

(RE)PROCESSING THE TRANSATLANTIC TRIANGLE: POSTCOLONIAL SOLUTIONS
TO THE MEMORY OF SLAVERY FOUND IN THE WORKS OF ALEJO CARPENTIER,
OUSMANE SEMBENE, AND MARYSE CONDE.

by

SARAH QUESADA

(Under the Direction of Doris Kadish)

ABSTRACT

My thesis addresses the memory of slavery in the Caribbean by analyzing the postcolonial solutions offered by the writings of Alejo Carpentier *El siglo de las luces*, and Maryse Traversée de la mangrove Condé, along with Ousmane Sembene's film *Ceddo*. My goal in revisiting the three axes of the triangle is to better understand how these nations appropriated a practice that would forever change the dynamics of the societies it involved. It analyzes how these authors intend to come to terms with the slave trade heritage, while grappling with questions of identity that result from such historical traumatism. Further understanding of this historical process might enable us to eradicate modern forms of discrimination, including slavery today; break away from the assumption that a "western solution" is the *best* solution; and accept the "other".

INDEX WORDS: slavery, postcolonial, triangle, literature, Caribbean, plantations, racism, discrimination, Enlightenment, abolition, negritude

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family who always encouraged me to aim high and reach for the stars. I dedicate this research to my mother, Margaret and father, Sergio, who reminded me that no matter what I decided, they would always be proud; to my sister, Mandy, who kept me company during difficult times when I needed to focus; to my brother Sergio for always giving me the most meaningful hugs when times were rough.

I also dedicate my thesis to all the wonderful people here and away that both listened to my ideas and concerns, and offered advice and encouragement along the way. My master's program has been one of the most academically rewarding short years of my life, and it was all made possible thanks to the wonderful faculty at the University of Georgia that worked with me.

I also dedicate this thesis to the peoples that have suffered from the impositions of Imperialists nations. I hope that with dialogue that my research may incite, that racism and discrimination can be eradicated in societies on which it weighs on. I dedicate my work to those that consider that the "oppressed" should "get over" their sense of victimization, and offer this work to them as an attempt to better inform them of the consequences of this mindset. I dedicate my work to Alejo Carpentier, Ousmane Sembene and Maryse Condé, for their meaningful and inspirational works and revolutionary spirits.

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INTRODUCTION

The Caribbean is a land of Diaspora,¹ which, similar to Africa, underwent the processes of forced migration, oppression, and dehumanization of significant magnitude. Unlike the African continent however, the Caribbean, apart from being a region populated by transplanted peoples from Africa (and other parts of the world), contains islands whose inhabitants were annihilated entirely by early Spanish colonizers.² Moreover, and significant for my study, the Caribbean is the territory that most suffered from the Middle Passage³: “there is probably no other region in the world that has been more radically altered in terms of human and botanic migration, transplantation, and settlement than the Caribbean” (DeLoughrey 1).

There is no doubt that the transatlantic trade tied this region to territories on the other side of the Atlantic, and by so doing, the imprint that slavery practices had on the Caribbean are profound. Its peoples are themselves reminders of the moral dilemmas that were to occupy

¹ See Hesse, “Diaspora formations currently define the post-colonial sense in the proliferation of and interaction between cultural differences that shape the transnational configuration of dispersed histories and identities within and against the cultural legislations of the western nation, 20.

² See Antoine, “Les grandes Antilles occupées par l’Espagne avaient été dépeuplées de leur indigènes, mais au sud, les petites Antilles gardaient leurs Caraïbes, qui avaient su résister à trios expéditions espagnoles,” 13.

³ What Christopher Miller would call “the forced migration of more than eleven million Africans to the New World,” 3.

tireless minds by the 18th and 19th century social justice advocates and abolitionists in France. Later in the 20th century, African writers and filmmakers would also assume responsibility for slavery and the slave trade inside Africa, and rewrite their own version of the African story. Finally, the descendants of the African Diaspora are endlessly confronted with this historical and damaging past – theirs is a history of oppression and exploitation lasting more than two centuries, carrying the burden of being the progeny of “un peuple vaincu” (Ngatcha).

Abolition and the fights for slave freedom, however glorious of a fight and an ideal, was not the end of the memory of slavery. As Doris Kadish states, “the conviction that the story of Francophone slavery did not end with the independence of Haiti in 1804 or emancipation in the French colonies in 1848 is a recurring theme in the writings of Francophone writers and scholars” (“Preface,” *Francophone Slavery*, xx). So even though slavery was abolished, the slave trade, its consequences, and the “solutions” to this haunting past (and present) have become major issues in postcolonial Caribbean texts. In the corpus of these works, the recovery of memory – one enmeshed with descriptions of a despicable nature – is at the center. After all, slavery has left a visible scar on the lives of its descendants: Marie-José N’Zengou-Tayo affirms that “slavery was the starting point of alienation, loss of pride in one’s race and of confidence in oneself” (176), and therefore, the practice is at the root of societal ills and modern forms of inequality that the Caribbean faces day-to-day.

What are these “societal ills,” or these “forms of inequality” engendered by the slave trade, one would ask? As I will make evident in my study, even though slaves were emancipated “definitively” in the 19th century, slave’s offspring are not “free,” and the memory of the inhumane practice remains. The historical traumatism produced by the transatlantic triangle, and its effects, are exposed in Arnaud Ngatcha’s documentary, *Noirs* (2006) where he visits the

children of the African Diaspora in all three axes of the Atlantic French triangle – France, Senegal, and the Caribbean (Guadeloupe, specifically). There, he encountered certain devastating effects of both the slave trade and colonialism. In France, he found the black population to be in need of black representation in the political arena as a means to eradicate overt racism they encounter on the streets daily. There is a need for important figures in the French *métropole* to speak against such racism engendered by the slave trade (discussed in chapter 1) and the different forms of discrimination existing in the republic well after abolition in 1848.

In Africa, the problematic is similar, yet perhaps more complex. When slavery was abolished, France then turned to strategies that would involve a *mise en valeur* “most energetically applied in West African colonies” (Prasad 11) – an idea born from a willingness to find a peaceful *solution* to end slavery, cease harsh treatment of slaves, and preserve European profit. The initial idea of *mise en valeur* was to “rationally develop the colony’s natural and human resources” and thus allow the African colonies be “free of the stain of servitude,” and “instruct Africans in the cultivation of their own land” (Prasad 12). In the second half of the 20th century, when waves of independence started breaking out in the African colonies, awareness arose that the African continent had not only been a victim and participant in the slave trade – where the trade once commenced.

However it had also suffered from European colonization that developed a “sense of civilization...to bring Africans into ‘social order,’” and thus creating an “assimilation ideology” that was imposed on the locals, similar to what happened in the Caribbean in the 18th and 19th centuries. Ngatcha interviews the impoverished *tirailleurs sénégalais*, whose nation had been portrayed as “savage” or “dangerous,” in the early 19th century, and was later colonized, forcing

their citizens to join the French army, to be later forgotten and denied payment from France. This is just one of the problems among many which are consequences of early European intervention with the slave trade departing *from* Africa, and its eventual colonization.

Lastly, in the Caribbean, the crises existing from colonization are interiorized feelings of inferiority (a complex which has yet to be eradicated), along with the struggle to define one's own identity. Frantz Fanon argues that the "inferiority complex" is constructed by a "double process" conceived by both economics and its "internalization or rather epidermalization" (xiv-xv). The inferiority complex is described as an apparent 'need' to *whiten* one's skin which has been internalized and is prevalent in Guadeloupe (and other Caribbean regions). Fanon explains that the "other" or rather the "colonized people" which he defines as "people whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave" attempt to assimilate to the "cultural values of the metropolis," that is, the colonizer's culture (2). Certain women in Ngatcha's film, *Noirs*, claim "je suis déjà noire, je ne veux pas devenir encore plus noire," evidencing the harm created by the racial hierarchies, product of colonization and slavery (a problem also made evident in Frantz Fanon's critique of Mayotte Cápécia, which will be treated in chapter four).

The second problematic of self-identity is discussed perhaps most clearly by Maryse Condé, who speaks of the painful search for one's own sense of self. Having parents who had broken with "les traditions guadeloupéennes," she asserts that she tried to find herself in other cultures and regretfully couldn't define "who she was:" not African (once in Africa, women would consider she "talked or thought too much"); not French since she was alienated by her skin color; and lastly not Caribbean having been estranged from her own Caribbean culture as a

child, since her parents saw France as “superior,” and therefore sought to become *French* (Ngatcha).

All these issues profoundly affect today’s Caribbean peoples and are born from slavery (as will be discussed in chapter one). What is worse is that historically, the marginalized have not often owned their story, are rarely given the chance to re-visit their own history, and are confronted with the social predicaments I have just mentioned. In literature, the descendants of these peoples have been able to contest these societal ills, and recast understanding on the memory of slavery by: re-interpreting their own history (Carpentier), giving voice to their communities (Sembene), and offering choices towards progress from within the Caribbean and Africa (Condé). My study will thus argue that certain authors have facilitated a “coming to terms” with the slave trade heritage, and grappling with questions of hybridity and identity that result from such historical traumatism. In this way, my thesis aims to analyze the ways in which slavery has been dealt with by France, but also re-visited by the descendants of the ones it has affected the most in the Francophone and Hispanic Caribbean, as well as Africa. In essence, I will analyze the three axes of the transatlantic triangle that was the slave trade.

Chapter one contains a historical analysis of the first axis, which draws on explanations of the Enlightenment’s views on matters of slavery and its influence on abolition, and well as the abolitionist epoch of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when France abolished slavery in 1794,⁴ and a second and final time by France in 1848. It centers on how slavery came to be noticed in France, and how it was dealt with in terms of abolition, arguing that emancipation did not mean the end of oppression. It also seeks to show how a sense of interiorized inferiority was transmitted to the peoples of the Caribbean. If Caribbean authors have turned to present-day

⁴ See Kadish, asserts that Sonthonax supported the decree of abolition in Saint-Domingue on June 21, 1793 as a means to “assure victory” against the Spanish, and that the National Convention “decreed universal emancipation on February 4, 1794,” (“Introduction,” *Slavery in the Caribbean Francophone World*, 7).

afflictions in an attempt to repair damage caused by the slave-trade, it is necessary to revisit the past and the origins of the transatlantic slave-trade: how it commenced, and how writers in the Enlightenment of the 18th and abolitionists in the early to mid-19th centuries saw it. The *siècle des lumières* is a period that covers the false justifications traders would draw from renowned thinkers of the time, in order to continue with slavery. In the 19th century, abolitionists will take a stand and denounce these myths that justified the trade. Post-colonial writers will later revisit the Enlightenment ideals and appropriate them, giving a more ample explanation of what happened to the “other” that Europe wanted to “civilize.”

Although no texts are analyzed in depth in this chapter, I will offer as examples passages that bear directly on the three authors I will analyze in later chapters: Rousseau and other Enlightenment thinkers in relation to Carpentier, Germaine de Staël in comparison with Condé, and Victor Hugo’s notion of history contrasted with that of Ousmane Sembene.

Chapters two and four examine the second axis. The second chapter deals with *El siglo de las luces* to gain a fuller Caribbean perspective. It will explore how Alejo Carpentier appropriates Enlightenment ideals and its failure to free slaves. He illustrates how western views are refracted in another culture that does not suit it, the Caribbean. Thoughts of the Enlightenment period remain vivid in the imagination of Carpentier, as he takes these ideals and redefines them from an “American” perspective, proving how they did not bring freedom to the new world. And so, similar to how the Enlightenment failed to abolish slavery, chapter two dialogues with chapter one, as they both delve into the ideals of liberation. In this way, Carpentier contests western *impositions* or ideals of freedom and shows how they do not free or better the condition of descendants of slaves.

Following the chronological order of the works' publications, chapter three explores Ousmane Sembene's *Ceddo* to delve into the middle axis of the transatlantic triangle, Senegal and the African coast. In Africa, slave heritage and its effects are viewed under a very different light, as there is an "understandable reluctance to assume a share of the blame for the Atlantic slave trade, coupled with reticence about slavery in Africa itself" (Miller 38). Anne Bailey admits that in the field of the transatlantic slavery, the question "why did Africans sell other Africans into slavery?" arises with frequency, and for some Diaspora communities, the answer to this question could signify a "reconciliation with their African past" (57). Sembene attempts to break this silence and effect reconciliation with Senegal's tragic history; he portrays African societies as they were, including the practice of slavery within the African continent, but at the same time reclaims his own history, contests European myths about Africa, and offers a solution to reconcile his people with a difficult past, through the leadership of women.

Chapter four analyzes Condé's tangible and inclusive "solutions" for Caribbean progress. Ever since contact with the islands, both slaves and surviving native indigenous peoples have suffered from degrading conditions, and presently their descendants not only are burdened by a hostile past; they must also endure modern forms of discrimination originating from that past, and silence. Maryse Condé resists and fights this silence by using the memory of the triangular trade as a means to *process* and *appropriate* the past, re-write historical accounts through a different lens. She thereby creates dialogues of solidarity between the "colonized" peoples. She argues that the present-day collective injustices that continue to impact certain groups that share a history of plantations, extermination of the natives, and slavery (Giménez-Saldivia 48) such as

the Caribbean (and to some extent Africa⁵) can only be confronted with certain “solutions” she presents in *Traversée de la mangrove*.

As a result, this thesis endeavors to expose the impact that these writings and their major themes have had on *today's* African and Caribbean peoples. The intent of my study is not to blame any of the axes of the triangle. When France condemned the slave trade a *crime against humanity* in 2001, the governor of French Guiana stated, “Il n'est pas une question de culpabilité, que la mémoire de l'esclavage doit être assumée” (Ngatcha). Similarly, I do not intend to either point the finger at guilty parties, or to dwell on a difficult past, but instead to further shed light on the memory of slavery which should not be forgotten, but rather dealt with, internalized, and understood. France, Africa, and the Caribbean dealt with slavery and its memory in different ways. My goal in revisiting the three axes of the triangle is to better understand how these nations appropriated a practice that would forever change the dynamics of the societies it involved. Further understanding of this historical process might enable us to eradicate modern forms of discrimination, including slavery today; break away from the assumption that a “western solution” is the *best* solution; and accept the “other⁶.” In this way, we might aid in the progress of nations that have been burdened by the slave trade and its devastating social, political, environmental, and economic consequences.

⁵Africa, as mentioned previously, was not a victim of a native extermination. However, it does resemble the Caribbean's history, since it suffered transplantation of peoples, a heritage of slavery, and other forms of plantations.

⁶ The “other,” also considered the “subaltern” is according to Gayatri Spivak “a nonelite or subordinated social groups,” 204.

CHAPTER 1

THE TRIANGLE'S FIRST AXIS: THE SLAVE TRADE FROM THE EUROPEAN POINT OF VIEW

My intention in mapping the first axis of the transatlantic triangle and France's slave trade history, from its inception to its abolition, is threefold. Firstly, to reveal that while the Enlightenment ideals were instrumental for abolition, they were not able to eradicate slavery all at once. Secondly, to better explain how interiorized inferiority complexes were built in the former French and Spanish colonies where slavery was present. Lastly, to explain how the 18th and 19th centuries in France influenced postcolonial "solutions" that try to eradicate those complexes in the 20th and 21st centuries. Several authors I will examine appropriate these issues: Alejo Carpentier, perhaps inspired by the ideals of Rousseau and Voltaire, reveals how the Enlightenment "solutions" reached (or failed to reach) the Caribbean. In Maryse Condé's work, parallels can be found with Germaine de Staël's solutions for women's voices advocating against slavery; and she stresses the importance of freedom. Ousmane Sembene, in contrast with Victor Hugo's views will rewrite the history of Imperialism in Africa and foreign intervention from an African point of view⁷.

The post-colonial solutions I will explore in the following chapters cannot be fully grasped if one does not comprehend how the slave trade was defended, justified, fought against and eventually abolished. In this way, chapter one maps the history of the slave trade, within its

⁷ I would like to indicate that I have found no evidence that these were the intentions of the contemporary writers I mention, but these are parallels that I have drawn to allow further dialogue between the 18th and 19th centuries (and their limitations towards slavery and dealing with the slave-trade) with the 20th and 21st century "solutions" post-colonial authors offer later.

18th and 19th century context. I present a few of the philosophical ideals involved in the slavery debates, as well as the setbacks that emancipation suffered, and that are later revisited by post-colonial authors to discuss contemporary solutions to the memory of slavery. It is also important to mention that although slavery was abolished in 1848, abolition did not eradicate slavery worldwide, nor did it fully ameliorate oppression in former colonized nations. Because the slave trade was the origin of many of the population's present-day woes in the Caribbean, this chapter will start out by going back to the origins of slavery itself.

The Origins of Slavery and its "justifications"

The word 'slave' comes from the word *sc̄lāvus*, which originated between 1250 –1300, and was used to designate the so-called Slavs because they were commonly enslaved in the early Middle Ages (Oxford Dictionary). The origins of slavery are complex, but Edward Seeber explains that such practices have "existed in the oldest societies," from Greek, Roman or Egyptian, and then "extended to Mohammedans in Africa" (11). European Christians abolished slavery in the 13th century, but it was maintained among *non-Christians* (11). The "other," in this case, was still justifiably enslaved, because of its *different* nature. Throughout time we have seen the practice of slavery justified by the subjugators; the Atlantic slave trade is an example of this, and Europeans justified its practice upon contact with African societies who commonly enslaved other groups. The act of subjugating the "other" has been interpreted and defined by numerous philosophers, among those Hegel in the 19th century, who explains subjugation through his master-slave dialectic: "he who attains recognition without reciprocating becomes the master... not only does the master obtain recognition, he also reduces the slave to a mere instrument of his will, a convenient means of fulfilling his needs" (Bulhan 102).

In that sense, according to Hegel, subjugation is justified when an individual apparently less afraid of death, subjects another who would “require” his protection and thus “civilize” the weaker, seen as “barbarian” for being different. In the 16th century, Michel Montaigne contested European views of “civilization.” In his essay “Des cannibales” (1580), Montaigne criticizes the notions of “barbarity” that Europeans attribute to the unknown “other”: “or, je trouve, pour revenir à mon propos qu’il n’y a rien de barbare et de sauvage dans cette nation...sinon que chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n’est pas de son usage” (Montaigne, *Des Cannibales*, 107). Instead of judging the “other,” he denounces European hypocrisy, claiming that Europeans fail to see their faults, and are thus “blinded” by “prying” into the apparent faults of the “other”: (108-09). In Montaigne’s view, one should see the said “barbarian” as culturally different; a telling and progressive consideration for his time. He also considered the “other” to be innocent, or closer to nature, who ignores civilization’s woes contained in European societies such as lying, falsehood, and treason. In this way, Montaigne denounces social ills, which are products of becoming alienated from one’s origins: estranged from *nature* – a notion that Rousseau will later expand nearly 200 years later during *le siècle des lumières*.

The 18th century defends and “justifies” the trade: Rousseau and Montesquieu

According to James Walvin, even the British abolition movement originated from the Enlightenment influence (*The Abolitions of Slavery*, 72), since it was a period in which thinkers questioned human nature, morality, and freedom. Revolutionary movements born from 18th century “optimism” estranged themselves from “Christian pessimism” (Ehrard *The Abolitions of Slavery*, 113). Furthermore, the laws that monarchies dictated had already oppressed societies, obliterating certain freedoms of choice and speech. Revolution was imminent, and therefore a consequence of this oppression. Oppression was seen particularly in the case of women, who

were subject to the wills of the patriarchy⁸ which governed society, as it has up to the 21st century. What led to the fall of la Bastille, were slogans for “freedom, liberty, fraternity” fueled by early Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau and Montesquieu. What is increasingly ironic, however, is the fact that while these ideals advocated freedom in the “old world,” Europe was gradually profiting from a trade that functioned on premises that essentially precluded freedom and authorized a despicable and dehumanizing practice: the Transatlantic slave trade. In fact, in the eighteenth century, “864,000 Africans were imported in Saint-Domingue alone” bestowing Europe with wealth beyond precedent and providing the island’s with its mythical label, “perle des Antilles” (Kadish, “Introduction,” 2).

Therefore, while there was certain attention focused on the slave-trade and texts dedicated to its abolition, they were quite scarce at the beginning⁹; some avoiding to speak openly about it, thus leading to modern criticism of the Enlightenment thinkers. For instance, while Africans were enslaved and embarked off to the Caribbean from the island of Gorée, Rousseau wrote *Du Contrat social* (1762) in which he claims: “l’homme est né libre, mais partout il est dans les fers” (16). However, the *Contrat social*, according to Jean Erhard “made no allusion either to the slave trade or to colonial slavery (*The Abolitions of Slavery* 118); thus, “slavery [was] a *metaphor* for the debased condition of man in society in general, that is to say in *Europe*” (Miller 69). Furthermore, in *Julie*, Rousseau depicts an appalled Saint-Preux turning away from the “vile conditions” of slavery in the Caribbean, transmitting a feeling of pity and disdain for beings characterized by Rousseau as “groveling” and “capable” of enduring such

⁸ Rousseau would later write *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, a novel that depicts both women’s lack of choice due to societal constraints of virginity and virtue (dictated by a patriarchal society), but yet provide a progressive scenario (if only temporary until Julie’s death), where women “prove” capable of leading their own lives.

⁹ Jean Ehrard states that at the beginning of the 18th century, “writings on the issue of slavery are a fraction of those on philosophical and religious polemics, controversies over the French ‘constitution’ and the prerogatives of parlements or even discussions of the freedom trade in cereals,” 112.

tortures. In *El siglo*, Carpentier picks up on Europeans' horrified pity for slaves, when one of his main characters, Esteban laments the treatment of the Surinamese slaves, walks away with disgust and without protest, leaving only behind him translated brochures of Enlightenment thought that were to influence the revolts in Saint Domingue. In this way, it is argued that slaves took it upon themselves to abolish slavery, since Europeans at this time were reluctant to eradicate it.

Rousseau is considered the “philosopher of liberty” but it is important to mention then that if Rousseau was advocating for freedom – which he clearly was – he was reluctant to include the African slaves being shipped to the Caribbean (“The second and most serious problem is that Rousseau...remains almost completely aloof to the Atlantic slave trade” [Miller 69]). Montesquieu, previous to Rousseau, is another example. In *L'Esprit des Lois* (1748) he criticizes slavery by sarcastically justifying it, saying that in certain countries it seems natural: “il faut borner la servitude naturelle à certains pays particuliers de la terre” (*Esprits des lois*, chap viii). However, his intentions might have backfired; the theorization of Montesquieu at the time was that men and women living in a tropical environment became “lazy,” and thus subjected to slavery (Ehrard 113). Christopher Miller claims that his writings were actually a “mock” of anti-abolitionism aiming to be ironic (perhaps sarcastic) about the incredulous conservative minds maintaining the slave trade afloat (65). Jean Ehrard asserts that Montesquieu was simply uncertain of the origins of slavery, and while “never aim[ing] to propose a body of doctrine about anything” he actually wanted to “get people thinking.¹⁰” Further, Mark Waddicor affirms that Montesquieu’s text is not a justification of slavery, but rather an “indictment of despotism”

¹⁰ Luc Ferry furthers that “the eighteenth century philosophers did not have the advantage of following the teachings of Lévi-Strauss. The idea that cultures could be the ‘others,’ that there is no single yardstick of human history by which to measure other cultures, was foreign to them. The existence of societies living resolutely outside of European civilization [...] could hardly be perceived as anything but negative,” 12.

(160), since he believes that Montesquieu was one of the “first major European writers to oppose all forms of slavery” (161), who wanted to “study the causes of those abuses” before reforming them.

Enlightenment thinkers’ apparent neglect or ambivalence towards African slaves can be explained by two factors. Firstly, Ehrard claims that the exclusion of black slaves in issues of freedom is due to a certain “lack of interest” at the time. For instance, Europe was coping with a “reassessment of productive labor,” and a certain social “violence” (112). Secondly, he mentions that the distance “both geographical and mental between France and the Antilles” was also a major factor, and people were more burdened by the habitual social violence perpetuated by the state and the Church, than the “cost of sugar and indigo” (112).

Whether philosophers writing on freedom remained aloof intentionally or not, their advocacy of freedom did not cease slave-traders justification for their commerce. The apparent “exclusion” of black peoples in 18th century’s defenses of liberty allowed for the creation of various myths, prevalent during the time Rousseau and his contemporaries were writing for a release from the chains of *social* slavery. These myths would then justify places, cultures or peoples that Europeans would not understand – the “other” in essence: “Considerados como la historia verdadera y sagrada de los actos de los seres sobrenaturales, los mitos constituyen paradigmas de todo acto humano...*explicaciones plausibles* sobre el origen del mundo” (Miampika 108). In this way, myths created by Montesquieu’s ironic “mock defense of slavery” or Rousseau’s contempt “for anybody who has been enslaved” (Miller 64-69), were taken by the slave-traders and used for their own gain:

Au XVIII^e siècle, il sera courant de croire à ce fatalisme géographique qui justifie la situation du noir esclave à la façon dont Aristote tirait une preuve de la supériorité des Grecs sur les barbares, par leur climat. La même argumentation permettait aussi d’expliquer la colonisation de l’Amérique” (Montandon 123)

These myths perpetuated justifications for the ill treatment of slaves and their captivity, and would further perpetuate the white supremacy theory that would justify slavery based on the assumption that Africans were “inferior.” If these myths “explain” the existence of the *other* by renowned thinkers, slave-traders could thus “take from Rousseau and other writers of the Enlightenment only what was useful and supportive of [their] worldview” (Miller 70). Fanon will contest this notion of superiority in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) – to be analyzed in the following chapters – explaining that this white superiority complex of the European, a product of Europeans subjecting and enslaving the peoples of African descent, produced a “racist gaze” (Wiredu 218). This *gaze*, according to Fanon, “indicts, humiliates, and deliberately and cruelly denies human recognition to the black body” (218). In this way, Rousseau’s reluctance to include Africans in his writings on social liberty, *denies* slaves’ assertion as equals to Europeans; it essentially precludes slaves’ descendants possessing liberty and dignity.

Despite these bold stances against slavery, during the end of the 18th century, slavery is *still* justified by Europe, and post-colonialists will later protest how they have interiorized an inferiority complex born from the enslaved condition.

The 19th century limitations on “solutions”

If the memory of slavery is difficult to confront, it is partly due to France’s historical reluctance to address the dehumanizing treatment of African peoples before its abolition in 1848. The fact that the slave trade lasted nearly three decades reinforces the “inferiority complex” transmitted to the Caribbean (and Africa). In 1848, slavery was definitively abolished in the French colonies, but emancipation suffered numerous setbacks, and the solutions put forward by certain abolitionists – while noble – suffered limitations. Post-colonial writers such as Carpentier, Sembene and Condé have revisited these moments in history to explain what slaves’

descendants had to deal with while confronting the memory of slavery. The 19th century is thus essential to understand in this study for two significant reasons: firstly, because this period continued *unintentionally* reinforcing the “inferiority complex” in the Caribbean (transmitted by the 18th century “justifications” of slavery) despite abolition; secondly, because it was also a time that would be reappropriated by post-colonial writers such as Sembene, as France turned to west Africa as a means to “solve” the slavery problem in the early 1800s.

The 19th century thus suffered limitations that 20th century writers would bring back to offer *solutions* that the abolitionist era could not provide at the time. The solutions provided by the 19th century abolitionists implied a *mise en valeur* that entailed “local inhabitants produc[ing] voluntarily the raw material essential to French economy” in West Africa, instead of importing slave labor to the Caribbean and exporting the goods back to France (Prasad 11); thus the Caribbean axis would be cut out of the triangle, and Africa would prove to be new land for colonization. Just like Carpentier resurrected the Enlightenment ideals applied to the Caribbean, Sembene for instance would reappropriate the abolitionist era (influenced by 18th century thought),¹¹ and further expose the consequences of it in Senegal. The way postcolonial writings confront these times can be better understood if we continue examining abolition in the late 18th and 19th century. The following section further maps abolition movements and its setbacks, in order to understand the difficulties of confronting a past that not only deals with the heritage of the slave trade, but also the inheritance of the “inferiority complex” born from European reluctance or delays in abolishing the trade.

¹¹ See James, mentions that the Enlightenment contributed to both British abolition, and the French Revolution, and it had its “repercussions” in San Domingo that led to the slave revolt and first abolition decree in 1794, 9.

Slavery produces a complex, setbacks reinforce it

The 18th century failed to eradicate the inferiority complex, since France reinstated slavery in 1802 under Napoleon (Jennings 289) and the first emancipation decree was thus short-lived. The fact that Napoleon, a revolutionary figure who was *supposed* to uphold ideals of freedom and liberty, reinstated slavery was one of the most significant setbacks for abolition, and further perpetuated a sense of neglect and disinterest in African peoples (a historical moment appropriated by Carpentier in *El siglo*). If France was still reluctant to abolish slavery when the French, by the 19th century, had become much more aware of its practice, but had *still* not abolished it, what does that generate in the psyches of a population descended from slaves? The inferiority complex was transmitted by Europe through social hierarchies. These were imposed on the subjugated peoples in the colonies, making them believe that western ideals of “civilization” were superior to their own values, which in turn also justified European colonization and African slavery: “In a situation where cultural values of the colonizer were clearly dominant and considered *superior*, ‘*forgetting*’ the indigenous heritage was a widely adopted strategy on the part of the mestizos in their desire to leave behind their marginalized condition” (Chanady xxvi). As I will discuss in later chapters, hierarchies based on color are still prevalent among mulattos and blacks in the Caribbean.

Emancipation, although a significant step for the rights of men and women, would not eliminate the damages perpetuated by the slave-trade, its memory, and the memory of pro-slavery movements that harmed the emancipation movement. Nonetheless, following Napoleon’s decree of forced labor in Haiti, abolition slowly came back to center stage in France, and abolitionists sought solutions to the trade. Influenced by 18th century abolitionists,¹²

⁸ See Rogers, “That Germaine de Staël and George Sand were greatly influenced by Rousseau is unquestionable,” 62.

Germaine de Staël for instance, in 1795 writes *Mirza* where she not only commiserates with the “other’s” enslavement by envisioning herself “as African,” – made possible due to her gender¹³ – but upholds the ideals of Les Amis des noirs to better the treatment of slaves (Isbell 40).

However, a new group formed by the former *Amis des noirs* in 1796 with Abbé Grégoire (Jennings 3), aimed to “bring questions of slavery to the attention of the French public” using “politics of pity” to reform harsh treatment of slaves (Reinhardt 22). While abolitionist literature did succeed in drawing tears, and “awakening” people’s sensitivity, it may have also resulted in a lack for any assumed responsibility for the crimes being committed throughout the Atlantic (23). The *Amis des noirs*, while troubled by the slaves’ conditions in the colonies sought reforms, and solutions while postponing eventual abolition, since “slavery was still inextricably linked to France’s commercial fortunes” (22). As a result, *politics of pity* didn’t mobilize abolition as energetically as abolitionists would have hoped, since France’s economic interests would have been at stake.

Other issues hurting the abolitionist movement were queries such as Chateaubriand’s condemning the violence of the revolts headed by Toussaint Louverture in *Génie du christianisme* (1802) – “Qui oserait encore plaider la cause des noirs après les crimes qu’ils ont commis ?” (Antoine 176). Abbé Grégoire defended the slaves’ cause in *De la littérature des nègres* (1808), mentioning that “black violence in Saint-Domingue had been provoked by planters” (Jennings 5). According to Edward Seeber, Chateaubriand’s query was “symptomatic” as it responded to the “decline of overt opposition to slavery” after 1802, when years before, according to Régis Antoine, a “surabondance fastidieuse” of texts demanding emancipation (looked down on as *négrophilie*) had been prevalent – thus, a time in France where there was “a

¹³ See Massardier-Kenney, “Staël’s gender allowed her to be inclusive racially,” 140.

profound mistrust of anti-slavery writing and abolitionism” (Kadish “Black Terror” 669). As a result, Chateaubriand adopted “les intérêts des anciens planteurs” that he depicted later in *René* (Antoine 176, 195).

As it has been discussed, the interests of the colons in the Caribbean were the main problem for abolition – and thus for the memory of slavery: the fact that France’s interests were maintained and human rights for African slaves were further ignored. The confrontations the abolitionist movements encountered in France (Jennings 5), and the taking of freedom in the colonies, further delayed abolition, and thus strengthened the myth of “white superiority” (Miller 211). Following the victorious slave revolts in Saint Domingue, Chateaubriand’s rejection of the revolt as a cause for freedom in 1802 coincides with Leclerc’s repossession of Saint-Domingue and Napoleon’s reinstatement of slavery. This is seen as a possible success in France, for the blacks are seen as rebels who must be governed due to their apparent incapacity and brutality, made evident in texts such as *Bug-Jargal* (as I will analyze later) or *Tamango*. Toussaint Louverture, “whose relation had been deteriorating with the slaves”¹⁴ is apprehended in le Cap and sent to the Fort de Joux in Portanlier, France where he would die in 1803. In Guadeloupe, Delgrès and his followers will commit suicide in Moutouba as an act of resistance against French invasions and the reinstatement of slaves (Kadish 12).

Such historical moments will profoundly affect later protestations in the Caribbean. In Guadeloupe, for instance, the statue erected of Empress Josephine is later beheaded as a symbol of resistance; Victor Hugues, who was an abolitionist in Guadeloupe in 1793 and scorned by

¹⁴ Kadish mentions that before Napoleonic invasions of the island, Toussaint had alienated the slaves who had fought with and for him, who “resented his imposition of high levels of agricultural productivity and his lack of sympathy toward their demands for land distribution.” He went as far as executing his adopted nephew Moïse for giving “voice to the slaves’ demands,” “Introduction,” *Slavery in the Caribbean Francophone World*, 11.

royalists as he sends many to the guillotine (Antoine 191), reinstates slavery in French Guiana and is made infamous in Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces*.

Kadish establishes that during Napoleon's take-over of Saint-Domingue, an important immigration to the United States, but mostly Cuba, would take place, and escaped slaves would settle and "contribute significantly to the economic development of the sugar and coffee industries" (12).¹⁵ With the Napoleonic era resuming and the Restoration period commencing, abolitionist efforts would still confront resistance but would nonetheless witness tireless efforts on the part of certain parties, such as Germaine de Staël.

De Staël and Condé

The resentment of abolition that France experiences in the era coming into the Restoration period continues to affect the slave-trade heritage and the ways in which African descendants in the Caribbean will perceive this time. After Napoleon was overthrown, Louis XVIII's reign was just as contemptuous towards abolitionism as the Republic had been during its brief rule (Jennings 5). Madame de Staël, member of a family invested in slave's emancipation,¹⁶ was an abolitionist whose "sex, religion, and life of revolution and exile fed the flame that drove her struggle forward" (Isbell 49). Although their exile was different and altered their lives differently, Condé in many ways resembles Staël, for Condé also uses her gender and past experiences (and in Condé's case, her heritage) to understand the slave-trade heritage and veritable solutions to grappling with such a hurtful past. Whether Condé draws from Staël's writing is yet to be determined, but I argue in this section that both writers advocate progress and

¹⁵ Cuba's role in this part of history and Victor Huges' apparent "change of character" will be made evident in my analysis of Carpentier in chapter two.

¹⁶ See Antoine, Following Staël's death, her son Auguste Staël also sought abolition, joining a protestant wing of the newly founded *Société pour la moralité chrétienne* in 1825 (225); see Isbell, he states that "three generations of Staël's family worked in succession to end it [slave-trade]." 39.

justice in two main ways: they both depict women having a voice and denouncing slavery/societal ills, and both seek solutions through female leadership and/or fraternity.

Staël proposes “solutions” to slavery that at the time were progressive and well-intentioned – a fact that should be considered when post-colonial writers deal with the memory of slavery in their works. In *Mirza*, the narrator establishes that Europeans had enabled Africans to come live in a plantation: “déterminé une famille nègre à venir demeurer...à quelques lieues de là, pour y établir une habitation pareille à celles de Saint-Domingue” and that “un tel exemple exciterait les Africains à la culture de sucre” (21). Later on, la Société pour les Amis des Noirs proposed to “réproduire en Afrique le système d’agriculture antillaise” so conditions for slaves would ameliorate and Europeans wouldn’t lose profits. Miller describes these intentions as “forget Saint-Domingue, forget Haiti, turn to Africa” (Miller 252). In this way, it can be said that Staël was progressive for searching for means in which France could continue profiting, but that would also abolish the abominable treatment of slaves. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the 19th century did suffer from limitations, and was focused on maintaining France’s economic interests. Staël, however, advocated abolition and equality (for women, as well).

While Staël circulates translated abolitionist texts written by Wilberforce (Jennings 6), and “devoted her life to the idea of freedom; [and] ...fought against slavery” (39), according to Kadish, she also “succeeded in enhancing women’s authority to speak out for slaves” but also for women as writers (and equals to men) [Kadish, “Black Terror,” 674]. The way she did this was through literature, by depicting women, in the case of *Mirza*, that would speak for the oppressed: women and slaves. Massardier-Kenney says that “[Staël’s] partial exclusion from written discourse because of her gender allowed her to be inclusive racially, and her early concern about

the questions of slavery would last throughout her life.”¹⁷ Some feminists would say that women during *l’ancien régime* (who lived under patriarchal laws, and were contracted to marry for instance), could relate to the oppression slaves endured, since blacks were also victims of an “exchange.” Staël parallels these two experiences through the voice of Mirza, who denounces slave suffering,¹⁸ and demands Europe take responsibility: “Européens, c’est pour cultiver vos terres, que vous nous condamnez à l’esclavage, c’est votre intérêt sans doute qui rend notre infortune nécessaire...”¹⁹ (8).

Staël’s denunciation of slavery, which demanded rights for both women and slaves, can be seen in Condé’s *Traversée de la mangrove* where only the female narrators and the male downtrodden speak in the first person. Mirza, as well as the narrators in *Traversée* have a unique voice, and both works denounce a social ill: slavery. In this way, Staël “equates slaves and women” (Isbell 42), while Condé will also equate women to slave descendants as the ones who are mostly oppressed in a society run by patriarchal norms (discussed in chapter 4).

Another way Staël is progressive through *Mirza* is that, contrary to Chateaubriand who condemns violence in Saint-Domingue’s revolt, she refuses violence clichés,²⁰ and focuses on “solutions” (I say “solutions” since I will discuss that the 19th century solutions to slavery did not cease the practice nor the oppression). Earlier I mentioned that turning attention towards

¹⁷ It must also be mentioned that Mirza is also a character that also speaks Wolof which is telling since, [see Massardier-Kenney] “Germaine Necker first encountered the life of the intellect in conversations, and she herself became a conversationalist well before she became a writer. The importance of the oral is obvious in the poetic improvisations of her famous heroine Corinne, but also, among the readings in this volume, in the early hymns of her Jolof character Mirza...Her emphasis on the oral rather than on the written made her particularly suited to accept cultures from Africa and to appreciate their oral traditions,” 136.

¹⁸ See Massardier-Kenney, “[Mirza] is first presented as the eloquent voice of antislavery... [She] opposes the male warriors’ custom of selling their war prisoners as slaves,” 142.

¹⁹ Further, Staël condemns African trade stating “Nous avons mutuellement l’atroce coutume de vendre nos prisonniers de guerres aux Européens,” 5.

²⁰ See Kadish, In Staël’s posthumous publication “Considérations sur la révolution,” Staël defends the Haitian revolution condemned by Chateaubriand, claiming that it was inevitable and due to fierce oppression: “Si les nègres de Saint-Domingue ont commis bien plus d’atrocités encore, c’est qu’ils avaient été plus opprimés. Les fureurs des révoltes donnent la mesure des vices des institutions,” *Black Terror*, 671.

peaceful plantations for voluntary labor in Africa would be a solution to slavery in the 19th century, but Staël also offers women fraternity and leadership as a means towards progress. Mirza is therefore, an essential figure embodying female strength that will fight against oppression until death. Her death in fact symbolizes the end of a threat for Ourika, since after Mirza dies, Ximeo and Ourika's relationship is renewed and female fraternity is thus restored, similar to what happens in *Traversée*, when Sancher dies: female competition for Sancher's heart dissipates, uniting women to bring progress to the island, contest the tale maintained by older generations in the Caribbean that "dans la cœur des noirs, la lumière ne brille jamais" (83). In this way, postcolonial writers who revisit the 19th century setbacks for abolition can at least look back on key figures such as Staël who attempted to seek solutions to oppression and future progress (as well as bandage the trauma of slavery).

Abolition Setbacks /Hugo and Sembene

Earlier setbacks that the abolition movement was up against reinforced a reluctance to eradicate the oppression of the "other." Two issues that further impeded abolition during the Restoration period were: 1) internal conflicts among abolitionist groups in France; 2) romantic novels that, though glorifying a black figure, also justified their leadership with royal ancestry in Africa, adding an overtone of "exoticism" to the *black man*. As mentioned earlier, the early 19th century will also be witness to an African colonialism that starts out as a noble cause, but ends up weakening African nations, whose wounds created by the slave trade start to become evident. I will start out by briefly exploring France's turn to Africa, continuing with the setbacks of abolition, and focusing on Hugo's writings on historical events, which sharply contrast with how Sembene will interpret African history and the African perspective on slavery in the 20th century.

By the 1820's, abolitionist doctrines in France are experiencing a schism. While well intentioned, they do not immediately abolish slavery and the trade persists, perpetuating the previously mentioned "inferiority complex" in the Caribbean, and later in Africa. The Protestants take the lead in the new formation of la *Société de la moralité chrétienne* (which will last until 1861[Jennings 8-9]), led by Auguste Staël and Victor de Broglie (who was actually not a Protestant) versus the Catholics led by Abbé Grégoire. It is interesting to note that the future king Louis Phillipe was also part of the abolitionist's *Société de la moralité chrétienne*, and he will take power come the July Revolution in 1830 (10). Schœlcher, who worked to abolish slavery in the Caribbean, will estrange himself from the more radical abolitionist Bisette. Schœlcher advocates (as did Staël and Grégoire) for reform of slaves' treatment, and writes "il faut trouver un moyen équitable de rétribuer le travail sans dommage pour le capital" (91).

Schœlcher saw abolition possible if slaves could be remunerated for their work and be allowed to "purchase their freedom" (Jennings 15). However these goals would prove to be moderate measures against slavery, for the originators claimed it would be "possible to destroy the evils of slavery by *degrees*" (Jennings 15), which Bisette rejects. The "evils of slavery" persisted, and in 1827, Cyril Bisette, "a black activist who would become the most radical abolitionist under the July Monarchy" (24), starts publicly demanding abolition, as well as "une égalité des droits" in France among peoples of "color" (Antoine 214). After Auguste Staël's death, la *Société morale chrétienne* starts to loose leadership, and their activism starts to "slow down" (Jennings 17). Divisions of this nature will persist until eventual abolition, but the setbacks that the decree suffered were partly due to a lack of unity between the abolitionist groups. Once again, French interests came before African human rights – a painful memory for the descendants of slaves.

During the time that abolition is facing major setbacks, young Victor Hugo works on a novel that condemned the revolt in Haiti in a way similar to Chateaubriand's *Génie du christianisme*: a violent revolt that affected the white masters. While it has not been demonstrated that Hugo further perpetuated white supremacy with this novel, one can assert that it did not help the emancipation cause. Even though critics claim he was an “anti-esclavagiste,”²¹ Hugo wrote *Bug Jargal* at the age of sixteen, and would not go back to “revise” his judgment (180-81). According to Régis Antoine, “[Hugo] insiste sur la crédulité des noirs, le ridicule de la ‘diplomacie nègre’” and Antoine affirms it can even be considered an “anti-mulâtre” novel (181). However, Timothy Raser states that *Bug Jargal* actually “attacks the Revolution” since it depicts blood-thirsty rebels, and condemns the Revolution for failing to follow through on its ideals of *fraternité*: “it did not defend equality or brotherhood; the use of terror was at odds with humanitarian ideals; its control of speech denied its liberty to claim liberty as one of its aims” [67] (similar to what Carpentier will pick up on in *El siglo*). The novel in essence criticized the Revolution's failure to implement its ideals, but it still depicted black violence and thus it did not help nor support the cause for a shattering of chains.

Another complicating factor to discuss in this novel is that Hugo positioned a black leader as a hero during a time when slavery was still authorized. Although it is telling that he did so, it may also lead readers to believe that Bug Jargal's capacity to lead comes from his royal African ancestry, lending to the interpretation that a black man (and not a woman) can only possess leadership skill if he is from noble blood. Hugo also suggests that this African ancestry is exotic: when Auvergne – the French hero of the novel (other than Bug) – is being held

²¹ See Raser, where he states that in 1859 he would condemn the hanging of John Brown, “protesting the institution of slavery” claiming “puisqu'il y a qu'un père...nous sommes tous des frères [...] il est beau que parmi les flambeaux du progress, éclairant la route des hommes, on en voie un tenu par la main d'un nègre,” 62. Such a statement as Raser comments, seems rather condescending when viewed from the 21st century.

hostage, Hugo sets the scene for a mythic and “exoticized” African heritage in the Caribbean, with *griotes* unleashing powerful incantations: “leurs femmes, les griotes possédées comme eux d’un *démon* insensé, accompagnent les chansons *barbares* de leurs maris par des danses *lubriques*, et présentent une *parodie grotesque*” [my italics] (89). Using words such as “barbare,” “demon,” and “grotesque,” Hugo seems to be perpetuate the myth of a dark, mysterious and potentially evil Africa, which further justifies its colonization as a solution: what he considers “civilization.” In his speech in favor of colonialism on May 18th, 1879 he asserts “le blanc a fait du noir un homme.”²² It should be considered however, that Hugo wrote when “le racisme imprégnait l’opinion publique française” (Antoine 229), and therefore one could say his ideals were a reflection of the times.²³

In the 1960’s, confronted with a slave trade heritage and an impoverished African nation, Sembene writes a history different from that of Hugo and his contemporaries. In *Ceddo* for instance, Sembene does not “exoticize” the fetishes of his native country, but rather exposes African culture as it was.²⁴ One of the most controversial factors he exposes, however, is Africa’s role in the transatlantic trade. By admitting that Africa has a tradition of slavery, he is helping both Africa and the Caribbean appropriate their history, for the slave trade is a history that both peoples share. Sembene is essentially filling in the details of Senegal’s true history: one which practiced slavery and participated in the trade, but also portrayed the existence of valued monarchies, the unique rhythm of children’s chanting, and most importantly perhaps, the

²² See Ngatcha. This declaration is read by Césaire in the documentary where he admits Hugo’s *discours* provoked his ideals of Négritude.

²³ See Jennings, The French associated the abolitionists with the British, and there was also a “lack of unity within the abolitionist ranks, the absence of a common anti-slavery policy, and a tendency of individual abolitionists to waver constantly in their own convictions,” 192. See Antoine where he explains that during this period, certain anti-abolition brochures represent Toussaint as “le rebut de la société, un assemblage inouï de scélératesse, d’ingratitude, de sottise, d’amour propre et de bassesse...un chef sanguinaire,” and the Haitian revolution being violent and out of control, 85.

²⁴ It must be noted that it would have been hard for Hugo to know, in the 19th century *and* as a *Frenchman* what the culture and the country were like originally, before the arrival of Europeans.

respectable *resistance* displayed by the *ceddo* (a society from the West African coast) in terms of guarding their customs. The *ceddo* spokesperson announces, for instance “may oppression end today,” making clear that *Ceddo* is a project that aims to heighten African nationalism based on keeping traditional and original customs close.

Further, and contrary to Hugo’s apparent solution to slavery, Sembene considers any imposition to be of great harm to the “other’s” culture. He also sees European colonialism as a further affirmation of white superiority and condemns the mentality of the 30’s and 40’s in *Bouts de bois de Dieu*, where his French character Victor establishes that Africa has been saved by France, since the continent prior to the arrival of western civilization was barely a “flat bush” stating that “France saved it by establishing hospitals, schools, trains” – and in fact “civilizing” Senegal (255). Following the years of independence movements in Africa in the 60’s, historians and filmmakers (writers) such as Sembene would rewrite historical events from their point of view.

Emancipation’s implications in this history

Emancipation setbacks and the conservative ideology held by the French harmed the descendants of slaves’ view of themselves as equals to the European man. It was as if the delay for abolition was justified. Further, in 1830 anti-abolition is reborn, and the new July Monarchy would decree minor reforms that would do little to further emancipation decrees.²⁵ Despite this, certain groups continue fighting, and defending their political ideologies, as Bissette publishes *Revue des colonies* in 1834,²⁶ the same year Schœlcher will found la *Société française pour l’abolition de l’esclavage* (Jennings 50). In 1833 a year before the British abolish slavery, Schœlcher invokes Robespierre’s famous statement, “Périssent les colonies plutôt qu’un

²⁵ This is considered ironic, because the July Monarchy had in power previous members of groups that had condemned slavery.

²⁶ Which was, according to Jennings, the “first French abolitionist periodical run by blacks,” 49.

principe” (102) protesting that economic value should not be prioritized over morality. The principle Schœlcher demanded was to abandon slavery, stating that whether useful or not, it is a crime: “il faut la détruire; une chose criminelle ne doit pas être nécessaire” (102). On April 27, 1848, France finally declares abolition in all colonies of France: “L’esclavage sera entièrement aboli dans toutes les colonies et possession françaises” (152) – made possible by numerous factors.²⁷

Despite this second abolition, slaves’ descendants are still not be free. Post-colonial writers will retake this period in history in the 20th and 21st centuries as they recapture it as glorious yet also disappointing. I have established that although the 19th century expanded on 18th century ideals and witnessed the emergence of remarkable figures who fought for freedom in the colonies, emancipation happened slowly, and the slave trade was upheld for nearly three centuries. Further, slavery still exists to this day, and descendants from slaves continue to be marginalized and exploited. Hence, the Enlightenment’s glorious promise to extend the ideals of *égalité, fraternité et liberté* is tarnished to a certain extent since it did not end oppression, and transmitted what is called a *Prospero complex*.²⁸ Nevertheless, post-colonial writers will appropriate the elements I examined in this chapter in an attempt to create “solutions” to better deal with the memory and heritage of slavery that this period fought, preserved, and finally abolished. These contestations and appropriations of the slave trade and its memory will be analyzed further in the following chapters.

²⁷ Some historians say abolition was a product of France, and that it succeeded due to the 1848 Revolution that toppled the Orleanist government (Jennings 197). Other historians consider abolition a consequence of economic factors, since slavery was becoming unprofitable. Finally, Reinhart mentions that the oppressed slaves had a prominent contribution, fighting for their own freedom as they did in 1794 under Toussaint and other leaders: “history born from the slaves often ignored cry for liberty challenges France’s hegemony over the past of French Caribbean nations,” 35.

²⁸ See Chantal Zabus, explains the ‘Prospero complex’ is a “dominant characteristic in any individual brought up in the unspoken assumption of the superiority of the European culture” that goes “hand in glove with the lack of awareness of the ‘Other’” and the “urge to dominate,” *Tempest after Shakespeare*, 22.

CHAPTER 2

THE TRIANGLE'S SPANISH AXIS: CARPENTIER'S RE-APPROPRIATION OF THE "CENTURY OF LIGHTS"

Slavery in the Caribbean was damaging in the ways that it degraded the psyches of the children of the Diaspora. Frantz Fanon writes "the misfortune of the man of color was to have been enslaved," expressing that the afflictions that overcame the Caribbean are still prevalent and a product of the memories of slavery weighing on its population (63). A way of contesting this past, and dealing with it is to re-write its history, exposing the situation from a Caribbean perspective²⁹. In *El siglo de las luces*, Carpentier will re-write Caribbean history affected by the Enlightenment ideals, *from the inside* – that is, *the Caribbean*.

Alejo Carpentier, son of Europeans and born in Switzerland, moved to Cuba immediately after his birth. He wrote and lived during the time that the Négritude movement was becoming popular. Négritude authors Senghor, Césaire and Damas, like Carpentier also contested the Enlightenment and its exclusivist presumptions – the fact that when Rousseau spoke of liberty, he did not include African slaves, for instance. This movement aimed to "celebrate black achievements, acknowledge common African roots unifying black experience worldwide, and raises black consciousness about the past and present forms of victimization and oppression"

²⁹ See Arnold, "The rewriting of history has been a constant endeavor of twentieth-century Caribbean writers. Emerging from a common experience of colonialism and slavery, Caribbean authors have found a history written by the Other, reflecting the Eurocentric perspective of the colonial powers who ruled the islands for centuries. These 'flawed' accounts of Caribbean historical development pointed to the need to recast the region's history into narratives that could serve as the basis for a reinterpretation of the roles played by the Caribbean peoples in their own history, and by extension, for a reformulation of the prevailing concepts of Caribbean national and individual identities" (215). Edouard Glissant writes, for instance, "I am often irritated by reading books that give an account of the miserable reality of our countries, and it is because I then have the impression of being faced with a substitute, a wretched one for Balzac or for Zola," 105.

(Kadish xix), venerating figures such as Toussaint Louverture and Henri Christophe. Carpentier becomes particularly interested in black empowerment after his visit to Haiti³⁰, and as a result writes *El reino de este mundo* (1949), reflecting on the “survival of African cultural heritage” on the island (Miampika 143). The years leading up to the revolutionary decade of the 60’s and Carpentier’s intense study of the 18th and 19th centuries (for he considers these centuries to be the staging of “a decisive phenomenon that helps understand culture” [“Introducción” 42]), make him reflect on what he calls, “la decadencia de Occidente” (42). Due to this, in 1962 – three years after Cuba’s take-over by Fidel’s revolutionaries³¹ – he publishes *El siglo de las luces*.

In this novel, Carpentier appropriates a time in history, and includes a larger Caribbean region, exploring the history of earlier revolution prior to the slave trade that had affected his native Cuba, but also the neighboring regions to his island. Carpentier, similar to Victor Hugo, deglorifies the effects of the French Revolution. Similar to what Condé will do in her play *Tan revolysion* (1998), Carpentier in *El siglo* lessens the glorification of historical figures such as Victor Hugues and the effects of revolutionary ideas transmitted to the Caribbean. He does so by giving voice to Cuban Creole characters (like himself). While a voice is still not given to slaves, Carpentier’s Creole characters – raised in Cuba, but from European descent – and their perceptions and disappointments of the revolution and its ideals unfold to the reader, a story from

³⁰ See Carpentier, “tuve la suerte de poder visitar el reino de Henri Christophe – las ruinas tan poéticas, de Sans-Souci [sin-preocupación]; la mole, imponentemente intacta a pesar de terremotos... – y de conocer la todavía normanda Ciudad del Cabo, el Cap Français de la antigua colonia...”, “Introducción: Carpentier sobre El siglo de las luces,” 42.

³¹ It is worthy to note that Carpentier wrote at a time when the Caribbean reflected upon repetitious impositions of plantations – [see Benítez-Rojo] “la complejidad que la repetición de la plantación, los efectos que su repetición ha imprimido a todo el area,” 54 – along with failed revolutions that did not stop slavery and the plantation economy. Carpentier, therefore was cautious about revolution in his own island, and perhaps warning that Fidel’s revolution would not fail to liberate the oppressed, as the Enlightenment’s fueled revolution failed to take hold in the Caribbean.

inside the Caribbean³². At the same time, these characters will be the final defender of slave's rights: Reminiscent of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul and Virginie*, where the character of Virginie speaks for an abused runaway slave, Sofia will defend *marronage* and speak of it, bringing slave resistance back into history. Under a different light, *marronage* is revisited and thus allows for understanding of the racist formations in some of the Caribbean regions³³.

Therefore, it can be said that Carpentier, also as a Creole Cuban, offers a re-writing of history and *El siglo* revisits the effects of European revolution and Enlightenment ideals from the Caribbean perspective. Carpentier fully believed that as a Caribbean writer, his vocation was that of a "discoverer": "emprender la búsqueda de las raíces, desvelar la fundación de las sociedades...destacar la 'otredad' caribeña" (Miampika 104). As a result Carpentier, offering a valuable postcolonial solution to problems inherited by his nation's (and other) degradation from the slave-trade, he takes back history through the eyes of Caribbean Creoles who denounce the failures of European men in power and shed light on *marronage* as a powerful and necessary resistance against slavery.

In this second chapter, I discuss how Carpentier while re-writing history from the perception of his Creole characters, revisits the French revolution's effects on the Caribbean³⁴. By re-writing a different view of the effects of revolutionary ideas transmitted in the Caribbean,

³² It is understandable that Carpentier, as a Cuban would be interested in neighboring regions: Cuba, besides being an island located in the Caribbean Sea, is fundamental to Caribbean history and is linked to other Caribbean regions due to this history. According to Lulú Giménez Saldivia, a region can be considered as part of the Caribbean when it meets three "fundamental conditions": el "exterminio de poblaciones indígenas, la economía de plantación y la esclavitud de africanos", (48). Cuba shares with other regions that Carpentier explores in the novel, those conditions that affected the entire Caribbean as a whole. Therefore, in the novel, what happens in Haiti or Martinique, will affect Cuba. As a matter of fact, in *El reino de este mundo*, Carpentier reports that it was due to the revolts in Haiti that many slaves fled to Cuba, and once there, they were placed in different plantations, commencing Cuba's peak in slavery practices. Benítez-Rojo comments on such situation in *La isla que se repite*, discussing that "...se podía comparar la sociedad cubana del siglo XIX, ya dominada por la economía de plantación, con la de Saint-Domingue del siglo XVIII," 53.

³³ Including the Francophone, Dutch, English, and Hispanic regions.

³⁴ See Carpentier, "Las Antillas, aquí han dejado de ser la periferia o los vertederos de la Historia para convertirse en el centro del universo, el Gran Teatro del Mundo – donde todas las ideas – las nociones mismas de humanidad y universalidad – serán sometidas a prueba y llevadas a juicio," "Introducción" 36.

Carpentier aims to offer history to the peoples affected, as a means of empowerment. I explain how he deglorifies Victor Hugues and the revolution's ideals of liberty in general. Second, I analyze the novel's re-interpretations of racism³⁵'s origins and notions of "barbarity." Further, I discuss Carpentier's bringing marronage into center stage to repair damages caused to the heroic groups that fled the plantations. Lastly, I analyze instances of Creole forms of resistance that Carpentier makes evident through his character of Sofia.

El siglo: The story

El siglo de las luces is the story of three impressionable orphaned children – Esteban, Sofia and Carlos – coming into contact with a former baker- turned revolutionary Victor Hugues, a real historical figure who was governor of Martinique under Napoleon, who later reinstates slavery. The novel journeys into the adventures of each individual character (with the exception of Carlos, whose character is not developed in the story as much as the others) as they grapple with the true meaning of the revolutionary slogans. All three are transformed in various ways by their contact with the French Enlightenment figure, Victor Hugues. However, after news of revolution spreading, the trio separates. Hugues becomes governor of Martinique, taking Esteban with him while Sofia and Carlos take refuge elsewhere not specified in the novel. Esteban, by Hugues' side, witnesses the failures of the Enlightenment's ideals to bring progress to the Caribbean region and emancipation to the enslaved (which Sofia will experience as well at the end of the novel). Hugues, a liberal revolutionary who claims that all men are equal, later strays from these ideals, as he will allow the selling of slaves.

During the explosion of the French revolution, Hugues is sent to Martinique to expel the English. What happens in the French Antilles under Hugues' command is a betrayal of

³⁵ See Ferry, defines racism as "the attempt to define a category of humans by essence," 5.

ideologies witnessed by Esteban that both disappoint and repulse him. In essence, the novel confronts the question of “why is the memory of slavery so difficult to deal with?” Carpentier will reveal that African descent peoples are further oppressed today because their forefathers were excluded of the Enlightenment’s project to liberate all men, to bestow equality upon all. In this way, Carpentier’s *El siglo* is “a response to the hypocrisy and the pragmatic exceptions of The Lights in response to the racial and colonial question” (Vazquez 381).

Esteban deglorifies Victor Hugues and the French Revolution

The day of the Bastille is celebrated in France on July 14th commemorating the French Revolution that would lead to France’s first slave abolition in 1794. However, Napoleon’s reinstatement of slavery in 1802 it is rarely remembered on that day. In *El siglo*, Carpentier evokes this moment in history, acknowledging that while reestablishment of slavery would not affect France’s general public, it would affect Caribbean peoples forever. He reminds his readers that following the decree of abolition, Napoleon “prohibits the entrance of any individual of color to France” (Carpentier 312). In this way, Carpentier rewrites history: he retakes periods of time that perhaps mattered less to canonical history written by Europeans and gives a Caribbean perspective. In other words, he writes the silenced versions that occurred in a different region, far from the gaze (or interest) of the European public and brings them into center stage.

First he reinterprets Victor Hugues, “whose regime has received little attention from historians” (Dubois 366). According to Laurent Dubois, Hugues was seen as a “brutal Jacobin” who was tyrannical towards white planters and thus he acquired the reputation of a liberator for slaves (366). From Carpentier’s perspective however, Hugues’ character invokes the “reversal of freedom” (392). In the novel, Carpentier illustrates Victor Hugues’ initial ideals for emancipation, and through his Creole characters, Carpentier denounces Hugues’ change of heart.

Having been governor of Martinique who fervently abolished slavery, he reestablishes it later, overlooking the principles of the French Revolution. Through Hugues' actions, not only does the novel question Hugues' revolutionary failures, but also he brings the French Revolution into the Caribbean sphere, acknowledging that although it may have liberated peoples in Europe, it did not do so in the Caribbean:

La novela [*El siglo*] tiene una intención legítima de cuestionar a la Revolución Francesa como mito y su Declaración de los derechos del hombre y del ciudadano como relatos de emancipación que poseen una distancia entre los principios proclamados y su realización política (Miampika 172).

In other words the revolution did not save slaves in the Caribbean, factor that France might overlook when celebrating the French Revolution. The way Carpenter denounces such an issue in his novel is reflected by Esteban's view of the situation onboard of a ship as he witnesses the rape of female slaves by the French crew members and the re-enslavement of the African males to be sold in Suriname. Despite the fact that the trade has been prohibited, Hugues' crew (and France in general) continues to benefit from slave-trade commerce, ignoring the abolition decree: Victor Hugues explains to Esteban,

Francia, en virtud de sus principios democráticos, no puede ejercer la trata. Pero los capitanes de navíos corsarios, están autorizados, si lo estiman conveniente o necesario, a vender en puertos holandeses los esclavos que hayan sido tomados de los ingleses, españoles, y otros enemigos de la República, 183.

Adding to Carpentier's denunciation of European revolutionary ideals failing to save slaves, he describes a crew member's remarks on remembering that before the Revolution, a slave-trade boat roamed those oceans belonging to a Jacobin who had named his ship "the Social Contract" (183), reminiscent and critical of Rousseau's ideas of freedom and liberty neglecting real slaves.

Denouncing further failure to abolish slavery, Esteban expresses utter disgust upon witnessing the crucial inefficiencies of the abolition decree and states – as if voicing Carpentier’s personal opinion: “Y hemos abolido la trata para servir de negreros entre otras naciones” (183). Further, Esteban witnesses that, despite this abolition decree, slaves are still treated as slaves, and that the decree was just a formality on paper not put into practice; he says upon arrival to Cayenne, “varios negros, *de los que ahora se decían libres*, eran expuestos sobre un tablado, con los tobillos fijos por argollas a una barra de hierro, para escarmiento de alguna holgazanería” (205). Not only does Carpentier in this way denounce Hugues’ and the revolution’s failure to free slaves, he also denounces the Code Noir which never ameliorated slaves’ condition; and ironically, after abolition, corporal punishments were still in effect. In *El siglo*, Esteban upon arrival to Suriname observes that slaves are being amputated of members as punishment for attempt to flee plantations: “También se amputan brazos – dijo el doctor Greuber – cuando el esclavo ha levantado la mano sobre su amo” (235).

Through Sofia’s character, the reader learns how the Enlightenment and the Revolution overlook their ideals of which Hugues is representative: “Hemos terminado la novela de la Revolución; nos toca ahora empezar su Historia y considerar tan sólo lo que resulta real y posible en la aplicación de sus principios.” Such a statement thus reestablishes that the Enlightenment ideals did not reach its fullest potential. Remembering that for the historical record, the revolution did not free slaves, Sofia says, “es muy triste empezar esa historia con el restablecimiento de la esclavitud” (315). In this way, *El siglo* remains an important criticism of Europe’s incapacity to bring slave freedom to the colonies.

Revisiting 19th century ‘racism,’ re-interpreting notions of “barbarity”

Re-writing the French Revolution and Enlightenment ideals – and describing how they affected a region that was mostly ignored by European history – is part of Carpentier’s solution for empowering the Diaspora peoples. However, another part of re-writing history or contesting the glorification of a revolution is by illustrating how the setbacks to abolish slavery perpetuated the feeling of inferiority towards peoples of African descent (as I discussed in chapter one). Following Sofia’s regret for Hugues’ dismissal of freedom for the black population, the latter justifies forced labor by claiming that the black man is innately evil.³⁶

Laurent Dubois explains that Hugues was a “pioneer of the strategies of Republican racism that would be at the heart of the French colonial enterprise in the Antilles and, later, in Africa” (392). *El siglo* exposes the mentality of racism that justifies reinstatement of slavery for economic gain – that is to force black people to work plantations and further enrich France. In the novel, once Hugues has reinstated slavery, he says to Sofia, “...los negros, nacidos con muchos vicios carecen a la vez de razón y de sentimiento, sin entender más normas que las que se imponen con el miedo” (316), which will justify his political move to bring slavery back. These words, however, sharply contrast with Hugues’ ideals of equality at the beginning of the novel, “todos los hombres nacieron iguales” (41). Carpentier’s example of European mentality at the time further explains what chapter one argued as the “setbacks” of abolition and therefore, the perpetuation of the “inferiority” complex found in Cuba and the Caribbean.

In the novel, Carpentier has Esteban express the consequences of the inferiority complex, as the population lives depressed to some extent: “en Cayena,...se vivía en horror” (313). Esteban further mentions that the blacks are “submitted to tortures,” that the certain populations

³⁶ Maryse Condé will also discuss the planter’s belief in slaves’ innate ‘evil;’ as she mentions in *Moi, Tituba sorcière...*, “Susanna Endicott m’avait déjà appris qu’à ses yeux, ma couleur était signe de mon intimité avec le Malin,” 104.

“vagaban a su antojo, mostrando pesadillas físicas para conseguir limosnas. La milicia de color era un muestrario de andrajos...algunos traían a sus hembras para prostituirlas” (205-06). The terrible conditions the population lives in are only part of the visible scars left behind by the plantation economy. It is in such ways that Carpentier denounces not only the “other side of the coin” when it comes to the French Revolution’s effect in the Caribbean, but its after-effects as well. In Esteban’s view, the revolution has turned the Caribbean region into an “asylum for the mentally insane” (205), “depressive and sordid” (231).

If the Caribbean remains oppressed and submerged in poverty it is initially due to the fact that slavery gave way to such current conditions. Edouard Glissant says that “the misery of our lands ...contains historical dimensions” (105). Further, Benítez-Rojo suggests, for instance, that it is the plantation economy that had the most powerful effect in the Caribbean region:

Pienso que el fenómeno de la llegada y la multiplicación de las plantaciones, por sí solo, es el de mayor importancia histórica que ha ocurrido en el Caribe, hasta el punto de que, si no hubiera sucedido, quizá las islas de la región fueran hoy replicas en miniatura – al menos en términos demográficos y etnológicos – de las naciones europeas que las colonizaron” (57).

However, the barbarians that are so often described in European literature as blood-thirsty revolted slaves, (consider Victor Hugo’s *Bug Jargal* “je me rappelai la coutume de ces peuplades sauvages qui dansent autour des prisonniers avant de les massacrer” [90], or the slaves in Prosper Mérimée’s *Tamango*, “Lorsque le cadavre du dernier Blanc, déchiqueté et coupé par morceaux, eut été jeté à la mer, les Noirs, rassasiés de vengeance, levèrent les yeux” [222]) in *El siglo* these are the white Europeans. Esteban, after leaving Hugues and his men and returning to Cuba utters, “vengo de vivir entre barbaros” (242). As a consequence, history is thus seen from a different angle. Slaves although tortured and thus “barbarized” by the Europeans are not seen as “barbarians” as they had been historically perceived. Rather, in *El siglo*, it’s the perpetrators

that are seen as “barbarians” in a sense, since it is they who cause such damage (242). Esteban also insists that, contrary to western ideology, his kind – the European man – is “la peor bestia de la creación” (235).

In Carpentier’s masterpiece, gone are the days in which the “other” – different from the European – was considered “barbarian” as described in Montaigne’s “Des Cannibales.” A similar perception of barbarity will be unfolded in the views of the fleeing slaves, also known also as *marronage*. This “fleeing” is a sign of resistance that had been kept in relative silence until postcolonial writers uncovered its underlying importance to the plight of slavery fought heroically by their forefathers.

Resistances: Re-writing, re-visiting views on *Marronage*

Carpentier rescues issues that matter in the Caribbean in his views of history by giving a voice – almost – to the maroons. I say “almost” because, contrary to Condé who *does* give a voice to these maroon slaves (exemplified by Xantippe – discussed in chapter 4), Carpentier brings our attention to these individuals through the experiences of Sofia. In *Noirs*, a documentary featuring Maryse Condé among many other important figures, Françoise Vergès gives a talk on resistance of slavery, and states “ils se sont défendus tout le temps.” Just as suicide or self-induced abortion was an unfortunate form of (female)³⁷ resistance against slavery addressed in postcolonial works such as Condé’s *Moi, Tituba sorcière* (“il me semblait que les mêmes mains qui avaient donné la mort peu de temps auparavant, donnaient la vie et que je me lavais du meurtre de mon enfant” [102]), *marronage* was another way to fight oppression. In rewriting history, however, Carpentier revisits the formation of *marronage* not only as an

³⁷ As a matter of fact, Tituba is described by Condé in the novel to be a prominent strong female figure, a symbol of resistance who takes the battle into her own hands, and aborts her child, feeling dread, but doing it as a necessity, for she does not want her child to be suffer from the horrifying conditions of slavery.

attempt to escape slavery, but also as a means of resistance that triumphs over western prowess and might.

In *El siglo*, when Napoleon reinstates slavery, Carpentier illustrates how Hugues' slaves turned to *marronage*, running to the seemingly enchanted woods, and making reinstitution of slavery merely futile. Hugues' army is deemed outright incapable to draw the slaves back and his men, in turn start suffering from "El Mal Egipcio":

Tuvimos que andar en pantanos con el agua por el pecho. Y luego, para colmo, el Mal Egipcio...Era como una fiebre maligna, con dolores articulares, que se trepaba al cuerpo, estallando por lo ojos. Se inflamaban las pupilas...mañana llegarían más enfermos, más heridos, meas hombres derrotados por los árboles de la selva y por las armas que, con sus trazas prehistóricas, sus dardos de hueso de mono, sus flechas de caña, sus picas y machetes campesinos, habían desafiado la artillería moderna, (323).

Contrary to the notions of *marronage* being a sign of "backwardness," in the novel, "marronaje" (*marronage*) is depicted as a sign of resistance against Napoleon's reinstatement of slavery. Not only do the slaves resist their enslavement by going into *marronage*, they also are, in essence, allied with nature, and the woods will defend them from being taken back to the plantations: When Hughes' troops go seek the refugee slaves in the forest, they encounter the "Mal Egipcio" which had "declared itself in Cayenne³⁸" (323), and thus protects the maroons from being recaptured. Hugues himself was also infected, and Carpentier describes this illness as the marginalized form of combating western impositions: "El Mal Egipcio estaba instalado en su organismo potente con una fuerza únicamente combatida por la del ser que le resistía" (325). It is interesting to note that Carpentier in *El Siglo* rescues the notion of *marronage* and not only uses it to symbolize European failure, but also (re)empowers a group that had been seen as heroic and brave, but that after emancipation was alienated from the rest of the former slave

³⁸ Cayenne, capital of French Guiana: the Guianas, sharing a history of plantations, execution of natives, and slavery is also considered part of the Caribbean region and thus described in Carpentier's novel, as suffering the consequences of a failed revolution with its surrounding neighbors.

population. N’Zengou-Tayo explains that when emancipation was declared a second time in the colonies, “the former maroons lost their prestige...” The fact that they had been seen as heroic was due to their resistance to work in the plantations. However, after emancipation, instead of this act being seen as admirable, it “indicated resistance to progress” and they “became exotic reminders of African origins” (182).

The freed slaves and the runaway slaves thus became estranged from each other (183), but the maroons were further exiled as European-established norms of racism were perpetuated. As a result, having black skin equated with the maroon slaves, and thus these groups were perceived as “savages” (N’Zengou-Tayo 182). Glissant explains that “in Martinique and in Guadeloupe a people of African descent” the word “*African* or *Negro* generally represented an insult” (6). As a result, the Afro-Caribbean population attempted to “whiten” themselves to achieve social recognition, as the mulattoes would often hear, “you’re not really so black, you’re like us, not like the Negroes” were legitimized (7) – the closer a black person was to the European “us,” the better he or she was to become, giving way to color hierarchies in the Caribbean. As N’Zengou-Tayo remarks, “we can see the emergence of class and color rivalry as we observe mulattoes imitating the *békés* [*whites*], the free blacks imitating the mulattoes, and the slaves imitating the free blacks” (183).

In *El Siglo*, the heroism of the maroons is remembered as their struggle to establish their own community (made evident by his use of the word “palenque”) is described in detail: “Y eran cien, doscientos, seguidos de sus mujeres cargadas de niños, quienes se internaban en junglas y arabucos, en busca de un lugar donde podrían fundar *palenques*” (183). At the same time their resistance is made exemplary, as it is described how they resist European impositions and go back to their customs: “Más allá de aquel torrente...empezaría el Africa nuevamente; se

regresaría a los idiomas olvidados, a los ritos de circuncisión, a la adoración de los Dioses Primeros, anteriores a los Dioses recientes del Cristianismo” (313). Further, Carpentier makes evident their heroism (as Sembene will with the “ceddo”) by illustrating that their resistance requires no use of weaponry nor brutal violence – making their cause even more noble and honorable: “se iban al monte...casi desnudos, sin armas, resueltos a regresar a la vida de sus ancestros, donde los blancos no podían alcanzarlos” (313). What happened after marronage was Hugues’ crucial defeat that Sofia deems warranted (“Sofía, gozosa por el fracaso de la expedición, recogió sus ropas” [323]).

In re-writing history, Carpentier offers a renewed view of *marronage*, as an understandable means of resistance against European brutality, and thus forcing a reevaluation of European forms of racism born from the interpretation of maroons as “savages.”³⁹ Further, Carpentier mentions *marronage* in his novel to denounce and describe the atrocious treatment of slavery at the time: “los negros insometidos o levantiscos eran azotados hasta morir, descuartizados, decapitados, sometidos a torturas atroces” (313). Under such conditions, it is not surprising that, revisiting history, one can understand the fleeing of groups of slaves. Furthermore, through Carpentier’s re-interpretations of history, *marronage* is no longer condemned or seen as a society that is “backwards.” Rather, it is seen as an act of defense and resistance against European brutality. In 1963, Miguel Barnet offers the testimony of Esteban Montejo, a real runaway slave from the plantations in Cuba, who recounts his days taking refuge in the forest. Maryse Condé in a similar way will give voice to a representative of the runaway slave using the fictional character of Xantippe in *Traversée de la mangrove* (who is the

³⁹ It is worthy to note, through conversations with Lesley Feracho, PhD, that “an interdisciplinary project is at hand” when dealing with historical recuperations of the marginalized strategies for resistance. That is, historians have also aimed to recover lost voices and, as Feracho says “relegate resistance to the margins.” One example of such attempts put forward by historians is Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*, which recovers U.S.’s history interpreted through the eyes of the historically subjugated.

symbolical representation of maroon). Such works attest to the postcolonial attempts to rescue marginalized voices⁴⁰, but also to re-visit history, and thus seeing *marronage* under a very different light, and perhaps helping to eradicate present-day alienations of societies that to this day live marginalized from society.

Creole resistance

As Carpentier re-interprets history, he exposes the revolution failures in the Caribbean. It is important to note firstly, that Vincent Ogé, mentioned briefly in the novel while he is traveling with Hugues, is an important aspect of resistance. The *Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture* considers Ogé (1755-1791) “a wealthy free man of color from Saint-Domingue.” As a member of la Société des Amis des Noirs, he “asked for equal rights for free people of color, the immediate abolition of the slave trade, and a gradual abolition of slavery.” Ogé returns to Saint-Domingue, part that Carpentier picks up on in his novel when he is accompanying Hugues. Upon his return, Ogé “demand[s] that the white colonists give the free people of color the rights that had been granted by France a few months earlier. [...] After a fight, he and his followers took refuge in the Spanish part of Hispaniola. They were handed back to the colonists. Ogé and his companion Jean-Baptiste Chavanne were broken on the wheel, a horrendous torture, on February 25, 1791. The martyr of Ogé and Chavanne convinced free blacks that only force could guarantee their rights and they allied themselves with the enslaved when the uprising broke out in August.” Ogé, in this way, is a figure that fought for the liberation of people of color and Carpentier’s inclusion of him in the novel is, even before *marronage*, an early and important representation of resistance.

⁴⁰ Other important examples that attest the experience of slavery and its resistance by capturing the voices of the marginalized in the Caribbean are *Reyita: sencillamente Reyita*, Marta Roja’s short story by the perspective of the slave woman (“Esclava de caracol”), or the woman slave in other parts of Latin America in Luz argentina Chiriboga’s *Jonatás and Manuela*.

Besides Ogé's representation of "creole" resistance, Carpentier's main protagonists are given a voice to denounce failures and marronage. However, one final and telling aspect of his novel is the contrast that he gives between revolutionaries. Hugues, in *El siglo* is a revolutionary brought to the Caribbean from France, (similar to Condé's revolutionary figure Sancher – whose parents are from Europe – will do the same). Hugues will fail in implementing the revolutionary ideals but the seeds of revolution he plants in Sofia and Esteban grow. As a consequence, Esteban first supports the revolution, and upon witnessing its failure becomes pessimistic, and finds that man cannot eradicate servitude and injustice. Sofia, on the other hand, is a woman figure who fights for freedom and equality until her death. Although Sofia is a fictitious character, it is telling that Carpentier at the beginning of the 20th century positions a woman as the tireless figure of revolution and resistance. It is as if history is being revisited, and it is found that women *also* battled and defended the oppressed, perhaps more passionately than men, like Esteban, who gave up, or like Hugues, who turned against his ideals.

Sofia was not always a revolutionary. At the beginning of the novel, she and her companions, Carlos and Esteban, are sheltered children (figuratively and literally, for they were abandoned in a house in Cuba when Hugues comes into their lives and spreads the ideals of the Enlightenment from France, thus "awakening" them [Vazquez 387]). Before giving up her life for the cause of the oppressed in Madrid, Sofia had dismissed Ogé – who is also renowned mulatto doctor – as anything but a physician. Despite Hugues' stating that Ogé is a reputable doctor who cures Esteban's asthma, Sofia does not trust him: "Quien fuera negro...para ella era sinónimo de de sirviente, estibador, cochero o músico ambulante (41). Sofia becomes at this point the perfect example of the European coming into contact and thus fearing the "unknown," as I discussed earlier. At this time, Hugues steps in and utters "all men are born equal," defying

Sofia's closed-mind attitude towards race (41), the way she will defy him in years to come when Hugues shies away from the slogans of equality, fraternity, and liberty.

Sofia thus develops into a powerful symbol of revolutionary resistance. A telling moment of her resistance is her abandoning of Hugues, while marronage is being fought and Victor Hugues attempts to rape her. Towards the end of the novel, disappointed about the conditions in Cayenne, the adamant reinstatement of forced labor under Hugues' watch, and the epidemic finally overturned, Sofia announces to Hugues that she is leaving him. He forces her against the bed, and Sofia, not resisting, emits the message that he can take her body, but never her heart: "Cayendo sobre ella, la abrazó fuertemente sin hallar resistencia: lo que se le ofrecía era un cuerpo frío, inerte, distante, que se prestaba a todo con tal de acabar pronto... 'si, es mejor que te vayas,' dijo Victor echándose a un lado, insatisfecho, invadido por una tristeza enorme" (328).

Sofia's attempted rape revives the countless times women slaves had been raped by their masters. The main difference is that Sofia, different than the unfortunate destiny of African woman slaves, had the resources to escape and was not raped. However, Carpentier illustrates that even though Hugues loved her and willed to take her love by force, she refused him. In this way, Sofia's reluctance to give herself whole-heartedly to Hugues marks her resistance: it is her coldness towards his aggressive grip that saves her from being raped; her detached spirit from body that Hugues will reject. It is this act that *also* marks an attempted rebellion against his failed promise (and the promise in general) to bring freedom to slaves. Sofia ends up seeing Hugues as "un hombre desaparecido que, en un tiempo, hubiese desempeñado un gran papel" (329) but bitterly fails. Before Sofia leaves Cayenne to head to Bordeaux en route to Spain where she will die in protest, she announces that she has finally "become the owner of her own

body, closing, with an act of her own will, with a long cycle of self-depravation” [‘volvía a ser dueña de su propio cuerpo cerrando, con un acto a su voluntad debido, el ciclo de una larga enajenación’] (329), symbolizing a new beginning born from resistance, and continual fight for change.

Even though Sofia is a fictitious character it is telling that in Carpentier’s re-writing of history, he includes a woman as a voice in resisting the impositions of a failed revolution. In other words, he is positioning a woman as a revolutionary, indicating as Nancy Morejón would later, that women also built the Cuban nation⁴¹.

An initial solution to memory

As a solution to deal with the memory of slavery, Carpentier offers one initial solution. Further solutions will be discussed in the chapters that follow, with Maryse Condé offering an encompassing of the solutions Carpentier initiated, followed by others she discovers after certain debate about the Afro-Caribbean’s sense of self.

El siglo, in this way, is a deconstruction of European glamour for their ideals of freedom and emancipation, and an insistence on successes of resistance by the black population found in marronage (not without forgetting their suffering and pain). In essence, Carpentier contests notions of inferiority based on caste systems and reappropriates history, bringing issues of slavery history under the spotlight from the Caribbean perspective, re-interpreting heroes and events, and analyzing themes of resistance. He retakes the Enlightenment in the title, “El siglo

⁴¹ Although Afro-Cuban poet Morejón’s project is to rescue the black woman’s voice, similar to Carpentier, (or Condé—see chapter 4), she also writes about women’s role in the building of a nation. See Lesley Feracho, Morejón’s Poetic ‘Persona,’ “While Morejón’s presentations of Cuban women’s reality specifically highlight the historically marginalized Afro-Cuban experience, she also presents a conceptualization of women’s empowerment,” 977. In her poem “Mujer negra,” Morejón writes: “Yo misma traje piedras para edificarlo/pero canté al natural compás de los pájaros nacionales/Me sublevé/En esta tierra toqué la sangre húmeda/y los huesos podridos de muchos otros...” indicating a revolutionary spirit and women participation in the building of the Cuban nation.

de las luces,” for his novel, but the story is about a revolution and transformation of the ideals of freedom on *Caribbean soil*, responding to *Caribbean woes*, such as slavery and the repercussions of it. Glissant said that “an essential point was that Caribbean people should not entrust others the job of defining their culture” (6), and that is precisely what Carpentier understood. He wrote a novel that would write history from the *Caribbean perspective*, including the slaves’ trials, the western impositions that failed to save the black (and Caribbean) population. *El siglo*, it can thus be said, is a re-interpretative project of memory; one which analyzes the memory of slavery, its abolition, and yet its repercussions in the children of the Diaspora, but at the same time it discloses heroic moments of resistance that also deserve significant attention.

CHAPTER 3

For Sembene, it's a case of recording colonial atrocities – the events everyone wants to forget

David Murphy “Postcolonial...”

THE (RE)CONFIGURATION OF THE SECOND AXIS OF THE TRIANGLE: A COMPLICIT AFRICA IN THE TRANSATLANTIC TRADE SEEN IN *CEDDO*

While the recovery of memory of the transatlantic trade has been a recurrent theme for writers in the Caribbean, for African postcolonialists there has been an “understandable reluctance to assume a share of the blame” (Miller 38). Further, if Africa participated in the trade, it was later impoverished by the explosion of demand from Europe, until the Western empires turned their attentions to Africa to colonize the continent in pacific ways as a “solution” to slavery and forced labor.

In terms of slavery, however, slaves arrived *in* the Caribbean *from* Africa, – a port of discharge for a destiny of historical misery and despair for the peoples of the African Diaspora. Due to this, it should be no surprise that the role that West Africa played in the transatlantic trade is not often referred to in francophone African texts. However, the “father of African cinema” Ousmane Sembene, reveals in *Ceddo* – judged as the most artistic of his films⁴² – an African nation participant in the trade and the practice of slavery, as well as an Africa in its original “state” prior to colonization or imperialism of any kind. *Ceddo*, censored by Senghor’s government until 1981 (Miller 370), marks part of Sembene’s social project to establish “a

⁴² See Murphy, “The Senegalese director and novelist Ousmane Sembene began his film career in the early 1960s, and is often hailed as ‘the father of African cinema’ for his role in the development of filmmaking on the continent,” 50.

commentary on changing African societies” (Petty 67). While it is a film that presents slavery present and dealt with in Africa, slavery is not its only theme.

In *Ceddo*, Sembene contests European notions of an “Africa lacking history,” or that of a “child” continent subjugated by external forces that have erased their native culture – a fact that disturbed him significantly.⁴³ As an act of resistance, Sembene similar to Carpentier in the 30’s re-writes history in the 60’s when African colonies begin moving towards independence. It should be mentioned however, that Sembene had no qualms transmitting history as it was – or rather, as Chinua Achebe would say, “with all its imperfections.”⁴⁴ For Sembene, it was necessary to assume a past, even if it meant acknowledging one’s nation’s complicity in the French Atlantic trade.

Understanding the middle axis of the triangular trade is important in dealing with the history of memory: first of all, for the Caribbean part of the axis, it allows the descendants of the African Diaspora to deal better with their history, for African complicity in the slave trade is as much part of African history as it is theirs. Secondly, for Africans it marks a repossession of their own past – a history that had been written by Europeans but that belongs to them. Similar to what Carpentier projected with *El siglo* in terms of Caribbean writing on their own history, in *Ceddo* Sembene re-interprets history, and thus allows Africans to *own* their own past, *recognize* it and from then on, *reveal* options for progress. For Sembene history must be grasped and recognized from all angles in order to deal better with such a devastating heritage, such as participation in or existence of slavery in West Africa: “History is a cage. A conundrum we must

⁴³ See Gadjigo, Before Sembene turns to film, he writes novels, and in an interview with Sada Niang, he states the motivations he had to produce one of his first novels, *Le Docker noir*: “...toute la littérature africaine écrite était basée sur une Afrique folklorique, bon enfant...C’était une Afrique assimilée que l’Europe avait déjà gagnée et corrodée de l’intérieur. Pour moi c’était révoltant, car cette littérature ethnographique présentait les Africains comme des enfants qu’il fallait aider,” 87.

⁴⁴ See Achebe, “I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past – *with all its imperfections* – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them,” 30.

escape or resolve before our art can go freely about its business” (Wideman 56). Therefore, Sembene sees this progress possible not only through reappropriation of history, but also giving a voice to women – which will be represented through the character of princess Dior.

Sembene’s goal is thus to reconstitute a new concept of a nation, since – as Murphy would claim – “for many African filmmakers from Chahine and Sembene onwards, cultural production has been inescapably tied up with the simultaneous production or *reproduction of the nation*” [my italics] (15). By first explaining how Sembene represents slavery in his film (by the three agents of power found in the monarchy, Islam and the *ceddo* people) I aim to explain how Sembene rewrites history by undoing certain myths such as the historically inaccurate notion of a “weak Africa.” As a result, Sembene will open ground to offer solutions for his nation’s memory and complicity in slavery and the triangular trade: the placement of women in social power and allowing them a voice in *Ceddo*.⁴⁵

The film

The story is developed ambiguously between the 17th and 19th centuries (as there are events that refer to influences from the 20th century)⁴⁶. A way of contesting history told by Europeans is by creating a chronological skipping as the backdrop of the film. By not anchoring the film to a specific time period and portraying instances of different times in history, Sembene “decenters” his story and contests western forms of story-telling. According to Carole Boyce Davies, one way postcolonial authors combat western structures of writing is by “decentering the former and current colonial paradigms, and the displacement of the implied focus on, things

⁴⁵ See Petty, “Sembene has chosen this type of presentation to empower the princess not only as a woman but also as an agent of change,” 81.

⁴⁶ See Miller, “The time frame of *Ceddo* is overdetermined: it seems to be the seventeenth or early eighteenth century; the film may be based on a ‘war of the marabouts’ that began in the Senegal river valley in 1645 and led to other wars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It has also been interpreted as a reflection on the demise of the Joloff state...in the nineteenth century. But *Ceddo* is in fact even more transhistorical than that: in a vision sequence it flashes back forward to the twentieth century,” 371.

European even as we talk about ourselves, i.e. its reproduction of the same discourse of dominance it seeks to challenge” (85-86). By providing certain difficulty to establish the film in a specific era, Sembene challenges official western discourses, and gives a different account or view of history.

The first scene that is presented is of Africans leading other enslaved Africans to a white capturer. The viewer will be taken to a region where women are undertaking habitual domestic chores, an Imam is praying with his African followers, and children run past the enslaved *ceddo* people yelling that princess Dior has been abducted. From that moment forward, disputes for power will be witnessed: the *ceddo* will demand freedom; the Imam will continue to impose his religion and more loyalty from the king; Dior’s cousin and Saxewar will dispute their right to Dior’s hand as for their right to the throne. Following the king’s death, the Imam will take over, enforce conversion, and intend to marry Dior to assure his power. However, before he finishes baptizing the entire village, princess Dior, having come to respect her *ceddo* captor, releases herself from him, comes back to the village, and frees her people.

Ceddo can be interpreted, by its storyline, as a rejection of foreign imposition that threatens to erase native culture, and part of Sembene’s project is to get his people to recognize that Islam is not part of their origins: “*Ceddo* is widely seen as a defense of indigenous peoples who resist the impositions of Islam and Christianity” (Miller 373). His film transmits pieces of forgotten memory, including slavery – an obligation of an African francophone writer according to Sembene: “l’artiste est là pour révéler un certain nombre de faits historiques que l’on voudrait taire...” [Gadjigo 101]. The African elite and French conservatives, however, have drawn a veil over slavery and its memory.⁴⁷ Similar to Carpentier, Sembene’s production of *Ceddo*, which

⁴⁷See Miller, Right-wing politicians had passed a law in 2004 that mandated a ‘positive’ representation of French-colonialism in schoolbooks, 287.

includes many aspects of history, is a project to resist the established historical (and European) canon: “Indeed, the idea of resistance to authority is central to Sembene’s worldview” (Murphy 51).

Slavery representations in *Ceddo*

Ceddo opens with scenes of bondage, and throughout the film we will be presented with three powers that will resort to this practice: the monarchy, the Imam, and even the ceddo. The monarchy, as is assumed by the initial scenes of the film, treats slavery as a habitual practice, enslaving the ceddo people. When the princess has been captured by a ceddo insurgent slave, she says to him, “seulement les animaux et les esclaves peuvent être attachés,” evidence of a cultural long tradition of slavery under the region’s monarchy. Further, when during the village meeting Dior’s rescue is being discussed, the ceddo intercede to decry their vile condition: “nous ne voulons plus être vendus comme des infidèles en esclavage et convertis en musulmanes.” The intolerable way in which the ceddo are treated is made obvious when a women slave is brought in to quench the thirst of the militant warrior, Saxewar, with a glass of water. The monarchy’s spokesperson, Jareef says to the warrior, “Elle est une esclave. Tu as le pouvoir de la mort ou de la vie sur elle.” Saxewar shoves her to the ground, pushing away the water she offers, as it falls to the ground where she lies in chains. All these instances of the treatment of slavery make evident Sembene’s intentions to reveal true historical accounts of Africa’s history, as he will himself claim: “Nous [les Africains] avons été les premiers esclavagistes. Dès qu’il avait une guerre, les membres du groupe ou de la communauté vaincue étaient transformés en esclaves” (Gadjigo 103).

However, *Ceddo* reveals how other groups, such as the Islamic imam are also accomplices in the practice. Throughout the film, the imam (as well as the priest) will be present

during the mistreatment of slaves, and yet do nothing to stop it. The instances of slavery prove “que ce soit les Arabes ou les Européens, ils ont pratiqué l’esclavage” (42).⁴⁸ When the Imam is taking over power, he announces he will make the *ceddo* his slaves. Further, the fact that the African enslavers march with rifles and wear colonial European clothing marks the presence and influence of the West, and while they were not in charge of slavery practices, they certainly allowed and profited from it.⁴⁹ Finally, it must be mentioned that the *ceddo* were just as guilty (if one can assign guilt) for the practice of slavery within Africa, for when they were confronted with the choice of being exiled or enslaved by the Imam and his rise to power, they resort to trading their families for arms: “un adulte contre deux fusils”; only one member refuses.

Due to the three groups’ resistance to oppression, David Murphy has interpreted *Ceddo* as a historical account that exposes *power struggles*: “The film presents the struggle for power between different social groups and it represents this struggle as a battle between opposing discourses and rituals” (60). So, in the case of the movie, as for colonization in general, in order for one group to assert itself as superior, the other must be subjected.⁵⁰ All groups in *Ceddo* have resorted to slavery in order to “buy” their autonomy, their liberty. *Ceddo*, in this case not only reprocesses the transatlantic trade and its origins, but doing so, confronts us with the causes of slavery’s use among African groups – a practice so harmful that it would be later justified by Europeans, who would exploit the practice to a degree until then unknown to mankind.

⁴⁸ That statement can in a way, explain Sembene’s lack of faith, for according to Gadjigo, he also claimed that “quel est le dieu qui fait de moi un esclave depuis le Coran et la Bible? Ce dieu, je ne veux pas le reconnaître,” 42. According to class conversations in Rachel Gabara’s Francophone African Spring 2010 course, *Ceddo* possesses a contemporary political message, and Sembene, having Marxist ideologies supported the *ceddo* working class and wanted to prove that Islam intervention was inevitable. Sembene is not as interested in the past as he is in the present and building on African nationalism.

⁴⁹ Class discussion in Rachel Gabara’s Francophone African literature class, at the University of Georgia, February 2010.

⁵⁰ In the 17th century, Hegel will form a theory, or rather a dialectic called the “Master-Slave relationship” in which he explains how the domination of the master over the slave is made. According to Hussein Bulhan, “he who attains recognition without reciprocating becomes the master... not only does the master obtain recognition, he also reduces the slave to a mere instrument of his will, a convenient means of fulfilling his needs,” 102

Rewriting history: *Ceddo* contests European myths of a weak Africa

If *marronage* was a way of resisting slavery in Carpentier's *El siglo*, *Ceddo*'s contestation of the "weak Africa" myth is a similar resistance project that disputes European superiority (which usually justified slavery in the Caribbean, and later in Africa). *Ceddo* was a film that received a lot of criticism due to its denunciation of slavery within Africa administered by Africans. Since these contestations and re-writings are relatively new, after *Ceddo*, *Adangaman* was also criticized for having represented explicit scenes of African slavery (Soudani, 2007). Roger Gnoan M'Bala shows how the African elite destroys African villages, captures its inhabitants, and enslaves them during a time when the slave trade is already taking place (evidenced by the Dutch rum the king consumes, among other things). Upon the capturing of Ossei's mother, she tells the king he is "insatiable" and calls him a "traitor" for "selling his own race off to the whites." Historian Fritz Umbach says the story amazes viewers because history had taught the West that Africa was completely absent during the trade, when it was actually the Africans, (as is witnessed in *Ceddo*), that managed slaves:

If Europeans had been able to do with Africa, what they had done elsewhere prior to the encounter with Africa, say for example, the Atlantic islands: that is conquering the land, enslave the inhabitants, and set up plantations, they would have. But African military might, from a very early date, squashed the European ambitions, and the Europeans are obliged, from the 16th century on, to trade on African, not Europeans terms (Soudani, 2007).

Argument for African complicity mark a turning point from the faulty historical notion that Africa was weak. Umbach further explains that Europeans actually conquered the Caribbean because they couldn't do so in Africa. Slaves were made available to Europeans, because Africa already practiced slavery, as well, (although I will later mention how the transatlantic trade was a European creation that later impoverished Africa). In any case, if films

like *Ceddo* and *Adangamman* exposed African slavery it was to contest the myth of “African weakness,” as Umbach explains:

But the notion that somehow African elites were innocent in the slave trade depends on a far more pernicious myth. The myth of a weak Africa. When Americans speak of or think about the slave trade and slavery in the ‘New world,’ they often do so, as if the slave trade was a representation of African weakness. [...] But if we step back and think about *the transatlantic slave trade* within its global context, it’s more obvious that the slave trade – a ‘New World’ slavery – *occurred precisely because Africa was strong*, not because she was weak [my italics] (Soudani, 2007).

Europeans would not be able to “conquer” Africa until the 19th century, but slavery and the slave trade were significantly different. For Sembene, “L’esclavage traditionnel diffère de la traite en ce que cette dernière se fondait sur la monnaie et le profit” (Gadjigo 103). Before European contact, slavery in Africa functioned on the premises of conquering smaller villages to subdue the inhabitants and either build a stronger army for the village or divest people of their valuable possessions (Soudani, 2007). However, it is important to mention that even if films such as *Ceddo* and *Adangaman* displayed African elites executing slave practices, upon European arrival, Europeans were the primary profiteers, the developers of the transatlantic trade and the ones who will ultimately justify it for centuries to come. The transatlantic trade will later feed internal slavery in Africa, however, and will thus allow a horrific vicious circle that will repeat itself: “quant à l’esclavage interne, tout semble indiquer qu’il s’est à la fois amplifié et durci parallèlement à la croissance de la traite” (M’Bokolo “La dimension... “ 1998). The demand for slaves from Europe increased, and in years to come, it would eventually weaken African states as is shown in Wouckoache’s film *Asientos*: “la pression européenne de la demande en esclaves brise l’équilibre sociale en Afrique.”

Wouckoache places his movie off the coast of Senegal where he explains the tortures caused by the mid and late 18th century slave trade in Africa. He depicts the cutting out of

tongues, the spearing with a lance if slaves were to flee, the forcing open of mouths if they refused to eat utilizing English machinery from Liverpool, and lastly the horrific epidemics of smallpox and scurvy fever that would break out: “These epidemics brought devastation” (Wouckoache 1995). What Sembene offers in *Ceddo* is actually a re-imagination of “that which was lost to Africa by the arrival of Islam and Europe” (Murphy 61), or even what the Senegalese coast would have looked like had Africa always triumphed over foreign impositions of any kind. By remembering the slave trade present in Africa, it supports a kind of solidarity with the African Diaspora, since Africa suffered similar torments at the expense of the elite. This solidarity, however, (with the Diaspora, but also among the Senegalese) lends itself for Sembene, to ideals of progress towards a unified African nationalism.

Appropriation of a past

If Sembene undid myths having to do with African slavery, he did so attempting to (re)appropriate his own history: he risked being criticized but wanted to show a difficult past in order to deal with it better in the present, and prove the strength of his own culture, as he affirms: “Comme le symbolise *Ceddo*, nous allons vers le syncrétisme. Est-ce que c’est une faiblesse ou une force de la culture africaine? Je dirais que c’est la force de la culture africaine” (Gadjigo 130). This strength is made evident by the fact that Senegal, for instance, resisted colonization until the start of the 19th century and that it also dictated the norms for slavery. In this way, films such as “*Emitai*, *Xala* and *Ceddo* are as much concerned with expressing the dignity of values of African cultural practices that have been denigrated by Europe or a colonized elite as they are with exploring social and political ills” (Murphy 55).

If slavery was a deplorable cultural practice, other cultural elements that Sembene chooses to respect and preserve are the singing of children, the *ceddo*, the strong monarchies, and

the beliefs in diverse deities, and the *rîtes des palabres*⁵¹ (which is why the film uses Wolof and some influence of Arab and attempts to include the marginalized cultural representations). For this reason, Sembene is un-apologetic for a controversial film, because he considers that history should include all versions, no matter how shameful its memory: “*Ceddo* thus acts as a striking example of Sembene’s belief in the power of cinema to intervene in the process of transmitting historical memory” [Murphy 57]). If he presents slavery in Africa, he does so to liberate his people from silence and shame, from the myth of a weak nation, or an Africa lacking historical memory. With *Ceddo*, Sembene reconfigures the second axis of the triangle, and sets the stage for progress through reappropriation of history, told by the people; and further, he allows women to take the lead.

Women: essential for progress and nationalism

If the deconstruction of myths transmitted by the West is a means to rescue the accounts of the oppressed in European history, women’s voices are also among the marginalized – voices that can be rescued in this way. Princess Dior is the liberator of her people in *Ceddo*, and Sembene offers, as an explanation, that it is through women’s leadership that colonized nations such as Senegal will advance towards progress:

C’est toujours les hommes qui vont en guerre, mais qui assume l’éducation des enfants, l’entretièn des cultures, la protection des animaux et du cheptel, qui pile? Ce sont les femmes...La conception que nos pères avaient de la femme doit être enterrée une fois pour toutes. La femme est l’élément le plus solide d’une communauté, d’une société (Gadjigo 99-100).

Further, Murphy mentions that Sembene has always considered women as “leading role[s] in any transformation of African society” (61). In *Ceddo*, the princess represents

⁵¹ Class discussion (February 2010): the *rîtes des palabres* are the phrases spoken by Jareef the spokesperson of the King, that allow people to take decisions based on words. It is a reminder of the griot tradition.

liberation from religious and social colonial constraints.⁵² Dior, like Sofia in *El siglo*, evokes resistance against imposition. If it is not certain how much Dior opposes the slavery once supported, she definitely evokes the abolition of female slavery, and in essence, an “emancipation of women” (Murphy 61). In the film, it is through marriage with Dior that one can assume power; and so early in the film, we get a sense of Dior’s power. Furthermore, Dior is represented as a figure with a strong voice (against her enslaver) that ultimately and valiantly saves her people. If Sembene is interested in giving females positive roles, especially in *Ceddo*, it is due to his conviction that education for women was always essential as a means of transmitting important values such as morality, liberty, and justice to future generations:

There can be no development in Africa, if women are left out of the account...and because Sembene recognizes the crucial role women play in Africa’s development, he gives voice to African women’s concerns in his films... (Petty 67).

Princess Dior is such an important character in the film since she, just like Sofia, undergoes significant change, from a supporter of slavery (as a means of African development and dictated by her father and the monarchy) to a liberator of the oppressed. Before she frees herself from her captor, she finds respect for the *ceddo* slave and goes back to remember the valiant soldier days before he captured her: she admired the fact the *ceddo* fought without European arms, using only their bodies, and therefore sees them as real warriors⁵³. There is no dialogue during this part of the film, but the close-ups and the gaze that Dior lends to her captor right after she takes his life to escape are representations of this respect. At the end, Dior embodies the union of her people, as the villagers sacrifice themselves for her, placing their

⁵² See Murphy, “the princess’s actions in killing the imam...must be seen symbolically in light of the destitution of an entire people,” 61.

⁵³ Class discussion (February 2010) where it was mentioned that one of the reasons Dior admires their lack of use of weapons, is because later on in the film, families of the *ceddo* will be sold into slavery in order to purchase these weapons.

mouths over the Imam's followers' rifles, enabling Dior to fire at the Imam. In this way, according to Petty, Dior is also a symbol for cultural preservation and values: "The princess' capture serves as a narrative device to expose Sembene's central thesis concerning the loss of cultural identity and roots" (79).

Sembene thus not only proposes a solution to the loss of one's roots through women's leadership; he also gives a voice to the marginalized. Ngugi explains in an interview with Gadjigo that the enterprise for postcolonial authors represents for Sembene the recovery and preservation of memory through ignored or erased voices:

So as we move towards the 21st century we can say that the forces which are a part of the struggle against enslavement and colonialism are the markers of the twentieth-first century...I am glad that these voices are so ably represented here, more so in the work of Ousmane Sembene in both literature and film (Gadjigo 55).

Without a doubt Sembene offers a voice to women, not only because of his conviction that women are essential for African progress, but also because they have been a voice that has been often repressed and ignored.

Reconfiguration of History: a Project of a Nation

I have established that Sembene used cinematography to assume his people's past, and appropriate it as their own: a (re)education in what concerns slavery and the transatlantic trade departing from West Africa. Even if *Ceddo* discusses much more than the practice of slavery in Africa, Sembene also explores the different types of slavery that existed in his region. Further, he argues through his film that a nation that has been colonized and suffered the ravages of slavery cannot attain progress if the rights and voices of women are not respected. It is Ousmane Sembene's project to recover a story that had been written by European pens (Murphy 55). As a result, just like Carpentier had rewritten history from inside the Caribbean as a Cuban, Sembene

presents us with a new version of history from inside Africa, through the eyes of an African – which is part of a greater postcolonial project.⁵⁴ Similar to what Achebe said, – “I would be quite satisfied if my novels did no more than teach my readers that their past, *with all its imperfections*, was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them” (30) – Sembene created a film that has the potential to change the way we perceive the trade in Africa, and women’s role in leadership, since it is not often that women are given their place in the history of the construction of a nation.

In *Moi, Tituba sorcière*, Condé similarly recreates the story of women who had been banished and gives them a voice. Kadish states that, “Tituba protests her omission from history and succeeds at telling her own myth,” a myth that had been evoked by slaves in Barbados coming from Africa (“Maryse Condé and Slavery” 216). Similarly, in *Traversée de la mangrove*, the author also grants women a voice, as the characters give accounts of their views in the first person, and thus these women become the voice of a Caribbean past, but also present and future, as I will argue in chapter four. In Sembene’s *Ceddo*, however, Dior is the ultimate voice of protest against her own slavery, and the oppression of her people.

By giving Dior this role in the film, the intention is to unite women (similar to what he does in *Bouts de bois de Dieu* during the women’s march for protest) and men under the same banner of progress for a nation: the Senegalese nation, an accomplice in slavery, burdened by that past, but nevertheless determined to overcome it, recognize it, and move forward. In *Ceddo*, we see Sembene’s intentions to rebuild an African society, which includes women, the proud rebuilding of its nation – “Sembene’s pan-Africanism is also expressed at times in the form of a cultural ‘nationalism’” (Miller 370). It can be said, therefore, that *Ceddo* reconstructs the second

⁵⁴ See Murphy, “The felt need for the recovery of an appropriate, usable past is something that postcolonial cultural producers worldwide have shared, and in the case of Africa has been at the forefront of the cultural agenda,” 16

axis of the triangle, and while doing so Sembene revisits the slave trade within Africa and contests historical myths. By doing so, he also reveals Senegal's rich cultural patrimony as a nation, and turns towards the future: one that will recognize the crimes of the past in order to fight the ones in the present.

CHAPTER 4

THE TRIANGLE'S FINAL AXIS: CONDÉ FACES SCARS OF SLAVERY AND EMPOWERS WOMEN IN *TRAVERSEE DE LA MANGROVE*

Although slavery was abolished in the 19th century,⁵⁵ the memory of its practice still weighs on the Caribbean population. In *Traversée de la mangrove*, the legacy of slavery is symbolized by Xantippe whose presence is rarely desired, “Xantippe créait toujours un réel malaise” (25). Further, the Caribbean community, the people of Guadeloupe specifically (Rivière au Sel) seems reluctant to negotiate with such feelings anchored in the past, and continues to live estranged from each other. Therefore, it is perhaps necessary, as Sembene has done, to face slavery and its tragic memory since “[it] was the starting-point of alienation, loss of pride in one’s race and confidence in oneself. The cruelties of the colonial era and the harsh realities of the present have served to perpetuate this state of alienation” (Ormerod 2).

By confronting the past, Maryse Condé, a Guadeloupian novelist, an academic, a Caribbean literary advocate, and despite the author’s disclaimer, a feminist⁵⁶ presents us with the aftermath of slavery and writes “il ne faut pas chercher, le malheur des enfants est toujours causé par les parents” (177). She reasons that the woes certain children of the Diaspora deal with today are due to their parents’ ineffective negotiation with their heritage, and their offspring are thus also victims of this “unsuccessful” affront to memory. In an effort to imagine a more lucid

⁵⁵ See Kadish, Condé mentions that due to the fact that some French islands remain *departments d’outre mer*, this “signifies that they have failed to this day to achieve freedom and independence and thus that there is an important sense in which neither slavery nor colonialism ever really ended in the French Caribbean,” “Maryse Condé and Slavery,” 218.

⁵⁶ See Nunez, “I was educated by a strong mother and a strong grandmother. My sisters are strong. All the women I knew in Guadeloupe were strong. They triumphed over the conditions that limited them. My books are a reflection of what I see in life. I don’t think I am a feminist. I write about what I know,” “Maryse Condé...,” (2000).

future, she writes *Traversée de la mangrove* in which certain characters – particularly women – use Francis Sancher as a catalyst to negotiate with the memory of their ancestors and thus assuage feelings of alienation with each other, improving their lives or those of their offspring.

The author admits she wrote *Traversée* so she could come to terms with her own past and identity: “I wrote it to order my thoughts, to understand the world, and to be at peace with myself” (Nunez 2000). In this chapter I will use *Traversée de la mangrove* to discuss how Condé offers varied options or solutions to problems inherited from slavery. Condé proposes as a first solution the confrontation of the memory of slavery; she uses Francis Sancher as a symbolical figure who faces his past, reimagining the colonizer, assuming responsibility for his crimes, and coming back to former plantations to confront the consequences. Condé also denounces the consequences of slavery found in the patriarchal impositions and racism, and uses certain characters to confront these issues. She also suggests that, through women’s strength and independence, a new consciousness can be formed. Lastly, Condé shines light on women’s renewal of bonds and their breaking away from inferiority complexes engendered from slavery and exported from Europe. While she offers these scenarios, Condé aims to confront Guadeloupean reality. The choices she offers to a new generation are a life devoid of racism while strong women lead the path towards progress and solidarity.

The story

Traversée is “told in pieces” using diverse characters as an example of Guadeloupe’s unique and diversified microcosms, sparing her characters any sense of judgment (Lionnet 80). The story opens with the death of Francisco Alvarez Sanchez, known as Francis Sancher (the creolisation of his Spanish name), a stranger who came to Guadeloupe from Cuba, but was originally from a plantation in Colombia. One important parallel to draw here is with

Carpentier's Victor Hugues who also, coming from Cuba with revolutionary ideas, arrived to Martinique (also a French *département d'outre mer*) to propagate revolutionary ideals that failed to take hold. Sancher in a way also propagates revolutionary ideas, but they are received in different ways and thus, one can say they succeed, contrary to Hugues' experience.

Sancher's wake is an opportunity for the entire town to get together and "recount their relationship or thoughts on the man." As Chamoiseau would say, the wake is "a space for the story teller...as if to teach us how to resist our collective death" (Chamoiseau, "Reflections," 390), or perhaps to reflect on the internal woes further perpetuated by Guadeloupe's own population and thus to decide to move past them. At Sancher's wake, everyone offers their point of view, rendering the accounts of Sancher's person contradictory, "with zones of nonknowledge and nonpower which the reader must learn to accept," supplying the story with an "open expanse of possibilities," lying in sharp contrast with Western story-telling (Lionnet 80). The story is narrated by 19 different voices, and it is particularly telling that Condé empowers the most marginalized by giving their accounts in the first person: Guadeloupian women, Joby (a young ignored boy, son of racist and patriarchal Loulou), and Xantippe (although essential in the story, he is rejected by society, seen as a "vagabond" who shies away from society).

What results is an unclear picture of who Sancher really was or how he died⁵⁷, but the individual narrations allow the reader to look through different windows to observe the island's realities and significant troubles⁵⁸. Contrary to traditional postcolonial narrations aiming to heighten mythic-historical figures (consider Toussaint Louverture in Césaire's *Cahier*), Condé is anchored in the present (Kadish "Maryse Condé and Slavery" 212) and makes her ordinary real

⁵⁷ See Suk, Chamoiseau would say, "What Creole person possesses a transparent past that would authorize certainty?," 157.

⁵⁸ Lionnet claims that Condé essentially "describes social reality in an extremely restrained manner in order to produce an anthropology of everyday life in Guadeloupe," 85.

life characters the true heroes (and writers) of the story.⁵⁹ In this way, Sancher is not the hero of the novel, but his existence in the story is significant, especially due to his blunt affront to the past.

The colonizer faces the memory of slavery

Francis Sancher carried a heavy weight on his shoulders. He was ashamed of his past, not because he represented a victim of slavery, but because his forefathers were colonizers and slavers⁶⁰. It is Condé's reimagining of colonizing nations assuming responsibilities for the problem that she will make obvious in her novel. In the story, Lucien Evariste explains that "Sancher se prendrait pour le descendant d'un béké maudit par ses esclaves en revenant errer sur les lieux de ses crimes passés" (237). Thus, he has come back to Guadeloupe, where it all began ("des papiers prouvent que tout part d'ici" [235]) to "chercher ses traces" (64), confront his past, and die with his legacy. According to Jeannie Suk, "Condé herself has compared Sancher's situation as outsider in Rivière au Sel to her own upon her return to Guadeloupe in 1986" and so the difficulties Sancher faces when he goes back to face his past are perhaps in some way associated with Condé's experiences reviving and dealing with memory and the memory of a people in the Caribbean – thus slavery (158).

Confronting a painful memory is not devoid of difficulties. In *Traversée*, upon contact with Léocadie Timothée, Sancher runs away, not bearing her stare, perhaps fearing judgment for impregnating women and further prolonging/continuing his legacy. The fact that he runs from Léocadie specifically is telling. Léocadie is a former retired headmaster, who "having observed

⁵⁹ See Lionnet, "Condé's originality lies in the fact that she goes beyond them [Jacques Roumain, Césaire, Schwartz-Bart] in the creolization of French...Whereas Schwartz-Bart places Creole idiom 'at the service of her literary strategy,' which is to reconstruct a sort of epic or myth of origins, Condé is content to anchor the text in the 'present' of the narrative enunciation and in the 'space' of the wake," 84-85. See Chamoiseau, "the 'we' takes precedence over the 'I,'" "Reflections," 391.

⁶⁰ See Suk, "Francis Sancher portrays the European vis-à-vis de West Indian world," 158.

the social and political evolution of the islands since 1920...she is the voice of a past time” or in other words, she is witness to the dramatic problems that have been caused by slavery and colonization (Suk 163).⁶¹ This is the reason for which Sancher can’t bear her presence, any more than his nightmares (Condé 203). His running away could thus be perceived as symbolic given the fact that Sancher runs from Léocadie just as the white planters ran from the Caribbean upon black resistance as Xantippe recites “J’ai vu les blancs s’enfuir en grand désordre dans les tourbillons de fumée des plantations” (257). Further, since Sancher is “trying to undo the crimes of his ancestors” (Suk 166) he has difficulty bearing Xantippe’s look.

Nonetheless, Sancher’s “turning away” from Xantippe – a symbol of the eternal presence of slavery and despair – sharply contrast with the established classical canons of 18th and 19th century dealing with slavery. Rousseau’s hero Saint-Preux in *Julie* looks away in disgust from the slave’s “vil aspect,”⁶² and Hugo’s Léopold d’Auvergne in *Bug Jargal* admits “je fermis les yeux pour ne plus voir du moins les ébats de ces demons femelles” (91) referring to runaway women slaves turned *griottes*. Condé’s novel, in this way contests European visions of the horror of slavery, and Sancher’s “looking away” is out of guilt and shame, rather than Rousseau’s and Hugo’s disgust, contempt, or pity. In other words, Condé’s reaching out to confront the past (re)imagines a responsible and penitent guilty perpetrator⁶³. In this respect, Sancher sets the example and this character’s experience thus exemplifies the difficulties of dealing with a devastating heritage.

⁶¹ Further, Suk claims that “Léocadie and Sancher can be seen as type and archetype, their lives inverted mirrors of each other,” 165.

⁶² See Rousseau, “A leur vil aspect j’ai détourné les yeux de dédain, d’horreur et de pitié...j’ai gémi d’être un homme,” *Julie*, 309.

⁶³ Other instances where we see Sancher’s pain dealing with his past are the nightmares he has at night, that Vilma tries to soothe, 103.

Xantippe, contrary to other portions of the population, and like Sancher, does not ignore slavery either. He is in fact an essential character in the novel, for he is the embodiment of the runaway slaves, and the spirit of the island that witnessed land and human deterioration. He announces, “J’ai nommé tous les arbres de ce pays...j’ai nommé les ravines...les roches” (255). We know he is the embodiment of a runaway slave, perhaps due to his exaltation of nature as his friend that protects him from the evil grasp of the white planters; as he says, “les arbres sont nos seuls amis...ils soignent nos corps et nos âmes” (255).⁶⁴ However, Xantippe is the only one on the island who confirms and understands Sancher’s crime, which is the reason Sancher cannot stand to face him: “A chaque fois que je le rencontre, le regard de mes yeux brûle les siens et il baisse la tête, car ce crime est le sien. Le sien” (259). It is telling that Condé, in contrast with Carpentier does give a voice to the maroon/former slave, who in the novel, is represented by Xantippe; although Carpentier heightens their importance in *El siglo*, Condé in *Traversée* has Xantippe speak in the first person giving a faithful account of his views and feelings.

Despite the fact that Xantippe considers Sancher a further perpetuation of the colonizer’s will, acting on impulse (“il peut dormir tranquille cependant, engrosser ses femmes, planter des fils, je ne lui ferai rien, le temps de la vengeance est passé [259]), Sancher does regret Vilma’s and Mira’s pregnancies and in fact feels he is beginning to fail his mission. Describing himself as a “mort-vivant” (94), people say his gaze was “loin loin de la terre des vivants” (159) or that his spirit “vagabondait dans des régions que [l’on] ne pouvait pas atteindre” (114). However, even though his “race” will be continued through Mira and Vilma, he refuses to give them his name and marry them as an attempt to cease the perpetuation of his lineage. In response to his friend Man Sanson who tries to persuade him to marry Mira, he says, “Je ne suis pas venu ici

⁶⁴ These instances of natural valorization is also one of Condé’s attempts to perhaps share an appreciation for the island’s natural surroundings.

pour planter des enfants et les regarder marcher sur cette terre. Je suis venu mettre un point final, terminer, oui, terminer une race maudite” (94). Even though Sancher does “plant his seed,” it can be considered the seed of revolution – his offspring will not perpetuate his imperialistic European legacy, but may indeed embody the rebirth of progressive thinking. Mira and Vilma’s children will have different lives than those of their mothers who had been subjugated by the racist and discriminatory patriarchy that Condé denounces in *Traversée*. The reasons for Sancher’s death are not clear. We only know that he was convinced his family was cursed, and that men in his family coincidentally died at the age of 50 by “accident.” Whether it was a family curse, or the inextinguishable sense of guilt that took Sancher’s last breath, we are not certain and the reader is left to interpret his death. What is certain, however, is that his death is a chance for the population to reflect on their lives.

Denouncing Patriarchy and Racism: contesting slavery’s consequences

While facing the memory of slavery is one of the postcolonial solutions Condé offers in her novel, *Traversée* also denounces other postcolonial issues inherited by this past. These are all made evident at Sancher’s wake, when the villagers gather to tell their accounts⁶⁵. Lionnet thus argues that Condé’s novel is comparable to “nineteenth century peasant literature which easily became a political weapon” because it describes “the daily life of a small village that serves as a microcosm of Guadeloupian society” (76). While she denounces issues of racism and others transmitted by the plantation economy, Condé illustrates general feelings existing in peoples as one of her characters reports, “dans les cœurs des noirs, la lumière de la bonté ne brille jamais” (89) and further “les nègres n’aiment pas les nègres,” offering a general “way of understanding reality” in Guadeloupe through literature (Lionnet 85).

⁶⁵ Which is why one can say that Sancher’s death allows for introspection and reflection while facing problems existing in this community of Guadeloupe.

Furthermore, her novel is an understanding of a “microcosms of the world” where racism has been propagated by power struggles and has been unconsciously accepted from generation to generation (Lionnet 77). Condé illustrates the problems engendered by the past, and uses some of her characters to contest and reject these disappointing ideologies.

Loulou Lameaulnes, for instance is an archetype of certain *mulato* racist who thinks he “passes as white” and who also thinks that, although he has an African heritage, he is better than some blacks of the working class: “nous n’avons rien de commun avec ces Nègres à tête grinnée” (134). He is also a xenophobe who claims foreigners should be expelled from the country, and affirms that the Ramsaran family – of Indian origin – although as wealthy as the Lameaulnes, should *still* bow their heads to him (135). Sylvestre Ramsaran, however, is the representation of the ever-present patriarch, who although not fully racist is misogynic and disregards the happiness of the women in *his* household: Rosa is invisible and ignored in a marriage devoid of love⁶⁶ and Vilma is pulled out of school to be married off to the highest bidder⁶⁷ – one can draw a parallel here to de Staël’s *Pauline* who was also “sold” by her father in order to purchase slaves. Sylvestre’s East Indian origins are also an important inclusion by Condé in her text; it attests to the Caribbean’s rich diversity, but she also portrays how, unfortunately, ethnic origins can divide sectors of society as it separates the Lameaulnes family from the Ramsaran. However, both Sylvestre’s and Loulou’s views will be contested upon Sancher’s death, since both fathers will be brought together as they both share the “misfortune” of having daughters who were made pregnant by Sancher. This situation thus “assigns both families to the same rank” (Lionnet 82).

⁶⁶ See Condé, “Comme elle le fait depuis tant et tant d’années, elle s’affairait autour du père...Le père, sans prendre la peine de lui dire merci, m’a arrêtée comme je me levais de table,” *Traversée*, 197. Her mother says to Vilma later, “est-ce que tu crois que j’aimais ton papa quand je me suis mariée avec lui ?” 199.

⁶⁷ “Tu ne retournes pas à l’école. Cela ne sert à rien, j’ai d’autres projets pour toi !” 198.

The women, who suffer in Sylvestre's household, however, are examples that Condé uses to decry female chains of slavery in their own homes – and these chains don't necessarily bond women together in solidarity. Both Rosa and Vilma are modern slaves to the will of contemporary Caribbean forms of patriarchal societies – a model exported from Europe: these structures that oppress women depicted in the works of Staël or in Rousseau's *Julie*, for instance. Furthermore, damage is thus transmitted to the women of whom Rosa is a typical example. Raised to believe women have no choice, she says to her daughter, “Ton papa sait ce qu'il fait. Une femme...c'est fait pour porter!” lying to her daughter as if she was “reciting a lesson” (198). The denouncer, in this case in Vilma, who refuses this imposition and announces, “A quoi ça sert une mère, si ce n'est à faire rampart contre l'egoïsme et la cruauté des pères” (201), expressing an unreserved desire to stop women's oppression in a society which – one should remember – was also built *by* women (see chapter 2).

Rosa is confronted a second time because of her racism towards her daughter, perhaps product of ideologies nurtured in part by the neglect of her husband, and the product of racist beliefs circulating around the island (and the world). After the death of her fair-skinned child Sheerin, Rosa is not able to accept Vilma, who she claims was “noir comme Sylvestre” (179). Upon meeting Sancher who claims her daughter is beautiful, she reevaluates beauty, and starts to reflect on making amends with a daughter she had never allowed herself to love – perhaps due to the social constraints of which she was a victim.

Although this discrimination among the Guadeloupian community is based on race hierarchies, it is born of slavery, as N'Zengou-Tayo says “An alienating ladder of social values based on color and appearance established itself in the pre- emancipation period, which exists even today despite the works of the negritude movement” (183). In *Traversée*, Xantippe's

seclusion is another good example of this alienation. Although the voice of experience and someone who has suffered through much that younger generations can learn from, Xantippe is scorned and his presence is often unwelcome: “ce vagabond que l’on assurait inoffensif, mais dont le regard donnait le frisson” (165), marking once again, an unwillingness (or difficulty perhaps) to confront the past.

Cohabitation on the island, as I have discussed, is thus by no means comfortable. Several problems abound, and women seem to be most affected, rejected both by race and gender. However, women on the island are not the only victims, The Ramsarans and Lameaulnes despise each other, the Haitians are rejected by the majority, and as it turns out, bitterness moves through the island and is made evident. Nonetheless, both women and men in *Traversée* are confronted with a “way out” if they choose to embrace it. This option comes through the figure of Sancher, who, as Lionnet says, “serves as the catalyst for the rapprochement” not only of the Lameaulnes and Ramsaran families, but also for the women and men who have encountered him (82). Though Sancher does not offer the population solutions to their social problems, he is an enigmatic and revolutionary figure who fights for the oppressed (Haitians for instance⁶⁸) and whose interactions with the people make certain characters reflect on their situation. It’s the choices these characters make to improve their lives (and those of future generations) that can be considered reflections on progress for regions embittered by a tragic past. Further, women particularly in this novel, can be looked at for encouragement and as leaders to achieve social progress.

⁶⁸ In defending the Haitians, Sancher says to Joby, “Ton père a tort... Les Haïtiens sont un grand peuple,” *Traversée* 103.

Female strength, as another solution

Another choice offered to deal with oppression transmitted by a painful past is that of female independence and strength, perhaps best represented in the characters of Mira and Dinah. Mira lives in Loulou's racist household, and is overcome by hate for her father, "la haine m'étouffait," and was intent on making him suffer: "je me demandais ce que je pourrais inventer pour le blesser" (56). Despising her father, she is also heartbroken by Sancher, who impregnates her yet never claims the child. She is thus let down by two important male figures, her father and her lover. Facing desperation, she is about to abandon everything, but instead, upon reflecting on her life, Mira acknowledges a revolutionary spirit, ("j'ai pris goût pour le défendu" [56]) that will inspire her to take responsibility to raise her son differently: "Mais je me suis rappelé la triste vie que je laissais derrière mon dos et mon désir de vivre enfin au soleil a été le plus fort" (67). Mira thus is a representative of female strength, one that fights the odds, and will raise a new "race." Contrary to Sancher's fear of having a son and perpetuating his "race maudite" (94), Mira will raise a "new consciousness," and Quentin will have his mother as an example of female persistence.

For Dinah, the situation is similar. Also heartbroken by Sancher and ignored by Loulou, her husband, who is transmitting racist ideas to his son Joby ("Mon père me dit que je finirai par charroyer du fumier comme les Haïtiens" [102]), she resolves to leave Loulou and also raise her son independently. What brings Dinah to this resolution is not only her encounter with Sancher, but also the misery she has endured under Loulou's bigotry: "tu ne vauds pas mieux que les nègres haïtiens qui charroient du fumier dans ma Pépinière" (62). Upon hearing Mira's "triste récit" about Sancher's attempt to make her abort (Sancher: "il ne faut pas que cet-enfant-là

ouvre ses yeux au jour⁶⁹....Un signe est sur lui, comme sur moi. Il vivra une vie de malheurs et pour finir, il mourra comme un chien, comme je vais bientôt mourir” [115]), she reflects on women’s attachment to men. In the novel, she states, “pourquoi restions-nous à l’attache?” a question which can be reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir’s “perspective of the female who has historically incarnated certain characteristics of Hegel’s slave” (Daigle 110) in his dialectic of the Master-slave relationship. According to Christine Daigle, Beauvoir believes women (such as Mira, Vilma, and Dinah), have the “propensity to give themselves to man...to fulfill themselves,” but as a result they are objectified for their love and thus “suffer deep alienation” (50). Therefore, Beauvoir would prefer that women be like men, “through action in the world” (50). Dinah, having suffered a “deep alienation” from being a “slave” to racism and patriarchy announces, “je chercherai le soleil et l’air et la lumière pour ce qui me reste d’années à vivre” (116), hoping to save her children from Loulou’s racist ideology. Thus, one can say that when Sancher’s dies, at the wake these women speak about their lives and then reflect on what they could change to improve their condition, but also those of their offspring. Having seen that patriarchy and blunt racism is not the answer, they gather their belongings and choose to raise their *own* households on *their* terms.

As a result, Quentin and Joby will be raised as revolutionaries and perhaps help eradicate social norms of racism and patriarchy. Joby for instance, who hates his father anyway, (“je me demandais si d’autres garçons détestent leur père comme moi” [101]) will be liberated from his father’s patriarchal and discriminatory behavior (“Dès qu’on avait entendu que c’était un Cubain, papa avait déclaré qu’il y avait trop d’étrangers en Guadeloupe et qu’il aurait fallu l’expulser avec tous ces Dominicains et ces Haïtiens” [101], and “Voilà pour quoi papa m’a emmené ici.

⁶⁹ Which can be reminiscent of Tituba aborting her own child by her own hand in *Tituba, moi sorcière...Noire de Salem*

Pour que je voie un mort et me comporte comme un homme devant lui” [99]). Perhaps his mother’s newly exemplified strength will eradicate racist ideas that have already started to form in Joby’s quasi-revolutionary mind: while Joby reflects on his admiration for his white grandfather marrying a black woman, he announces to himself that “Moi aussi quand je suis grand, j’aimerais faire une chose *terrible et défendue* comme cela qui mettrait papa en rage” (106). His perception of interracial marriages being “terrible” or “défendue” are indicators of semi-racist notions transmitted by his father and his surroundings, while the fact that he wants to go against his father in the first place is proof of his revolutionary spirit and is also a sign of hope.

Eradicating feelings of “whitening” oneself, renewing (female) bonds

Renewing female relationships is another solution to eradicating the sense of “whiteness” engendered by slavery and illustrated in *Traversée*. The renewal of friendship between mother and daughter is exemplified in Vilma and Rosa’s relationship. Vilma, although bright and interested in acquiring an education, has been estranged from her mother Rosa for being black and by her father, Sylvestre for being a woman. Vilma feels unworthy and as a consequence moves in with Sancher to spite her family. Later in the story, Sancher says to Rosa, “[Vilma] a votre beauté” (178),⁷⁰ which shocks her, for she never thought her daughter would be admired for any physical beauty: “je ne pense pas que Vilma soit belle. Noire, noire comme Sylvestre” (179). This instance illustrates Rosa’s self-denial as black, which is also an internalized sense of inferiority based on the color of her and her daughter’s skin. Even though Condé “has asserted the importance of going beyond the notion of the black, which she considers a European

⁷⁰ Similarities can be found between Sancher’s statement and some of Senghor’s *Négritude* ideas concerning black female beauty that are analyzed in his poem. See Mezu, “Femme noire,” where he writes, “Vêtue de ta couleur qui est vie, de ta forme qui est beauté,” 23.

invention, and beyond victimization” (Kadish, “Maryse Condé and Slavery,” 211), the issue here is not valorizing “negritude;” it is accepting and loving oneself, foremost.

Rosa’s (and others she represents in Guadeloupe) acknowledgement of her lack of acceptance is the first step towards recognizing a problem. Rosa’s situation relates to Mayotte Capécia’s obsession to marrying a white man to switch from “the rank of the slave to that of master” (Fanon 40). Although not always the case – since women writers such as Nancy Morejón resist this inferiority complex and valorize black women’s strength and beauty as a strategy to contest the complex (in her poem *Mujer negra*,” for instance), the obsession with “whiteness” is, according to Fanon, due to the fact that in both Rosa and Mayotte’s cases, “the black woman feels inferior” and thus “aspires to gain admittance to the white world” (41). Rosa’s inferiority complex (which is not her fault – she only has been a victim) therefore reflects onto her daughter.

Before Rosa can restore any bond with Vilma, she must rid herself of notions of inferiority engendered by slavery. Through this process, Rosa finds out that her daughter’s estrangement from her is merely due to Rosa’s bitterness towards herself, and as Sancher says, “Pour donner, pour rendre l’amour, il faut en avoir reçu beaucoup, beaucoup!” (180); implying that today’s generation is not at fault for the postcolonial problems they suffer. Although we do not see how the relationship is renewed, Rosa announces, “Sortie de mon ventre, je t’ai mal aimée. Je ne t’ai pas aidée à éclore et tu as poussé, rabougrie. Il n’est pas trop tard pour que nos yeux se rencontrent et que nos mains se touchent. Donne-moi ton pardon” (182). Rosa’s initial mistake evidences former generations’ mistake at not knowing (or neglecting) to face or accept their past: as Lionnet would say, Condé here “denounces misérabiliste ideology of her predecessors, which casts Guadeloupe as a marginal and oppressed land from which one could

be forced into exile,” as Mira was about to do (73). Rosa’s resolution rejects the need to “whiten” oneself for beauty and stature, as she renews a female bond that can make a difference for future generations.

In dying, Sancher unintentionally opens the door to new realizations in the community. He allows patriarchy to break down, and women to find a new sense of self-appreciation. Another example is Dodose who says, “il m’a montré la voie” (224), for he makes her question her love for her mentally ill son, Sonny. It’s after Sancher’s death that Dodose decides to find Sony a doctor and says “venu est le temps de recommencement,” which is key to the novel, to Sancher’s confronting his ancestors’ sin of slavery and to Guadeloupian society’s awakening.

Contemporary solutions to present-day problems

Slavery’s memory, as exemplified by Sancher’s search for closure is not an easy task. In *Traversée de la mangrove*, Condé makes it evident that while facing a tragic memory, one can deal with its scars better. For Condé, however, it is through negotiation with this memory that one can improve the relationship with oneself and with others. As an attempt to reimagine what an assumed past and social solidarity would look like, she writes *Traversée*. While offering voices of the diverse people that form Guadeloupe in this novel, Condé “elaborates a particular vision based on local conditions for political change” (Kadish, “Maryse Condé and Slavery,” 213). It is through the narrations of each individual character that Condé unveils the social problems that have been transmitted by slavery, and the memory of its practice yet to be fully dealt with in an effective way.

In *Traversée*, Sancher is presented as a colonialist in search of repentance who will assume responsibility for his forefather’s tragic actions. It is a reimagining of the present for present-day solutions: the facing of a tragic past to reject ideologies of racism and assumed

victimization. Secondly, as Sembene and Carpentier did with different time periods and places, *Traversée* also denounces social ills, but offers various solutions: Sancher's wake in the novel is an opportunity for the narrators to recount their story, and reject patriarchy, racism and "whitening." Condé denounces these practices through the voices and actions of women, the catalysts for real change. Women will renew bonds with each other, their offspring or themselves. Similarly, by realizing their independence and strength, they resolve to become independent, and to break away from the social conformity that is degrading the community.

Condé does not dwell on slavery to qualify the Caribbean Diaspora as victims, but instead faces memory and thus proves that she is neither ashamed, nor inferior due to its former practice. Rather, like the characters in *Traversée*, she is empowered as a Caribbean woman who has come to terms with it. As Kadish asserts, "Condé's interest has always focused on the significance of the subject of slavery for the *present* and the ways in which people today can draw upon the past to forge identities as free and independent citizens for the future" (Kadish 212). Through the characters of her story, Condé offers postcolonial solutions for which the peoples of the Caribbean can reflect on to understand their past, themselves in present-days, and thus create a better tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

How does one deal with a devastating heritage involving the oppression and enslavement of one's ancestors? Would it be useful to resurrect dialogue and come to terms with such a past, a history which on so many levels was silenced, and whose main perpetrators remain reluctant to assume responsibility⁷¹? In France it is recent that the slave trade has been declared a "crime against humanity" (Miller 386). However, just as in Latin America, grade-schoolers learn that their continent was in fact "discovered by Columbus," in France, right-wing politicians consider that "colonialism" should be represented in a positive way (385-86). Antillean authors from Nicolás Guillén to Frantz Fanon, from Alejo Carpentier to Maryse Condé have advocated reconfiguration of history, turning away from the canonical or rather European views of historical factors that have constructed the world we view today. This is especially important because presently, the Antilles is by no means the paradisiacal estate described by tourist corporations (which have been vehemently denounced by Chamoiseau). The Antilles is one of the regions that has most suffered from both slavery and colonialism; its profound and traumatizing imprint has left marks on both its land as on the psyches of its people of what today can be called postcolonial problems.

Such postcolonial issues one finds today in terms of land exploitation were denounced in Africa by Ousmane Sembene. He condemns Europeans' demand for increased agriculture of several items yet their abandonment of the land when one product proved less marketable. Such land exploitation rendered the soil unstable and toxic (*Bouts de bois de Dieu*). In the Caribbean,

⁷¹ See Miller, "European powers create the Atlantic system, putting in place what was in effect a vast triangular machine in which slave labor played an essential role," 6.

Haiti – recently tormented by devastating earthquakes – is a perfect example of the consequences of the plantation economy and land exploitation. Its soil today has been excavated so intensely to the point where today, little breathing room is left for agriculture. The plantation economy – although it is at the base of the Caribbean’s actual “aesthetic impoverishment” (DeLoughrey 23) – was not the only factor of natural devastation alluded to by Caribbean authors. Today’s tourist machine continues to ravage the Antilles’ soil, and “does little to sustain the local economy while fattening the coffers of industrialization” (24). DeLoughrey explains that authors such as Chamoiseau challenge the misconceptions of exotic visions of the Caribbean (25). In his most recent novel, *Les neuf consciences du Malfini*, the protagonist, a bird of prey native of Martinique protests foreign excavations and destruction comparing it to its past natural beauty:

Plus d’essaims de moustiques. Plus des bandes d’anolis [...] Lui qui d’habitude s’ébattait dans les fleurs avec ses cliques d’abeilles, errait maintenant bien seul [...] D’habitude Rabuchon était ouélélé de chants et des cris de mille sorts [...] Les coulés d’alizés diffusaient par à-coups un chuchotement lugubre dans les herbes cabouyas...(131).

Such land exploitation that has made “les fleurs perdre leur éclat” (131) is what Chamoiseau protests in his most recent work. However, slavery and conquest had its most traumatizing effect on the social arena. Language, for instance was one of the tools that colonialism used to assimilate, or “civilize,” the Antillean inhabitants into “copies” of a European. In the case of the French colonies, the goal was to be (and speak) French. L-G Damas in *Pigments* writes against the “civilization” project in the Caribbean saying, “J’ai l’impression d’être ridicule avec les théories qu’ils assaisonnent [...] parmi eux complice [...] égorgeur, les mains effroyablement rouges du sang de leur ci-vi-li-sa-tion” (40). He rejects his mother’s attempt to assimilate him to a French model, and speak “le français de France, le français français,” being forced into a mold that wasn’t made for him, to assimilate to a European

model. In the same poem, Damas writes, "...Ma mère voulait d'un fils/ Très do/Très ré/Très mi/Très fa..." (40), in which he claims that, just as the solfège system teaches to sing in score, Antillean youth is forced to adhere to a strict and imposed western model representing order and harmony.

Other impositions were those of race and culture that have been generally discussed in this work. One would ask, what these *impositions* do to the psyches of colonized peoples, who are consistently estranged from their identity, as dictated by the oppressor? According to Fanon, it produces the need of the Afro-Antillean – especially the educated – to *whiten* him or herself, searching for acceptance: "the feeling of inferiority by Blacks is especially evident in the educated man who is constantly trying to overcome it" (9). Further, he explains the Prospero complex as the black man suffering "insofar as the white man discriminates against me; turns me into a colonized subject; robs me of any value or originality...so I will try to make myself white, in other words, I will force the white man to acknowledge my humanity" (9). Fanon criticizes Manoni's claims that certain colonial subjects were subjected based on their apparent "need" to be colonized, reinforcing Hegel's view of the master-slave dialectic which claims that the oppressed becomes so due to fear of dying. Therefore, in the view of Hegel and Manoni, the slave acknowledges the master's "capacity" to protect him from death, and thus the superiority of the master is asserted. Fanon rejects this affirmation and explains instead that this history was "fabricated for [the colonized]" in a way that these theories were "inscribed on [their] chromosomes" (100).

As a means to refute a written identity, history and culture of the colonized, these former colonized subjects "write back," in a way. Instead of assimilating to the colonizer's model, the Caribbean author forms – from their past and present – his and her own identity. Alejo

Carpentier, for instance retakes the history of the Enlightenment and French revolution, and argues how its ideals failed to become a faithful reflection of Europe in the New World, but instead a *refracted* image, since the European revolutionaries failed to implement ideals of freedom and equality. *El siglo de las luces* is an awakening for the Antillean population, just like the Enlightenment was for Europe; for it re-writes history bringing the effects of the French revolution and instances of resistance onto center stage. In other words, Carpentier empowers the Caribbean people by writing on a history that concerns them. By re-assessing historical events, the former colonized population is better able to come to terms with their past.

While Carpentier re-visits history in the Caribbean, Sembene does the same in Africa and contests the common assumption (and misconception) that Africa was not participant in the slave-trade, when in fact, “slavery had existed [there] for centuries” (Miller 44). I do not mean, therefore, that Europeans could justify the slave trade or that Africans created the slave-trade. The Middle passage was crafted and exploited by the Europeans, but the African elite played an important role in the trade, and was, by no means innocent as Ousmane Sembene exposes in *Ceddo*. Therefore, a critical analysis of the African complicity in the slave trade is essential, as Sembene offers a powerful film that rescues silenced voices and supports women empowerment for progress.

In Caribbean territories that today remain “neocolonies” (N’Zengou-Tayo 187),⁷² fraternity is needed to bridge differences resulting from colonialism: “Slavery was the starting point of alienation, loss of pride in one’s race and of confidence in oneself” (N-Zengou-Tayo 176). Caribbean writers such as Maryse Condé produce *Traversée de la mangrove*, a novel that is constructed by the absence of a hero, and yet the collectiveness of a community as a whole :

⁷² Puerto Rico, for instance is a “País libre-asociado” of the U.S., or Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guyane are “departments d’outre-mer” belonging to France.

“*Traversée de la mangrove* est emblématique de cette exploration du sujet collectif antillais compris lui-même comme une multiplicité de lieux de mémoire” (Nesbitt 115). While doing so Condé puts forward that women are the new missing element to bring a society into advancement, eradicate forms of patriarchy and racism inherited from the slave trade, and move towards solidarity and fraternity. Her novels, in many ways, advocate women’s education and solidarity as a means to correct societal constraints and injustices. In this way, such a generation of educated and empowered women might nurture and develop a new society; one which shall be better equipped to face present-day challenges resulting from power struggles fueled by western greed and economic gain.

Postcolonial problems continue to abound in the Caribbean. However, external forms of impositions have been contested, and thus dealing with a hurtful past can be (re)negotiated. The works that I have analyzed have the power to enable the Caribbean population to come to terms with a past – not dwell on it – but evolve *with it*, as a solution. By revisiting it, analyzing its origins, its development and its consequences, descendants of the Diaspora are empowered, and no longer must feel subjected to their past. Instead, as Condé proposes, they should *own* their past and collectively progress towards a more prosperous future.

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