured in a section entitled "Páginas feministas". The new *Minerva: Revista Ilustrada Universal* remained in print until 1915, reporting through the 1912 organization and repression of the "Partido Independiente de Color".

Consisting of different sections, the journal *Minerva* always had included a poetry section, Cristina Ayala preferred genre. Besides publishing poetry, Ayala wrote also articles such as the one written for *Minerva* number 7 (II), of 26 January, 1889, entitled "Me Adhiero". In this article, the author addressed the issue of ex-slaves' right to education, blaming the "ominous institutions" for the oppressive situation of Afro-descendants and emphasizing that the faults attributed to Afro-Cubans were the consequence of their being denied access to education, a theme that will be recurrent in her poetry and literary production. Before delving further into Cristina Ayala's poetry, it is of fundamental importance to place her work within the landscape of Spanish and Cuban female writings on gender and abolitionism.

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[10] The only extant collection of *Minerva: Revista Quincenal Dedicada a la Mujer de Color*, can be found in Cuba.

2. Female subjectivities in Spain and Cuba during the nineteenth century: a confrontation

In her ground-breaking book, *Ain't I a Woman* (1990), bell hooks underlies the dissimilarities of the political claims made by white upper-class European women and colonial women of African descent in the United States, since the nineteenth century (Hooks 1990, pp.165-166). According to hooks, one of the main reasons for this discrepancy relays on the fact that black women had to fight against the stereotypical image that presented them as immoral (a label inherited from the legacy of slavery). Moreover, Afro-American women addressed whole sets of problems related to class (and therefore to race) that were largely absent from the claims of white feminists. Therefore, according to bell hooks, while white women's organizations focused their attention mainly on issues such as education, the formation of literary societies, sexual freedom, and work; black women addressed issues such as poverty, care for the elderly and the disabled, prostitution and other themes strongly linked to class and race (hooks 165).

What applies to the Afro-American female experience could also be true for that of Afro-Cuban women. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, while mid-upper-class white women in Spain experienced a condition of limited freedom, mainly due to their exclusion from the public space[11], Afro-descendant women of Hispano-American colonies[12] confronted radically different problems during the nineteenth century. Afro-descendant women in Cuba had never been part of colonial society as many of them were still slaves. As a result, rather than questioning social gender rules, their priority was to adapt to pre-existing social norms and to actively participate in social institutions (such as family), instead of criticizing them. Afro-

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[11] See: Susan Kirkpatrick (1989) *Las Románticas. Women Writers and Subjectivity in Spain, 1835-1850.* University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles- London; Susan Moller Okin (1981), "Women ad the Making of the Sentimental Family", Philosophy and Public Affairs, 11, pp. 65-88.

[12] As Aurelia Martin Cesares has demonstrated, the same also applied for black women in peninsular Spain. See for instance: A. M. Cesares, L. Rodriguez, 2013, *Negroafricanos marginación y violencia en el mundo hispano en la Edad Moderna*; Aurelia Martín Casares, and Gómez, Rocío Periáñez. 2014. *Mujeres esclavas y abolicionistas en la España de los siglos XVI-XIX.* Iberoamericana Editorial Vervuert.

Cuban women needed to demonstrate that they could adhere to certain principles of respect and moral dignity through marriage and family bonds that, for a slave or ex-slave woman, had never proved to be conventional. In order to make these differences among white upper class European women and Afro-descendant colonial women clearer, I will first describe the characteristics of pro-feminist Spanish writers, contrasting them with the writings of Afro-Cuban writers of the same period.

2.1. Spanish proto-feminist and Romantic writers

In nineteenth century Spain, a link was established between the lack of passion, ascribed to upper and middle class women, and the civilizing and their moralizing influence (since they started to considered superior to all desiring subjects) (Kirkpatrick 34, 57). This imaginary link was a constraint for white upper-class women that started to embark on quests of further rights and freedom. As claimed by Professor Susan Kirkpatrick in her pioneering research, *Las Románticas. Women Writers and Subjectivity in Spain, 1835-1850*: "The psyche of the woman, defined as an angel, has intensity but little space: it consists only of love. Other forms of desire – ambition, rebellion, aspirations for a greater good for humanity – were not even considered in relation to women" (34, 57). Additionally, thanks to women's involvement in the literary space, the process of emancipation from patriarchal social roles started in Spain in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The access of Spanish women to the press and their participation in the print culture took place around 1840s, also due to the increase in literacy rates and education programs for Spanish women (mainly belonging to a high social class). Between 1836 and 1842, the Spanish Romanticism[13] assumed a central role in the cultural agenda of the liberal movement[14]. Moral and economic freedom represented

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[13] For an account of Spanish Romanticism see: *Romanticism in Spain and Spanish romanticism: A critical survey* (Tarr); *Spanish Romantic literary theory and criticism* (Flitter); *Panorama crítico del romanticismo español* (Tobar); *Spanish Women's Writing 1849-1996* (Davies).
[14] As a consequence of the strong power of the church, Spain did not live the same effects of the French revolution like Germany or England and began to question its class hierarchies only after the Napoleonic invasion (which demonstrated the weakness of the monarchy). When King Ferdinand VII returned to power, destroyed the liberal constitution promulgated in 1812 by Napoleon Bonaparte, but his wife, Maria Cristina, was soon forced to sign it The liberal intellectuals who had theorized the 1818 constitution had neoclassicism as an ideal (rationality, measure, objectivity). See: Richard Herr (1958), *The Eighteenth-Century Revolution in Spain*. Princenton: Princenton Universty Press; Andrew

the key words of this movement. Women writers and thinkers started to advance further social demands such as the right to education, the freedom to work, and the revaluation of the roles of the mother and the wife rather than political equality[15]. Likewise, in the political arena, women were starting to fight for the acquisition of fair treatment, as writer and poet Gertrudis Gómez Avellaneda claimed in an important article ("Capacidad de las mujeres para el gobierno", 1859) in which she advocated for the equality of political rights for Spanish women. They were encouraged to write to each other and to develop a bond of female solidarity and sisterhood (Kirkpatrick 85).

From 1844-45, women dedicated their poems to issues concerning their condition of oppression and injustice in society, when they started to form a circle of female poets. Maria Josepa Massanés (1811-1887), Gómez de Avellaneda (1814-1873) and Carolina Coronado (1820-1911) published the first collections of poems between 1841 and 1843. Although these writers did not explicitly raise the problem of female destiny, they constructed a lyrical self concerned with a discussion on women's place in the world (a fact that assimilates their work to a form of proto-feminism)[16].

Ginger and Geraldine Lawless, *Spain in the nineteenth century. New essays on experiences of culture and society*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018; Lou Charnon-Deutsch and Jo Labanyi, *Culture and Gender in Nineteenth-Century Spain*, Clarendon Press, 1995.

[15] Despite the development of the feminist movement as such, some women began the struggle for gender equality, such as Dolors Monserdà (1845-1919), who defended the rights of women from a Catalan nationalist and deeply Catholic perspective. Teresa Claramunt (1862-1931), textile worker and anarcho-syndicalist militant, claimed the role of the mother as a transmitter of values and Maria de Echarri (1878 - 1955) promoted some measures to improve work conditions for female workers, including the "Ley de la Silla" (1912), according to which a chair should be provided to women working in industry or commerce. Spanish writer Carolina Coronado (1820-1911) documents the difficulty of Spanish women in the early nineteenth century to become writers and readers (Kirkpatrick 1989: 62). Among many others, see: Lisa Vollendorf ed. (2005*), Literatura y Feminismo en España, s. XV-XXI*, Barcelona: Icaria Editorial; Martha Ackelsberg (1991), *Free Women of Spain. Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana U.P.; Catherine Davies (1998), *Spanish women's writing 1849-1996*. London: Anthlone Press.

[16] Another pioneer of Spanish female writers was Conception Arenal who, from a very young age, fought to break the traditional canons established for women, rebelling against the traditional marginalization of the female sex and claiming equality in all social spheres. Although in many of her writings she accepts that the roles of mother and wife were fundamental in the lives of women, she always stressed that the experience of women's life could not focus on the exclusive exercise of that role. Like the Krausists, she gave women's education and instruction a fundamental role as Arenal thought that "mientras la mujer no tiene otra carrera más allá del matrimonio, los hombres aprenden un oficio y las mujeres no". In Arenal's vision, men of her time had "inclinaciones de sultanes, reminiscencias de salvajes y pretensiones de sacerdotes", and also the clergy was "en general, es muy ignorante, no querer a la mujer instruida y quererla mejor como auxiliar para mantenerla en la ignorancia".

2.1.1. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's abolitionism and feminism

Spanish-Cuban writer Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda is a very interesting literary figure inasmuch as she brings together the colonial Cuban reality with the Spanish one, producing what is now considered the first Spanish abolitionist novel, *Sab* (1841)[17]. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda was born in 1814 in Camagüey (ancient Puerto Principe). In 1836, Gertrudis and her family moved to Galicia due to a slave revolt, and in April 1836, she moved with her family to Bordeaux and from there to La Coruña. In 1839, she went to Seville and then to Cádiz, where she wrote for the first time for *La Aureola*, a journal edited by Manuel Canete, under the pseudonym "La Peregrina". She married twice, and before the death of her second husband, she travelled to Cuba, North America, and France. Gertudis de Avellaneda died widowed in Seville in 1873, and although she immigrated to Spain from an early age, she always cherished the memory of her native land, constantly evoked with nostalgia in her works. She wrote lyrics (*Poesías*, 1841-50), novels (*Sab*, 1841; *Espatolino*, 1844), and theatre plays (*Alfonso Munio*, 1844; *Baltasar*, 1848; *Saul*, 1849), becoming one of the leading members of Spanish Romanticism.

Gertrudis Avellaneda sets her novel, *Sab*, in Puerto Principe, Cuba, where she had lived. *Sab* was published in Madrid in 1841 and shortly afterwards, in 1845, it was censored in Cuba, where it remained under censorship until the 1960s. Even for a censored novel, the text remained unobserved until the second half of the twentieth century. The main character is Sab, an Afro-descendant slave of noble origin, who is secretly in love with Carlota, his mistress, who is, in turn, in love with Enrique, an English merchant who wants to marry her only out of financial interest.

In this novel, Gertrudis Avellaneda seems keen on provocatively reproaching the topic of marriage. For instance, Sab, commenting on the marriage of Carlota and

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[17] Before her another little known and almost unpublished author, Maria Rosa Gálvez de Cabrera, had written an abolitionist play entitled "Zinda" in 1804. The subject of the play was a historical figure: Queen Jinga Mbandi Ngola (1582-1663), who reigned in the Ngongo (present-day Angola) for forty years. She took forty male concubines and ordered her male servants to dress as women. A clever and fearsome diplomat, the Queen fought against the slave trade practiced by the Portuguese throughout her life. In the work of Maria Gálvez, Jinga Mbandi Ngola becomes a figure of female empowerment and a way to promote abolitionist ideals. However, the text that represents the abolitionist spirit that was forming in Spain and which, as we saw in the first chapter, would become a symptom of the beginning of the Spanish abolitionist movement, is *Sab* (1841) by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814 - 1873).

Enrique, says: "Tanto valdría ligar al águila con la serpiente, o al vivo con un cadáver. ¡Y ella batirá de jurar a ese hombre amor y obediencia!, ile entregará su corazón, su porvenir, su destino entero!.... ¡ella se hará un deber de respetable!, y él... ¡él la tomará por mujer, como a un género de mercancía, por cálculo, por conveniencia..." (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Sab* 120)[18]. So far, Sab's Romantic impulse to revolt is what characterizes the Romantic Self of the novel; however, Sab's monologue against slavery is also of concern to women.

At last, Avellaneda, through the voice of Sab, compares the fate of married women with that of slaves. As a result, what has been interpreted as Sab's anti-slavery speech appears to be a mask for the feminist protest. Avellaneda colonizes the subjectivity of the slave for her feminist purposes, as he is willing to sacrifice both his freedom and his people for his illegitimate love for a middle-class white woman. Sab, while criticizing the status of being a servant to someone (an inquiry that evokes the positions both of women and slaves), also speaks from the standpoint of a "privileged" slave coming from regal descendants. Although Gómez de Avellaneda employs religion as an irrefutable element of equality, she never engages with Universalist tones, a fact that inflamed the on-going debate about whether *Sab* qualifies as an abolitionist novel[19].

Eventually, Avellaneda considers the fate of the woman to be worse than that of the slave, since, as Sab says: "El esclavo al menos puede cambiar de amo, puede esperar que juntando oro comprará algún día su libertad; pero la mujer, cuando levanta sus manos enflaquecidas y su frente ultrajada, para pedir libertad, oye al

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[18] "It would be like linking the eagle with the serpent, or a live person with a corpse. And she will have to pledge to that man love and obedience! She will give him her heart, her future, her whole future! She will be forced to respect him!, and he..., he will take her as a woman, as to a genre of gender, by calculation, by convenience..., making a shameful speculation of the most holy bond, of the most solemn commitment! To her who will give him her soul! And he will be her husband, the possessor of Carlota, the father of her children! ... Oh, no! No, Teresa! There is evil in this thought..., you see, I cannot stand it... impossible!"

[19] For further critical readings on *Sab*, see: Jorge Camacho (2004), "¿Adónde se fueron? Modernidad e Indianismo en *Sab* de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda", *Tropelias: Revista de teoría de la literatura y literatura comparada*, pp. 33-44; Nuria Girona Fibla (2013), "Amos y esclavos ¿Quién habla en *Sab* de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda?", *Cuadernos de Literatura*, 17: 33, pp. 121-140; Elsa Maxwell (2016), "Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, la esfera pública y el abolicionismo, representaciones del sujeto esclavizado y la esclavitud caribeña en Sab", *Revista de estudios hispánicos*, 50:1; Sandra Milena Castillo Balmaceda (2017) Liberalismo Burgués en SAB de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y torquemada en la hoguera de Benito Pérez Galdós intelectualidad y poder en el siglo XIX, *Revista Cuadernos de Literatura del Caribe e Hispanoamérica*, 26.

monstruo de voz sepulclar que le grita: En la tumba" (166)[20]. Later, Avellaneda concludes that the woman is victimized in her marital relationship, as well as in all her relationships with men: "la mujer es siempre víctima en todas sus relaciones con el hombre" (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Dos Mujeres* 6)[21]. The target of Avellaneda's criticism, therefore, is the condition of slavery in which middle and upper class women are obliged to live, which is epitomized in marriage. Marriage, according to Avellaneda, is women's social condemnation, the greatest limitation to their autonomy, since it is often organized out of economic interest.

In contrast, such a critique of marriage is not present in Maria Cristina Fragas' work, since her identity as an Afro-Cuban and the legacy of slavery inflicted on her people made marriage a source of agency and not a limitation of their freedom. For Afro-Cuban women indeed, marriage represented one of the few institutions that allowed them to be morally rehabilitated.

2.2. Being a woman of African origins in Cuba, an overview

The condition of women in the Hispano-American colonies was drastically different from the panorama outlined by women in the Spanish motherland. In the Cuban context, which is Cristina Ayala's background for her poetic work, the stereotype of black women as sleazy and sinful was a well-present reality. As testified by writer bell hooks: "black women in colonial American territories were naturally seen as the embodiment of female evil and sexual lust. They were labelled jezebels and sexual temptresses and accused of leading white men away from spiritual purity into sin" (33). Accordingly, the condition for white married women to be considered pure angels was rooted in the existence of Afro-descendant women as sexually accessible. As bell hooks claims indeed:

> the shift away from the image of white woman as sinful and sexual to that of white woman as virtuous lady occurred at the same time as mass sexual exploitation of enslaved black women — just as the rigid sexual morality of Victorian England created a society in which the

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[20] "The slave can at least change master, he can hope that by collecting gold he will one day buy his freedom; but the woman, when she raises her emaciated hands and her outraged forehead-, to ask for freedom, she hears the monster with the voice of the grave that shouts at her: In the grave".
[21] "The woman is always victim in all her relations with men" Gertruds Gómez de Avellaneda, Dos Mujeres (Madrid: 1842-1843) I, p. 6.

extolling of woman as mother and helpmeet occurred at the same time as the formation of a mass underworld of prostitution. (hooks 33)

This meant that "while American white men idealized white womanhood, they sexually assaulted and brutalized black women" (hooks 33).

To explain it further, hooks underlines how:

> The "cult of true womanhood" that emerged during the 19th century Europe had an intense demoralizing impact on enslaved black females. They were not proud of their ability to labour alongside men in the fields and wanted more than anything for their lot to be the same as that of white women. White male slave owners and overseers found that slave women could best be manipulated by promises of a new dress, a hair ribbon, or a parasol—anything that emphasized their femininity. (hooks 48)

Considering all of that, Afro-Cuban women of the nineteenth century probably felt the need to detach themselves from such stereotypical vision. For instance, in the journal *Minerva*, the attempt to comply with gender social norms is well evident. Therefore, it seems to me that while proto-feminist white women in Spain were trying to achieve sexual freedom and independence, writers of Afro-Cuban society were instead trying to demonstrate that they could be as virtuous and sexually "moral" as white, upper-class women. This sort of racial uplift became part of a moralizing gesture advanced by Afro-Cuban women at the end of the nineteenth century.

2.2.1. Writing the female Afro-Cuban experience between the lines of *Minerva*

In *Minerva*, Afro-Cuban women highlighted their needs for social and moral elevation[22]. First, the theme of education was highly important, as it enabled them to emancipate from an oppressive society. For instance, in the editorial by "América Font" that appeared on the front page of the fourth volume of *Minerva* in 1888 (no. 4), the author claims that beyond the function of care reserved for women in raising children, women must also have the opportunity to educate themselves. Only in this way in reality she can counter "the weakness of her physical body [...] the moral and scientific education with which she will win her debility and it will become strong"

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[22] The magazine Minerva also engaged with reports from the Florida Conference on "Women's Rights in Society Progress", 1887, reported mostly by the thinker and writer Marin Morua Delgado (1856-1910) (*Minerva*, II, num. 9, 15th February 1889 and subsequents).

(1). In the final lines of this article, the author also stresses that "la mujer debe aspirar, repito, á salir de la esclavitud de la ignorancia; y para poder ser libre, en este concepto, debe ser instruida; pues donde no hay instrucción no hay libertad" (*Minerva*, n. 4, 30 November 1888: 3)[23].

Likewise, in the article published in the number seven of Minerva (II, 26 January 1889), entitled "La instrucción", Lucrecia Gonzales stated that "la instrucción es el adorno del rico y la riqueza del pobre"[24] and that even if the lack of economic means did not allow women to educate themselves, "we must educate ourselves not to be like useless plants on earth. We cannot live in inaction, we become the heroines of our sex. Let's get rid of the yoke of ignorance" (2).

Together with education, other recurrent themes debated in the journal were poverty and family life. A female writer, under the penname of O.R.P., in the sixth edition (30th December 1888) of *Minerva* writes an article entitled "¡Raza negra elévate! La familia", in which she indicates that the compliance with social norms and gender roles was a way for Afro women to integrate in society. O.R.P., in fact, suggests that if Afro-Cubans wanted to access all classes of society, they must begin to form families within the precepts dictated by morality and required by law ("Tenga presente que sin familia no hay organización sociológica posible. Medite que es irrealizable la familia sin el matrimonio", 2), considering that "la escuela ilustra, la familia educa". In this sense, O. R. P. underlines how slavery had never allowed the formation of a morally coherent family for African-Americans ("Verdad es que la esclavitud jamás has producido esposas, sino concubinas", 3) and thus only recently have they been allowed to form family bonds by adapting to a consolidated morality ("mas ya que pasó la servidumbre, pase tambien la degradación", 2). Therefore, O. R. P. describes marriage as an altar of civilization, as the source of the family, of progress and of morality (since it leads to the elevation of humanity), and not as a source of social slavery.

Similarly, in "La felicidad del hogar", unknown writers with the pen names of V. Kop and Torrea, emphasize how women should be educated to make men happy. In

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[23] "The woman must aspire, I repeat, to leave the bondage of ignorance; and in order to be free, following this concept, she must be educated; because where there is no instruction there is no freedom".

[24] "The instruction is the adornment of the rich and the wealth of the poor".

addition, they must be able to maintain a high level of morality, which according to J. Granada ("Consejos a Carmen", *Minerva*, II, n. 7, 26th January 1889), can be compromised by throwing the flower of one's own virginity too quickly, as the man will take advantage of it. Likewise, the writer Maria Cleofa, in an article entitled "A Onatina" (*Minerva*, II, n. 7, 26th January 1889), underlines that an African American woman must carry on her virtue through education because slavery has put women of colour in morally debatable situations ("Resultado degradante/ Pero por desgracias cierto,/ Efecto del desconcierto/ De la institución infamante", 6). Under slavery, masters and mistresses effectively depicted slave women as immoral in order to keep them in their status as slaves ("No enseñaron la virtud./ Porque para que triunfante creciera la institución/ La sacrosanta instrucción/ No le era dado enseñarte", 7).

Overall, once emancipated from slavery, Afro-Cubans then faced the need to emancipate themselves from the status of poverty and ignorance in which they were placed under. To do this meant to comply with social norms and gender roles, demanding recognition as full subjects. In a piece titled "Gratidud" (*Minerva*, II, num. 9, 15th February 1889), Cecilia clearly shows it by saying: "me sento orgullosa de pertenecer a una raza que por si sola y a costa de sacrificios, procura elevarse a la altura de las deinas y lucha, trabaja y estudia para vencer" (1). In the same issue of *Minerva*, Antorcha de Trinidad ("A las cubanas de color") writes that "la clase de color viene con sus proprios esfuerzos trabajando por la emancipación de la ignorancia de aquí que con justicia tiene que ser indulgente con nosotros en todo aquello que se relacione con las bella letras y el decir" (2).[25]

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[25] "I feel proud to belong to a race that alone and at the cost of sacrifices seeks to rise to the height of gods and fight, work and study to win". Whereas Antorcha de Trinidad in "A las cubanas de color" writes that: "the class of people of colour comes with its own efforts working for the emancipation from ignorance that here with justice has to be lenient with us in everything that is related to writing and talking".
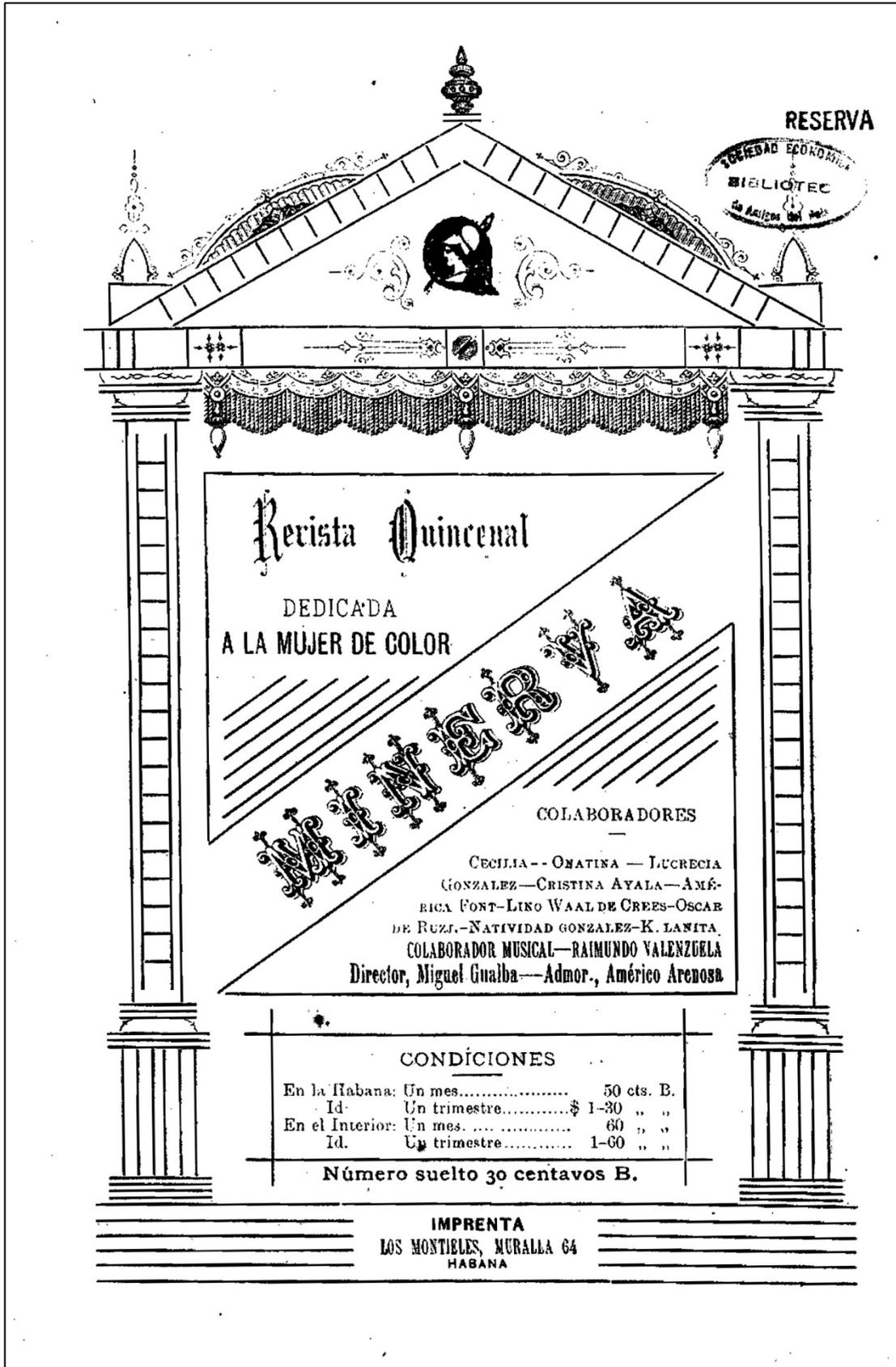
Image 3: Cover page of *Minerva*, II, 15ᵗʰ April 1889

2.2.2. Racial uplift

The drive towards the elevation of female Afro-Cuban morality can be considered complementary to the *racial uplift* project.[26] The theory of the racial uplift has been analysed mostly in the context of the culture and history of the United States rather than Cuba.

The origins of racial uplift ideology can be traced to the race relations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (1776–1840), when many denigatory images of black people circulated depicting them as immoral and demoted (Miller). As a matter of fact, in American society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, most whites viewed African Americans as "a homogenous mass of degraded people" (Gatewood 7).

As a reaction to the racial discourse that fostered the idea of black "degradation", African American elites wanted to enable free people of colour to "uplift" themselves to conditions of respectability, mainly through education. As James Brewer Stewart writes in *Modernizing "Difference": The Political Meanings of Color in the Free States, 1776–1840* (1999), this approach stressed "patient incrementalism, strenuous self-improvement, deference from ordinary community members, and the guidance of patriarchal leaders" (694). In order to rehabilitate the image of the Afro-American community, their leaders insisted on the responsibility of each individual to uplift by "striving to embrace piety, practice thrift and temperance, comport one's self with well-mannered dignity, and seek all advantage that education offered" (Stewart 695). "Respectability" and an ethos of service to the masses were the means by which African American élites tried to change the racial

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[26] For further studies on the complex theme of "racial uplift", see: Gaines, Kevin K. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996; Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., and Cornel West. *The Future of the Race.* New York: Knopf, 1996; Gatewood, Willard B. *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990; Gatewood, Willard B., Jr. "Aristocrats of Color: South and North The Black Elite, 1880–1920." *Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 1 (February 1988): 3–20; Giddings, Paula. *When and Where I Enter: The Impact on Black Women of Race and Sex in America.* New York: W. Morrow, 1984; Howe, Daniel Walker. "Victorian Culture in America." In *Victorian America,* edited by Daniel Walker Howe. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976; Miller, Albert G. *Elevating the Race: Theophilus G. Steward, Black Theology, and the Making of an African American Civil Society, 1865–1924.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003; Moses, Wilson Jeremiah. *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925.* Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1978; Toll, William. *The Resurgence of Race: Black Social Theory from Reconstruction to the Pan-African Conferences.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979.

prejudice. The achievement of this standard was dependent on a good education and the possession of propriety, as a way to acquire an honest position in American society.[27]

The Cuban context was slightly different from that of the United States, however it is reasonable to argue that Cristina Ayala expressed in her poetry the same anxiety about racial uplift as her Afro-Americans contemporaries. In particular, Ayala's concern is markedly collective rather than directed toward an individual uplift. Indeed, in her poetry, she constantly stresses the need for Afro-Cuban women to integrate in society through adherence to gender roles as a way of both self and collective empowerment, inasmuch as it would have led to the overcoming of the past, made out of slavery and therefore of immorality.

In this frame, the family and patriarchal gender relations were seen by Afro-Americans as crucial markers of respectability and racial progress. Cristina Ayala, as well as her contemporaries, the female Afro-Cuban writers of Minerva, wrote literature precisely in the passage of time between slavery and freedom. This occurred when Afro-Cubans, particularly women, found themselves free but poor, with low education and a powerful stigma upon them. All these issues are recurrent in the poetry of Maria Cristina Fragas, or Cristina Ayala, who interpreted the gender and racial roles of her time as to help Afro-Cuban women become part of the creation of the Cuban nation and of its society: a society that Cristina hoped could be full of new opportunities for former slaves and free workers. Lastly, the themes as well as the aesthetics of Cristina Ayala's poetry will be the topic of the next section of this chapter.

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[27] In the post-Reconstruction era, however, uplift ideology was transformed by the imperatives of Jim Crow terror and New South economic development and by the values of a transatlantic Victorian culture. In this context, uplift became an ideology of self-help articulated mainly in racial- and middle-class-specific terms rather than in a broader, egalitarian social context. Consistent with the late Victorian emphasis on autonomous individualism and personal achievement, black elites opposed racism by pointing to class distinctions within the race as evidence of evolutionary progress. See: Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (1978) and Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920* (1990).

3. An offer to Güines: Cristina Ayala's *Ofrendas Mayabequinas*

Maria Cristina Fragas, or Cristina Ayala, in the *dedicatoria* (dedication) of her only-published collection of poems, *Ofrendas Mayabequinas*, defines her poems as "modestos trabajos" ("modest works"), a "manojo de violetas" ("bunch of violets"), dedicated to her beloved city of belonging, Güines. However, she attests that she wishes for a good welcoming of the book among friends and "fervientes admiradores" ("fervent fans"), showing as well an awareness of her full status as a writer and a poet. In some of her poems, indeed, Maria Cristina Fragas recalls her wish to be among illustrated poets, with a certain anxiety of not being considered as much worth as other Cuban writers.

In the poem "Lo que yo Quisiera Ser" (Ayala 58), Ayala affirms that she does not want to have the solemn majesty of the genius or to be famous ("No espero vero mi nombre consagrado/ con gran pompa y selemne majestad […]/ Yo no tengo del *Genio* la realeza/ que hace presto las cumbres esclar", vv. 1-2, 5-6), yet she only wants to leave a little trace for posterity, even though she knows she would remain mostly ignored ("pero si, la violeta que, ignorada/ se oculta entre hojarasca con temor" vv. 41-42). Cristina Ayala does not feel she is at the same rank of many other Cuban poets ("Al peso del laurel, doblo mi frente;/ pues sé, que no merezco los honores de que a mi humilde lira, reverente/ culto, le rindan bardos y escritores", Ayala 120, vv. 5-8), yet she believes that for an Afro-Cuban female it is particularly important to write as a political act of empowerment. In the poem "Contestacion", written in 1906 and dedicated to Vincenzo Silveira[28], Ayala says that she can hardly aspire to be in the "Parnaso"[29] of Cuban poets ("Yo, que no puedo, por desdicha mia/ pensar, un puesto en el future dia/ del *Parnaso* ocupar", Ayala 90, vv. 28-30) yet, if under the "*látigo* inhumano" of slavery, Afro-Cubans wrote poetry ("un *Plácido*, un

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[28] Vincenzo Silveira (1841-1928) was an Afro-Cuban poet and writer, he was a regular contributor of many Cuban journals and helped through the participation in many voluntary association his Afro-descendant fellows, especially for what concerned education.

[29] The Parnaśo (lat. *Parnasus* o *Parnassus*, or gr. Παρνασός o Παρνασσός) is the name of a mountain of central Greece, in the north of the Gulf of Corinth (near Delphi), considered in antiquity the seat of Apollo and the Muses, to which it was therefore sacred. It became for many cultures the symbol of poetry. By writing of wanting to have a place in the "Parnassus", Ayala implicitly suggests she wants to be counted among the illustrious poets.

Medican y un Manzano nuestra Cuba nos dió", vv. 40-43) now that slavery had ended and that Cuba is free from the Spanish coloniser, more and more Afro-Cuban poets should write ("¿Cómo es possible que hoy, que ya la *tralla*/ rasgando nuestra espalda no restalla,/ no logremos también/ que nuestro acento, noble y grave vibre/ y del Parnaso de la Patria libre/ no hagamos un Edén?" vv. 46-51) as a way to gain agency and affirm themselves as subjects of art and history.

As Cecilia Pietropoli and Lilla Maria Crisafulli insightfully argue in their preface to *Le poetesse romantiche inglesi* (2002: 14), the precariousness of the female writers' position in the literary world made the poets resort to continuous forms of self-justification and declarations of modesty. It is arguable that what is true for the English literary context can be applied also here. The declarations of modesty must be contextualised within the historical context that produced them, therefore far from being evidence that the authors had uncritically internalised oppressive patriarchal attitudes toward authorship, it was an astute strategy to challenge them. By using expressions of self-deprecation or insufficiency, women writers anticipated the possible criticisms of the public, lowering their expectations, in order to be able to express themselves more freely. Women writers knew that their work would have never been accepted as favourably as men, so they needed first to apologise for their being women and then use the chance to express their literary art directly in the text; equally it is the case of both for Maria Cristina Fragas and for Maria Firmina dos Reis[30].

In a poem written as an answer to Cuban poet Gregorio Delgado y Fernandez ("Contestación", 1923, Ayala 120) who had dedicated a poem to her in turn, Ayala explains the topics of her poetry: the beauty of nature ("Yo rindo culto a la Naturaleza/ en sus diversas manifestaciones, p. 120, vv. 17-18), together with the most important facts of Cuban history ("También canté los hechos mas salientes/ que se registran en la patria historia", vv. 21-22), and of its freedom fighters (""y las proezas de sus cambatientes/ he consignado en la páginas de gloria", vv. 23-24). Cristina Ayala's poems are an offer to her native land, Güines, to which she dedicates her writings. According to her dedication, she had another collection of poems in mind ("Más Adelante espero publicar en otro volume-que ya está en

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[30] See chapter five.

preparación la ofrenda que le he venido consagrando tembién, a la Patria grande"), which she wanted to devote to her nation, Cuba, although she never published it. In the prologue, written by the editor, Valentin Cuesta Jimenez[31], Cristina is compared to a priestess that from the altar of beauty gives communion to the equal souls ("lo espíritus iguales, […] cuando reciben por sus versos y en el cálido regazo de sus lucubraciones, 'la comunión'; en la hostia y el vino sagrados que la sacerdotisa ofrece, transfigurada, en sus palmos rotundos y armoniosos", Ayala 7). Poems are then the tribute that poet Ayala offers, as a priestess, to her native land, desiring freedom still after having obtained it, at a national level with independence, and at a cultural level with the abolishing of slavery and the slave trade. The editor affirms that Ayala is at the same rank of Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda, and that to read Cristina's poems means to become able to feel what she feels, as far as she is uniquely able to access higher picks of spirituality:

> Leer a Cristina es sentir con Cristina. Sentir, es admirarla. Admirarla es vibrar come ella vibra, en el arrebato de la admonición patriótica, en el tremor glorioso del misticismo consolador, en el psiquismo febril y emotivo de la romántica ensoñación, y en el ensalmo lírico, risueños y huvenil […] ella, siente siempre, porque espiga en el campo exhuberante y magnífico de la espiritualidad más exquisita. (Ayala 7)[32]

Cristina Ayala conceives the poet as a person with a delicate soul, different from the rest of people due to a distinct sensitiveness which makes her/him feel everything more intensely, especially beauty, as well as pain: "El alma del poeta/ es tan sensible/ que el más ligero golpe/ la hace sufrir; […]/ No envidies, pues, amiga,/a los poetas./ No anheles de estos seres/ la triste vida;/ ¡mira que tú no sabes,/ cuánta saetas/ nos causan en el alma/ profunda herida!..." ("A Maria Regla Valdes Cardenas", 1925;

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[31]Valentin Cuesta Jimenez, the editor f Cristina Ayala's collection of poems, was born in Güines on July 24, 1888. He is one of the most prominent literary and journalistic figures in Güines, he directed the local newspaper Heraldo de Güines and was a corresponding member of the Academy of History of Cuba, appointed by the Güinero City Council as Official Cronista de la Villa. He died in Güines on December 5, 1969.

[32] "To read Cristina means to feel with Cristina. To feel is to admire her. To Admire her, is to vibrate as she vibrates, in the outburst of patriotic admonition, in the glorious tremor of consoling mysticism, in the feverish and emotional psyches of romantic daydreaming, and in the lyrical, laughing, and humane spell [...], she always feels, because she stands out in the exuberant and magnificent field of the most exquisite spirituality".

Ayala 1926: 124, vv. 9-12, 57-64)[33]. This vision of the poet makes her closer to the Spanish Romantic Movement.

The poet consequently has a social role, which in the case of Ayala is seen has the mission to counter ignorance and celebrate freedom, as she states in her poem "En la Brecha", 1912 (Ayala 194):

> "Como soldado de fila,
> –pues no he de decir "soldada" –
> me echo al hombro la mochila,
> y acudo firme y tranquila
> a tu bélica llamada.
>
> Ya me tienes en la "brecha",
> Arma en ristre –digo, pluma–,
> Pues que de esta lucha en suma
> El final es, ver deshecha
> De la ignorancia la bruma
> (vv. 1-8)[34]

The poet then is a "soldado de fila" that uses the weapons of "digo" and "pluma" to win the battle against ignorance ("ver deshecha de la ignorancia la bruma"). Therefore, the fight for freedom of Cristina Ayala is of the same importance as the one of the patriots, even though it is fought on a cultural level and by a woman.

3.1. Belonging and longing: renaming freedom through poetry

The theme of freedom is addressed by Cristina Ayala trough reflections on Afro-descendants' story in Cuba and gender roles in the society of her time. In order to examine her concern about Afro-Cuban history and identity in Cuba, the poems "Redencion" (1889), "Piensamientos" (1889), "A mi raza" (1888), "Mi flor" (1911) and "Canto a la raza española" (1925) will be studied. Moreover, I will critically analyse the poems, "El arroyuelo y la flor" (1893) and "Una rosa despues del baile" (1890) in order to understand how Ayala imagined gender roles in society.

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[33] "The soul of the poet / is so sensitive / that the slightest blow / makes her suffer; [...] / Do not envy, then, my friend, / the poets./ Do not wish for the their / sad life; / look that you do not know, / how many arrows / cause in our soul / deep wound!...".
[34] "As a rank soldier,/ –For I do not have to say "female soldier" – / I put the backpack in my shoulder, / and I come firm and calm / to your war call. / You have me in the "gap", / Weapon at the ready - I say, pen– /Well, of this struggle in sum / The end is, see undone / From ignorance the mist".

Although only some of her poems have been selected, through Ayala's work reflections on slavery are ubiquitously present. Slavery is indeed described as an "estigma" (in "A mi raza"), a "làtigo Infamante" (in "Redencion") and a "latigo inumano" (90), explaining how in other societies, as was the case in Cuba then, people rebelled against it. In the two sonnets "Episodios de la antigua Roma" (73) and "El gladiator subelevado", for instance, Ayala praises the rebellion of slaves in ancient Rome. Slavery was indeed responsible for the "negra desventura", or "el negro destino" (in "En el arroyo", 51), it thus represented the "historia mas negra" for the "raza oprimida". This "latigo inumano" is also a "latigo infamante". The sense of infamy born out of slavery is presented as the consequence of the slaves' condition, which did not allow them to be morally upright. Yet, the slave even if aware of being a victim of that violent society, feels also a sense of shame. The sense of shame derives from the fact that Cuban society itself blamed slaves for their status of immorality, without taking responsibility for it.

The feeling of being considered immoral and thus an emotion of indignity experienced by Afro-Cubans came from actual attacks that were undertaken rhetorically against them. Among those polemic writings, there was a book of notes by the Argentinean explorer Francisco Moreno (1852-1919)[35], published in 1887 and titled *Cuba y su gente*. Francisco Moreno addressed his pamphlet to Victor Balaguer (1824-1901) – a writer, a journalist and, at that time, the Spanish "Ministro de Ultramar" – stating that with it, he wanted to depict Cuban reality "tal y cual es" (Moreno, VII). The description that Moreno did was alarming and particularly hostile, especially in respect to black Cuban women. In point of fact, according to Moreno, if when arriving at the port, Havana looked beautiful, when descending from the ship the nice spell ended: "calles todas rectas, pero sucias, asquerosas y mal

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[35] Francisco Pascasio Moreno (1852-1919) was an Argentinian explorer, remembered as *Perito* Moreno ("Perito" means "specialist, expert"). In 1872, Moreno began a series of exploratory expeditions that made him well known. In January 1876 he explored Lake Nahuel-Huapi, in the southern part of the Andes and discovered, on February 14, 1877, Lake San Martin. He also explored numerous rivers in Patagonia. In 1882-1883 he explored the Andes from the south part of Bolivia, and in 1884-1885 he made a new exploration of the territory south of the Río Negro and Patagonia. He was director of the anthropological museum of Buenos Aires, head of the Argentine exploratory commission and of the southern territories, and a member of several European scientific societies. For his contribution to science, Moreno received an honorary doctorate from the University of Córdoba in 1877. He is also known for his role in defending Argentina during the delineation of international boundaries between Chile and Argentina. In 1902 he was also appointed *Perito* (a specialist or expert technician) in the conflict of borders.

empedradas; edificios de un solo piso, y á lo sumo de dos; rostros pálidos, cuerpos flacos y enclenques, con la sangre minada y carcomida por la anemia, la clorósis ó la dispepsia; negros y negras, apestando á grajo ó á catinga desde cien varas de distancia, y moviéndose al arrullador compás de las chancletas que arrastran"[36](Moreno 11). Close to family houses and churches, Moreno found temples of pleasure, brothels with open windows so that people could smell and see everything from the street (12). After having mocked many Cuban newspapers, presenting the island as highly dangerous other than immoral, Moreno pointed to the general "desmoralización social" ("social immorality", 194) of the Island, both religious and political, of which women of Cuba were also responsible, as far as people morality depended mostly on women, and "sin buenas esposas y sin buenas madres no puede haber moral de ningun género" (194). This was a consequence of the fact that, according to Moreno, women's education in Cuba was superficial and therefore women had no analytical thinking and no desire. Marriage was just a vanity or a material interest: "Ni un pensamiento que analice, ni una voluntad para querer, ni un corazon para sentir, ni un alma para elevarse… y el matrimonio como límite de la vanidad femenil ó como necesidad de la materia… En Cuba se educa á la mujer para casarse, no para saber ser casada, ni para educar á sus hijos" (195)[37].

3.1.1. "A mi raza", 1888

As a Cuban and a "negro" woman, Ayala responded directly to Moreno innuendos with a poem, "A mi raza", published two years after the abolition of slavery in Cuba (1888), which contains a direct response to the pamphlet *Cuba y su gente*[38]. The poem "A mi raza" presents a practical "self-help" racial theory to solve the problem of "racial uplift" in post-emancipation Cuba. The poem begins with the affirmation

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[36] "Straight but dirty streets, one-story buildings, pale faces and anaemic bodies, blacks and niggers that stank from hundreds of meters and went around dragging the flip flops, bars and Chinese shops, stink of sugar cane liquor".

[37] "Neither a thought that analyzes, nor a will to want, nor a heart to feel, nor a soul to rise... and marriage as the limit of feminine vanity or as a necessity... In Cuba, women are educated to marry, not to know how to be married or how to educate their children".

[38] Ayala explicitly states in a note at the margin of the poem "A mi raza", a stanza of the poem is a response to the pamplet of Moreno: "Se refiere a un folleto que se titulaba Cuba y su gente donde se denigraba a la raza de color y sobre todo a la mujer" (Ayala 17).

of the necessity for the "raza querida" to give proof of civilisation, having ended the servility and having obtained the ransom from the condition of slavery:

> Ya es tiempo raza querida
> Que, acabado el servilismo,
> Demos pruebas de civismo
> Y tengamos propria vida
>
> Ya es tiempo de comprender
> -pues esta probado el hecho –
> que es imposible el Derecho,
> si no se cumple el Deber.
>
> Y, lo que el Deber nos traza
> en tan solemne momento,
> es, redoblar el intento
> de mejorar nuestra raza.
>   (vv. 1-12)[39]

Now that slavery was over ("acabado el servilismo"), it was time for Afro-Cubans to understand that the right to freedom must be achieved through the effort to improve their morality ("demos pruebas de civismo"), in order to address the accusations of being immoral subjects. Improvement arises as a moral duty once freedom has been obtained, so far as Afro-Cuban people are faced with the need to prove that they deserved it ("es imposible el Derecho, si no se cumple el Deber"). Freedom, as a process, must continue to be achieved every day, through moral strength, despite the fact that it is not the "raza negra" which is responsible for Cuban immorality, nor for the tremendous condition of slavery in which they poured, as indeed Franciso Moreno had claimed:

> No es la raza negra, no;
> aunque en tal sentido se hable;
> la que ha de ser responsable
> de "aquel tiempo que pasó."
>
> Pero no puede eludir
> la responsabilidad
> que es suya en la actualidad,
> para con el porvenir.
> (vv. 13-20)[40]

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[39] "It is already the time my dear race / That, finished the servility, / we give evidence of civility / And live our own life / It is already time to understand / –For is has been proven– / that the Law is unapplied, / If the Duty is not fulfilled. / And, what Duty draws us / in such a solemn moment is, / to redouble the attempt to improve our race".

Ayala introduces the second stanza by repeating the opening sentence "Ya es tiempo". The repetition of this sentence introduces time as a trope: the present ("ya es tiempo"), the past ("aquel tiempo que pasó") and the future ("el provenir") converge in the context of an imagined community, which is the silent auditor of her poetry. Every quatrain, the ryming abba, and the end-ryme, both through alliteration (Deber Derecho) and assonance (namely the inner rhyme: "Deber", "dErEcho"), create a semantic link between the words "derecho" and "deber". Even thanks to this rhetoric, "A mi raza" projects the political message that black Cubans should not expect political rights without fulfilling their duty to improve their race's morality ("no puede eludir la responsabilidad que es suya"), remarking at the same time that their actual condition was not their responsibility ("No es la raza negra, no; aunque en tal sentido se hable; la que ha de ser responsable de 'aquel tiempo que pasó'.").

According to Cristina Ayala, this improvement in Afro-Cubans' morality can take place mainly through education and, in particular, through the eradication of ignorance from the social sphere:

> Evitemos ese mal,
> Teniendo perseverancia
> Para extirpar la ignorancia
> De nuestra esfera social.
> (vv. 23-26)[41]

This goal also requires a division of roles, based on gender belonging. Thus, Ayala assigns different roles to men and women in the post-emancipatory process, as men have to follow education and women to perform their duties:

> Los hombres han de estudiar;
> hay que abandonar el vicio
> y salvar el precipicio
> en que se van a estrellar.
> […]
> Y, nosotras las mujeres
> cumpliendo nuestra misión,
> tenemos la obligación
> de entender nuestros deberes.
> (vv. 29-32, 37-40)[42]

---

[40] "It is not the black race, no; / although people say so; / the one responsible of / 'that time that passed.' / But we cannot avoid / The responsibility / which is ours today, / for the future".
[41] "Let's avoid this evil,/ Having perseverance / In order to extirpate ignorance / Of our social sphere".

Men must study and abandon their own vices ("abandoner el vicio"), for which they have no fault, as they are a direct consequence of the social condition of subordination in which they were forced to be; while women must understand what their social duties are and respect them. Whereas Ayala indicates what the role of men is in this post-emancipator process, she leaves women in an ambiguous position, suggesting that female Afro-Cubans have an implicit knowledge of how the social sphere works and their position in it ("cumpliendo nuestra mission" and "entender nuestros deberes"). The moral perfection of the race is therefore contingent on women's understanding of their relationship to the racial uplift project.

The ultimate goal of this uplift is to produce the biggest enlightenment ("la mayor ilustración"). The sought progress is aimed at moral perfection, as the only key available to Afro-Cubans in order to access history:

> Que si todos por igual
> -sin que haya rémora en eso –
> buscamos en el progreso
> nuestra perfección moral
>
> tal vez tengamos la gloria
> para que el mundo se asombre,
> de consignar nuestro nombre
> con honra y prez en la Historia.
>
> Y si tal éxito alcanza
> el noble esfuerzo que haremos
> el estigma borraremos
> que la Sociedad nos lanza.
> (vv. 41-52)[43]

History itself becomes the abstract surface on which to inscribe the name of the newly emancipated race (Callahan 75). To deliver the name of the black race to history would mean to erase definitively the stigma that society has imposed on them, since slavery is inscribed in the collective bodies of Afro-Cubans and ex-slaves as a tremendous and unsolicited ill repute. Therefore, in this stanza (vv. 22-52) two

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[42] "Men have to study; / the vice must be abandoned / and save the precipice / where they are going to crash.[...] / And, we women / fulfilling our mission, / we have an obligation / to understand our duties".

[43] "What if all equally / -without any hindrance in that - / we look for progress / as our moral perfection / maybe we have the glory / for the world to be amazed, / to consign our name / with honor in History. / And if such success reaches / the noble effort that we will make / the stigma will be erase / that the Society attached us".

images come together within the process of renaming the stigmatised slave bodies: a written name and an erased stigma: "Consignar nuestro nombre" and "estigma borraremos". In this way, "A mi raza" presents the problem of the transition from slavery to freedom as a problem of collective politics of identity, which requires a social change on the side of Afro-Cubans and a problem of semiotic signification. This requires the removal of a system of signification ("el estigma borraremos que la sociedad nos laza") to be replaced with another ("consignar nuestro nombre with honra y prex en la historia") morally superior frame. Ayala suggests that to remove the stigma of slavery one must write freedom. Likewise, freedom is not an inevitable consequence of the abolition of slavery, since it must be rewritten through the poetic re-naming process.

Furthermore, as Monique-Adelle Callahan argues:

> Ayala's use of the didactic form in "A mi raza" counters the sentimentalism of the Romantic era's poetic treatment of slavery and abolition. So far, she builds on the tradition of Latin American Romantic poetry in its concern with the socio-political problem of slavery and the theme of abolition. *A mi raza* however does not feature the voice of a sympathetic observer as many abolitionist poems did. Ayala diverges from this tradition by projecting a voice from within the *raza negra* that interprets its own history, therefore "A mi raza" presents abolition as a symbolic event that emerges from actively influences precipitant concepts of freedom. (78)

The groundbreaking nature of Ayala's work resides also in its capacity to give an account of the legacy of slavery from an internal point of view. By talking in first person about the social, political and historical situation in which the Afro-Cuban community found itself after the abolition of slavery, Ayala posits a way for Afro-descendants to integrate in society without renouncing their roots and community's history. The stress on the imagined community of Africans, well evident since the choice of the title "A mi raza", emphasises the need for a collective upraise towards actual freedom. This process of becoming within an imaginary community, not defined by contrast or opposition with other communities but only by its history and common past, is undertaken by Ayala also in the poem "Redención" in which she collocates Afro-Cuban history within the broader frame of Cuban national independence.

3.1.2. "Redención", 1889

The poem "Redención" was published the 15th of February 1889, in the number 9 of the magazine Minerva (*Minerva*, no.9, anno II, p.7), it is composed by eighteen verses, divided in four stanzas, alternate rhymes, and it traces the history of slavery in Cuba by using biblical allusions to the Israelites and the figure of Christ. Parallels between the Israelites and slaves were common in the abolitionist discourse[44], and yet Ayala appropriates the biblical figure of Jesus Christ in an innovative and innovative manner, by comparing the image of Christ-as-martyr to that of Afro-Cubans, only recently "redeemed" from slavery. The poem begins with a description of a passed storm ("negra tormenta"), a metaphor that refers to the end of the slave trade (1867) and of slavery (1886) in Cuba:

> Cual trás negra tormenta, un claro día
> lucir suele con bellos esplendores,
> y cual brilla en un rostro la alegría
> tras un cúmulo inmenso de dolores.
>
> así mi pobre raza, que llevaba
> una vida de mísera agonía,
> y bajo el férreo yugo que la ahogaba
> en dura esclavitud triste gemía,
>
> hoy se encuentra feliz, pues con sus galas
> (vv. 1-9)[45]

The metaphor of these first verses offers a powerful image to the reader. Ayala, in fact, says that as after a strong storm a clear day usually shines, and after an immense heap of pain joy sparkles on our faces, Afro-Cubans who lived for a long time a life of miserable agony, underneath the iron yoke of slavery, are happy today. The juxtaposition between the expression "negra tormenta" and "claro dia" establishes the dichotomy between pre and post slavery conditions. The "pobre raza", subjected to the "ferreo yugo" of slavery, with the "cumulo inmenso de doleres" that brought with it, is now living a "claro dia", thanks to abolition. As researcher Monique-Adelle Callahan underlines, the tears of the "pobre raza" under the iron yoke of

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[44] See third chapter. For further readings see: Kenneth Chelst (2009), *Exodus and Emancipation: Biblical and African-American Slavery*, Jerusalem: Urim Publications.

[45] "As after a black storm, a clear day / usually shines with beautiful splendors, / and as shines in the face the joy / after an immense accumulation of pains. / so my poor race, who had / a life of miserable agony, / and under the iron yoke that choked us/ in hard sad slavery moaned, / Today we are happy, with our finery".

slavery echo the tears of Israelites under the yoke of Egyptian slavery and their subsequent redemption.

However, the road from slavery to freedom for Afro-Cubans is neither ensuing nor easy, as indicated rhetorically by the fact that slaves' sufferings are in a different stanza than their obtainment of liberty. This is because even though the poem presents a collective racial identity framed by the history of racial slavery, it does not focus on a single moment of "deliverance", yet it proposes a more general vision of liberty's achievement. As in the case of Mary Prince and Maria Firmina dos Reis indeed, also Cristina Ayala envisions freedom as a landscape, and as a process:

> hoy se encuentra feliz, pues con sus galas
> la hermosa Libertad augusta y santa
> la cubre, y adornada de esas galas,
> bate las palmas y sus gloria canta.
> (vv. 9-12)[46]

Now that the Afro-Cubans are happy, the beautiful and holy Liberty covers with its wings the black race, which adorned by these wings, sings its glory. The author praises the "pobre raza" as it had carried the burden of slavery and admonishes it to sing the glories of freedom, from which it is now adorned. To sing the "pobre raza" glory means for Ayala to evoke the memory of the history of slavery and emancipation.

In the successive stanza, the poet describes the nature and the character of Afro-Cubans and their recent encounter with freedom, through an allusion to the figure of Jesus Christ:

> ¡Raza humilde, sencilla y laboriosa,
> Modelo fiel de abnegacion constante,
> Que vertistes tu sangre generosa
> Al impulso del làtigo infamante!
> (vv. 13-16)[47]

The Afro-Cuban race is a humble and disinterested martyr, a sacrificial lamb who shed its blood generously, under the oppressive yoke of slavery. The spilled blood

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[46] "Today we are happy, because with its elegance / the beautiful august and holy liberty / covers us, / and adorned with its elegance, / we beats the palms and sing its glory".

[47] "Humble, simple and laborious race, / Faithful model of constant abnegation, / That shed your generous blood / At the impulse of the infamous lash!"

instead of being the damned one of Ham[48], is that of a divine sacrifice. Therefore, in the following stanzas ex-slaves' community is transfigured:

> ¡Canta tu gloria, si! Pues no es posible
> Que al cesar tu baldon y tu tortura
> Una plegaria mistica y sensible
> No se exhale de tu alma con tenura...
>
> Has que hasta el trono del Eterno suba
> Tu acento, y di con voz que tierna vibre;
> ¡Perdon señor te imploro para Cuba!
> ¡Ya su crímen borró, ya el negro es libre...
> (vv. 17-24)[49]

Singing for the achieved glory and liberation is necessary, due to the end of tortures, together with a mystical and sensitive prayer that comes from the soul. The liberation of slaves from captivity makes them able to intercede for the salvation of all of the people of Cuba, even for the ones responsible for their enslavement. Now freed, after having met liberty, the newly emancipated "negro" race epitomize the benevolent dispenser of forgiveness, which frees Cuba from its past sins. In particular, the word "redención" comes from the Latin and means "redemption", namely to "buy back", indeed in this poem the bought turns into the buyer, and the redeemed slave becomes the one who redeems. The freedom of slaves is thus inextricably linked to the redemption of the Cuban nation. Like Christ, the "black race" spreads its blood in a voluntary sacrifice, thus removing the "crímen" of slavery, indicting the Cuban nation. Likewise, as Christ brought freedom from sin to humanity, the black race brings freedom to Cuba through forgiveness.

In the last stanza of the poem, Cuba is invoked with a prayer, which joins the critical state of the recently emancipated African race to the collective project of a Cuban nation, as "the poem presents a symbolic raza negra empowered to verbalise

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[48] As mentioned in chapter 3 of this dissertation, one of the most followed pro-slavery argument, claimed that the Bible supported the enslavement of black people, because they were considered the descendants of Ham (son of Noah), cursed by God (see: David M. Goldenberg, 2005, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Princenton: Princenton University Press).

[49] "Sing your glory, yes! Well, it is not possible / That when your baldon and your torture cease / A mystical and sensitive pray /Do not exhale from your soul with tenure ... / May the throne of the Eternal rise / Your accent, and I said in a voice that tender vibrates; / Forgiveness, I implore you for Cuba! / Already their crimes are erased, the black is already free...".

in a prayer the possibility of a free Cuban nation" (Callahan 70). The author asks the black race to pray for an imaginary free Cuba:

> Pide al hado feliz que tu Derecho
> respetado en el mundo siempre veas
> y exclama desde el fondo de tu pecho:
> ¡Oh Santa Libertad! ¡Bendita seas!
> (vv. 25-28)[50]

Since freedom is a process, ex-slaves have to constantly ask for the right to freedom, blessing liberty as a constant conquest. Furthermore, Cuba can evolve into a nation only if slaves are free, so much so that "it is the experience and history of black Cubans here that provide the historical and linguistic material with which to build a concept of *libertad*" (Callahan 69).

The reference to the "Derechos" of people of colour in the last verses refers to the political climate created by the wars of independence and the drive towards abolition. Many afro-Cuban people in fact had participated in the war of independence from Spain in 1886, led by General Antonio Maceo (1845-1896), in the hope that the end of the Spanish empire would have meant an improvement of their conditions, even if it did not eventuate. Ayala indeed seems to suggest that the Cubans should remember slavery, along with forming a common front in favour of the national unity against the Spanish establishment. Hence, at the end of the nineteenth century, Cristina Ayala contributes with "Redención" to the work of inscribing Cuban Afro-descendants within the nascent Cuba nation that had previously enslaved them.

The debate on abolition in Cuba had not had a religious connotation as long as the Catholic Church largely supported slavery. Protestant missionaries outside Cuba (USA, Jamaica, London, and Santo Domingo) began to disseminate anti-slavery ideas, some of them explicitly comparing slaves to the Israelites. The conflict between supporters of the Spanish crown and the *independentistas* manifested itself as an ideological battle between Protestantism and Catholicism, as the Protestant church identified with the Cuban independence movement. In addition, the members of Cuban Creole elite wanted independence although they themselves had made a plan for independence that preserved the institution of slavery. Joaquin Infante

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[50] "Ask the happy fate that your Right / respected in the world you will always see / and exclaim from the bottom of your chest: / Oh Holy Liberty! Blessed be you!".

(1780-?)[51], for instance, proposed an independent Cuban Republic, inspired by the ideals of French revolution, albeit he wished-for the continuation of slavery in Cuba, supporting a social system that designated the status of free mixed-race and Afro-Cuban people, on the basis of the proportion of "black blood" in their veins (Carreras 21). Furthermore, even after the abolition of slavery, the imposed racial hierarchy continued to influence Cuban politics. The government supported white Spanish immigration, or "whitening", as a means of ensuring white supremacy in Cuban society and in politics. Additionally, the association between Cuban blacks and barbarism was highly rooted in the biblical justification for African slavery in Cuba (Callhan 71), as the Afro-Cubans were accused of being responsible for the lack of morality of the Cuban nation.

Therefore, "Redención" positions Afro-Cubans as symbolic martyrs for the cause of the Cuban nation, defining them as redeemers of the nation. They are not inevitably cursed by their racial descent; instead, they help to define the meaning of national freedom. Emancipated slaves then embody the link between God and Cuba, and the "raza" Afro acts as an intercessor, reflecting the figure of Christ as intercessor on behalf of a human race fallen into sin. In the same way as Christ, in fact, ex-slaves voluntarily forgive sin and decide to join a unique struggle for a new rebirth, the genesis of the independent Cuban nation, redeemed by the sin of slavery and independent from Spain. The redemption of the "negro" thus means redemption for all the oppressed in Cuba (oppressed by the racial Creole hierarchy and by former slaveholders) and freedom from foreign oppressors (the Spaniards and their colonial establishment). Ayala consequently suggests both that slaves knew the meaning of freedom and that thay had played a primary role in determining what that freedom

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[51] Joaquin Infante (1780 -?) Lawyer, promoter of Cuban independence and creator of a draft Constitution for Cuba that was printed in Venezuela. Infante studied law in Havana and from 1809 he participated with a group of freemasons in conspiracy movements against the Spanish regime. Persecuted in Havana, he fled to the United States and then Venezuela. In 1811 he settled in Caracas, where he worked as a lawyer. In Venezuela he participated in different revolutionary groups. In 1812 his Constitution Project for the island of Cuba was published in Caracas. In this document he proposed the creation of four state powers - the Executive, the Legislative, the Judicial and the Military -, the maintenance of the slave regime and an anticlerical tendency. The following year he was appointed war auditor in Puerto Cabello, next to Simón Bolívar. Captured in a war campaign by the royalist forces, he was imprisoned and sent to Cuba to be tried. In 1813 he was released by the Cuban authorities. With the return of Fernando VII, he was persecuted for his Masonic ideas and emigrated to Cartagena. It is unknown where or when he died and he does not usually appear among the Cuban patriots.

would mean in post-abolition Cuba. Ultimately, the appropriation of biblical topology therefore serves to create a narrative to understand the history of peoples of African descent in Cuba, presenting them as an imaginary community built through a narrative of slavery and emancipation. At the same time, biblical topology also serves to testify to the role that African descendants played, both as participants and as authors, in the formation of the new Cuban nation. As a result, the poem inscribes a narrative of freedom, proposing a particular way of imagining the emancipation of Afro-descendants in Cuba, framing a collective history of Afro-descendants in the new world.

3.1.3. "A mi flor", 1909-1911

The sense of martyrdom, associated with Cuban black people, could be maybe better understood if considered in the context of Cuban history. By the time Cristina Ayala wrote "Redemptión", the incredible cruel event of the conspiracy of "Escaleras" had already taken place in Cuba, for which Spanish people actually needed the forgiveness of Afro-Cuban people. In 1844, actually began one of the most brutal periods of repression ever to be inflicted upon the island of Cuba.

Throughout 1843, there had been several episodes of slave rebellion, associated with rumours of a conspiracy for a general uprising. Captain General Leopoldo O'Donnell, Governor of the island at the time, created a special Militar Commission to face the evenience of a conspiracy. The following year, the Commission arrested and persecuted a large proportion of the free coloured population and foreign workers, supposedly involved in the affair. It also massively tortured many slaves, tring to extort them confessions and accusations (Curry-Machado 71).[52] Besides all the torture and persecution inflicted, "authorities did not find arms, munitions, documents, or any other incriminating object which proved that there was such a conspiracy, much less on such a vast scale" (Curry-Machado 73-72). At the time of

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[52] Among other methods, there was that which gave name to the conspiracy ("Escalera"). The accused were "taken to a room which had been white-washed, and whose sides were besmeared with blood and small pieces of flesh, from the wretches who had preceded them. There stood a bloody ladder [*escalera*], where the accused were tied, with their heads downward. Whether free or a slave, if they would not avow what the fiscal officer insinuated, they were whipped to death.They were scourged with leather straps, with a small destructive button at the end, made of fine wire", Michele Reid-Vazquez (2011), *The Year of the Lash: Free People of Color in Cuba and the Nineteenth-century Atlantic World,* Georgia: University of Geria Press, p. 55.

the 1844 trials, one of the British representatives of the island, James Kennedy, was just as certain "that no such conspiracy ever existed" (73), suggesting that the authorities had exaggerated the threat in their own interests[53]. Among the many innocent victims of the persecution, there was the famous Cuban poet Gabriel de la Conception Valdes (1809-1844), commonly known by the pen name "Placido", the son of a Spanish dancer and an Afro-Cuban barber, who became the main representative of Cuban Romanticism and one of the first Afro-Cuban poets ever. In 1844, Placido was ferociously persecuted and then executed by the Spanish government, as he had been accused of being part of the "Escalera" conspiracy.

The martyr made by the Afro-Cuban poet, and by many others at that time, can only be overcome, according to Cristina Ayala, by patriotism, so to say by the fight for independence against the Spanish oppressor. In "Mi Flor", a poem written by Cristina Ayala between 1909 and 1911, and dedicated explicitly to Placido, Ayala honours the memory of the poet by saying that "si en el espacio inmenso tu alma flotando està", his bloody martyrdom caused pain in America as well as in all of Europe. As for this unjust death, Spain now asks to honour his memory. Despite all the treatment he received by the Cuban and Spanish governments, the humble poet, never used the poetic verses to denounce the unfair and unjust laws of society or to reproach the world for its lack of fairness. Moreover, Ayala points out that Placido belonged to that same Spanish race that murdered him out of a miserable social concern. Overall, only Cuban independence could cancel this "sangrienta historia", the most "negra, terrible y afrentosa que de cuba en el libro llegose a registrar…" (Ayala 147).

3.1.4. "Canto a la raza española", 1925

The sense of an ambivalent belonging, of a deep bond between Spanish and Cuban identity, is expressed by Cristina Ayala in an even more cogent manner in the poem

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[53] While some historians have picked up on such doubts, questioning whether the conspiracy ever really existed or at least downplaying it in favour of stressing the Spanish exaggeration of the threat, others have defended the idea that there was indeed an attempted revolution of slaves and free men at that time. After all, instead of a slave conspiracy, the *Escalera* conspiracy seems to have been a confabulation of the creole oligarchy with the Spanish colonial authorities destined to neutralise the abolitionist and liquidate the economic and social influence that free blacks began to have.

"Canto a la raza española", written the 12th of October 1925[54], when Cuban independence from Spain was already a reality. The poem shows a sharp irony, which becomes more and more pressing throughout it. The hymn is addressed to the Spanish race, which immediately Ayala indicates as the "race of her progenitors", establishing a family genealogy, parallel to the colonial one, thus creating a ground of hybridism, an indissoluble connection between Spaniards and Afro-Cubans, made of blood parentages. The "Raza heroica", the "Raza de mis progenitores", is ironically praised by Ayala for its indomitable firmness, demonstrated in their victory against the Moors. The Catholic kings in fact freed Spain from foreign invaders and the Queen mobilised resources to look for a "World in an unknown sea". The American "new" world was humiliated by Spanish power, since many nations became slaves of Spain in the new continent. Nonetheless, due to poor governance, Spain had lost its territories.

After this pompous praise for Spanish history, Ayala calms the conquistadors, saying that even if they have lost their conquests, their indomitable blood continues to flow in the conquered people. The Cubans, in fact, as worthy sons of Spain, have been able to maintain the paternal heritage of this land and to hold high the Spanish honour, dying to defend their own Holy Independence:

> Mas, esto no te asombre, pues por paterna herencia,
> los hijos de estas tierras, supieron del honor
> tener gallardo gesto, y morir con valor,
> por defender la Santa, preciada Independencia,
> o sacudir el yugo de un Gobierno opresor.
> (vv. 61-61)[55]

The ironic tone of Ayala's words aims to highlight the historical relationship between Spain and the independence of its territories. Spain as a country indeed had always fight for its independence. At the same time, the Spanish government did not want to allow the independence of the Cuban nation. Specifically, the legitimacy of Cubans' desire for independence for Ayala is given by the fact that Cubans are not

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[54] The note, written by Cristin Ayala claims that: "Este Canto fué escrito con arreglo a las bases ele los juegos florales que se iban a celebrar en la Habana el año 1924, con motivo de la Fiesta ele la Raza, pero no habiendo tenido efecto dicho Certámen, la autora lo publicó el año siguiente, dedicándolo a la Colonia Española de Güines. (Ñ. de la A.)".

[55] "But, do not be surprised by this, because by paternal inheritance, / the children of these lands, knew how to keep the honor / of the gallant gesture, and die with courage, / to defend the Holy, precious Independence, / or shake off the yoke of an oppressive government".

just people conquered by Spain; they are a people "created" in a certain sense by Spain. Accordingly, if the Spanish oppressing government is the father of the Cuban nation ("paterna herencia"), Africa is presumably one of its many mothers. This process of mixing and hybridisation, which gave Cubans the full right of access to independence, is absolutely crucial and innovative ("defender la Santa, preciada Independencia, o sacudir el yugo de un Gobierno opresor") also at a political level.

Cubans wanted to free themselves from the Spaniards in the same way as Spaniards freed themselves from the invasion of the Moors. By drawing this parallelism, Cristina Ayala equates the ancient Spanish glory to the Cuban one, a glory that consists in knowing how to drive away conquerors and oppressors:

> ¡Oh raza ilustre! ¡Raza de mis progenitores,
> donde también muy alto el intelecto brilla!
> Raza del gran Cervantes, del ínclito Zorrilla;
> de Lope, Garcilaso, y tantos escritores
> que de las buenas Letras han sido maravilla!
>
> Hoy quiero que mi canto hasta el Empíreo suba;
> y junto con el Himno que elevo a la memoria
> de los hijos egregios que venera tu historia,
> darte un cordial abrazo, en nombre de mi Cuba,
> ¡porque tu gloria antigua, fue también nuestra gloria...!
> (vv. 81-88)[56]

Moreover, claiming the ancient Spanish glory as Cuban glory ("tu gloria antigua, fue también nuestra gloria"), Ayala creates a genealogical link between the two cultures, eliminating the binomial us-them, yet insisting on the oppressive and colonising practices of the Spanish establishment, that were themselves the justification and reason which led Cubans to independence.

Women also played a role in the process of Spanish independence, and Ayala honoured them sincerely, especially with reference to Agustina Raimunda María Zaragoza y Domenech or Agustina of Aragón (1786-1857), a Spanish heroine who

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[56] "Oh illustrious race! Race of my ancestors, / where also very high the intellect shines! / Race of the great Cervantes, of the reverend Zorrilla; / of Lope, Garcilaso, and so many writers / that of the literature have been the wonder! / Today I want my singing to the Empyrean rise; / and together with the Hymn that I raise to memory / of the egregious sons who venerates your history, / I want to give you a warm hug, on behalf of my Cuba, / Because your ancient glory was also our glory...!".

defended Spain during the Peninsular War, first as a civilian and later as a professional officer in the Spanish Army[57]:

> Saludaré tan solo, con santa devoción
> ¡a una mujer sublime! ¡a una mujer divina!
> A la zaragozana; la intrépida Agustina
> que en Zaragoza estoica, al pie de su cañón,
> ¡haciendo siempre fuego, murió como heroína!
> (vv. 77-80)[58]

Moreover, also in the process of formation of the Cuban nation, as in the Spanish one, not only slaves were martyrs (who made the redemption of Cuba possible through their sacrifice), albeit women suffered the same fate.

3.2. Contingent as a flower: female subject lyrical representations in Ayala's poetry

3.2.1. "El arroyuelo y la flor", 1893

In the poem "El arroyuelo y la flor", written in 1893, Cristina Ayala explores explicitly the relation between nation-building and gender roles in society. "El Arroyuelo y la flor" is composed by twenty-six quatrains rhyming abba, and it is a narrative poem focused on an allegorical dialogue between a little river ("arroyuelo") and a flower ("la flor"). At the end of the poem, the allegory is explained as a symbol of the different social roles played by men and women in the formation of the Cuban nation. It is therefore didactic, inasmuch as the ethical and moral messages converge. The poem is a meta-discourse on the system of social relations and mediation on the formulation of a meaning within the poetic space. It begins with a bucolic scene, an enchanted garden (as the one of Eden) where a river and a flower stand. The flower at the foot of the watercourse, looking at it in its constant flow, begins to ask him questions, in a gloomy darkness scenario. While the flower stands at the edge of the river and therefore has the possibility to take part in the action only as an observer,

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[57] Known as "the Spanish Joan of Arc", Agustina had also been the subject of much folklore, mythology, and artwork, including sketches by Francisco Goya and the poetry of Lord Byron.
[58] "I will greet alone, with holy devotion / to a sublime woman! To a divine woman! / To the zaragozana; the intrepid Agustina / that in Stoic Zaragoza, at the foot of her cannon, / Always ready to fire, died as heroine!".

the river flows incessantly thus representing the boundless boundaries of action conferred on the social level by masculinity:

> Al pie de una selva umbría
> en un valle encantador,
> rápido y murmurador
> un arroyuelo corría.
>
> Una flor que en su ribera
> su lozanía ostentaba
> y en su linfa se miraba,
> le increpó de esta manera:
> (vv.1-6)[59]

The flower asks the river for the reason ("causa sagrada") of its continuous movement and advances a moral argument to persuade it to stop. It first identifies itself as the work of God, emphasising its qualities as a beautiful yet ephemeral ornamental object, p. 89

> "¿Dime arroyuelo, a do vas
> en contínua corriente
> y por que lánguidamente
> siempre murmurando estás?
>
> [...]
>
> ¿No te acusa la conciencia
> al ver que a una flor vecina
> si a tí su corola inclina
> la destrozas sin clemencia?
>
> Pues de tu corriente en pos,
> en revuelta confusión
> arrastras sin compasión
> a esa flor, obra de Dios.
>
> Dime ¿qus causa sagrada
> influye Arroyuelo en tí,
> para que corras así
> sin que te detenga nada?"
>
> El arroyuelo que oyó
> la queja de aquella flor,
> mirándola con amor
> de este modo contestó:
>
> "Yo, de mi corriente, en pos
> te arrastro, ¡flor inocente!

---

[59] "At the foot of a shady forest / in a lovely valley, / quicking and whispering /a river ran. / A flower that on its shore / its bloom boasted / and in its lymph looked at itsself, / rebuked him in this way:".

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más, no soy inconsecuente
a los decretos de Dios.
(vv. 9-12, 25-44)[60]
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While the river speaks as a full subject ("yo"), the flower continuously whispers as an object, even when it communicate in the first person ("dime"). Nonetheless, the subjectivity of the river depends on its destroying the flower, a destruction determined by the divine laws of nature. Looking at the river that eventually overwhelms it, the flower is not concerned on itself. The social genders roles for Ayala are fixed and established by natural and divine laws, which enshrine both the slavery of the flower (therefore of women) and the freedom of the river (of men) which is possible merely thanks to blossom's death.

Overall, the relationship between man and woman is thus exemplified by the relationship of the river (which flows incessantly) with the flower (which takes the water of the river to live, even though it is then be killed by its course), a relationship that follows the natural laws of God. Similarly to what Simon De Beauvoir will suggest years later[61], Ayala interprets the destiny of the woman as immanence, while man has a fate of transcendence ("en su alma anida otro amor mas grande y fuerte.. que le hace correr sin cesar, para internarse en el mar"). Yet, while for Simon De Beauvoir the transcendence of the man and the contingency of the women are not a biological or natural destinies, Cristina Ayala advises that it is nature, and through it God, that entails these laws. Yet, the gender roles imposed by nature, inevitably led to the destruction of female life and to its sacrifice, at the advantage of the fullness and vitality of male destiny. Therefore man is the only one called to intervene

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[60] "'Tell me river, where are you going / in continuous stream / and why languidly / Are you always whispering? [...] / Do not you feel guilty? / to see that if a neighboring flower / come close to you / you destroy it without mercy? / Well with your current, / in turmoil confusion / you drag without compassion / that flower, work of God. / Tell me what sacred cause / influences you, / that make you run like this / and nothing can stop you?" / The river that heard / the complaint of that flower, / looking at her with love / answered: / 'With my stream I drag you, innocent flower! / but, I'm not inconsequential / to the decrees of God'".

[61] Simon de Beauvoir Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) was one of the twentieth century's leading intellectuals. In her pivotal essay *The second sex*, De Beauvoir uses the concepts of *immanence* and *transcendence* to further explain the situation of women. Immanence is stagnation within a situation, while transcendence is reaching out into the future, through projects that open up freedom. Although every 'existent' – every human being – is both immanent and transcendent, some social practices may imprison one in immanence such that one is unable to achieve transcendence (freedom). This happens in every case of oppression. Insofar as they work on meaningful projects that reach into the future men occupy the sphere of transcendence, while women's oppression relegates them to the sphere of immanence, until they may be no longer aware that they have free choice.

actively in history, being consecrated to the supreme trinity of "Derecho", "Patria" and "Libertad".

In the second section of the poem, Ayala explains the meaning of this story, so far indeed, as Eden represents a point of origin of gender difference, this poem problematises the relationship between man and woman as a literary and political project. It symbolises then an allegory of what happens in life:

> Pues la mujer, cual la flor
> que se mira en el arroyo,
> busca del hombre el apoyo,
> y le consagra su amor.
>
> Pero él, en su alma anida
> otro amor más grande y fuerte,
> ¡que a veces le da la muerte
> y a veces le da la vida!
>
> Que al igual del arroyuelo,
> le hace correr sin cesar,
> para internarse en el mar
> donde le lleva su anhelo.
>
> y ese amor sublime y santo
> por quien el hombre se olvida
> de la mujer más querida
> y que le seduce tanto,
>
> ese fuego que arde en su alma
> cual una pira bendita,
> que a llevar le precipita
> del noble mártir la palma,
>
> ¡a una excelsa trinidad
> se lo consagra su pecho!
> que se llama, ¡ su Derecho;
> su Patria y su Libertad!
> (vv. 77-100)[62]

The male is seduced by an abyss without a name, represented by the ideal of national independence. The woman is overwhelmed by the man in this process of seeking transformation. The trace of women is destroyed in order to reappear in the nation's

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[62] "Well, the woman, like the flower / that looks at the river, / looks for man's support, / and consecrates her love. / But he, in his soul nests / a bigger and stronger love, / That sometimes gives death / and sometimes gives you life! / That like the river, / it makes him run without ceasing, / to go into the sea / where his longing leads him. / And that sublime and holy love / for whom man forgets / of the most beloved woman / and that seduces him so much, / that fire that burns in his soul / what a blessed pyre, / what to carry rushes / of the noble martyr the palm, / To an exalted trinity / he consecrates his chest! / what is called, his Right; / his Country and his Freedom!".

rhetoric: the flower, that is, the woman, is replaced by another love, that of the nation. In a liminal space between life and death, this love manifests itself as the supreme Trinity, Law-Nation-Freedom, and the biblical symbolism is again useful as a social metaphor (Callahan 92).

Liberty in Cuba in the nineteenth century meant both freedom from slavery and freedom from the Spaniards; for instance, in the abolitionist novel *Cecilia Valdes*, published in 1882, Cirillio Villaverde (1812-1894)[63] places the woman at the centre of her story as a symbol of the contradictions of the late nineteenth century Cuba. The protagonist, a mixed-race woman, epitomized the symbol of nationalism against white Spanish people. The body of the woman then converts in a sense into the site of contention of unresolved problems of race and class related to a nation that sought to reconcile with its history of slavery and colonialism. Consequently, defining womanhood becomes problematic as women saw themselves in the mirror of an ill-defined national project. Women were excluded from the process of nation building as viewed only as the progenitors of Cuban patriots[64]. Ayala's "El Arroyuelo y la flor" considers the cost of this national revolutionary ideal in which women are objectified as aesthetic objects and sacrificed for the good of the nation. Likewise, while through national independence the man goes towards a sea of new meanings, the woman remains trapped in the margins, to her inevitable destruction. Through this image, Ayala problematizes then the Romantic union man-woman-nation (Callahan 94). The creation of the allegorical form taken from the natural world stands then for a meta-discourse on social processes.

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[63] Cirillo Villaverde, a novelist and Cuban politician, was born in San Diego (Cuba) in 1812, and died in 1894. He began writing before the age of twenty with great success, but soon after, due to his separatist and independent ideas, he was persecuted and sentenced to ten years in prison by the Spanish authorities. He fled to the United States in 1849, continuing his work as a novelist. He can be considered, in a sense, a precursor of the realistic school, not only for the artistic substance of his novels, but also for the aesthetic conscience that he had and of which he also wrote. His first novel was *Cecilia Valdés o la Loma de Ángel*, a romantic novel considered one of the most representative of Cuba, both for its themes and its argument; likewise, it can be considered the first Cuban novel. It is a novel in two volumes, the first one was published by the literary press of Lino Valdés in the middle of 1839. The complete work would be published in New York in 1879, and, already in its definitive version, in the same city in 1882.

[64] For further readings on female figures in Cuban independence (as *mambisa* and mother patriots) see: Lynn Stoner (2003), "Militant Heroines and the Consecration of the Patriarchal State: The Glorification of Loyalty, Combat and National Suicide in the Making of Cuban National Identity", *Cuban Studies*, 34, pp. 71-96.

Overall, for what concerns gender roles in society, Ayala's poetry show a hymn to women patriots and writers who actively participate in the life of the nation, both in the Cuban and Spanish one, entering history, thus assuming the possibility of transcendence. Yet, poems often put a strong emphasis on the contingency of women in the world and in society and on their fragility. The vision of woman as a being abandoned to herself and exposed to an unjust society, as the one that emerges in the "El Arroyuelo y la flor", is reinforced by other equally distressing images that Ayala presents in different poems.

In the poem "Una rosa despues del baile" (1890), for instance, Ayala describes a rose that is torn from the earth to be taken in hand and smelled. The poem ends with the statement that it is unfair to deprive a flower of its life just for taste. Whether the flower represents the feminine virtue or woman's life itself, the reference to the sense of female powerlessness with respect to the usurpation suffered remains alive. Accordingly, in the poem "Lamento del Alma" (1901), the poet describes the solitude of the lonely woman, who decides not to marry and not to have family, which means to choose to be abandoned by society. The sense of injustice and impotence is further emphasised in "En el arroyo", written in 1912 by Ayala, in which the poet describes the feminine destiny as "black": she tells the story of a woman who meets a man, a modern Don Giovanni whom she falls in love with. After having dishonoured her, however, he abandons her (Ayala 54). Despite the wrong suffered, however, the woman does not have the support of society, which instead praises the infamous man and accuses the offended woman. In spite of everything, it seems that women in society are weak and victims of crime. Therefore, for Ayala both the freedom of the Cuban nation and Afro-Cubans' freedom from slavery involved a sacrifice from the side of women. Women are the ones who have to understand their social role and adopt it, because the historical events that they are experiencing require it. National freedom represents then a compromise for women, since they are supporting it from the backstage of history. Simultaneously, in history, freedom could not have been possible without female silent work, as it would have not been possible without the sacrifice of black people in Cuba.

Cristina Ayala's poetry gives then an insight on female Afro-Cuban reality at the end of the nineteenth century, from an internal point of view. From a constant review

of the mechanisms of rhetorical enunciation, her poetic work problematises the relationship between poetry and identity, incorporating to the poetic forms inherited from the Hispanic tradition, contents that emphasise the historical legacy of slavery. The writer reflects on social inequalities based on racial and gender categories and problematises them throughout poetry. By articulating her dual status as a woman and as a person of African descent, Ayala is able to claim for herself the representativeness of both groups. This makes her work able to offer a valuable opportunity to approach the experience of a woman of African offspring during the process of organising Cuban civil society before and after its independence from the Spanish government and the end of slavery and of the slave trade.

CHAPTER V

PORTUGUESE-BRAZILIAN LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter aims to examine the novel *Úrsula* (1859) written by Maria Firmina do Reis (1822-1917), the first Afro-Brazilian female writer of whom we have actual evidence[1]. As for the analytical investigation on her novel, *Úrsula*, there are not academic studies dedicated entirely to it, and there are only a few book's chapters that critically addressed it, such as "Textual hybridity in Maria Firmina dos Reis's 'Úrsula'" (2008) by Dawn Duke and "Úrsula, Primeiro Romance Afro-Brasileiro" (2006) by Eduardo de Assis Duarte. Additionally, few critical short essays have been published as an introduction or afterword to the novel in its various editions, namely the prologue by Horácio Ameida to the 1975 edition, the introduction of the 1988 edition by Charles Martin, and the afterword by Eduardo de Assis in 2004.[2] The present research attempts to enrich the critical knowledge of Maria Firmina's work, inasmuch as it could help to establish a transnational dialogue between Afro-American literatures and to facilitate international discussions on the legacy of the slave trade.

The chapter will be structured in five parts. Firstly, I will illustrate the life and works of Maria Firmina dos Reis and the events that led to her novel's discovery. Secondly, I will make some remarks regarding the relationships between the Brazilian literary canon and the work of Maria Firmina, highlighting the innovative aspects of her writing. In the third and fourth sections, I will analyse the novel *Úrsula*, focusing on the links between cultural belonging and gender as they emerge in the text and on the specificity of the novel's characters. Finally, the last section will focus on how Maria Firmina expresses a characteristic desire for freedom, which

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[1] Indeed, before Maria Firmina dos Reis, another Afro-Brazilian woman, Rosa Maria Egipciaca da Vera Cruz (1719-1778) wrote literature. Rosa Maria wrote her autobiography, *Sagrada teologia do amor divino das almas peregrinas* before Maria Firmina dos Reis was born. Yet, Rosa Maria's confessor destroyed her manuscript when she was accused of heresy; therefore, it is not possible to know neither the exact date in which it was written, nor the actual content of it. Her story was made known by Luiz Mott who wrote a biography of the Saint, *Rosa Egipcíaca: uma santa africana no Brasil* (1993).

[2] Other critical works on Firmina's novel can be found in master's theses or PhD dissertations. Among them, the most remarkable studies are that of Juliano Carrupt do Nascimento (2009), alongside with that of Algemira Macêdo Mendes (2007) and Adriana Barbosa de Oliveira (2007).

is collective and revolutionary in the sense that it calls for a radical social and cultural change.

1. Maria Firmina dos Reis, "Uma Maranhense"

Maria Firmina dos Reis was born in São Luís do Maranhão, in Brazil, on 11 October 1825, registered as a daughter of João Pedro Esteves[3] and Leonor Felipe dos Reis, a slave. As an illegitimate child and an Afro-Brazilian daughter, she lived in a context of extreme social and racial segregation. Thus, at the age of five, Maria Firmina moved to Guimarães with her mother and her cousins, where she lived for most of her life. In 1917, according to Luísa Lobo she died, "solteira, pobre e cega, e desconhecida da crítica de seu tempo" / "single, poor and blind, and unknown by the readers of her time" (222)[4]. Thanks to her cousin on her mother's side, Sotero de Reis, a writer and grammarian, Maria Firmina acquired an education that she herself enriched with numerous readings along with the study of French language, in which she was fluent.

Maria Firmina's first steps against the exclusion of women from the literary arena had already taken place in 1847 when she became one of the first female teachers in Guimarães at the age of 22. In her biography entitled *Maria Firmina dos Reis: Fragmentos de uma vida* (1976), José Nascimento Moraes Filho recalls that Maria had always been sympathetic to the oppressed. For instance, on the day of her graduation, she refused to use a palanquin since: "Negro não é animal para se andar montado nele!"/ "The negro is not an animal which you ride on!" (qtd. in Duke 63). A year before her retirement, Maria founded the first mixed public school of Maranhão, which lasted from 1880 to 1890**.** The foundation of a mixed school and, above all, of a public school by a woman of African descent was an event of

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[3] Unfortunately, as far as I know, there not available information on her father.
[4] If not otherwise specified, every English translation from now on is going to be made by me. So far, there is not any English translation neither of the novel *Úrsula* nor of Maria Firmina works. The same applies to many critical essays and researches on Brazilian literature quoted in this chapter.

revolutionary importance at the time, when education in Brazil was distinct for men and women and divided according to one's social class[5].

As testified by Zahidé Lupinacci Muzart in her groundbreaking anthology *Escritoras Brasileiras do Século XIX* (2000), Maria Firmina's literary production was not extensive yet undoubtedly innovative. Firmina published the first abolitionist novel written in Brazil[6] in 1859 under the name of "Uma Maranhense", followed by the publication of the Indianist[7] novel *Gupeva* in 1861 and by a collection of poems, *Cantos à beira-mar*, in 1871. In 1887, Maria Firmina wrote the short abolitionist story *A escrava* and one year later she composed a hymn for the emancipation of slaves. Furthermore, she was an active actor of the public opinion in her region, since she published many poems, stories and chronicles in various local journals and newspapers such as *A Verdadeira Marmota, Semanário Maranhense, O Domingo, O País, Pacotilha, Federalistas* and *O Jardim dos Maranhenses*. Apart from being a

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[5] For a documentary and bibliographical history of the development of public education in nineteenth century Brazil, see Almeida, J. R. P. (1989), *História da instrução pública no brasil (1500-1889)*, São paulo: Educa; Barroso, J. L. (2005) *A instrucção publica no brasil,* Pelotas: Seiva; Filho F. (2000), *500 anos de educação no Brasil*, Belo horizonte: Autêntica; Werebe, M. J. G. (1985), "Educação", in: Campos, P. M., Holanda, S. B., *História geral da civilização brasileira*, São paulo: Difel; Neto C. (1911) *Alma: a educacao feminina*, Rio de Janeiro: Tip. Da Empr. Litter e Tipografica.

[6] According to José Nascimento Moraes Filho, *Úrsula* is the first known Brazilian abolitionist novel and one of the earliest written by a female author in Brazil (Morais Filho 1975). However, there has been a long debate about Firmina being the first female novelist of Brazil. Horácio de Almeida and Menezes, for instance, affirms that although Brazilian author Teresa Margarida da Silvia e Orta wrote *Aventuras de Diófanes* in 1752, since she published it in Portugal and her story is related to Greek mythology, her novel cannot be consider Brazilian. If this is the case, Firmina would become the first female Brazilian novelist (Menezes: 570-575). On the other hand, researchers like Wilson Martins (*História da Inteligência Brasileira*, 1977: 94) and Temístocles Linhares claim that other female novels, such as Eufrosina Barandas' *A filósofa por amor* (1845), Nísia Floresta's *Daciz, ou A jovem completa* (1847), or Ildefonsa Laura's *Lição a meus filhos* (1854), preceded the novel of Maria Firmina dos Reis. Notwithstanding the importance of the debate, I prefer to concentrate on the pioneering aspects of Firmina's novel, regardless of its status as the first Brazilian novel written by a woman.

[7] In Brazilian literature, *Indianism* is a term that refers to the idealization of Indians, sometimes portrayed as mythical national heroes. It was one of the peculiarities of Brazilian Romanticism, although it was also present in the Brazilian figurative arts during Century XIX. The idealization of Indians also had a nationalistic aim, since it praised the time when the Portuguese colonisers had not yet arrived. It had many different connotations, such as the Baroque Indianism, present in the work of Father José de Anchieta; Arcadian Indianism employed by Basilio da Gama, author of the epic poem *O Uraguai* (1769); Romantic Indianism, such in the work of José de Alencar, in prose, with the novels *O Guarani* (1874), *Iracema* (1865) and *Ubirajara* (1874), among others. Some examples of Indianism outside the literary field are the paintings *Moema* (1866), by Victor Meirelles, Marabá and *O Último Tamoio* (1883), by Rodolfo Amoedo. See: Ricardo, Cassiano. *O indianismo de Gonçalves Dias*. Conselho Estadual de Cultura, 1964 and Svampa, Maristella. *Debates latinoamericanos indianismo, desarrollo, dependencia y populismo*. 2016.

teacher and a writer, Maria Firmina was also a musician. Maria composed popular and classical music (such as *Autos de bumba meu boi*), together with music for *Versos da garrafa,* written by Gonçalves Dias – a song that is still famous today.

Maria Firmina dos Reis spent more than a century on the margins of Brazilian literary historiography, as in her time she was only mentioned by two historical researchers, Ribeiro do Amaral and Jerônimo de Viveiros, and by two literary critics, Sacramento Blake and Raimundo de Menezes. In the article "A imprensa no Maranhão: jornais e jornalistas" (*Typographic Magazine*, 1913) Ribeiro do Amaral briefly mentioned Firmina among the collaborators of the *Semanário Maranhense,* whereas Jerônimo de Viveiros, in the article "Quadros da vida maranhense" (*Jornal do dia*, 1963), pointed to *Úrsula* as the second novel ever published in Maranhão. Yet, outside of Maranhão, only Sacramento Blake and Raimundo de Menezes cited Firmina's work. The former wrote about Firmina in an entry for the *Brazilian Bibliographical Dictionary* in 1900 and the latter, in turn, included the author in the second issue of the *Brazilian Literary Dictionary*, in 1978.

Nevertheless, it was thanks to the efforts of a contemporary Brazilian writer, poet and journalist, Nascimento Moraes Filho (1922-2009) that Maria Firmina's work started to be critically studied. Nascimento Moraes Filho became acquainted with the work of Maria Firmina dos Reis by chance in 1973, while he was studying nineteenth-century newspapers in the Benedito Leite Public Library (in São Luís, Brazil). In the same year, Nascimento Moraes Filho gave an interview to the newspaper *O Imparcial* about Maria Firmina dos Reis' literary production. The interview was subsequently transformed into news by the Southern Agency, which resulted in the author's exposure beyond the limits of Maranhão.

However, the year 1975 can be considered a historical landmark for the reception of the work of Maria Firmina dos Reis in Brazil, insofar as in this year, the commemoration of the birth anniversary of the author gave rise to several events in her honour. Among them were the publication of a facsimile edition of the novel *Úrsula*, the biography *Maria Firmina: fragmentos de uma vida* written by Nascimento Moraes Filho, the novel *Gupeva*, and the tale *A Escrava* together with riddles, excerpts from her *Album*, musical compositions, and various documents. In the meantime, the Maranhão critic Josué Montello also honoured Maria Firmina dos

Reis with an article published in the *Jornal do Brasil*, arousing scholars' interest in her work.

Later on, another critical edition of the novel *Úrsula* was published in 1988, edited by researcher Luiza Lobo, and accompanied by an analytical preface by scholar Charles Martin entitled *A rare vision of freedom*. In 2004, thanks to Editora Mulheres and the PUC publishing house of Minas Gerais, a new edition of the novel was published with an afterword by Professor Eduardo de Assis Duarte[8] entitled *Maria Firmina and the beginnings of Afro-Brazilian fiction*. The latter is the edition studied in this chapter since, as the editor affirms in the introduction, "uma cópia fac-similar de um exemplar de 1859 permitiu que esta edição fosse devidamente atualizada quanto à ortografia, sobretudo a acentuação […] e uns poucos erros evidentes"/ "a fac-simile of a 1859 copy of the book allowed the actualization of the novel, especially for the orthography and the accents" and still, the specific aspects of Firmina's writing have remained unchanged ("Maria Firmina dos Reis características proprias […] procurou-se canservá-la o mais fielmente possível" (Reis 9-10).

2. *Úrsula*, a Gothic novel

2.1. The title, the prologue, and the form of the novel

Since the first edition of *Úrsula*, Maria Firmina dos Reis published her work under the pseudonym "Uma Maranhense". It was a common practice in a time when women and Afro-descendants of modest origins in Brazil suffered many limitations in public activities, including in the literary field[9] (Duarte 266-267). Even so, the

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[8] Eduardo Duarte de Assis is a Brazilian scholar who has been long interested in literary studies on Afro-Brazilian literature. His work, of international value, includes critical collections such as *Literatura Afro-brasileira: 100 autores do século XVIII ao XXI* (2014), *Falas do outro: literatura, gênero, etnicidade* (2010) and *Contos do mar sem fim: antologia afro-brasileira* (2010).
[9] On the condition of black women in nineteenth century Brazil, see: Caldwell K. L. (2007), *Negras in Brazil, Re-envisioning Black Women, Citizenship, and the Politics of Identity,* New Brunswick-New Jersey-London: Rutgers University Press; Kuznesof E. A. (1991), "Sexual Politics, Race and Bastard-Bearing in Nineteenth-Century Brazil", in *Journal of Family History*, 16: 3, pp. 241-160; Nazzari M. (1990), *Disappearance of the Dowry, women, families and social change in Sao Paulo*, Brazil (1600-1900), Stanford: Stanford University Press; Cardoso, F. H. (1962), *Capitalismo e escravidão no Brasil meridional: o negro na sociedade escravocrata do Rio Grande do Sul*, São Paulo: Difusão Européia do Livro; Quintaneiro T. (1996), *Retratos de mulher: O cotidiano feminino no Brasil sob o olhar de*

suggestion that the author was a woman ("uma"), her affiliation with a peripheral Brazilian province and the innovative way in which she dealt with the issues of slavery and gender roles was probably enough to decree the disappearance of her work from Brazilian literary canon.

The novel *Úrsula*, then, was published for the first time in 1859. In the prologue, Maria Firmina dos Reis attests her awareness that the "mesquinho e humilde"/ "mean and humble" book will be published surrounded by the "indiferentismo glacial de uns"/ "glacial indifference of some" and the "riso mofador de outros"/ "the moking laugh of others" (Reis 13). Either way, Maria Firmina decides to bear it ("ainda assim o dou a lume"/ "still give it light"). The author knows that the little importance that will be given to it depends on the fact that it was written by "uma mulher"/ "a woman" and "uma mulher brasileira, de educação acanhada e sem o trato e conversação dos homens ilustrados"/ "a Brazilian woman, of low education and without the mark and the language of the illustrated men" (13). Even so, the maternal love of the author for her creation motivates her to publish it so that it can serve to other women writers to "produzir cousa melhor, ou quando menos, sirva esse bom acolhimento de incentivo para outras, que com imaginação mais brilhante, com educação mais acurada, com instrução mais vasta e liberal, tenham mais timidez do que nós"/ "To produce something better, or at least, that the positive reception of the novel may serve to encourage other women with a brighter imagination and a more accurate and liberal education, even if with more shyness than us" (14).

The title of the novel, *Úrsula*, is conceivably a reference to Saint Úrsula, a British martyr who lends her name to the congregation of Ursulines[10]. In the British version of Saint Úrsula's story, the nun was asked by a pagan prince to marry, even though she promised herself to Jesus Christ. Úrsula takes her time to decide, praying for her

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viageiros do seculo XIX, Petropolis: Vozes; Ferreira M. (1999), *Mulher, genero e political publicas*, Sao Luis: UFM;Fonseca M. N. S. (2000), *Brazil Afro-Brasileiro*, Belo Horizonte: Autentica.

[10] In Brazil, a slightly different version the story of Saint Úrsula's life was disseminated by Father Anchieta José de Anchieta y Díaz de Clavijo. Father Anchieta José de Anchieta (1534-1597) was a Spanish Jesuit missionary to the Portuguese colony of Brazil in the second half of the XVI century. A highly influential figure in Brazil's history in the first century after its European discovery, Anchieta was one of the founders of São Paulo in 1554 and of Rio de Janeiro in 1565. He is also considered the father of Brazilian literature. Anchieta was additionally involved in the religious instruction and conversion to the Catholic faith of the Indian population; his efforts were crucial to the establishment of stable colonial settlements in the colony. See: Campbell, T. (1907), "Joseph Anchieta", *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, New York: Robert Appleton Company; Dominian G. H (1958), *Apostle of Brazil, The Biography of Padre José De Anchieta* (1534-1597), Exposition Press.

suitor to convert and resolves to flee the seas with eleven other virgins. Nevertheless, as soon as they reach Cologne, in Germany, they are barbarously massacred by the Huns. Only Úrsula is spared due to her beauty and nobility. Yet, the King of the Huns falls in love with Úrsula and asks her to marry him. As a result of her prior vows to Jesus Christ, she refuses the marriage offer and is later crucified by the pagan Huns. It is therefore possible to perceive intertextualities between the novel and the Saint's story, since both in the novel and in the Saint story, Úrsula is a character that fights against marriages imposed by powerful men.

At the end of *Úrsula*'s preface, Firmina states that she wished that critics would support her book, for good criticism could allow other and better-educated women to publish better books. However, she expresses concern that this will not occur. These statements are proof of the author's desire to have literary recognition for her work by her contemporary critics, an idea similar to that which appears in the preface of the novel *D. Narcisa de Villar*, published in 1851 by Indígena do Ipiranga (pseudonym of Ana Luísa de Azevedo Castro). Through the writing of prefaces, female writers could express personal feelings about their work and discuss their ideas regarding feelings of repudiation or non-acceptance by society. Even though Maria Firmina dos Reis is well aware of the limits society imposed to women of her status, she knows that the only way to be accepted by interpreters is to explicitly diminish her value: it is only in this manner, in fact, that intellectuals would not feel in competition with her. The uses of modesty tropes in female writings can be intended as a proto-feminist practice inasmuch as it was a way for women writers to enter the public literary domain, which classified them inferior in respect to men.[11] The use of expressions of self-deprecation or insufficiency, far from providing evidence that the authors had uncritically internalized oppressive patriarchal attitudes toward authorship, was an astute way to challenge them (as underlined in Chapter IV).

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[11] As researcher Patricia Pender suggested in her study on Early-Modern English female writers (Pender 2012). For further studies on the rhetoric of modesty that are more focused on British Romantic literature see: Crisafulli L. M., Pietropoli C. (2002) *Le poetesse Romantiche, tra identità e genere*, Roma: Carocci Editore; and Mellor A., (1993) *Romanticism and Gender*, New York: Routledge.

Moreover, the prologue of *Úrsula* establishes the cultural background surrounding the project of the novel. In 1859, prose fiction took its first steps in Brazil[12], and Maria Firmina was the first to discuss political issues in her novels through denouncing the injustices that the Brazilian patriarchal system caused to slaves and women. The prologue also defines the distance between the Brazilian intellectual culture, (a circle of a white elite that winked at European culture, to which Firmina refers as "homens ilustrados, que aconselham, que discutem e que corrigem"/ "Enlightened men who advise, question and correct", 13), and the Brazilian people, "com uma instrução misérrima, apenas conhecendo a língua de seus pais, e pouco lida, o seu cabedal intelectual é quase nulo"/ "miserly educated, only knowing the language of their parents, and poorly read, whose intellectual background is almost nil" (13), of which Firmina herself felt part.

In addition to the prologue, the novel is composed by twenty chapters and an epilogue, and it is narrated by an omniscient extra diegetic narrator. Throughout the course of the narrative, psychological descriptions and conjectures regarding the intimate feelings of the characters are made, which lead the reader to reflect on the internal conflicts they have faced. In some passages, the language becomes poetic, evoking the bucolic landscape that surrounds virtuous characters in contrast to the gloomy atmospheres of the wicked ones. As the plot is structured through slots, the voices go in parallel, albeit they all intersect. Maria Firmina dos Reis uses the technique of the mixed narrative, by alternating the narrator's voice to that of the characters, some of them invested in the responsibility of telling their experiences in first person. Additionally, there are four intertwined narratives that give rise to the plot: the story of slave Túlio, who saves Tancredo's life and brings him to Úrsula's house; that of Tancredo, narrated by himself; the life of Úrsula's mother, exposed by herself, and the misfortunes of slave Susana, who remembers her life in Africa as well as her enslavement and journey to Brazil. The four narratives fit together composing the body of the novel and carry out the creative process of intertwined narrations.

The main characters of the novel are Úrsula, the daughter of Luísa B. and the niece of *Comendador* Fernando, a landowner; the Afro-descendant slaves Túlio,

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[12] See: Cândido, Antônio. *O romantismo no Brasil*. Humanitas, 2004.

Susana, and Pai Antero; the knight Tancredo, his father and mother, and her ex-lover's orphan Adelaide, together with other secondary characters such as Fernando's chaplain and his overseers. The tale presents features of realism – especially thanks to the history of the African Diaspora narrated by slave Susana –, as well as sentimentalism and Gothicism. The solidarity towards the oppressed displays aspects of absolute innovation if compared to other abolitionist Brazilian novels of the nineteenth century, inasmuch as the author allows the character to express an internal point of view on slavery, letting the slaves speak in first person. Overall, the novel's frame is defined by a straightforward story line endorsed by characters that find themselves in extreme situations, invested by sudden changes in their destinies.
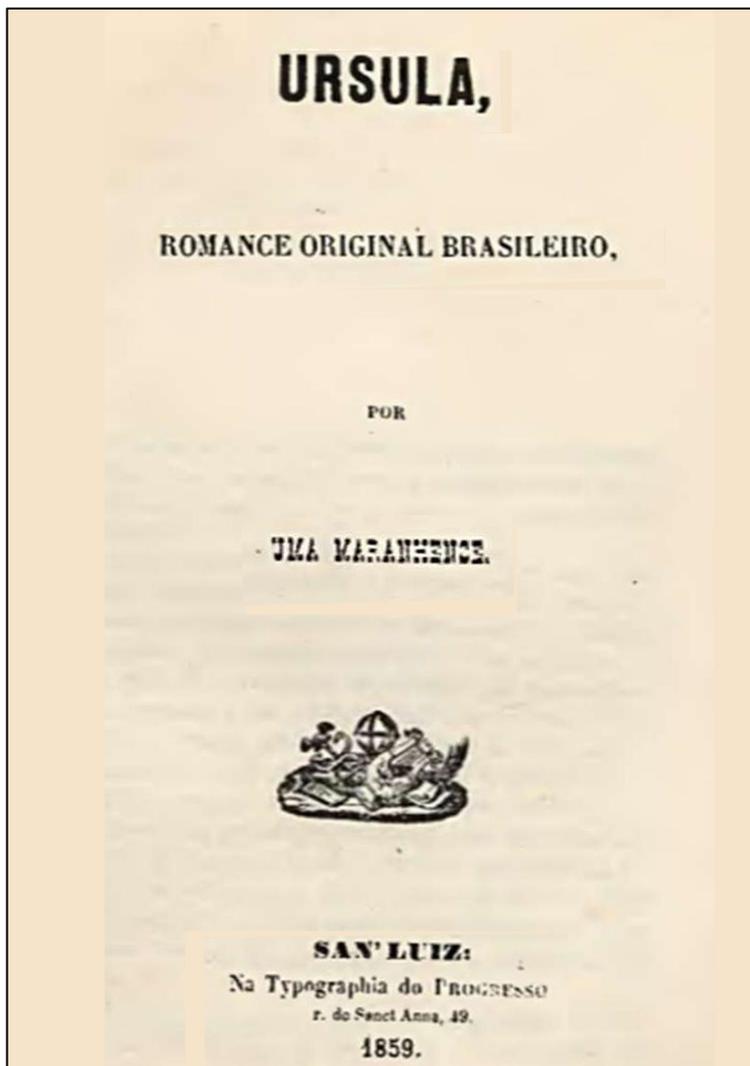

Image 4: Cover page of *Ursula* (1859)

2.2. The intricacy of bare-lives in nineteenth century Brazil

The story opens up with a knight who is walking pensively after having fallen from his horse, nearly losing his life. Túlio, a noble-hearted man with "sangre africano" (bounded to the "odiosa cadeia da escravidão", 22) passes by and saves the knight, taking him to his mistress' house. The mistress, Luísa B., is a paralytic woman living alone with her daughter, Úrsula, due to the mysterious death of her husband. Úrsula, a beautiful young woman, starts to mercifully take care of Tancredo, the knight, with the help of the slave Túlio. Right from the beginning, the narrative is enriched by reflections on the evil of slavery, strengthened when Tancredo, recovered from his accident, decides to give to Túlio, his saviour, the money to buy his freedom. Once Tancredo starts to feel better, Úrsula begins to feel troubled without knowing why, until, on one of her solitary walks, Tancredo follows her, declaring his love.

At this point in the narrative, the story is enriched by micro-narratives told directly by the characters without the intervention of the omniscient voice. Tancredo indeed tells Úrsula his tremendous past romantic experience: he fell in love with an orphan, Adelaide, whom his tyrannical father allowed to marry only on the condition that Tancredo would go to a faraway province to work for one year. After this compulsory exile, Tancredo returns to his house but finds his mother – who has always supported him against his cruel father – dead, replaced by Adelaide, who is now married to his father. Upon hearing this sad story, the shy Úrsula feels even more empathy and love for Tancredo, who asks her to marry him. The couple goes to Úrsula's mother, Luísa B., in order to obtain the permission to marry, and this is when Luísa B. starts to tell then the second interlinked story. Her tremendous brother, Fernando de P., did not approve her marriage to a poor man (Paulo B., Úrsula's father) who mistreated her and dissipated the entire family fortune. He disapproved to the extent that Fernando killed Paulo B. and took over Luísa's house, leaving her alone with Úrsula. The third interlocking narrative begins when Túlio tells slave Susana that he has bought his freedom thanks to Tancredo and therefore wants to accompany him as a token of thanks. Subsequently, Susana relates in first person the story of her capture in Africa, reminding Túlio that what he has bought is not true freedom, since the gratitude he has for Tancredo keeps him still in chain.

The story could have had a successful conclusion, with the marriage of the Úrsula and Tancredo, if it was not for Fernando, who, while hunting, encounters Úrsula, his niece, and falls in love with her. Fernando, described as an overbearing land and slave owner, wants to take Úrsula by force, who at her mother's death will legally be his property. On her deathbed, Luísa warns Úrsula of her uncle's plan, telling her to run away and marry Tancredo as soon as possible. Úrsula manages to escape and, while in the cemetery, meets Tancredo. As they head to the convent ready to get married, Fernando joins them, putting Túlio in prison and shooting at Tancredo. At that point, Úrsula becomes the property of Fernando and proceeds to lose her mind. Despair makes her sink into a hopeless folly for which Fernando knows he is responsible. Fernando decides therefore to shut himself up in a convent, where he does not repent of the countless murders he has stained until the very end; instead, he only damns himself for not being capable of conquering the heart of Úrsula.

Many studies[13] analysing the structure of the story state that the narrative is chiefly structured upon two love triangles, always destroyed by the figure of the father-master tyrant. On one hand, there is the love triangle composed of Tancredo, Adelaide, and Tancredo's tyrannical father. Likewise, the other triangle is that of Úrsula, Tancredo, and Fernando. However, the description of love relationships as a triangle excludes two fundamental characters of the story, which are the mothers. The love affairs in the novel, in fact, are always mediated in a crucial manner by the mother of Tancredo and by the mother of Úrsula. Yet, despite the crucial mothers' roles, their words do not have the strength to become action (as they are always more vulnerable than male characters). Still, their presence is fundamental to the development of the story, inasmuch as they actively support positive characters' fortune. Therefore, I would suggest that the story is structured around narrative intertwining, rather than by love triangles. Moreover, since the narration moves from one character to another, there is not a single protagonist, being rather a choral novel.

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[13] See: Duarte, E. de A. (2004), "Pósfacio: Maria Firmina dos Reis e os primórdios da ficção Afro-brasileira", in *Úrsula*, Florianópolis: Ed. Mulheres; Oliveira, A. B. (2007), *Gênero e etnicidade no romance Úrsula, de Maria Firmina dos Reis*, Dissertação de mestrado, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais; Nascimiento do J. (2009), *O Romance Úrsula De Maria Firmina Dos Reis: Estética e Ideologia no Romantismo Brasileiro*, Dissertação de Mestrado apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em LetrasVernáculas da Universidade Federal do Riode Janeiro.

Memory is another essential feature for the development of the fiction, as it is deployed by Maria Firmina as a discursive device in a creative and revolutionary manner. In fact, the narration is constructed on memory, which represents the inaction in the novel, while events develop from actions. As Juliano Carrupt do Nascimento (2009) states, the narrative plot is based on digressions from the enterprises made by characters who tell their past story. Action and inaction are then intertwined in the narrative through the intervention of the poetic memory.

Eventually, the story of the characters is revealed, giving meaning to happenings stemming from narrative digressions. The bearers of these memories are subjects that have been historically excluded from the production of knowledge, namely a slave and a disabled woman. Tancredo, Luísa B. and Susana, allow the action to unfold through their stories on the narrative level and flourish into active subjects thanks to their memories. Being bearers of memories allows these socially marginalized characters to gain agency. Their subjectivities become a conveyer of historical truths, in contrast with their inability to take decisive action within reality, due to their social position. Ultimately, the construction of the narrative relies on the memory of the characters, since memory has a strong political meaning in the novel and it is strictly connected to the feeling of *saudade*.

2.3. *Úrsula* as a Gothic novel

Úrsula appears as the only Brazilian novel of the nineteenth century that critically unites aesthetics and ideology in the elaboration of its characters, a fact that distorts the statement of researcher Haroldo Paranhos, who, commenting on Brazilian Romanticism, stated that: "Se não foi inteiramente original, é porque não possuímos tradições nem organização étnica e sociológica que nos permitisse alimentar tal pretensão" / "If it was not entirely original, it is because we neither have traditions, nor ethnic and sociological organization, that would allow us to feed such pretension" (45). The originality of the text resides on its capacity to address specific Brazilian relations of power pertaining to gender and race, through the frame of

Brazilian Romanticism[14] and thus employing the description of nature, a peculiar form of nationalism, and the employment of a minor language as well as with a political and aesthetic use of memory.

The ethnic and cultural reality of nineteenth century Brazil is highlighted in the novel *Úrsula* by many narrative strategies devices and, in particular, through the genre of Romantic Gothic novel, which allowed Maria Firmina dos Reis to explore relations of power in colonial Brazil in a creative, innovative, and witty manner. As Ana Paula Araujo dos Santos and Júlio França stress in their inspiring article, *O páter-famílias como vilão gótico em Úrsula, de Maria Firmina dos Reis* (2017), Gothic fiction is a literary genre that explores violent and transgressive situations in attempt to inspire fear, terror, or repugnance in the reader.[15] Yet, due to its transgressiveness, female Gothic literature has been considered immoral and was

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[14] The European Romantic Movement began to influence Brazilian literature on a large scale around 1836, principally through the efforts of the expatriate poet Gonçalves de Magalhães (1811-1882). A number of young poets, such as Casimiro de Abreu (1839-1860), began experimenting with the new style soon afterward. This period produced some of the first canonical works of Brazilian literature. The key features of these works were the stress on sentiments, nationalism, and celebration of nature, accompanied by the use of colloquial language. Romantic literature soon became very popular in Brazil. Novelists like Joaquim Manuel de Macedo (1820-1882), Manuel Antônio de Almeida (1830-1861) and José de Alencar (1829-1877) published their works in serial form in the newspapers and became national celebrities. Around 1850, a transition began, centred on Álvares de Azevedo (1831-1852) works. Azevedo's short story collection *Noite na Taverna* and his poetry, collected posthumously in *Lira dos Vinte Anos*, became influential. Azevedo was largely influenced by the poetry of Lord Byron and Alfred de Musset. This second Romantic generation was obsessed with morbidity and death. At the same time, poets such as Castro Alves, who wrote of the horrors of slavery (*Navio Negreiro*), began writing works with a specific progressive social agenda. The two trends coincided in one of the most important accomplishments of the Romantic era: the establishment of a Brazilian national identity based on Indian ancestry (*Indianism*) and the rich nature of the country. These traits first appeared in Gonçalves Dias' narrative poem *I-Juca-Pirama*, but soon became widespread. As mentioned later in this Chapter, many literary critics lament European influences in Brazilian Romanticism. See: Amora, A. Soares, A Literatura Brasileira, O Romantismo 1833-1838/1878-1881, 3vols (São Paulo: Editora Cultrix, 1967); Broca, J. Brito, and Alexandre Eulálio, Românticos, Pré-Românticos, UltraRomânticos: Vida Literária e Romantismo Brasileiro (São Paulo: Polis, 1979); Cunha, Fausto, O Romantismo no Brasil (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Paz e Terra, 1971); *Galvão, Walnice Nogueira (2005). As Musas sob Assédio: Literatura e indústria cultural no Brasil; Coutinho, Afrânio (2004). A Literatura no Brasil;* Guinsburg, Jacó, ed., 'Romantismo, Historicismo e História', in O Romantismo (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2002).

[15] As for Brazilian literature, researchers such as Maurício Menon (2007), Daniel Serravalle de Sá (2010), Sandra Vasconcelos (2012), Alexander Meireles (2016), Fernando Monteiro de Barros (2014) and Marina Sena (2017) have demonstrated that Brazilian fictional production is heavily tributary of the English Gothic tradition. For a detailed analysis of the Brazilian Gothic see: Menon, Maurício Cesar. Figurações do gótico e de seus desmembramentos na literatura brasileira: de 1843 a 1932. Tese de Doutorado em Letras. Faculdade de Letras, UEL. Londrina, Paraná, 2007; Vasconcelos, Sandra Guardini Teixeira. *Sentidos do demoníaco em José de Alencar*. In: Ilha do Desterro, n° 62, Florianópolis, 2012. pp. 271-292; Sena, Marina. *O Gótico-Naturalismo na Literatura Brasileira Oitocentista*. Dissertação de mestrado. Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Letras, 2017.

very often excluded from canonical literature, especially in the nineteenth century.[16] This was the case until the twentieth century, when it was rehabilitated, particularly in British literature[17], with the study of authors such as Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823)[18]. Ana Paula Araujo dos Santos and Júlio Franca (89) attest that various studies in Brazil have recently given Gothic authors visibility; among them many women, including Maria Firmina dos Reis[19]. They also argue that the Gothic elements of *Úrsula* were responsible for its disappearance from the Brazilian literary canon as it was considered an inappropriate literary genre.

As David Punter states, female Gothic writers depict a world "in which women are in constant danger, almost regardless of their social position or historical importance, a world in which men, as protectors, almost go from gentleness to rape" (52). In novels such as *The Recess* (1783-1785) by Sophia Lee, *The Sicilian Romance* (1790) and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe, and *Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793) by Eliza Parsons, for example, female protagonists are forced to face the tyranny of their protectors and tutors, parents, uncles, and grooms who jeopardize their life and their virtue.

Additionally, as Maurício Menon (101) warns, it is the clash between the positive forces, epitomised by the young, innocent and virtuous heroine, and the negative forces, represented by cruel and transgressive villains, that leads the Gothic narrative

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[16]As researcher Anne Williams attests in her book, *Art of Darkness: a poetics of gothic*: "Until recently most of them [*Gothic women authors*] – novelists and romancers alike – were largely forgotten. Ann Radcliffe, 'the great enchantress of that generation' according to De Quincey, was enshrined in the scholarly footnotes to *Northanger Abbey* as the object of Austen's affectionate satire. And while Radcliffe's contribution to the Gothic tradition was important to students of Gothic, Gothic itself was assumed to be marginal" (Williams 1995: 135).

[17] For the British Gothic genre during the Romantic period, see: Botting, F. (1996) *Gothic*. London: Routledge; Punter, D. (1996), *The Literature of Terror: a history of gothic fictions from 1765 to the present day*, v. 1; London: Longman; Williams, A. (1995), *Art of Darkness: a poetics of gothic*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press; Punter D. (2012), *A New Companion to The Gothic*, Wiley-Blackwell; Wright A., Townshend D. (2015), *Romantic Gothic. An Edinburgh Companion*, Edinburgh UP; Gamer M. (2000), *Romanticism and the Gothic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Hume R. (1969), "Gothic vs Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel", in PMLA, 84, pp. 282-290; Battaglia B. (2007), *Paesaggi e misteri. Riscoprire Ann Radcliffe*, Napoli: Liguori.

[18] Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) was undoubtedly one of the most successful British Gothic writers with a great ability to entertain the reader through fear. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797) are among her most successful gothic novels.

[19] See: Barros, F. M. (2014), *Do castelo à casa-grande: o "Gótico brasileiro"*, in *Soletras*, pp. 80-94; Muzart, Z. L. (2008), "Sob o signo do gótico: o romance feminino no Brasil, século XIX", in: *Veredas: Revista da Associação Internacional de Lusitanistas*, 10, p. 295-308; Serravalle D. (2010), *Gótico tropical: o sublime e o demoníaco em O Guarani*, Salvador: EDUFBA; Santos, A. P. (2017), "Gótico e escrita feminina", in: *Poéticas do mal: a literatura do medo no Brasil (1840 – 1920)*, Rio de Janeiro: Bonecker, pp. 53-76.

to its climax. It is not surprising, therefore, that villainous characters are of unparalleled importance to the Gothic[20], inasmuch as their threats and persecutions function as the thread of the plot. In addition, their transgressions draw the readers' attention to the dangers to which women are subjected daily in society.

It is not by chance, then, that taboos and crimes against the family are among the most common issues presented in Gothic novels. In *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole (1676-18745), for instance, the villain Manfred is responsible for the suffering of Hippolita, his wife, and the death of Matilda, his daughter. Women writers have explored male domestic violence even more strongly in Gothic novels, showcasing both the strength of heroin's escape attempts, thwarted by the persecution of the villain, as well as situations of horror that arise from familial oppression and from binding woman to domesticity (Gilbert e Gubar 85; Williams 10). This is also the case for Maria Firmina's Gothic novel, where only death will bring hope to the heroines ("Oh! esperança! Só a têm os desgraçados, no refúgio que a todos oferece a sepultura!"/ "Oh! Hope! The wretched ones can find hope only in the grave!", 22).

2.4. Love in the Gothic frame as an allegory of feelings' social value

Likewise, the novel *Úrsula* follows Gothic conventions to represent situations of physical and psychological violence perpetuated by male characters, namely fathers who act violently towards slaves and women (but also against good-hearted men, such as Tancredo), whose lives are irreparably broken by the violent action of these masters and landowners. Specifically, in *Úrsula*, three paterfamilias play the role of villains in the plot: the *comendador* Fernando P., who is the uncle and the legal tutor of Úrsula, the father of Úrsula (Paulo B.), and the father of Tancredo. Each of these men is responsible for the death of his wife or, in the case of Úrsula's father, of her

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[20] In British literature for instance, works such as Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796) and Horance Walpole's *The Castel of Otranto* (1764) are the milestones of male gothic, whereas seminal female Gothic texts are for instance Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). For differences in female and male Gothic, see: Fleenor J. (1983), *The Female Gothic*, Montreal: Eden Press; Gamer M. (2000), *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Heiland D. (2004), *Gothic & Gender: An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell; Hoeveler, D. L. (1998), *Gothic Feminism*, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press.

disability, and each of them acted against the interests of their own children. Furthermore, these paterfamilias are landowners and seem incapable to love in a way that does not express possession and arrogance, as the narrator affirms in a passage of the story where there are indeed two possible ways of loving – love can express virtue and loyalty, inspiring noble actions, or it can be experienced as possession and concupiscence, which leads to crime:

> O amor, que se nutre no coração do homem generoso, é puro e nobre, leal e santo, profundo e immenso, e capaz de quanta virtude o mundo pode conhecer, de quanta dedicação se possa conceber. Ele o eleva acima de si próprio, e as suas ações são o perfume embriagador desse sentimento, que o anima: mas o amor no peito do homem feroz e concupiscente é uma paixão funesta, que conduz ao crime, que lhe mata a alma e a despenha no inferno. Tal era o amor que abrasava a alma indômita e malvada de Fernando P... O amor perdera-o. (Reis 216)[21]

The love of Tancredo is a source of freedom and passion, in contrast to Fernando's feelings for Úrsula, which are mean and selfish. Love, then, stands as an allegory of feelings' social value, inasmuch as it leads, in one case, to freedom and life, and in the other to possession and death.

Moreover, the feeling that makes Fernando obnoxious is his pride, hardening his heart to slaves, as Firmina affirms:

> Fernando tinha vivido solitário, e desesperado com essa luta terrível do coração com o orgulho: e esses desgostos íntimos, que ele próprio forjava, o tinham embrutecido, e tanto lhe afearam o moral, que era odiado, e temido de quantos o praticavam ou conheciam de nome. (Reis 143)[22]

In turn, it is Fernando's incapacity to feel true love and his being fulfilled by hate and revenge, that had made him a villain with a strong desire to inflict the pain he was feeling onto others. Indeed, he is described in the novel with these words:

> Ele tornara-se odioso e temível aos seus escravos: nunca fora benigno e generoso para com eles; porém o ódio, e o amor, que lhe torturavam de contínuo fizeram-no uma fera – um

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[21] "The love that nourishes the heart of the generous man is pure and noble, loyal and holy, profound and immense, and capable of as much virtue and dedication as the world can know. He elevates his love above himself, and his actions are the inebriating perfume of this feeling, which animates him: but the love in the chest of the ferocious and concupiscent man is a fatal passion, which leads to crime, which kills the soul and send it to hell. Such was the love that burned the untamed and evil soul of Fernando P ... Love had lost him"

[22] "Fernando had lived alone and desperate with this terrible struggle of the heart with pride: and these intimate dislikes, which he himself forged, had brutalized him, and so much had defied his morality, that he was hated, and feared by all the people who knew him, even only by name."

Therefore, it is not merely love that can be experienced in two different and opposite ways but also sorrow: the desperate sorrow of one's soul can indeed lead to compassion and generosity, as in the case of Túlio and Tancredo, or to hate and death, as in the case of Fernando. Even though Romantic love appears to be the main event of the story, it is surrounded by themes that are apparently transverse or minor such as slavery and the female condition.

2.5. The Gothic setting

Another important feature of the Gothic framework of the novel is the setting. The space in which the action takes place is highly significant to its symbolic meaning and to the atmosphere it creates. The setting, in fact, reflects the psychology of the characters. In turn, the characters express the quality of their souls through the relationship they have with the natural environment that surrounds them. The villain Fernando hunts, kills and spoils; for him nature is not sacred and thus he neither feels any sentiment of communion nor sees a divine presence in it. Accordingly, he mirrors the materialist culture that takes possession of things without loving or understanding them – as colonisers did in Brazil –. The landowner cannot feel communion with nature, as he considers it his property rather than a divine gift, as Firmina describes in this passage:

> Brilhavam ainda no ocaso os últimos raios do sol. A parda tarde embelezava a natureza com essas melancólicas cores, que trazem ao coração do homem a saudade e a tristeza.
>   Sentado em um banco do seo jardim, o commendador Fernando P... não via, nem curava de toda essa beleza arrebatadora, que inebria os sentidos, e eleva a alma até Deus. A essa hora mágica em que a flor singela e sedutora escuta enlevada o suspiroso segredo da brisa, que a festeja; em que o colibri furtando-lhe um mimoso e feiticeiro beijo adeja e sussura-lhe em volta; em que lá no bosque o vento suspira harmonioso, e os cantores das selvas soltam seo trinar melodioso e terno; em que o mar na praia é pacifico e manso, e perde a altivez com que bramia; em que a virgem entregue a um vago, indefinível e mágico cismar recende mais casto, mais enlevador perfume, como o aroma de uma flor celeste; a essa hora mesma Fernando P..., aguilhoado pelos remorsos, só via hórridos fantasmas, que o cercavam. (Reis 223)[23]

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[23] "The last rays of the sun still shone. At dawn it enraptured the nature with melancholy colours, which pierced the man's heart with longing and sadness. Sitting on a bench in the garden, the commander Fernando P ... did not see it, nor did he felt the sweeping beauty that inebriates the senses

Conversely, the first chapter of the novel entitled "Duas almas generosas"/ "Two generous souls", featuring Tancredo and Túlio as the protagonists, opens with the description of a bucolic, rural landscape, so beautiful that it inspires a divine love: "O campo, o mar, a abòbada celeste ensinam a adorar o supremo Autor da natureza, e a bendizerlhe a mão"/ "The field, the sea, the heavenly abbot teach to worship and to bless the supreme Author of nature" (Reis 17). Nature can therefore be the setting of authenticity and revelation; if lived in solitude, it can prove to be a shelter from an unjust society. It is the place where "despe-se-nos o coração do orgulho da sociedade, que o embota, que o apodrece, e livre dessa vergonhosa cadeia, volve a Deus e o busca – e o encontra; porque com o dom da ubiqüidade Ele aí está!"/ "Our heart, blunt and rot by the pride of society, frees itself from this shameful chain, turns to God and seeks it – and finds it; because with the gift of ubiquity God is in nature" (Reis 17). Through the elegy to nature as the temple of God, the author criticizes the culture that builds its morality on material property.

Furthermore, the Gothic setting helps further evolve the violent relationships of power of the colonial age. The Cemetery of *** and the Convent of ***[24] contrasts with the colourful environment provided by Brazilian nature, in so far as they are contextually places of terror (where dreadful actions take place, like the murder of Tancredo) and peacefully architectonical shelters. The cemetery is a space of meditation for Úrsula, where after the death of her mother she learns that she is no longer safe and that her fate depends on the ability of Tancredo to defend her from her violent uncle. Úrsula asks herself if our sorrows follow us to our graves, yet the cemetery is silent and no one can help her:

> Silencioso e ermo estava então o cemitério de Santa Cruz, e só o vento, que silvava entre o arvoredo ao longe, e que mais brando gemia tristemente nessa cidade da morte, é que quebrava a solidão monotona e impotente desse lugar do esquecimento eterno! […]
> Simples e quase nu era esse cemitério de Santa Cruz – como devera ser a última morada do homem.

and elevates the soul to God. At this magic hour in which the simple and seductive flower listens to the sighing secrecy of the breeze, which celebrates it; in which the hummingbird steals whispers it to him around; in which the wind sighs harmoniously in the woods, and the singers of the jungles let out a triumph, melodious and tender; in which the sea on the shore is peaceful and meek, and loses the loftiness with which it roars; in which the virgin delivered to a vague, indefinable and magical fragrance more chaste, more uplifting perfume, as the aroma of a celestial flower; at this very moment Fernando P ..., prodded by the remorse, only saw horrible ghosts, that surrounded him".

[24] The full names are not spelled in the novel.

> A vaidade não tinha franqueado o seu liminar; aí não havia mausoléus, nem floreadas campas, mas uma capelinha singela e pobre e a cruz com os seus braços destendidos, protegendo as cinzas dos que eram pó, e denunciando que na vida seguiram a sublime religião do Cordeiro Crucificado. Além disso uma ou outra árvore, e ervas rasteiras cobrindo o terreno e invadindo tudo. (Reis 154-155)[25]

Likewise, the convent represents the place where the female Úrsula can be safe and take refuge from the violent Fernando: "Meia légua fora da cidade erguiam-se denegridas pelo tempo as velhas paredes de antigo convento, com suas gelogias tambem esfumaçadas pelo tempo, e que escondiamm zellosas às vistas indiscretas as puras virgens dedicadas ao Senhor. Era um edificio antigo na sua fundação, grave e melancholico no seo aspecto"/ "Half a league outside the city, the old walls of the old convent, stood erect by the time, and the pure virgins dedicated to the Lord hid in their pristine eyes. It was an old building in its foundation, grave and melancholic in its aspect" (Reis 173). Nonetheless, the convent is also the place in which Fernando tries unsuccessfully to redeem himself from his sins:

> No convento dos carmelitas, havia dois anos, entrara um homem, que pedira o hábito, e logo depois começara o seo noviciado.
> Esse homem era um velho, com a fronte e o rosto sulcados de rugas, a pele macilenta, e o corpo vergado e encarquilhado como do convalescente de moléstia atroz, debilitante e prolongada.
> Quem era elle ninguém o sabia no convento. Chamava-se – frei Luíz de Santa Úrsula.
> Affirmavam alguns leigos que esse velho era um louco; porque ás vezes, rompendo fervorosa oração, possuía-se de frenesi, os olhos chamejavam-lhe, rangia os dentes, e caía por terra em delíquio. (Reis 232)[26]

Still, the convent is not a place of salvation for neither Úrsula nor Fernando, inasmuch as they are all victims the sort of love that wants to possess or to rule, as Maria Firmina affirms at the end of the epilogue.

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[25] "The cemetery of Sancta Cruz was silent and wild, and only the wind, which hissed among the grove in the distance, and which moaned sadly in this city of death, broke the monotonous and impotent solitude of this place of eternal oblivion! [...] Simple and almost naked was this cemetery of Sancta Cruz – as it should be the last lodge of man. Vanity had not opened its injunction; there were no mausoleums or flower beds, but a simple and poor chapel and the cross with its arms outstretched, protecting the ashes of the dust, and denouncing that in life they followed the sublime religion of the Crucified Lamb. In addition to this, trees, and creeping grasses covering the ground, invading everything".
[26] "In the convent of the Carmelites, since two years, a man had entered, who had began his novitiate. This man was an old man, his forehead and face wrinkled, his skin wan, and his body was bent and shrouded like the convalescent of atrocious, debilitating, prolonged discomforts. Who he was, nobody knew it in the convent. He was called – Friar Luiz de Sancta Úrsula. Some lay people said that this old man was a madman; because sometimes, breaking fervent prayer, he had a frenzy, his eyes blazed, he gritted his teeth, and he fell on the ground in delirium"–

The description of nature also suggests a certain criticality with respect to the idea of nationality in addition to the references to European literary culture that Maria Firmina makes in the novel through references to Romantic French literature and Italian Renaissance painters: "que só Bernardin de Saint-Pierre soube pintar no delicioso *Paulo e Virginia* […] Era pois uma dessas tardes em que o sol no seu descambar para o ocaso recebe mil e cambiantes cores, invejadas pela palheta dos Rafaéis" (153).[27] In the first chapter of the book, she also describes Brazil's stunning natural beauty ("são vastos e belos os nossos campos"/ "our fields are beautiful and vast", 15), in which medieval and modern elements coexist.

The contradictions of the Brazilian national identity are further condensed in the story that slave Susana tells, especially in relation to African nature, represented as equally beautiful and happy although destroyed by the European intervention: "via despontar o sol rutilante e ardente do meu país, e louca de prazer a essa hora matinal, em que tudo aí respira amor, eu corria ás descarnadas e arenosas praias"/ "through the blazing and intense sun of my country, filled with pleasure at this morning hour, when everything breathes love, I gnawed at the barren, sandy beaches" (115).

The beauty of the Brazilian landscape is thus a perfect background to endure *saudade,* a feeling absolutely central to the novel, strongly bonded with the central theme of memory: "a sua beleza é amena e doce, e o exíguo esquife, que vai cortando as suas águas hibernais mansas e quedas, e o homem, que sem custo o guia, e que sente vaga sensação de melancólico enlevo, desprende com mavioso accento um canto de harmoniosa saudade, despertado pela grandeaa dessas águas, que sulca"/ "its beauty is sweet and sugary, the little skiff, which cuts off its calm waters and falls, and the man, who at no cost guides him, and who feels a vague sense of melancholy exhilaration, harmonious longing, awakened by the greatness of these waters, which furrows" (15). The comparison between Brazilian culture and European culture was a highly sensitive topic in Brazilian Romanticism that needs to be analysed separately in the following section.

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[27] "Which only Bernardin de Saint-Pierre knew how to paint in the delightfully Paul and Virginia […] It was therefore one of those afternoons when the sun falls apart, receiving thousands of changing colours, envied by the palette of the Raphael".

3. A drop of slave blood: *Úrsula* and the Brazilian literary canon

In the abolitionist story "A escrava", written by Maria Firmina dos Reis in 1887, the author affirms:

> Por qualquer modo que encaremos a escravidão, ela é, e sempre será um grande mal. Dela a decadência do comércio: porque o comércio, e a lavoura caminham de mãos dadas, e o escravo não pode fazer florescer a lavoura; porque o seu trabalho é forçado. Ele não tem futuro; o seu trabalho não é indenizado; ainda dela nos vem o opróbrio, a vergonha: porque de fronte altiva e desassombrada não podemos encarar as nações livres: por isso que o estigma da escravidão, pelo cruzamento das raças, estampa-se na fronte de todos nós. Embalde procurará um dentre nós convencer ao estrangeiro que em suas veias não gira uma só gota de sangue escravo... (Reis 242)[28]

Firmina points out how the stigma of slavery is imprinted in every Brazilian – to the extent that it is impossible to deny their holding of slave blood –. Apart from being a strong political statement of revolutionary proportion, affirming the miscegenation of Brazilian culture to the point that hybridity becomes inevitable, this quotation says also something more. In fact, slave blood flows through the veins of every Brazilian citizen, and thereby there is no way to convince a non-Brazilian citizen of the opposite. Why is Maria Firmina making this statement? Why should Brazilians, in the nineteenth century, worry about convincing the foreigners that they do not have slave blood in their veins?

The answer to those questions could perhaps be found in the book *Misplaced ideas* (1992), a collection of various essays, classes and interviews on Brazilian culture and literary life by literary critic Roberto Schwarz**.** In the first essay, entitled *Brazilian culture: Nationalism by elimination* (originally published in 1986), Schwarz claims that Brazilians have felt the inauthentic and artificial nature of the cultural aspect of Brazilian life since the formation of the Brazilian nation. The sense of strident contradiction between the real Brazil and the ideological prestige of countries used as models is perceived also from a literary point of view: critical movements followed European or American trends, sanctioning what Schwarz defines as the "imitative nature of Brazilian cultural life" (Schwarz 2). In particular,

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[28] "In whatever way we look at slavery, it is, and always will be, a great evil. From it, it derives the decay of commerce: because trade and farming go hand in hand, and the slave can not make the terrain flourish; because his/her work is forced. He has no future; his/her work is not compensated; yet shame is upon us: we cannot confront easily free nations: because the stigma of slavery, by the creolisation of the races, is on the forehead of all of us. Without effect we will seek one inside us, to convince the foreigner that in our veins does not flux a single drop of slave blood".

Schwarz claims that authors such as Machado de Assis, Mario Andade and Antonio Candido achieved to make good use of their Brazilian predecessors, although in general, the lack of continuity did not allow the growth of a "local" thought.

Schwartz exposes the reasons for the imitative character of Brazilian aesthetic and theoretical production through the analysis of a text by Silvio Romero[29] in which, in 1897, he classified the work of Machado de Assis[30] as Anglophile and incompetent. Roberto Schwarz analyses Silvio Romero's critical essay as an example of how to interpret the historical significance of the Brazilian imitation of European culture in a way that for Schwarz is ideological, namely that hides the true historical-cultural and economic structure that led to imitation. Specifically, Silvio Romero interprets the birth of Brazilian literature as the production of an elite that separates itself from the rest of the population (which instead remained illiterate and uneducated) and launches itself into the imitation of all that it finds in the European world. From this "original sin" (the copying) made by elite classes followed the exotic nature of Brazilian literature. According to Silvio Romero, the reasons for this lack of originality can be explained also historically.

During the period of colonial rule, segregation kept the Brazilians away from foreigners, giving a sense of cohesion to Brazilian culture (with the creation of the Minas Group of Arcadian Poets, for example). Then, from the first Emperor and the Regency onwards (1822-1831/1831-1840) a breach was opened and the intellectual élite began to copy French Romanticism while the people, the mass, remained uneducated. When the second Kingdom began with Pedro II (1840-1889), political incompetence and misgovernment encouraged generalized and mediocre imitation. In view of this, Romero argues that the "original sin" of Brazilian culture is denoted by the mimicking of European culture, inasmuch as it has separated culture (detached from the context) from production (which is not born from the specific experience of Brazilian life).

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[29] The text to which Schwarz refers is: Romero S. (1897), *Machado de Assis*, Rio de Janeiro. Silvio Romero (1851–1914) was an important Brazilian intellectual al literary critic of the nineteenth century, who wrote the first modern history of Brazilian literature, a work which is still of interest today, despite the scientistic language of the period.

[30] Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839–1908) is regarded as the greatest of all Portuguese-language novelists. He wrote nine novels and two hundred short stories, including *Epitaph of a Small Winner* (1880), *Dom Casmurro* (1900) and *Esau and Jacob* (1904), which are considered to be far ahead of their time.

Robert Schwarz, nonetheless, notes that imitation in many cultures has had a positive connotation – in Neoclassicism, for example – and that opposing national to foreign and original to imitative does not allow us to grasp the elements of Brazilian culture dynamism, creating the mythical requirement of ex-nihilo creation in literature. Why, then, did imitation acquire such a negative connotation in Brazil? Schwartz explains how Brazilian independence was not the result of a revolution, as long as, although independence has led to administrative reorganization, the colonial socioeconomic structure has remained intact (Schwarz 12). Consequently, modern European theories of freedom and citizenship seemed to be out of place artefacts in this context. The Brazilian elite, in the face of fast-spreading liberal ideas of equality and democracy, had two alternatives: either they denied their pre-eminence and their privileges in the name of progress, or they desecrated progress in the name of their privileges. In fact, since its establishment as an independent country, Brazil has had to deal with a central node: on the one hand, the presence of slave trade, landlordism and patronage (a set of relations with rules consolidated in colonial times) and on the other hand, the law that claimed that everyone was equal. Ensuring a stable coexistence between these two elements was the moral concern of the Brazilian elite in the nineteenth century (Schwarz 13).

From this perspective, therefore, elites' cultural imitation served to obscure the real state of poverty in order to create an illusion of progress. Yet, the modernizing force of progress of the nineteenth century, true or false as it was, still clashed with slavery. Forced labour was a fact that sanctioned the inauthenticity of these liberal and progressive values. Therefore, the ideas of European equality spread with enthusiasm by Machado de Assis clashed with the Brazilian reality, characterized by a different articulation of power, by fundamental criteria of economic exploitation and by an unequal distribution of privileges in comparison to the European reality. Subsequently, when Brazil became independent, the colonial powers merged with the bourgeoisie: capitalism broke down and landowners and administrators became the ruling class, while maintaining the old forms of exploitation of labour (even today not fully modernized). Thus, Schwarz points out that the discrepancy between the "two Brazils" did not arouse from an imitative tendency, as Romero claims, instead it was the result of having built a nation state on the basis of slave-labour:

> The discrepancy between the 'two Brazils' was not due to an imitative tendency […] nor did it correspond to a brief period of transition. It was the lasting result of the creation of a nation-state on the basis of slave-labor which […] arose in turn out of the English industrial revolution and the consequent crisis of the old colonial system. That is to say, it arose out of contemporary history. (Schwarz 14)

The imitative character of Brazilian culture therefore arose from forms of inequality. This inequality was intentionally brutal in order to break the "common denominator" that created culture, given that they lacked the minimum reciprocity:

> At a time when the idea of the nation had become the norm, the dominant class's unpatriotic disregard for the lives it exploited gave it the feeling of being alien. The origins of this situation in colonialism and slavery are immediately apparent. (Schwarz 15)

Therefore, the condemnation of cultural imitation and cultural transplantation became the inspiration for a naïve critical standpoint that, in fact, "presents as a national characteristic what is actually a malaise of the dominant class, bound up with the difficulty of morally reconciling the advantages of progress with those of slavery or its surrogates" (Schwarz 16).

Given Schwarz's analysis, we can therefore fully understand the quote I first mentioned in the short abolitionist story "A escrava" by Maria Firmina dos Reis. No Brazilian, Maria says, can prove that there is not even a drop of slave blood in his/her body. This statement takes the state of Brazilian cultural production back to the reality that this same culture seeks to erase: slavery. Slavery is an evil: "um grande mal", as Fimina says. The solution to this iniquity, however, cannot be the attempt to erase it from Brazilian culture as if it did not exist ("Embalde procurará um dentre nós convencer ao estrangeiro que em suas veias não gira uma só gota de sangue escravo"/ "Uselessly one of us will try convince the foreigner that in our blood there is not even a drop of slave blood", Reis 242). Alternatively, Firminia claims that Brazilians should eliminate slavery in reality, deciding for the definitive abolition of slavery throughout the country.

Therefore, the original sin of the Brazilian nation, since its inception, was the exploitation of slaves, from which derived "o opróbrio, a vergonha" / "the opprobrium, the shame", the anxiety towards other nations; hitherto, it was slavery and not imitation that prevented Brazil to face free nations ("De fronte altiva e desassombrada não podemos encarar as nações livres", Reis 242). Furthermore, as

Schwarz reminds us, the central critical point of Brazilian cultural life has not been the relation between the elite and the model, but the exclusion of the poor from the universe of Brazilian cultural life. Hence, the change necessary to Brazilian cultural production is not represented by the end of imitation but by giving other classes access to culture.

On the other hand, not everything in Brazilian literature has had an imitative nature; beyond élite culture, the novel, as a genre, has been employed in a creative and innovative manner in order to talk about the reality of Brazilian history and culture, including slavery and Afro-descendant culture. Maria Firmina dos Reis, in fact, speaks of society as it is from a popular and Afro-descendant perspective, infusing Brazilian reality with the one of Africa. In light of all this, the work of Maria Firmina dos Reis is truly of unprecedented innovation. Indeed, as we shall see, unlike her contemporary authors, such as José de Alencar and many of his successors, Maria Firmina's novel has a strong connotation of social denunciation and realism in relation to slavery which are absent in many other novels of her time.

3.1. The Brazilian novel

As evidenced by Roberto Schwarz (1992), the novel existed in Brazil before there were Brazilian novelists. It is therefore normal that the first Brazilian novelists followed literary models already developed in Europe, as it is the case of José de Alencar. José de Alencar (1829-1877) is the most important Brazilian Romantic novelist, famous for his Indianist novels (like *O Guaraní*, 1857) and a contemporary of Maria Firmina dos Reis. Alencar fictionalizes and sentimentalises the encounter between Portuguese colonialists and the Brazilian indigenous peoples with the aim of establishing a national literature able to cover all aspects of the history of the country and its society (perhaps based on the Balzac model). However, the social reality of Brazil was that of favour[31], and it had little to do with the Realistic or Romantic melodramatic plot of the European novel. Romantic ideologies of a liberal or

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[31] See Schwartz (22): "favour was our quasi-universal social mediation", inherited from colonial times and used as core aspect of Brazilian cultural life by intellectuals, so to obscure the role of slavery in the sphere of production.

aristocratic tendency that implied a commodification of life were therefore used by Alencar as a master key to enter the universe of favour.

As a Romantic writer, considered by many to be the patriarch of Brazilian literature, Alencar was not sympathetic to his female characters, as they did not transgress the cultural impositions. His female characters are no more than reduplications of patriarchal morality, ultimately "transients of the voice of others, Lucíola, Diva, Aurelia or Amalia circulate as prototypes of the love of self-denial, blind disappearance in the mirror of their heroes" (Castello Branco and Brandão 13). Meanwhile, Maria Firmina dos Reis, in a single novel − that preceded chronologically the publication of *Lucíola* (1862) *Diva* (1864), *Lady* (1875) and *Incarnation* (1893) −, consolidated the transgression of several female characters, representing them, although submissive, as resistant to the cultural determinations.

The narrative model of Brazilian novel draws on the materials of first-degree ideologies such as equality, the republic, the redeeming power of science and art, romantic love, the recognition of merits, and the possibility of social mobility, leaving them unquestioned. The characters, driven by practical reason, convert Machiavellian, sanctioning the general victory of exchange-value and the alienation of emotions. It was therefore not a literature of social criticism; instead, the fetishism of capital absolutized values (art, morality, science, love, property and economic value) and separated them from social life as a whole, making them irrational (Schwartz 59). In this sense, Maria Firmina is truly an exception. The narrative model of *Úrsula*, in fact, while drawing on the literary models of the European Gothic novel, re-elaborates them in a creative way in order to display specifically the Brazilian reality. Brazilian life is openly represented, in its uniqueness, as the consequence of slavery, together with its particular colonial history, which has created an exchange and a hybridization of its culture with that of the Africans, Indigenous and Portuguese, masterfully expressed in *Úrsula*.

Apart from belonging of female Brazilian literature, the work of Maria Firmina dos Reis is also part of Afro-Brazilian literature. In an interesting article by Edmilson de Almeida Pereira, *Survey of African-Brazilian Literature* (1995), Afro-Brazilian literature is defined as part of the fractured tradition of Brazilian Literature. Therefore, it both validates the specific character of the Afro-Brazilian experience (in

ethnic, psychological, historical and social terms) while engaging in the more general task of defining the essential 'Brazilianess' of Brazilian literature (Pereira 875). The Afro-Brazilian tradition, according to Pereira, includes male and female authors, starting from the XVIII and XIX century[32]. Although Pereira found difficulties in identifying Afro-Brazilians female women writers, some of them are presented[33], and among them, Maria Firmina dos Reis is mentioned as the first one of the tradition.

For Afro-Brazilian authors, as happens with all the literature written by minor subjects, language is a decisive factor. Pereira affirms:

> Brazilians of different ethnic origins all use Portuguese, but a Portuguese transformed in accordance with the dynamics of our socio-historical context and of the linguistic groups that entered into contact here. African-Brazilian Literature written in this system is Brazilian Literature, as well, albeit a literature that expresses a world view specific to African-Brazilians (Pereira 875-6)

Likewise, language is one of the distinctive traits of Afro-Brazilian literature. Additionally, it deals with particular subjects, that according to Pereira are: the black ethno-cultural identity, and in general the "stimulation of a new aesthetic and social sensibility". The proposal of a new aesthetic is the outcome of a new "world vision" of the "interaction of differences" that are in play in Afro-Brazilian literature author's and characters' identities, that lead to the "rupture of the models" (Pereira 877).

In conclusion, Maria Firmina anticipates the work and the limits of abolitionist and Afro-descendant writers Castro Alves (whose production goes from 1876 to 1883), Joaquim Manoel de Macedo (*Victims-killers*, 1869) and Bernardo Guimarães (*Escrava Isaura*, 1875). *Úrsula* is not only the first abolitionist novel of Brazilian

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[32] Pereira (1995) lists among the Afro-Braziliam male authors: the mestizo poet and musician Domingos Caldas Barbosa (1738-1800); the writer Manuel Inacio da Silva Alvarenga (1749-1814); Antonio Goncalves Dias (1823-1864), the son of a Indian-Black slave; Laurindo Jose da Silva Rabelo (1826-1864), a mestizo poet; Luiz Gonzaga Pinto da Gama (1830-1882), the slave son of an African woman and Portuguese man; Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839-1908) the son of a mulato painter and an Azorean washerwoman and Tobias Barreto de Menezes (1839-1889) was a poet, sociologist and philosopher; Antonio Goncalves Crespo (1846-1883); Jose do Patrocinio (1853-1905), an abolitionist; Joao da Cruz e Sousa (1861-1898), the son of enslaved parents; Afonso Henriques de Lima Barreto (1891-1922) was the son of a typographer and primary school teacher; Lino Guedes (1906-1951), black poet and Solano Trindade (1908-1974), an intensely political poet.
[33] Pereira (1995) includes among the Afro-Braziliam female authors: Maria Firmina dos Reis, Auta de Souza (1876-1901), Carolina Maria de Jesus (1914-1977), Quarto de Despejo (1960). A really inspiring book by Monique-Adelle Callahan *Between the Lines, Literary Transnationalism and African American Poetics* (2011) analyses critically the work of Auta de Souza and the intersection of gender and race aspects in her poetry.

literature, a fact that even few historians admit. It is also the first novel of Afro-Brazilian literature, understood as the production of Afro-descendent authorship, which thematises the black experience from an internal and politically committed perspective. Additionally, Maria Firmina innovatively inscribes in Brazilian culture elements of ancestral memory and African traditions, filling the absence of "black romances", by letting the voice of Afro-descendants be heard.

Furthermore, Maria Firmina dos Reis inaugurates the presence of women in literature as the subject of their own history, and not only as an object of representation. Afro-descendant slaves and women in fact were already present in literature in a stereotypical form and never as subjects with a proper voice[34]. In addition, *Úrsula* is the only Romantic Brazilian novel of the nineteenth century that combines aesthetics and ideology. It is also the first Brazilian novel that openly attacks the despotic power of landowners: they have an oppressive and antagonistic function in the plot that prevents the development of love and the fullness of life. The narrative irony of the novel, which emerges in the construction of story, allows the denunciation of abuses in an indirect form and without scandalising the reader. In order to understand entirely the radical innovative features of the novel, it can be useful to look at Romantic Brazilian movement within which it was written, and in respect to whom it represents an innovation.

4. Articulating gender and slavery
4.1. Unhappy but virtuous: slavery in Brazil

In *Úrsula*, Maria Fimina dos Reis deals with the experience of slavery in a quite innovative manner, mainly in view of the fact that she challenges the stereotypical representation of the Afro-Brazilian slave, present also in other abolitionist texts of

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[34] Even fundamental works indeed, like Gilberto Freyre's *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933), re-proposed stereotypical representations of black women (Nascimento 2006). The same applies also to writer Machado de Assis (see: Chalhoub, "Interpreting Machado de Assis: Paternalism, Slavery, and the Free Womb Law," in *Honor, Status, and Law in Modern Latin America*, eds. Sueann Caulfield, Sarah C. Chambers, and L. Putnam, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005, pp. 87-108).
For more information on literary stereotypes on black women and men in Brazilian culture, see: Sáenz de Tejada C. (1997), "Blacks In Brazilian Literature: A Long Journey From Concealment To Recognition", *Hispanófila*, 121, pp. 61-74; Toller, H. G. (1988), *O negro e o Romantismo brasileiro.* São Paulo: Atual; Proença Filho, D. (1988), "O negro e a literatura brasileira", in *Boletim Bibliográfico da Biblioteca Mário de Andrad*, São Paulo, 49:1/4, p. 77-109; Marotti, G. (1982), *Il negro nel romanzo brasiliano*. Roma: Bulzoni Editore.

her time. Moreover, her narrative advances a radical vision of the issues of ethnicity, race and slavery, expressed at a political level through the employment of a pleasant literary aesthetic.

In Firmina's view, slavery is hateful, albeit it does not petrify the sensitivity of the slave: "o mísero sofria; porque era escravo, e a escravidão não lhe embrutecera a alma; porque os sentimentos generosos, que Deus lhe implantou no coração, permaneciam intactos, e puros como sua alma. Era infeliz; mas era virtuoso" / "the miserable suffered; because he was a slave, but slavery did not harden his soul; because the generous feelings, which God implanted in his heart, remained intact, and pure as his soul. He was unhappy; but he was virtuous" (Reis 24-25). Túlio is a victim, not an executioner; his revolt is done in silence, for Túlio uses no means to confront the masters' power directly: he does not sabotage or steal; he is not an wicked character, full of feelings of revenge and hate. He is rather a gentle soul with a strong sensitivity combined with the will to help other people. Likewise, the slave never injures the master, nor tries to escape or commit suicide (a quite recurrent trope in the mid-nineteenth century literature).

Conversely, the conduct of Túlio is guided by Christian values, for the author's strategy of denouncing slavery without attacking directly the convictions of the readers can be effective: "Senhor Deus! quando calará no peito do homem a tua sublime máxima – ama a teu próximo como a ti mesmo – e deixará de oprimir com tão repreensível injustiça ao seu semelhante!... a aquele que também era livre no seu país... aquele que é seu irmão?!"/ "Dear God! When will your sublime maxim – love your neighbour as yourself – be instilled in the man's heart and when will men cease to oppress their fellows with such a reprehensible injustice? To oppress him who was also free in his country, who is also his brother" (Reis 24-25).

Eventually, the narrative develops within Christian moral standards freed from clerical hypocrisy, by the condemnation it advances to slavery, in the name of God. As writer Antônio Candido comments, religion was a prominent theme of Romantic aesthetics (*O romantismo no Brasil* 16). In the novel *Úrsula* it is expressed both by religious sentiments and by a devotion to vague, almost pantheistic, spiritualism. Furthermore, the novel seems to suggest that a behaviour consistent with Christian morality is not able to give salvation from slavery in the terrain life on its own. So

far, in this fiction, only death gives freedom to oppressed subjects. However, the end is not all pessimistic, as long as a strong wish for future changes in society is hoped for, as the "good" white character Tancredo hopes:

> Dia virá em que os homens reconheçam que são todos irmãos. Túlio, meu amigo, eu avalio a grandeza de dores sem lenitivo, que te borbulha na alma, compreendo tua amargura, e amaldiçôo em teu nome ao primeiro homem que escravizou a seu semelhante. Sim – prosseguiu – tens razão; o branco desdenhou a generosidade do negro e cuspiu sobre a pureza dos seus sentimentos! Sim, acerbo deve ser o seu sofrer, e eles que o não compreendem! (Reis 28)[35]

The change needed in the terrain life in order to acquire salvation, relies on the capacity of people to recognise themselves as brothers, as equals. Since the sin of enslavement is all human, it is a condition that can be exceeded only by humanity itself, for "É horrível lembrar que criaturas humanas tratem seus semelhantes assim que não lhes doa a consciência de levá-los à sepultura asfixiados e famintos!"/ "It is horrible to remember that human creatures treat their fellows so, taking them to the grave, asphyxiated and hungry!" (Reis 117).

Slavery is not an evil with respect to a single slave with a superior soul, which deserves salvation from oppression; rather it is condemned broadly as a social structure. At the time, this message was highly revolutionary and radical, especially considering that the majority of religious groups in Brazil actually were not against slavery and had slaves themselves in their proprieties. In addition, many other slave abolitionist novels of the second half of the nineteenth century did not propose liberty as a universal value. Taking into account for instance at the abolitionist novel by Cuban female writer Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda, *Sab* (1841)[36], is clear that salvation was thought of as a personal compensation for a single privileged slave, with a superior soul than other slaves were[37]. *Úrsula* destabilised this trope aiming at

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[35] "The day will come when men will recognise that they are all brothers. Túlio, my friend, I exalt the greatness of sorrows without lenitive, that bubbles you in the soul, I understand your bliss, and I curse in your name the first man who enslaved his similar. Yes – he went on – you are right; the white disdained the Negro's generosity and spat on the purity of his feelings! Yes, it must be bitter your suffering, as are the ones who do not understand it!".

[36] See Chapter IV.

[37] The trope of the elected slave, often with noble blood in his veins, was very common also in British abolitionist literature, since Aphra Ben's novel, *Oroonoko*, 1688). Aphra Behn (1640-1689), regarded as the first English woman to earn her living by her writing, published the short work of prose fiction *Oroonoko: or, the Royal Slave*, in 1688. The eponymous hero is an African prince from Coramantien who is tricked into slavery and sold to British colonists in Surinam where he meets the narrator. Behn's text is a first person account of his life, love, rebellion, and execution.

a radical achievement of freedom for all slaves, regardless of their class, origin, and their past.

Furthermore, Maria Firmina gives an account of human complexities that go far beyond racial or sexual identity. Virtuous souls do not have specific racial or sexual features[38]; so far, their integrity is due to the capacity to sympathize with others, to love and to forgive. What is at stake then, is how feelings of compassion and sincere love develop in one's soul, rather than racial or sexual identity. Moreover, in the novel, the ability to embrace human ethics seems to be related to the ability of feeling pain (see for instance: Reis 143). By dismantling the dualism between victims and oppressors, Maria Firmina suggests the necessity for a personal conversion towards relations free from any form of injustice, in order to obtain liberty. At the end of her novel in fact, Firmina shows how the existing social system is only able to create victims. The decent characters, like the mother of Tancredo, Luísa B., Túlio, Tancredo and Susana, are destined to die, while Úrsula due to her sorrow is lost in an irrecoverable madness. Yet, even the wicked, such as the father of Tancredo, Fernando P. and Adelaide, end up living in despair. Lastly, Firmina fosters the idea that a society based on oppression, is not only unjust and inequitable for the oppressed; it is definitely destructive for the oppressors too.

4.1.1. The middle passage told in first person

In addition to the denunciation of Brazilian slave society, in *Úrsula* another element of radical novelty is present, which is the description that slave Susana makes in first person of her capture in Africa and the journey she undertook by coercion to get to Brazil, the famous middle-passage.[39] Through the account of the capture and enslavement of free Africans by the Europeans, Firmina overturns the racist accusation exemplified by Hegel's work that Africa was not part of the civilised world. Through the story of Susana, Firmina emphasises how barbarism was a

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[38] For instance, not all women are good or all men are bad. Adelaide is a woman but she acts badly. Also, Tancredo is a white upper-class man and he has a good soul, as well as Pai Antero is an Afro-descendant man but that acts against his people's interests.

[39] In describing the horrors of the middle passage, Maria Firmina tries to awaken a feeling of compassion in the reader. This narrative device could be associated with the English sentimentalistic rethoric that insisted on the emotion of sympathy (see Chapter II, but also the recent studies by Paul Ricoeur regarding the francophone literature).

peculiarity of the Europeans who violently removed the Africans from their lands, separating them from their families and their culture, to compel them to work in the colonies. Susana defines men who captured her as "barbarians" that parted her from her relatives and especially from her daughter:

> E logo dois homens apareceram, e amarraram-me com cordas. Era uma prisioneira – era uma escrava! Foi embalde que supliquei em nome de minha filha, que me restituíssem a liberdade: os bárbaros sorriam-se de minhas lágrimas, e olhavam-me sem compaixão. Julguei enlouquecer, julguei morrer, mas não me foi possível... a sorte me reservava ainda longos combates. (Reis 116)[40]

Not by chance, indeed, in the novel Túlio will always call Susana mother ("mãe") – notwithstanding the fact that she was not his actual mother –, underlining how she never lost her status of mother, despite she was forcedly separated from her family. The barbarians have no pity or compassion (as happens in the narrative of Mary Prince, where Mary describes how she was sold and separated from her mother and brothers). The despair caused by the imprisonment is gradually "overtaken", since the slave is calloused by increasingly worse experiences through which she was forced to pass: the nostalgia for her relatives, the certainty that she would never see them again.

Susana's speech is also historically cogent, as it describes the condition of the slaves' transportation on the ship, characterised by inhuman treatment and death, caused by the indifference of European powers:

> Meteram-me a mim e a mais trezentos companheiros de infortúnio e de cativeiro no estreito e infecto porão de um navio. Trinta dias de cruéis tormentos, e de falta absoluta de tudo quanto é mais necessário à vida passamos nessa sepultura até que abordamos as praias brasileiras. Para caber a *mercadoria humana* no porão fomos *amarrados* em pé e para que não houvesse receio de revolta, acorrentados como animais ferozes das nossas matas, que se levam para recreio dos potentados da Europa. Davam-nos a água imunda, podre e dada com mesquinhez, a comida má e ainda mais porca: vimos morrer ao nosso lado muitos companheiros à falta de ar, de alimento e de água. (Reis 117)[41]

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[40] "And immediately two men appeared, and bound me with ropes. I was a prisoner – I was a slave! I begged them, in the name of my daughter, to restore my freedom: the barbarians would smile at my tears and look at me without mercy. I thought I was going crazy, I thought I was going to die, but it did not happen because luck kept me fighting for long".

[41] "They put me, together with three hundred companions of misfortune and captivity, in the narrow and infected basement of a ship. Thirty days of cruel torments, and absolute lack of all that is most necessary in life; we stayed in this grave until we approached the Brazilian beaches. To fit the human commodity in the basement we were tied up on foot, so that there would be no revolt, chained like ferocious animals of our jungles, taken for the recreation of the potentates of Europe. They gave us dirty water, rotten with stinginess, bad food and even more so; we saw many comrades dying beside us in the absence of air, food and water".

Susana's words make the ill-treatment to which slaves were subjected explicit, by depicting the hardships they suffered. It displays, in turn, the impossibility for sòaves to reverse the situation, since they had no other alternative than to accept the unfortunate position of captives. Certainly, rebellions would had only assassination as a response: "Nos dois últimos dias não houve mais alimento. Os mais insofridos entraram a vozear. Grande Deus! Da escotilha lançaram sobre nós água e breu fervendo, que escaldou-nos e veio dar morte aos cabeças do motim" / "In the last two days there was no more food. Even the quietest people began to scream. Dear Lord! They cast the water and boiling water on us, which burned us and came to slay the heads of the mutiny" (Reis 117-118).

Eventually, when the unfortunate slaves crossed the ocean and arrived in Brazil, entered a different world without return. Captivity is the true home of eternal pain: it blunts slaves' sensitivity and through terror brings it to a mixture of confusion and torpor. The insane and incessant work, the scarce and bad food, the punishments and the vices, the beloved ones absent and lost forever, the physical tortures, together with moral anguishes, generated at last despair or sadness, after which sometimes came death: "muitos não deixavam chegar a esse último extremo – davam-se à morte"/ "many did not wait until this extreme state and chose to die first" (Reis 117). Slavery puts slaves in a sate of "embrutecimento"/ "ugliness" and complete "torpor", caused by the loss of freedom, of their beloved ones and of their native land. It was all exacerbate by the constant horror felt for the atrocities to which they were subjected: "a dor da perda da pátria, dos entes caros, da liberdade foram sufocados nessa viagem pelo horror constante de tamanhas atrocidades"/ "the pain for the loss of the homeland, of the beloved ones and of freedom were smothered in this journey by the constant horror of such atrocities" (Reis 118).

4.1.2. The social framework of Brazilian slavery

As matter of fact, Maria Firmina dos Reis revealed how slavery as an institution in the colony is made possible by a social system that directly or indirectly supports it, of which the paterfamilias are not the only ones responsible for. The main characters of the novel (Túlio, Tancredo, Úrsula, Adelaide, Fernando, Luísa B., the father of

Tancredo and his mother, Susana) are surrounded by other secondary characters that have a relevant position in respect to the violent action of the paterfamilias. By the complicity they express to the violent male characters, they allow injustice to take place. This is the case of Fernando's chaplain where not taking sides implicitly favours the violent behaviour of the *comendador*:

> O comendador, talvez mais por ostentação que por sentimentos religiosos, tinha em sua casa um capelão, que era voz pública ser-lhe muito dedicado em consequência de altos favores feitos pelos pais de Fernando à sua família. Fosse pelo que fosse, o capelão de Fernando P... dizia-se amigo deste, e isso causava a todos admiração; porque o comendador era um homem detestável e rancoroso, o sacerdote parecia ser um santo varão. Por singular anomalia, estes dois homens pareciam querer-se, ou suportam-se reciprocamente e essa união dava-lhes a reputação de íntimos amigos. (Reis 177)[42]

By showing the behaviour of the chaplain, the writer denounces the Church's complicity and passivity toward slavery: the bonds between the priests and the lords were intimate. The connivance of the Church with the slaveholders was due to the fact that the Clergy benefited from the economic power of the ruling classes, which served their interests. Accordingly, the narrator refers to the intimate friendship between *comendador* Fernando P. and the chaplain, as a relation between a "homem muito perverso, poderoso, estúpido e orgulhoso" and "um santo homem que se submetia aos mandos e caprichos e era cúmplice do senhor" (178).

In addition, when Fernando P. orders the capture of Susana, the chaplain takes part to the imprisonment, indicating how the conniving behaviour of the chaplain went beyond his silence. Yet, when finally the chaplain resolves himself to defend Susana, by declaring her innocent (and by stating that who condemns the innocent is, in turn, condemned to hell), he is vexed by insults from Fernando, thirsting for revenge: "Mind you, you damned father! I will never listen to your doctrine [...] – Shut up, shut up, you stupid fool!" (Reis 194). In the same scene, two other interesting figures appear: the farmer overseers. The first one, when ordered by Fernando to go and get the old slave Susana and torture her to death, in order to find

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[42] "The commander, perhaps more by ostentation than by religious sentiments, had in his house a chaplain, who was said to be very devoted to Fernando, as a consequence of high favours made by his family's parents. Whatever it was, the chaplain of Fernando P... was said to be his friend, and this caused everyone stupor; because the commander was a detestable and spiteful man, the priest seemed to be a holy man. By a singular anomaly, these two men seemed to love each other, or support each other, and this association gave them the reputation of close friends".

out where Úrsula and Tancredo had gone, refuses to obey. He quits his job and goes to Susana to save her (even though she will prefer to die as an innocent person rather than to flee). The other superintendent instead, hired after the quitting of the first, obeys the orders without any form of resistance, becoming complicit with Fernando's crimes and actually killing Susana. Ultimately, the social context that favours and never questions the master's behaviour turns out to be a decisive element for the tyranny to take place.

In this sense, another subtle examination of Brazilian society is advanced by Maria Firmina dos Reis, since, besides its being formally based on liberal values, it cannot count on any form of impartial justice. For instance, in telling her story, Luisa B. relates how her husband was killed without anyone being denounced: "Ninguém, a não ser eu, sentiu a morte de meu esposo. A justiça adormeceu sobre o facto, [...] – Oh! – disse o cavalleiro commovido – quantas desgraças! E não tendes suspeita alguma de quem quer que fosse esse assassino, que a justiça não procurou punir?"/ "No one but me felt the death of my husband. Justice fell asleep on the fact, [...] – Oh! Said the knight, touched, "how many misfortunes! And you have no suspicions of whoever this murderer was, whom justice did not seek to punish?" (Reis 81). Impartial justice is absent in the Brazilian socio-cultural context of the nineteenth centuryas long as no one dares to denounce harassments by powerful men, including the Church who takes part in those powers. In this regard, Fernando speaks truth to his chaplain: "– Silencio! – exclamou Fernando ardendo em ira, e aproximando-se-lhe, disse: – Sois meo prisioneiro. A justiça da terra não me estorvará a vingança porque ninguem senão vós ousará denunciar-me. – As... sas... si... no!! – estupefacto disse o pobre sacerdote, e ficou estacado nesse lugar sem movimento, com os cabellos irriçados, os membros hirtos, e os olhos parados, como se um raio o houvesse fulminado" / "Silence! Exclaimed Fernando, burning in anger, and coming to him, said: 'You are my prisoner. The righteousness of the earth will not hinder my vengeance, for no one but you will dare to denounce me'. – 'The ... yes ... no!' Said the poor priest, and he stood there motionless, his hair irked, his limbs stiff, his eyes still, as if a lightning bolt had struck him" (Reis 196).

Maria Firmina stresses the absence of any juridical justice to which weak people could appeal also in the epilogue: "Dous annos eram já passados sobre os tristes

acontecimentos, que narrámos, e ninguem mais na provincia se lembrava dos execrandos factos do convento de *** e da horrenda morte de Tancredo. A justiça, se a pintam vendada, completamente cega ficou, e os assassinatos do apaixonado mancebo e do seo fiel Tulio impunes"/ "Two years had passed since the sad events narrated, and no one else in the province remembered the execrating facts of the convent and the hideous death of Tancredo. Justice, if painted blindfolded, remained completely blind, and the murders of the passionate young man and of his faithful slave Túlio remained unpunished". Consequently, Maria Firmina demonstrates how in the Brazil of her time, there was not impartial juridical or social justice.

5. The female gaze

Likewise, society was unjust for slaves and Afro-descendants along with women. Overall, the female characters, Úrsula, Luísa B., Adelaide, Tancredo's mother, Mãe Susana, together with Túlio's mother, revealed the oppression they experienced. The female gaze manifests itself as reflecting on the difference between men and women and how to represent the tensions generated by this difference that was built through the cultural ideology proposed and imposed by the dominant patriarchal society. Yet, women in the novel pay the price of freedom and emancipation from society with death, disability or madness, whether it is for their own liberty (as in the case of Úrsula) or for the one of their children (as for Luísa B., the mother of Tancredo and Susana). Thus, Maria Firmina's novel covers a universe of gender relations that ranges from the Romantic love of one of the main characters, Úrsula and the young man Tancredo, to the rotten family structure of Tancredo's parents, destroyed by the adulterous relationship of Adelaide with Tancredo's father. In addition to love relationships, the innovative presence of brothers and sisters' relationships is also extant, as that of Luísa B. and Fernando P., and the almost incestuous love of Fernando P. for his nephew, Úrsula. A very special tide, then, is the one of Mãe Susana and Túlio: being both slaves with a traumatic past, their relationship is stronger than that of blood, for it was born out of indescribable sorrows.

In this scenario, Tancredo is a key figure insofar as he demonstrates how it is possible for a white man of power (he was related to Fernando, therefore he was Ursula's cousin and had a high social title, see: Reis 106) to have a virtuous soul. Tancredo also challenges patriarchal structures by searching for a marriage outside the mere convenience of castes and gifts. Tancredo registers as a defender of women and slave's rights, given his criticism of his own father's behaviour, and by allying himself with the female characters, disobeying the male-power confraternity. The true innovative aspect of the novel Úrsula, also resides in this male figure that illustrates how power relations, even if mediated by social aspects of race and gender, are in fact the outcome of the inability of men in a patriarchal and colonial social structure to suffer and to love. This message is extremely relevant also today for both the feminist and the postcolonial movements, inasmuch as Tancredo is the demonstration of how a subject of power, can detach himself from his privilege to enter into a process of empathising, which helps him see interconnections with others rather than exercising his authority over them.

Conversely, the antagonists of the novel *Úrsula* impose their morality, based on hypocrisy and purely economic and sexual interests, to other characters, that can resist only by facing the risk of death or madness. The Gothic characterization of Fernando P., which is depicted as the malicious incarnation of authority, corroborates the situation of women in nineteenth century Brazil. Fernando, the main character's uncle and her antagonist par excellence, represents all the oppression resulting from the abuse of power. Particularly, he epitomizes the dark and perverse side of *commendadors* of the time, whose oppressive practices were determinant for an obedience based on the fear of violence. Therefore, male leadership relied on violence both as a sadistic practice, against slaves and women, and as an act of pleasure and revenge. The characterizations of female figures are not aligned with the conventional women's literary and socio-cultural image; instead, they reveal several features of the feminine, declined within different cultural identities. In order to understand the innovation that these characters bring in the literary Brazilian landscape of the nineteenth century better, it could be useful to look at them specifically, looking at how their voices intermingle in the fiction.

6. A closer look at *Úrsula*'s characters

Like the narrative of Mary Prince and Cristina Ayala's poetry, the subjectivities described in the novel have a markedly collective nature, as the language is infused with collective utterances. Susana with her story is talking in the name of an entire people, tied together by the violence of extirpation and separation, which generates *saudade*, the feeling of something irremediably lost, that cannot be recaptured neither by freedom in the new land nor with returning to the native land. Once the traumatic experiences have taken place, nothing can repair it, since it proved the barbaric nature of men of power and the irremediably loss of innocence. With the novel of *Úrsula* and, above all, with her abolitionist position, Reis contributed to the formation of a literature that privileges the collective, besides bringing to the reader the historical and literary marks of a past sometimes forgotten. If Mary Prince, with her autobiography narrated the history of a collective rather than individual subject, Maria Firmina dos Reis, using the genre of the novel with a third person narrator, creates a coral story in which there is not a single protagonist. Each character contributes to the denouncement of collective injustices. The interventions that the narrator does in the novel indeed underline how Túlio and Susana are representative of a collective subject, as Deleuze and Guattari claim happens with minor literature.

6.1 Ursula

Ursula's character exemplifies the typical naïve Romantic heroine[43], portrayed with an extraordinary innocence and a profound capacity to feel compassion and love. Accordingly, Úrsula is potrayed by the narrator as "mimosa filha da floresta", "flor educada na tranqüilidade dos campos...", "anjo", "figura cândida", "a pobre donzela", "era como uma rosa no meio das açucenas, " "essa beleza adormecida e

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[43] Hammond K. (2012), *Radcliffe's daughters : a study of Gothic motifs, female authorship, and the Gothic heroine in the Romantic and postmodern periods*, M.A. Tarleton State University 2012; Moers E., *Literary Women*, (1978), London: The Women's Press.

pálida, " "como um lírio do vale"; "faces cândidas aveludadas", "peito cândido e descuidoso da virgem", "rosto pálido e aflito". The sweet Úrsula seeks spiritual refuge with nature and even Tancredo identifies her with natural forces ("Úrsula, mimosa filha da floresta", Reis 40). In moments of greater distress, Úrsula follows the advice of her mother and of mother Susana, finding comfort in the natural world, in conformity with the African and Afro-Brazilian belief that nature is the mediating force between the human being and God (as the narrator frequently remarks).

The readers can sympathetically feel the vulnerability and the anxieties that affect Úrsula, such as the fear to lose her mother, and then transferred to the romantic love she felt for Tancredo. As a true Romantic heroine, Úrsula faints in the graveyard when she prays for her mother, awakened only by the voice of her beloved one: "-Sois vós? Disse num transporte indefinível de amor e de esperanças. – Oh! Então é verdade que Deus escutou as minhas súplicas! ... Tancredo, em nome do céu, salvai-me! " (Reis 160). Úrsula as a fragile and angelic woman needs her saviour, Tancredo, in order to survive. Nonetheless, the love for Tancredo gives her the strength to face any obstacle, including her uncle: "juro-vos pela vida de minha mãe, que vos amarei agora e sempre, com toda a força de um amor puro e intenso, e que zombará de qualquer oposição donde quer que parta" (Reis 53). Likewise, Úrsula's voice sounds as a cry for freedom in honour of her own family. Yet, Reis takes from Úrsula those central issues of romantic love fantasies to present the real world of suffering, in which it is impossible for some people to accomplish their wishes, due to society and the violence it is built upon.

6.2. Tancredo's Father

Maria Firmina gives a narrative example of *mandonismo*[44] with the figure of Tancredo's father, of which Firmina does not indicate the name. Tancredo's father is the paterfamilias of a notorious and illustrious family, unscrupulous and cruel. His

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[44] *Mandonismo* is a Brazilian word, used in political science, philosophy and sociology, to define one of the characteristics of the exercise of power by oligarchic structures (and in many ways it is similar to the Spanish word *caciquismo*). The master – a potentate, chief, or colonel – is the individual who, possessing strategic resource control (such as land ownership) acquires dominance over the population of the territory that allows him to arbitrarily exercise politics and trade. See: Carvalho, José Murilo de. 'Mandonismo, Coronelismo, Clientelismo: Uma Discussão Conceitual'. *Dados Dados*, vol. 40, no. 2, 1997, pp. 229-250.

anger and his rude personality caused his wife a lot of suffering. Tancredo describes him as a tyrannical figure: "estava colocado o mais despótico poder: meu pai era o tirano de sua mulher; e ela, triste vítima, chorava em silêncio, e resignava-se com sublime brandura" (Reis 60). When Tancredo asks his father to allow him to marry Adelaide, the Gothic description of the scene remarks Tancredo's father characteristics as an intimidating person:

> Fui logo introduzido em seus aposentos. Nesse quarto, onde brilhavam o luxo e a opulência, tudo era triste e sombrio. Cruzava-o meu pai com passos rápidos e incertos; seus olhos refletiam o ódio que lhe dominava nesse momento o pensamento. Notei que suas feições estavam transtornadas, e que baça palidez lhe anuviava o rosto. Semelhava o leão ferido, que despede chama dos olhos, e eu julguei que ia prorromper em insensatos brados. (Reis 64)[45]

If the luxury and opulence of the place denounce Tancredo's father privileged position in family and society, the dark atmosphere seems to leave no doubt that Tancredo is facing a threat. This last proposition is confirmed by the physiognomy of the villainous character, whose description proves his irascible state of mind, upset and dominated by hatred.

When Tancredo then comes back to his father's house, after one year of forced exile, with the will to marry Adelaide, as his father had promised him, he senses the crime that his father had presumably done: "à proporção que me aproximava dessa casa, onde eu deixara minha desventurada mãe, pálida e desfeita, e onde ia encontrar lutuoso silêncio: e o aspecto lúgubre do escravo, que vigiava a entrada, aumentou mais essa dor profunda"/ "as I approached the house, where I had left my unhappy mother, pale and shattered, and where I would find a mournful silence: and the sullen aspect of the slave, who watched the entrance, further increased this deep pain" (Reis 86). The air of pestilence scented by Tancredo is due to the death of Tancredo's mother, the circumstances of which are not explicitly explained, although the marriage of Tancredo's father with Adelaide, immediately after the wife's death, suggests his responsibility for the crime: "Oh! meu pai! meu pai... minha mãe era uma angélica mulher, e vós, implacável no vosso ódio, envenenaste-lhe a existência, a roubastes ao meu coração... Oh! suas cinzas, senhor, clamam justiça contra os

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[45] "I was soon introduced into his chambers. In this room, where luxury and opulence shone, everything was sad and gloomy. My father was crossing me with quick, uncertain steps; his eyes reflected the hatred that dominated his thoughts at that moment. I noticed that his features were upset, and that his face was pale. He seemed like a wounded lion, who fires flame from the eyes, and I thought I was going to burst into foolish cries".

autores de seus últimos pesares"/ "Oh! my dad! my dad... my mother was an angelic woman, and you, implacable in your hatred, poisoned her existence, you robbed her from my heart... Oh! Her ashes, sir, cry out justice against the authors of her last sorrows" (Reis 90).

Through the figure of Tancredo's mother, the narrator criticises the marriage bankruptcy postulated by dowries and conveniences, and mainly criticises the maintenance of the patriarchal family model. The delineation of this character reveals the wife's submission to the husband's will, although Tancredo reveals the injustices imposed on his mother:

> Não sei por quê, mas nunca pude dedicar a meu pai amor filial que rivalizasse com aquele que sentia por minha mãe, e sabeis por quê? É que entre ele e sua esposa estava colocado o mais despótico poder: meu pai era o tirano de sua mulher, e ela, triste vítima, chorava em silêncio e resignava-se com sublime brandura.
> Meu pai era para com ela um homem desapiedado e orgulhoso – minha mãe era uma santa e humilde mulher.
> Quantas vezes na infância, malgrado meu, testemunhei cenas dolorosas que magoavam, e de louca prepotência, que revoltavam! E meu coração alvoroçava-se nessas ocasiões, apesar das prudentes admoestações de minha pobre mãe.
> É que as lágrimas da infeliz, e os desgostos que a minavam, tocavam o fundo da minha alma. (Reis 60)[46]

In female Gothic, marriage is rarely represented as a blissful conclusion (Williams 140); rather, it commonly indicates the beginning of ruinous women's sufferings. Therefore, the fatality occurred to Tancredo's mother is one among many other stories in which Gothic writers reveal oppressed wives subjected to the violence of their husbands, which are not in turn subjected to any law. Indeed, also for the ambiguous character of Adelaide, marriage will not have a cheerful epilogue, as Maria Fimina reveals in the epilogue of the novel.

6.3. Adelaide

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[46] "I do not know why; but I could never dedicate my filial love to my father as I did to my mother, and do you know why? Because between him and his wife was placed the most despotic power: my father was the tyrant of his wife; and she, a sad victim, wept in silence, and resigned herself with sublime mildness. My father was a pitiful and proud man – my mother was a holy and humble woman. How many times in my childhood, in my midst, I witnessed painful scenes that hurt, of mad arrogance, which nauseated me! And my heart was stirring on these occasions despite the prudent admonitions of my poor mother. And the cries of the unhappy, and the displeasures, that undermined her, touched the bottom of my soul".

Tancredo's mother had welcomed Adelaide, a beautiful and charming girl, as a daughter. Accordingly, Adelaide is initially described as an angel:

> No salão havia um turbilhão de luzes; no fundo, reclinada em primoroso sofá, estava uma mulher de extremada belesa. Figurou-se-me um anjo. A explendente claridade, que iluminava esse salão dourado, dando-lhe de chapa sobre a fronte larga e límpida circundava-a de voluptuoso encanto.
> Era Adelaide.
> Adornava-a um rico vestido de seda cor de pérolas, e no seio nú ondeava-lhe um precioso colar de brilhantes e pérolas, e os cabellos estavam enastrados de jóias de não menor valor.
> Distraída, no meio de tão opulento explendor, afagava meigamente as penas de seo leque dourado. (Reis 87)[47]

However, when Tancredo returns home from his forced exile he envisages a completely different figure: as a transgressor of the Romantic aesthetic demands, Adelaide is covered with jewels (a sign of the sensualisation and metonymy of her intentions), she has a naked breast, sits down in a provocative manner, and becomes a "mulher odiosa" (Reis 87):

> A mulher, que tinha ante meus olhos, era um fantasma terrível, era um demônio de traições, que na mente abrasada de desesperação figurava-se-me sorrindo para mim com insultuoso escárnio. Parecia horrível, desferindo chamas dos olhos, e que me cercava e dava estrepitosas gargalhadas. Erguia-se para mim ameaçadora, e abraçava e beijava outro ente de aspecto também medonho. Ambos no meio de orgia infernal cercavam-me e não me deixava partir. (Reis 88)[48]

Adelaide represents a woman of the people who is able to do anything for the sake of survival. While she is initially portrayed as a suffering person, she suddenly reverses her position becoming cruel and cold. Adelaide, therefore, represents the image of the devil, of the mermaid and the jellyfish, which symbolize lust.

The construction of this character undergoes a negative gradation: from an orphan and idealized virgin to a promiscuous woman, who ends up in suffering, dying repentant. In approaching lust, Adelaide embodies the achievable fruition of women,

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[47] "In the hall there was a whirlwind of lights; in the background, reclining in an exquisite chair, was a woman of extreme beauty. She looked like an angel to me. The bright clarity, which illuminated this golden hall, giving her a plaque on her broad, clean forehead surrounded her with voluptuous charm. It was Adelaide. She adorned it with a rich silk-pearly gown, and on her breast she waved a precious necklace of glittering pearls, and her hair was full of jewels of no less value. Unmasked, in the midst of such an opulent splendour, she caressed tenderly the pen of the golden fan".

[48] "The woman before my eyes was a terrible ghost; she was a demon of treachery, and in her burning mind of despair she was smiling at me with insulting scorn. She looked horrible, sending flames from my eyes, she came close to me and gave loud laughs. She looked up at me threateningly, and hugged and kissed another equally hideous looking entity. Both in the midst of the infernal orgy surrounded me and would not let me go".

her disposable body comes to represent the sexualized flesh, the pleasures offered by woman's flesh to man. Adelaide's characterization closely approximates the lust that will appear in women constructed by realistic and naturalistic narratives, since in Romanticism women could be represented as mothers, daughters, or a religious women, except never as lovers. Yet, Adelaide expresses also a form of feminine resistance to the commands of the patriarchal lord. As a matter of fact, through her promiscuity inflict an indirect revenge to Tancredo's father: "Ela ludibriara o decrépito velho, que a roubara ao filho; e ele em seus momentos de ciúme impotente amaldiçoava a hora em que a amara"/ "She deceived the old decrepitess, who had stolen her from his son; and in his moments of helpless jealousy he cursed the times when he had loved her" (236). Adelaide is then both a victim and a perpetuator: she is a poor orphan, yet cruel and unscrupulous. Lastly, in the epilogue is revealed how Adelaide regrets her choices, revealing her capacity to change her mind. By doing so, she adds complexities to gender, racial and cultural relations of power, representing human beings as multifaceted subjects (as well as Tancredo does).

6.4. Tancredo

Tancredo is a young aristocratic knight, ("um jovem cavaleiro melancólico", Reis 42), a description that reaffirms the Romantic tone of the novel. Yet, Tancredo's character gains prominence by the feelings of friendship he has towards slave Túlio. The friendship with Túlio is highly innovative if compared to other narratives of the time, for in Brazilian literature a white man had never been placed so closely to the side of an African slave: "Esse beijo selou para sempre a mútua amizade que em seus peitos sentiam eles nascer e vigorar. As almas generosas são sempre irmãs" (Reis 26).

Tancredo breaks all the colonial conventions, by kissing a slave, treating him fraternally. Showing his virtue, Tancredo symbolizes the possibility for Brazilian society to change: it is clear in fact that the society could become just only to the extent that all the white male Brazilian convert their attitude, as Tancredo does ("Continuai, pelo céo, a ser generoso, e compassivo para com todo aquelle que, como eu, tiver a desventura de ser vil e miseravel escravo! Costumados como estamos ao

rigoroso despreso dos brancos, quanto nos será doce vos encontrarmos no meio das nossas dores! Se todos elles, meu senhor, se assemelhassem a vós, por certo mais suave nos seria a escravidão"/ "Continue to be generous and merciful to the one who, like me, has the misfortune of being a vile and miserable slave! Accustomed as we are to the rigorous contempt of whites, how sweet it will be for us to find ourselves in the midst of our pains! If all of them, my lord, resemble you, we would have been softer slavery", 28-29).

6.5. Túlio

Slave Túlio is another character of fundamental importance in the narrative. Companion and saviour of Tancredo, he was born and lived in captivity. Túlio is a victim, not a tormentor. Yet, his revolt is settled in silence, since he has no means to confront directly the power of the lords. Firmina describes his condition as such:

> O sangue africano refervia-lhe nas veias; o mísero ligava-se á odiosa cadeia da escravidão; e embalde o sangue ardente que herdara de seus pais, e que o nosso clima e a servidão não poderam resfriar, embalde – dissemos – se revoltava; porque se lhe erguia como barreira – o poder do forte contra o fraco!... (Reis 22)[49]

Túlio revolts against slavery, insomuch as his African blood still fluxed in his vein, making him feel the injustices of slavery. In particular, the moment he finds someone who pays for his freedom, he finds himself freed, so much as Firmina stresses that also Úrsula envied him ("Úrsula invejava vagamente a sorte de Túlio e achava mór ventura do que a liberdade poder elle acompanhar o cavalleiro" (Reis 41). Yet, Mother Susana reminds him that freedom would only be achieved in their homeland: "-Vai, meu filho! Que o senhor guie os teus passos, e te abençoe, como eu te abençôo" / "Go, my son! May the Lord guide your steps, and bless you, as I bless you" (119).

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[49] "African blood burned in his veins; the poor man was attached to the odious chain of slavery; and the ardent blood he had inherited from his parents, and that our climate and servitude could not have cooled, – let's say – he revolted; because it stood as a barrier – the power of the strong against the weak".

6.6 Mãe Susana

Mother Susana holds the consciousness of being oppressed and thus sees in death the only way to reach freedom again, so much that when she is offered an opportunity to escape from Fernando she refuses, claiming to be innocent, preferring death to flight. Already the figure of Mother Susana breaks the representation created by society about female slaves as an obedient and submissive person. That is, far from being the submissive woman, without thoughts and actions of her own, Mother Susana shows Túlio that even freed, he is not free, in as much as in Brazilian society the distinction between slave and freedman was nothing more than an artifice.

Susana appears alive the last time in the novel when she stands up against Fernando, knowing that she was going to die:

> "Levem-na!" tornou accenando para Susana, "Miserável! Prentendeste iludir-me... saberei vingar-me. Encerrem-na em a mais úmida prisão desta casa, ponha-se-lhe corrente aos pés, e à cintura, e a comida seja-lhe permittida quanto baste para que eu a encontre viva".
> Susana ouviu tudo isso com a cabeça baixa; depois ergueu-a, fitou os céos, onde a aurora começava a pintar-se, como se intentasse dar à luz seu derradeiro adeus, e de novo volvendo para o chão, exclamou:
> "Paciência!" (Reis 192)[50]

Although under the defenceless yoke of slavery, Susana preserved her moral integrity. The word "patience" is not the symbol of her submission; rather, it stands for a passive resistance to injustice, through serenity. In her last appearance in the narrative, she is deceased, and Firmina describes her corpse, wrapped in a shroud. Even dead, Black Susana disturbs Fernando P., as far as her sacrifice haunts the patriarchal lord, and her voice resonates ghostly, transformed into the remorse of the master, disturbing his consciousness:

> Em uma rede velha levavam dois pretos um cadáver envolto em grosseira e exígua mortalha; iam-no sepultar!

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[50] "'Take her!' He [Fernando] said, pointing at Susana, 'Miserable! You tried to deceive me... I know how to take revenge. Lock her up in the most confined prison of this house, let chains be at her feet, and at her waist, and let her food only be sufficient for me to find her alive'. Susana heard all this with her head lowered; then she lifted it, stared at the sky, where the sunrise began to be painted, as if it was trying to give birth to the last one, and and again returning to the ground, she exclaimed: 'Patience!'".

This moment is actually the only one in the narrative in which Fernando shows any kind of sincere fear and regret for his tyrannical behaviour. Soon after, however, he returns on his foolish rage, filled out with vengeance, and goes to find Tancredo and Úrsula.

6.7 Fernando P.

Commander Fernando P. is the pure narrative incarnation of evil, of the villain, who has been destroying several lives only to achieve his ambitions. At first glance, the villain's attempts to charm Úrsula can be understood as "attempted incest". Initially toward his sister, Luísa B., for whom he had such an intense love that he was frustrated to see her marrying another man (to the point of murdering his rival). Then, the feeling is transferred to Úrsula, his niece, whom he declares to be in love with, although the girl loves another man. Fernando, once again, kills his rival and commits barbarities against people who helped Tancredo, like Susana and Túlio, accusing them of accomplices.

Fernando assassinates his rivals, by doing so he contributed to render his beloved, Luísa B. and Úrsula, invalid: one paralytic, the other mad. Like other Gothic villains, whose transgressing behaviour is the outcome of extreme and unrestrained emotions – such as passion, jealousy, ambition, and desire for revenge –, the malignity of the commander is born out of the hatred of a sister who, in the past, disobeyed his will. The noncompliance turned him into a violent and sadistic man (as the way he approaches slaves of Santa Cruz shows), to the point that, in order to find Úrsula, commander Fernando tortures Susana, assassins Túlio, and soon afterwards kills Tancredo:

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[51] "In an old hammock two black people carried a corpse in coarse shroud; they would not bury it! Then Fernando P... trembled; because in his ears he heard a tremendous and horrible voice that froze him with fear. It was the voice of poignant and sharp remorse, which without truce or pause stirred up his heart".

> Fernando P... furioso e com ímpeto [...] apareceu às suas vítimas sinistro e ameaçador, como
> o anjo deve-o ser no dia supremo do julgamento.
> Feroz e hórrido sorriso arregaçava-lhe os lábios, que resfolegavam o ódio e o crime. Assim
> deviam sorrir-se Nero, Heliogábalo e Sila nas suas saturnais de sangue. (Reis 213)[52]

This sadistic attitude of the villain is associated with to Roman emperors, historically known for their tyrannical deeds. Fernando's characterization in the narrative climax works then to emphasize the cruelty he is about to commit: ferocious, dark and menacing, he murders Tancredo in front of Úrsula. The protagonist sees herself helpless at the mercy of her tormentor, and under the command of Fernando she turns mad.

6.8. Luisa B.

The author uses Gothic literature to give Luísa B.'s character, Úrsula's mother, a terrifying appearance. However, unlike the description of Tancredo's father and Adelaide, in Luisa's case it is noticeable that her skeletal and unhealthy appearance, compared to that of a galvanized corpse, is not an indication of her own transgressions, but rather the effect resulting from the displeasures caused by her husband. Luisa herself narrates the adverse conditions she had faced during marriage:

> Ah! Senhor! – continuou a infeliz mulher – este desgraçado consórcio, que atraiu tão
> vivamente sobre os dois esposos a cólera de um irmão ofendido, fez toda a desgraça da
> minha vida. Paulo B... não soube compreender a grandeza de meu amor, cumulou-me de
> desgostos e de aflições domésticas, desrespeitou seus deveres conjugais, e sacrificou a minha
> fortuna em favor de suas loucas paixões. (Reis 102)[53]

Like the marriage of Tancredo's parents, Luísa and Paulo's union is portrayed as a source of suffering for the wife. The adversities caused by the wretched consortium only end with the mysterious murder of Paul B. Luisa thus turns into a helpless widow, reduced to misery for twelve long years, displaying the bitterness of the

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[52] "Fernando P ... furious and with impetus [...] appeared to his victims sinister and threatening, as the angel ought to be on the supreme day of judgment. A ferocious, horrid smile spread his lips, which bled hate and crime. So Nero, Heliogabalus, and Sila should have been smiling in their blood".
[53] "'Ah! Sir!' the wretched woman continued, 'this consortium that had drawn the wrath of an offended brother so heartily upon the two spouses, made all the disgrace of my life. Paul B... could not understand the greatness of my love, he overcame me with displeasures and domestic afflictions, disrespected his conjugal duties, and sacrificed my fortune in favour of his mad passions'".

subordinate condition of woman. Unlike the other personages, she was condemned to live under the caste of masculine power represented by the brother and later by the husband, being limited by her physical disability, subjected to the constant persecutions of Fernando.

Furthermore, the problem of senescence appears incarnated in the personage Luisa B (mother of Úrsula), and in tow, the narrator constructs a completely debilitated personage, creating for the first time in the Brazilian Literature a figure who problematizes the physical deficiency, that speaks in first person. Luísa B., as a character of fiction, represents the extent of men's oppression of woman, as far as her whole image revolves on the image of immobility. In turn, her economic bankruptcy, her helplessness, relieved only by her daughter are elements that denounce the results of male oppression and its effects on the female body, indended as physical, as well as the socio-cultural and psychological. So far, she only wishes to die: "eu nada peço para mim nada mais que a sepultura" (Reis 77). Even under the strong characterization of immobility and powerlessness, Luisa B raises her voice to denounce the ills of her condition, along with the impunity to the crimes practiced by patriarchal lords:

> Ninguém, a não ser eu, sentiu a morte de meu esposo. A justiça adormeceu sobre o facto, e eu, pobre mulher, chorei a orfandade de minha filha, que apenas saía do berço, sem uma esperança, sem um arrimo, e alguns meses depois, veio a paralisia – essa meia-morte – roubar-me o movimento e tirar-me até o gozo ao menos de seguir os primeiros passos desta menina, que o céu me confiou. (Reis 102)[54]

Ultimately, Luísa B, as a fictional character, symbolises all together the wife, the elderly, the widow, the woman with physical disability, the mother, the mother-in-law and the sister. The feminine dimensions, seen by the narrator situates a single personage in several social roles and raises an intense critique of the feminine situation in Brazilian society.

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[54] "No one but me felt the death of my husband. Justice fell asleep on the fact, and I, poor woman, cried the orphanage of my daughter, just out of the cradle, without hope, without a hold, and a few months later came paralysis – this half death robs me of movement and allows me only to enjoy to follow the first steps of this girl, whom heaven entrusted to me".

6.9. Father Antero

At last, Father Antero is another character that despite the fact of having a small participation in the novel, actively contributes to the fiction frame. He is an Afro-Brazilian who is responsible for Fernando's prisons. When Túlio is incarcerated Antero completes his task to watch over his fellow slave, now prisoner. Antero, while talking with Túlio, mourns the lost African homeland, remembers moments of happiness, amusing himself amidst parties and drinks extracted from the native palm trees, regretting the life of captivity that he leads. Only his addiction to *tiquira* (an alcoholic drink *cachaça* extracted from *cassava*, very common in Maranhão and in the north of the country) gave him strength to be able to withstand the wickedness of his master, Fernando P..., making him one of the ambiguous figures of the novel.

7. An "ungrateful" desire for freedom

Tancredo, the good white man that sacrifices his life for the sake of his love, treats the slave and lifesaver Túlio, as an equal and, in turn, when Túlio sees the fainted body of Tancredo, "coração tocou-lhe piedoso interesse". The interest the slave feels is driven by a sincere affection, and not by the will of a reward, as the narrator stresses in many passages of the text. The help Túlio gives Tancredo is indeed a "obra de piedade", that makes him a "compassivo escravo".[55] Túlio helps Tancredo because he has a generous soul, and in turn Tancredo is able to truly appreciate the help of Túlio, by considering it not a service but a sign of friendship, as long as "as almas generosas são sempre irmans" ("the generous souls are always soul mates", 15).

The friendship, defined by Tancredo as "a mais nobre missão de que o homem está imcumbido por Deos – a fraternidade" (26), and the gratitude that Tancredo feels for Túlio leads him to give Túlio the money to buy his freedom: "– Recebe, meo amigo, este pequeno presente que te faço, e compra com elle a tua liberdade.

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[55] Another examplar passage in the text is when Tancredo asks "Porque assim mostras interessar-te por mim?", Túlio answers: "Eu –continuou com acanhamento, que a escravidão gerava – supposto nenhum serviço vos possa prestar, todavia quisera poder ser-vos util. Perdoae-me!...".

Túlio obteve pois por dinheiro aquillo que Deus lhe dera, como a todos os viventes –
Era livre como o ar, como o haviam sido seos paes, la nesses adustos sertões da
Africa". By doing so, a relationship born between a slave and a free, powerful, man
could have become a relationship among two free people. Yet, Túlio, after having
received the money to buy freedom: "como se fora a sombra do seo joven protector
estava disposto a seguil-o por toda a parte. Agora Túlio daria todo o seo sangue para
poupar ao mancebo uma dôr sequer, o mais leve pesar; a sua gratidão não conhecia
limites". The feeling of gratitude bounded Túlio to Tancredo, in a way that the
gratitude of Tancredo for Túlio's help never did. It seems that this new relationship,
based on gratitude, leaves the relationship between the two generous souls
unbalanced. In a sense, Túlio, who was Fernando's slave, being freed by Tancredo,
becomes his grateful slave, bounded with a stronger link than slavery: the voluntary
service, born out of the fact that his friend gave him all he longed for, namely
freedom.

The literary trope of "the grateful slave" has been highly employed in Atlantic
British literature of the eighteenth century, as professor George Boulukos analyses in
his pioneer work, *The Grateful Slave: the Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-century
British and American Culture* (2008). According to George Boulukos, The
controversy on slavery born out of the dilemma it created: "the problem with slavery
is that slaves are dangerous because they are forced to work against their will; the
danger is removed if their 'enslavement' is voluntary and therefore not slavery at all"
(qtd. in Boulukos 2). English eighteenth century fiction, suggests that this
paradoxical state could be overcame by an emotional relation: the one of gratitude. In
The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1719) by Daniel
Defoe (1660-1731) it is possible to find one of the most known instances of this
relation of gratitute, when Friday becomes the voluntary slave of Crusoe because he
was grateful that Crusoe saved his life[56].

The figure of the grateful slave[57] describes the successful reform of slave
plantation through the efforts of a sentimental master, whose reforms put an end to

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[56] Peter Hulme, in *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492–1797* (New York: Routledge, 1986, p. 205), in his reading of the meaning of slavery in *Robinson Crusoe*, gives pithy expression to the dilemma this creates for Friday is not called a slave.
[57] Those critics who have identified the grateful slave as a recurrent trope have done so in asides. See C. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

slaves' brutal punishment, leading the slaves to become personally devoted to the reformer, in gratitude for his kindness. Slaves' gratitude becomes then productive work under the new and more humane disciplinary regime. The key to this disciplinary regime is the threat that ungrateful slaves could always be sold to a new – and presumably less humane – master. Being a trope that sympathizes with slaves' feelings, it was also largely adopted in abolitionist literature. Yet, it is a trope based on two assumptions: that slavery plantation will continue in a brutal form, to make humane reforms meaningful, and that enslaved had both to be induced to accept slavery and to welcome it with ecstatic gratitude. Hence, while it is a trope that starts from an assumption of human equality, of "sentimental attention to slave suffering" (Boulukos 127), it entails the suggestion of a significant difference. Certainly, slaves are so overwhelmed by passionate, irrational gratitude that they accept with enthusiasm their state of slavery (Boulukos). This trope, then, allowed the transaction from a non-racial view of slavery to a racial one, as it has been at the centre of an ameliorative vision of slavery.[58]

According to Boulukos, writers of the Black Atlantic, like Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780), Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797) or Ottobah Cugoano (1757-1791), were the only English literary examples to resist the racial implications of the grateful slave's trope. Firmina too re-proposes the image of the grateful slave in a significant way, by subverting it: Tancredo binds Túlio giving him freedom, yet the shy slave Susana shows Túlio how his freedom is illusory, since is still a slave by gratitude:

> Fitou então os olhos em Túlio, e disse-lhe:
> – Onde vás, Túlio?
> – Acompanhar o senhor Tancredo de *** – respondeo o interpelado.
> – Acompanhar o senhor Tancredo! – continuou a velha com accento repreensivo – Sabes tu o que fazes? Túlio, Túlio!
> [...]
> – Então não procures hir com esse homem, que apenas conheces! […]

1988), 107–8; K. Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); and M. Ferguson, ''Mansfield Park: Slavery, Colonialism, and Gender,'' *Oxford Literary Review*, 13 (1991), 124. *Slavery*, 1760–1807 (New York: Palgrave, 2005). Those works centrally concerned with slave narratives are discussed in chapter III.
[58] Yet, as Rousseau claimed with reference to relationships, emotions must be spontaneous to be compelling, and therefore a kindness that one is forced to accept will not bring gratitude. In Ann Radcliffe's gothic novel, *The Italian* (1796), the hero, Vivaldi, is incensed when the heroine, Ellena, defines her commitment to him by saying: "'I will obey the dictates of gratitude', 'This assurance', he complains, 'feebly as it sustains my hopes, is extorted; you see my misery, and from pity, from gratitude, not affection, would assuage it'"(60).

> Meo filho, acho bom que não te vás. Que te adianta trocares um cativeiro por outro! E sabes tu se aí o encontrarás melhor? Olha, chamar-te-ão, talvez, ingrato, e eu não terei uma palavra para defender-te. (112-113)[59]

Susana demonstrates Túlio how he is going to abandon a form slavery for another. Conversely, she claims that Túlio is deeply ungrateful to his ancestors, in view of the fact that the true gratitude must be addressed towards real affections, rather than towards those who long for an unconditional service, as Tancredo did.

Freedom for Susana means to be free in Africa, to be integrated with the land itself and therefore it cannot be achieved in a system that works according to slave system's laws, where there is not true sense of freedom. Susana describes to Túlio the African sense of liberty, a concept in contrast with manumission, being the last forged by the same system that enslaved captives.

Morevoer, the image of Susana in tears stands for an expression of consciousness and not as mere sentimentality, as far as the sentimentality that permeates the discourse of the old slave conveys the original conception of freedom, essentially linked to African cultural identity.

Thus, Susana, by subverting the trope of the grateful slave, resumes in herself the community, the interruption of millions of lives that were captured from her nations, customs, and experiences torn by the colonizing process. This figure symbolizes the voice that rises to revive the traditions of a mythical space, stereotyped by the slave regime, founds the essence of the African cultural identity from within. The process of idealization overtakes the Brazilian space trough the memory of the character, mixed with aesthetic innovation. Susana changes the melancholic reference to the past as European medieval culture or as Brazilian Indians, since Africa represents the space of idealization, of dreams, of human integration with nature and with culture, and especially, of freedom.

> O senhor Paulo B... morreo, e sua esposa, e sua filha procuraram em sua extrema bondade fazer-nos esquecer nossas desditas! Túlio, meo filho, eu as amo de todo o coração, e lhes

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[59] "Then she looked at Tullio, and said, 'Where are you going, Tullio?' 'I am going to follow Tancredo', answered the man. 'Follow Tancredo!' continued the old woman with reprehensive accent 'Do you know what you do? Túlio, Túlio!' [...] 'Then do not seek with this man whom you only know since a short time!' [...] 'My son, I think it's better if you do not go. What good is it that you exchange one captivity for another! And do you know if this captivity will be better? Look, they'll call you, maybe, ungrateful, and I will not have a word to defend you'".

agradeço: mas a dor, que tenho no coração, só a morte poderá apagar! – meu marido, minha filha, minha terra... minha liberdade... (118-119)[60]

The quote above is of key importance, inasmuch as in it Susana dismantles the illusion of Túlio, who believes he can meet virtuous people in their new world. Although Susana loves and appreciates Úrsula and Luisa B, indeed, she knows that they can never erase the original crime made on slave community: the enslavement of the Africans by force in their own land. That sense of irreparableness, the impossibility of going backwards, makes the traumatic experience of enslavement so intense as to leave no room for present happiness. On the other hand, this same experience is what generates a collective memory, as is expressed by the feeling of *saudade*.

Following the itinerary of ethnic or collective memory[61], the old African narrates the violence that the slave traders had subjected African people from the moment of capture until the landing on Brazilian soil. Uselessly Susana directly urges Túlio to teach him the concept of freedom elaborated from her African origin. Sentences such as: "I will tell you of my captivity" (Reis 92), are important dialogic expressions for the construction of the novel *Úrsula*. These utterances are the prelude to the atrocity performed on black people in capture on African land and the crossing of the slave ship across the Atlantic. When Susana narrates her enslavement, the tone or her narration becomes agonizing, desperate; her speech appears to be heavy, reflexive, and forceful. Susana's voice reveals the atrocious way in which ethnic memory started to be formed: when the slave traders took the enslaved Africans in the slave ships, they were experiencing trauma in the same space and time, as an exordium of what would become their life in Brazilian lands. Likewise, memory acts as a driving force to the exhortations that Susana does to Túlio; in accordance with the African culture's customs, following which the elders are the custodies of memory and

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[60] "Mr. Paulo B ... died, and his wife, and his daughter, sought in their extreme goodness to make us forget our misery! Túlio, my son, I love you with all my heart, and I thank you: but the pain that I have in my heart, only death can erase! – my husband, my daughter, my land ... my freedom ...".

[61] Pivotal studies in cultural theory concerning the circulation, grounding, and elision of memories include Laura Rorarto and Anna Saunders, eds, *The Essence and the Margin: National Identities and Collective Memories in Contemporary European Culture*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2009; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2002; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London, 1991; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989; Paul Gilroy, *There ain't no Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, Routledge, London, 1987; Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1985; Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, Harper and Row, New York, 1980, [originally published as *La mémoire collective*, Paris 1950]).

traditions. Such counselling comes from experience, from the wisdom of the storyteller.

Another feature of Susana's speech, together with collective ethnic memory, is the stress on the feeling of *saudade*:

> Túlio, entanto no meio da sua felicidade parecia ás vezes tocado por viva melancolia, que se lhe debuxava no rosto, onde uma lágrima recente havia deixado profundo sulco. Era por sem dúvida a saudade da separação, essa dôr, que aflige a todo o coração sensível, quem assim o consumia. Ia deixar a casa de sua senhora, onde senão ledos, pelo menos não muito amargos tinha ele passado seus primeiros annos. O negro sentia saudades. (111)[62]

The word *saudade* appears in Maria Firmina's novel thirty times, as to underline the semantic value of this feeling in the fiction. The meaning of the word is highly intricate in Portuguese speaking countries. Correlated terms would be the English word "remembrance" or the French *souvenir*, albeit these are limited to the idea of remembering; as well as the Galician *morriña*, or the German *Sehnsucht*, which, perhaps, express more closely the meaning of *saudade*. Despite all, historiography ensures that the term *saudade* has its origins in the Latin *solitatem*, or solitude, which was culturally appropriated for the Galician-Portuguese peoples inhabiting the Iberian Peninsula throughout the Middle Ages.[63]

As a result, the history behind the term *saudade* and its unique semantics is profoundly connected with the establishment of the Portuguese identity and languages. The latter, in turn, is connected to the raise and establishment of the Kingdom of Portugal, with its maritime expansion and overseas conquests. The Brazilian writer and scholar Moacyr Scliar (99) highlights the fact that Portuguese sailors who left Portugal in search of new horizons, the New World, carried with them the Portuguese culture and the feeling of nostalgia. Quoting the Portuguese

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[62] "Túlio, however, in the midst of his happiness seemed at times to be touched by a melancholy, which was devolving upon his face, where a recent tear had left a deep furrow. It was undoubtedly the yearning for separation, this pain, which afflicts all sensible hearts, who consumed it. He had left his mistress's house, where, if not at all, at least not very bitter, he had spent his first years. The negro felt homesick".

[63] It is common to find in the written documents of the region the use of terms such as *solitate*, *solitas*, *suidadeor soidade* (in Galician, Spanish or archaic Portuguese). For a critical understanding of how "soudade" has been employed in literature see: Alfredo Antunes (1983) *Saudade e profetismo em Fernando Pessoa: elementos para uma antropologia filosofica*. Braga: Faculdade de Filosofia; Fernando Guimarães (1988) *Poética do Saudosismo*. Lisboa: Presença; Eduardo Lourenço (1999) *Portugal como destino seguido de Mitologia da saudade*. Lisboa: Gradiva; Fernando Rosas (2018) *História A História. África*. Lisboa: Tinta da China; and António Braz Teixeira (2006*) A filosofia da saudade*. Lisboa: Quidnovi.

writer and researcher Teixeira de Pascoaes, indeed, Portuguese ships had "saudade at the steering wheel" (Moacyr Scliar 99). Not by chance, the Portuguese "king-philosopher" Dom Duarte I (1391-1438), one of the men responsible for the beginning of Portugal's maritime expansion, was one of the first accounts of the feeling of *saudade* within the taxonomy of feelings related to loss.[64] The entry for *saudade* in the *Dicionário Houaiss de Língua Portuguesa* describes it as:

> a melancholic feeling of incompleteness connected by memory to situations of deprivation of someone's presence or someone as a whole, of departure from a place or thing, of absence of certain experiences and pleasures once lived and thought to bethe cause of a desirable wellness. (Houaiss 350)

In the cultural history of Portugal and Brazil, there are numerous references to the contradictory meaning of *saudade*. Since Luís Vaz de Camões, the founding poet of the Lusophone literature, as supported by Scliar (102), the neo-platonic Christian view of the late Middle Ages helped to establish a true "mythology of saudade" that will become the hallmark of a distinct cultural identity[65]. For a great author of Portuguese literature, Teixeira de Pascoaes (1877-1952), a member of the so called Saudosismo, *saudade* would be, "a synthesis of a memory or a remembrance with desire or hope, thus involving at the same time a painful evocation or creative premonition of the past and a future, referred to specific people and situations" (qtd in Teixeira and Botelho 20).

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[64] Case made for the notion of saudade as an autochthonous term comes up in what is considered the first philosophical work on saudade, Chapter XXV of Leal Conselheiro, by Dom Duarte, the King of Portugal. On the matter, see, for instance, the following references: Botelho, Afonso; Teixeira, António Braz (Orgs.). Filosofia da saudade. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1986 (Col. Pensamento Português); Queiruga, Andrés Torres. Nova aproximacion a unha filosofia da saudade In: Botelho, Afonso; Teixeira, António Braz (Orgs.). Op. cit., pp. 570-639; Teixeira, António Braz. A filosofia da saudade. Porto: Quidnovi, 2006, pp. 22-30. 4Cfr. Ferreira, Aurélio Buarque de Holanda. Novo Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 1975, p. 1276. In Portuguese: "eles tinham 'ao leme a saudade'". Cláudia Assunpção Dias, Márcio Jarek, Vilmar Debona.

[65] In fact, Portugal and Galicia have experienced a significant historical debate over this symptomatic aspect of the Iberian culture – including congresses dedicated to saudade – followed by a profuse literary-philosophical production on the subject, which has been several scholars' object of study for over five centuries, gaining new momentum from the half of the twentieth century on. There have been several attempts to put forward a justification for a systematic "philosophy of saudade", as the works of Botelho and Braz Teixeira in the collection Filosofia da saudade (1986), the article compilation by Ramón Piñeiro, also entitled Filosofía da saudade (1984), in Spanish, as well as numerous articles published on the Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia, such as Antunes', entitled *O significado da saudade numa filosofia portuguesa* (1983).

Without ignoring the tremendous importance of different definitions and philosophical contributions on the theme, and without taking a specific line of interpretation among the established ones, I shall limit to point out the following scheme of Firmina's novel: *saudade* may be conceived from an initial idea of conceptual ambivalence. In other words, as a feeling or affection characterised by the wish of returning (allowed by remembrances and memories) to a happy and successful past, as for the possible pain, suffering and melancholy which those very remembrances and memories cause, due to the impossibility of such return, which establish a kind of *saudade* paradox:

> it is a friendly evil, a wellness that makes us sick [...]. Saudade is characterised by its contradictions, its bittersweet remembrance of extraordinary proportions of what left a mark in our lives, whether it is what we have lived, a loved one who is no longer near us and who we long for. This new possibility of interaction reasonably soothes our hearts (Bittencourt 1).

The feeling of *saudade* expresses then a sense of impossibility, an unbridgeable distance with the past, as well as, and more importantly with the future. In *Úrsula* this sense of distance, is part of slave's resistance. Susana, by affirming that she could never be fully happy in Brazil, having been captured in her native land, exercises a form of resistance and agency, inasmuch as her impossibility to be happy in Brazil makes her closer with her life in Africa. Túlio, born in Brazil, feels this same feeling of *saudade* when he has to separate from Susana, his real ancestor and the keeper of his cultural memory. His detachment from Africa, is then somewhat symbolic, but nonetheless truly heinous.

Ultimately, the *saudade* Túlio feels is without remedy, as the one of Susana: he is going to leave his African family, to become slave by gratitude of a white man. The feeling of *saudade* is by this way strongly connected to the idea of freedom and future: where there are no voluntary relations, where freedom is denied, *saudade* takes place, as an irreparable mark of time over their life.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study has been to explore non-canonical literature written by women of African descent during the period of transatlantic slavery (in particular, in the nineteenth century) in English, Spanish and Portuguese languages.

The present dissertation is therefore a comparative study intended as a relational study. To address comparison as a relation means to historically intertwine the objects selected to be compared. According to the aims of this dissertation, this meant to bring into relation terms that have been traditionally separated, namely the stories of Afro-descendant women in the New World and Europe. The claim made is that this separation - as with every act of knowledge - was political, since it insinuated specific power relations connected to European exceptionalism (that, in turn, allowed Europecentrism)[1].

As underlined in the first chapter, Shu-mei Shi, in her insightful essay, *Comparison as Relation* (2013), has defined relational comparison as the act to look at "subterenean convergences" and at "the worldwide confluences of cultures". Accordingly, relational comparison has been one of the main methods employed in this dissertation, as it has shown how the experiences of Afro-descendant women that dealt with the legacy of transatlantic slavery contribute to highpoint the links of global history. The study of the literary texts selected has proven that there are silent tides that create a poetics of relation between the authors, which is neither universal nor relative.

All the three texts express an internal point of view on the legacy of transatlantic slavery. The fact that the perspective on the experiences of transatlantic slavery is expressed directly by Afro-descendants that had different relations with it makes their work highly interesting. The three of them indeed put forth a new idea of subjectivity and literature, which I thereby defined as "minor".

A creolisation of language distinguishes the works written by these Afro-descendant women under the legacy of slavery in the Atlantic world. The criticality of writing in the conqueror idiom, accompanied either by a political statement or by

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[1] For an analysis and definition of European exceptionalism, see the work of historical sociologist J. L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony* (1991).

the altered knowledge of the vocabulary, makes their language a minor one. The authors' language indeed challenges the language of the colonisers in subversive ways, by allowing it to enter into a process of becoming.

For instance, in *The History of Mary Prince* the language is typically colloquial, filled with vernacular expressions. Also the lyrical language of Cristina Ayala and the sentimental register of Maria Cristina Fragas reshape their idiom of belonging. In fact, since the official literature of their time employed the language of the conqueror they changed it mainly through its creolisation, making it a cross-bred language.

Furthermore, in the selected works, every subjective fact is immediately grafted onto politics. As in minor literature, the individual becomes political; since "its narrow space compels every individual intrigue to immediately connect with politics" (Deleuze and Guattari 17). Accordingly, each examined text engages uniquely with the political and power relations of their time. Through her narrative, Mary Prince asserts the ruinous condition of slaves in the colonies, contradicting pro-slavery claims. Cristina Ayala, with poems such as "Redencion" – in an innovative and courageous way – includes the history of enslaved Afro-Cubans as crucial to the formation of an independent Cuban nation. Similarly, Maria Cristina Fragas rehabilitate the stories of the marginalised, such as a disabled woman, women who were victims of their husband's violence and enslaved Africans, in order to reflect on Brazilian history and society. In particular, the fact that Fragas gives voice to an enslaved African who tells the story of her life in Africa, her enslavement, and middle-passage is ground-breaking in itself.

Additionally, the political field in minor literature contaminates every sentence. Above all, since the collective or national consciousness is often inactive in external life and always in the process of disintegration, minor literature positively incorporates itself the role and function of collective enunciation. Therefore, despite scepticism, this literature produces an active solidarity. Even when the writer remains on the margins or outside of her community, this situation further helps her to envisage another potential community, to forge the instruments of new conscience and sensibility.

Furthermore, through their literary works it has emerged how these women cultivated their relation with their community of belonging. Their idea of community

is in fact very similar to what Glissant has magisterially described in his *Poetic of Relations*:

> Peoples who have been to the abyss do not brag of being chosen. They do not believe they are giving birth to any modern force. They live Relation and clear the way for it, to the extent that the oblivion of the abyss comes to them and that, consequently, their memory intensifies. For though this experience made you, original victim floating toward the sea's abysses, an exception, it became something shared and made us, the descendants, one people among others. Peoples do not live on exception. Relation is not made up of things that are foreign but of shared knowledge. This experience of the abyss can now be said to be the best element of exchange (Glissant 6)

What was an exceptional experience, namely, the condition of forced slavery and the middle-passage, bounded together individuals and their descendants creating a community. None of the three studied authors rises haughtily as a crusader or spokeswoman of their community, none of them expresses an individuality that co-opts all the other subjectivities of the community to which they belong. Conversely, the authors express their sense of community through the use of collective utterance.

As for Mary prince, she talks about her individual story and in doing so, she displays the story of an entire people. As has been noted in the third chapter, in fact, there are many collective utterances that insist on the sense of belonging to an Afro-descendant community, linked by the experience of slavery. Either, Cristina Ayala through her lyrical self, as specified in the fourth chapter, develops, historicises, and lyricizes the history of Afro-descendant people in Cuba. Likewise, Maria Firmina dos Reis creates an orchestra of voices by different subjectivities, which enter in relation with one another, composing the intricacy of the novel. Notably, there is not a true and unique protagonist of the story, but a chorus of voices.

In writing minor literature, the author is a visionary of potential futures yet-to-be. So far, the act of writing is creation, it is becoming, and that is what makes it so revolutionary. The works by Mary Prince, Cristina Ayala and Maria Cristina Fragas, are the direct expression of the creolisation of cultures. Yet, in their writing creolisation also has a bitter residue, since as Glissant put it:

> In countries that are creolised like the Caribbean or Brazil, where cultural elements have been brought together by the settlement pattern that was trafficking in Africans, the African and black cultural components were routinely inferiorised. Creolisation still exists in these circumstances, but leaving a bitter, uncontrollable residue. And almost everywhere in New

America, it was necessary to restore the balance between the elements brought together, first by upgrading the African heritage, this is the so-called Haitian indigenism…

The words of Glissant eloquently explain the literary engagement of our authors, which display the relation of creolisation of the cultures in which they lived, despite being in a context of sharp social inequalities and little freedom.

The inequality that they lived affected both their status as women, and they identity as Afro-descendants. All three authors question the social roles of women and men within the colonial experience. As we have seen, for example, in the "Arroyuelo y la flor" (1893), Cristina Ayala identifies the man as the destructive materiality of the river, and the woman as the flower subjected to natural laws. In a very similar way, Maria Cristina Fragas in Ursula employs the same image of the woman as a flower destroyed by man (Reis 20). The violence of social inequalities, in fact, makes the relationship of women with society problematic and painful.

Likewise, the authors employ both the aesthetic literary art (through the use of figures for example) and irony to show the social inequalities given by the affiliation to the Afro-descendant and slave community. For example, Mary Prince, describing the selling of slaves, reverses the discriminatory discourse that depicted the Afro-descendants without a noble soul. In the same way, Maria Firmina dos Reis, through the words of Susana, contrasts the barbarity of the Europeans with the virtuous soul of the enslaved, when she describes her capture in Africa. The same goes for Ayala in the poem "A la raza espanola", where she reverses the conqueror's discourse of domination through the use of irony.

In this panorama of social inequalities, freedom becomes much more than a formal objective. The desire for freedom that these authors express is indeed a desire for a broader social change, and not only the necessity to obtain a formal recognition that is missing. The yearning that emerges in the three examined texts is a desire for a change in the relationships among people in society.
A formal freedom, like the one acquired by Mary Prince in England, is not sufficient, since it leaves the world of unequal relationships untouched.

The yearning for freedom of these authors, is namely the desire for a landscape, for a horizon. This horizon that they envision is characterised by a whole new set of relations among people free from oppression.

Their desire for a new society, freed from inequalities and oppression, is neither utopian nor fantastic. Their desire immediately invests in the realm of social production since it aims at the transformation of material reality since it directly invests in relations. The way we desire, in fact, influences or determines our relationships as well as the types of collective existence that are formed.

Nineteenth-century Afro-descendant literature in the New World has evolved in the shadow of New World slavery. African descendants in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States faced the challenge of defining freedom for themselves. The process of defining freedom was not just political it was also literary. It called for a culling of metaphors, symbols, and tropes to create the stories Afro-descendants would tell about their individual and collective lives. Freedom was problematised in its various forms and modalities, by Mary Prince, Cristina Ayala, and Maria Cristina Fragas. They also examined the relationship between freedom and slavery together with their identities as women. The aspiration of this dissertation has been to consistently contribute to the display of this literary space where freedom and slavery coexist and where new stories and identities are generated.

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