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## **The Black Womb: Reconstructing Families in Caribbean Testimonial Literature**

*Evidemment, tout le monde sort du ventre de sa mère,  
c'est notre seule vraie patrie...*

Léonora<sup>1</sup>

In the testimonial narratives included in this study, women turn an inward gaze towards the functioning of their bodies, exploring pain, illness, physical differences, and motherhood, questioning the semiotic articulation of exterior corporeal signs in their society - skin color, aging, or the scars of abuse - while simultaneously learning about their role within the social structures they inhabit. Their focus is on women's roles within the family or community configuration and on their exploration of womanhood within their various social contexts. At the core of their narratives is the peculiar formation of family life in the Caribbean, colored by the legacy of the ruptures created in crossing the Middle Passage. Domestic life in the Caribbean has been notorious for the quantity of mother-headed families, the lack of participation of a co-residential male, and a high rate of illegitimacy. As in the case of African-Americans in the United States, this situation has been partly explained by the effects of slavery on family life and its weakening of the father role.

Slavery was a destructive force that made family life and stability nearly impossible. The very definition of a slave opposes any possibility of developing institutions other than those of the masters. Slaves are aliens in the masters' society. In *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold*, Claude Meillassoux defines the principal determinants of slavehood as the de-socialization, de-civilization, de-personalizing, and, to a certain degree, the de-sexualizing of a person, since the distribution of tasks does not always take into account the sex of the slave, and fatherhood and motherhood were, in many instances, denied to the slave. Even though Meillassoux's studies focus on slavery and its origins in Africa, his definitions are pertinent to the manifestations of slavery in the Americas:

*They were, successively, "commodities" in the hands of the merchants (the so-called 'slave-trade captives'), then "use-goods" and "patrimony" in the hands of the buyers. In all these cases, they were "objects". Since they were seen as livestock, and thus de-personalized, their re-socialization, in juridical terms, was improbable and in fact unknown, since it presupposed not only the rebuilding of links with other, similarly de-personalized captives, but also permission to build links with gentles of the sort which constitute the social person. (p. 109)*

The view that the instability of the African-American family is due to a pattern inherited from slavery has been disputed by historians who claim there is enough empirical data to attest to the stability of slave family structures. It is believed that the de-emphasis of the father role, which has often been cited in support

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<sup>1</sup> Dany Bébel-Gisler, *Léonora: l'histoire enfouie de la Guadeloupe*, Paris: Editions Seghers, 1985.

of matrifocal theories of black family organization, rather than being a direct result of the weakening of the father role during the days of slavery, is far more plausibly the result of the migrant labor system, which developed after slavery, ended. In *Slave-Women in Caribbean Society: 1650-1838* Barbara Bush has argued that, in spite of the cultural dislocation and the total severance from the traditional kinship ties suffered by the slaves, they managed to hold together families by establishing ties with newly-arrived slaves. She points out the bias of theories, which focus on the moral and social instability of black families. Based on preconceptions about what marriage and the family should be according to modern European models and ignoring West African family organization, these theories tend to place serial unions, characterized by a succession of partners, in a bad light, while sanctioning multiple divorces in modern Western society. The basic error, in her view, is to equate family to household, and marriage to a religious or civil service. She establishes the difference between the nuclear unit, which is based on a married couple, and the co-residential family unit, where different groupings are possible; for example, the unit may be based on the grandmother, mother, and child, not conforming to the conventional definition of a family. She also points out the great importance given to non-co-residential kinship ties, or extended family, besides the co-residential kin in slave society.

*In slave society complex family relationships existed between non-co-residential as well as co-residential kin: in some cases, however, "family" was represented by fictive kin. In the absence of blood kin, non-related slaves were "adopted" to reconstitute traditional kinship-based relationships. (p. 86)*

*Where kin was absent, bonds were formed with shipmates or people from the same tribe, and a sense of community developed, based on a well-defined code of morality and order; slaves did not become promiscuous or exist only in a chaotic and unstable environment. Wherever possible, they recreated a meaningful family life based largely on their African cultural heritage. (p. 118)*

Bush feels that because of the existence of "this stable family life" which gave the individual slave, as well as the slave community as a whole, the strength and will to endure and survive the experience of slavery, and because of the importance given by African woman to family bonding, the woman slave played a crucial part in defending family and community values.

Bush's analysis, although primarily sound, has its limitations and might be seen as misrepresenting the realities of slave life. While more emphasis should be given to the active role of the slaves in resisting cruelty and injustice, it is dangerous to downplay the catastrophic levels of the violations suffered under slavery. It is misleading to speak about slave family life as stable since, as Bush herself states, every aspect of the Caribbean slave regime worked against the stability of the slave family. It is perhaps more helpful to argue, not that family life gave the slaves the strength and will to survive slavery, but rather that slaves had the strength and will to survive slave life by preserving and strengthening "family" and community ties, religion and rituals, and language.

If the appalling quality of the life slaves endured did not destroy family and community bonds in the emotional sense, it certainly destroyed physical ties. Strong

kinship ties and cultural continuity were constantly interrupted by the intervention of slave holders. Slaves were sold off without any consideration given to keeping family members together; they were not allowed to choose spouses; infants were forcibly placed in weaning houses, thus preventing a long suckling period (which, for West Africans, was traditionally a minimum of two years); and, especially in large scale plantations, the preference for male workers led to gender imbalances as slaves were brought to the Caribbean without their wives and children. These practices, it should be noted, were met with much resistance, including marronage, suicide, despondency, or clandestine traveling great distances to see loved ones. Some mothers threatened to kill their children before they were taken away from them and many actually carried this out.

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, these adverse conditions and the resistance to them are poignantly illustrated. The main character in *Beloved*, a runaway slave called Sethe, tries to kill all her children before they can be taken away to be brought up as slaves. Sethe is considered a madwoman because upon seeing the schoolteacher (the "master") approach the house, she runs to a shed where she beats her two sons unconscious with a shovel. Thinking they are dead, she then slits the throat of one of her daughters. When the "master" arrives she is found clasping her dead daughter to her breast while swinging her youngest daughter by the feet to smash her against the wall. Both before and after her imprisonment, she remains certain that the experiences she has suffered as a slave justified her actions, for an early death is preferable to the tortures she had endured.

In the Caribbean context, forced familial estrangement is exemplified in *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*. A Bermudan slave, Mary Prince chronicles the endless separations she suffered and the impossibility of rejoining her husband and family members. About the first time she was sold and separated from her siblings and mother, she says: "The great God above alone knows the thoughts of a poor slave's heart, and the bitter pains which follow such separations as these. All that love taken away from us-oh, it is sad, sad! And sore to be borne!" (p. 51). Compounding this grief caused by separation, was the fact that Prince's mother had to take her own children to the market to sell them for her masters.

Whilst she was putting on us the new osnaburgs in which we were to be sold, she said, in a sorrowful voice, (I shall never forget it!) "See, I am "shrouding" my poor children; what a task for a mother!"... "I am going to carry my little chickens to market..." (p. 51)

*We followed my mother to the marketplace, where she placed us in a row against a large house, with our backs to the wall and our arms folded across our breasts. I, as the eldest, stood first, Hannah next to me, then Dinah; and our mother stood beside us crying over us.* (p. 52)

For Prince's mother, dressing her own children for the sale and taking them to the market is like leading them to their execution. According to Prince, her life was hardly worth living, and she often mentions that she would have considered death a deliverance: "life was very weak in me, and I wished more than ever to die" (p. 56).

In this light, it is understandable that *Beloved's* Sethe finds it easier to kill her children than to see them suffer through years of slavery.

Just as her mother compares her children to chickens sacrificed in the marketplace, Mary Prince is conscious of her status as an animal as she is being led out to the middle of the street by the vendue master, "who was to offer us for sale like sheep or cattle".

I was soon surrounded by strange men, who examined and handled me in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or a lamb he was about to purchase, and who talked about my shape and size in like words-as if I could no more understand their meaning than the dumb beasts. (52)

She is not only physically treated as an animal - led, turned around slowly, examined, handled, and judged by her shape and size - but she is not considered at all as a thinking and comprehending being. Her silence and passivity during the sale make her appear to be a "dumb beast" and thus unable to understand her fate. Her mother is likewise reduced to beastlike silence by this spectacle: "She said nothing, but pointed to me." In silence, she watches as her daughters are sold and her family, her only possession, is thus torn apart: "It was a sad parting; one went one way, one another, and our poor mammy went home with nothing" (53). Prince also expresses pain at not being able to suffer through slavery together with members of her family, which might have provided a limited degree of satisfaction: "I then saw my sisters led forth, and sold to different owners; so that we had not the sad satisfaction of being partners in bondage" (53).

One gathers Mary Prince was about twelve years old at the time of this separation, as she mentions that her first twelve years were the happiest in her life, a time when she had not yet understood the meaning of slavery. She is forever emotionally marked by this trauma and later by the physical impact of slavery.

*My heart was quite broken with grief, and my thoughts went back continually to those from whom I had been so suddenly parted. "Oh, my mother! My mother!" I kept saying to myself, "Oh, my mammy and my sisters and my brothers, shall I never see you again!"* (54)

Similar words are echoed in Dora Alonso's *Tiempo ido*. In these memoirs about her childhood in Cuba, she details how at the tender age of eight, she learned about history - specifically about the cruelty of slavery - from her nanny, Namuní, a former slave whom she considered an adoptive grandmother. Namuní was only ten years old when she was sold and separated from her mother: "Yo estaba con ella en el barracón. Llegó el mayoral y me dijo: 'Ven conmigo, mulata, que ya tienes nuevo amo.' Mi madre lloró cuando yo la miré muerta de miedo. Mi madre se tapó la cara y dijo: ¡Ay, mi hija! Fue la última vez que la vi" (p. 73)<sup>2</sup>.

When Prince is taken to Turks Island by her new owners, she is not allowed to seek out her parents or siblings to say good-bye before leaving, and once again she is reminded of the inhuman status attributed to her by her white masters: "Oh the

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the influence of African women as role models, see Ivette Romero-Cesareo's "Namuní y Ninina: La representación de la mujer negra", en Dora Alonso y María Josefa de Granados", Forthcoming in *Homines*, Río Piedras: University of Puerto Rico.

Buckra people who keep slaves think that black people are like cattle, without natural affection. But my heart tells me it is far otherwise" (p. 61).

While Namuní recounts the bravery that awakened in her once she became pregnant (her efforts to protect the fruit of her womb, and her determination to ensure her child's freedom from slavery), Prince is faced with numerous obstacles, which render a normal relationship impossible. She marries Daniel James, a freed slave, in the more liberal Moravian Church, where they had met because they "could not be married in the English Church. English marriage is not allowed to slaves; and no free man can marry a slave woman" (p. 74). This is done without the approval of her masters; when they find out about it, they are outraged. The wife is the most offended: "She could not forgive me for getting married, but stirred up Mr. Wood to flog me dreadfully with his horsewhip. I thought it very hard to be whipped at my time of life for getting a husband" (p. 75). Mrs. Wood then forbids Prince to bring "Nigger men about the yard and premises, or to allow a nigger man's clothes to be washed in the same tub where hers was washed" (p. 75). By prohibiting Daniel James to set foot on her property, she makes living together impossible for the couple. She and her husband are equally responsible for never allowing Prince to buy her own freedom, to see Daniel James or her family, or to return to Bermuda again. In this case, the white slave-owner's wife controls the destinies of both the slave woman and the freed man.

This relationship between white female slave-owner, white male slave-owner, black freed man, and black slave woman, is a good example of the complexity of the politics of domination. In *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*, Elizabeth V. Spelman comments on slavery in the United States trying to determine differences among women in terms of power:

*For example, using the first criterion, I cannot attach significance to the fact that because wives of white slave-owners in the United States were of a different race and class, they had many more privileges than the Black women who were their slaves (including the privilege of whipping their female slaves with impunity). If my working criterion is the kind of power women lack rather than the degree of power they have, then I have to say that the wives did not have the economic and political power their husbands did, and hence there is no significant difference between them and the Black slave women. But by the second criterion, I cannot discount the power women have (however derivative it might be) in trying to see what women do or do not have in common. I note that while neither the white wife nor the Black female slave had the power the white male slave-owner did, this does not mean they were subject to the same abuses of his power, nor did it mean that the women were equally powerless in relation to each other. (p. 141)*

Here, and in other sections of her book, Spelman points out the impossibility of homogenizing the term "woman". But, in this attempt to determine the complexities and levels of power in terms of gender, race, and class within slavery, the black man disappears. However, in another essay she points out that slave men lacked the institutional means by which they might dominate women. In many Caribbean or US slave narratives, references to white women present them in the same light as white male slave-owners, particularly in cases where these women had as much or more economic leverage. In *Green-eyed Monsters of the Slavocracy: Jealous Mistresses in Two Slave Narratives* Minrose C. Gwin sees the slave woman as a victim

of "the two-headed monster of the slavocracy, the lecherous master and the jealous mistress" (p. 40). Mary Prince's narrative shows that decisions regarding domestic slaves for instance, the flogging or sale of slaves, their marital status and living conditions were made mainly by the wives of the slave-owners who were in charge of the domestic realm. While Mrs. Wood had her husband whip her slaves whenever she thought necessary, Prince's previous mistress, Mrs. I, meted out physical punishment as readily as her husband. Prince, however, seems to focus on Mrs. I's brutality more often than the master's.

*And she taught me (how can I ever forget it!) more things than these; she caused me to know the exact difference between the smart of the rope, the cart-whip, and the cow-skin, when applied to my naked body by her own cruel hand. And there was scarcely a punishment more dreadful than the blows I received on my face and head from her hard heavy fist. She was a fearful woman and a savage mistress to her slaves. (p. 56)*

It is interesting to note that the enumeration of punishments follows a list of tasks that Mrs. I "teaches" Prince to do - "to wash and bake, pick cotton and wool, and wash floors, and cook." Prince ironically mentions her "instruction" of the language of pain<sup>3</sup>. She leaves no room for doubt as to who the author of this inscription of pain is - she stresses the differences in types of pain inflicted "by her own cruel hand," "from her hard heavy fist," and "by her pitiless fingers." Prince becomes both the addressee of this discourse of pain "applied to my naked body" and the medium for its inscription, since it is recorded on her skin. In another anecdote which further illustrates the destruction of the family, Mary Prince recalls two little slave boys a mulatto "who had been bought while an infant in his mother's arms," and an African "whom a sailor had given or sold" to her master and provides details of the pain they suffered.

*Seldom a day passed without these boys receiving the most severe treatment, and often for no fault at all. Both my master and mistress seemed to think that they had a right to ill - use them at their pleasure; and very often accompanied their commands with blows; whether the children were behaving well or ill. I have seen their flesh ragged and raw with licks. Lick - lick - they were never secure one moment from a blow, and their lives were passed in continual fear. (p. 56)*

Prince points out that both master and mistress are equally pitiless and are unable to speak to their slaves without inflicting physical pain. The metaphor of the discourse of pain is continued here when she stresses that her masters "very often accompanied their commands with blows" and she accentuates the language of the whip by repeating the onomatopoeic "...licks. Lick lick". In this instance, she is a

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<sup>3</sup> In *Tiempo ido*, Namuní recounts the efforts of slave mistress' efforts to teach her slaves how to read and write, while dispensing slaps right and left: "Alrededor del sillón de la vieja, las jóvenes siervas aprendían el estribillo de las primeras letras, a, b, c, d... y vengan bofetones de mano blanca de esclavista, cuando Namuní, aburrida y rebelde, respondía por su libre saber." Having learned the power of a sharp tongue, Namuní never hesitated to infuriate her mistress, and when asked: "¿Cuál es el arte de la gramática castellana?" she would answer, "Fregar un bacín con propiedad, mi Ama" (p. 74), indicating her awareness of the fact that the only grammar, or language, her masters would ultimately understand, was her hard work.

witness of their pain: she hears the blows and she sees "their flesh ragged and raw with licks," but their pain and that of other slaves echo her own. She clearly identifies with their plight, as she purposefully shifts the focus of her anecdote from the children's mistreatment to her own:

*My mistress was not contented with using the whip, but often pinched their cheeks and arms in the cruelest manner. My pity for these poor boys was soon transferred to myself; for I was licked, and flogged, and pinched by her pitiless fingers in the neck and arms, exactly as they were. To strip me naked to hang me up by the wrists and lay my flesh open with the cow-skin, was an ordinary punishment for even a slight offense. (p. 56)*

Prince often describes her feeling of identification with other slaves' suffering. In most instances, when she recounts the injustices she has witnessed, she closes the anecdote with a reference to her own grief or that of the slave community as a whole. She tells the story of Sarah, an old woman "who was subject to several bodily infirmities." Sarah is severely mistreated by the slave-owner's son and overseer whom she calls a "cruel son of a cruel father", and who "had been brought up by a bad father in a bad path, and he delighted to follow in the same steps" for not pushing a wheelbarrow fast enough:

*He threw her down on the ground, and after beating her severely, he took her up in his arms and flung her among the prickly-pear bushes, which are all covered over with sharp venomous prickles. By this, her naked flesh was so grievously wounded, that her body swelled and festered all over, and she died in a few days after. In telling my own sorrows, I cannot pass by those of my fellow-slaves - for when I think of my own grief, I remember theirs. (p. 65; emphasis added)*

In another anecdote, she describes the fate of another elderly slave who is similarly tortured:

*Mr. D had a slave called old Daniel, whom he used to treat in the most cruel manner. Poor Daniel was lame in the hip, and could not keep up with the rest of the slaves; and our master would order him to be stripped and laid down on the ground, and have him beaten with a rod of rough briar till his skin was quite red and raw. He would then call for a bucket of salt, and fling upon the raw flesh till the man writhed on the ground like a worm, and screamed aloud with agony. This poor man's wounds were never healed, and I have often seen them full of maggots, which increased his torments to an intolerable degree. He was an object of pity and terror to the whole gang of slaves, and in his wretched case we saw, each of us, our own lot, if we should live to be as old. (p. 65; emphasis added)*

As in, the narrator's observation and reporting of the injustices committed against others and the ones she herself suffered combine to present the horrors of slavocracy.<sup>4</sup> Mary Prince's focus on the body-naked, ragged, raw, or open flesh, swelling limbs, festering wounds, mutilation, infirmities as a surface on which the marks of slavery are inscribed, and as a receptacle of memory, allows her to estab-

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed study of witnessing and attesting to traumatic events in the domestic and public spheres in *Léonora: l'histoire enfouie de la Guadeloupe*, see Ivette Romero-Cesareo's "Homebodies and Heroines: Women in French Caribbean Testimonial Narrative" (*Anales del Caribe*, 1998).

lish a linkage between herself and all those who suffered under the same system. In the case of *The History of Mary Prince*, the witnessed history extends beyond national boundaries, and it is slavery all over the world, which is decried. Mary Prince's state of servitude takes her from Bermuda to Turks Island, Antigua, and London, where she finally runs away and contacts the Anti-Slavery Society. Because her masters never accept her manumission, returning to the islands would mean relapsing into slavery. Thus, she is obliged to stay in England where she is protected legally and by the Moravian Church.

Throughout her narrative, Prince displays several modes of rebellion - ranging from talking back and refusing to perform certain tasks, trying to sell herself to other masters, buying herself, to running away - in spite of the fear of severe punishment. In the underground network created by runaway slaves, women had a very important role to play in planning and relaying information, facilitated by a greater physical mobility if they were street vendors or had other jobs outside the plantation and by an insider's access to information if they were domestic workers. Many women also took an active role in armed revolt. The Jamaican "Nanny of the Maroons" an obeah leader who was not only responsible for bolstering the morale of the maroons through religious guidance, but who also fought alongside the maroons against the English is thought to have held considerable power as a religious leader and tactician (Bush 1990:70). She was often described as wearing a girdle with nine or ten knives in different sizes hanging from it, and legend has it she killed English soldiers taken captive during the maroon wars. Her role as an obeah leader is important because she was able to offer spiritual guidance as well as revolutionary leadership. She had the respect of the community as a spiritual mother, which provided a replication of family structures for those who had fled from slavery, sometimes leaving family members behind.

Oral transmission and testimonial narratives record a tradition of women fighting along with men in slave revolts. Women served as spies and messengers, incited revolt<sup>5</sup>, and took care of community enterprises, such as organizing community gardens and religious life. However, their greatest contributions may have been those of upholding a family structure - and consequently a community structure that was the source spring of resistance - and safeguarding the memory of the injustices suffered. This was achieved through the preservation and nurturing of a continuing tradition of oral history passed from generation to generation.

Preserving a sense of family, community, and history was no small feat for a people permanently uprooted and dispersed. There was nevertheless a constant struggle on the part of the slaves to counteract the destructive forces of slavery; this

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<sup>5</sup> Nanny Grigg, a woman who incited the slaves to revolt in Barbados in 1816, provides a good example of this not uncommon phenomenon.

According to the confession of Robert, a slave from the Simmon's Plantation, this dangerous woman had informed the blacks that she had read in the newspapers that all Negroes would be freed on New Year's Day; she was "always talking about it" and told the slaves they were "damned fools" to work. When the blacks had not been freed by New Year, she declared that the only way in which they could achieve freedom was to fight for it by setting fires "the way they did in Saint Domingo." (Bush 1990:80)



has been attested to by records of numerous insurgencies and other forms of retaliation, including theft, feigning illness to shirk work, traveling clandestinely to see loved ones, damaging tools or crops, non-cooperation, talking back, suicide, arson, poisoning, or murder. Some of these modes of resistance were efforts on the part of the slaves to preserve family and family-like structures<sup>6</sup>.

The difficulties in establishing family relationships had serious repercussions. Reproduction became a primary concern for slave holders in the Caribbean as the numbers of slaves decreased through early deaths caused by illness and mistreatment. Slaves were "encouraged" to produce more slaves once it was obvious that the numbers were rapidly diminishing. Children were so important as merchandise that when pregnant women were punished, holes were dug so that when they were placed face down to receive flogging, their fetuses were not harmed despite the severity of the punishment (Baralt et al. 1990:48). This was, by no means, the case throughout the Caribbean. In Bermuda, Mary Prince recollects severe punishment inflicted upon a fellow slave in spite of her pregnancy:

*My master flew into a terrible passion, and ordered the poor creature to be stripped quite naked, notwithstanding her pregnancy, and to be tied up to a tree in the yard. He then flogged her as hard as he could lick, both with the whip and the cow-skin, till she was all over streaming with blood. He rested, and then he beat her again and again. Her shrieks were terrible. The consequence was that poor Hetty was brought to bed before her time, and was delivered after severe labour of a dead child. (p. 57)*

On some islands, policies on marriage and the family were abruptly changed according to the new need for replacing importation with reproduction as the costs of importing slaves increased.

*La politique des maîtres en matière de sexualité est de faire copuler mais non d'unir en vue de former une famille...*

*Le mariage entre esclaves ne doit pas apparaître comme une nécessité sociale ni religieuse mais pour ce qu'il est, une nécessité économique. Aussi seul le mariage entre esclaves d'une même «habitation» était vu d'un bon œil. Il permettait aux maîtres de faire coup double: reproduction sur place et liberté de manœuvre par rapport à l'article 47 du Code Noir (qui stipulait l'interdiction de vendre le mari sans la femme et les enfants de bas âge) puisque, le mariage ayant eu lieu sans témoin extérieur, il pouvait toujours être contesté par le maître. (Bébel-Gisler 1985:31-32)*

Nevertheless, many slaves refused to marry for the sole purpose of having children and they did not reproduce as rapidly as they were expected to. It is not cer-

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<sup>6</sup> As Marietta Morrissey states, not all slaves were passive and not all were rebels. Slavery was constituted by opposing and contradictory forces, and this is true in the case of the slave family. Furthermore, it is impossible to establish conclusions on the family within slavery without specifying the geographic location, the idiosyncrasies of the colonizing group, the time frame, and the economic conditions within these specific places and times. Conditions varied greatly decade by decade, depending on whether the islands were colonized by the Spanish, French, Dutch, English, or Danish, whether the islands' economies were based on either large-or small-scale production, and the nationality and cultural differences of the slave population (for instance, slaves that grew up as warriors in their homelands were more apt to rebel in the colonies).

tain how much of this was a reflection of their harsh living conditions and how much of it was a conscious refusal to bear children under such conditions. Slave women resisted the usufruct of their bodies as reproductive machines. Many used their knowledge of medicinal or poisonous plants—knowledge of infusions (of manioc, yam, papaya, mango, lime, pepper, or cotton tree root) brought from Africa and passed down from mothers and grandmothers—to prevent pregnancy or induce abortions. Many women preferred to become sterile (as a result of some of the medicinal potions used) than to produce children for the masters. As Hilary Beckles argues in *Centering Woman: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society*, enslaved women "extended their resistance network into bio-social zones associated with maternity" in a type of "gynecological warfare upon slavery" (pp. 158-159). There was a general sense of the futility of forming families which would then be torn apart in accordance to the master's needs. Edouard Glissant refers to the Caribbean slave family, specifically in Martinique, as the *anti-famille*:

*La «famille» a été d'abord une «anti-famille». Accouplement pour le profit d'un maître. C'est la femme qui a murmuré ou crié: «Manjé té, pa fè yich pou lesclavaj»; la terre pour être stérile, la terre pour mourir. C'est la femme qui a ainsi parfois refusé de porter dans ses flancs le profit du maître. L'histoire d'un énorme avortement primordial: la parole rentrée dans la gorge, avec le premier cri. (p. 97)*

The Creole phrase: «Manjé té, pa fè yich pou lesclavaj» means "Eat dirt; do not have children for slavery." Eating dirt caused sterility or death. Even though this practice has been recorded as an illness caused by thiamin deficiencies (pica, a craving for unnatural foods like chalk, ashes, or dirt), it is believed that it may have also been carried out intentionally as an act of resistance, as a refusal to bear children for the master's profit. The sense of futility permeating slave life is well illustrated by Glissant's parallel of abortion and the suppressed word. The double movement of expelling a body and stifling the word represents the history of the contradictions of slavery and colonialism. Glissant finds these contradictions in the formation of the Martinican *corps familial*. He finds that African influence and traditions meet and counteract the idea of the "anti-family" ("la volonté d'«anti-famille»") created in the midst of the despair suffered under slavery. Due to the continuation of African traditions, strong ties to the mother have survived<sup>7</sup>, as well as matrilineality<sup>8</sup>, the extended family ("soeurs aînées, tantes, marraines, grand-mères"), and the active role of women in the labor force from the beginning of colonization. The family structure is thus formed, according to Glissant, by contradictory forces<sup>9</sup>. Describing the origin ("le degré zéro") of the Martinican family, Glissant identifies the following categories: "Famille-investissement (pour le profit du maître); désir de mort et meurtre de

<sup>7</sup> Edouard Glissant specifies that the tie to the mother existed until the period of initiation in Africa, but this initiation has no place within the new slave order. (Glissant 1981:97)

<sup>8</sup> "Lorsque naissent les enfants, la famille est en générale sans père: «pater incertus, mater certa». La famille c'est d'abord la mère, à qui on laissait les enfants avec l'obligation de les nourrir et les soigner jusqu'au sevrage. (Bébel-Gisler 1981:30)

<sup>9</sup> "Nous sommes en présence d'un corps social (...) qui est tirailé par des courants contradictoires, fruits du désordre colonialiste" (Glissant 1981:97).

l'enfant par la mère; condition de la femme: génitrice; condition de l'homme: étalon; condition de la famille: la vie au-dehors". He finds, as the main source of instability, the unrecognized official character of the family as such under slavery: "(...) la famille se présente à la fois comme utérine et tribale (ou plutôt étendue), mais aussi comme *non consentie*, et en tout cas *non officialisée*". Family life was always confronted with prohibition and rarely enjoyed a legal status. Any attempts to preserve family traditions were stifled according to production needs; rules were as easily modified or overlooked as they were established. Thus, trying to maintain family ties was truly an act of defiance, which implied serious risks.

Another major impediment to family stability was the sexual exploitation of domestic workers by plantation owners. Prone to abuse their authority, the masters had a total disrespect for family or marital bonds and considered any black woman, married or single, at their disposal. While some slave women resisted in spite of repeated floggings or death threats, sometimes going as far as to poison their masters or commit suicide, others acquiesced in order to avoid severe punishment, to obtain favors, or to have the opportunity to offer a slightly better life to their children. Sexual exploitation included manumission in exchange for sexual favors. Women could also obtain manumission by buying themselves out or being bought out of bondage by freed children, especially if they were mulattos. Mulattos generally stood a better chance for upward mobility and a degree of respect. Some women were thus encouraged to have children by white men in order to ensure a way out of slavery for the future generations.

The status of mulattos and slaves is illustrated in the testimonial narrative of Leoncia Lassalle<sup>10</sup>, a slave in nineteenth-century Puerto Rico, who recounts how she was passed on from one master to another. She was raised on the plantation of Marcelino Lassalle working in the sugar cane fields from a very early age. According to Leoncia, Marcelino Lassalle lost a great deal of money gambling and gave her to his debtor as payment. Her new master, Soto Rosado, was terribly abusive: "Me tocó un amo bien sinvergüenza y abusador, Don Soto Rosado de Lares. Tan malo era que, por haberseme quebrao unos sorullitos que estaba friendo, mandó que me dieran el castigo de la paleta" (Baralt, 1990:30). Her story echoes that of Mary Prince, who also tells us what insignificant events triggered the rage of her masters in Prince's case, breaking a vase earned her severe flogging, while here, broken corn sticks are sufficient to unleash the master's fury. Nevertheless, she expresses apprehension about being sold to yet another master: "Por suerte o por desgracia, el tal Don Soto me vendió a Don Manuel González en cien pesos. Le salí barata porque yo sabía hacer de to, en la caña y en la casa" (p. 30). One of the interesting elements in this passage is Leoncia's expression of her awareness of her labor value as in the case of Mary Prince evident in her conviction that her new owner purchased her very cheaply. The ambiguity expressed in the opening phrase, "Por suerte o por desgracia", shows how difficult it was to choose between evils: was it fortunate or unfortunate for her to be bought by a master who did not punish her severely but whose son had

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<sup>10</sup> See Guillermo Baralt et al. *El machete de Ogún: Las luchas de los esclavos en Puerto Rico (Siglo 19)*, Río Piedras: CEREP, 1990.

rights over her body? "El hijo de Don Manuel, viéndome tan jovencita y tan desarrollá, se aprovechó de mí y me hizo el daño. Eso era antes así: una tenía que complacer al amo en to lo que se le antojara, porque si no se metía una en líos" (30). By using the phrases "se aprovechó de mí" and "me hizo el daño" Leoncia stresses her innocence, passivity, or reluctant compliance. The first, "he took advantage of me", clearly implies that she is the victim of his affront. The latter, meaning "I lost my virginity to him", has a broader range of connotations, and can express anything from varying degrees of seduction or coercion to outright rape. It always implies some type of force, abuse, or violence, as the literal translation of "hacerle daño" renders "to do harm unto someone." In spite of this ambiguity, Leoncia strongly points out the societal constraints with which she was forced to comply, since she could suffer dire consequences were she to put up resistance.

*Salí encinta y tuve una nena bien bonita que se parecía al papá, porque él era bien parecido, eso sí, sabe. El tenía muchísimas atenciones con ella. Yo se lo agradezco. Los favores se agradecen siempre. (...) Otras negras que salieron encintas de blancos, les reclamaban y ¡como si con ellos no fuera! Total, ellas eran las que tenían que mantener y criar a los hijos. Yo por eso nunca le reclamé. Que me diera lo que le diera la gana y si no, que no me diera na. Lo único que me hubiera gustao era la libertad para mí y pa la nena. Y eso nunca nos lo dio. (p. 30)*

Leoncia considers herself lucky, in comparison with other black women who receive no special treatment for their mulatto offspring, and she contrasts their unsuccessful claiming of rights to her own attitude - she feels the master's son is doing her a favor by being nice to her daughter; however, she never receives the ultimate favor: the much-yearned for freedom for her daughter and herself. Leoncia Lassalle's clarification about the father's handsomeness as the cause of her daughter's beauty shows, however subtly, the idea of "improving" the family by the mixing of blood. This concept still exists in the Caribbean, where every shade of skin color counts as a sign implicated in that economy of race and class<sup>11</sup> - a meaning maintained by the

<sup>11</sup> In the French Caribbean, there are many names for different skin colors and these tie in to the complexities of both race and class. Referring to Guadeloupe, Dany Bébel-Gisler states: Comme l'écrivait Jack Berthelot en 1981, «définir quelqu'un, c'est d'abord et tout de suite le situer dans la gamme chromatique faite des innombrables nuances, entre le blanc et le noire, avec ses pointes fortes, ses arêtes et ses seuils. (...) La couleur est vécue comme frontière, cli-vage».

D'où toute une série de dénominations classant les individus par le métissage de leurs origines. Si *mulâtre* ou *métis* sont des appellations courantes, il faut savoir qu'un *chabin* est une sorte de métis à peau et cheveux dorés, un *câpre*, le produit d'une mulâtresse et d'un Nègre bien noir, qu'un *quarteron* est issu d'un mulâtre et d'une Blanche, et qu'un enfant *po chapé* a le teint clair (il échappait ainsi à la condition d'esclave). (Bébel-Gisler 304)

In the Spanish Caribbean there are claims made to a lack of racism, however, similar terms of color differentiation still survive today. In Puerto Rico, for instance, the term *negro retinto* or *prieto* refers to a very black person and *jabao* is still used as an equivalent of the *chabin* mentioned above, while other words like *moreno* and *trigueño* have taken on different meanings or shades, depending on geography or social class. In spite of denials to racism, there are still jokes about "whitening" the family (the equivalent of the Jamaican expression "putting a little milk in your coffee") by marrying lighter-skinned people, and about speculations of a black

social and economic improvement derived from mulatto offspring. The hope of being manumitted or at least, obtaining freedom for the children, represented an enormous incentive to comply with the masters if the fear of physical abuse or being put to death was not enough. As in Leoncia's case, the birth of a mulatto child, however, was no guarantee for manumission, and manumission was no guarantee for a better life.

The abuses committed by men and women of the ruling families are further illustrated in *La otra María o la niña de Artemisa*, the testimony of the Cuban María Josefa Granados<sup>12</sup>. It also illustrates the way permissive behavior and control of women's bodies did not end with the abolition of slavery. María Granados' grandfather, whom she says was "as perverse as the rest of the family," was chaplain of a hospital where he abused all the women he could get his hands on: "...fue hecho capellán del hospital de Paula, donde, a base de crueldades y de su lascivia constante y descarada, llegó a ejercer una influencia perniciosa sobre todas las enfermas del lugar" (Núñez Machín 26). The "pernicious influence" he had over women, due to his "cruelties and constant and shameless lasciviousness", is better described as rape in the next section.

*Durante los meses que pasaba en la finca, no había mujer respetada. Tenía como veinte o más hijos mulaticos, fabricados en las guardarrayas de los cañaverales. En su jaula cayó hasta una hermana de la pobre Ninina: una negra linda, llamada Gabriela, que era casi una niña. Fue violada en su misma casa. El malvado le fabricó seis hijos con la benevolencia de la familia. Jamás se preocupó por la vida de esas criaturas...* (pp. 26-27)

Granados uses the verb "fabricar", as if speaking of mass production, to refer to her great-uncle's impregnation of the women on her grandmother's estate and of the proliferation of mulatto children. Meaningfully enough, she describes these children as "fabricated" on the boundary lines of the plantation's sugar cane fields. These children were to remain marginalized, on the borderlines between slavery and underpaid labor<sup>13</sup>, as illustrated by Granados when she remembers Gabriela's six children as relegated to the outskirts of town in a miserable hut. The chaplain never cared about their lives and his cruelty and predatory ways are conveyed by the description of Gabriela's misfortune as falling into his "cage" ("En su jaula cayó") and the emphasis on her being a mere child when he raped her.

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ancestor in the background of any Puerto Rican family - "Y tu abuela, ¿dónde está?"

In the Dominican Republic, terms used for different shades still survive closely tied to social status, as in *madamo*, usually used to address poor Haitians who are hired over the border to cut sugar cane for incredibly low wages.

<sup>12</sup> This testimonial narrative, published in 1975, is transcribed by the Cuban poet and journalist Ana Núñez Machín. María Granados claims to want to give a contrasting view of history to that of René Méndez Capote's *Memorias de una cubanita que nació con el siglo* because "she has sweet stories to tell; I, very few" (Núñez Machín 53).

<sup>13</sup> Although legally abolished in Cuba 1880 (the year María Josefa Granados was born), slavery continued in the form of a similar system called "patronato" whereby ex-slaves were forced to work for their previous masters for a certain number of years with very poor remuneration. This practice benefited the plantation owners enormously since they could pay the ex-slaves very little while having no obligation to provide for their meals or basic needs.

The complexities of the politics of domination, where different factors gender, color, class and age are difficult to separate, are exemplified by Granados' account of the chaplain's abuse of *all* women. His display of authority as a man was compounded by his religious status. A scandal that was hushed in the family and kept within the church's confines was the chaplain's seduction of a member of the family Granados' mother's half-sister, Filomena. Filomena is described as a pious young girl who spent her hours amidst priests, novenas and prayers but, in Granados' words, was "transformed"<sup>14</sup> into a "Mrs. "overnight" by the chaplain. Having then been appointed chaplain and administrator of the cemetery, he took Filomena into his home as a cook and housekeeper. Sensing the chaplain's treatment of women as objects and his manipulation of them by means of his religious authority, Granados ironically states: "...se llevó «prestada» a Filomena, humilde sierva del Señor..." (27). The eight children he "manufactured" (*fabricó*) at the cemetery did not fare much better than their mulatto half-brothers on the estate.

*En aquel lugar fabricó ocho hijos, que vivieron en la más grande miseria y desamparo: analfabetos, hipócritas, rateros, se ganaban la vida, desde pequeños, limpiando y cuidando panteones de ricos. Cuanto dinero ganaban, el padrecito les hacía echarlo en el cepillo de las Ánimas, a cambio de la mala comida que les daba. Con el tiempo, fueron emancipándose de su tutela: unos se inscribieron en el Ejército Permanente, y dos fueron a dar con sus huesos al presidio. De las hembras nunca supe el destino.* (p. 27)

Granados never openly mentions slavery, but she equates the children to slaves, when she states that they were eventually "emancipated" from the chaplain's tutelage. This family is continuously exploited by different institutions, first the Church, and later, the army and prison. She also ties the chaplain's "manufacturing" of children to the social consequences of his behavior, by focusing on their illiteracy, hypocrisy, servitude, criminality, and imprisonment. Notably, Granados excludes the women from this enumeration of social ills by stating that she had no information about the females.

At a time when black bodies could be moved around and disposed of at the masters' will, what impeded the disposability of other human beings mulatto, white, or those of a different social class or religion? In *La otra María...* we observe the crossing of the fine lines between valuable and disposable bodies. Her mother had left her husband and had fallen in love with a young, handsome, married man who threatened to leave her the moment she became pregnant unless she had an abortion. She decided to have the child and, being abandoned by the man, she went to live with his first cousin.

*Ella no le hizo caso, entonces él la dejó y ella se puso a vivir con un primo-hermano de él, que también era capirro y guapo, y que se parecía mucho a mi padre. Porque yo creo que mi madre no quería mucho a nadie. Ni a mí. Cuando yo nací, dejó que mi abuela me pusiera en manos de Regina, diciéndole:*

*«Toma, Regina, aquí tienes la hija que se te murió. Críala, que es tuya.»*

*Y Ninina me llevó con ella y me crió. ¡Por eso yo no perdono a mi madre, aunque me muera cincuenta veces!* (p. 22)

<sup>14</sup> Appropriately enough for this context, the word *convirtió* also means *converted*.

Here, Granados only expresses her fury against her mother for allowing her grandmother to control Granados' destiny; but the cycle of disposability seems more complex. According to Granados, that her mother never really loved anyone much was proven by the facts that she was able to begin living with another man immediately after her previous lover abandoned her, and that she allowed her mother to give her own daughter away as a gift to one of her servants to raise as her own. She does not mention that her father had considered her mother and herself disposable objects, but rather limits her criticism to the women in the family, her mother and grandmother. The fact that they are women seems to make their rejection of Granados all the more abominable and unnatural.

María Granados was raised by Ninina (Regina), her grandmother's servant and former slave. She describes meeting her real mother when she was three years old and recalls her dismay at not even receiving a kiss but rather a cruel exclamation: «¡No parece hija mía!» ("She doesn't look as if she could be my daughter"). This rejection is never forgiven. Her mother had herself been married off when she was very young, to a Spanish councilman, whom she later abandoned. Her grandmother was able to dispose of her own daughter's body, marrying her off against her will to a rich man; she later disowns her, banishing her from the household for rejecting him. It is not surprising that she could do the same to her granddaughter. The fact that she was an illegitimate child justified the cruelty performed against her, in her grandmother's "religious" view.

Nevertheless, there are indications of another reason, never articulated in the text, for her attitude towards her grandchild beyond her strict religious upbringing and class-consciousness. Granados claims that the cause for her grandmother's rejection was her illegitimacy-never mentioning racism as another factor. The brief description of her father - "Mi padre era capirro, pero muy guapo" - shows that color-consciousness might have compounded Granados' illegitimacy. "Capirro" is the term used for a light-skinned mulatto. This helps to explain why Granados is given away to one of the former slaves, receiving the same harsh treatment, and is banished to the slave quarters. "Tenía que arrodillarme y pedirle la bendición, como cualquiera de sus antiguos esclavos" (22). This situation can be understood in light of Elizabeth V. Spelman's assertion that

*...according to his [Aristotle's] catalog of persons, functions virtues, and natures some men are naturally subordinate to some women (or in any event not naturally subordinate to those women); some women are not naturally subordinate to some men; and some women are naturally subordinate to some other women. (p. 48)*

It must not be forgotten that Granados' grandmother is a powerful, white woman, which allows her total control. She not only determines the future of her granddaughter, but is able to morally justify her daughter's banishment for choosing a colored man, although she had also left her husband in Spain, to join her lover in Cuba. Her power is such that people are perceived as objects to be moved around at a whim. This can be observed in the way Granados describes, in one sentence, how her grandmother left her husband and a town she had founded in Spain: "Mi abuela era casada con un isleño que se llamaba Francisco Varela, pero lo dejó en España, y dejó también un pueblo que ella fundó allá" (p. 20). She is also able to ignore legal

bounds; in spite of the fact that Ninina had previously bought her manumission, and that slavery had been abolished, she is able to call her back to work for her, and is not met with resistance<sup>15</sup>. The relationship between Granados' grandmother, her daughter, granddaughter, and servants, is a perfect example of the privileged status of some women over others. According to this account, her status allowed her power over most men in the community as well.

There is a marked silence in the text when it comes to exploring the narrator's racial background that reveals Granados' difficulty in coming to terms with her racial identity. There are several moments when she inadvertently displays a certain amount of prejudice. For instance, when she says her father was handsome *although* "capirro," in the only reference made about her father. In spite of Granados' love for Ninina, she never really accepts her as a mother. She angrily states that she barely had parents "Mis padres, ¿para qué hablar de ellos, si apenas tuve alguno?" and expresses confusion regarding the memories of her foster mother, with whom she spent her entire childhood:

*¡Cuanto más atrás miro, más confusos son mis recuerdos! Como en sueños, veo a la que siempre llamaba «mamá Ninina». Siempre creí que fuera mi madre, luego supe toda la verdad: que me habían puesto en sus brazos acabada de nacer, como compensación por la pérdida de su única hija, ocurrida días antes de mi nacimiento. (p. 19)*

Her tone betrays a certain bitterness when she claims to have discovered the truth surrounding her birth. When she speaks harshly of her situation - "Y Ninina me llevó con ella y me crió. ¡Por eso yo no perdono a mi madre, aunque me muera cincuenta veces!" - it is hard to determine to what extent her outrage is caused by the "degradation" of being raised by a black servant and being condemned to a life of servitude, rather than her mother's passivity in the whole matter.

Even though Granados was accepted by the black community, she yearned for acceptance by the rich, white family, represented by her grandmother. She expresses anguish at not being treated as the other grandchildren were.

*Cuando mi abuela iba a España, había un barco donde le ponían una alfombra para que ella pasara. Yo no recuerdo el nombre del barco. Lo que sí sé es que mi abuela, toda llena de alhajas, subía majestuosa hasta el barco y se despedía de sus nietos con un beso en la mejilla. Yo quería que me besara a mí también, pero nunca lo hizo. Cuando quería que me llamaran, le decía a una de sus criadas: «A la hija de puta que venga.» (21)*

This passage stresses the privileged position her grandmother had in Cuban society. The description of her finery and majestic trips to Europe is sharply contrasted to her foul language when referring to Granados, whom she called "hija de

<sup>15</sup> María attributes the freed slave's suffering to ignorance regarding their rights and human dignity: "Las negras mandingas esclavas libertas de mi abuela vivían en la más completa ignorancia; no tenían idea de la dignidad humana; no sabían si tenían algún derecho: ignoraban si merecían vivir mejor de lo que les permitía la patrona. A ésta le era fácil convencerlas de que habían nacido para hacer la felicidad de otras personas y que tenían que contentarse con las migajas que de vez en cuando les arrojaban. Esta era la vida de mi pobre Ninina. No se atrevía siquiera a reclamar lo que era suyo. lo que le habían asignado por sus servicios, al comprar su libertad". (Núñez Machín 25-26)



puta." Granados' recollections convey the image of a woman who is powerful and rich enough to remain outside the bounds of moral values; the fact that she can donate an entire town to the Church is enough to earn her the right to use foul language, have lovers, and abuse others:

*De aquellos días de la infancia recuerdo las escenas de gritos y palabrotas, bofetones y latigazos entre mi abuela y mi mamá. A tal extremo llegaron las peleas, que un día mi abuela echó a mi madre de la casa otra vez. Y aquella noche dormimos mi madre, Ninina, y yo en la casa de los esclavos. (21)*

Granados' social insignificance is stressed by her grandmother's refusal to call her by her name. She was not only treated as one of the ex-slaves; she did not even deserve a name, other than her grandmother's favorite, "daughter of a whore". Jamás me llamó por mi nombre. (...) Cuando mi abuela decía: "A la hija de puta que venga", yo venía acompañada por Ninina" (22).

Names are shown to be problematic in the text, since they are the more obvious social markers. In the narration's opening phrase - "Antes de nacer, me pusieron por nombre María Josefa" - Granados makes sure to point out she was named Josefa after her grandmother, and because of this, she is determined not to use it: "Por ella me pusieron Josefa que yo me quité después". However, the name stays with her throughout her life, as she is affectionately called Pepilla, a typical nickname for Josefa. On the other hand, she often points to the nobility and power displayed in her grandmother's name, by using her titles. It is also significant that the servant is given the name Regina, but is stripped of the "royal" connotation, by being more commonly called Titina. In Granados' eyes, Ninina's only two claims to glory are her tribal origins and her religious status. Granados approvingly notes that the mandinga tribe women are black with "white facial features" and are very hard to catch. Ninina/Regina holds an important position as Queen of a *cabildo* ("era reina del Cabildo de Arará del barrio de Jesús María"), a religious-cooperative association for slaves. Each *cabildo* was directed by a king and queen, chosen among the elder members respected for their tribal or religious standing. Here, Ninina's religious affiliation with the secretive arará *cabildo* provides her with the titles she lacks "outside" in the accepted social order of Cuban hegemonic society.

In this alternative social order, Granados has difficulty being accepted because she is "white", but Ninina wields her authority as queen: "Las santeras del cabildo pusieron reparos por mi presencia. Era natural. En aquellos tiempos difícilmente se encontraba un blanco en los templos africanos; yo no encajaba en sus ritos, aunque todos los conocía. Pero Ninina impuso su voluntad y vivimos allí unos meses" (56). When Ninina passes away, the members of the *cabildo* choose her as the heir to Ninina's position. She inherits her Ninina's necklaces and attributes, symbols of her religious authority:

*Allí, de pie junto a su cabecera, pusieron mi frente sobre la de ella y pasaron a mi cuello todos sus collares, atributos y manillas de plata, que eran ocho - estas manillas de plata constituían el símbolo de Obatalá. En la mano izquierda me colocaron la insignia de Orula, y así quedé convertida, después de muchos cantos y ceremonias, que duraron más de seis horas, en la hija blanca de la reina africana Regina Olaneta. (p. 60)*

All the religious artifacts that Granados inherited, as "the white daughter of the African queen", would have, under normal circumstances, ensured her protection, respect, and survival. However, it is 1895, and war breaks out the very night of Ninina's death, and Granados is forgotten in the chaos that ensued. Her reign is short-lived as she embarks on her personal voyage without Ninina.

As in the case of Dora Alonso and her beloved Namuní, whom she acknowledges for having freed her from racial prejudice "Fue por ella [...] que aprendí a matar los prejuicios racistas con el puñal amoroso de su bondad, su abnegación y su dignidad" (p. 79). María Granados learns about the struggle for survival and the perseverance of human dignity from a black mother figure<sup>16</sup>. Similarly to the alternative kinship ties described by Barbara Bush in the lives of displaced peoples, she ultimately recognizes that her family had in fact been Ninina. Ninina is credited with being the source of Granados' own endurance and her political trajectory as a supporter of the ideals of José Martí and of the Cuban revolution. At the end of *La otra María...*, she exclaims fulfillment at having witnessed the end of slavery: "Y moriré feliz. La niña que vio al Apóstol en Cayo Hueso, es ésta: la anciana que ve convertido en realidad su sueño, en una Patria donde no existirán jamás esclavas como Ninina, niñas descalzas y piojosas como Pepilla, ni ricos sin entrañas" (p. 125). Both Dora Alonso and María Granados could be daughters of Léonora, Mary Prince, Leoncia Lassalle, Namuní, Ninina, or the scores of women whose bodies bore the ravages of slavery; and having heeded their mother's words, they actively contributed to social changes, believing that the physical and emotional ties shattered through centuries of servitude can be rearticulated through the revolutionary process and the construction of a new society.

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<sup>16</sup> Mary Ann Gosser-Esquilín explores the problematic representation of black mother figures in Puerto Rican literature in "Nanas negras: The Silenced Women in Rosario Ferré and Olga Nolla", *CENTRO*, New York: CUNY-Hunter College, 2002.

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