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# **Transatlantic Literary Triangle: The ‘Africanness’ of Writers of African Origin and Descent**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Africa has suffered two traumatizing events in history that have helped shape the present day individual, be it on the continent or in the diaspora. First there was the transatlantic slave trade that spanned from the 15th century to the late 19th century and saw the inhuman and forceful transportation of Africans to plantations and homes in the Americas. Then came colonialism immediately after slavery (late 19th century), which involved the arbitrary partitioning and ruling of Africans by Western European nations through the use of oppression, exploitation and extortion. These two unfortunate events in history have directly or indirectly influenced the life of the present day African and people of African descent in the diaspora. Writers with African background very often dwell on themes surrounding slavery and colonialism.

This work investigates the 'Africanness' of writers of African origin throughout the world. A specific selection of literary works by writers of African origin and descent in English, French and Spanish was studied. Using literary theories on post colonialism, authorial intention, otherness, hybridity, signifying, appropriation, intertextuality and power/knowledge, a close look at major themes found in these works led to the conclusion that writers of African origin mostly share a common underlying preoccupation in their works, by virtue of the fact that they share a common heritage. Particular attention was paid to the direct or indirect evocation of slavery, colonialism, African traditional beliefs and practices leading to the construction of the 'African' and black 'otherness'.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 AIM OF STUDY

The topic under study is not a new one. Many renowned scholars have looked at the literary and artistic relations between Africans on the continent and those whose ancestors, through slavery, have ever since become citizens in Europe, the Caribbean and the Americas, referred to in this work as the diaspora. In his book *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates Jr. expounds a theory known as Signifying, with the use of two figures in African traditions, Esu-Elegbara the trickster and the Signifying Monkey. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy also studies general artistic trends (literatures and musical genres) using the term 'black Atlantic' to encompass African artists on the continent and in the diaspora. It would be impossible to produce an exhaustive list of scholars who have written on this subject. The above presented are some of the most renowned in the Anglo-Saxon academic circle.

As the title of this work suggests, I seek to investigate the dynamics of African heritage as expressed by peoples of African origin and descent which I term 'Africanness', using selected works of writers of African origin and descent. The word 'triangle' used in the title denotes the imaginary link between Africa, Europe, the Caribbean and the Americas, the sphere within which various socio-political events shaped the lives of present day Africans both on the continent and in the diaspora. As will be seen in the analyses, there is always a multi-directional flow of ideas and thoughts amongst writers within the triangle. The work also looks at the differences between these works, given the fact that they are produced in different geographical and socio-cultural locations within the triangle.

The methods undertaken in this work comprise of thematic analyses and comparisons of the authors and works under study. Drawing from literary theories on post-colonialism, authorial intention, otherness, hybridity, signifying, power/knowledge, intertextuality and appropriation, important recurring themes in the selected works are identified and analyzed. Furthermore, there is a comparison between:

- i- African writers and writers in the diaspora;
- ii- African writers from different African countries and cultures; and
- iii- Writers in the diaspora from different countries and cultures .

## 1.2 SELECTION OF DATA

The literary works used in this study were selected after a close study of many works by authors of African origin and descent. The nine works finally selected dwell on themes directly or indirectly related to African cultural heritage over many centuries, from slavery to post-colonialism. This does not mean that the books left out dwell less on African heritage. They are great works that deserve to be studied, but it was impossible to use more than nine works for this study. Some of the works left out include *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) by Buchi Emecheta, *Black Boy* (1945) by Richard Wright, *En Chimá Nace un Santo* (1963) by Manuel Zapata Olivella, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière* (1986) by Maryse Condé, and *Nocturnes, Poèmes* (1961) by Léopold Sédar Senghor, just to name a few. Care was taken to ensure that writers in and out of the African continent were fairly represented, male and female alike.

The works studied include *No Longer at Ease* (1960) by Chinua Achebe, *The Autobiography of my Mother* (1996) by Jamaica Kincaid, *Mama Day* (1988) by Gloria Naylor, *Une Tempête* (1968) by Aimé Césaire, *Mission Terminée* (1957) by Mongo Béti, *Les Soleils des Indépendances* (1968) by Ahmadou Kourouma, *Kimbo* (1990) by Quince Duncan, “Danza Negra” (1926) by Luis Palés Matos, and “Balada de los Dos Abuelos” (1934) by Nicolás Guillén. There are six novels (three English, two French and one Spanish), one play (French) and two poems (Spanish). The data analysed in this work come from the above books. There are many secondary sources included, to support findings from the primary data.

I was motivated to choose the above works because of their combined spatio-temporal, linguistic and thematic representations, not leaving out the fact that they cover the three most important genres of literature. They span seventy years of literary production and represent important targeted areas within the triangle, as explained in 1.1 above. The works are written in three of the most widely spoken languages within the triangle: English, French and Spanish.

Each of these works is diverse in thematic representation and touches important diachronic and synchronic aspects of colonialism, post-colonialism and even slavery, and above all speaks to each other on many levels, as will be analysed in chapter 3.

Owing to the scope of the work, some representations could not be incorporated into the study. Slave narratives giving first hand information on slavery were left out because they mainly touch on the various facets of slavery and do not include many other ills that ensued after its abolition, such as Jim Crow laws and civil rights movements. Some of these works are however used as secondary material, such as the narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacob's. Famous works on the role of Christianity during and after colonisation, such as Ferdinand Oyono's *Le Vieil Nègre et la Médaille* (1956) and *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956) by Mongo Béti were left out. Writers from the Harlem Renaissance such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and Zola Neale Hurston were also left out. *Black Boy* (1945), *Invisible Man* (1957) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) are classic African American novels in their own right. However, they did not meet the objectives of my study because they did not touch important and varied themes as Naylor's novel does, both temporally and spatially. Finally, some famous African literary works echoing post-colonialism and produced within the triangle after independence were left out, such as *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1989) by Ayi Kwei Armah and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

### **1.3 SCOPE OF STUDY**

This work in no way pretends to undertake a comprehensive look at themes related to African cultural heritage. It also does not pretend to have selected the data to be used after an exhaustive consultation of literary works by writers of African origin and descent throughout the world. Novels from Africa for example are works of authors from West Africa who resided or are residing in Europe and America. It is barely representative and just an indication of what the outcome would be if all the works were to be studied. From the analyses of these nine works as will be seen in chapter three, there is an indication that literary works by authors on the African continent and in the diaspora speak to each other in various ways and on many levels, owing to the shared heritage, however distant, by these writers. For the convenience of the reader, the



themes studied have been sub-divided into seven groups, as will be seen below (chapter three). The same applies to theoretical concepts used to support claims and observations (chapter two). Those to be used frequently have been limited to post-colonialism, intentionality, otherness, hybridity, signifying, appropriation and intertextuality, and power/knowledge.

## 1.4 WORKING DEFINITION OF TERMS

Below is a concise description of some key words that will frequently feature in this study.

- 1.4.1 Diaspora** This term will be used to include every individual of African origin or descent living out of the continent. This will include Afro-Americans, Afro-Latinos, Afro-Europeans, Afro-Asians and Afro-Australians. Those born in Africa but living abroad for whatever reason will also be included in this definition.
- 1.4.2 Origin** Origin as in African origin is used to define an individual having direct African lineage, either living on the continent or in the diaspora, for an infinite amount of time.
- 1.4.3 Descent** Descent as in an individual of African descent would mean anybody having mixed lineage (African and any other or others).
- 1.4.4 Africanness** This term is used in this work to mean the qualities that qualify an individual as African, either through cultural heritage or as constructed by western civilization.
- 1.4.5 Négritude** This term will describe the francophone literary movement by black intellectuals in France in the 1930s evoking consciousness of and pride in African cultural heritage.
- 1.4.6 Civilization** The word will be used strictly as defined by Western Europeans, especially when they attempted to justify slavery and colonialism in the past. Civilized will be looked upon as opposed to primitive, not having attained the Western model of well-being.
- 1.4.7 Otherness** Derived from ‘other’, this term will be used in this work to denote those qualities that make an individual or a group to be looked upon as different from the ‘self’, ‘self’ referring to those having traits prescribed by ‘mainstream’ society.

**1.4.8 Tradition** This term will be used according to the following definition: “Something passed down from one generation to the next, generally by informal means, with little or no change in the transmission of that item or in the item that is transmitted.”<sup>1</sup>

**1.4.9 Nature** Nature as used in this work refers to the general realm and interaction of living and non-living things. It is the unaltered state of things; things that are not completely created out of human science and technology.

**1.4.10 Culture** Culture would mean human phenomena that are not purely results of human genetics. Focus will be on the ways in which people live and represent their experiences. Experiences include ideas, customs, social behaviour and way of life.

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas A. Green (ed.), *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music and Art. Vol. 1* Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1997, p. 800.

# CHAPTER TWO

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literary theory is the collection of ideas and methods used in the practical reading of literature. It describes the underlying principles that we use in an attempt to understand what a literary text is telling us. This section looks at the theories to be applied in this work in analysing the texts under study. However, this does not mean that in analysing the works, mention would not be made of any other theoretical idea deemed appropriate and not included in this section.

#### 2.2.1 Post-colonialism

Post-colonialism is an umbrella term, which describes a study of the relations between colonized countries and their colonial masters. In literary studies, post-colonialism studies these relations through the works of literature written by the colonized, thereby empowering them to air their views and speak from their perspective. It is not to be denied that the discourses on colonial territories have been carried out by the colonial masters for themselves. It is in this regard that Indian post colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak writes: “Some of the most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as subject.”<sup>2</sup> The subaltern<sup>3</sup> or the colonized can only get attention for themselves through their own efforts. Their disgruntled views can only be aired by them. Part of the task of this study is to offset this view held by the West, through the analysis of literary works by the colonized, using post-colonial theories. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write: “The idea of ‘post-

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<sup>2</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Cultures*, London: Macmillan, 1988, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Used by Spivak to mean ‘marginalized’.

colonial literary theory' emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing."<sup>4</sup> European theory having as primordial preoccupation the analysis of European works of literature, post-colonial theories provide a ready solution to the understanding of literary works by the colonized, the oppressed.

Post-colonial theories apply in all the nine works studied. Authors evoke social, political and economic discrimination and subjugation suffered in the hands of the colonial masters, slave masters and White supremacist societies, for some authors of the diaspora.

### 2.2.2 Authorial Intention

In literary theory, authorial intention is one of the most debated theories. Wimsatt and Beardsley claim that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as standard for judging the success of a work of literary art."<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes furthers this dismissal of authorial intention when he proclaims the "death of the author".<sup>6</sup>

However, the author of this work, based on the views of E.D. Hirsch and Antoine Compagnon, gives credit to the importance of authorial intention in studying a work. Hirsch draws a difference between meaning and significance and maintains that authorial intention lies within the domain of meaning because "the interpreter's job is to specify the text's horizon as far as he is able [...] he must familiarize himself with the typical meanings of the author's mental and experiential world."<sup>7</sup> In his *Literature, Theory and Common Sense*, Antoine Compagnon posits that intention is what an author means to say by the words he uses, which is logically equivalent to what he means by the statements that constitute the text, as he explains: "To

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<sup>4</sup> Bill Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back*, London: Routledge, 1989, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954. June 5 2012.  
<http://faculty.smu.edu/nschwartz/seminar/Fallacy.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", UBU Web. 20 March 2012.  
[http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death\\_authorbarthes.pdf](http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf) (1967)

<sup>7</sup> E.D. Hirsch, "Objective Interpretation" in *Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967, p. 209-244.

consider that the various parts of a text (lines, sentences, etc.) make a whole assumes that the text represents an intentional action. To interpret a work assumes that this work corresponds to an intention, that it is the product of a human agency.”<sup>8</sup>

The consideration of authorial intention as expounded by Hirsch and Compagnon above was extremely helpful in my selection of certain works. It is not to be denied that authorial intention is a useful tool in dealing with works of authors who are marginalized on basis of their race, class or gender. Some texts were selected not based on significance but on meaning, that is to say what the author meant by the statements he wrote, considering his mental and experiential world, as E.D. Hirsch explains above. Authorial intention is a useful tool when dealing with literary works written from a culturally, economically, politically and historically oppressed position. Alexandre Biyidi Awala, fearing possible repercussions on his family, uses pseudonyms like Eza Boto and Mongo Béti in his earlier literary works produced during colonialism. This is a clear indication of the author’s intention in his works, owing to their political tone.

### **2.2.3 Otherness**

Otherness is a philosophical concept that derives from Friedrich Hegel’s theory of binary opposition, often referred to as the master-slave dialectic, where the ‘self’ defines itself in relation to the ‘other’. In explicating Hegel’s dialectics, Philip J. Kain argues “Desire desires the existence of the other as much as its negation. Desire, then, shows self-consciousness that there is an other and that this other has an independence that cannot easily be eliminated.”<sup>9</sup> Post-colonial theorists use the concept of the ‘other’ to describe the process by which a dominant group otherwise known as the ‘self’ (colonizing countries) constructed ‘other’ dominated groups (colonized countries) by stigmatizing and perpetuating differences, real or imagined, so as to ‘moralize’ and ‘legitimize’ their dominance. In colonial literature, otherness is a major

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<sup>8</sup> Antoine Compagnon, *Literature, Theory and Common Sense*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> Philip J. Kain, *Hegel and the Other*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, p. 46.

discourse.<sup>10</sup> In the analysis section of this study, the concept of otherness serves to give an insight into the works studied as one deciphers the stigmas constructed by colonialists and slaveholders in order to justify and legitimize their actions.

#### 2.2.4 Hybridity

The term hybridity has become an indispensable term in cultural and post-colonial studies. It describes the coming together and blending of two or more cultures. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi K. Bhabha discourages the concept of cultural purity and maintains that cultural systems are constructed in a space that he calls the “Third Space of Enunciation”, and cultural identity always emerges from this contradictory and ambivalent space.<sup>11</sup> Bhabha asserts the significance of this third space when he says: “It is significant that the productive capacities of this third space have a colonial or post colonial provenance.”<sup>12</sup> This suggests that the colonizer-colonized discourse meets in this third space of enunciation under post-colonialism, demystifying the colonial master and empowering the subaltern.

In the preface to *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Paul Gilroy announces that the book is generally against racial [and cultural] purity and advocates the inescapable hybridity and intermixture of ideas.<sup>13</sup> Gilroy argues against cultural essentialism and echoes Bhabha’s ideas of the constant mobility of cultures. In an ever-changing world socio-politically speaking, hybridity becomes an important element when one analyses post-colonial literatures, hence its significant presence in this study. The arguments for hybridity in this work would be modelled alongside the views of Bhabha and Gilroy.

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<sup>10</sup> Bill Ashcroft et al. *Post-Colonial Studies*, London: Routledge, 2000, p.154-155.

<sup>11</sup> K. Sripad Bhat. “Translating the Translated: Interrogating the Post-colonial Condition” 10 June 2012 <http://www.anukriti.net/vol2/article4/page1.asp>

<sup>12</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 98.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, London: Verso, 1993, p. ix.

### 2.2.5 Signifying

Signifying is a literary theory coined by Henry Louis Gates Jr., to describe the network of cultural heritage that binds Afro-American texts in particular and black literature in general. This network is centred on two folkloric trickster figures, Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey. Gates makes an important observation:

The black Africans who survived the dreaded “Middle Passage” from the west coast of Africa to the New World did not sail alone [...]. [They] carried with them to the Western hemisphere aspects of their cultures that were meaningful, that could not be obliterated, and that they chose, by acts of will, not to forget [...].<sup>14</sup>

The conscious and unconscious use of African folklore in black works of literature, be it in the diaspora or on the continent, is what Gates terms Signifying, at times written Signifyin’: “Signifyin(g) is a trope in which are subsumed several other rhetorical tropes including metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony [...]”<sup>15</sup> Signifying extends to the relationship between texts, a form of intertextuality. Gates uses the terms speakerly and talking texts. Gate’s theory of Signifying can be likened to Julia Kristeva’s literary theory known as intertextuality (to be seen below). It takes a careful look at the interwoven nature of black literary and artistic production, be it on the African continent or in the diaspora. Signifying is an indispensable tool in the study of the literary production of writers of African origin and descent, such as that undertaken in this study.

### 2.2.6 Appropriation and Intertextuality

In literary criticism, appropriation is the creation of a work of art out of an existing one. In the process of creation, elements of the existing work are borrowed or the whole story (the old work) is told in another character or narrator’s point of view. The concept of appropriation has been very instrumental in the empowerment of the ‘other’ and the subaltern in formerly colonized countries, because they are given a space, an audience to speak from their point of view, often

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<sup>14</sup> Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Gates 1988, p. 52.

contradicting the image portrayed by the former speaker, most often the ‘self’. As Ashcroft et al. put it, “it is through appropriation of the power invested in writing that this discourse [the post-colonial discourse] can take hold of the marginality imposed on it and make hybridity and syncreticity the source of literal and cultural redefinition.”<sup>16</sup>

Intertextuality is a term coined by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s that describes a text’s meaning being derived from or shaped by other texts.<sup>17</sup> In her essay “Word, Dialogue and the Novel”, Kristeva maintains that “Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.”<sup>18</sup> Appropriation and intertextuality are closely related concepts in that the former ranges from an author’s borrowing and transformation of a previous text while the latter deals with the interrelatedness of texts. Intertextuality is very visible in texts of African origin in that they mostly dwell on common themes and one can rightly say one text speaks to another. Identical thematic patterns can be identified amongst some of the works under study, as shall be seen in the next chapter.

### **2.2.7 Power/Knowledge**

Power/Knowledge is a concept coined by the French philosopher Michel Foucault that describes the dynamics of power and knowledge. Foucault claims “knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of the ‘truth’ but has the power to make itself true [...]. [T]here is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations.”<sup>19</sup> According to Foucault, therefore, whosoever holds power holds knowledge, and he who holds power decides what is considered knowledge. Power/Knowledge is important in colonial and post-colonial studies because it gives an insight to the dynamics of hybridity and acculturation.

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<sup>16</sup> Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 77.

<sup>17</sup> Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 14-1.

<sup>18</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Arts*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, New York: Vintage Books, 1977, p. 27.



Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o describes the imperialist process in the following terms:

To ensure economic and political control the colonizing power tries to control the cultural environment: education, religion, language, literature, songs, forms of dances, every form of expression, hoping in this way to control a people's values and ultimately their world outlook, their image and definition of self.<sup>20</sup>

The colonial master drew the curriculum in schools, decided what was right and what was wrong, and termed African cultures primitive and barbaric. This was typical of the French, who introduced Assimilation, a policy aiming to transform Africans to Frenchmen. Power/knowledge as a concept is useful in analysing the works of writers from oppressed communities, hence its importance in this study.

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<sup>20</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Literature and Society: the Politics of the Canon", G.D. Killam (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi*, Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1984, p. 17-45.

# CHAPTER THREE

## ANALYSES OF THEMES

### 3.1 SLAVERY

Slavery is defined as a condition in which a human being is considered as property of another human being. The transatlantic slave trade began around the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century and lasted for more than four hundred years. It involved the trade and transportation of peoples of the West and Central African coasts in slave ships to the newly discovered West Indies and the Americas. The transatlantic slave trade has been considered one of the worst acts of inhumanity mankind has ever witnessed. Millions who could not make it across the ocean were thrown overboard. Many reasons at the time accounted for this treatment of human beings as chattel, amongst which was the desperate quest for work force in the expanding European empires in the New World. Slavery became so profitable to Southern farmers that it had to be moralized. They claimed God had bestowed unto them the power to take care of Africans since they couldn't take care of themselves. Several articles were written by accredited medical doctors and intellectuals to justify the 'sub-human' nature of slaves and why they should always be overburdened.

In an article from 1851 entitled "Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race", Dr Samuel Cartwright, a highly respected and widely published doctor from the University of Louisiana, discusses two diseases which he claims are unique to slaves.

Drapetomania [is] the disease causing Negroes to run away. If the white man attempts to oppose the Deity's will, by trying to make the Negro anything then 'the submissive kneebender' (which the Almighty declared he should be) [...] by putting himself on equality with the Negro [...] the Negro will run away.

Dysaesthesia Aethiopica is a disease peculiar to Negroes. It is prevalent among free Negroes living in clusters themselves than among slaves in our plantations, and attacks only such slaves as live like free Negroes.<sup>21</sup>

Slaves had to work from dawn to dusk and could barely have time to prepare food for the next day, let alone rest their exhausted bodies. Paul Gilroy reminisces the traumatic experience of slavery when he points out that “the slaves’ access to literacy was often denied on point of death and only a few cultural opportunities were offered as a surrogate for the other forms of individual autonomy denied by life on the plantations and in the barracoons.”<sup>22</sup> These few cultural opportunities offered were mostly singing and signifying on each other, activities that did not halt the labour process. Slaves generally had just one holiday a year, as expressed in the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs.<sup>23</sup>

Reading most of the books analysed in this work, one finds the recurring theme of slavery. Authors, through their works, advertently or inadvertently touch on different aspects of slavery within the slave period or its aftermath. Going through Naylor’s *Mama Day*, one comes across a radical resistance to slavery. The novel opens with the slave deed of Sapphira Wade, through which the reader is informed on how slaves were deemed sub-human in the Western sense of the term during slavery, and fit for nothing other than crude labour. The deed reads:

Sold to Mister Bascombe Wade [...] Age 20. Pure African stock, limbs and teeth sound. All warranty against the vices and maladies prescribed by law do not hold forth [...] Sapphira is half prime, inflicted with sullenness and entertains a bilious nature, having resisted under reasonable chastisement the performance of field or domestic labour (Naylor: 1).

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<sup>21</sup> Samuel Cartwright, “Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race”. Nov. 2011.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h3106.html>

<sup>22</sup> Gilroy 1993, p. 94.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Douglass. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Boston: 1845. Web 15 Jan. 2012 Elegant EBooks.

[http://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Douglass/Narrative/Douglass\\_Narrative.pdf](http://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Douglass/Narrative/Douglass_Narrative.pdf). Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

<http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/1510/1546451/pdfs/incidents.pdf> 7 Nov. 2011

Sapphira's value is based on her limbs and teeth, health and nature. She is half prime so hasn't undergone the complete process of 'taming'. Slaves were considered brutes, primates that had not yet attained full maturity with respect to being 'cultured' and 'civilized'.

Sapphira's sales deed plays a major role in the development of the plot, since the story picks up from her being sold to Bascombe Wade, as well as portrays her resistance to slavery. In a flashback, the narrator informs the reader that Sapphira marries her master, bears him seven sons in a thousand days, tricks him into deeding his land to all his children and slaves, and ends up poisoning him, after which it is alleged she 'magically' goes back to Africa, leaving her children behind. Sapphira, through her resistance, frees her children and fellow slaves from bondage and this slave woman cum liberator's legacy runs through the story. Another aspect of slavery that one notices when reading *Mama Day* is the alternative lifestyle offered the freed slaves as opposed to the fate of freed slaves in the then United States, especially in the south. Looking at the freed slaves and their descendants in Willow Springs, which happens not to be part of the United States in a jurisdictional sense, they organize themselves into a self-sufficient community, mostly indulging in agriculture and fishing. They sell the excess over the bridge (USA) to afford other goods and services. This unfortunately was not the case with other freed slaves as seen in other slave centred novels and narratives. After liberation came the Jim Crow laws and the Ku Klux Klan, which made sure freed slaves did not have the opportunity to be able to 'stand on their own'. Through the slave discourse in her novel, Gloria Naylor attempts to suggest how the fate of slaves would have been like, had they been granted liberty and given the chance to dwell in society like everybody else.

Reading *The Autobiography of my Mother*, one also comes across the slavery discourse. Through her story, Kincaid looks at the religious aspects of slavery, the socio-economic split and the construction of 'self' in post slavery Dominica. Xuela, the first person narrator, sees going to church as a sign of defeat because she feels worshipping the 'god' of slave masters equals perpetual enslavement, for though the church preaches equality, there is a marked hiatus between descendants of slave masters and those of slavery. Passing by a church, Xuela is reminded by its sad history; a church built by enslaved people, and those who died while building it, their masters had them buried with their faces turned away from the east, so that when the Day of

Judgment comes, the enslaved faces wouldn't turn toward eternal light but eternal darkness (Kincaid: 133).

Xuela also draws a parallel when she thinks about her father's parents:

His father was a Scots-man, his mother was of the African people, and this distinction between "man" and "people" was an important distinction, for one of them came off the boat as part of a horde, already demonized, mind blank to everything but human suffering [...] the other came off the boat of his own volition, seeking to fulfil a destiny, a vision of himself he carried in his mind's eye (Kincaid: 181).

The above description makes it clear that slavery split the society into two main camps; that of winners and that of losers, leading to racial divide that affects contemporary society. Xuela's father always mentions and describes his father with pride but never mentions his mother (Kincaid: 182-183). He readily identifies and associates himself with the 'winners' and not the 'defeated', though a product of the two. It is interesting to note the signifying between Naylor's book and Kincaid's. Both deal with the marriage between a master and a slave or servant. However while redemption comes from the slave woman in Naylor's book, the master seems to be the one who takes credit in Kincaid's. While some are proud of their African ancestry, others, like Xuela's father, consider it a stigma.

In *Une Tempête*, the reader pictures the brutality of slavery as well as a staged revolt by the enslaved, however unsuccessful, reminding us that slaves were not 'content' with their enslavement, as some 'southern' narratives seemed to suggest. Prospero blatantly tells Caliban that "La trique, c'est le seul langage que tu comprends [...]"<sup>24</sup>(Césaire: 27). This threat is prompted by Caliban's hesitation to carry out one of his endless orders. During the slave and colonial era, the whip was commonly used to enforce orders and curb insubordination. Slaves were beaten and at times tied to a pole, just for the sheer pleasure of the overseer.

Nicolas Guillén, in "Balada de Los Dos Abuelos", through the first person narrator, muses on the aftermath of slavery. He evokes hybridity and the apparent advantage of being an offspring of two different ethnicities. The narrator's grandfathers are black and white and though

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<sup>24</sup> Translation: The cane is the only language you understand.

this evokes a disturbing past characterised by slavery (Guillén: 1. 37-38), he sees them always strolling together in the evening, holding hands and laughing. This is an indication of coming to terms with the past and living happily together. Luis Palés Matos, through “Danza Negra”, evokes nostalgia and hybridity, brought about as a consequence of slavery. He praises African musical instruments, drums and dance. He also signifies on the black Atlantic culture as he dwells on diverse African dance rhythms in different African countries as well as in the Caribbean (Matos: 4. 22). In Quince Duncan’s *Kimbo*, the theme of slavery features as a precondition for the events in the story. Slave descendants from Jamaica immigrated in large numbers to Costa Rica in the early and mid twentieth century to work in newly opened plantations. The narrator informs us that even though Costa Rica had a small black population, the 1930s and 1940s sees a heavy influx of black migrant workers from Jamaica to the Limón province, which transforms the socio-political situation of the country with uncomfortable consequences such as prejudice, racial discrimination and scape-goating. Kimbo, the tragic hero, is framed for kidnapping because he is black (Duncan: 49).

A close look at the six works analysed above reveals the theme of slavery, though looked at from different perspectives. Through their works, Kincaid and Césaire portray the endurance of slavery by slaves while Naylor looks at the resistance of slavery. Guillén, Palés Matos and Duncan allude to the aftermath of slavery, as one notices elements like hybridity, nostalgia and racism. There is an absence of the theme of slavery in the works of Kourouma, Bédié and Achebe, largely due to the fact that they are from the African continent. Their works echo a plight similar to but different from slavery – colonialism.

### **3.2 COLONIALISM**

Colonialism is a broad term, which generally describes the practice of one country acquiring full control over another country politically, economically and socially. This work centres on the colonization of African countries after the scramble for Africa and its partition in the 1884 Berlin conference. The scramble for Africa was a process of invasion, annexation and ultimate partition of Africa by European powers during the New Imperialism period, between 1881 and 1918. This annexation had above all economic but also political and social motivations as well. With the

abolition of slave trade and the expansion of the industrial revolution, the search for raw material to feed the industries and markets to sell the finished products was imperative. Moreover, industrialization and capitalism gave birth to social problems like unemployment, homelessness and rural exodus, thus the need for this ‘excess’ population to be sent overseas to settle, hence creating settler colonies.<sup>25</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century, there was perpetuation of material and human resources by the colonizers. Forced labour ensured that locals provided ‘free’ labour in mining and farming. To ensure total domination and little resistance, the colonizers constructed a negative image of the colonized. Just like during slavery, locals were made to believe that they were, by all standards, inferior to their colonial master, and the latter was doing them a big favour and making a huge sacrifice in civilizing them, hence echoing Foucault’s power/knowledge concept explained in the previous chapter. European ideals and norms were taught in schools and children had to sing the anthem of the colonial masters every morning. It has been argued that the subhuman treatment inflicted on indigenes because they were considered barbarians made the perpetrator no less barbaric. Césaire underscores this hypocrisy in his book, *Discours sur le Colonialisme* (1955):

La colonisation [...] déshumanise l’homme même le plus civilisé ; le colonisateur, pour se donner une bonne conscience, s’habitue à voir dans l’autre la bête, s’entraîne à le traiter en bête, tend objectivement à se transformer lui-même en bête.<sup>26</sup>

This exposes the ill intent of the colonizer who, in the guise of humanism (civilization), treats his fellow human being inhumanely. Césaire mocks this ‘fake’ humanism by alluding to Ernest Renan’s philosophy who said in his *La Réforme Intellectuelle et Morale* (1875) that the divine order of things places the European at the top, the superior race that is supposed to take care of and supervise the other ‘labouring’ races of the world.<sup>27</sup> For Europeans to define themselves as

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<sup>25</sup> “The Colonization of Africa”, African Age 12 Feb. 2012.

<http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-colonization-of-africa.html>

<sup>26</sup> Césaire 1955, p. 10. Translation: Colonialism dehumanizes even the most civilized. The colonizer, in a bid to clear his conscience, sees a beast in the colonized, treats him like one, and ends up becoming himself a beast by all standards.

<sup>27</sup> Césaire 1955, p. 8.

masters, there was need for them to subjugate Africans, Asians and other non-European populations around the world.

Africans resisted colonialism both physically and intellectually. French speaking African and Caribbean intellectuals formed “Négritude” in the thirties as a protest against French colonialism and the policy of assimilation. Spearheaded by Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor and Léon Damas, Négritude was basically a response to the European claim of civilizing the African, saving him from his barbaric culture and pagan religion. An important influence to the founding of the Négritude movement was the Harlem Renaissance in New York in the twenties and thirties. Also known as the New Negro Movement, its followers and intellectuals strove to use the heritage and culture of black Americans as “a means towards redefining African American expression.”<sup>28</sup> The Négritude pioneers also founded the *l'Étudiant Noir*, a review that enabled them express their convictions on black cultures and beliefs while decrying French acculturation of Africans. In their articles and the subsequent literary works they published, these black intellectuals appropriated the colonial master’s ‘received knowledge’ and used it against these very masters, to show the injustice in colonialism.

In the opening chapter in Mongo Béti’s *Mission Terminée* the reader meets Medza and his classmates who have just received their end of year results. Daniel, one of them, fails but does not seem to worry about his failure. He jokingly justifies his failing his exams by maintaining that it is because he is taught another man’s culture in another man’s language. Daniel says his ancestors are Bantus and not Gallic, so he doesn’t wish to become somebody he isn’t (Béti: 6). This echoes Foucault’s power/knowledge paradigm. He who holds power holds knowledge. The colonialists dictated knowledge because they had the power to do so. Just like the colonized are made to believe, the indigenes consider anyone who speaks French as automatically vested with special powers. When Niam’s wife escapes, villagers, in a concerted effort, try to make her come back to no avail. But the arrival of Medza from school proves a ‘golden opportunity’, as Bikokolo the elder puts it, “Ta voix du tonnerre, sais tu ce que c’est?”

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<sup>28</sup> “Harlem Renaissance” John Carroll University Multimedia Resource. 5 June 2012  
[http://www.jcu.edu/harlem/Literature/Page\\_1.htm](http://www.jcu.edu/harlem/Literature/Page_1.htm)



Tes diplômes, ton instruction, ta connaissance des choses des Blancs”<sup>29</sup>(Béti: 15). Mongo Béti, through *Mission Terminée*, satirizes colonial education and the French policy of assimilation, instituted in French colonies. Assimilation was a policy where the colonized were encouraged to think and act French, in order to gain special privileges and an eventual French citizenship.<sup>30</sup>

While in Kala, we are informed by the narrator that Medza becomes the centre of attraction and holds evening gatherings in the houses of ‘privileged’ elders, in order to explain to the villagers what he studies in school. While the curiosity of the villagers could be lauded, Mongo Béti sublimely satirises school policies and the received notion of the inherent superiority of the French, the ‘self’. When Medza tells the villagers that he sits in the same classroom with white children who perform just as well as he does, they are dazed. One man remarks that it is strange because the white kids are normally supposed to be smarter than the black kids since what is taught in school is the Whiteman’s secret (Béti, p. 48). The confusion of these villagers stems from their looking at Medza as the ‘other’, since he is one of them. It is baffling to them that Medza (and other black students) could challenge white kids (the ‘self’) in class and even perform better than them at times. The colonized only learned about himself through the coloniser, owing to the mechanics of power/knowledge.

During one of the meetings, a lady asks Medza how he and his educated friends will relate with them when they become French citizens. “Pourrons-nous entrer dans vos maisons comme nous entrons dans les maisons de nos autres enfants – librement?”<sup>31</sup> (Béti: 63). This lady, from the nature of her question, seems to be disturbed that she and other parents would have to cultivate two sets of behaviour and manners, to deal with their educated and uneducated children. This echoes double consciousness, a term coined by W.E.B. Dubois in his book, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), and further explicated by later scholars, Fanon, Gates and Gilroy being good examples. Dubois defined this concept in the following terms:

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<sup>29</sup> Translation: Do you know what your voice of thunder [authority] is? Your diplomas, your education, your knowledge of the Whiteman’s secrets.

<sup>30</sup> Wallace G. Mills, “French Approaches in Colonial Policy”, 15 June 2012  
[http://stmarys.ca/~wmills/course317/4French\\_Policies.html](http://stmarys.ca/~wmills/course317/4French_Policies.html)

<sup>31</sup> Translation: Would we be allowed to enter your houses as freely as we enter those of our other [uneducated] children?

It is a particular sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others [...]. One ever feels his twoness [...]; two warring ideals in one dark body.<sup>32</sup>

Western prescribed ideals, dubbed assimilation by the French, fostered double consciousness as expressed by this lady. She worries that she would have to behave 'French' in order to be accepted by her assimilated African children and at the same time behave African (with reference to the Bédi culture to be precise) when she is with her non-assimilated children. There is thus a connection between Bédi's work and Dubois's, together with many other black literary works, confirming Gates' concept of speakerly texts, where one text echoes another. Kristeva's intertextuality also fits into this view, since Mongo Bédi, consciously or unconsciously, absorbs Dubois's earlier notion of double consciousness.

It is worth noting that assimilation, hence acculturation, disrupted the homogeneity of the indigenous society. Educated and assimilated indigenes cut-off contact with the non-assimilated, including family relations. They considered themselves "too civilized" to be mingling with indigenes, and only aspired to cultivate social ties with other assimilated Africans or Europeans. Even among the uneducated, there was the ever-present urge to show a certain level of assimilation. Those who could afford it preferred French wine to palm wine, and some even preferred using cutlery when eating local dishes (with much difficulty), because they believed it was primitive to eat with bare hands, which was and is logically convenient. A way out could have been what Bhabha calls the third space of enunciation, where these cultures could have met and blended, each borrowing 'something good and practical' from the other, hence hybridity.

One also notices traits of assimilation when reading Jamaica Kincaid's novel. Her story focuses on the brainwashed mentality of 'superior culture' inculcated into Dominicans. She makes good use of 'Stream of Consciousness' for the reader often goes into Xuela's mind to read her thoughts. Passing by a church one Sunday, Xuela notices the congregation standing on the church steps and chatting with one another. She then narrates/reflects:

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<sup>32</sup> W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Boston: The Pennsylvania State University, 2006, p. 9.

They bade each other goodbye and returned to their homes, where they would drink a cup of English tea, even though they were quite aware that no such thing as tea grew in England, and later that night, before they went to bed, they would drink a cup of English cocoa, even though they were quite aware that no such thing as a cocoa tree grew in England (Kincaid: 142).

Consuming English products make them feel English. Colonialism gave the colonized a ‘false self’ since they were taught to totally reject all they did and were used to doing, and embrace things foreign to them, because it was right. To the colonized, drinking cocoa and coffee was not for the nutritive value of these products, but for the sake of feeling English; since it was believed that these traits were essential in English culture.

In Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Les Soleils des Indépendances*, Fama, the legitimate heir of the Doumbouya dynasty, is deprived of the throne because he won’t comply and cooperate with the local colonial administrator. Instead, the throne is given to his pliable cousin, Lacina. Fama terms it ‘bastardisation’ of African tradition. The author hereby points an accusing finger to the colonialists for destabilizing Malinké traditional norms. Another evil angle of colonialism can be seen through the detestable acts committed by Tomasini, the colonial administrator of Horodougou. The narrator informs us that Tomasini attempts to force the young Matali to have sex with him and she escapes. Enraged, he sends his assistants to bring her by force: “Il ordonna. On amena Matali sous forte escorte. Il l’engrossa deux fois coup sur coup: deux garçons”<sup>33</sup> (Kourouma: 78). Matali’s parents could do nothing but consent, lest they be sent to prison for daring to oppose the colonial master’s ‘privilege’. This goes on to highlight the hypocritical and double standard nature of colonialism and colonial administrators, as seen earlier. No ‘ideal’ civilization would include coercion and rape as ideals.

Césaire, through *Une Tempête*, questions the ‘civilizing mission’ of colonialists. When Prospero, in a rhetorical bid, asks Caliban what he would become without him, he proudly retorts: “Mais tout simplement le roi! Le roi de l’île!”<sup>34</sup> (Césaire: 25). It probably slips Prospero’s mind that before he came, Caliban was and even if he goes (which is Caliban’s

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<sup>33</sup> Translation: He ordered. Matali was brought under heavy escort. He impregnated her two successive times: two boys.

<sup>34</sup> Translation: Simply the King of the island!

greatest wish), Caliban is still going to be. Through this dialogue between colonizer and colonized, one notices that excessive power led the colonialists to think that the colonized were 'objects of their own creation', which they had to mould to suit their intent. Caliban blatantly tells Prospero his civilizing mission is nothing but a façade to exploit and oppress him, for he knows he is a liar: "Et tu m'as tellement menti, menti sur le monde, menti sur moi-même: que tu as fini par m'imposer une image de moi-même."<sup>35</sup> (Césaire: 88). The colonized here tries to free himself from the colonizer by rejecting his ill-intended knowledge, an attempted reversal of the concept of power/knowledge.

Gonzalo, King Alonso's adviser, has a slightly different view from that embraced by Prospero and imperialist European countries. He advises that they should exploit the island but make an effort to preserve the tradition and values of the indigenes as they are (Césaire: 40-41). This to most colonized people would have resonated preferring the lesser evil to the greater. Acculturation is highlighted in the play when Caliban prefers to be called X, instead of Caliban, which he claims is a name given to him out of hatred and spite (Césaire: 28). Caliban seems to suggest an ill-intended Western influence on his culture since his name is not indigenous (of his culture) but given by the master. Césaire signifies on the American civil rights activist in the sixties, Malcolm X, who preferred to be called X because his surname reminded him of slavery, oppression and domination.

Reading Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, one finds the recurring discourse of colonial essentialism, the Western defence of their 'duty' to colonize Africans because they cannot live on their own. Obi's boss Mr Green echoes this opinion, saying:

The fact that over countless centuries the African has been the victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease. Hardly his fault. But he has been sapped mentally and physically. We have brought him western education. But what use is it to him? (Achebe: 3)

Mr Green hereby suggests an essential, widened gap between Africans and Europeans, hence the duty of the latter to subjugate and dominate the former. It is worth reiterating that slaveholders

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<sup>35</sup> Translation: And you've so deceived me about the world and myself that you have ended up imposing an image on me.

came up with these same reasons to justify the ‘lucrative’ trade in humans. As Hegel suggests, “desire always desires the existence of the other as much as its negation.”<sup>36</sup> Man’s desire to rule, conquer, pilfer and fulfil countless perversities drives him to construct other fellow human beings as ‘other’ and different, in order to justify his evil goals. Such was the case during slavery and colonialism, and has been the case in every domination and occupation.

Though the setting and plot of Gloria Naylor’s work falls out of the range of colonialism as the world has actually known it, traits of this ill are echoed when Miranda and her sister Abigail look at the adverse effects of relinquishing one’s rights to his or her property. They repeatedly and vehemently refuse to sell part of their island to corporate companies, so that they build hotels and holiday resorts. Miranda always reminds herself of those who have committed such mistakes, as she says:

Hadn’t we seen it happen back in the ‘80s on St. Helena [...]? Got them folks’ land, built fences around it first thing, and then brought in all the builders and high-paid managers from mainside – ain’t nobody on them islands benefited. And the only dark faces you see now in them “vacation paradises” is the ones cleaning the toilets and cutting the grass. On their own land, mind you, their own land. Weren’t gonna happen in Willow Springs (Naylor: 6).

Though this is slightly different because these islanders who sold their island had the choice to say no, unlike the colonised, the resulting consequences are the same – exclusion, subjugation and exploitation.

Colonialism as a theme always features directly or indirectly in the literary works of writers from the African continent and the diaspora. In the selected works under study, Bédi’s work focuses on colonial education and assimilation, Kincaid’s looks at the brainwashed mentality of ‘superior culture’ while Kourouma’s dwells on the disruption of tradition, the act of rape by colonialists, hypocrisy and double standards. Aimé Césaire satirises the colonial ‘civilising mission’, Achebe highlights the discourse on colonial essentialism while Naylor looks at the dangers of economic subjugation and domination. The works of Guillén, Palés Matos and Duncan do not significantly portray themes pertaining to colonialism. Guillén’s work centres on

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<sup>36</sup> Philip J. Kain (ibid)

the aftermath of slavery, when the master and servant have to live in the same country as opposed to colonialism where the colonialists pay allegiance to their 'mother' country. Palés Matos, in his work, looks at the diversity of African dances and tradition both on the continent and in the diaspora. Quince Duncan's looks at migration and not occupation. His work centres on the fate of black migration workers and their descendants, who leave Jamaica to Costa Rica to live and work.

In his famous *Discours sur le Colonialisme*, Césaire likens colonialism to Nazism and claims that Europeans closed their eyes to the rise of Nazism because it targeted non-European people. They only realized its barbarism too late when the Nazis started coming at them.<sup>37</sup> It can be argued that the education of the colonized and their subsequent fighting alongside European soldiers in wars played a major role in demystifying the myth surrounding colonialism, hence its speedy decline and the subsequent gaining of independence by African colonies in the late 1950s and 1960s. The colonized had come to see the blatant lies told them every day by the colonial masters and decided to put an end to it at all costs.

### 3.3 OTHERNESS

As earlier defined under the theoretical framework of this study, otherness is characterised by a dominant group constructing dominated groups by stigmatizing a difference, real or imagined, looked upon as a negation of identity and thus a motive for discrimination. Otherness in the works studied is presented in two distinct forms: colour line based and socially based. Colour line based otherness involves the stigmatization of peoples of African origin and descent, with labels emanating from difference in the colour of the skin. Socially based otherness witnessed in some works is mostly found in novels set in West Africa. Here we find people of the same ethnicity, ancestry or nationality constructing differences on the basis of caste, religion and primitivism. It is worth reminding that some of these constructs, like primitivism and religion, are products of colonialism and 'brainwashing' by the colonial master. The difference between these two forms of otherness is simply based on the assumption that the first is static while the

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<sup>37</sup> Césaire 1955, p. 6.

second is dynamic in status. While it is possible to remove the stigmas of socially constructed otherness, it is assumed that it is impossible to undo the stigmas of colour line otherness.

Colour line otherness holds much heard stigmas like African or of African origin, therefore black, not intelligent, hasn't fully developed his reasoning faculty, a criminal, a drug addict or dealer, below poverty line and lazy, dishonest, a pagan who adores fetishes therefore doesn't know God, has a primitive tradition and culture, therefore not 'civilized' enough to associate with civilized people. In fact, it is interesting to know that people of other non-Caucasian ethnicities have their own set of stigmas, which also propel difference and negation. On the contrary, the 'self' (Europeans) has attributes, not stigmas, which they constructed and perpetuated through literature and the media, that mostly hold as 'true' even nowadays when different peoples of the world have co-habited for a lengthy amount of time. The 'self' is still all that the 'other' isn't, therefore good. He is smart, intelligent, industrious, compassionate, God-fearing, honest, generous and an ardent peacemaker. You may have the same education, have the same job, worship in the same church, carry out the same daily tasks, but if you are not the 'self', you are considered smart but not 'as smart', dutiful but not 'as dutiful', religious but not 'as religious'.

Jamaica Kincaid's novel throws light on the relationship between an English woman and a Dominican woman. Xuela, in her stream of consciousness, reflects on the inherent difference in the way Philip's wife considers her and herself, and constructs a parallel between lady and woman. She observes: "Her otherness was not particularly offensive; it was just that I became more familiar with it [...]. She was a lady, I was a woman, and this distinction for her was important [...]" (Kincaid: 158-159). Being from Great Britain, Philip's wife makes it clear through her words and deeds that she is one kind of a female and Xuela is another. The epithet Lady gives her class and the status of civilized, which is 'natural' since she comes from a country that disseminates civilization. Otherness based on colour line and provenance is again noticed when Philip and Xuela get married, after the former's wife passes away. Philip's English friends, seeing that his love for Xuela is genuine, do not attend their wedding, abandon him and the newly married couple have to relocate faraway into the mountains, says the narrator (Kincaid: 206).

There is an echo of Renan's philosophy of ordained hierarchy, when one looks at how imperialism works in the novel, as again witnessed in Xuela's stream of consciousness:

A man proud of the pale blue of his skin cherishes it especially because it is not a fulfilment of any aspiration [...], it gives him a special privilege in the hierarchy of everything [...] he knows with an iron certainty [it] should be his own (Kincaid: 131).

Renan, in *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale* (1875) advocated wealth and labour based on colour line. According to his philosophy, Europeans, by the mere virtue of their birth, were supposed to be masters of everything. Others were supposed to work for them while they dwelled on sports and leisure.<sup>38</sup> It is interesting to note that the French society (Renan's) had just gotten rid of serfdom through the French Revolution. Still cherishing it, he then turned towards non-Europeans. Equally worthy of note is the fact that French kings and absentee landlords prior to the French Revolution also told the labouring and dying population that they were invested with special powers from God to rule over them.

In *Kimbo*, Quince Duncan addresses the problems of the black populace, descendants of Jamaican migrant workers. Kimbo's fate evokes discrimination, perjury and victimization. Through the omniscient narrator, we learn that Kimbo is arrested and jailed, falsely accused of actively taking part in the kidnapping of El Barrigón. Witnesses falsely testify against him, including a priest. One of those bearing false witness later regrets his action, confessing: "Porque ahora me doy cuenta que en realidad nadie le vio allí: solo vieron un negro"<sup>39</sup> (Duncan: 140). Kimbo sacrifices his life for a crime committed by others, because of the tone of his skin. One man affirms that Kimbo is targeted because he is a successful Blackman, something not welcome in the eyes of society: "Sabemos muy bien que lo quieren tumbar y es que ese muchacho está ya en la cumbre y es negro y eso les molesta"<sup>40</sup> (Duncan : 49). Kimbo, by being black, is an 'other' and that is why he is 'scapegoated'. Dark skin in this society seems to suggest poverty, laziness, lack of intelligence and primitive; and Kimbo, though black, doesn't possess these.

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<sup>38</sup> Ernest Renan. *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*. Paris : Michel Lévy et Frères. 1875 (e-book) <http://archive.org/details/a605975000renauoft>

<sup>39</sup> Translation: Because now I realise that actually nobody saw him there: all they saw was a Blackman.

<sup>40</sup> Translation: We are fully aware that they want to bring him down and it is because this guy is already at the top and is black. That pisses them off



In *Une Tempête*, colour line based otherness can be perceived in the relationship between Prospero and the Royal entourage on one hand and Caliban on the other. Prospero, in a private conversation with his ‘favoured slave’ Ariel, assures the latter that Caliban is the greater enemy compared to those who exiled him from his dukedom: “[...] Caliban, voilà l’ennemi. Quant aux gens du vaisseau, mes sentiments à leur égard ont changé [...], ce sont gens de ma race et de haut rang ”<sup>41</sup>(Césaire: 29). Prospero, in the twinkle of an eye, forgives the very people who caused him and his daughter misery by banishing him from his dukedom, but swears to crush him that welcomes him with open hands to his island. He can easily forgive Antonio and Alonso because they are his ‘brothers’ and are liable to mistakes just like him. But Caliban, the brute, the ‘other’, can’t be forgiven. This is further compounded in the scene where Caliban and Ferdinand are given work to do by Prospero. He relieves Ferdinand of his task but compels Caliban to complete both assignments (Césaire: 55). As he puts it, Ferdinand has worked enough for a day. This is to send a direct message to Caliban that he is not like Ferdinand, for he is the ‘other’ so has to work without complaining. Aimé Césaire, through these instances, decries nepotism and discrimination, brought about by difference in skin colour.

Nicolás Guillén, in his ballad, attempts to look at the merits brought about by difference. The narrator acknowledges the difference between his two grandfathers: “Pie desnuda, torso petreo / los de mi negro; / pupilas de vitrio antartica, / los de mi blanco!”<sup>42</sup> (Guillén: 1. 9-12). Despite these differences, he lauds his two grandfathers, for they put their differences aside and carry on with life in harmony. The author seems to discourage the tendency of humans focusing more on what makes them look different than on their inherent sameness.

The above instances from Kincaid, Duncan, Césaire and Guillén are instances of colour line based otherness. While the first three stigmatize differences and use them as motif for discrimination, the fourth (Guillén) does the contrary. He, through the narrator, sees goodness in sameness. These authors live in a multiracial society, as opposed to authors from the African continent, who, through their works, highlight an otherness that is not colour line based. One mostly notices socially constructed otherness when reading works of writers from the African

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<sup>41</sup> Translation: Caliban is the enemy. As for those in the ship, my feelings towards them have changed [...] they are people of my race and of high social standing

<sup>42</sup> Translation: Bare feet, stony torso of my black (grandfather); Antarctic glass pupils of my white (grandfather).

continent. It is interesting to notice the compartmentalization of this phenomenon. Even amongst the oppressed, the marginalized, the discriminated against, there are different types of constructed otherness, real or imagined. However, it has less noticeable impact upon the victims like colour line otherness, because of its dynamism, as explained above.

In Kourouma's *Les Soleils des Indépendances*, a close look at the relationship between Balla and the other elders of Horodougou reveals socially constructed otherness. The narrator describes Balla as a well-respected fetish in Horodougou, in charge of protecting the royal family. However, the reader is informed that all the elders are Muslims, except Balla. He is what the others call 'cafre', a pagan who does not worship Allah. When Fama goes to pray over the graves of his parents at the village cemetery, accompanied by Diamourou the griot and other elders, Balla keeps a hundred metre distance behind and waits for them. He is treated as an 'other', not part of them as far as religion is concerned. There seems to be some kind of understanding between them because this otherness does not lead to any confrontation. Balla does not complain.

In Béti's *Mission Terminée*, the villagers around Vimili consider themselves elite and privileged because they are nearer the district headquarters, hence nearer the colonial administrators, hence more 'civilized'. Bikokolo refers to villagers from Kala as "péquenots" (Béti: 14)<sup>43</sup> because of their long distance from the nearest colonial post. Medza even echoes this otherness when he arrives in Kala and finds the youth practicing an old type of sports that their village no longer practiced. He also claims that they (Kala villagers) still danced 'assiko', a primitive dance. Being a product of his village, Medza takes on the views and beliefs of his kinsmen in the construction of others. He considers his kinsmen more 'civilized' than the villagers of Kala.

In Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, George, Cocoa's husband, visits his in-laws in Willow Springs and finds it so different from the American society he grew up in. These islanders have a way of their own, are mostly self-sufficient and are not part of mainland America's rational, scientific and capitalist society. George's belief systems are challenged, as Daphne Lamonte puts it: "George's empirical mind doesn't see the value in herbalism or in a wooden bridge that must

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<sup>43</sup> Translation: Bumpkins.

be rebuilt after every major storm.”<sup>44</sup> George only comes to see meaning in the ways of the islanders when he dies, since his narrative voice is heard from his grave. His otherness is largely due to the fact that he is an orphan raised in a foster home, which of course inculcated nothing but strict ‘mainstream’ American values, quintessentially different from the ways of the islanders.

Reading Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* one comes across a dilemma which can neither comfortably fit in the first nor second category of otherness explicated above; the belief in castes. In a flashback, we are informed by the narrator how Obi meets and falls in love with Clara on the ship that brings them back to Nigeria after their studies. After going out together for a while he makes up his mind to marry her. However things take a different turn when Obi is told by his kinsmen in Lagos that he can’t marry Clara despite her education and beauty, because she is the daughter of an outcast and therefore an outcast in the eyes of the Umuofia people. He ignores them and goes to his village to break the news to his parents, only to be told by his father, a retired catechist, that tradition forbade him from getting married to a girl like Clara. It is interesting to note that being a catechist; Obi’s father had shunned Umuofia tradition to serve God. Obi’s ailing mother takes the same stand and even warns him that if he must marry Clara, he will have to wait until she dies because if he doesn’t, then she will die of shock. Clara’s being an outcast (osu) stems from the fact that her ancestors had been dedicated to serving a god, thereby neither they, nor their generations to come, could marry with members of mainstream society (Achebe: 133). From the point of view of the Umuofia people, this was a tradition that had been passed from generation to generation and nothing Clara or her family did could alter the situation. This resonates colour line based otherness because Clara did not choose to be born into that family and is of the same tribe as Obi. They speak the same language and share the same values but for this belief in ‘osu’. Achebe seems to be questioning the essence of this belief and leaves it open, since the novel ends with neither Clara nor Obi getting married.

The analysis of otherness above falls into two categories, but the authors touch on different aspects of otherness. Kincaid looks at the relation between white and black women in

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<sup>44</sup> Daphne Lamothe. “Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*: Bridging Roots and Routes”, *African American Review* Vol. 39, 1 / 2, 4-1-2005, p. 155–169.

Dominica, Duncan looks at perjury and victimization, Césaire touches on nepotism and discrimination, Guillén looks at the advantages of looking past differences. Béti and Kourouma look at otherness based on ‘civilization’ and religion respectively, Naylor touches on otherness based on difference in lifestyle and worldview while Achebe questions the Umuofia traditional belief in *osu*. Luis Palés Matos’s work doesn’t dwell on the dynamics of otherness, since it centres on the various dances and traditions on the African continent and in the diaspora.

### 3.4 CIVILIZATION

Civilization comes from Latin ‘civilis’, meaning citizen, and has been used to mean different concepts through history. Civilization got its modern connotation as the attainment of maturity or civility in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. In *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1762), Adam Ferguson writes: “Not only the individual advances from infancy to manhood, but the species itself from rudeness to civilization.”<sup>45</sup> Evolutionists and cultural anthropologists subsequently classified different societies and cultures linearly; defining phases and states through which all human groups passed. American Lewis Henry Morgan later on purported that it can’t be denied that portions of the human family still existed in a state of savagery and barbarism while other portions were actually in a state of civilization.<sup>46</sup> Little wonder why slave holders claimed the Negro was like an infant and should be treated as such, because he has not fully attained the Western level of reasoning, and never would, as purported by George Fitzhugh (1854): “no one will differ with us who thinks as we do of the Negro’s capacity, and we might argue till doomsday in vain, with those who have a high opinion of the Negro’s intellectual capacity.”<sup>47</sup> All these views from experts and men of ‘authority’ contributed to ‘established knowledge’ back then. It gradually became the view of mainstream society that there was need for primitive societies to be civilized, and this cleared the path for inhuman acts like slavery and colonialism.

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<sup>45</sup> Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, London: Millar and Cadell, 1762. 25 Apr. 2012. The Online Library of Liberty.

<sup>46</sup> Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000.

<sup>47</sup> George Fitzhugh. “The Universal Law on Slavery”, 20 November 2011. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h3141t.html>

However, many scholars, dating as far back as the sixteenth century, have had a different view on civilization. Jean Jacques Rousseau, in his work on education, *Emile* (1796), affirms that civilization, more rational and socially driven, is not fully in accordance with human nature. In his book, *Being after Rousseau* (2002), Richard Velkley reads Rousseau's views on civilization in the following words: "human wholeness is achievable only through the recovery of or approximation to an original pre-discursive or pre-rational unity."<sup>48</sup> This seems to contradict the views of Ferguson and Morgan, who saw civilization as a linear evolution of a given society, from a primitive, nature-bound state to a sophisticated, socio-technological state. Necessity being the mother of invention, the basic needs of one society may not necessarily be those of another. In contrast therefore, western civilization, though more rational and successful concerning material progress, is seen as un-natural and leads to vices of social life such as guile, hypocrisy, envy and avarice.

Professor Tim Ingold, a social anthropologist in the University of Aberdeen, strongly holds that civilization is a term appropriated by the West and constructed to suit their propaganda. Using the concept of differentiation, the West claimed their culture was different from and more advanced (civilized) than those of 'barbaric' and 'primitive' peoples. He argues:

Through culture people adapt to their environment in non-genetic ways; that is people in different environments will often have different cultures [and therefore] since humans acquire culture through learning, people living in different places or different circumstances may develop different cultures.<sup>49</sup>

To Ingold therefore, there is no echeloning of cultures from primitive to civilized because all cultures are contemporaries. A careful reading of the texts under study seems to reveal a connection between them when it comes to the primitive/civilized discourse. Through the narrator and at times characters, one always discerns a sublime discourse between 'primitive' and 'civilized' lifestyles as constructed by western society. Consciously or unconsciously, these writers dwell on this distinction that their ancestors and even they have had to shoulder for a long

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<sup>48</sup> Richard Velkley, *Being After Rousseau*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> Tim Ingold, "Lecture 2: Culture vs Civilization", 7 June 2012.

[www.abdn.ac.uk/.../Lecture%202.%20Nature%20vs%20Culture.ppt](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/.../Lecture%202.%20Nature%20vs%20Culture.ppt)

time. They, through their literature, seem to defend the lifestyle led by their ancestors and subtly oppose the western civilization discourse, the “received” norms of western ‘ideal and universal civilization’.

In *Une Tempête*, Aimé Césaire challenges the colonialist’s civilising mission. Caliban looks at civilization with much scepticism. When Prospero gibes him about having saved him from barbarism, Caliban categorically retorts that Prospero has taught him nothing but his language, which he uses to subjugate and enslave him. He further consolidates his opinion on Prospero’s civilizing mission when he declares: “Ça me fait rigoler ta ‘mission,’ ta ‘vocation!’ Ta vocation est de m’emmerder!”<sup>50</sup>(Césaire: 89) Caliban says this because he has not seen the change Prospero’s mission has brought him, except that he has gone from a natural, free master of himself to a slave. He prefers to answer Prospero in his language (Uhuru! – Freedom!), and prefers to be called X, saying his name reminds him of his subjugation by Prospero through his civilizing mission. He lives in harmony with nature: tree, birds, mountains, rain, and reassures Prospero that Sycorax his mother is alive though he (Prospero) thinks her dead. From Caliban’s retorts, one clearly sees an oppressed individual who is not ready to completely reject his ideals, lifestyle and world view to whole-heartedly embrace another.

The villagers of Kala in Bédi’s *Mission Terminée* are presented by the narrator as hunters and farmers. During one of his evening meetings, Medza, in an attempt to marvel his audience, talks about the wonders of western civilization and describes New York, the skyscrapers and the modern lifestyle (Bédi: 51). To his surprise, the villagers are not moved. He then decides to talk about Russia and their farming system, which produces the desired effect. They all give a cry of admiration and one of them declares: “Dans le fond, ces gens-là nous ressemblent. Ils s’aiment les uns les autres et ils se tiennent les coudes”<sup>51</sup> (Bédi : 52). It is worthy to note that these villagers admire realities that resemble theirs and shun those that don’t. Bédi underscores the fact that Westerners decided on and imposed what they thought was best for the colonized, even though it was in a guise to exploit and oppress them. This point can never be overemphasized.

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<sup>50</sup> Translation: Your mission makes me laugh! Your mission is to piss me off!

<sup>51</sup> Translation: Basically, these people are like us. They love and help each other.

We learn from the narrator in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* that Obi returns to Nigeria after spending four years in London, with much relief. He gets very elated during his welcome ceremony, when villagers gather in Isaac Okonkwo's compound to welcome his illustrious son. Reflecting on the way he is treated while in London, he wishes those who look down on the Ibos and other Africans were present, as he puts it:

Let them come to Umuofia now and listen to the talk of men who made a great art of conversation. Let them come and see men and women and children who knew how to live, whose joy of life had not yet been killed by those who claimed to teach other nations how to live (Achebe: 50).

Obi is directly challenging the primitivism/civilized discourse of the colonialists. He savours the ways and lifestyle of his people with pride. As one would put it, he passes through London but London doesn't pass through him. Villagers are astounded when they learn of a consequence of colonialism from Mr. Ikedi, a city dweller, that a man could not go to his neighbour's wedding unless he was given "one of those papers on which they wrote R.S.V.P."<sup>52</sup> (Achebe: 10). They are so astounded because it goes against their worldview, their way of living, their civilization. Achebe, through these instances, satirises the Western notion of primitive/civilized; what is right and what is wrong.

Xuela, in Kincaid's novel, looks at the education she receives in school with suspicion. She claims her being taught western civilization is in a bid to belittle her, so that she always looks at Europeans with awe. She laments: "it was only that this history of peoples that I would never meet – Romans, Gauls, Saxons, Britons, the British people – had behind it a malicious intent: to make me feel humiliated, humbled, small" (Kincaid: 59). Kincaid hereby questions the imposition of western culture to non-European Dominicans. A close look at Xuela's suspicion leads one to infer that she would have loved to be taught about Dominica, Dominicans and her potentials as an alternative, instead of being taught realities that have no direct bearing with her existence.

In Kourouma's *Les Soleils des Indépendances*, western civilization comes to the limelight when Séry points an accusing finger to the French and western civilization. During colonialism,

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<sup>52</sup> An invitation card.

the French use Senegalese and Dahomeans to rule the locals in Côte des Ebènes, because they are deemed civilized and have French nationality. Feeling inferior and humiliated, these locals torture and forcefully send away these ‘French’ intruders, at the dawn of independence. Kourouma, through his book, seems to question the French civilising mission and its devastating effects on the colonized.

In Naylor’s *Mama Day*, Willow Spring has a lifestyle of its own, though just a bridge away from the United States of America. This explains the remarkable surprise expressed by George, a New Yorker, when he visits the island. He seems to consider Willow Springs as ‘lost in civilization’, instead of looking at it as having ‘ways of its own’. Miranda lives a simple life, communicating with nature and her ancestors. She considers ‘Willow Springers’ dwelling beyond the bridge as delving in the ways of the ‘civilized world’ and alienating themselves from their roots. That’s what she thinks of Sue Henry, Reema’s offspring, who goes to a fancy school, settles beyond the bridge and forgets how to talk to folks. She even considers Cocoa her granddaughter as ‘too adulterated’ ever since she starts living beyond the bridge (Charleston and New York), because she has copied the ways of the ‘civilized world’. Miranda blames her vulnerability to Ruby’s spell on this acculturation. In presenting the villagers of Willow Springs and their distinct lifestyle, Naylor aims at the civilization discourse, proving that there can be a successful alternative to mainstream American civilization. She highlights man’s bond with nature and the apparent dangers of western civilization, which seems to completely relegate nature to the background.

However, Miranda doesn’t totally reject mainstream American culture but skilfully navigates between the two. She accepts it to the limit necessary. Being an herbalist, a traditional doctor, she works hand in gloves with Dr Brian Smithfield, who lives beyond the bridge, calling him to use his knowledge in modern medicine and medical instruments when the need arises. This is a clear indication of cultural tolerance and cohabitation (hybridity), which seems to be a better option than cultural domination and suppression. As Gilroy puts it, hybridity and intermixture of ideas are inescapable.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Gilroy 1993, p. ix.



Palés Matos, Guillén and Duncan also echo hybridity and syncretisation. In Palés Matos' "Danza Negra", the narrator, though of the Caribbean, lauds African tradition and dance, practised on the continent and in the diaspora. He blends African cultures with those of the Caribbean, as he links the dances and cultural performances in Mali, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and the Congo to those of Haiti, Martinique and other localities in the diaspora, hence an expression of Africanness as the title of this work suggests (Palés Matos: l. 22,29,30). The narrator in Guillén's poem defines himself from his black and white grandparents with their different ancestries unlike Xuela's father in Kincaid's novel, as seen in 3.3. He sees himself as a 'happy' blend of both, as he pictures his grandparents holding hands, singing and laughing (Guillén: l. 51-61). Quince Duncan, though a Costa Rican, taps from his African and Jamaican heritage. Kimbo, a black hardworking Costa Rican with Jamaican ancestry, is falsely accused, gets arrested, tortured and dies in jail because he is seen by the 'dominant' white Costa Rican society as upcoming and successful. He does not 'tow the line' he and blacks in general are supposed to; that is not aspiring for anything deemed 'white' such as wealth and status. Duncan seems to criticize the double standard nature of this society while advocating for tolerance, acceptance and possible merging of differences, be it skin colour, creed or culture.

In the works studied, western civilization and cultural intolerance are touched from different angles by different authors. Césaire, Bédié and Kourouma question the colonialist's civilising mission. This could be attributed to their being 'victims' of French colonisation, hence the policy of assimilation. Achebe looks at the civilized/primitive dichotomy that the West constructed in order to perpetuate their selfish interests. Naylor examines man's bond with nature while Kincaid questions Western imposed educational curriculum and its degradation of the Dominican. Palés Matos, Guillén and Duncan throw light on hybridity and syncretisation.

Aimé Césaire, in an interview, laments the Western categorical rejection of black civilization. In an analogy, he posits that 'Who am I?' is a question Descartes posed, and a reader of the French philosopher naturally understands such a question to be universal, and the subject who says 'I' here to stand for any human being. But when 'Who am I?' has been translated as 'Who are we?' everything changes especially when the 'We' have to defend themselves against a world which leaves no room for who or what they are because they are black folks in a world

where ‘universal’ seems to naturally mean ‘white’.<sup>54</sup> Césaire is lamenting cultural intolerance, stressing that we define ourselves from our heritage and experiences, which must not necessarily be subdued and another imposed on us. His reflections resonate fair cultural tolerance and exchange amongst peoples of the world. In a similar vein, London-based scholar and cultural critic, Ziuddin Sardar, in his foreword to the 2008 edition of Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White masks* (1952), affirms that the book is about the bitterness of those demonstrating against the Empire, and adds: “It is the anger of all whose cultures, knowledge systems and ways of being that are ridiculed, demonized, declared inferior and irrational, and, in some cases, eliminated.”<sup>55</sup> This view confirms Césaire’s cry on the West’s cultural intolerance as well as Rousseau’s view on culture and civilization.

In recent post-colonial discourse, the concept of culture has been problematized. Scholars no longer talk of a cultural centre, cultural history or cultural purity, which seem to be agents of nationalism and ethnic cleansing. Instead they look at culture as an arena in which peoples from the whole wide world, in one way or another do contribute. Homi K. Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), argues for hybridity, because it destabilizes cultural hegemony and empowers the ‘subaltern’. In the preface, he states: “A right to difference-in-equality can be articulated from the perspective of both national minorities and global migrants [...]”<sup>56</sup> This echoes the view that minorities in all societies ought to be treated as equals, and not stigmatised. Bhabha points out that “Culture [...] can be transformed from by the unpredictable and partial desire of hybridity [...]. The paranoid threat from the hybrid breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside.”<sup>57</sup> Cultural tolerance and exchange can therefore foster a healthy relationship amongst peoples in a community.

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<sup>54</sup> Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 15 Jan. 2012. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/negritude/>

<sup>55</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press, 2008, p. vi.

<sup>56</sup> Bhabha 1994, p. xvii.

<sup>57</sup> Bhabha 1994, p. 164-165.

### 3.5 TRADITION

As defined in 1.4.8 above, tradition is a belief, a ritual or an object passed down within a society, still maintained in the present, with origins in the past. It involves passing on information, beliefs and customs from generation to generation, by word or by example. Tradition can pertain to a family, a tribe or any defined society. Scandinavian countries (at least Sweden and Denmark) have a Christmas Eve traditional dinner whereas Cameroon has a traditional Christmas meal. This example is in a bid to stress the fact that traditions are found the world over, and mostly date far in the past. Some have explicit, convincing explanations while some don't. Its devotees just do it because those before them did the same thing. In African countries, especially in West Africa, griots play an important part in upholding the tradition of their society. A griot is a descendant of a designated family in charge of perpetuating the oral tradition and history of his village or tribe. They explain the symbolism behind each aspect of tradition, often with anecdotes.

One of the main objectives of this work is to show the Africanness (defined in 1.4.4) of studied authors through their works of literature, how the texts signify on each other through their reflection of African cultural heritage. And one of the main components of Africanness is African traditions, first exported to the diaspora during slavery. Though greatly discouraged in the slavery and colonial days, many aspects of African traditions survived and are very much practiced by Africans on the continent and in the diaspora. Many Africans pay respect to their ancestors and believe there is an everlasting bond between those living at the present and those who have gone ahead. They always implore their ancestors to guide them in their actions and the paths they follow.

Reading through the works selected for this study, one notices this veneration of ancestors. In Achebe's work, Obi Okonkwo's father, a staunch Christian, a catechist whose responsibility is imparting the new faith to converts, still believes in the power of ancestors. He tells Obi he cannot marry Clara because the ancestors willed it so, and even goes further to explain: "We are Christians, but that is no reason to marry an *osu*." (Achebe: 133) He fears reprimands from the ancestors if his son should dare go against tradition. His conversion to Christianity does not stop him from still respecting certain aspects of Umuofia tradition.

Malinkés in Kourouma's *Les Soleils des Indépendances* always consult their ancestors through the chief priest before taking any major decision and whatever the ancestors say is followed to the letter. Fama believes in his destiny because his ancestors had predicted the end of the Doumbouya dynasty when the sun will never set (electricity), the sons of slaves will be rulers (elected presidents), and every corner will be linked with ropes (phone lines) (Kourouma: 71). Seeing all these happen in his lifetime, coupled with his sterility and no prospects of having a successor, Fama realizes that he is the last ruler of the Doumbouyas.

In Naylor's *Mama Day*, Miranda and the inhabitants of Willow Springs venerate Sapphira Wade and the Day family keeps a close relation with their ancestors, especially Miranda, who constantly goes to 'the other place' to seek powers and wisdom to perform her herbalism. Xuela in Kincaid's novel, though without a mother and having estranged relations with her father, still attaches a lot of importance to her ancestors. When she becomes pregnant and escapes from the Labattes, she goes to her mother's people in the mountains, because she believes that is the only place she can find sanctuary. She incessantly strives to get into contact with her dead mother, whom she sees in her dreams every now and then. Caliban in Césaire's *Une Tempête* has a firm belief that his mother Sycorax still lives and manifests herself in the winds, rains and thunders, so does Yohannès-le-Palmipède in Bédi's *Mission Terminée*, who calls his father of blessed memories for guidance when he is to shoot an animal (Bédi: 84). Quince Duncan, Palés Matos and Nicolás Guillén also put a heavy emphasis on the theme of ancestors in their works. In "Balada de los Dos Abuelos", Guillén lauds his African and European ancestry, and their coming together to build a diverse society. These works, by virtue of the evocation of different aspects of African traditions, are signifying on each other. Matos pays tribute to traditional dances and the village setup while Duncan venerates the Samamfo (Duncan: 81) which, as he explains in the glossary section of his novel, is the heritage and spirit of ancestors.

Songs also play a vital part in African traditions. Songs accompany thoughts, actions and celebrations, mostly birth and death. The songs of slaves working in the fields were very popular and a lot has been written on that subject. Frederick Douglass, in his slave narrative, tells us that through songs, the slave drowns his sorrow and musters hope for an end to his suffering, as he writes: "The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them,

only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears.”<sup>58</sup> Most musical genres in North and South America (Blues, Spiritual, Rap, Jazz, R n’ B, Salsa, Merengue, Bachata, Coumbia and even Tango) owe their origins to slave songs and music exported from Africa during slavery.

In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy points out that music was an outlet through which slaves could express themselves, having been stripped of any agency, especially on the political, economic and social platforms. He stresses: “Music becomes vital at the point at which linguistic and semantic interdeterminacy/polyphony arise amidst the protracted battle between masters, mistresses, and slaves.”<sup>59</sup> This explains why the slave poured his entire thoughts and emotions in solos, because it was the only way out. To buttress his argument on the importance of music to the slaves and the black diaspora in general, Gilroy quotes Edouard Glissant:

It is nothing new to declare that for us music, gesture, dance are forms of communication, just as important as the gift of speech. This is how we first managed to emerge from the plantation: aesthetic form in our cultures must be shaped from these oral structures.<sup>60</sup>

This explains the presence of songs in most of the primary texts chosen for this thesis.

Caliban sings all the time he works, contemplating his present situation and giving praises to his ancestors and gods. He gives praises to Shango (Césaire: 35) and warns anyone who tries to play tricks with this all-present deity. Obi is welcomed to Umuofia with songs. Youths on their way from a ceremony, on hearing that Obi has arrived, also stop by, sing and dance, to the pleasure and delight of Obi (Achebe: 128). It is worth noting that there is a lot of spontaneity in most of these songs, as the singers are not invited well in advance. The most famous song in *Mission Terminée* is “La Complainte du petit Orphélin” sung by the youths of Kala, to the amazement of Medza (Béti: 103). As Edima explains, this song evokes the melancholy of loss, be it physical or emotional. Fama remembers his favourite childhood song on his way to the village after spending twenty years in the capital. Palés Matos’s poem “Danza Negra” is centred on singing and dancing as the core of African tradition. He describes some of the musical instruments used, like drums and flutes. Guillén also alludes to heavy African gongs

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<sup>58</sup> Douglass 1845, p. 18.

<sup>59</sup> Gilroy 1993, p. 74.

<sup>60</sup> Gilroy 1993, p. 7.

in his poem (Guillén: l. 14). Gongs are very popular musical instruments in west and central Africa.

African community and family structures are identically reflected in most of the works studied. Villages are ruled by chiefs, family relations are extended and second and third cousins are all considered brothers and sisters, as if they shared the same biological parents. There is respect for elders for they are considered the pillars of society and bearers of wisdom. There is a famous saying that goes thus: “What an elder sits and sees, a youth won’t see even while standing.”<sup>61</sup> There is a big sense of community and very little privacy, one man’s issue being that of the whole community.

When Niam’s wife runs to Kala in *Mission Terminée*, the village elders ‘put their heads together’ and decide to send Medza to Kala. Niam is not left alone to sort out his problems himself. Medza is sent to Kala and asked to live with his Uncle Mama due to ‘blood relationship’, as Mama puts it. He emphasizes its importance to Medza and urges him to leave half of the gifts he gets from his evening gatherings to him (Béti: 69). Medza quickly notices Uncle Mama’s subtle exploitation and feels disappointed with his uncle for as he puts it, he did not have to use the ‘blood relationship line’ to get a share of his gifts. Achebe emphasises the importance of kinsmen when an elder says: “If you stand a hundred pounds here where I stand, it will not talk. That is why we say that he who has people is richer than he who has money” (Achebe: 79). The sense of belonging to and actively participating in a community precedes that of being wealthy. In Kourouma’s novel, Fama’s cousin dies and he has to go to the village for the funeral. Malinkés in the capital get together and help make his journey a reality. In Naylor’s *Mama Day*, Parris gets threatened by the new Sheriff’s deputy from across the bridge, in a bid to “show off his badge while it was still shiny”. Inhabitants of Willow Springs tactfully join forces to give the officer a tough time, flattening his tyres and making him walk home in a storm. (Naylor: 80-81)

Symbolism has an important place in African traditions and it is believed that man’s life is a passage, from when he is born till when he dies, hence important stages of a man’s life are celebrated, the most being birth, excision/circumcision (for those who practise it), marriage,

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<sup>61</sup> Popular West African proverb.

child-bearing and death. Lacina's funeral (*Les Soleils des Indépendances*) is celebrated twice, the seventh and fortieth day funerals, according to Malinké tradition. It is believed that a dead person's spirit dwells among his people for seven days, then leaves to the land of the dead. After forty days, another ceremony is performed with many cattle slaughtered, to appease those gone ahead and implore them to welcome the spirit of the dead man into their world.

A cup of water or kola nut is offered to strangers as a sign of welcome and the stranger has to accept it, if he comes with good intent. Refusing will therefore mean the guest does not want to feel welcome, and steps will be taken to deal with the situation accordingly. In some cultures, you are handed a chalk and you have to draw three lines on the floor as a sign that you came peacefully. It is absolutely important to be at peace with your guest and knowing his state of mind beforehand. In Kourouma's *Les Soleils des Indépendances* Fama is offered a calabash of water when he arrives in his village. He first of all drinks half the content before he is told about the circumstances surrounding his cousin's death. In Achebe's novel, kinsmen come to welcome Obi when he goes to the village and kola is broken first before they settle and engage in conversation. In fact there is a popular saying in Ibo culture that "He who brings kola brings life." Miranda visits 'the other place' regularly and a lot of symbolism is attached to the family house built by Bascombe Wade. Whenever there is a spiritual problem needing a spiritual solution, Miranda goes to 'the other place'. The walking stick and ledger she hands to George to take to the chicken coop in order to save Cocoa are all full of symbolism, since the stick belonged to his father and the ledger to his great grandfather.

The theme of excision comes up when reading some of the works, with their own accompanying symbolism. As the narrator in *Les Soleils des Indépendances* puts it, excision marks the passage of a female from girlhood to womanhood and she who courageously goes through excision earns a lot of respect from the village community, after which she is 'given a husband'. To support this view, Jomo Kenyatta underscores the importance of excision and circumcision in the Kikuyu tradition in his book, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1965).<sup>62</sup> He informs his readers that it marks the passage from a child to adult and he who goes through circumcision proves himself worthy to make a family, build a homestead and defend the clan in times of war. Men who shy away from circumcision are treated like women. They take care of the village

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<sup>62</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, New York: Vintage Books, 1965, p. 104.

while the ‘real’ men are away and find it very difficult to marry, because neither a family nor a girl would want to have marital affairs with such a man who is not courageous enough.

As shown in the above analyses, the selected writers under study, in their various literary works, highlight different aspects of African tradition, among which veneration of ancestors is the most prominent. Césaire, Achebe, Bédi and Matos express the inescapability of the use of songs in this tradition. Naylor, Achebe and Bédi look at the various manifestations of communalism and strong family bond in African traditions, while Achebe, Naylor and Kourouma touch on symbolism. Kourouma, who comes from a tradition that attaches a lot of importance in excision, does not fail to highlight this issue in his novel.

One of the most striking traits of Africanness noticed in the works studied is the use of language. Though written in English, French and Spanish respectively, just two out of the nine works are written in ‘mainstream’ language without added peculiarities and these are *The Autobiography of my Mother* by Jamaica Kincaid and *Mission Terminée* by Mongo Bédi. Chinua Achebe and Ahmadou Kourouma both appropriate French and English respectively and use ‘West Africanised’ English and French to write their novels, a tradition that will later on be copied by some other younger authors. Aimé Césaire and the three Spanish authors, Quince Duncan, Luis Palés Matos and Nicolás Guillén, all use Creole<sup>63</sup> language in their works. Gloria Naylor makes significant use of African-American slangs and expressions in her novel. This can be translated as an attempt to authenticate their traditional realities and take it out of the centre-stage of imperialism. It is worth mentioning that as time goes on, due to the dynamics of hybridity and cultural crossroads, some aspects of African tradition have been modified and some even abandoned, just like any other set of traditional values in any part of the world. Excision and forced marriage are gradually being paid less attention to by more recent authors, though it may still exist in certain areas of the continent.

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<sup>63</sup> A language derived by mixing a parent language with other languages, for example Spanish and French creoles in the Caribbean.



### 3.6 NEO-COLONIALISM

A wave of independence, described as the ‘wind of change’ by Ian Smith<sup>64</sup> in the sixties, hit most African countries in the late fifties and the sixties. Colonial masters, under fierce pressure from colonized intellectuals, granted independence to their colonies and ‘officially’ withdrew from the socio-economic and political centre-stage of these countries. But as will be seen later, they were far from gone and till present, they exert full influence on the governments ‘they’ put in place. As post-colonial critics put it, post-colonialism can also be seen as a continuation of colonialism, albeit through different or new relationships concerning power and the control/production of knowledge. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write: “We use the term ‘post-colonial’ [...] to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to present day.”<sup>65</sup> Technically speaking therefore, post-colonialism is colonialism and neo-colonialism combined. The term neo-colonialism was first coined by Ghanaian Kwame Nkrumah in his book that decried western capitalism and globalization: “It is the sum total of [...] modern attempts to perpetuate colonialism while at the same time talking about ‘freedom’, which has come to be known as neo-colonialism.”<sup>66</sup>

The official end of colonialism in Africa gave rise to a new set of problems, some of which are unsolved till date. Frantz Fanon says in the colonized soul “an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its cultural originality.”<sup>67</sup> Most leaders put in place after colonialism had a very low sense of patriotism and those who had, like the late Kwame Nkrumah, were tactfully replaced by all means necessary. This led to an ineffective, very corrupt government in most countries, who had as first and second priorities to enrich themselves and satisfy the colonial master. In his book, Nkrumah makes a financial analysis of the loan forced on African countries with cut throat interest rates and realised that the West made substantial gains out of that ‘benevolent loan’ while the colonized remained ever crushed under the burden

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<sup>64</sup> First Prime Minister of Rhodesia, present day Zimbabwe.

<sup>65</sup> Bill Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*, London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965. 10 Dec. 2011, <http://politicalanthro.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/nkrumah.pdf>, p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> Fanon, (2008) p. 9.

of debt due to the draconian conditions placed on these debts. Traits of neo-colonialism are discernible in the works under study, as shall be analysed in the subsequent paragraphs.

*Les Soleils des Indépendances*, judging from its title, expresses the bitter disappointment independence brings, seen through the predicaments of the main character Fama. The narrator informs the reader that despite his abandoning trade to join forces with his countrymen and send the French out of Côte des Ebènes, Fama ends up having just a national identification card and a party card as reward. The government is so corrupt that there is little meritocracy. The steady practice of nepotism ensures that those who have ‘God fathers’ in high places could get a job. As if this is not enough, the government extorts money from the impoverished and unemployed citizens, forcing them to make regular contributions to the ‘Parti Unique’<sup>68</sup>, something Fama finds almost impossible to do. The capital city is visibly divided into two distinct sections, the ‘quartier nègre’<sup>69</sup> and the ‘quartier blanc’<sup>70</sup>, suggesting the presence and heavy influence of the West in general and the former colonial master in particular. The narrator reads Fama’s thought, when he bitterly reflects: “Partout, sous tous les soleils, sous tous les sols, les Noirs tiennent les pattes; les Blancs découpent et bouffant la viande et le gras.”<sup>71</sup>(Kourouma: 12). Fama is hereby referring to the stark difference in the standard of living between Whites and Blacks even after independence. While the white quarters is well constructed and glittering with skyscrapers, well tarred and having paved roads, the streets of the black quarters get inundated when it rains, and its inhabitants live in slums. Above all, it is forbidden to talk ill of the government in public and citizens, for fear that they might be reported, prefer to bear the pains in silence, as Fama puts it (Kourouma: 68). This is a strong indication of dictatorship. It would be futile not to consider the authorial intention of Ahmadou Kourouma or associate what he writes to his intention. Kourouma unequivocally attacks the government of “Côte des Ebènes” for being corrupt,

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<sup>68</sup> Translation: Single Party.

<sup>69</sup> Translation: black quarters.

<sup>70</sup> Translation: white quarters.

<sup>71</sup> Translation: Everywhere you go, under every sun of independence, blacks suck the bone while Whites feast on the flesh.

irresponsible and oppressive. It is worth noting that Ahmadou Kourouma got thrown in jail for opposing the Ivorian government in 1963, as mentioned in an article by Jean Ouédraogo.<sup>72</sup>

In *No Longer at Ease*, Obi returns from England with a vow to be part of the upcoming Nigerian civil servants who will change the past and rid the country of its corrupt civil servants. No sooner does he get a job than he starts facing pressure from home and adopts a very ostentatious lifestyle, which leads him to the very vice he had intended to shun, corruption. He also faces the challenge of upholding the ideals of national unity, since his tribesmen always prefer speaking to him in Ibo in the office, because they won't want Obi's non-Ibo colleagues to understand their conversation. Independence brings acute hybridity in African societies, since those who take over administrative positions try to copy the lifestyle of colonial masters, without realising that it won't be easy because they are from a culture different from that of the West. Mr Green makes this clear when he addresses Obi about his yearly insurance premium: "It is, of course, none of my business really. But in a country where even the educated have not reached the level of thinking about tomorrow, one has a clear duty" (Achebe: 95). Just like he predicts, Obi falls short of money to renew his yearly car insurance premium when the time comes. Without stigmatizing hybridity, it would be reasonable to adopt a gradual and realistic adjustment of one's worldview and ways, instead of delving into a lifestyle to 'impress' other people. This echoes the worries of the lady in *Kala (Mission Terminée)* who expresses worries over the future of their educated kids completely taking to the ways of the colonial master. Copying 'received' lifestyles and trying to live beyond one's means is one of the root causes of corruption, misappropriation and dishonesty in contemporary African society, as seen in *No Longer at Ease*.

Xuela in *The Autobiography of my Mother* notices that hatred breeds hatred and cruelty breeds cruelty. In school, her Methodist trained teacher talks to them and treats them cruelly, because that is how she was treated by the 'master'. Just as the British robbed Dominicans of their treasures and enslaved them, so does Xuela's father, in a bid to erase his tedious past, use his position of government official to extort money from vulnerable citizens, most of the time throwing them in jail. Xuela also notices the brainwashed mentality that British occupation

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<sup>72</sup> Jean Ouédraogo, "Introduction to Dossier Kourouma", *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2007, p.77-80, Indiana University Press.

causes on the people of Dominica, seen through acculturation and power/knowledge. Dominicans come to realize that the ideal in life is acting British if you cannot become British because of the tone of your skin. This can be seen in the lifestyle of those in Roseau, who have a penchant for English silk, English coffee and English cocoa (Kincaid: 142).

Reading through Quince Duncan's novel *Kimbo*, one discerns ills in Costa Rican society brought forth by colonization. There is racism, corruption and oppression in contemporary society. When the tragic hero Kimbo is falsely arrested, as the narrator informs the reader, the government puts pressure on the prosecutor to get him to confess as soon as possible, because the alleged kidnapped victim, El Barrigón, is an important personality in the eyes of society. He is tortured and ends up losing his life, because of scape-goatism, which echoes the corrupt and discriminatory nature of the Costa Rican society. To the government, it is not important to follow the course of law and equity; it is important to produce a scapegoat as soon as possible. The inhumane actions of government is a direct consequence of the iron fists the colonialists previously used, thus confirming Xuela's view that hatred breeds hatred, and by extension cruelty breeds cruelty.

Going through *Mission Terminée*, the reader will conclude that the power relations instituted and enforced by colonial administrators are still recognized today, long after independence. The 'chef de canton' (District Head) appointed by the colonialists is feared and detested in Medza's village. Encouraged and backed by the administration, he is served by his people, instead of serving his people, as Medza puts it: "Le Chef de canton de chez nous était une sorte de vieux vicieux [...] adulé par l'administration coloniale qui l'avait nommé [...] à laquelle il obéissait comme un robot idéal, redouté de tous par suites des trahisons à l'époque des travaux forcés"<sup>73</sup> (Béti: 17). The district head, in complicity with the colonial administration, enriches himself at the expense of the villagers, which he arrays for forced labour. This same power relation goes on today, as one sees heads of government, protected by former colonial masters, being corrupt and extorting the populace, for the benefit of themselves and their masters.

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<sup>73</sup> Translation: Our District Head was old and vicious. Supported by the colonial administration that put him in power [...] which he obeyed like an ideal robot, feared by all following his betrayals during forced labour.

*Une Tempête* highlights self-interest, a prominent woe of neo-colonialism. Stéphano and Trinculo decide to help Caliban oust Prospero the tyrant. On their way to oust Prospero, they see second hand clothes nicely displayed along their path. Not knowing that it is part of Prospero's plan to forestall their moves, they fall on these clothes and even start fighting over them, to the disappointment of Caliban, who exclaims: "Laisse donc cela, imbécile, je te parle de la dignité à conquérir et non de défroques à emporter!"<sup>74</sup> (Cesaire: 79). This incident translates to the geopolitical relations between former colonial masters and their colonies. Time and again it has been proven that Western intervention in former colonies is first for their interests, not the interest of the local populace.

In so far as post-colonialism encompasses slavery and colonialism following the definition of Ashcroft et al., it is interesting to examine the relation between slave descendants living in Willow Springs and institutions such as the US government and big corporations in Naylor's *Mama Day*. These inhabitants are self-governed, as they have no mayors and congressmen. They are largely auto-sufficient and only call in medical assistance in rare and necessary cases, Miranda taking care of most health problems. They work hand in gloves to repel any external threats to their lifestyle and well being, such as the deputy sheriff from across the bridge's attempted aggression on Parris, analysed in 3.5. While accepting commodities that they deem useful, they look at mainland US influence with scepticism. They repeatedly say no to big corporations willing to invest on the island. They jointly build the bridge that links their island to mainland USA. Through these descriptions, Gloria Naylor seems to put the dangers of post-colonialism and the heavy influence of ex-colonial (and slave) masters in check. The inhabitants of Willow Springs, while not cutting the external world out, create and live their own reality, shunning heavy influences from across the bridge.

Traits of post-colonialism found in the works under study are varied. Kourouma looks at the disillusion brought by independence, Achebe looks at corruption, Kincaid looks at hatred resulting from colonial subjugation, Duncan touches on racism, corruption and oppression, Béti explores power relations and Césaire looks at self interest. The works of Palés Matos and Guillén do not significantly touch on post-independence, because one doesn't come across the dynamics of colonizer/colonized.

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<sup>74</sup> Translation: Put it down, fool. I speak of dignity to conquer and not thrifths to take away.

As Kwame Nkrumah says:

The essence of neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.<sup>75</sup>

Such is the relations between the West and her former colonized countries. An outsider will blame it on the corrupt and dictatorial governments (which of course, they are), but will fail to see those who pull the strings behind the curtain. History has it that radical, non-complying African leaders have always met the same fate, in the likes of Kwame Nkrumah, Thomas Sankara, Sékou Touré, Félix Um Nyobe, Patrice Lumumba, to name a few.

As explained by Ashcroft et al., post-colonial literatures “emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their difference from the assumption of the imperial centre.”<sup>76</sup> Post-colonial novels challenge all the established truths laid down by the colonialists to further their selfish goals. This explains why writers of African origin and descent took up the challenge to express their plight from their own point of view, and question the alleged ‘civilizing mission’ of the imperialists. Even after the abolition of slavery and the granting of independence to colonized states, African writers as well as those of the diaspora play the role of vanguards, since they denounce the injustices and marginalization perpetrated by the ‘self’ and the dictatorship of the ‘puppet’ governments put in place by former colonial masters commanding from the backstage.

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<sup>75</sup> Nkrumah 1965, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Ashcroft et al. (1989) *ibid.* p.2.

### 3.7 RELIGION

Religion is “human beings’ relation to that which they regard as holy, sacred, absolute, spiritual, divine, or worthy of especial reverence.”<sup>77</sup> Religion deals with what humans regard as sacred and spiritual, be it tangible or intangible, and its reverence, in view of dealing with the challenges of daily life as well as concerns over life after death. Religion is as varied as diverse in different areas and different cultures of the world. While some are monotheist, others are polytheist, but all nonetheless have the same goal. Humans have been practising and worshipping their religions, as they see fit in their belief systems, from time immemorial. African clans and ethnicities have also practised different types of religions. These (African) religions generally believe in one supreme God, maker of the universe. They then have many deities that take care of various aspects of life. In most West African religions, there is a deity for rain, fertility (both humans and the soil), thunder, wealth, just to name a few.<sup>78</sup>

The coming of European missionaries and subsequent colonizers saw a steady decline of African religion. Missionaries strongly condemned these religions as heathen because of the worship of symbols and statues. Little did Africans know that the ‘new religion’ also worshipped symbols and statues and was just another brand of religion and not one specially sent by the Almighty to save the world, as the missionaries claimed. The Online Etymology Dictionary traces the word ‘heathen’ to old English to mean ‘not Christian or Jewish’.<sup>79</sup> This seems to suggest that Christianity and Judaism are the only two ‘recognized’ religions of the world. Whoever practiced any religion which is none of the above was a heathen, someone who did not know God. These missionaries did not seek to know the rationale behind African religions for they already had the preconceived idea that there was nothing the African did that ‘made sense’ at all. They boldly declared that those who did not adhere to the new religion shall not be saved, shall burn in the eternal fire of hell, implying therefore that all who had ‘unfortunately’ died before their arrival were going directly to hell. Many adhered, but some did not, and African

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<sup>77</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 25 April 2012.  
<http://www.britannica.com/ludwig.lub.lu.se/bps/search?query=Religion>

<sup>78</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica Online 25 April 2012.  
<http://www.britannica.com/ludwig.lub.lu.se/EBchecked/topic/973712/African-religions>

<sup>79</sup>[http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed\\_in\\_frame=0&search=heathen&searchmode=none](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=heathen&searchmode=none)

religions are still practised today in Africa and the diaspora. This controversy in religion is echoed in the works studied. While some dwell on African religions and ancestors, others dwell on the friction created with the coming of western religion, and others still, dwell on the dilemma faced by Africans who combine two or more belief systems commonly known as syncretism. These three categories shall be closely looked at in the subsequent paragraphs.

The theme of religion and worship is evoked in Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* when Caliban, even under bondage, believes in and reveres Shango (Césaire: 35). Shango is a deity traced to the Yorubas and Oyos of West Africa, believed to be the god of fire, lightning and thunder. Shango is generally invoked when one honestly feels unjustly treated and seeks revenge. It is believed Shango is just and won't carry out revenge if no wrong was done to the first party. In West Cameroon, it is generally believed that Shango, once invoked, has to cause havoc thus if it finds out your cause was not worthy enough to seek revenge, it comes back to you.<sup>80</sup> Caliban believes in Shango and knows that justice shall one day be rendered through Shango's intervention. Another African deity mentioned in the book is Eshu. In the introductory chapter of *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates dwells on the trickster figure Esu-Elegbara and looks at the diverse ways he is represented in different cultures in the coast of Western Africa, in the Caribbean, Central and South America as well as in the United States. Eshu is Césaire's version of Esu-Elegbara expounded by Gates in his book. Aimé Césaire signifies on the trickster figure and uses him as a buffer to Prospero's magic. In Act 3 scene 3, during the celebration of the marriage between Ferdinand and Miranda, Eshu makes a forceful appearance, which leaves Prospero doubting the potency of his own magic (Césaire: 69). Eshu reprimands Prospero for inviting other gods to bless the wedding and leaving him out. Through his songs, which cause a stir in the banquet hall, Eshu reminds Prospero that he is not a god to be held in low esteem.

Quince Duncan, like Césaire, puts a lot of emphasis on African religion in his novel *Kimbo*. He alludes to the Samamfo and Nyambe. The Samamfo is the spirit of the ancestors, still dwelling among the living and guiding their every action. In many African religions, it is believed that the dead are not gone. Their spirit guides their offspring and this offspring in turn honours and reveres them in a bid to acknowledge their presence and guidance. In the preface to

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<sup>80</sup> The author of this work hails from West Cameroon.



the third part of the novel, Duncan writes: “Yo he adorado a Nyambe”<sup>81</sup> (Duncan: 81). Nyambe, spelt Nzambe in the Congo, is God the creator in the religions of central southern Africa around the Zambezi region. Nyambe is believed to have created man, and then left him behind and gone up to the skies, due to man’s insubordination. Duncan through his writing shows attachment to his ancestral beliefs and roots.

Ancestral worship is a major theme in Naylor’s *Mama Day*. Miranda, in order to help Bernice conceive, has to take her to ‘the other place’, as she forewarns her: “But if it turns out that we gotta go to the other place together in the end, what happens there we gotta keep a secret” (Naylor: 87). Miranda keeps close contact with her ancestors, who envision her and help her solve daily problems affecting Willow Springs. When Ruby, in a rage of jealousy poisons Cocoa, thinking that she is having an affair with her fiancé Junior Lee, Miranda works for days and nights in the other place, looking for a solution, until she finds one. She cures her granddaughter through the intercession of George her husband, who ‘sacrifices’ his life so that his wife can live, as Miranda tells Abigail: “It’s gonna take a man to bring her peace” (Naylor: 263). In the likes of the deity Shango, Miranda avenges Cocoa’s poisoning by sending a thunder that destroys Ruby’s house while she is inside. Miranda believes in the cosmos, and works in harmony with the mind and nature. When helping Bernice to conceive a baby, she asserts that she will have to put her in the right frame of mind for conceiving a baby before taking her to ‘the other place’ (Naylor: 96).

In Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of my Mother*, Xuela maintains her stepmother tries to poison her with a necklace. As she tells the reader, she secretly places the necklace around her stepmother’s dog’s neck and within twenty-four hours it goes mad and dies (Kincaid: 34–35). This is an evocation of voodoo, which can be traced back to West African Vodun, a religion practiced by the Fon and the Ewe. There is a belief in the creator and his subservient or deities, who intercede in human affairs. It is believed you can get to your enemies through an object, like in the case of the necklace. Voodoo has become so widespread that one identifies Haitian Voodoo, Louisiana Voodoo, Benin voodoo and many other versions in the Caribbean and South America. Xuela also claims her stepmother believes in Obeah, which is the reason why she puts her ailing son on the floor and not on the bed, for it is believed that he can be attacked from

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<sup>81</sup> Translation: I have worshipped Nyambe.

under the bed by spirits (Kincaid: 108). Alexander Giraldo, in his article titled “Obeah the Ultimate Resistance”, points out that modern historians believe that Obeah originated from the Ashanti and Koromantin tribes of West Africa on the Gold Coast, and that imported slaves introduced it to the Caribbean as early as the mid 17th century.<sup>82</sup> There is religious conflict because Xuela’s father, a Christian, does not believe in Obeah but has to give in because his wife insists their son must lie on the floor.

The narrator informs the reader that indigenous beliefs, the religion of the ‘defeated’, has been so crushed that they are forced to see reality differently. It is for this reason that Xuela is not believed most of the time when she recounts the story of his schoolmate who is lulled to the sea by a mermaid because Christianity forbids folks from believing in spirits (except the Holy Spirit of course). She believes in shape shifting and affirms that at night, she can identify each noise, separating the real from the unreal, the screeches of a bat or someone who has taken the shape of a bat, for example (Kincaid: 42). As mentioned above, some writers underscore syncretism, which is the fusion of different belief systems by an individual or a group of people. While some indigenes embraced Islam or Christianity, they still pledged full allegiance to their traditional religion, most of the time covertly, thus practicing dual belief. They must have felt that what Islam or Christianity could not give them, their traditional religion would and vice versa.

In Kourouma’s *Les Soleils des Indépendances*, Fama and his wife Salimata both practise syncretism. Salimata prays five times a day and gives offerings, as a true Muslim should. Not having what she very much longs for, she goes to the marabou, uses herbs and makes traditional incantations in the hope of getting pregnant, thus going against the teachings of Islam (Kourouma: 19). Ouédraogo the bus driver transporting Fama and other passengers to the north seeks guidance and protection from both Allah and his ancestors and deities: “il murmurait mille incantations où se mêlaient le nom d’Allah et les manes”<sup>83</sup> (Kourouma: 59). Fama laments the duplicity of Malinkés that he terms “faussétés Malinkés.”<sup>84</sup> Every Malinké appears a Muslim and

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<sup>82</sup> Alexander Giraldo, “Obeah the Ultimate Resistance”, 10 January 2012, <http://scholar.library.miami.edu/slaves/Religion/religion.html>

<sup>83</sup> Translation: He murmured a thousand incantations in which one could hear Allah’s name as well as those of the spirits.

<sup>84</sup> Translation: Malinké hypocrisy.

behaves like one. However, each of them still consults fetishes and worship local deities. In Togobala, there is a strong belief in totems and they have two; the sacred hyena of the mountain called “l’Ancienne” and the sacred boa of the backwater called “Le Révérend du Marigot” (Kourouma: 114). These two totems seldom come to the village square but when they do, a sacrifice is offered them and the chief priest reads and interprets the message they bring. This message is then followed by the villagers to the letter, like the epidemic announced by the boa in 1919. Africans, instead of completely rejecting and fighting against the new religions, accepted them but then skilfully navigated between theirs and these new religions, which accounts for the prevalence of syncretism.

Chinua Achebe, in his very famous works like *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1964), takes a close look at the tension brought about by the coming of the ‘Whiteman’s’ religion. There is an ever present conflict between converts and those adamant to conversion. Such is the case with Obi’s father, an ardent Christian, a catechist, who tirelessly opposes the ‘heathen’ practices of his kinsmen, and calls it “religion of idols” (Achebe: 51-52). During Obi’s home coming gathering, he fiercely opposes a kinsman who talks about consulting the rain deity to withhold rain, saying believing in such a thing is like putting one’s head in a cooking pot (Achebe: 48). One man remarks about Isaac Okonkwo’s zeal in the new religion, saying: “He is not the only Christian we have seen [...] but it is like the palm wine we drink. Some people can drink it and remain wise. Others lose all their senses” (Achebe: 48). Isaac Okonkwo refuses to accept any reality that is not in line with the teachings of the Bible. He even goes as far as forbidding his wife from telling folk stories to the children, calling them “heathen stories” (Achebe: 58). Obi fails to tell a folk story when called upon by his teacher during an oral lesson and comes back home frustrated. He complains to his mother who then teaches him stories in hiding. Chinua Achebe, in evoking these conflicts between Christianity and Ibo religion, seeks to highlight the destabilization of traditional values and beliefs with the coming of missionaries and the colonial master. Not everybody attended seasonal rites and festivals any longer, and this helped disintegrate the Ibo society.

In Bédi’s *Mission Terminée*, the youth of Kala ridicule the Catholic religion on several occasions. Yohannès-le-Palmipede, while drunk, insists to be called Saint Yohannès de Kala. He

even goes further to baptize Pétrus-Fils-de-Dieu in ‘Catholic style’ when the latter acquiesces to his commands (Béti: 29). During a feast at Yohannès’s hut, the walls are with images of the Sacred Heart, the Crucifix and the Immaculate Conception (Béti: 91), all effigies used at the altar of the Catholic Church. These and other instances left out are aimed at satirising the religion of the missionaries, which gradually unveiled its double standard nature. Mongo Béti does not repeatedly include these detailed instances in his book by coincidence. Leaning on authorial intention, it is worth noting that Alexandre Biyidi Awala (alias Mongo Béti) was dismissed from a mission school at the age of fourteen, for questioning Catholic dogma.

Among the works studied, just the poems of Guillén and Palés Matos fail to allude to religion. There is a lot of interconnection between the various religions and gods evoked, be it by authors on the African continent or those in the diaspora, confirming Gates’ theory of Signifying and Gilroy’s black Atlantic discourse elucidated all along. Césaire evokes Shango and Eshu, Kincaid evokes Voodoo and Obeah and Duncan evokes Samamfo and Nyambe. Naylor dwells on ancestral worship and Achebe looks at the conflict between Ibo religions and Christianity. Kourouma looks at syncrecity practised by the Malinkés, which was and still is common in many different areas in Africa and the diaspora.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## SAMENESS AND DIFFERENCE

Chapter three of this work looked at how the selected works of writers of African origin and descent address major themes that suggest their interconnection and Africanness. It also looked at how these major themes are dealt with in the various works, suggesting patterns adopted by the various authors. Though these authors share a common heritage, however distant, a close look at the works reveal that there are both elements of sameness and difference among them, owing to many factors. Paul Gilroy stresses the importance of looking at black cultures in terms of similarities and dissimilarities. He points out:

[W]eighing the similarities and differences between black cultures remains an urgent concern [...]. Diaspora is still indispensable in focusing on the political and ethical dynamics of the unfinished history of blacks in the modern world.<sup>85</sup>

This chapter will dwell on elements of sameness and difference amongst the studied works and advance possible reasons to explain these phenomena.

### 4.1 ELEMENTS OF SAMENESS

The elements of sameness drawn from the analysis of the nine works studied will be grouped into five sub-categories: use of songs, overall tone, mode of expression, power relations and evocation of heritage.

#### 4.1.1 Use of Songs

The use of songs is a major narrative device in these works and a direct testimony of and pledge to the 'Africanness' of these writers. In most African traditions, songs are used to communicate

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<sup>85</sup> Gilroy 1993, p. 80.

emotions and state of mind. They serve as a medium through which one penetrates into the psyche of the character to know how he feels. As explained in chapter three, songs played a major role in helping slaves overcome their physical and mental torture and many songs today trace their origins back to colonial plantations. Songs are also widely sung during gatherings and ceremonies, a good example being when the griot intonates songs during Bakari's funeral. (Kourouma: 7). Many African peoples and ethnicities have always communicated through songs and this is vividly reflected in the works studied though more heavily present in the works of Césaire, Achebe and Palés Matos than the others.

In *Une Tempête*, Caliban laments his present state of subjugation by singing and imploring the god of thunder Shango while working (Césaire: 35). In *No Longer at Ease*, Obi's going to Umuofia to visit his parents and kinsmen is always marked by music and songs, one of them being "The Song of the Heart" (Achebe: 38). The poem of Palés Matos centres on music produced by different types of African instruments, such as the 'junjunes" (Matos: l. 7), which translates to the kora, ngoni and other musical instruments. The poem informs us that these instruments are played in a dance called "Mariyanda" (Matos: l. 14 and 32). These instances are a clear indication that the heritage of these writers is revealed through their works, and there is a connection, an Africanness between them, as established by Gates and Gilroy.

#### **4.1.2 Overall Tone**

The expression overall tone, as used in this work, describes the general attitude towards the expression of the various themes analysed in the nine works studied, what I also term echo. There is a noticeable sameness in the overall tone of these works. Generally, Africans have had quite a few hundred years of domination from slavery to colonialism, neo-colonialism and racial prejudice, for those in the diaspora. There is little doubt therefore that the works of these writers all echo different kinds of asphyxiating oppression and domination.

*Une Tempête* decries the usurpation of Caliban's island and his subsequent enslavement, *Mission Terminée* criticizes the French colonial administration and its effects on the indigenes, *Les Soleils des Indépendances* echoes the disillusion of the African with the coming of

independence, and the continuous presence of former colonial masters. *The Autobiography of my Mother*, through Xuela, examines the hopeless conditions of ‘the defeated’, as she puts it, alluding to Dominicans. *No Longer at Ease* looks at the conflicts brought about by the missionaries and colonialists. *Mama Day* celebrates the liberation of slaves from bondage by a slave woman, and the efforts of their descendants to fight against domination. *Kimbo* decries racial prejudice and persecution suffered by blacks in the Costa Rican society, “Danza Negra” evokes the nostalgia of the African traditional setup, due to the narrator’s spatial displacement, which of course is because of slavery. “Balada de los Abuelos” discourages racism and bigotry, by showing the positiveness in having mixed ‘black and white’ ancestries. This sameness in the works echoes the heritage of Africans both on the continent and in the diaspora.

#### 4.1.3 Mode of Expression

The mode of expression of these writers is also an indication of sameness. It is evident that these works are all written in different European languages (English, French and Spanish). However, each work, through its expression, reveals the socio-linguistic reality of its setting, and by extension the author, taking authorial intention into consideration. These works are not a hundred per cent faithful to the mainstream or received language used in writing them. As explained in 2.2.6, Ashcroft et al. hold that the colonized appropriates the colonizer’s language in his writing in order to challenge the latter and instigate literal and cultural redefinitions.<sup>86</sup>

The first instance of this appropriation of mainstream expressions is in the works of Caribbean authors, in what is often referred to as Creole languages. Professor Michel De Graft of Massachusetts Institute of Technology describes Creole languages spoken in the Caribbean as “linguistic by-products of the historical events triggered by colonization and slave trade in Africa and the ‘New World’”<sup>87</sup> Palés Matos (Puerto Rican), in his work, uses “El gran coco roco” (Matos: l. 7) for ‘the great African chief’. ‘Coco roco’ is not chief in Spanish, thus is a Creole word. In Césaire’s (Martinique) work, when Prospero calls Caliban, he answers “Uhuru”, to the

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<sup>86</sup> Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 77.

<sup>87</sup> Michel De Graft, “Topics in Linguistics: Creole Languages and Caribbean Identities”, June 23 2012, <http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/linguistics-and-philosophy/24-919-topics-in-linguistics-creole-languages-and-caribbean-identities-spring-2004/>

bafflement of the former, who asks, “Qu’est-ce que tu dis?” (Césaire: 24). ‘Uhuru’, which draws its origins from Swahili, means freedom. Duncan (Costa Rican with Jamaican ancestry) uses words like ‘Kimbo’ and ‘Samamfo’, which are not Spanish. He adds a glossary at the end of his novel to explain these expressions (Duncan: 153). He even signifies on the Esu-Elegbara legend, using Anansi the spider (Duncan: 118-119). Kincaid (American from Dominica) does not use many local expressions, but dwells lengthily on the dynamics of the French and English Patois (Creole languages). Xuela addresses her guardian ‘Ma Eunice’ (Kincaid: 12), which is the same form of expression used to address a mother who is not yours in Cameroon and other West African countries. Nicolás Guillén (Cuban) is the only Caribbean author among those used in this study, who does not significantly deviate from mainstream Spanish expression in his poem.

Gloria Naylor’s work is laden with African American expressions and slangs, the most striking being 18&23, meaning, among several possibilities, to outsmart someone or something. The omniscient narrator declares: “Sapphira was African-born, Bascombe Wade was from Norway, and it was the 18&23’ing that went down between them two put deed in our hands” (Naylor: 5). On the African continent, Achebe appropriates the English language while Kourouma and Bédi appropriate the French language. Achebe uses expressions like ‘ojare’, seen in: “ ‘Leave me, ojare’, she said, snatching her hand” (Achebe: 19). ‘Ojare’ is used when making an earnest request. Kourouma remains unfaithful to French as he expresses Malinké idioms in French, such as: “il n’avait pas soutenu un petit rhume”<sup>88</sup> (Kourouma: 4) for someone who dies and ‘charognard’ for a beggar. He also uses Malinké words like ‘Houmba!’, which is a form of greeting. Mongo Bédi expresses Bédi realities such as “La voix du tonnerre” (Bédi: 15) to describe Medza’s education as his armoury. He also expresses the extended family reality when Oncle Mama expounds the “communauté du sang”<sup>89</sup> theory to Medza (Bédi: 68-69). All the above instances from the works studied show their apparent sameness in their mode of expression.

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<sup>88</sup> Translation: He did not withstand a little cold.

<sup>89</sup> Relationship by blood.



#### **4.1.4 Power Relations**

Inferring from 4.1.2 above, the power relations in the works studied are identical in that the narrators mostly take the point of view of the 'other', thus confirming the overall tone of suppression as explained above. A slaveholder writing about slavery, a European writing about colonisation or a European activist writing against racial discrimination often does so from the subject point of view, no matter how sympathetic he or she is to the cause. This is because the work will obviously read: "We do this to them and it is unfair." This of course will be different from an oppressed who writes as: "They do this to us and it is unfair." This therefore explains the apparent similarity of the power relations expressed in the works studied.

Césaire's work satirises slavery and colonialism, Bédi's satirises French colonialism, Kourouma's satirises neo-colonialism. Kincaid decries colonialism, racial discrimination and subjugation. Achebe questions missionary and colonial activities, Duncan exposes racial prejudice and exclusion, Naylor parodies slavery and contemporary corporate societies. Nicolás Guillén's work lauds racial hybridity but alludes to slavery suffered by the ancestors of the black segment of the population. The work of Palés Matos does not contain satire per se, for the narrator celebrates African traditions and their diversity. Authors appropriate a platform on which they can shout out the predicament of their people to the world. They echo centuries of physical and mental suppression of the African, both at home and in the diaspora. Through their works, they put up a political front, clamouring the injustice faced by their peoples. Their works are widely known and read in Europe, the Americas and Africa, bolstering their claim and speeding political decisions in favour of their cause.

#### **4.1.5 Evocation of Heritage**

The last but not the least important point of sameness is fidelity to identity. All the nine writers without exception, through the narrators and characters, evoke different aspects of African heritage, proud to be who they are. This translates to the fact that the premises of European power/knowledge strategies perpetuated for centuries have failed to take over the minds of these writers and intellectuals in general. It is worth noting that while some narrators and characters

pose as alter egos of the author, such as the narrator in Guillén's ballad posing as Guillén, Medza as Bédi and Caliban as Césaire, some other characters infuse nuances to African heritage, such as the black Methodist teacher in Kincaid's book. This however is read as the author's effort to satirise those who, through received notions of the self, stigmatize themselves and generate self-hatred. Taught through the centuries to hate what they represent and embrace what they don't, like Xuela's Methodist trained teacher, many people of African origin or descent have experienced self-loathing, showing signs of being lost between running away from their shadow and chasing one that they will never catch. They have lost touch with 'being themselves.'

Homi K. Bhabha and Paul Gilroy, in their works used in this study, posit that there is an unending mutation of cultures wherever they come into contact and thus the urgent need to resist cultural purity and nationalism. It is worth mentioning that slavery and colonialism led to hybridity, since the colonized copied some aspects of the colonialist's culture. This in no way denigrates hybridity. However, there is need for cultures to be looked at from an equal standpoint, not one superimposing the other or others. In the works studied, there is no echo or urge to maintain and preserve African cultures, keeping them 'pure'. However, from a reading of the works, one notices that authors challenge the received notion of European cultural superiority during the slave and colonial days.

Though not expressly mentioned in the works of Césaire, Kincaid and Duncan, the works of Naylor, Bédi, Kourouma, Achebe, Guillén and Matos echo different ideas of hybridity. In Mama Day, Miranda combines traditional healing and scientifically researched, medical healing. She accepts the gradual transformation and eventual abandonment of 'Candle Walk' (Naylor: 111). The villagers of Kala in Bédi's work admire the Russian social system (Bédi: 52) and accept the colonial law on divorce (Bédi: 112). In Kourouma's work, the Malinkés pray to Allah (Islam) and at the same time worship their African religion. In Achebe's, Isaac Okonkwo, though a Christian, obeys and respects aspects of his tradition that his religion teaches him to ignore, such as the belief in 'osu'. The narrator in Guillén's poem echoes racial and cultural hybridity. The work of Palés Matos looks at different African traditions on the continent and in the diaspora, without accepting some and rejecting others.

Drawing from E.K. Brathwaite and Wilson Harris of the West Indies and their views towards liberating cultures from the destructive dialectic of history and offering possibilities of escape from the politics of dominance and subservience, Ashcroft et al. hold that “the strength of Post Colonial theory may well lie in its inherently comparative methodology and the hybridized and syncretic view of the modern world which this implies”. They maintain that the above view provides “a framework of ‘difference on equal terms’ within which multicultural theories, both within and between societies, may continue to be fruitfully explored.”<sup>90</sup> This goes on to support the view that hybridity helps suppress the ‘destructive’ notion of nationalism and cultural purity. However, it would be commendable if cultures from all societies could be placed on the same platform and looked at on equal terms, none claiming superiority over the other. While embracing the world, other peoples and cultures, these writers would not like to toss their culture in the bin, as their ancestors and even they themselves had been made to believe.

Though some of the selected works echo some forms of hybridity, and are by extension in line with the views of Ashcroft et al., Bhabha and Gilroy, this echo is mild, not emphasised. It is not as persistent as the need to reclaim African values and socio-cultural aspects, relegated and ‘emptied in the doldrums’ by European colonial masters, for their selfish goals. Without advocating essence and purity, it is their fervent wish to place African traditions and cultures alongside others, in the world arena of cultures, difference on equal terms as indicated in the previous paragraph.

## **4.2 ELEMENTS OF DIFFERENCE**

From 4.1 above, it is clear and evident that there is sameness in the works of the selected authors on many grounds, which confirm their Africanness. However there are some crucial points of consideration that make each book unique, or some different from others. These characteristic differences shall be grouped in three categories: African writers and writers in the diaspora, different African perspectives and different perspectives in the diaspora.

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<sup>90</sup> Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 36-37.

#### 4.2.1 African writers and writers in the diaspora

Though having an overall echo of domination and suppression, the focus on the themes echoing these malaises differ in the different works, due to the relative historical difference between Africans on the continent and those in the diaspora. ‘Continental’ writers dwell mostly on colonialism and post-colonialism since Africa was colonized after the abolition of slavery. Ahmadou Kourouma decries the colonial occupation by the French and its resulting destabilization of traditional norms and trade. He also stresses the enormous problems independence seemed to inherit from colonialism, thus supporting the view that colonialism and post-colonialism are two sides of the same coin. Those in the government are puppets and corrupt, paying allegiance to their former colonial masters who still ‘pull the strings’ in the background, than to their fellow countrymen to whom they owe allegiance. Mongo Béti also dwells on colonialism, but takes a slightly different view. He looks at the devastating effects of French colonialism through the policy of assimilation and wanton exploitation, as Kritikos the Greek driver remarks that the French do nothing but pillage the resources without providing basic necessities like roads (Béti: 7). Chinua Achebe dwells on the transition between colonialism and independence, as we see Nigerians working in the civil service alongside Englishmen. He focuses on the illusion of upcoming administrators who were to take over from the English, thinking they will miraculously change everything overnight and rid Nigeria of all the ills brought by colonialism. Such is Obi’s dream, which unfortunately never comes to fruition

Writers in the diaspora focus on the effects of slavery and its resulting racial segregation and discrimination and one of them, Matos, celebrates black traditions and cultures in his ballad, “Danza Negra”. Needless it is to reiterate the fact that the first important exodus of Africans in the diaspora was through slavery, as they were forcefully transported to Europe and America through the ‘middle passage’, to borrow from Gilroy.<sup>91</sup> These slaves were to toil as domestic servants and field hands in the New World. Gloria Naylor’s anecdote of Sapphira Wade, the slave woman cum liberator, vividly evokes the slave era. Her descendants in Willow Springs live a very different reality from freed slaves in mainland America, because she had guaranteed their means of livelihood in the future by tricking Bascombe Wade to deed all his land to his children and slaves. Jamaica Kincaid and Quince Duncan tell the story of the enslaved, colonized,

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<sup>91</sup> Gilroy 1993, p. 4.

marginalized and defeated. Xuela grows up without the much-needed maternal love, and a father who loathes part of his past – that which brought his Scottish father and African mother together. Xuela generally characterizes non-Europeans living in Dominica as ‘the defeated’, because of their historical and present subjugation by Europeans. In Duncan’s satirical novel, Kimbo gets arrested, jailed and tortured, and even ends up being murdered, because he is black and smart, two irreconcilable attributes in the Costa Rican society, as suggested by the novel. Aimé Césaire appropriates and rewrites Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, empowering Caliban and creating space for him to air his disenchantment. Nicolás Guillén, through the narrator in his ballad, evokes slavery and echoes reconciliation between his two ancestors, African and European.

There is an important linguistic difference between writers on the continent and those in the diaspora. The language used in the works of writers on the continent is colonial language, corresponding to a political power no longer present. This remains the property of the elite, the educated, reasons why these works are mostly read only by the educated. They hardly encounter the ‘world’ of the local, uneducated population. It is for these same reasons that the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong’o writes in Gikuyu, his native language, representing the local reality in the local language. By so doing, he hopes to reach the inner core of the local populace. In this context, protest novels that necessitate global awareness and reaction could be translated into target languages. However, owing to the multilingual populations of most African countries, using the colonial language often known as the official language and putting in local slangs and phrases would be a better way out, for the sake of hybridity and sharing of ideas, even within the same country. On the other hand, the mainstream language in the various settings in the diaspora, though appropriated by some authors and infused with slangs, represents a present political power. This facilitates the mixing of ideas, hence hybridity, since the works, by virtue of the language used, are not intended for a designated segment of society but for all.

An interesting point worthy of mention is the move towards cultural blending and hybridity. Though not a remarkably heavy concern in the works in general as mentioned in 4.1.5, a close look at these isolated instances of the evocation of hybridity would suggest that there is more concern in the works of writers in the diaspora, than those on the continent. A pertinent factor justifying this tendency is the multiracial and cultural societies that most authors in the diaspora are from. Naylor, Duncan, Guillén, Matos and Kincaid are from societies where there is

a fair blend of the world's major ethnicities. This therefore gives rise to the need to hear and understand each other, tolerance and inclusion being major tools. On the contrary, authors from the continent studied, though from different traditions and cultures, do not have to face racial prejudice in their daily lives. The settings of the novels are all in West Africa. Though Bédi and Kourouma got married to French women, they do not emphatically raise the issues of racial prejudice in their books, as faced by blacks and other minorities in Europe and the Americas. It is my firm belief, however, that these two authors also advocate various forms of hybridity, owing to their marital statuses.

The last but not the least important element of difference in the works studied is the relation of these authors to their background and heritage. On this score, there is a marked difference between African authors and those of the diaspora. African authors are specific when writing about religion and culture. Kourouma talks of the Malinkés, Bédi talks of the Bédés and Chinua Achebe talks of the Ibos. However, writers in the diaspora have a generic approach to tradition and culture for though they are from Africa, mostly west, central and south west Africa, it is difficult to pin-point their exact areas of origin because they have lost track of their exact provenance over the years since slavery. Kincaid's stepmother practises voodoo and Obeah, beliefs from two different locations in West Africa. In *Mama Day*, it is alleged that Sapphira goes back to Africa, not to any specific location. Duncan explains in the glossary of his novel that the belief in the Samamfo and Nyambe are aspects of Jamaican heritage. These beliefs however can be traced back to different locations in Africa. Matos and Guillén mention gongs and other musical instruments. The gong is popular in many traditions in Cameroon, Nigeria and other areas in west-central Africa. So too are ngonis, flutes, balafons and many other musical instruments used in different parts of Africa. This explains why the different traditions and cultures expressed truly come from Africa but are very diverse in nature. At times elements from the Bambaras and the Ibos are jointly expressed, as though they came from the same locality. This in no way undermines the cultural heritage of Africans in the diaspora. It celebrates hybridity on the other hand, as expressed by Matos in his poem

#### 4.2.2 Different African Perspectives

The works of the three different African authors studied, though having similarities in many issues, as seen above, are different in perspectives and preoccupations. The first perspective is linguistic difference, as the authors come from different linguistic backgrounds, different tribes and even different countries. They all express their local language and reality in the colonial language used to write their works, thus suggesting hybridity. Chinua Achebe leans heavily on Ibo expressions and Pidgin English though he writes in the English language, thus suggesting linguistic hybridity. An offended Christopher tells his girlfriend: “Look here, Bisi, we [Obi and I] are not interested in what you want to do. It’s for Obi and me to decide. This na Africa, you know” (Achebe: 109). ‘This na Africa’ is the pidgin English equivalence for this is Africa. Ahmadou Kourouma also displays linguistic hybridity when he expresses Malinké realities and proverbs in French and even infuses some Malinké words, like ‘gnamkodé’ (Kourouma: 5), which in the context of the utterance could mean ‘rubbish’. Mongo Béti also expresses local realities in his work, such the evocation of the ‘assiko’.<sup>92</sup>

Another interesting diversity in perspective is the different backgrounds of the individual authors. In 2.2.2, I argued, with the help of supporting theories, that an author’s background and past life can influence his work. Such seems to be the case with the three African writers. Achebe’s parents converted to Christianity even though they lived in the small village of Ogidi, surrounded by different aspects of Ibo culture. This is witnessed in his work, as he tactfully opposes aspects of Ibo tradition and culture to Christianity. The Reverend Samuel Ikedi of St. Mark’s Anglican church in Umuofia presides over the religious ceremony marking Obi’s departure to England (Achebe: 8) and the Elders of Umuofia gather in Isaac Okonkwo’s house to welcome Obi from his stay in England, breaking the traditional kolanut on the occasion (Achebe: 52). His characters are mostly tolerant and at times share Christian and traditional views, a suggestion of syncretism. Ahmadou Kourouma, who got locked up in the sixties for opposing the government, writes a novel that expresses the bitterness and disillusion of Africans with independence and the governments, a clear indication of authorial intention. Mongo Béti, who got dismissed from a mission school for questioning dogma, parodies the Catholic religion in his

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<sup>92</sup> A popular dance from Southern Cameroon and some parts of the coastline.

work. The above instances are pieces of evidence and a confirmation of the usefulness of authorial intention.

The last important difference in the perspectives of African writers studied is their colonial history. Ahmadou Kourouma and Mongo Béti are all products of French colonialism and the policy of assimilation. The French adopted a policy of Direct Rule, appointing District Heads and Chiefs who had very limited powers.<sup>93</sup> This explains the over-centralised governments still found in French West Africa till date. The appointed District Head in Medza's village is feared and despised by all, for his corrupt practices and close collaboration with the colonial master, especially during forced labour (Béti: 17). Fama, the legitimate heir of the throne is dropped when his father dies, and the local colonial administrator gives the throne to Fama's cousin Lacina (Kourouma: 14). These differences attest to different colonial experiences by the authors. The British adopted Indirect Rule unlike the French. They preferred to rule though laid down traditional structures, and this is witnessed in the fairly decentralised system of government in former English colonies.<sup>94</sup> Achebe's work lean heavily on tradition (the Ibo tradition) because even though discouraged, the British did not forcefully destabilize the traditional set-up and prescribe cultural codes, like the assimilationists did. That is why there are instances of the breaking of kola, the belief in 'osu' and the pride of expressing oneself in Ibo, as expressed by Obi (Achebe: 48) In *Mission Terminée*, the villagers are instead at awe when a colonized is speaking French.

#### **4.2.3 Different perspectives in the diaspora**

Writers in the diaspora, by virtue of the coming from diverse locations in the Caribbean and the Americas, exhibit diverse perspectives in their works. Owing to their histories, these writers portray different linguistic hybridities. Gloria Naylor mixes Afro-American expressions and slangs in her work to acoustically situate her novel, since character representation is about ninety per cent African American. George, a black character who is raised in a foster home alongside

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<sup>93</sup> "The French Argument for Direct Rule", 10 May 2012, <http://www.historians.org/tl/lessonplans/nc/trask/frendirect.htm>

<sup>94</sup> "England's Indirect Rule in its African Countries", 10 May 2012, <http://www.historians.org/tl/lessonplans/nc/trask/indirect.htm>



other American orphans, speaks mainstream American English. Césaire writes in French but endows Caliban with some French Creole and African lexicons, to bolster his predicament as an enslaved. Kincaid, throughout her work, highlights the linguistic dynamics of Dominica, the affiliation to different strata of society by virtue of your medium of expression. Those who speak Patois are looked upon as the low, and those who speak English are deemed the Elite. As Xuela observes, many Dominicans speak both, but use English for flattery and Patois for abasement, such as her stepmother (Kincaid: 32). Duncan, though Costa Rican by birth, evokes his Jamaican and African ancestry by extension, when he infuses Jamaican lexicons in his writing, such as *Dopi*, *Kimbo* and *Samamfo*. Palés Matos uses lexicons like *calabó* and *mariyanda* in his ballad “*Danza Negra*”. Nicolás Guillén does not use Creole lexicons in his poems, but however, through his narrator, calls for a mixture of peoples and ideas, as he lauds his mixed ancestry.

These writers also exhibit different kinds of influence due to the environments in which they live. Even though they lean heavily on their ancestral cultures as seen through their works, they nonetheless are influenced by the mainstream cultures of where they live, be it in the United States, the Caribbean or Central America. Gloria Naylor is American and one easily finds aspects of American culture expressed like the wonders of New York, restaurants and dating, corporate ‘land developers’ who are turned down in Willow Springs and television programmes like Miranda’s favourite, the Phil Donahue show. Quince Duncan also expresses Costa Rican peculiarities in his book when he talks about the Limón province and what it stands for in Costa Rica. It is worthy to reiterate that there was a heavy influx of plantation workers from Jamaica in the mid twentieth century into Costa Rica via the Limón port, which changed the socio-economic and political situation of the country. In Kincaid’s book, Xuela, though against Christianity, ends up getting married to Philippe, in church (Kincaid: 214). She echoes hybridity in her decision to speak to her husband Philip in Patois while he speaks to her in English. These different works by writers in the diaspora, evoking and echoing different experiences due to environmental influence, suggest hybridity. They are not tied to a fixed set of ideas or to an essence; they mix different ideas, leading to the conclusion that these works support the views of hybridity held by Paul Gilroy and Homi K. Bhabha.

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **CONCLUSION**

The concluding chapter of this work will centre on three axes: a recapitulation of the goal of study, a review of the results arrived at and finally an insight on how important and helpful these results could be.

### **5.1 GOAL OF STUDY**

This study set out to take a comparative look at authors of African origin and descent both from the African continent and the diaspora. Leaning on African heritage, it paid close attention to what made the works African, tracing and highlighting those aspects and instances in the works that echo Africa, thus the term ‘Africanness’. It is worth mentioning that the work is descriptive and not prescriptive in nature. It does not seek to stereotype Africans. It merely looks at elements of thought and action that are identical among the works due to the sharing of a common heritage by their authors. Furthermore, owing to the fact that the nine works are by nine different authors, this work also sought to investigate elements of difference among these authors.

### **5.2 RESULTS OF STUDY**

After a careful reading and analysis of the selected works of literature, the author of this study came to some important conclusions. The first important conclusion arrived at is that there is a literary trait that unites writers of African origin and descent all over the world. Even after half a millennium of forceful exodus, African writers and peoples of African origin still have a lot in common as expressed in the studied works. The writers, consciously and unconsciously, express their heritage in their writings. One finds the evocation of past history such as slavery, colonialism, religion and traditional beliefs, not forgetting the frequent use of songs.

Another striking conclusion arrived at after the study is that there is the use of frequent satire and the overall tone of these works is mostly that of an outcry. Writers point out the injustices of the past as well as those of the present. These works can rightly be termed ‘works of protest’, because they are characterised by a speaking ‘other’ or subaltern. This leads to the next point, which is that of power relations. Apart from *Mama Day* and the poems by Palés Matos and Nicolás Guillén, all the works studied are narrated using the point of view of the ‘other’, in a power struggle with the ‘self’. A few examples are Caliban claiming the right to his island from an ‘usurping’ Prospero, Fama claiming the right to gainful employment and sustenance after joining in the fight to evict the French from the country and Xuela protesting against the British settlers for forcefully taking all that belongs to them, leaving them with the status of the defeated. These signs of discontent expressed in the works send a message to the ‘self’ that the ordinary African is yet to be satisfied, given the numerous problems plaguing him daily.

Many themes frequently centred on in western literature, like courtship, spirituality and even the arts and urbanization, are far-fetched in most works by writers of African origin and descent, not because they do not know what they stand for but because there are other more pressing needs to be met. The power relations leave the West with relative economic stability and social equilibrium, paving the way for western writers to venture on more relaxed ‘pleasure’ seeking themes. This does not however suggest that the West do not have problems of their own. The point I wish to make here is that whatever problems they have, that of the African is far more pressing and it would take just good will and honesty to help eradicate these post-colonial problems.

Another important fact is that in the plots of these works studied, especially those by writers in the diaspora, one witnesses a blend of different cultures and worldviews. What I noticed was that the characters express aspects of African traditions and cultures against a background of the prevailing ‘mainstream’ culture. In no instance do they look low on or become critical of the background culture, except in colonial protest novels where they defend their traditions against one imposed on them. There is a situation of evolving hybridity displayed by these characters, in their quest to accommodate their cultural heritage and the dominant background culture. This echoes the views of Gilroy and Bhabha on hybridity. These works do not echo the return to any glorious past or ‘good old days’. The preoccupation of these writers, as

deduced from their works, is mostly to extricate Africans on the continent and the diaspora from post-colonial bondage. They all seem to echo the maxim “Forward ever, backward never.”

It is worth reiterating that the fact that ‘Africanness’ is expressed in these works doesn’t make them entirely the same. There are some inherent differences as seen in 4.2 above. These works are so diverse in themes and perspectives, given the fact that their authors come from different parts of the world with different socio-political realities. They mostly write within the framework of the realities they face in their various countries and societies.

### **5.3 IMPORTANCE OF FINDINGS**

This section shall attempt to answer the question ‘so what?’ It wouldn’t be a balanced work if one were to painstakingly establish these underlying sameness (and differences) among writers of African origin and descent without attempting to show how important the findings are, if it could bring a change, however modest, to the perception, reading attitude and social behaviour of society as a whole.

The first importance of this study is that it will help prospective readers of African literature, both students and lay readers, especially those with little or no background knowledge on African history and heritage. It would add its little contribution, however minimal, to the numerous works on the same subject, including works by famous scholars in the likes of Dubois, Fanon, Gates, Césaire and the numerous post-colonial scholars. This work attempts to answer some of the questions that some individuals have always been asking themselves without asking anybody. It is my firm belief that it would enable the ‘protest’ works of writers of African origin and descent to be understood and appraised fairly better than before.

Furthermore, this work shall create a platform of understanding, for both the ‘self’ and the ‘other’. It is an established truism that prejudice and unexplained discrimination is inherited, just like Christmas celebrations and Saint Lucia Day. This work could help society understand the ‘other’ by transcending the constructed prism through which this same society sees him/her and using personal, fresh lenses provided by the study. I am of the opinion that people are inherently good and are just too afraid at times not to belong to the views and ways of the

mainstream. Sometimes they do what they do because others do the same, not because they have spun it around their minds and arrived at a conclusion that it is the right thing to do.

On the other hand, this work could help some ‘others’ as well, who are devoid of self-confidence, positive thinking and a strong will, to avoid self-loathing and psychological trauma caused by the construction of themselves through the eyes and views of the ‘self’. “Keeping it real” is a famous phrase in the United States of America that describes this attitude of conforming to established constructions so as to always fit-in. Our thoughts affect our actions and what we think of ourselves mirror a reflection on our character. We can thus assert ourselves by coming out of these constructed caricatures and boldly living our lives in harmony with one another, without carrying constructed stigmas on our shoulders.

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# APPENDIX

## SYNOPSIS OF SELECTED WORKS

### **I. *No Longer at Ease* (Chinua Achebe, 1960)**

*No Longer at Ease* is Chinua Achebe's second novel and centres on Nigeria just before independence and ideological conflicts. Told by a third person omniscient narrator, the novel looks at the socio-political situation of Nigeria just before it is granted independence by the British. Twenty-six year old Obi Okonkwo returns from England with a bachelor's degree in English and a firm conviction to join forces with the upcoming generation of civil servants and fight the ills of the Nigerian civil service, marred by corruption, tribalism and nepotism. He picks up a job at the scholarship board and is in charge of recommending the granting of scholarships to deserving applicants. However, faced with the challenges of paying back his scholarship loan, meet his family obligations in the village and sustain his rather ostentatious lifestyle, Obi finds himself plunged in the very acts he vowed to stamp out. He becomes corrupt, accepting bribes to influence the decision of the scholarship board.

A sequel to his first novel *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* is also rich in Ibo folklore and traditional values. Achebe appropriates the English language and uses it in a manner that vividly depicts Ibo reality and customs. The book also provides a platform for a critical insight to some traditional beliefs against a background of the newly received religion, Christianity, as well as other customs that would raise questions in a rational mind, such as Obi's parents and kinsmen barring him from marrying Clara because she is an outcast, even though of the same tribe, speaking the same language and sharing the same values.

### **II. *The Autobiography of my Mother* (Jamaica Kincaid, 1996)**

Jamaica Kincaid's third novel, *The Autobiography of my Mother*, has been considered by many critics as her finest. Set in the Caribbean island of Dominica, this fascinating novel, narrated in

the first person, centres on the life of the protagonist, seventy-year-old Xuela. It recounts the story of a child born into the world without a mother, growing up without the vital mother-child bond. She lives with 'strangers' from when she is born, growing up to create a distinctive world view of her own. She trusts nobody but herself, having grown up in loveless households and having a father who puts money-making and appearances before a child's welfare. Kincaid's novel looks at the ripple effects of apathy and 'lovelessness'. Xuela becomes so self-centred that she will not allow herself to get pregnant, will not love any partner or husband she has. She creates a 'mini world' within that which she lives in.

The novel also takes a square look at British imperialism and the devastating consequences it brings to the little island of Dominica – racism, oppression, extortion and the evocation of slavery. It examines the dynamics of the weak periphery and the strong centre, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, the victors and the defeated. The novel also displays a rich Caribbean culture, most of which can be traced back to different locations on the African continent.

### **III. *Mama Day* (Gloria Naylor, 1988)**

In *Mama Day*, Gloria Naylor skilfully sets a stage for the juxtaposition of cultures, beliefs and traditions. Miranda (otherwise known as Mama Day) and her kindred have lived in Willow Springs, off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia for generations, venerating their slave ancestor Sapphira Wade, who tricked her master and husband and obtained freedom for all the slaves on the island. Miranda believes her special healing powers come directly from Sapphira. The narrator informs us that Willow Springs is technically not part of the United States of America (Naylor: 4-5). Its inhabitants, all descendants of freed slaves, have been living a reality slightly different from those of other descendants of freed slaves in the United States. One finds a glaring sense of communalism and solidarity in dealing with the daily constraints of life, even though there are a few others who would rather sow discordance and confrontations, like Pearl and Ruby.

Told from three different points of view, *Mama Day* carefully negotiates a balance between nature and civilization, tradition and modernity, traditional beliefs and Christianity, dependence and independence as well as touching on themes like magic, myth and mystery. There is an air of auto-sufficiency as the indigenes rarely go across the bridge to the USA to meet their wants. They are mostly fishermen and gardeners. However, some of the youth have to emigrate beyond the bridge to attend university and work. At times one notices a subtle friction when one of these youngsters visits, as the islanders often criticize their eccentric ways. Naylor creates an alternative scenario where freed slaves live up to their aspirations without feeling the crushing burdens of Jim Crow laws, economic deprivation and systematized racism.

The integrity of Willow Springs is seriously tested when Abigail's granddaughter Ophelia, fondly referred to as Cocoa, brings her husband home to show her grandparents. George, being a city boy, has a tough time negotiating his convictions and past experiences in the city with those of this seemingly 'strange' island just a bridge away from the United States. The apogee of this test comes when he has to save Cocoa from a mysterious illness. He ends up dying while trying to save his wife but as Mama Day puts it, he sacrifices his life for Cocoa to be brought back from the dead. Cocoa can thus live and one day take on from where Mama Day will leave off, if she is not too adulterated by city life.

#### **IV. *Une Tempête* (Aimé Césaire, 1968)**

Aimé Césaire is inarguably the most influential French speaking Caribbean writer. *Une Tempête* is a rewriting of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1623). Prospero colonizes Caliban's island and enslaves him after the death of his mother Sycorax. He strips him of any form of freedom and burdens him with different tasks from sunup to sundown. Meanwhile he also holds another human/spirit islander (Ariel) as slave but puts him in charge of his magical ambitions. Through his magical powers, he wrecks the ship of King Alonso and his entourage, when he spots them approaching the island, and seizes this opportunity to avenge his banishment from Milan, though he ends up reconciling with the king and his subversive brother.



Césaire's appropriation is clearly visible in his empowerment of Caliban to stand up against his master, air his discontentment and make demands. Unlike Shakespeare's Caliban, Césaire's is given ample space to fight against his enslavement and ends up seizing his freedom from the imperialist. A co-founder of the Négritude movement in the thirties, Césaire fiercely criticizes European imperialism. While maintaining Shakespeare's themes like class conflict and subversion, he includes all the major agonies gone through by the peoples of Africa both at home and abroad: slavery, colonialism, racism, cultural imperialism, religious suppression as well as the civil rights movement in the United States' sixties. When Caliban says: "Appelez-moi X" (Césaire: 28), he brings to mind Malcolm X, the black civil rights leader in the sixties who refused to be called by his surname. Caliban's seizing his freedom could be likened to the wave of independence that hit African countries in the sixties.

*Une Tempête* is also rich in Caribbean culture and mythology. Césaire empowers Caliban by appropriating the French language. He also makes use of French Creole, spoken in French Caribbean territories. One witnesses the evocation of tradition, as he makes use of songs as well as the famous trickster/god, Esu, known in the play as Eshu.

#### **V. *Mission Terminée* (Mongo Béti, 1957)**

*Mission Terminée* is Mongo Béti's third novel, directly following *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* which satirizes French Catholic missionary activities in Cameroon. He was expelled from a catholic school for questioning religious doctrine at the age of fourteen. It is worth noting that Mongo Béti, whose real name is Alexandre Biyidi Awala is one of the most fervent anti-colonial writers in Francophone Africa. He published his books under different pseudonyms to avoid reprimands from the colonial administration.

Told in the first person, *Mission Terminée* recounts the adventures and misadventures of a young boy who is sent on a mission. No sooner does Medza, a young adolescent, come home for holidays than he is sent to Kala to get his cousin Niam's runaway wife. He is chosen to undertake this mission, which have proven futile on the last two attempts, because as Bikokolo the elder puts it, he has the voice of thunder, which permits him to do anything anywhere, even

though a teenager (Béti: 15). This voice of thunder is his having learned to speak and write the Whiteman's language. Medza arrives Kala and discovers a people he calls 'backwards' since they live in the hinterland, far from the nearest colonial post, and carry on practices deemed 'primitive', like the game the boys play when he arrives and the dancing of assiko<sup>95</sup>. While waiting for Niam's wife to return from her unexplained journey, Medza easily gains fame in the village and people gather every evening to ask him questions about the Whiteman and education.

Through Medza's contact with the village of Kala, the narrator takes the reader to a journey through colonialism, extortion and brainwashing. Mental colonialism alienates the colonized from their culture. The villagers are at the mercy of the chief, appointed by the colonial administration. There is forced labour and the appointed chief, with blessings from his appointers, exploits his subjects with impunity. He charges an extra fee when any villager intends to buy a product from overseas, though he is not the supplier. Villagers have to contribute in cash or kind whenever he feels like getting married. The narrator also touches on the plight of women, who are quintessentially objectified. Young girls are betrothed to much older men, against their will, and a woman is considered as 'property' of the whole community. There is also an inter-generational struggle. Medza, by the end of the narrative, breaks free from the 'grip' of his father, at the expense of his fiancée, mother and siblings. Béti's novel is also rich in folklore and various aspects of the Béti<sup>96</sup> culture.

## **VI. *Les Soleils des Indépendances* (Ahmadou Kourouma, 1968)**

*Les Soleils des Indépendances* is Ahmadou Kourouma's most acclaimed novel, set in Côte d'Ivoire (referred to as Côte des Ebènes in the novel) at the dawn of independence. Fama Doumbouya, the tragic hero, is a disenchanted Malinké<sup>97</sup> who gives up trading at the dawn of independence to fight the French. Fama's only reward when independence is achieved is an

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<sup>95</sup> A popular dance from Southern Cameroon and some parts of the coastline.

<sup>96</sup> A tribe in southern Cameroon, where the author hails from. His pseudonym is taken from the name of his tribe.

<sup>97</sup> A West African people living in the North of Ivory Coast and parts of Guinea, Mali, Senegal and Gambia.

identification card and a party card. Faced with unemployment, he roams the streets of the capital, attending Malinké ceremonies in the hope of returning home with some money and gifts, since he is a prince. Meanwhile Fama's wife, Salimata, works very hard to take care of herself, Fama, and pay the rents. The death of Fama's cousin and chief of Horodougou, Lacina, marks an end to this routine lifestyle and Fama is caught between going to the village to assume the throne and ignoring it and staying in the capital. During a political upheaval, Fama is erroneously arrested and imprisoned for subversion. When he and other prisoners are released and the president offers indemnities and national reconciliation, Fama declines this opportunity to have his economic problems solved and embarks on a journey to the village, where he dies on the way.

Through his novel, Kourouma criticizes 'Côte des Ebènes' in particular and other African countries in general, under the 'suns of independence'. Leaders are corrupt and dictatorial, and the capital city is clearly divided into two, the flashy 'White quarters' and the gloomy and neglected 'Black quarters', suggesting an active presence of neo-colonialism. Colonial masters are now 'pulling the strings' not at the forefront but at the backstage and African leaders put in place are nothing but puppets. It is worth mentioning that Ahmadou Kourouma was imprisoned in 1963 for criticizing the government and went into exile the following year.<sup>98</sup> *Les Soleils des Indépendances* is rich in Malinké folklore and customs. As one advances through the plot, one easily notices the plethoric mention and description of Malinké customs and beliefs. Kourouma seems to write Malinké in French. Like Achebe, he appropriates the French languages to describe Malinké reality and customs, an indication of 'signifyin' and Intertextuality, to be looked at in the next section.

## **VII. *Kimbo* (Quince Duncan, 1990)**

Quince Duncan is regarded as the first Afro-Costa Rican writer in the Spanish language. His work centres on the plight of the Afro-Costa Rican population living in Limón on the Caribbean coast of the country. *Kimbo*, told in multiple voices and points of view, tells the sad story of the

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<sup>98</sup> Ouédraogo 2007.

tragic hero Kimbo, arrested and severely tortured, falsely accused of helping to kidnap the influential businessman, El Barrigón. The testimonies against him mostly reveal that most of the witnesses hold their convictions out of racial prejudice. He loses his life in detention. One of Barrigón's real captives claims that Kimbo won't be missed because he is "un bruto que ni siquiera ha podido defenderse"<sup>99</sup> (Duncan: 55).

*Kimbo* is also a novel that stresses roots and attachment to ancestral beliefs. Duncan claims to have adored Nyambe<sup>100</sup> (Duncan: 81). The narrator lengthily evokes the mass arrival of ships from Jamaica in the forties, and how this mass immigration changes the socio-political landscape of Costa Rica. The situation of women is paid much attention to. As we see some female characters questioning the attitudes of their husbands. El Barrigón's wife, tired of playing the role of a 'good housewife', vows to leave him for good.

### **VIII. "Danza Negra" (Luis Palés Matos, 1926)**

Luis Palés Matos was Puerto Rican of African descent. "Danza Negra" was first published in the Puerto Rican newspaper, *La Democracia* in 1926. One of the earliest practitioners of Afro-Antillean poetry, he venerates Africa and African tradition in "Danza Negra," included in *The Literature of Spanish America* (1967). Having a vibrant rhythm that matches the sounds of African drums, Palés Matos hails tribal chieftains, their commanding presence and traditional dances, from Timbuktu in Mali to Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Congo. (Matos: L. 11-12) There is a nostalgic evocation of roots and lineage in the poem. He visibly creates a link between these authentic traditions in Africa and those exported by slaves to Haiti, Martinique and the Caribbean in general. His afro-centred writing made him very popular in the Spanish Caribbean islands.

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<sup>99</sup> Translation: A brute who has not even been able to defend himself.

<sup>100</sup> God in some African religions.

### **IX. “Balada de los dos Abuelos” (Nicolás Guillén, 1934)**

Nicolás Guillén is one of Cuba’s most prominent poets. His mixed ancestry (African and European) is often reflected in his works. In 1961, he was named national poet of Cuba by Fidel Castro. His poem, “Balada de los dos Abuelos” evokes the dual characteristics of African and European history and culture of his two grandfathers. He attempts a blend of both cultures to reflect his reality as well as that of Cuba. It is clearly evident that Guillén attempts to reconcile the past and happily live the present. Towards the end of the poem, he affirms that the two grandparents embrace each other. (Guillén: L. 51) Their destinies have been united and they have to pursue it together, looking ever forward.

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