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Silenced but Not Forgotten: The verbalization of the experience of black enslaved women in contemporary Puerto Rican literature

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Silenced but Not Forgotten

The verbalization of the experience of black enslaved women in contemporary Puerto Rican literature

They tell us what our history is,
that we didn't have it that bad.

They say they saved and fixed our kind,
and that we should be grateful for the help they gave us
with civilizing and indoctrinating us with Christianity.

They tell us we shouldn't be mad or dramatic,
that we shouldn't look for a problem where there isn't any.

They tell us that we didn't suffer that much,
because the economic profit wasn't a lot.

They said we had it easier,
because there were less plantations.

They compare our suffering,
give it a value,
reduce it to a number not worth mentioning,
and chain us to a history and worldview
where we do not as exist as equal human beings.

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“Todo lo que divide a los hombres, todo lo que especifica, aparte o acorrala es un pecado contra la humanidad.”

- José Martí

“a hacer del negro un tema central [...] y con ello, reconocer a los africanos y sus descendientes un lugar en la historia de Puerto Rico.”

- José Luis Méndez

Introduction

In Puerto Rico in the recent years there has been an emergence in the proclamation for recognition of *afrodescendencia*¹, from academics such as (but not limited to) Marie Ramos Rosado, Mayra Santos-Febres, Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, and Zaira Rivera Casellas, to regain dignity for a lost history, ancestry and community. The proclamation is a demand for the recognition that the African heritage that was brought through the transatlantic slave trade to the island is part of Puerto Rico. Ignoring or denying the *afrodescendencia* that is present within the Puerto Rican culture would mean neglecting a big part of the history of the island. One of the things that the authors mentioned above have in common, is that when they approach the notion of *afrodescendencia*, either directly or indirectly within their work, they all refer to the time of slavery. This is not only because through enslavement the Africans were brought to Puerto Rico, it is because speaking about the time of slavery gives way to the rewriting of the Puerto Rican colonial History in which the African is silenced. Through the rewriting of the colonial History alternative logics, languages and thinking are recognized, and it is possible to decolonize the hegemonic knowledge in which those alternative worlds are deemed

¹ The words ‘*afrodescendencia*’ and ‘*afrodescendientes*’ are intentionally used instead of their English translation ‘Afro-descendants’, because the hyphenation that implies a break or division between the two words does not do the *afrodescendientes* that demand to be heard and a presence justice. The word should be heavy and a mouthful, because the generational suffering and silencing is not a lightweight topic and it shouldn’t be dealt with as such.

nonexistent (Mignolo, 2005, p. xx). The decolonization of knowledge is crucial in the recognition of the African heritage within Puerto Rico because it dismantles the control of the hegemonic perspective on the mind (consciousness, subconsciousness and unconsciousness). The rewriting counters the amnesia that comes at the cost of the colonial History that overwrites the experiences and past of the *afrodescendientes*. An amnesia developed after enslavement – from which a loss of self and humanity emerged – that “symbolizes the ultimate loss, that of the past and of language, the loss of the code without which normality cannot be restored” (Christol IN Diedrich & Gates Jr., 1999, p. 167). The rewriting is about combating the colonial knowledge of erasure, and reclaiming existence and recognition in silenced spaces. The rewriting is done from a fictional mnemonic space where an alternative reality is created that transcends the reality depicted within the colonial Historical pages and documents. Through fiction it becomes possible to overcome the invisibilization of the *afrodescendencia* and the silencing of *afrodescendiente* within the hegemonic historical debate. Because by incorporating the embodied experiences, ancestrality, oral histories and narratives that are excluded within the literary colonial history an alternative, or *otherwise* as Catherine Walsh names it, is created where the rejected from the hegemonic worldview and existence, regain agency and re-exist as human beings. As Zaira Rivera Casellas states, through fiction a literary corpus is created that vocalizes and verbalizes the silenced voices of the hegemonic historical literature (2011, p. 99). Thus, through rewriting and fiction silenced voices have access to a reality in which they are liberated from the shackles of invisibility, reclaim their voices and demand recognition.

The history that is written and taught in institutional places, is a historical account that exercises a monopoly over how Puerto Rico is seen and made into what it is today. Because the historical account that is being taught within institutional spaces, is from a singular colonial perspective that eliminates and silences other historical narratives that make up the histories

present within a place (Trouillot, 2015, p. 21). Within this singular colonial perspective there is an explicit renunciation of the radical destruction of the lives of the enslaved, which in turn is transferred into the silencing of the presence of *afrodescendencia* in modern times. Moreover, this colonial historical account created an ontology of the enslaved as passive cattle that needed the colonial reform and could not envision or seek freedom for themselves or their descendants (Trouillot, 2015, p. 73). The colonial perspective created the illusion that the enslaved² were dependent on the colonial enterprise. It was an illusion where the enslaved were commodified into a product that only existed for and through the plantation model to produce value and pleasure for the colonizers; masters of the plantation (Hartman, 2016). Within such an illusion to civilize meant to colonize, meaning that the idea was that without the colonial reform implemented through the plantation model, the black enslaved would still be primitive and/or barbaric – “incomplete according to the dictates of civilization” (Rushdy, 1999, p. 177; Trouillot, 2015, p. 86). The thought that the African is primitive and reduced to an inferior uncivilized being is rooted within an ideology “that produces Africa as the temporal other of the West and the values of the Africanity as little more than a shorthand of sensuousness, instinct, rhythm, superstition, improvisation, naturalness, and physical prowess” (Hartman, 1997, p. 74). Additionally, the writing-off of the enslaved as passive cattle with no aspiration to fight for freedom was a method to deny “the humanity of the enslaved” and strengthen the resolve of the transatlantic enslavement and trade (Trouillot, 2015, p. 83). Furthermore, the colonial historical account promotes a worldview that provides an ideological rationalization for the enslavement of Africans that states that “blacks were inferior and therefore enslaved” securing blacks “at the bottom of the human world” (Trouillot, 2015, p. 77). This historical

² The word ‘enslavement’ or ‘enslaved’ will be used throughout this work for the people were born free and as humans, not as what the colonial enterprise leads us to think that by using the word slaves the enslavement is naturalized as if the black Africans that were captured were born as slaves and to be enslaved; not as humans.

account in turn gives a justification to the dehumanization and enslavement of the blacks, Africans, and removes their agency to turn the blacks into a product for economic gain. Understanding that the history is colonial is also understanding that the written story is inherently made by and for the colonizer/settler, for the narrative of the captured, slaughtered and enslaved is completely erased and has no historical representation (Fanon, 1963, p. 51). The enslaved has no access to history or means of representation, for a product has no other value than quantifying the gain of the colonizers, and in the colonial history the enslaved was a mere tool as a means to an end.

The history that is written is patriarchal in that the absence and presence of the woman within the historical account is dictated by sex, pleasure and care of the family. Marie Ramos Rosado specifically makes note of the patriarchal history of Puerto Rico stating “*la invisibilidad a la que los relatos oficiales [...] han condenado [a la mujer negra] históricamente [es] tanto por negra como por mujer*”³ (2012, p. 185). The reduction of the woman’s role within a historical account to a mere addition or mention in the story of the man introduces a “patriarchal literary authority” in what is being represented, told and given importance to (Rushdy, 1999, p. 15). The idea is created that only the man and his historical role are at the foundation of the creation of what Puerto Rico is today. However, overlooking the role and voice of the woman when looking at the history of a country, is the same as not knowing the history of Puerto Rico. Or as Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro stated, “*no conocen la historia de su país [si] no conocen la historia de su familia*”⁴ (2016). Moreover, a historical account that is inherently patriarchal creates patriarchal roots within the foundation of the country that become part of the

³ Translation: the invisibility to which the official account have historically condemned black woman, is both for being black and woman

⁴ Translation: You do not know the history of your country [if] you do not know the history of your family

contemporary society securing the continuation of male chauvinistic tendencies towards women (Courtad IN Hidalgo de Jesús, 2012, p. 111). The absencing of women and their contributions to history is the result of the oppression, subordination and subjectification that they had to suffer through. The Puerto Rican women had to tolerate “the legacy of colonialism, political intolerance, educational deprivation, economic dependence[,] exploitation[,] racism, the division of classes, patriarchy, and the mythology of subordination implicit in the religious dogma of Catholicism” (Jimenez Wagenheim, 1981, p. 196). Due to the conditions that the women had to suffer through they were neglected, their role was omitted from history and their importance as a historical figure was lessened (Messinger Cypess IN Davies & Fido, 1990, p. 76). The roles of the women were thus filtered and reshaped by the historian to fit the dominating patriarchal perspective. The black women were represented in occasions but “*siempre ha sido encarnando papeles sumisos y domesticados, nunca protagónicos y liberadores*”⁵ (Ramos Rosado, 2012, p. 185). The identities and roles of women “were socially constructed, refashioned, and politicized by legislated patriarchal power” securing them in an “established gender order” where the men are superior and the women are inferior (McD Beckles, 1999, p. x). The patriarchal history is prejudiced towards women, silencing and erasing them from history by telling a story of male dominance, superiority and success.

It is important to understand that history is gendered and because of that it is necessary to look at the “femeology of our female ancestors”, which is a genealogy that follows the trajectory of the erased and silenced (Walsh IN Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 41). Gender has memory; the retaining of information varies per individual but it also greatly varies per gender. What each man or woman experiences, retains, shares and passes down is influenced by their gender; the social constructed reality that is predetermined and based on their sex. It is

⁵ Translation: it has always been embodied submissive and domesticated roles, never protagonistic or liberators

necessary to look at history not only from the above as a written text, but from below through memory politics presented in oral histories, narratives and fictional stories that retell stories in a passionate and exaggerated manner (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016; Walsh IN Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 41; Rushdy, 1999). Remembering and re-telling the history of the enslaved is to reclaim and rewrite the historical account of the time of slavery where the transatlantic enslaved are not represented as humans, but as cattle and products. It is to regain a sense of humanity and dignity for the descendants of and deceased enslaved Africans. The rewriting and reclaiming give the power of representation and historical presence back to the dehumanized enslaved Africans and their descendants, and changes the narrative that creates a negative stigma surrounding Africaneity and blackness. Furthermore, the rewriting of the time of slavery is necessary to understand the enslavement not as an economic materialism where it is viewed and defined through capitalism, however how the enslavement defined the capital. It is necessary to understand the act of enslaving “as high crimes against the flesh, as the person of African females and African males registered the wounding” and “think of the ‘flesh’ as a primary narrative” (Spillers, 1987, p. 67). Additionally, a double-consciousness is needed when rewriting and reclaiming the power of representation, because through the double-consciousness it is possible to reach another reality that is beyond the idea of the enslaved as written in the colonial patriarchal history. The double-consciousness is a way of seeing the world from the position of the colonizer and the oppressed, it is the understanding that the enslaved is a product in the eye of the master, but for the self a human being in their own perception (Du Bois, 2015, p. 5; Ferreira Da Silva, 2014, p. 86). It is to see beyond the condition of property and see the self differently; to regain a sense of humanity and dignity.

To move against such a patriarchal colonial History of erasure, primitivizing, commodifying and objectifying of the enslaved and their *afrodescendencia* within Puerto Rico, *afroboricua* writers, including (but not limited to) Mayra Santos-Febres and Yolanda Arroyo

Pizarro, have made it their mission to rewrite the hegemonic colonial historical narrative. Both authors make use of embodied mnemonic fiction to highlight the void within history and problematics of Puerto Rico in regards to *afrodescendencia*, race, *la mujer negra*, gender and diversity. Their literary projects are political in that they portray the current problems within Puerto Rico through fiction, which allows their work to be transtemporal transporting the readers to another reality in which the silenced and marginalized gain a voice. Some examples of such works are *Anamú y Manigua*, *Fé en disfraz*, *Las Negras*, *Ojos de Luna* and *Pez de Vidrio*. Mayra Santos Febres, is an essayist, poet and novelist born in Carolina Puerto Rico, was motivated to write *Anamú y Manigua*, because “*la historia, y sobretudo la historia de las mujeres negras en la confección de mi país, había sido cuidadosamente borrada del mapa*”⁶ (Torres Martínez et al., 2004, p. 7). In the work *Anamú y Manigua*, Febres attempts a rewriting by conjuring the bodies of black Puerto Rican women in which the body works as a “quintessential instrument of literature” that “reflects the way in which history touches a person” (Birmingham-Pokorny, 2003, p. 457). Here the black female body is reshaped into a historical space of significance and Puerto Rican nationhood. The fictional literary work for Santos-Febres is crucial because of the absence of black women in Puerto Rican literature.

“I needed to feel that my mother, my grandmother, the women of my family, and I were a part of Puerto Rico; for we had worked so hard and suffered and conquered so much that Puerto Rico would be incomplete without us. This book [...] address[es] the ways in which Black women have always been Puerto Rican, because their/ our work is a thread in the construction of the nation” (Birmingham-Pokorny, 2003)

⁶ Translation: history, and above all the history of black women in the making of my country, had been carefully erased from the map

What is also made apparent in the work of Santos-Febres is the plurality of black women and their fused/intermeshed intersectionality that establishes a specific historical account that is crucial in the understanding of a society in which the black woman is part of.

“Maybe in critical analysis it is difficult to explain the ways in which race, gender, class and nation intersect, but in the lives of my mother, my grandmother and me, those identities go hand in hand and place us in a particular locus within the history of our country, of this planet. Anamú y manigua is an attempt to understand those places and to celebrate them”(Birmingham-Pokorny, 2003)

As well as Santos-Febres, Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro – an essayist, poet and novelist born in Amalía de Guaynabo Puerto Rico – writes about the plurality of the black woman in their cultural artistic products. Arroyo Pizarro’s works are *“poblada de personajes con cuerpo de mujer entabla diálogos incesantes con las luchas por la equidad en múltiples frentes: la raza, el género, lo queer”*⁷ (Lladó Ortega, 2018, p. 273). Arroyo Pizarro’s work *Las Negras* is an example of how *“la reapropiación de la literatura fundacional abolicionista se transforma en la utopía de la auto-representación de la mujer africana que se inserta a la realidad de la vida caribeña”*⁸ (Rivera Casellas, 2011, p. 108). *Las Negras* provides a literary and imaginary space for the black woman that is historically and culturally unmade to exist and become part of the conscious daily life of Puerto Rico. In the work such as *Las Negras* Arroyo Pizarro *“nos devuelve a una de esas zonas inimaginables de la historia cultural y nacional puertorriqueñas”*⁹ (Rivera Casellas, 2011, p. 108). Where the erased, marginalized and

⁷ Translation: populated by characters with the female body, they engage in incessant dialogues for the struggle of equity on multiple fronts: race, gender, queer

⁸ Translation: the reappropriation of the founding abolitionist literature is transformed into the utopia of the self-representation of the African woman that is inserted in the reality of the Caribbean life.

⁹ Translation: takes us back to one of those unimaginable areas of Puerto Rican cultural and national history

silenced is imagined into a living breathing being and reanimated as part of the *puertorriqueñidad*. Both authors rewrite the narratives of black women in Puerto Rican literature, regaining agency and recognition for the black woman within Puerto Rico. The rewriting of the identity of the black Puerto Rican woman through fictional literary works, and from the perspective of the *afrodescendiente*, is an attempt to visibilize the “*marginados e invisibilizados por la historia oficial en la sociedad puertorriqueña*”¹⁰ and reclaim a position of authority where the black woman is a protagonist and a leader (Ramos Rosado, 2012, p. 185). It is necessary to analyze these type of embodied mnemonic fictional literary works because they can bridge the gap made by binary oppositions (black-white; human-nonhuman) and allow us to get in touch with a forgotten history and people. This is possible because “*works of literature are never mere ‘memories’, they rewrite what they remember [and] they ‘influence their precursors’*” (Borges IN Eckstein, 2006, p. 54). Thus, through fictional literary works it is possible to change the narrative of automatic silencing that stems from the hegemonic historical discourse within Puerto Rico.

This research will analyze how the experiences of black enslaved women in *Las Negras* rewrite and depatriarchalize the history of Puerto Rico. *Las Negras* was chosen as the main source of this work because of the hyperpresence of the black woman. Moreover, the novel addresses, through the narratives of Wanwe, Ndizi, Tshanwe and Petra, social problems that can be connected to *afrodescendencia* and *negritud* in contemporary Puerto Rico. Another key reason for choosing a novel such as *Las Negras* is because of the ‘actual’ role of the black enslaved women during the time of slavery. The black enslaved women played a key role in the upholding and expansion of the exploitative plantation system established through the Transatlantic Slave Trade, making it important to understand the historical account from the

¹⁰ Translation: marginalized and invisibilized by the official history in the Puerto Rican society

black female perspective (Hartman, 2002). The focus will be on listening to and understanding the voices of the enslaved women, expressed through the first-person narrative, within the novel. The voices of the black enslaved women expressed within the work are transtemporal and relevant because the traces of the transatlantic slave trade are still present within the people. It is necessary to understand that the inequalities that stemmed from the enslavement are not only specific to the time period in which it happened, 15th – 19th century, the inequalities and silencing are part of *puertorriqueñidad*. As Saidiya Hartman stated “we are encouraged to see ourselves as the vessels for the captive’s return; we stand in the ancestor’s shoes. We imaginatively witness the crimes of the past and cry for those victimized—the enslaved, the ravaged, and the slaughtered” (2002, p. 767). The main research question that will guide this work is how *Las Negras* reclaim and rewrite Puerto Rican colonial history through neo-slave narratives of resistance. Where the aim is to understand how the female voice verbalizes a narrative that is different from historical texts and grounded in the common people or embodied knowledge. It is a narrative of relationality, ancestry, and intersubjective connectivity that is left out of and erased from the hegemonic history in Puerto Rico.

In order to achieve the aim of the research the work is divided in three chapters that will each fulfil an objective contributing to the main aim of this work. The first two chapters will make use of close reading and transtextuality, where the novel *Las Negras* will be analyzed through a zoom-in and zoom-out approach. As a close reading the intention is to read and understand the text, more closely or intimately, thus zooming into the novel. And through transtextuality it will be possible to zoom out by placing the text in relation to each other or other situations, such as the social conditions from which the creation of the text stemmed from and/or disciplines/concepts of which the novel is trying to fill gaps of. Inter- and intratextuality will be used as a tool to analyze the relationship between the four short stories that compose the novel and attempt to insert the novel within the general discussion on the colonial History

of Puerto Rico. The intratextual approach is chosen because it specifically “defends the value and the relevance of close reading” (Bruno, 2020) in that “close readings of the textuality of texts are essential for effective historicist analysis” (Morales IN Bruno, 2020). Such an approach in analyzing allows for a transtemporal dialogue to occur between the past and the current, ensuring a conscientization on the historical silencing and marginalization of the enslaved and their descendants, and a rewriting to regain the power of representation and recognition. Architextuality is also used as a tool within this work to highlight “that relationship of inclusion that links each [part of the novel] to the various types of discourse it belongs to” (Genette, 1992, p. 82). The third chapter will zoom out further by giving a broad view of the social conditions, or maybe better said restrictions, that come with blackness and *afrodescendencia* in Puerto Rico. The third chapter is important for it expands the transtemporal and transtextual dialogue of the fictional novel, *Las Negras*, with the reader to contemporary Puerto Rico. This in turn politicizes the novel as a necessary point of departure for opening the conversation on the current social and cultural problems surrounding blackness and *afrodescendencia* in Puerto Rico.

The first chapter focuses on the reading of neo-slave narratives and decolonizing memory, where the objective is to understand how the neo-slave narratives compiled in *Las Negras* aid in the decolonization of the dismemory created by the colonial Puerto Rican History. The theory of Ashraf Rushdy on neo-slave narratives will be used as a foundation in the chapter, where it will gradually be connected with the notion of mnemonic fiction and decolonization of memory. Excerptions of the novel will be used to aid in visibilizing the dismemories created through the colonial History of Puerto Rico. This in return can highlight how fiction, through neo-slave narratives, is used to ‘rewrite’ the past and create an alternative reality.

The second chapter focuses on the political implications of the novel, in the sense of the societal problems it is addressing through placing it in general academic debates/discourse surrounding enslavement. Passages of the novel will be used transtextually with theories and notions that are approached from non-western perspectives on the transatlantic slave trade. This chapter will link the novel with sex, race, coloniality and death. Connecting the novel with such notions shifts the content transtextually to the problems that black women are confronted with for being black and a woman, because the coloniality of the hegemonic History is inscribed on the body.

The third chapter attempts to address the repercussions of lack of historical representation by highlighting some societal issues that arise as result of silencing the Africaneity in the colonial Puerto Rican History. Due to a lack of historical representation negritude and Africaneity are shunned within the Puerto Rican society, leading to pigmentocracy, colorism, double consciousness, intersectionality and invisibilization. This chapter is important in realizing the aim of the work because as Arroyo Pizarro stated “*es importante que se sepa las conexiones que hay entre la negritud y otras maneras de prejuiciar y discriminar. De ahí la importancia de mencionar las intersecciones cuando hablamos de negritud*¹¹” (“Escritoras Afroboricuas,” 2017). Thus, when analyzing works such as *Las Negras* and their political implications it is necessary to understand them in the broader context of blackness and its intersections.

¹¹ Translation: it is important to know the connections between blackness and other forms of prejudice and discrimination. Hence the importance of mentioning intersections when we speak of blackness.

“Los seres humanos somos actores sociales, participantes activos o pasivos de eso que denominamos nuestra historia, pero también narramos aquello que aconteció desde nuestras particulares referencias metaculturales, desde los umbrales de nuestra personal manera de ser en el mundo.”

- Ivette Chiclana Miranda

Chapter 1 Reading Neo-Slave Narratives and Decolonizing Memory

1.1 Neo-Slave Narratives

From the 1970s a wave of Puerto Rican women writers emerged that “have created some of the most innovative literary works, in terms of the themes that they approach, the problems that they critique and the possibilities that they imagine for female empowerment, agency and equality” (Rangelova, 2012, p. 150). This wave of Puerto Rican women writers such as Ana Lydia Vega, Julia de Burgos and Magali García that dealt with independence, nationhood, racism, classicism and gender from a female point of view, made way for a second wave of afro-Puerto Rican women writers such as Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro that focuses on the ways in which gender, sexuality, race and the history of slavery intersect and are “embodied by young Afro-Caribbean women” (Rangelova, 2012, p. 150). Through writers such as Arroyo Pizarro, the “*mirada literaria ha cambiado*”, from the literature before in which, as Ramos Rosado states, “*hemos sido educados y educadas en una sociedad patriarcal, autoritaria, hegemónica, clasista, sexista, racista*¹²” (“Escritoras Afroboricuas,” 2017). The works of

¹² Translation: we have been educated and educated in a patriarchal, authoritarian, hegemonic, classist, sexist, racist society

Arroyo Pizarro change the literary field within Puerto Rico in dismantling the structures of power that create of literature an authoritative, patriarchal, racist and sexist field.

In *Las Negras* the characters are “intertwined with the history of slavery and [...] marked by both patriarchal and neo-colonial hierarchies [placing the work as a] neo-slave narrative” (Rangelova, 2012, p. 150). The novel focusses on neo-slave narratives told from the perspective of the *ancestras*¹³ or *Las Negras*, in order to decolonize memory, depatriarchalize history, racialize historical exclusions and reclaim history through rewriting. Understanding *Las Negras* as a neo-slave narrative makes of the novel a fictional (auto)biography of the time of slavery told by the *afrodescendientes* (colonized) instead of the colonizer. Fiction in this context provides the gateway to:

*“acceder [...] a ese silencio para repensar la arbitrariedad de imágenes y valores que comparten las representaciones culturales de los miembros de la diáspora africana en las Américas y el Caribe [y crear un] corpus literario en el que las voces de los esclavos podrían brindar continuidad a una memoria histórica de los afro-puertorriqueños”*¹⁴ (Rivera Casellas, 2011, p. 99).

Through the colonial History that is written in textbooks and taught as an ‘objective’ view of what happened during the time of slavery, the belief is created that such a History is the only history. However, for the people that were not represented or misrepresented within the colonial History the looking back at such an account creates discomfort, disturbance and generates dismemories. The usage of fiction allows for the imaginary to transcend the History and its coloniality that is engrained within the social structures of Puerto Rico, and create

¹³ Translation: Female ancestors

¹⁴ Translation: literary corpus in which the voices of the enslaved could provide a continuity to a historical memory of Afro-Puerto Ricans

another historical narrative leading to a multiplicity of histories. The mnemonic fiction can also be a political endeavor where it creates a “political projection against a historical reality beyond the boundaries of text” (Eckstein, 2006, p. xv). The mnemonic fiction becomes political when it is actively involved with the social and political problematics of Puerto Rico. The mnemonic fiction itself also has a political position in regards to where the memory is derived from; the social (cultural), individual or collective (Eckstein, 2006, p. xv). For Arroyo Pizarro the memory and remembering stems from all three; the social, individual and collective (see positionality). Moreover, through fiction it is also possible to reach within or from the cracks or nodes, as Ellison names it (explained in section 3.4), of the Puerto Rican society where those that are not deemed *puertorriqueño* reside. The fiction has no time restriction such as ‘pre’ or ‘post’ because it does not have a timepoint in reality like the nonfictional, even when it is detailing a specific time frame, this allows for a continuity to co-exist within the narrative. The memory and remembrance that happens through fiction then experiences a plurality of temporalities.

Neo-slave narratives are a necessary tool to “enable the construction of multiple critical positions from which to approach the experience of slavery, its historical manifestations and contemporary effects” (Rangelova, 2012, p. 151). Rushdy coined these narratives as neo-slave because they are “one particular form of contemporary narrative of slavery [...] that is, contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave [*sic*] narrative” (1999, p. 3). These types of neo-slave narratives are necessary to give back authority to the enslaved and their descendants over their own voice, experience and perspective (Rushdy, 1999, p. 6). Neo-slave narratives are thus a necessary tool in the journey of rewriting and reclaiming history for the oppressed, silenced and erased.

Through the first-person narrative it is also possible for Arroyo Pizarro to use their¹⁵ “life to offer reflection upon the subject’s life” (Hanel, 2018, p. 19). Meaning through the neo-slave narrative it becomes possible for Arroyo Pizarro to reach into their own historical background and place it within a fictional literary work that enables it to exist through the imaginary.

Starting from the paratext of *Las Negras* it is already evident that the novel is to be understood as a neo-slave narrative and should be analyzed as such. The first quote in the novel is by Guillermo A. Baralt, who was a history professor that wrote on the resistance and rebellions of the enslaved to captivity. The quote specifically renounces the passivity that is attached to the enslaved and inserts resistance and rebellion; “*contrario a lo que siempre se había creído, los esclavos de la isla se rebelaron con frecuencia*”¹⁶ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 13). Here the conversation is about the colonial past, enslavement and resistance. The second quote is by Gabriela Soyna, a pseudonym invented in 1998 by Arroyo Pizarro because of a “*iglesia muy fundamentalista que sin duda se escandalizaría por mis escritos de tendencia transgresora*”¹⁷ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2012). The quote was invented in order to “*dialogar de algún modo con el escrito de Baralt*”¹⁸ on the idea of the enslaved resisting and rebelling against the oppressive order of the plantation (Arroyo Pizarro, 2012). The quote of Soyna brings gender politics into the discussion, where Baralt spoke about the enslaved as a whole, Soyna is

¹⁵ It is not known what gender pronouns Yolando Arroyo Pizarro prefers so the pronoun ‘they’/‘their’ will be used for ambiguity and opacity. I am aware of the fact that the debates surrounding gender pronouns are socially and culturally contingent; in that the notions and existence of gender and pronouns are dependent on language, privilege, politics, time and space. The pronoun ‘they’ also gives a sense of respect, as it was used back in the day to refer to the kings and used nowadays to address elders.

¹⁶ Translation: contrary to what has always been believed, the enslaved of the island frequently rebelled

¹⁷ Translation: very fundamentalist church that would that would undoubtedly be scandalized by my transgressive writings

¹⁸ Translation: dialogue in some way with the writings of Baralt

speaking specifically about the “*mujeres negras [que] tomaron partido en las miles fugas individuales y grupales que se desataron en épocas esclavistas y subsiguientes*”¹⁹ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 15). Through this quote Arroyo is bringing the conversation that Basalt is provoking with his words to the discourse on the “*machismo y racism rampante que se vive en mi país hoy*”²⁰ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2012). Here the direction of the discussion is not only on the silencing of the enslaved, it is also criticizing the specific silencing of black women that is still present in Puerto Rico today.

The third quote by Gloria Steinem, an American feminist and former leader of the American feminist movement in the 60s/70s, said the following: “*He conocido mujeres valientes que explotaron los límites de la posibilidad humana, sin ninguna historia que las guiara*”²¹ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 15). This quote opens the scope of the variety of discourses further through inserting the idea of a patriarchal history that needs to be countered or contrasted or contested with a matriarchal narrative of *las Ancestras*. Or as a Nigerian proverb states “*hasta que los leones tengan sus propios historiadores, las historias de cacería seguirán glorificando al cazador*”²² (Arroyo Pizarro, 2012). Meaning that there is a necessity for “*una nueva literatura insurgente de la Afrodescendencia*”²³ that focuses on the matrilineage or femeology (Arroyo Pizarro, 2012). This becomes evident through the ‘female voice’ that is used throughout the novel. With female voice referring to the narrators, the point of view that the story is told from, the characters and problems that are focused on, and the method in which

¹⁹ Translation: black women who took part in the thousands of escaped both individual and in groups that happened in during enslavement and subsequent eras

²⁰ Translation: rampant machismo and racism that is present in my country today

²¹ Translation: I have met valiant women that exploited the limits of the human ability with no history to guide them

²² Translation: until the lions have their own historians, the histories of the hunt will keep glorifying the hunter

²³ Translation: a new insurgent literature on afrodescendencia

the story itself is delivered. The quote is also used to highlight a gap or better said void within the history of Puerto Rico told from the perspective of the *afrodescendientes*. As Arroyo Pizarro states “*digo nueva, porque en Puerto Rico tenemos muy poco o casi nada de literatura que describa a nuestras antepasadas*”²⁴ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2012). The work of Arroyo Pizarro positions the dominant historical narrative present within Puerto Rico, fixing it in the perspective, narration and worldview of one specific group, and highlighting that there are other worldviews and historical narrations differing from the dominant.

The foreword by Dra. Marie Ramos Rosado, a researcher, writer and a black feminist activist, named *Exordio a Las Negras*²⁵ highlights the discrepancy in the written history that is incomplete because it portrays disinformation regarding the rebellions of the enslaved by only focusing on rebellions by black enslaved men and erasing that of the black enslaved women. She then criticizes the patriarchal tendency of the historical narrative that is seen as the universal history in Puerto Rico. Dra. Rosado states that the author through the fictional stories makes the black women visible and highlights their contributions towards humanity. Followed by a critical review written by Carmen Dolores Hernández named *Llenar el vacío*²⁶, it is stated that the novel intends to fill a void through the narrations of enslaved people that were subjected to one of the cruelest social institutions created by mankind, the plantation model, and that the memory plays a big role in realizing this. These two paratextual reviews on the novel help to liaise the overall intent and direction of the author and the short stories.

Before the short stories start there are two quotes that can be interpreted as the genealogy of the novel. The first is of Julia de Burgos, she was a Puerto Rican poet, feminist

²⁴ Translation: I say new, because in Puerto Rico we have very little to barely nothing of literature that describes our ancestors

²⁵ Translation: Exordium to the blacks (specifically women)

²⁶ Translation: Filling the void/gap

and an advocate for independence. Through her poem, *Ay, Ay, Ay, De La Grifa Negra*, the author highlights the looks of *Las Negras* where homage is given to their phenotype; the skin that is “*grifa y pura negra*” referencing to *mestizaje* and black; the hairs having “*grifería*” in them referring to the frizzy, tangled or kinky hair, which is ‘reserved’ to the nonwhite; the lips that have “*cafrería*” in them disparaging them to being cruel, savage, brute, vulgar, ‘insulting’ the lips to being black African; And finally, the Mozambique nose that is ‘*chata*’ meaning flat. The other quote of Johanny Vázquez Paz, Puerto Rican poet, narrator and professor writes about being woman and the excuses that come with why the woman is treated the way she is.

“porque nací mujer y sangro y me preñan y paro/ y crío y cuido y limpio y organizo y
dejo de sangrar”(Vázquez Paz IN Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 21)

With this quote the emphasis is further put on the fact that the suffering of the black (enslaved) women is specific to them simply because they are blackwomen; ‘*las negras*’.

1.2 **Positioning**

The notion of positionality needs to be taken into account when reading, analyzing and understanding the neo-slave narrative *Las Negras* because it deals with “the question of who is speaking; where are you speaking from; and why are you speaking about this” (Vázquez IN Hernández & te Velde, 2018, p. 104). These questions are asked in order to situate the novel, author and reader within time, space and social conditions specific to them. The positioning is also done in order to “displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and thought” (Walsh IN Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 17). In this regard, the novel works as a means of positioning the colonial dismemory and inserting other perspectives of thinking, experiencing and relating to the time of slavery and enslavement. Positioning brings forward an understanding of time and space that is not linear. It is an understanding that resists the idea that a story has a specific “point in time which was prehistoric” in turn ceasing its continuation in historic and/or contemporary (Smith, 2008, p. 57). This resistance to a linear

time, brings breaks in the perspective of the Western colonial history that can be envisioned on a straight line of successive historical events creating of certain societies, cultures and situations as prehistoric. Through positioning the colonial History of Puerto Rico in its coloniality it is possible to insert “different orientations towards time and space, different positioning within time and space, and different systems of language for making space and time 'real'” (Smith, 2008, p. 57). This creates breaks and discontinuity within the understanding of time and space as linear and singular to the western Eurocentric worldview in which other world-systems are deemed inexistent through prehistoricity. And inserts other worldviews and understandings of “notions of past and present, of place and of relationships to the land” (Smith, 2008, p. 57). Through positionality a space of existing in time is created where the fictional reality of *Las Negras* becomes a possible and likely alternative to the colonial History of Puerto Rico that had made of ‘*las negras*’ a mere afterthought of pleasure and domesticity.

Las Negras was written as a neo-slave narrative meaning that the experiences date back to the time of the transatlantic slave trade dating and starting from all the way back to the 15th century. When reading the text, the text should be understood within the social, political and economic circumstances from the 15th century and the changes throughout the following centuries. The novel starts with the captivity of the Africans from their homeland, which would place the start of the novel around 1517s. The time span that the novel is told in is not clearly indicated but it can be inferred from the last short story in the novel where the narrator Petra mentions that she was born in “*San Juan Bautista y es descendiente mandinga por vía de su abuela maternal*²⁷” (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 139), the mention of abolition being spoken about in “tabernas” (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 140), and the antagonist Jonás mentions later on having

²⁷ Translation: San Juan Bautista/ Puerto Rico and is from Mandinka descent through her grandmother on her mother’s side

read “*sobre los ancestros de Petra en el documento de cartas de las indias y nuevas colonias de 1793*”²⁸ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 145). Petra would be third generation, and considering that the life expectancy of an enslaved was around 30 years (Wessman, 1980, p. 284), at least 60 years have passed since captivity. However, the talks on abolition and the anti-slavery sentiment started around the middle of the 19th century, more or less around 1840s and 1850s (Bergad IN Eltis et al., 2017, p. 125). So, the time span in which the novel is told is from the 15th century to the 19th century.

The author Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, novelist and *afrodescendiente*, was born in the 20th century and is from the *barrio* Amelia de Guaynabo, a poor neighborhood in Puerto Rico. Although, saying poor might make reference to a global economic status, it does not say anything about the richness of the culture that is present within the people. Their²⁹ family is Puerto Rican and, from a “slave rebel area named Santurce and Rio Grande, and her ancestors are from Africa” (Miller, 2014). Arroyo Pizarro mentions that the themes that are chosen for and inform their writing stem from their heritage and culture (Miller, 2014). They are also an activist for equal rights and treatment for the *afrodescendientes* and LGBTQ+ community. Thus, the author writes from the 20th century looking back into the 15th to 17th century, while being informed by their ancestry. The first person Arroyo Pizarro acknowledges in *Las Negras* is their daughter Aurora; “*a Aurora, gran Negra cimarrona de mi casta, por haberse parido de mi cuerpo*”³⁰ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016). Arroyo Pizarro does this because they write for their legacy; their daughter Aurora; “*yo tengo como meta muy real, muy latente, de todos los*

²⁸ Translation: About the ancestors of Petra in the document of letters of the Indies and new colonies of 1793

²⁹ See note 13

³⁰ Translation: to Aurora, great black marron of my caste, for being birthed from my body

*dias el creer un mejor mundo para Aurora, así que por eso escribo*³¹” (Arroyo Pizarro, 2013).

This goal of Arroyo Pizarro is a humble quest because the demand is not for the exclusion of anyone or thing, it is a request for the inclusivity of the already present diversity within Puerto Rico that make up part of the *puertorriqueñidad*. The author also stated that through writing there is healing “*a mí me enseñaron que una de las maneras de sanar es escribiendo. Así que yo tengo que pasar ese conocimiento a otras generaciones*³²” (Arroyo Pizarro IN “Escritoras Afroboricuas,” 2017). The healing that the author is attempting to achieve through writing is not an individual healing but a communitive one, where to ability heal through writing becomes generational when the curative writing is shared.

As for myself, I was also born in the late 20th century and am from Curaçao. My family is from all over the Caribbean and we have roots within Africa, Europe, Abya Yala, Asia, North America. The best way to illustrate would be through a graph generated by an ancestry site:



Fig. 1. World Map of Ancestry based on DNA

³¹ Translation: I have a very real, very latent, daily goal of making a better world for Aurora, that’s why I write

³² Translation: they taught me that one of the ways to heal is through writing. So, I have to pass that knowledge to other generations

Apparently, according to the test I have a highly likely match with Ponce Puerto Rico. Although even if there is a high chance according to my biological make-up, that does not mean that I can say I am from Puerto Rico. The DNA shows the traces where my molecular structure is similar to that of others, however that still does not mean I understand, am part of or relate to the places in which such similarities are found. It is a biological connection that does not directly get transferred into a sociological or cultural one. However, a biological connection could be a trigger or motivation for the establishing of relationality across differences, because as a human being I find it necessary to have motivation in order to move towards something.



Fig. 2. Puerto Rico: From light to dark shows how weak to strong of match with DNA

So, now that there is a motivation, a further zooming in is needed on my DNA in Puerto Rico. My DNA has the strongest match in Ponce, when looking at the geographical position and its historical background is not surprising. The city Ponce was named after don Juan Ponce de León the first conqueror and governor of the island and according to José Antonio Saco it is highly likely that the first black enslaved people came together with Juan Ponce de León to the island (IN Diaz Soler, 1970, p. 15). It is also in Ponce that “African traditions are often celebrated” and has “a large concentration of African descendants and for its carnival with strong African elements” (Hernández Hiraldo, 2006, pp. xi & 24). Moreover, Ponce was one of the places that benefited the from sugar production and slave labor, “making it into one of

the leading centers of slavery-based sugarcane agriculture in Puerto Rico from the early decades of the nineteenth century” (Figuroa, 2005, p. 10). Seeing, the connection between Ponce and enslavement, it is not surprising that I have DNA markers there as I am a result of enslavement, colonialism and trade.

The quest for belonging and uncovering the silenced voices is one that I have in common with the author. The search for the histories that cannot be found within the textbooks is a personal one and through this work an academic one. The positioning of the self is also necessary to address that I am also implicated within the imperial order. It is that I can also be a colonizer especially when I “fail to question [my] own identity and privileged position, and in the ways in which [my] writing [can] perpetuate othering” (Villenas, 1996, p. 713). My intention, and hopefully this is achieved, is that I provide a platform through my writing not to give voice (which would also presuppose a sense of authority and privilege) but bring visibility to the silenced voices in a as humble manner as I possibly can. Because it is through “a process of humbling and positioning [that it becomes possible] for the hegemonic position to enter a truly intercultural dialogue” (Vázquez IN Hernández & te Velde, 2018, p. 104). Through this work I hope to visibilize the importance of works such as *Las Negras* in debates on history, belonging, identity, racism, gender and sexuality. And in general, the importance of understanding that there are world-systems beyond our understanding and worldview, and recognizing that our way of living, being and existing is not the only way of co-existing with the earth and each other.

As part of positioning the self the idea of research/academic distance comes into question. Research distance/academic distance is problematic in that it brings interpretations and manipulations to the research, contorting and twisting that which has been found into what the researcher wants instead of what it was by itself. As much as there is the thought that an objective distance is needed in order to analyze or research a topic, decolonial methodology

argues the opposite. The belief is that once the distance is created between the researcher and subject/object of investigation a sense of authority is exercised upon the subject/object (Smith, 2008). This in turn inferiorizes the information provided through the subject/object because its value is belittled and categorized by the power and control that is exercised upon the subject/object through authority. The research/academic distance also presupposes a sense of privilege over the information gained from the subject/object. It is because the researcher/academic “may interpret [the information] within an overt theoretical framework, but also in terms of a covert ideological framework” (Smith, 2008, p. 176). This is the instance when interpretation, manipulation and elimination of the information can happen. It is “the power to distort, make invisible, to overlook, to exaggerate and to draw conclusions, based not on factual data, but on assumptions, hidden value judgements, and often downright misunderstandings” (Smith, 2008, p. 176). Such a power has “the potential to extend knowledge or to perpetuate ignorance” (Smith, 2008, p. 176), to enact an “arrogant ignorant mode of being towards others [, judge] the reality of others, and rid[e] the colonial difference to reproduce [...] our epistemic privilege” (Vázquez IN Hernández & te Velde, 2018, p. 104). The distance is creating an ‘us vs them’ problem. To counter such a distance, it is necessary to approach the work through relationality. Relationality “in the social and political sphere takes the form of a togetherness where there is no dichotomy between” us and them, and is “a way of overcoming modern dichotomies and moving towards nondualities” (Vázquez, 2012, p. 245). Relationality is the recovering of a “radical freedom of compassion, of being able to feel *with* others” (Vázquez IN Hernández & te Velde, 2018, p. 100). It is through humbling and eliminating the distance that creates an authoritative privileged position of the research above that subject/object, and at the same time understand that there is a difference in positions and worldviews. The idea of feeling *with* is what is important here, it is about the understanding of another; of listening to another.

1.3 Decolonizing Memory

The decolonizing of memory happens when the politics of memory become positioned within their histories and not remembered as one History. The decolonization of memory comes together with the decolonization of the mind that is constructed through the “colonial memory” that “erases the memory of blackness” (Braziel, 2009, p. 50). The decolonization of the mind is to emancipate from the coloniality on the memory that creates dismemories and perpetuates the enslavement of the *ancestras*. The colonization of the memory and the resistance or decolonization of such a colonial memory can be exemplified in the story Wanwe.

“1: *“El primer recuerdo pudiera ser el barco. Un barriga de maderas unidos y flotantes a quienes los suyos llaman owba cocoo.”* 5: *“El primer recuerdo también pudiera ser la aldea. El correteo de los chicos y las chicas, el juego de los hombros”*”³³(Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, pp. 27&37)

The first chapter of Wanwe begins with her first memory; the memory of the slave ship, owba cocoo. The naming of the visual of the ship as the first memory is an example of how the colonial memory overwrites the memory of Wanwe into enslaved cattle. This first memory is a colonial endeavor because it presupposes that the life of Wanwe before the ship with the wooden belly did not exist, or better said is erased. It is where the memory of Wanwe, as human, is erased and replaced for an enslaved. Later on, in chapter five of Wanwe, there is mention of another first memory, one of her village, where boys and girls were running and the game of the shoulders. The mentioning of another first memory can be interpreted as a moment of confusion, conflict and struggle. Where this moment can be connected to the idea of loss,

³³ Translation: 1: The first memory could've been of the boat. A belly of united floating wood that their people call owba cocoo. 5: The first memory could also be the village. The boys and the girls running, the game of the shoulders.

grief and suspension. Wanwe her first memory got overwritten through captivity and enslavement, where her actual first memory got suspended in the time before slavery, and substituted by the first moment of the whole journey to the plantations that made her realize her loss of home, family, and self. It is as if her life ‘restarted’ where she gained another first memory, one that is not connected to her home before the captivity but the one of enslavement as if her life before captivity is gone forever or plainly never existed. The image that overwrote her first memory is that of the ship, which she describes as “a belly of united and floating wood who they call *owba cocoo*³⁴” (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 27). Connecting with the idea of the belly of the boat and the womb abyss the new first memory acts as an imagery of the womb abyss where the enslaved were made into nonhumans and rebirthed into the gears of the plantation system further pushing the enslaved into oblivion. The slave trade “thrived on its hemorrhaging and draining of the most useful arms and most vital energies of the slave-providing societies” (Mbembe, 2019, p. 10). This meant forcing the enslaved “into the belly of the boat [which] dissolves you, precipitates you into a nonworld from which you cry out” (Glissant, 2010, p. 6). The ships that brought the enslaved to the Caribbean were “a womb abyss [...] a matrix [that] expels you[; a] boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under sentence of death” (Glissant, 2010, p. 6). It was a passing of the human enslaved and creation of the dehumanized thing that was birthed into a void of nothingness.

The presence of another first memory can also act as a means to decolonize the first memory that presupposes a void before being enslaved. The contrast between the two memories can represent the moment of coming to or regaining consciousness, a so called conscientization. Where the colonial memory, as described in chapter 1, is decolonized, dismembered as the main or only memory and positioned in the reality of colonialism. The

³⁴ *Owba cocoo* is a Nigerian igbo word for slave ship

decolonization of the memory allowed for the remembrance and commemoration of the time before captivity. The remembering and decolonization also allows for the time before slavery to have an active presence within the current reality of captivity for Wanwe.

In chapter 8 of Wanwe another memory surges; “*Es posible que el primer recuerdo también sea el día del secuestro*” (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 45). This third first memory can be seen as the manifestation of a mnemonic fragmentation because of the activation of a new memory or remembrance. That is to say “*no hay memoria sin conflicto significa que por cada memoria activada hay otras memorias reprimidas, desactivadas, enmudecidas, por cada memoria legitimada hay montones de memorias excluidas*³⁵” (Martin-Barbero, 2002). For Wanwe the remembering of the time before captivity came at the cost of what was happening to her and the rest of the shackled Africans. With each passage that Wanwe remembered the ‘before captivity’ her reality pulled her back to being enslaved, and the time before enslavement was a distant memory/place. The reality in those distant memories became impossibilities in her current reality leading to the overwriting of the first memory into that of the boat, the village and the kidnapping. This overwriting that happened created a mnemonic fragmentation, where Wanwe’s first memory became distorted into three different points in her life. The three first memories of Wanwe, portray the fragmentation that manifested as a result of enslavement. Such a mnemonic fragmentation “hinders any full-remembering” and creates a “fragmentation of the self” that is disconnected to the previous and current reality (Garvey & Portelli IN Diedrich & Gates Jr., 1999). For Wanwe this creates a sort of out of body experience of time where she becomes a spectator to her own life, without experiencing anything lucidly.

³⁵ Translation: there is no memory without conflict means that for each activated memory there are other memories repressed, deactivated, muted, for each legitimized memory there are lots of memories excluded

“Wanwe mira sus manos sujetadas, como si fuera la primera vez que nota que de su cuerpo brotan extremidades indefensas, pero lo cierto es que lleva horas observándose. Se siente extraña, como salida de su propio cuerpo. Observa los acontecimientos aun sin entender del todo”³⁶ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 33).

For Wanwe the experience seems to be happening to someone else, a disconnectedness manifests itself with her current reality making it difficult to comprehend what is happening to her. The recognition of the presence of a mnemonic fragmentation can help to decolonize the memory in understanding that there is no linearity in memory and remembering. Fragmentation is a “result of violence and oppression” and part of the experience of Wanwe (Portelli IN Diedrich & Gates Jr., 1999, p. 288). The visibilization of the fragmented memories allows for the understanding that there is suffering and positions it within the moment in which that suffering manifested. Through fragmentation Wanwe is able to exist beyond enslavement, where her memories allow her to be somewhere and someone other than an enslaved. Without such mnemonic fragmentation, the dismemory that creates a linear recollection of events according to the hegemonic perspective would further erase Wanwe into a dehumanized enslaved.

Another act of decolonizing memory is linked to the idea of discovery or colonial knowledge. This idea is not necessarily connected to the individual memories of the narrators but more of the white colonizers in the book. A good example is the thought of the ‘*señorito*’, Jonás Cartagena, that is one or part of the ‘owners’ of Petra. It is when he believed that he knew something about Petra, assumed that she did not know about it and so wanted to gift Petra a

³⁶ Translation: Wanwe looks at her fastened hands, as if it was the first time she noticed the defenseless limbs sprouting from her body, but the truth is that she has been observing herself for hours. It is a strange feeling, like leaving her own body. She observing the events without fully understanding.

memory; the memory of her ancestors. “*Ha leído sobre los ancestros de Petra en el Documento de Cartas de Las Indias y Nuevas Colonias de 1793. Se lo ha memorizado. Desea en cualquier ocasión regalarle aquel detalle de conocimiento a Petra*³⁷” (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 145). The part to focus on is the idea of gifting to, that presupposes that the knowledge did not exist before the ‘*señorito*’ was aware of it. It is to say that the past or history of Petra, or even Petra herself, did not exist before it was ‘discovered’ by the ‘*señorito*’. And it is also with the thought of privilege and superiority that the ‘*señorito*’ believes he is doing Petra a ‘justice’ of giving her a piece of herself, and believes he is in the power to do this. The ‘*señorito*’ that sees Petra as his property and fetish object is blind and ignorant towards the fact that Petra herself already carries the knowledge with her of her ancestors. Petra states that she “*es descendiente mandinga por vía de su abuela maternal*³⁸” and that she has told the ‘*señorito*’ about it “*en noches de nanas*³⁹” (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 139). It is just that the ‘*señorito*’ refuses to acknowledge this fact because he did not discover it and it is not part of his History or direct reality or memory.

The novel, as a whole, acts as a method to decolonize the memory of the readers. It illustrates and voices those narratives that were not part of the colonial History as we know it. The reader is taken on a different epistemological journey, where the stories of the black enslaved women resist the absence within western epistemology. This positions the knowledge of the reader upon the topic of enslavement and demonopolizes the colonial grasp upon the memories of the reader. In turn aiding in the decolonization of the readers memory on the

³⁷ Translation: He has read about Petra’s ancestors in the *Documento de Cartas de Las Indias y Nuevas Colonias de 1793*. He has memorized it. He wishes in any occasion to gift this piece of knowledge to Petra

³⁸ Translation: is from Mandinka descent through her grandmother on her mother’s side

³⁹ Translation: through lullabies

transatlantic enslavement. Additionally, the novel works as a way to decolonize the dismemories created through the colonial History. Dismemories are those memories that “*de forma velada procuran echar al olvido las condiciones de desigualdad que por razones de raza y color aún perviven en la sociedad puertorriqueña*”⁴⁰ (Flores Collazo IN Valladares-Ruiz, 2011, p. 36). In the decolonization of those dismemories, the novel attempts a rewriting where the conscientization on the racial, gender and sex inequalities present within Puerto Rico become historically apparent through fiction.

1.4 Female Presence/voice

The novel visibilizes, gives recognition to and dignifies the historical narratives of the enslaved Africans neo-slave narratives that tell *her* story. It makes use of the female voice or better said has a hyper presence of the feminine, this can be connected to two movements within the recognition for *afrodescendencia*. The first is the depatriarchalizing of the Puerto Rican History in which the absence of the woman is very evident because it is a “*mundo falocentrico que [domina] la literatura puertorriqueña*”⁴¹ (Centeno Añeses, 2018, p. 11). By telling ‘*her* story’ the narrative of the black enslaved women is told not from the point of view of the “various white men who held power over them” but through the embodied knowledges passed down through the *afrodescendientes* and their daily lives (Bahadur, 2018, p. 246). The telling of ‘*her* story’ is crucial in combating those patriarchal structures of power that create “large gaps in the archives[, that] are structural in nature”, where “there is not a single existing narrative from a woman or girl who survived the Middle Passage” (Bahadur, 2018, p. 246). Thus, a narrative told from the perspective of the black woman resists the patriarchal colonial

⁴⁰ Translation: in a veiled way try to forget the conditions of inequality that for reasons of race and color still survive in Puerto Rican society

⁴¹ Translation: phallogocentric world that dominates the Puerto Rican literature

imposed absence that silences and reproduces the structures of power of oppressing the black (enslaved) woman. This, leads us to the second movement, which is the rewriting of the patriarchal colonial History in which the nonexistent other that is racially and sexually inferior resurges and regains agency as an active participant. Resistance is the first step in the re-existence, which is “the redefining and re-signifying of life in conditions of dignity” (Albán IN Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 3), of the black woman. The second is for a resurgence or better said, a ‘collective resurgence’ – to be “understood as renewal, restoration, revival or a continuing after interruption – of knowledges, life practices , and re-existences” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 18). Through rewriting it then becomes possible for the invisibilized and nonexistent to re-exist and regain a voice. This voice that is being regained is not a singular voice but a ‘we’-voice that highlights the plurality of voices that are embodied within the visibilization and recognition of the silenced. It is a ‘we’-voice that embodies an ancestry, community and relationality across time and space, where the erased are re-imagined into existence and given recognition as part of the embodied knowledge (Vázquez, 2020). Such a voice gives an understanding of knowledge, language and everyday politics that could not exist without its predecessors; without ancestry and community. The ‘we’-voice also moves against the “I-voice that determines ownership, property and individuality” that is present within hegemonic, authoritative and patriarchal discourse (Vázquez, 2020, p. xxv). The ‘we’-voice dismantles “*la autoridad del modelo de silencio y [encuentra] el valor en las micropolíticas de la vida cotidiana, sospechando de cada acto o acción nuestra, las que van hilando el tiempo con nuestros cuerpo*”⁴² (Flores IN Torres Martínez et al., 2004, p. 109). Thus, the ‘we’-voice that is spoken from embodied knowledges and micropolitics of daily lives of

⁴² Translation: the authority of the model of silence and finds the value in the micropolitics of everyday life, suspecting each act or action of ours, those that are weaving time with our bodies

the blackwomen, depatriarchalizes the colonial History in which the blackwomen is deemed inexistent.

The dedicatory in the frontmatter is written by a ‘we’ that represents the multiple voices that are in dialogue within and between the text, writer and people mentioned in the quotes. This is a form of transtextuality where the multiple voices in dialogue are used to bring the text “into relation (manifest or hidden) with other texts” (Genette, 1992, p. 81). In other words, the short stories of the novel transcend their own imaginary space, connecting them to each other, to the writer, and other texts/people through dialogue are transtextual, specifically intertextual. Another example of the presence of intertextuality, which is “the literal presence (more or less literal, whether integral or not) of one text within another”, is how the novel is retelling the historical narrative of the enslaved (Genette, 1992, pp. 81–82). The function of retelling in this context is to create an interlink between the historical narrative of the *historiadores* and that of *las Negras*. The retelling is not just intertextual, it is also intratextual in that it is commenting on, criticizing and responding the historical narrative in which *las Negras* are deemed inexistent.

The thick presence of the female as the protagonist can also be seen as a means of creating discomfort through repetition and the explicit reduction of the male as an antagonist that terrorizes the body and mind of the black enslaved woman. Throughout the novel abuse and misuse of the black female body through sexual violence is repeated in the chapters *Matronas*, *Saeta* and *Los amamantados*. The repetition is to display:

“una y otra vez, con distintos tonos y expresiones, tantas veces como sea necesario, [...] tantas para que viva en las memorias, tantas para corroer el incisivo dobléz del silencio, [...], tantas para que digan que exageramos, porque para quien silencia el más mínimo

*sonido de una palabra le parece un exceso*⁴³” (Flores IN Torres Martínez et al., 2004, p. 109)

The repetition of the sexual violence imposed on the black female body is done to etch the scenes of abuse and misuse into our minds. It is to create such a discomfort that cannot be ignored and demands recognition. Through repetition the sexual violence becomes unavoidably unforgettable to the extent that it tugs at the back of the mind for the conscientization towards the exploitation of the black female body.

1.5 Task of listening and translation

To analyze the work of *Las Negras* it is also necessary to listen. That is to say that the ‘we’-voice can only be approached/analyzed through the ‘mode of listening’, which highlights the awareness of the “infinite indebtedness to others” (Vázquez, 2020, p. xxvi). The indebtedness to others is making reference to the fact that no individual exists by and on their own, we exist in relationality with each other. Listening “refers to a mode of relation that belongs to the decolonial or that gets activated through the decolonial” and has the “task of bridging the colonial difference” (Vázquez IN Dankert, 2019, pp. 148–149). It is about listening to another in an unfiltered or uninterpreted manner, where there is no translating or changing of what is being heard. This mode of listening is,

“about relating to the outside of your epistemic and aesthetic framework so that all your categories, your systems of thought, your senses become located, become humbled and open to real interactions and a growing with other worlds” (Vázquez IN Dankert, 2019, p. 149)

⁴³ Translation: over and over again, with different tones and expressions, as many times as necessary, as many to live in the memories, as many times to corrode the incisive fold of silence, as many times for them to say that we are exaggerating, because for those who silence the slightest sound of one word seems like an excess

To listen to *Las Negras* would mean to understand and analyze the work in its own voice and not through translated interpretations that leave the voices of *Las Negras* out, in turn silencing them again.

The use of both Spanish and English within this work is done intentionally for two reasons. The first is to mimic the two ‘official’ languages of Puerto Rico and using them interchangeably as a fused mix of languages that represent a Puerto Rican language. A so called ‘spanglish’ or ‘enish’, where spanglish would be more accurate in the context of Puerto Rico because of the dominance of Spanish and ‘enish’ for this work where the main language is English. The second reason is built off the first where the idea of not translating is in part to not lose the original meaning of the words or text and in part to, as Maria Lugones states, “give an example of thinking at the colonial difference” (Lugones, 2010, p. 758). It is an example because by not translating,

“would enable you to understand what I am saying, but not really, since I cannot say what I want to say having translated the terms. So, if I do not translate and you think you understand less, or do not understand at all, I think that you can understand better why this works as an example of thinking at the colonial difference” (Lugones, 2010, p. 758)

Although even if the attempt is to give an example of the colonial difference or maintain the original meaning of the text, in the footnotes the text still provides a translation. This is the works attempt to be inclusionary to both the idea of fragmentation and a smooth flow when reading. It is also that through translations that “absent presences are to be recovered”, which refer to the “epistemes” (Henry IN Bagues, 2006, p. 272). Meaning that through translating the embodied knowledge or micropolitics of the everyday life into writing it becomes possible to uncover the epistemology of *las Negras*.

“A los historiadores, por habernos dejado fuera.

Aquí estamos de nuevo...

cuerpo presente, color vigente,

declinándonos a ser invisibles...

rehusándonos a ser borradas.”

- Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro

Chapter 2 Las Negras: Rewriting Narratives of the Transatlantic Enslavement

The novel is divided in four stories Wanwe, Matronas, Saeta and Los amamantados, each story is told from the point of view of the narrator where the reader is taken on their journey that is part memory and part what is happening directly to the women. The sections Wanwe, Matrones and Saeta start off with a quote, each quote is an indication of the sentiments expressed by the enslaved women within the narrations. The characters in the novel work with an idea of double consciousness where they are thoroughly aware of their position in the eyes of the masters and work the invisibility that comes with the double consciousness. It is within this invisibility that they were able to exist beyond the plantation system. The same flow of the time of slavery, from the de-rooting of the African tribes, to enslavement, the middle passage and ending on the treatment of the enslaved on the plantations is followed as the chronological order of the short stories. Before analyzing the novel in connection with other concepts it is necessary to understand the notion of coloniality, for it is at the foundation of the inequalities that is experienced by the *afrodescendientes* in Puerto Rico and, also what *Las Negras* is tempting to work against and resist.

In analyzing the novel it is also important to understand that writing *with* and through blackness is an embodied endeavor. This thought is clearly stated and shouted when looking at the cover of the novel that has a black female body on it. From the posture, to the look and the

way in which the skin tone is contrasted with the background an active conversation is made with the reader on blackness through the black female body. The covering of the ears as a gesture of defense towards something is contrasted against the look in the eyes that show no sign of fear instead, they look determined and resolute. It is as if the blocking of the outside through the covering of the ears is used as a gesture to silence and eliminate the outside completely, not just defending against it. This is in dialogue with the resistance and rebellion expressed towards the historical silencing and erasure, which becomes immediately evident through the dedicatory “a los historiadores por habernos dejado fuera⁴⁴” (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016). In this dedicatory *las negras* are “declinándonos a ser invisibles [i] rehusándonos a ser borradas”⁴⁵ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016). The nudity can first be connected to the idea of vulnerability and exposure, which intertwines with the intimacy and intensity of the short stories. And second with the idea of ‘forcing presence’ or recognition where that which is not meant to be or exist, is demanding existence and recognition through confrontation. Confrontation through the “cuerpo presente, color vigente” (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016); the body, flesh and color of those that are deemed inexistent, especially in the historical sense. Thirdly, blackness or negritude are embodied in that when looking at blackness it is necessary to look at the body; the skin. It is that “*la negritud se escribe desde la propia piel negra*”⁴⁶ (“Escritoras Afroboricuas,” 2017). Blackness stems from embodied experiences and knowledge that are enfolded through the daily lives of the *afrodescendientes*. It is as Bárbara Abadía Rexach states “*la negritud se escribe desde las personas negras, desde el apalabramiento de sus vivencias,*

⁴⁴ Translation: to the historians for having excluded us

⁴⁵ Translation: denouncing being invisible and refusing to be erased

⁴⁶ Translation: blackness is written from the black skin itself

*y no desde la historia oficial del poder*⁴⁷ (“Escritoras Afroboricuas,” 2017). It is the understanding that when analyzing blackness it is necessary to look at the body, both physical and nonphysical, and the multiple misuses of the body.

2.1 Coloniality

It is important to look at colonialism, modernity and coloniality when looking into the history of the Caribbean because “it was in the Caribbean where colonialism in its modern form started” (Ogot, 1997, p. 1). And it is also from these that the modern subject stemmed from. The modern subject is “located in historically specific and unavoidably complex configurations of individualization and embodiment – black and white, male and female, lord and bondsman” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 46). That is to say that the subject that is part of a modern society is part of modernity/coloniality, whether that is as dominator or oppressed, they are part of the power hierarchies that were established during the colonial regime. Through colonization “an idea of power – the totalitarian drive of a single, unique root – rather than around a fundamental relationship with the Other” became the norm (Glissant, 2010, p. 14). It is when power became monopolized and used for the benefit of the ones ‘in power’ to singularize into a form of individualized ‘society’. Where the individual is above notions of relationality and deep connections. Moreover, “colonization thrived by excreting those who were, in several regards, deemed superfluous, a surfeit within the colonizing nations[;] colonization was a technology for regulating migratory movements (Mbembe, 2019, p. 10). The so called “repeopling of the Earth” (Mbembe, 2019, p. 12). According to the colonial regime, the order of the world (or social world) was based on the movement upwards, where everything was done for and in the name of the ones at the top of the hierarchy. And the closer to the top of the pyramid, the more

⁴⁷ Translation: blackness is written from black people, from the endorsement of their lived experiences and not from the official history of power

people fell off, being deemed unworthy of ‘fitting’ within the ‘chosen’ civilization. Colonialization was the main factor in “the fulfillment of [...] institutionalizing a regime of inequality at the planetary scale” (Mbembe, 2019, pp. 19–20). Through colonization the ideals of singular world view became the mechanism to control the society and reproduce this control through that same society. The exercising of such control brought with it the coloniality of power and “its system of social classification based on the idea of race, of “conqueror” over “conquered,” and its structural foundation tied to modernity and Eurocentered capitalism” (Walsh IN Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 16). The “social classification of the world’s population around the idea of race [is] a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and pervades the more important dimensions of global power, including its specific rationality: Eurocentrism” (Quijano, 2000, p. 533). Through socially classifying one race over another and indoctrinating this with the society, it became possible for the monopoly of white Eurocentric thinking to expand and deepen its control. From this Eurocentric ontology “a historical understanding of the inseparability of racialization and capitalist exploitation as constitutive of the capitalist system of power as anchored in [...] colonization” is normalized and naturalized (Lugones, 2010, p. 745). It is through the Eurocentric ontology that is centralized around a singular race that racial categorizations and exploitations became the norm.

Trouillot highlights that the ontology that sustained “the colonialist enterprise” is based on the principles “that the differences between forms of humanity [are] not only of degree but of kind, not historical but primordial” (Trouillot, 2015, p. 81). Stating that the thought of distinguishing between the in and out, human and nonhuman, civilized and uncivilized, dominator and colonized, is something inherent or primordial. Which would mean that even if that which is used to categorize and deem inferior is changed the thought that distinguishes between the human and nonhuman still remains. And according to this same ontology to control

the primordial or primitive, colonialism and “the institution of slavery [were needed because enslavement was] the only avenue through which Africans could become cultured individuals and modern subjects” (Rodríguez-Silva, 2012, p. 24). The idea of making the primitive into a cultured being is an excuse, because the fundamental belief of the Eurocentric ontology is that the primitivity is enveined within the nonwhite. Where primitivity is seen as part of the tissue, the constitution; the whole essence of the inferior being. The modern cultural subject painted within this colonial illusion is one where the Africans are needed to be “totally devoid of their African primal forms of sociality” (Rodríguez-Silva, 2012, p. 24). It is an illusion, because it is engrained within the Eurocentric thinking that the nonwhite will always have primitivity within them, making it impossible to be part of the white dominated top of the hierarchy. Second, it is an impossibility to devoid the self of that which created and preceded it because it would be a denial of the self that is influenced one way or another by the thing it is trying to deny. The colonial illusion that is sustained by a “model of power coloniality also involved a cognitive model, a new perspective of knowledge within which non-Europe was the past, and because of that inferior, if not always primitive” (Quijano, 2000, p. 552). The non-Europe was made prehistoric denying its existence within the Eurocentric world view and model of civilization; or better said within ‘the modern’.

Coloniality is exercised upon the body through racialized distinctions made between who gets to live and who gets to die – the former essentially having the “political power to kill, to call for deaths, to demand deaths, to give the order to kill, and to expose not only its enemies but its own citizens to the risk of death” (Foucault, 2003, p. 254). It is a political power in that it is stemming from the power structures that sustain the uneven division of the modern setup of society based on race. Racial distinction, -discrimination, and - categorization where “the distinction among races, the hierarchy of races, the fact that certain races are described as good and that others, in contrast, are described as inferior” are converted in ways “of fragmenting

the field of the biological that power controls” (Foucault, 2003, p. 255). In the fragmentation is when subjection happens; when the whole is separated in multiple pieces to be controlled and assigned unequal distributions of power. Within the fragmentation a break is introduced, through biopower, “into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die” (Foucault, 2003, p. 254). Racism or racial distinction is one of those methods that are used to bring fragmentation. That is because racism is used “to subdivide the species it controls into subspecies known, precisely, as races [and] to fragment, to create caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower” (Foucault, 2003, p. 255). The fissures move from a sociological realm to a biological one, where the fragmentation attempts to gain a biological rationale to exist. The biological rationale introduces a reality where “the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer” (Foucault, 2003, p. 255). Through the biological rationale of fragmentation race is linked to the notion of purity and health, stating that the races that are not part of ‘the Race’ are all unhealthy and immoral. Such a reality “opens the way to other technologies and procedures by which lives can be abandoned or “let to die” without any one assuming responsibility for the action” (Butler, 2020, p. 110; Foucault, 2003, p. 213). Butler explains that this reality is one where “a right to life – and even a right over one’s own death – comes to exist only for those who have already been constituted as rights-bearing subjects” (2020, pp. 109–110). Butler digs deeper into the idea of the racial break that is introduced through biopower, stating that the break is not merely distinguishing “between superior and inferior types within the idea of the species, but also between the living and the nonliving” (Butler, 2020, p. 111). Where “if a nonliving population is destroyed, then nothing of note had happened: there is no destruction, just certain clearing away of some curious obstruction from the path of the living” (Butler, 2020, p. 111).

Thus, through the coloniality imposed on the body, fragmented nonliving beings are created that are subjected to the control and domination of the one in power.

Coloniality is that which “has a colonial origin and character, but [...] has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established” (Quijano, 2000, p. 533). That is to say that although coloniality stemmed from colonialism, it became its own entity morphing it into something distinct from colonialism. And the coloniality of power, as Anibal Quijano explains, is “the specific form that domination and exploitation takes in the constitution of the capitalist world system of power” (Lugones, 2010, p. 756). Within the idea of coloniality of power practices such as “the control of labor and subjectivity, the practices and policies of genocide and enslavement, the pillage of life and land, and the denials and destruction of knowledge, humanity, spirituality, and cosmo-existence became the modus operandi of this new model and pattern of power that later traveled the globe” (Walsh IN Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 16).

Walter Mignolo claims that “coloniality names the experiences and views of the world and history of those whom Fanon called *les damnés de la terre* (“the wretched of the earth,” those who have been, and continue to be, subjected to the standards of modernity)” (2005, p. 8). And that as a consequence of racism these ‘wretched of the earth’ “are defined by the colonial wound, [which is] the hegemonic discourse that questions the humanity of all those who do not belong to the locus of enunciation (and the geo-politics of knowledge) of those who assign the standards of classification and assign to themselves the right to classify ” (Mignolo, 2005, p. 8). In sum, coloniality is an entity that encompasses the multiple ways in which power is used to oppress, exploit, marginalize and suppress those that are the wretched of the earth.

2.2 The ‘Trade’

To talk about a ‘trade’ would mean to talk about an exchange or transaction of equal value, where that which has been bought or sold is swapped for a compensation of what that

thing was worth. This would mean that a previous calculation of the value of the thing that is traded should be decided. However, how does one put a value on a human being's life in the context of the Africans being the 'thing' that is traded. The enslavement perverted "both civilization and the natural attributes of human beings" (Gilroy, 1993, p. 67), where the enslaved Africans were funneled, forcibly, "into the market and transformed into commodities" resulting in the 'birth' of "the slave [*sic*]" (Hartman, 2006). It is that the worth was not derived from 'how much does this human being cost', but from how can this thing be commodified, exploited and used to gain capital. An idea of civilization was created that holds "together opposites, whose only former identity existed in their opposition to the Other" (Glissant, 2010, p. 14). Meaning that this notion of civilization only exists through its opposition, such as civilized-animal/product, master-enslaved, white-black, human-nonhuman, and subject-object.

The captivity as explained through the narrative of Wanwe is not one that speaks of a trade, but it speaks of a kidnapping; "*el día del secuestro*"⁴⁸ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 45). A kidnapping of free human beings that were forcibly and violently taken from their homes and put into a reality in which the captured were reduced to a commodity and property of their masters. The captivity of Wanwe is illustrated through a hunt, not for animals like Wanwe described her people did, but for Wanwe and her people. The hunt starts off with Wanwe and Bosuá, her sister, thinking that there is a dangerous animal that is coming to attack them; "*Ella y algunas otras detectan la presencia de otro animal posiblemente grande y peligroso. Un animal, o varios que no temen, porque en vez de alejarse, se acercan*"⁴⁹ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016,

⁴⁸ Translation: the day of the kidnapping

⁴⁹ Translation: She and a few others detect the presence of another possible large and dangerous animal. An animal, or several that do not fear, because instead of moving away they approach

p. 47). Wanwe and Bosuá begin to run but just as the animals that are captured for dinner, the bodies of Wanwe and her people are captured.

“Los cuerpos magullados. Las manos encadenadas. Las presas atrapadas para la cena se caen, ruedan por la hierba, por los arbustos con troncos sin ramificar o raramente ramificados y son arrastradas por las lluvias torrentosas del suelo⁵⁰ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 48).

Through making the kidnapping synonymous with the hunt for dinner, animalizes the captured and gives a sense of helplessness to the situation. Where the captured were in a disadvantaged position of being preyed on and consumed by the hunter/capturer. This image dismantles the idea that there was a ‘trade’ established when the Africans were captured and enslaved.

The commodification and objectification of the enslaved enabled the creation of a merchandise out of a human being (Hartman, 2002). Which lead to the silencing and erasing of the history of the enslaved, the product, and turned the enslaved into a being with no future other than the fixed position of a commodity of economic gain for the owner of the enslaved. Through commodification the enslaved were radically anonymized and deprived of their own life, making the transatlantic slave trade unique in its dimension, intensity and suffering (Hartman, 2002, p. 770). The value of the commodity or product was determined by how much and how well ‘it’ could produce for the plantation. For example, the women were able to ‘singlehandedly’ reproduce the whole process of enslavement; from captivity, to transportation and placement on the plantation. And the children of the enslaved, “were to be treated as valuable commodities” for they could be nurtured into the ‘perfect’ plantation laborer (Paton, 2017, p. 252). It is that the transatlantic slave trade is a portrayal of the most radical reduction

⁵⁰ Translation: The bruised bodies. Chained hands. The prey caught for dinner falls, rolls in the grass, in the unbranched or rarely branched bushes, and are dragged away by the torrential rain of the ground

of life to a dehumanized and animalized ‘thing’; it is the portrayal of a massive commercialization of human life (Hartman, 2002, 2006). Where the human that is othered and eliminated of its humanity becomes a commercial good.

The thought of the enslaved as an animalized commercial good becomes an unquestionable and normalized thought within the plantation system. It is a thinking that cannot conceive of the idea that the enslaved could have any ‘true’ value. This is made apparent in the novel when Jonás Cartagenas asks his teacher Celestina Cordero, “*sobre el servicio de las negras esclavas; cuestione el por qué se les estima a algunas de ellas, si deberían ser bestias de carga, si deberían ser inferiores*”⁵¹ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 140). Within Jonás’ reality the enslaved women are inferior animals that cannot realize any human condition such as being esteemed. Jonás lives in this fantasy that the black enslaved women are mere animals because that is what has been thought to him as being true. He is blinded by his surroundings that are only colored in the white hegemonic authoritative thought of seeing the world. In this Jonás is deliberately ignoring the reality outside of this fantasy and closes his eyes for everything that would contest his delusional reality.

The disenfranchised enslaved were placed in a “fetishized commodity world” of the West, where escape meant “moving deeper into its snare” and where “the system does not allow for a way out” (Moten, 2017, p. 131). Within the perception of the commodity world, the enslaved were deemed products, eliminating them from human agency and chaining each of their movement to the plantation system. It is a world where the enslaved did not ‘long’ “for freedom, but rather [regressed] through suppression” (Moten, 2017, p. 131). Because the more the enslaved refused or resisted the more they were subjected to violent suppression through

⁵¹ Translation: on the service of the black enslaved women; he questions why some of them are esteemed, if they are animals of cargo, if they are inferior.

punishment. The enslaved were valued as a silenced product, dehumanized and depersonalized (Moten, 2017, p. 26). To be seen as a tool within the mechanics of the commodity world to produce profit and value. The right of enslaved as a subject or human being is eliminated and manipulated into an object; a commodity (Mbembe, 2019, p. 18). It is the creation of the commodity for the plantation through its own system of reproduction.

On the cover of the novel, the naked pose in which the black female body is presented can be seen as an image of resistance towards the eroticizing and fetishizing of the female body. Or better said, the erotizing and fetishizing of the black female body as a commodity. It is by presenting the body in an almost linear pose where no specific features stand out is able to dismantle the imaginary of the erotic black female body. Not that there is anything wrong with eroticism or fetishism in and of itself, the problem lies with imagined imposed white patriarchal illustration of the black female body that has led to multiple abuses of the black female body.

The owning of the commodity ‘the black enslaved’ was “a sign of prestige” and the heavy dependence upon enslaved labor “could make the difference between the mere survival of the owner’s household and the economic flexibility to display wealth or invest in more advantageous enterprises” (Rodríguez-Silva, 2012, p. 22). The sociality of the plantation for the masters, owners, administrators and colonizers became “the emanation of a fantasy” not of capital (Glissant, 2010, p. 67). It is the understanding that the enslavement and owning of the enslaved as commodities was not about profit but about ‘playing King’ and, exercising a sovereign tyrannical power that governs and controls all; a form of a totalitarian power (Glissant, 2010, p. 67). The owning of enslaved people meant the acting out of a perverted desire of the masters to be at the top of everything; the monarch or even a god.

In the story Saeta, the ‘owner’ of Tshanwe, Don Georgino is the perfect personification of the tyrant playing king where he depersonalized Tshanwe into an object for realizing any of his desires. The first is by naming her Teresa instead of her own name, he is stripping her of

her own personhood and making her into his property. He is doing this through the politics of naming where by giving a name to something he is conquering it and, imposing his superiority and dominance. The second is when he uses her for the fulfilling of his sexual desires through nonconsensually penetrating her whenever he saw fit. On top of penetrating her without her consent, he would terrorize her by making her watch and wait her turn while he was busy with Jwaabi; who is also depersonified into Juana. The third was when he needed to release his anger on some 'thing' for his child having killed his dog. While beating Tshanwe he is stating out loud: "*es mi propiedad. Golpes a la espalda. "Muchachos insensatos", "vas a ver quien manda negra asquerosa". Tshanwe no entiende y cae impotente al suelo*"⁵² (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, pp. 127–128). Don Georgino is releasing his anger and frustration on Tshanwe but she does not understand why and her 'owner' does not feel the need to explain either. Because to explain would mean that she has a right to something, the right to know and be excused of his irrational behavior. But Tshanwe did not, she was his; owned and completely subordinated and bended to his will, because he bought her. At least that is what he believes.

Another example is that of Jonás Cartagena, where as expressed above (see section 1.3 on decolonizing memory) he lives in a fantasy where Petra is his do with as he pleases even when he is having indecent and nonconsensual feelings towards her. The fetishizing and acting upon his desires for Petra only happened after the confirmation he got from his white peer that seems to live in the same fantasy of the white being superior, dominant and kings over the commodified enslaved.

⁵² Translation: its my property. Blows to the back. "Foolish boys", "you're going to see who's boss disgusting 'negra'". Tshanwe does not understand and falls helplessly to the ground

*“Dice mi padre que las negras están aquí solo para montarlas. Se disfrutan mejor que las blancas. Jonás Cartagena reacciona sorprendido, y ya no es el mismo”*⁵³ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 141).

Through the statement of the peer of Jonás the fantasy, that could have been questioned by the few lines before in the same paragraph of the novel in which talks about abolition emerged, was reconfirmed. In the reaffirmation of the black enslaved women being mere products for the satisfaction of their white masters, Jonás sunk deeper in the white delusional fantasy of playing king.

2.3 Racial Discrimination

The ideology of the plantation or “planter ideology” is a doctrine that places blacks at the bottom of the “Western nomenclature” ensuring and guaranteeing an anti-black racism in the Caribbean (Trouillot, 2015, p. 77). This ideology creates an enslaved fugitive of the black enslaved, where they are chained by the “economy and mechanics of fugitive making where the subject is hopelessly troubled by, in being emphatically detached from, the action whose agent it is supposed to be” (Moten, 2017, p. vii). Or in other words, the racialization and categorization as inferior of the black enslaved, creates a notion of blackness to subordinate the enslaved to the planter ideology where blackness becomes a label that determines the subjectification and othering of the enslaved. Which places the enslaved in a paradox of being enslaved in the white colonial ideology of supremacy and a fugitive that is in a constant struggle of escaping such a subjectivity of enslavement.

The “negative connotation” linked to skin colors increasingly grouped as “black” are rooted within “Christendom in the late Middle Ages” (Trouillot, 2015, p. 76). Which resulted

⁵³ Translation: My father says that the black women are only here to ride them. They are better than the white women. Jonás Cartagena reacts surprised, and is no longer the same.

in, “black” becoming “almost universally bad” “by the middle of the eighteenth century” (Trouillot, 2015, pp. 76–77). This links the idea with being black or blackness with a heretic entity or the embodiment of blasphemy. The tainting of blackness as something sacrilegious morphed into a complete denial of blackness when the religious perspective gained colonial and Eurocentric footing. It is because “colonization provided the most potent impetus for the transformation of European ethnocentrism into scientific racism” (Trouillot, 2015, p. 77). The transformation was necessary because the addition of science to an ontology moves the reasoning from a subjective space to an ‘objective’ one with scientific ‘factual reproducible logic’. This also advanced the idea that “worldview wins over facts [where] white hegemony is natural and taken for granted [and] any alternative is still in the domain of the unthinkable” (Trouillot, 2015, p. 93). Moreover, the transformation, of the racial hierarchal categorization and distinguishing, into a science was “an ideological device central in diverting attention from a direct engagement with the nature of racial domination” (Rodríguez-Silva, 2012, p. 24). It was an excuse for Eurocentric thinking to gain factual objective reason to expand their worldview and impose their desires.

The thoughts of “negroes [*sic*]”/“blacks” belonging “to a different species” or the same, and the belief that blacks are “destined to slavery [or] to be slaves [*sic*]” are part of “learned opinions” that are rooted in a European ethnocentric ontology (Fanon, 2008, p. 23; Trouillot, 2015, pp. 77–78). It is a logic where “claims about the fundamental uniqueness of humankind, [...] the ethical irrelevance of racial categories or of geographical situations to matters of governance and [...] the right of all peoples to self-determination” opposed the worldview of the West (Trouillot, 2015, pp. 88–89). Suggesting “that racial terror is not merely compatible with occidental rationality, but cheerfully complicit with it” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 56).

A distinction was made between the white “unmarked” Man and the marked “rest of human kind”, creating “degrees of humanity” that are hierarchically ordered (Trouillot, 2015,

p. 81). This distinction drew a line between the Man, whites, and the blacks where the two stood in opposition to each other “Man-versus-Native (or Man-versus-Negro[*sic*]) [tainting] the European literature on the Americas [and Caribbean] and beyond” (Trouillot, 2015, p. 82). Furthermore, the notion of “slavery” in and of itself was designed to stand “for a number of evils except perhaps the evil of itself” where it “could be whatever was wrong with European rule in Europe and elsewhere” (Trouillot, 2015, p. 85). Slavery gave the European the space in which the desires and world view of the Europeans/West could come into realization without any restrictions or social inhibitions. This also meant that the chaining of blacks and natives, enslaved and free, to slavery was to relate them to or even write them off as the embodiment of evil, giving sustenance to the rationale of enslaving the blacks and natives.

The cover of the novel as a whole is having an active conversation with the power hierarchies that are present in the History and in turn is dismantling them. The conversation of addressing the racial discrimination starts with the cover of the novel. The contrast between the black background and the white font of the title become a representation of a dialogue that is being held within the pages of the novel. The first is the dialogue of racial politics that the novel embarks on, which is the white vs. black debate. The second is that the writing of *Las Negras* in white, makes reference to the name imposed of the ‘*negroe*’ upon people from African descent. It is that the term or identification of being ‘black’ or ‘*negra*’ was not chosen but principally selected by the white colonizer to subordinate, animalize and categorize the ‘blacks’ as inferior. Through presenting the black body that is racially discriminated against in such an unapologetic way is resisting the Eurocentric rationale that racially inferiorized the black.

The logic of blackness being heretic and objectively bad is criticized by Ndizi. Ndizi in the chapter *Matrones* questions the Christian religion that is used to justify the enslaving and

inhumane treatment of the enslaved, merely because they are black and African. Ndizi questions the white God that allowed for the blacks to be enslaved and dehumanized;

*“¿Lo juras por tu dios?, le increpo, [...]: Pero tu dios no tiene poder ni fuerza alguna, es indolente, débil, sin propósito. ¿Cómo permite esto? Petro asiente. Baja la cabeza en lo que únicamente puedo percibir como un gesto de vergüenza.”*⁵⁴ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 84).

Ndizi contests the idea of Christendom in the Middle Ages that determined that black meant bad and heretic. She rebukes the white monk Petro that supports and swears to such a God. Through rebuking the white man’s God, Ndizi is reproaching the hypocrisy that is part of such a religion that screams for the equality of all humans, but inserts an asterisk through scientific racism that in the idea of ‘human’ the black human is excluded.

2.4 Black Female Bodies

As Wanwe her first memory is also the first sentence of the novel the importance of the image created within that first memory cannot be overlooked. The first memory as mentioned previously (see section 1.3 on decolonizing memory) is of “a belly of united and floating wood who they call *owba cooco*”⁵⁵ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 27). This thinking of a ship as a belly, is understanding it as a womb abyss in which the enslaved were unmade, dehumanized and anonymized into objects. The idea of connecting the enslavement with the notion belly could also be understand in relation to the plantation mode. The plantation model can also be viewed as “the belly of the world” where “the modern world follows the belly” and the “master dreams of future increase” (Hartman, 2016, p. 166). This is referring to how through the body of the

⁵⁴ Translation: Do you swear by your God? I rebuke him, but your god has no power or strength, he is indolent, weak without purpose. How does He allow this? Petro nods. He lowers his head which I can only perceive as a gesture of shame.

⁵⁵ See note 34

black enslaved woman the plantation model is reproduced creating the ‘modern’ worldview of the master/colonizer through the body. Or, “plainly put, subjection was anchored in black women’s reproductive capacities” (Hartman, 2016, p. 168). Economical gain for the master, meant the consumption of black enslaved bodies, especially the enslaved women that carried the ability of maintaining and reproducing the plantation model by themselves (Hartman, 2016, pp. 166–167). The demands imposed on the body of the black woman through the plantation model highlights how the suffering and enslavement of the black woman is focused “on her ‘flesh’ and its abuse” (Anim-Addo, 2004, p. 36). The flesh or body of the black enslaved woman “locates precisely a moment of converging political and social vectors that mark the flesh as prime commodity of exchange” (Spillers, 1987, p. 75). The black female body was misused and abused in order to extract from it every ounce of economic utility. Because of this the captive female body “was subjected to innumerable uses[;] converted into cash, speculated and traded as commodity, worked to death, taken, tortured, seeded, and propagated like any other crop, or murdered” (Hartman, 2016, pp. 168–169). The enslaved female body was wrung out like a cloth that all its liquid is squeezed out of, in order to extract as much usefulness from the enslaved female body as possible. Within the extraction of the captive female body, “the work of sex and procreation was the chief motor of reproducing the material, social, and symbolic relations of slavery” (Hartman, 2016, p. 169). It is through the quite literal belly of the enslaved female body that the plantation system could be reenacted and reproduced.

What “the belly of the world” “created [and] destroyed has been explicated by way of gendered figures of conception, birth, parturition, and severed or negated maternity” (Hartman, 2016, p. 166). Which resulted in “the perversion of maternity by the institution of slavery” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 67) and creating of motherhood a privilege where the black enslaved women were deprived of the ‘pleasures of maternity’ and femininity (Davies & Fido, 1990; Hartman, 2016; Spillers, 1987). For the black women, there was “a tension set up between the conflicting

images of ‘conventional’ maternity (loving, gentle), and the reality of motherhood under stress”; one under entrapment deprived of the ability to care and want for new life (Braziel, 2009, p. 125; Fido IN Davies & Fido, 1990, p. 36; Hartman, 2016). A reality where “the mother’s only claim [was] to transfer her dispossession to the child” (Hartman, 2016, p. 166) and where “motherhood is not perceived in the prevailing social climate as a legitimate procedure of cultural inheritance” (Spillers, 1987, p. 80). The dispossession of the enslaved ‘mother’ is “forever entailed on her remotest posterity” and negates “feature of human community” where “descent and identity through the female line is comparable to a brute animality” (Spillers, 1987, pp. 79–80). The animalizing of the enslaved mother and her descendants legalized the idea “of slavery and its inheritability” (Hartman, 2016, p. 169). The reality of the enslaved women and her descents is one where “the faded faces of the Negro[sic] Children tell too plainly to what degradation female slaves[sic] submit” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 67). As a result, the black enslaved women renounced maternity and genealogy because they refused to see their children “brutalized, maimed, or killed under systems of racial oppression” (Braziel, 2009, p. 125). Such a refusal led to the poisoning and killing of any child, mother or person that could contribute to the perpetual nature of the plantation system.

In such a reality where the enslaved female is animalized, Ndizi wanted to die; “*Os juro que quise morir [...] a ser tratada como animal. Os juro que luego quise matar a todos*⁵⁶” (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 88)”. With the thought of wanting to kill everyone Ndizi took on the role to rebel through ensuring the death of the living beings that could contribute to and reproduce the plantation. Ndizi worked as an “*esclava doméstica para acercarme primero a*

⁵⁶ Translation: I swear to you that I wanted to die when being treated like an animal. I swear to you that afterwards I wanted to kill everyone.

*niños blancos recién nacidos*⁵⁷” (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 90). She gains the trust to then reenact her rebellion and resistance by making sure the pregnant women get a miscarriage and if that does not work,

*“les doy de comer frutos contaminados con sangre de mujeres con el tétano de las cadenas. O recojo diarreas expulsadas con pujos de disentería y las mezclo en las comidas y purés. A veces coloco el mejunje sobre el pezón de mis tetas y los lacto. O deposito casabe sin humedecer cerca de sus amígdalas y obstruyo las narices*⁵⁸” (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 97).

This act of resistance aims for the future, even though it is carried out in the present, making of such an act of rebellion transtemporal connecting the current with the futurity. It is the resistance to the expansion of the plantation and enslavement through the reproductive system. Resistance to the making of more master and ‘*señoritos*’ that follow them to maintain the power hierarchies and suppressions of the enslaved. This highlights that the resistance of Ndizi is a generational one, where it is not just about breaking the plantation system but about ensuring its extinction. This form of rebelling is done in silence, a covert rebellion, and very much a rebellion of the flesh, the body. Through such a rebellion resistance became an embodied experience where violence inflicted upon the body and self, such as “murder, self-mutilation and infanticide [were] the core psychological dynamic of all resistance” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 16). The enacting of such a covert rebellion for Ndizi was a natural thing, because it was an impulsive reaction to the oppression and suppression of the enslaved. Impulsive not because it

⁵⁷ Translation: domestic enslaved to first get close to newborn white children

⁵⁸ Translation: I feed them fruits contaminated with the blood of chained women with tetanus. Or I collect diarrhea caused by dysentery and mix it in the food and purees. Sometimes I put the brew/mixture over my nipple and breastfeed them. Or I put unmoistened cassava near the tonsils and obstruct the nostrils

was not thought through but impulsive in the sense of a deliberate acting out on the inherent disgust and wish to eradicate the inhumane treatment of the enslaved. In connecting the rebelling of Ndizi to the idea of it being natural, creates of the black woman a ‘natural rebel’. This idea of the ‘natural rebel’, refers to “the slave mode of production by virtue of placing the woman’s ‘inner world’ – her fertility, sexuality and maternity – on the market as capital assets, produced in them a ‘natural’ propensity to resist and to refuse as part of a basic self-protective and survival response” (McD Beckles, 1999, p. xxii). It is the natural response of Ndizi to survive and ensure survival for future generations in her act of rebellion, such a rebellion was not unfounded but grounded in the exploitation of the captive female body as a natural system of reproducing the enslavement. Additionally, the using of abortifacients as means to rebel against enslavement by stopping the reproduction of enslaved, was also to stop the suffering through enslavement of the generations to come. The black enslaved women that used abortifacients “practiced infanticide rather than sentence their children to social death, the auction block, and the master’s bedroom [and] exercised autonomy in suicidal acts” (Hartman, 2016, p. 167). These acts were “forms of violence, once coded as male and outward, directed towards the oppressor, and the other, coded as female, somehow internal, channeled towards a parent’s most precious and intimate objects of love, pride and desire” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 66). They were acts done with “a calm determination” where “an ardent longing for freedom” and the prevention of “deep suffering” could be found through death (Gilroy, 1993, pp. 66–67). It was to save the children and end the suffering of the self from “the unbridled appetites of the slave masters” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 66). The covert rebellious act of Ndizi could be seen as an act of mercy done through the maternity that she was denied for being an enslaved. It was the purest act of love that she could display towards others and future generations.

Black enslaved women had both productive as reproductive labor, doubling "the value produced and extracted from" them (Hartman, 2016, p. 169). Where “even the unborn figured

into the reproductive calculus of the institution” of racial slavery (Hartman, 2016, p. 169). Black enslaved women worked “as farm workers, cotton pickers, tobacco hands, and rice cultivators—and their reproductive capacities created “future increase” for farms and plantations and human commodities for markets, yoking the prospect of racial slavery to their bodies” (Hartman, 2016, p. 169; Spillers, 1987). The enslaved women were “bred like cattle and oxen” because “the reproductive labor [...] guaranteed slavery as an institutional process and secured the status of the enslaved” (Hartman, 2016, p. 169). The racialized slavery got etched on the black female body ensuring its perpetual exploitation and abuse, making the masters/colonizers believe that they had complete control over the black female body.

Ndizi renounces and rebels against such a control of the white man over the black female body, that he believes he has because he ‘owns’ *her* body as his property/commodity.

“Ahora somos instigadas a no defendernos porque le pertenecemos a un amo. El opresor tiene ese permiso, pero nos subestima. Siempre presto atención al rostro de vitalidad o cansancio de aquellos que entran al cuerpo de una mujer sin su permiso”⁵⁹ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 88).

The act of raping an enslaved black woman was not deemed wrong because they are the property of the masters and objects to be used to fulfill their desires, even when it was always against the will of the woman. However, this one-sided thinking and perspective ignores the fact that the other person, Ndizi, is not accepting it because she is laying still, she is just waiting for an opportunity. Resistance is achieved here through memory and timing. Through memory by not forgetting and going along with the predicament of being used for satisfying the needs of the colonizer. And for timing, Ndizi demonstrates this part very well:

⁵⁹ Translation:

“Segundo que bastó para darme cuenta que estaba solo... que me tomaría poco esfuerzo. Echó la cabeza atrás en un gesto de arrobamiento por su eyaculación y se distrajo. Lo mordí. Llevé mis dientes hasta su glande y apreté virulenta, como los cerdos rabiosos”⁶⁰

(Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 88).

Ndizi waited for the perfect moment to gain a momentum, in order to rebel against the perpetrator. This act of resistance demonstrates the idea of nonconsensual penetration.

The nonconsensual penetration as an act to subordinate the blackwoman to the man is a reoccurring scene in the novel. In the chapter Saeta, Tshanwe and Jwaabi experience rape as a normal daily act of the master, where the master is using his ‘property’ when and wherever needed for a lustful release. And in each occasion, he makes either Tshanwe, whom he calls Teresa, or Jwaabi, whom he calls Juana, watch the other being penetrated and await their predicament of being penetrated without their consent. It was a quiet scene with only the moans of the perpetrator, no other sound could be heard.

“1: *“Entonces entra y sale de ella; entra y sale. La otra esclava, Jwaabi, se ha quedado de pie, en mitad del aposento, con las manos entrelazadas a la espalda. Espera sin pudor su turno.”* 4: *“Juana, había entrado en Jwaabi primero, dejando a la otro que observara. Luego se había servido de Tshanwe, llamándola Teresa”⁶¹* (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, pp. 106&116).

⁶⁰ Translation: The second I realized I was alone... that it would take little effort. He threw his head back in ecstasy when ejaculating and was distracted. I bit him. I brought my teeth to this gland and violently held on, like rabid pigs.

⁶¹ Translation: 1: then he goes in and out of her; in and out. The other enslaved, Jwaabi, remained standing, in the middle of the room, with her hands behind her back. Awaiting unobtrusively her turn. 4: Juana, he entered Jwaabi first, leaving the other to observe. Then he serviced himself Tshanwe, calling her Teresa.

Not only were the enslaved women a form of cattle for reproduction, they were beings with no freewill to give consent to the act of being penetrated; they were products that needed to produce economic profit and provide sexual release for their masters (Hartman, 1997, p. 105). The idea of consent for black enslaved women worked was a “nonconsent that ever and always stipulates the willingness of the captive female” (Hartman, 1997, p. 105). Moreover, this notion of nonconsent was exclusive to the black woman because “deployments of sexuality act concertedly with processes of racialization, accumulation, and domination” (Hartman, 1997, p. 99). Highlighting that, “gender becomes a descriptive for the social and sexual arrangements of the dominant order rather than an analytic category [and] naturalizes the discourse of protection and mystifies its instrumental role in the control and disciplining of body [maintaining] the white normativity of the category "woman"” (Hartman, 1997, p. 99).

The disciplining the body of the black women, through nonconsensual penetration, was a means to “establish her as a female animal [and allow the master] to destroy her proclivities towards resistance” (A. Davis, 1971, p. 11). A fact denied by both the plantation owners – that stated that enslaved “women were generally promiscuous, and pursued sexual relations with white males for their own material and social betterment”, – and the historians by not giving recognition nor representation of this fact within the written histories (McD Beckles, 1999, p. 26). Even though rape was also used as a means to an end, a currency to enable an exchange between the owner and the enslaved for some (A. Davis, 1971, p. 13; McD Beckles, 1999, p. 23), the reducing of the act of copulation to “an animal-like act” was a “symbolic of the effort to conquer the resistance the black woman could unloose” (A. Davis, 1971, p. 11). The animal-act had the intention of subjecting the black woman to a physical “terrorism distinctively suited for the female: rape” on top of the “already terroristic texture of plantation life” (A. Davis, 1971, p. 11). The act of raping the black woman was not only to assert the sovereignty of the white man over the black woman but also over the black man that could not retaliate against

the tyranny of the master of the black woman's body (Castanha, 2011, p. 8; A. Davis, 1971, p. 12). The feeling of powerlessness resulting of an act of rape "serves as a confirmation of the totality of enslavement" (McD Beckles, 1999, p. 23). Furthermore, the act of rape "as a form, or degree, of sexual violation perpetuated against enslaved women by males – black, white, free or enslaved – was not considered a legal offense" (McD Beckles, 1999, p. 23), whereas for against a white woman it was (Hartman, 1997, p. 99). It is important to understand that the acts to subordinate the black women were not natural even though they were naturalized, these acts have "their origins in human agency rather than in the natural world" (Adjarian, 2004, pp. 1–2).

However, regardless of the attempt to discipline the female body and break resistance through terrorizing the black female body with rape, the black women fought back, struggled and resisted (A. Davis, 1971, p. 12). The black women "poisoned the European enslavers, overseers, and workers, residing on their estate of plantation" (McD Beckles & Shepherd, 2007, p. 36). The enslaved women "fled the plantation[;] plotted resistance; dreamed of destroying the master and his house[;] gave birth to children as testament to an abiding knowledge of freedom contrary to every empirical index on the plantation; and yearned for radically different ways of being in the world" (Hartman, 2016, p. 167).

2.5 Death

The dehumanization and enslaving of the Africans meant not just a control over their lives, it also meant a control over their death. The colonial enslavement system corrupted "the body of freedom" and drove "it ineluctably towards decomposition" where there was an erosion of both the body and the self (Mbembe, 2019, p. 20). Within such a colonial system, through the generalization of power and modes of tyranny, it became possible to "produce death on a large scale [...] carried out on a basis of a purely instrumental calculation of life and of the political" (Mbembe, 2019, p. 34). The colonial system places the grasp upon life and death in

the hands of the hegemonic authority that in turn exercises control on who gets to die and who gets to live. To govern in such a system meant to use terror “to kill either en masse or in small doses”, which was done through “strict surveillance of bodies (or in agglomerating them within the perimeters it controls) [...] to extract a maximum of utility [...] and, sometimes, forms of enjoyment (notably with sexual slavery)” (Mbembe, 2019, p. 36). The form of control exercised in such a system meant the domination over the physical and nonphysical. The physical expression of terror through killings varied but the traces left behind persist long after the event had taken place. The traces are left behind on the body, self and the memory:

“of human beings who are assuredly living but whose bodily totality has been replaced by pieces, fragments, folds, and even immense wounds and scars that are continually held up before the victim’s eyes, and the eyes of those he rubs shoulders with, to display the morbid spectacle of his severing” (Mbembe, 2019, p. 37).

The way in which control is exercised over the physical and nonphysical through death and terror is addressed in *Las Negras*. In the narrative of Wanwe there is a woman with the “*orejeras y un pendiente de nariz*”⁶² that tries to jump out of the canoe that is transporting the kidnapped women (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 27). In this sense the woman with the *orejeras* tried to regain some sense of freedom over at least her death, however she gets caught again and shackles are placed around her neck. However, she is caught again only to be killed in a way that the kidnappers wanted, not through drowning as the woman might have hoped, but by letting her get half eaten by sharks. In this scene is expressed as “*la escena muda*”⁶³, which could refer to the muting, silencing of the enslaved even in death (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 60).

⁶² Translation: headband/ear-covers (this is a very cautious translation, as I am unsure what *orejeras* are meant to be) and a nose pendant

⁶³ Translation: the muted scene

The act of displaying complete control over life and death through the death of the woman with *orejeras*, was meant as a punishment for the woman and warning for the rest of the women. It was the terror to kill whenever, however and for whatever reason the superior party felt like. When Wanwe makes eye contact with the woman “*ojos míos con ojos suyos, justo antes de verla hundirse*”⁶⁴ it feels as if the woman gets connected to Wanwe (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 60). Through this connection with Wanwe it becomes possible for Wanwe to imagine herself as the woman with *orejeras*. Within the eyes of another it is possible to see a reflection of the self, which makes it possible to imagine the self as the other. The further display of having no control over death and afterlife, the nonphysical, is expressed in chapter 4 of Wanwe:

*“Wanwe desearía escalar un árbol, hacerse de una rama larga y agitarla para marcar el despacho de la mujer sofocada y su cuerpo desprendido o a punto de desprenderse. Pero no puede, e intuye que a partir de ahora, jamás volverá a hacerlo ”*⁶⁵

(Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 36).

There is a sense of loss and grief expressed here by Wanwe, where she is mourning the ability to give farewell and commemorate death. The total control over death that gets transferred over to the afterlife establishes a sense of loss that is forever in mourning, because even the afterlife and rest is tampered with. It gives a complete sense of hopelessness in which the person gets paralyzed in the colonality of their death and that of their predecessors.

⁶⁴ Translation: my eyes with her eyes, just before seeing her drown

⁶⁵ Translation: Wanwe wished she could climb a tree, grab a long branch and shake it to mark the departure of the suffocated woman and her detached body or soon to be detached. But she cannot and she senses that from now on she will never be able to do it again.

The control over death and the afterlife is also expressed in Saeta when Tshanwe or Teresa “*el nombre impuesto por el amo en el proceso de despersonalización*”⁶⁶, is wrongfully killed and thrown in the same burial space as the animals (Rivera Casellas, 2011, p. 108).

“*Siguen las instrucciones del conde de enterrarla en el lugar de los perros y los negros. Como comienza a llover, la colocan sobre una plataforma de madera en donde nadie le rinde tributos ni actos de duelo*”⁶⁷ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 132)

The not paying tribute or act of mourning to the enslaved is part of the ungrievability of the people around Tshanwe. The other enslaved that could relate with her on the basis of being enslaved and exploited were not allowed to and could not act out their beliefs in mourning and sending the person off safely. The ungrievability devalued the life of the enslaved further to not being worthy of safeguarding. The novel attempts to rewrite such an ungrievability. The describing of the inability to mourn in the novel through the story of Tshanwe is enacting a transtemporal mourning where the grieving for Tshanwe is done through *Las Negras* and the spectators/readers. This creates that grieving is not a linear act of time and space, but a multiplicity in ways in which mourning can manifest transtemporally through the mnemonic fictional (auto)biography of *Las Negras* and its readers.

As much as death was used as a means to exercise control over the physical and nonphysical, it was also used as a means to resist and attain freedom for the enslaved. For the enslaved there was “a positive preference for death rather than continued servitude [which is] a contribution towards slave[sic] discourse and the nature of freedom itself” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 68). Death becomes an answer to “the question of how the realm of freedom is conceptualized

⁶⁶ Translation: the name imposed by the master in the process of depersonalization

⁶⁷ Translation: They follow the master’s instructions to bury her in the place of the dogs and blacks. As it begins to rain they place her on a wooden platform where no one pays tribute or acts of mourning

by those who have never been free” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 68). The disposition to freedom of captivity through death “is a moment of jubilee that has the upper hand over the pursuit of utopia by rational means” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 68). It is “a principle of negativity that is opposed to the formal logic and rational calculation characteristic of modern western thinking” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 68). In the colonial perspective where death could be used as a means to terrorize the idea of death as freedom becomes a counter thought to resist the control over life and death. Death for the enslaved became a method to achieve freedom and return to home.

The woman with the *orejeras* is the first to display the idea of achieving freedom through death, even though she does not succeed. It is not made apparent if the woman can swim or not, but if she could not swim then the act of throwing herself off of the canoe was an act of suicide. This is a display of gaining freedom through death, whether it refers to the choice in how death is achieved or dying itself, both allow the person to be liberated from a fate destined by the other. And if the women with the *orejeras* knew how to swim, then the idea of ‘to die trying’ comes to mind, where regardless of the distance that had to be swum or the difficulty of it, she wanted to die trying in order to resist her current situation.

For the other women in the novel, Tshanwe actually attain freedom in the afterlife regardless of their death being chosen by another. “*Las gotas le reaniman los párpados y un chamán invisible la hace despertar. Namaqua y sus mujeres guerreras la amparan. Desaparece el cuerpo*”⁶⁸ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, pp. 132–133). Even though Tshanwe is unfairly killed and had no power over how she attained death, her soul was able to gain freedom. Tshanwe was able to attain freedom and return home through her soul by being released from the shackles and oppressions of imposed on her physical body.

⁶⁸ Translation: the drops revive her eyelids and an invisible shaman has awakened her. Namaqua and her warrior women protect her. The body disappears.

2.6 Rebellion

Writing the black woman and man, enslaved and free, as a passive or defiant being – “a maladjusted Negro [*sic*]” – within literature is to deny them their humanity and write them off as animals “driven by biological constraints, at best as a pathological case” (Trouillot, 2015, p. 83). The writing off of the enslaved as an animal driven by biology was to primitivize the enslaved and imprison them into a being that is devoid of thinking and rationalization (Quijano, 2000, p. 542; Trouillot, 2015, p. 91). Or as Gilroy explains, “the blacks [...] appear as signs of irrational disorder or as a means to celebrate the power of human nature uncorrupted by the decadence of the civilizing process” (1993, p. 45). This is done to subordinate the blacks to a “dualistic system that reproduces the dominance of bonded whiteness, masculinity and rationality” (Gilroy, 1993, pp. 45–46). The historical experiences of black enslaved woman were defined by “material relations of sexuality and reproduction” which wrote them off “as laborers and shaped the character of their refusal of and resistance to slavery” (Hartman, 2016, p. 166). This denial of the existence of resistance was also for the plantation model of domination to maintain its proclamation of “its own normalcy”, because “to acknowledge resistance as a mass phenomenon is to acknowledge the possibility that something is wrong with the system” (Trouillot, 2015, p. 84). Meaning that the idea that the enslaved rebelled or could cause a rebellion is omitted from the thinking back the time of slavery, because to recognize resistance would mean to re-humanize the enslaved. The impression was created that only “the right of white [...] men” was recognized to “revolt against colonialism” in turn racializing the right to resist (Trouillot, 2015, p. 87). Revolution, rebellion and resistance become an “unthinkable” event “and, therefore, unannounced in the West, it was also – to a large extent – unspoken among the slaves [*sic*] themselves” (Trouillot, 2015, p. 88). However regardless of the belief, ‘imposed’ ignorance of the “Western discourse” and the “unthinkable”, resistance and rebellion was within the “animal slave [*sic*]” that was not part of their pathology

but their humanity (Trouillot, 2015, pp. 84–85). The enslaved rebelled and resisted with the intention to rehumanize themselves and break free from the oppressive Eurocentric thinking that subordinates and eliminates the blacks.

Las Negras resists the idea that the enslaved did not rebel and passively accepted their subordination to the whites. The resistance starts from the paratext with the quotes of Baralt and Soyna, that denounce the idea that the enslaved, both men and women, did not rebel. Not only their quotes, the whole paratext is dedicated to the conscientization that the enslaved resisted and till the day of today blacks are resisting the racism that stemmed from the time of slavery. The characters in the novel each are resisting and rebelling against an aspect that manifested through enslavement.

Resistance and rebellion of the black enslaved was one rooted in struggle, where “struggle is concerned as much with freedom from colonialism as with liberation from the suffocating embrace of Europe, and the pretensions of its civilization to be the universal destiny of all humanity” (Fanon, 2008, p. xxi). It is through struggle that resistance is made possible because to struggle would mean to be alive and find ways to achieve freedom. The woman with the *orejeras* until the moment of her death kept struggling, kept resisting and refused to give in. Almost throughout the whole narration of Wanwe, the woman remained silent and, is only known by her physical traits and her attempted escape. The anonymity attached to the character of the woman with *orejeras* gave her a sense of opacity where in her remaining obscure she was able to resist the complete control over her person.

The notion of opacity as resistance is also realized by Ndizi when she is being interrogated by a white monk in prison. She tells herself, “*Debo tener cuidado con este hombre, anoto en mi cabeza. Debo recordar no contarle jamás todo lo que sé, lo que he visto, lo que he*

*sentido*⁶⁹ (Arroyo Pizarro, 2016, p. 73). This form of resistance is carried out through silence in which a refusal to transparency and readability is enacted. Ndizi is making the mental note to not expose herself completely to the white monk. She is telling herself this in order to not give more knowledge to the white monk that can be used against her or another enslaved. It is through the opaque that she can achieve to protect not just herself but also the others that are in the same predicament. The more opaque or unreadable Ndizi is, the more she is able to resist, because the more the white man knows the stronger his grip and suppression will be. The idea of safeguarding is not just for the physical, Ndizi and other enslaved, it is also for the nonphysical her memories. The memories that are made transparent or shared are exposed to potential manipulations, therefore it is in and through silence they are remembered and kept safe.

2.7 Middle Passage

The trans-Atlantic crossing that the enslaved Africans were forced to go through is also known as the middle passage. On the ships the enslaved were degendered and desexed, where they were reduced to mere units of merchandise and cargo; “eclipsed [...] of the subject, the personhood or individual” (Hartman, 2016, p. 167; Smallwood, 2007, p. 82; Spillers, 1987, p. 72). Quantity and quality were mutually exclusive, subordinating quality to quantity and the enslaved to “human-as-cargo [...] taken into account as quantities” (Spillers, 1987, p. 72). The enslaved were placed in the depot of the ship, the hull, and stacked on top and next to each other like boxes, where even the small ounce of humanity towards necessary physical releases of the human-as-cargo was denied. The experience and treatment of the enslaved within the middle passage set a precedence for the “institution of bondage that interlinked slaving voyages

⁶⁹ Translation: I have to be careful with this man, I make a mental note. I must remember to never tell him everything I know, what I have seen, what I have felt

and plantation societies” (Mustakeem, 2016, p. 3). Along with a perpetual cycle of terrorizing and bloodying the black body “within the human manufacturing process” of enslavement (Mustakeem, 2016, p. 123).

The middle passage is the symbolic representation of “a predatory network of exchanges, forced migrations, and acts of resistance rooted in war and conquest” (Johnson, 2020, p. 160). It is a metaphor for the coloniality and its tyrannical presence within the New World and transatlantic slave trade (Smallwood, 2007, p. 8). Where the enslaved were “culturally unmade” and thrown into “a figurative darkness” that remained “suspended in the oceanic” (Spillers, 1987, p. 72). Re-birthing the Africans into enslaved merchandise through the middle passage made that the humanity of the enslaved remained behind in the sea. It is where the eyes of the enslaved were re-opened – just like the birth of a child that opened their eyes for the first time – to an exploitable, oppressed and silenced existence of captivity and bondage.

The coffle was a “domestic middle passage”, “in its formation and its movement/passage” where the enslaved were disfigured and reduced to animals, or better said cattle (Hartman, 1997, p. 32; Sharpe, 2014, p. 63). Aside from making the reference towards the domestication, the domestic which relates to the ‘family’, the ‘home’ meant two things for the enslaved. First, the domestic made reference to a place “of common origin of cultural fictions [...] grounded in the specificity of proper names” to which the enslaved, the cargo, were “not regarded as elements” of (Spillers, 1987, p. 72). Second, the domestic made reference to the disfiguring of the black maternity and the reproducing of blackness as abjection, through turning “the womb into a factory [and] the birth canal into” an inherited middle passage (Sharpe, 2014, p. 63). Where the middle passage, in both its physical and symbolic representations, become part of the descendants of the enslaved; the condition of the mother is passed over to her progeny. The inherited middle passage becomes a cortège and coffle for the

children “birthed by and from a black woman” converting the delivery and journey of the black child into the moment of death of the black child as a human being and ‘rebirth’, or better said remade, into a product; a commodity (Sharpe, 2014, p. 63). The making of the Africans into enslaved commodities and the reproducing of these commodities through the black female body, abjected the notion blackness “from the social, political and cultural belonging”, thus “from the realm of the human” (Sharpe, 2016, p. 42). The middle passage is the dehumanization of the blacks and, the creation of the nonhuman status for the blacks and their descendants.

The domesticity highlights how the middle passage is not bound/defined by time and space. There is the engendering of the discontinuity and loss of the past and history of the enslaved within future generations extending the middle passage across temporalities (Hartman, 1997, p. 74; Spillers, 1987, p. 71). Where the dehumanizing and categorizing of the blacks as nonhuman became normalized and natural within the modern/colonial order of white male bourgeois supremacy that is rooted in the transatlantic slave trade.

The novel as a whole, acts as a means to counter the middle passage that seems to be part of the *afrodescendientes* in Puerto Rico. The cover of the novel can be seen as a manifestation of the Middle Passage, through the black background, that the novel wants to dismantle. The black background can represent the black void or abyss of the Middle Passage in which the human African is suspended and created into the dehumanized enslaved. A void of that which has been lost in the endless darkness of the Atlantic. The black background also serves as a contrast between what is actually the color black and the skin tone that is blackened through classifying it as black. The distinction between the two presentations of ‘black’ is also an illustration of the sanctioned racialized inferiorization of the *afrodescendientes* or colorism that is present within Puerto Rico.

“[...] es por esta moderna obviada, pasamos por alto que el pasado es una reconstrucción ejecutada desde el presente, y por lo mismo, debemos estudiar estos acontecimientos dentro del marco de la complejidad que encierran”

- Ivette Chiclana Miranda

Chapter 3 Afrodescendencia in Puerto Rico

3.1 Negritude

Puerto Rico had an active role in housing the influx of the enslaved, accounting “for more than one-quarter of all Caribbean slaves [*sic*] in the early nineteenth century” (Emmer and Engerman IN Eltis et al., 2017, p. 74) and was one of “the main sugar producers in the Caribbean” during the Spanish conquest (Rodríguez-Silva, 2012, p. 23). The island also housed the enslaved that were exiled by the Cuban colonial government, to serve a prison sentence (Ortiz-Minaya, 2014, p. iv). The extradition of condemned enslaved to Puerto Rico seemed to be a common occurrence where for example other islands in the Caribbean such as Curaçao exported the “bad, stubborn, thievish and for the colony extremely dangerous slaves [*sic*]” under the pretext of selling the enslaved to Puerto Rico (Klooster & Oostindie, 2011, p. 17). Creating from Puerto Rico a place of educating or re-educating enslaved either through making an example out of them by chopping their heads off or torturing them into re-submission.

This influx of enslaved Africans in Puerto Rico created a new identity, types of languages and a collective mentality surrounding the slave society (Figueroa, 2005, p. 2). Meaning that slavery was central to social, political, economic and cultural life of all inhabitants, and thus part of the identity languages and collective memory (Bergad IN Eltis et al., 2017, p. 99). The influence of the presence of the enslaved Africans expanded and eventually became part of the “Puerto Rican national identity” (Figueroa, 2005, p. 2). This would mean that the *afrodescendencia* is part of the Puerto Rican national identity, however reality is a bit different. To be black actually meant to be unpatriotic, which led to the “social,

political and cultural marginalization of the vast majority of [...] blacks” in Puerto Rico (Helg IN D. J. Davis, 2007, p. 364). The connecting of blackness with unpatriotism creates a resistance and denial towards negritude, where to be Puerto Rican would mean to be ‘not black’. It also constructs “individual and collective silences about African-derived cultural heritage, ancestry, and history” (Rodríguez-Silva, 2012, pp. 2–3). The silencing invisibilizes the *afrodescendencia* within Puerto Rico and pushes it into cracks of marginality within the society.

The silencing, marginalizing and invisibilizing are part of the coloniality exercised upon the *afrodescendientes* through racism. It is because of the coloniality imposed upon the *afrodescendientes* that they are condemned to carrying a colonial wound that subordinates them to a hegemonic discourse that dominates and excludes them. This hegemonic discourse and coloniality is part of the modern colonial order, and through this order it is possible to reproduce,

“a escala global, un racismo estructural de larga data, capaz de atravesar las políticas públicas fijando las huellas de la esclavitud como proceso de subalternización racializada y sostenida, no solo de determinados grupos, sino de las estructuras sociales”⁷⁰

(Campoalegre Septien, 2018, p. 23).

And it is within these “intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). Regardless of the denial of negritude within Puerto Rico, enslavement and its coloniality are imprinted on the social structures that sustain the inexistence of blackness and Africaneity. As much as there is

⁷⁰ Translation: on a global scale, a long-standing structural racism, capable of penetrating public policies fixing the traces of slavery as a process of racialized and sustained subalternization, not just of determined groups, but also of social structures

a negation and elimination of blackness, blackness is also needed in order to sustain the current social structures within Puerto Rico. Because first, in order to have a superior race that can dominate, there is a necessity for an inferior race to exist, otherwise it would not be possible to differentiate between inferior and superior or to dominate and subordinate. Second, “the hidden violence of [the] intolerant [exclusion of the blacks] is the manifest and integrating violence of contaminations” (Glissant, 2010, p. 91). There is a fear of the black and its barbarism/primitivism contaminating the civilized and pure white. And this fear that started from slavery got dissolved into a racialized subalternity that is sustained through “*enajenación y acatamiento mental*”⁷¹ (Romay IN Campoalegre Septien, 2018, p. 94). The alienation and compliance towards such a subaltern or othered condition is sustained not only by the ‘whites’ or ‘pure breeds’ but also by the blacks in Puerto Rico.

*“todas las percepciones, actitudes y comportamientos [...] están alimentados por una cultura que ha moldeado a blancos y negros, haciéndolos compartir los mismos estereotipos y prejuicios y, mayoría de los casos, aceptar el statu quo como manifestación de lo “natural”*⁷²” (Romay IN Campoalegre Septien, 2018, p. 94).

The normalization or naturalization allowed also for a self-discrimination or internal racism to manifest within the *afrodescendientes* in Puerto Rico. It is when the *afrodescendientes* “disparaged their ancestral past and strove to eliminate or conceal all evidence of their negroid origin [and,] accepted and internalized all the myths about black inferiority, and imitated with exaggerated fidelity the cultural patterns of the Europeans”

⁷¹ Translation: alienation and mental compliance

⁷² Translation: all the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors are fed by a culture that has shaped black and white people, making them share the same stereotypes and prejudices and, in most cases, accept the status quo as a manifestation of the “natural”

(Brereton IN Beckles & Shepherd, 1996, p. 274). This lead to the denial of blackness and, “everyday antiblack racist practices and racialized talk” in Puerto Rico, which most do not understand is a “product of and form sustaining racialized domination” (Rodríguez-Silva, 2012, p. 4). The denial of negritude will not eliminate the phenotype or “*matices epiteliales y texturas de pelo*” but actually chain the self to the “*experiencia de esclavización pero también con los grilletes mentales que aún arrastramos*”⁷³; a so called “slavery of color” (Romay IN Campoalegre Septien, 2018, p. 93). The normalization shackles the *afrodescendientes* to an internal racism that is subordinated to the belief that black and African is inferior.

In Puerto Rico there is also the belief that there is no racism, or racial identities. It is a common phrase in Puerto Rico that “*en Puerto Rico no existe el racismo*”⁷⁴ (Franco Ortiz & Ortiz Torres, 2004, p. 18) because “*las diferencias entre razas no vienen al caso cuando la población es mestiza*”⁷⁵ (Godreau, 2011, p. 27), and that there are only “*alguna gente prejuiciada*”⁷⁶ (Bonilla-Silva, 2020, p. 425). The belief is so engrained within people that when racially self-identifying people choose *puertorriqueño* as their race, because race is often viewed “as equivalent to nationality, culture or birthplace” (Landale, 2002, p. 233). Another category for racial self-identification in Puerto Rico (but not limited to⁷⁷) is ‘*trigueño*’. However, this term is used as a colloquial word in informal settings and, even though in certain countries “*las categorías de que se pueden valer los grupos afrodescendientes para autoafirmar su identidad en las estadísticas oficiales son diversas y están relacionadas con los*

⁷³ Translation: experience of enslavement but also to the mental shackles that we still carry

⁷⁴ Translation: in Puerto Rico racism doesn’t exist

⁷⁵ Translation: the differences between races is not relevant when the population is mixed

⁷⁶ Translation: some prejudiced people

⁷⁷ Mulatto, jíbaro, boricua, nuyorican. When self-identifying as being from a specific part of Puerto Rico a racial identity or marker is also attached to the self-identity.

*procesos históricos de integración/segregación en cada uno de los países*⁷⁸”, in Puerto Rico there is only ‘Negra’ as an official category (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, 2018, p. 21). Thus, having another term to relate to or auto identify with the people could feel less boxed in only choosing black, white or other as their racial identity. The term *trigueño* is a fluid term that,

“may denote a person whose racial description lies somewhere between White and Black, and thus be used more or less as an equivalent of mulatto. [It] may also be used to refer euphemistically to a Black person, [or it] may also refer to a White person’s tanned (wheat-colored) complexion.” (Vargas-Ramos, 2005, p. 270)

The fluid term *trigueño* seems to be synonymous with the *puertorriqueño* as race, that encapsulates the complexity of the diversity of backgrounds and races in Puerto Rico. It is as if *trigueño* is used as an umbrella term to racially identify the Puerto Rican self. However, in as much as the term seems to bring the different races ‘together’ under an umbrella term it is also homogenizing the races by putting mulatto or mestizaje on the same line as black and a tanned white person. This in turn is redefining blackness as something that is ‘refined’ or without evoking “images of prototypical (and stereotypical) sub-Saharan African phenotype as it pertains to skin color, hair texture, thickness/narrowness of lips, nose” (Vargas-Ramos, 2005, p. 270). Black as a racial identifier, becomes ambiguous and at the same time synonymous with two racial categories that are not black. This is problematic because through the term *trigueño* blackness gets anonymized and removed from its position as a main racial category to a subcategory of *trigueño* or wheat-colored.

⁷⁸ Translation: the categories that afrodescendientes groups can use to self-affirm their identity in official statistics are diverse and are related to the historical processes of integration/segregation in each of the countries

It is also important to understand that *mestizaje*/mulatto and *afrodescendencia* are two separate notions that should not be used as synonyms of the each other or interchanged. One of the reasons is that *mestizaje* can be used as a means of silencing the African heritage. It is because through *mestizaje* “the role of African slavery [is often minimized] in Puerto Rico” (Rodríguez-Silva, 2012, p. 21). Even though “the sugar-slave complex [...] contributed more than any other factor to the racial diversity of the free population while simultaneously reaffirming— more than ever— whiteness and blackness as opposite extremes of the social hierarchy” (Rodríguez-Silva, 2012, p. 21). Thus, using *mestizaje* to refer to *afrodescendientes* would mean to minimize the influence of *afrodescendencia*, African culture and blackness within the Puerto Rican society and culture. Another reason to be cautious when using the word *mestizaje* instead of *afro* is that the *mestizaje* was used as the in-between identity that accentuated the “*maniqueísmo del postulado civilización/barbarie que definía el discurso identitario decimonónico y colonial*”⁷⁹ (Branche, 1999, p. 483). The *mestizaje* is the hyphen between the white and the black, where it is neither but is used to differentiates between the two and impose the one on the other; where the one cannot exist without the other. It is to say that through *mestizaje* duality is inserted in identity politics creating that the identity can only be seen in a binary opposition of each other.

3.2 Pigmentocracy

Puerto Rico being a place that still has traces of enslavement within its social structures and frameworks, even though the people state that there is no racism, makes that the *puertorriqueños* are actually constantly busy with racial politics. It is because as Stuart Hall indicated:

⁷⁹ Translation: Manichaeism of the postulated civilization/barbaric

“Race is a modality in which class is lived. It is also the medium in which class relations are experienced. This [...] has consequences for the whole class, whose relation to their conditions of existence is now systematically transformed by race” (Reiner et al., 2013, p. 394)

And Mayra Santos Febres demonstrates in her work “that racial equality is also a cultural invention that does not correspond to Puerto Rican social reality because *pigmentocracia* is what forms the core of the country’s social structure” (Gumbar, 2012, p. 59). Denoting that the intersection of class and race dictates and is part of the social organization of life within Puerto Rico. Santos Febres describes that the pigmentocracy is a performance of ‘passing’, which is “*el hacer pasar gato negro por liebre blanca*⁸⁰” or a “*enmascarada racial que tanto determina el imaginario de las sociedades pigmentocratizadas*⁸¹” (Torres Martínez et al., 2004, p. 14). The passing refers to the impersonating of something, in this context the pretending to be not-black, whether that is through adopting whiteness or denying blackness the race is masked in order to sit in the position of the higher class within the hierarchal racial order. Even if this position is only achieved through the imaginary.

Pigmentocracy is a social condition depended on the intersection and fusion of race and class, where there is “a graded system of color prejudices [...] interwoven with the perceived social status of different groups [resulting in a] castelike hierarchy” (Dzidzienyo & Oboler, 2005, p. 11). The aristocracy or bourgeoisie (in Marxist definition) that is imagined to come with a race is similar to the white pseudoaristocracy that was established within the plantations. Where to be white is synonymous with the ‘highest’ economic status or class and in a receding manner the other races follow from light to dark, with black being at the bottom of the pyramid.

⁸⁰ Translation: the passing of a black cat for a white hare

⁸¹ Translation: racial masking that very much determines the imaginary of pigmentocratized societies

It is a pyramid of power and privilege of “*clase que se intersectan las más de las veces con privilegios de raza*⁸²” where “*la pureza es elusiva y la hibridez inconmensurable*⁸³” (Santos-Febres IN Torres Martínez et al., 2004, p. 14). Within a racial and classist pyramid skin color is used “to examine inequality [due to skin tone being used] to make cognitive judgements of others and employ racial stereotypes especially for persons of darker color” (Gravlee, 2005; Telles et al., 2015, p. 42). These stereotypes are not just reserved for racial distinctions but also for ethnic ones, because, according to Lipschutz, pigmentocracy, is used “to refer to [both] the ethnic and color-based hierarchies” (Telles et al., 2015, p. 39). So, the association with class superiority when white and class inferiority when black through the notion of pigmentocracy, is not only relating to the phenotype but also to the cultural characteristics and backgrounds. Thus, pigmentocracy intersects class, race and ethnicity, allowing for the oppressions imposed by pigmentocracy to expand in multiple temporalities through ancestry.

Pigmentocracy is a bilateral phenomenon that is sustained through every level within the racial, class and ethnic pyramid. It is “highly consensual across racial hierarchy [and is] consistent with the expectation of social dominance theory” (Sidanius et al., 2001, p. 827). As the superiority of whiteness persist and blackness is silenced to the margins as inferior, whiteness becomes the desired condition to be and aim for. It is within this desire that an indirect agreement is given to black being inferior and in the pursuit for whiteness blackness is pushed deeper into the crack of inexistence. The theory of social dominance “argues that human social systems tend to organize themselves as group-based hierarchies” (Sidanius et al., 2001, p. 832). The connecting of pigmentocracy with social dominance moves the inferiorization of a race, the phenotype, to the level of a group, an abstract form. Through this is becomes possible

⁸² Translation: class that intersects most of the time with racial privileges

⁸³ Translation: purity is elusive and hybridity immeasurable

to move the racial, classist and ethnic hierarchal order to an institutionalized and systemic space, where pigmentocracy can be exercised in a subtle way.

Pigmentocracy and colorism are in synergy with and related to each other, because where pigmentocracy relates to the racialized class distinctions on a structural level, colorism refers to the racialized class differentiations on an individual level. Where colorism reflects and plays a role in “shaping cultural standards of beauty and attractiveness” both intraracially as interracially (Williams, 2011). Through colorism racial discrimination is moved within the aesthetics realm where the phenotype, skin tone, becomes linked to the nature of beauty and taste. Colorism becomes a ‘useful’ tool to understand the “differential treatment based on skin color and physical features, as the pervasiveness of whiteness” (Hordge-Freeman, 2015, p. 238).

““Colorism” is the discriminatory treatment of individuals falling within the same “racial” group on the basis of skin color. It operates both intraracially and interracially. Intraracial colorism occurs when members of a racial group make distinctions based upon skin color between members of their own race. Interracial colorism occurs when members of one racial group make distinctions based upon skin color between members of another racial group” (Herring IN Williams, 2011)

Colorism brings further discord within an already hyperracialized context where a sense of community or unity is destabilized and fragmented. Where it *“debilita la posibilidad de que los estratos raciales subyugados se unan y produzcan [...] acciones colectivas [y] también fomenta acciones problemáticas de movilidad social por parte de los individuos de color con*

*el objetivo de mejorar la raza*⁸⁴” (Bonilla-Silva, 2020, p. 437). Through colorism the idea of solidarity or unity becomes a faraway and practically unachievable goal.

The prejudice against the darker skin tone being at the bottom of the hierarchy lead to a self-identification as white or *blanqueamiento*⁸⁵ (Simmons, 2017, p. 21). Through *blanqueamiento* there is a rejection of blackness and a pursuit for a “biological and cultural whitening” (Rodríguez-Silva, 2012, p. 2). The black or undesired is used synonymously with the African culture, making not just the phenotype black the negative condition to have but also the presence of the African culture is negatively perceived (Sawyer & Paschel, 2007, pp. 310–311). There is also the idea that to be human one needs to climb “up towards whiteness and light” (Fanon, 2008, p. xix). That would mean that to be human one must be white and to be black which is the opposite is to be nonhuman. Thus, the pursuit for *blanqueamiento* can also be seen as the pursuit to be Human. However, this pursuit is based on a “single, monolithic notion of what it means to be human” (Fanon, 2008, p. 115). Within such a pursuit for whitening, the black “is made inferior” forced “to choose between his [*sic*] family and European society; in other words, the individual who *climbs up* into society – white and civilized – tends to reject his [*sic*] family – black and savage – on the plane of imagination” (Fanon, 2008, p. 115). The problem with this idea of becoming Human through *blanqueamiento* is with the same part that needs to become white, which is the phenotype or ethnicity. Because one cannot change being black, no matter how much it is attempted to ““*mejorar la raza*” a través de *juntas que aclaren la piel, o bien a través de afeites (alisados, operaciones de nariz y liposucciones, tintes de pelo, lentes de contactos, cremas aclaradoras) que encubran lo más*

⁸⁴ Translation: weakens the possibility of the subjugates racial strata uniting and producing collective actions and also encourages problematic social mobility actions by individuals of color with the aim of ‘improving the race’

⁸⁵ Translation: whitening

*posible el defecto de ser negro*⁸⁶” (Santos-Febres IN Torres Martínez et al., 2004, p. 14). As much as the belief exists that black should become extinct so that the nonhuman and inhumane treatment associated with blackness is eliminated, the problem is not with blackness but the thought that blackness is bad and synonymous with nonhumanness.

Even if purity that is linked to clarity (in context with clear skin or white skin) it is a difficult – no actually practically impossible – goal to achieve, because one does not choose the phenotype they are born with. However, that does not mean that people do not attempt to achieve it through the imaginary. Santos-Febres redefines transvestism into something not just relating to the change of gender but also that of race; it is a moment where “*el cuerpo oscuro se traviste de blanco, no para parodiarlo, sino para intentar una metamorfosis*⁸⁷” (Santos-Febres IN Torres Martínez et al., 2004, p. 14). The metamorphosis is about the wearing of another race through transmutation where the outside is or the norm of white meaning human is restored. However, this imaginary metamorphosis is impossible to complete, because the change does not directly or even impact the form in which, whether whitened or not, blackness or black is perceived. As Santos-Febres explains:

“Porque aún la apariencia blanca revela su costura cultural- esa condición caribeña que instauro la identidad en la mezcla. Los blancos caribeños nunca pueden pasar por europeos. Muchos viven día a día la nostalgia de lo que nunca fueron ni podrán llegar a ser. Anhelan la determinación identitaria de sus abuelos que sí fueron holandeses, gallegos, alemanes, franceses o italianos-; eso imaginan.

⁸⁶ Translation: improve the race through remedies that lighten the skin, or through refinement (straightening, nose operations, and liposuctions, hair dyes, contact lenses, lightening creams) that cover up as much as possible the defect of being black

⁸⁷ Translation: the dark body is dressed in white, not as a parody, but to attempt a metamorphosis

Ellos, en cambio son y siempre serán blancos menores, blancos sospechosos, negros en potencia⁸⁸ (Santos-Febres IN Torres Martínez et al., 2004, p. 14)

As much as the colored or black puerto rican would like to pass as white, their blackness markers or ‘unpure’ whiteness will always be apparent. Just because there is denial of an aspect of the self and it gets masked or morphed into something else does not mean it goes away. Sometimes it actually enhances the presence of that which is being denied more.

3.3 Double Consciousness

In order for the Other, the blacks and colored, to understand the racial categorization of blacks and colored as inferior, and white as superior a double consciousness is needed. Du Bois coined the seeing of “one’s self through the eyes of others” – with ‘others’ in this context referring to the worldview of the dominator that monopolizes the power of representation, being and existing – as a form of a double consciousness (2015, p. 5). The double consciousness is the measuring of the black-Othered self according to the modern/colonial order where there is a “two-ness[;] two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois, 2015, p. 5). It is to understand how the other views and categorizes the black, what implications it has for the self that is, deemed or chosen as, black and that the perspective of the other is separate from that of the black self. Where the ‘black-self’ is always both black (in context of the

⁸⁸ Translation: because even the white appearance reveals its cultural seam – that Caribbean condition that establishes identity in the mix. Caribbean whites can never pass for Europeans. Many live day by day the nostalgia that they never were and will never be able to become. They long for the identity determination of their grandparents who were Dutch, Galician, German, French or Italian-; that’s what they imagine. They, on the other hand, are and always will be minor whites, suspect whites, potential blacks

Othered, nonhuman, nonwhite inferior entity) and self (in context of self-identifying separate from modern/colonial impositions).

The notion of double consciousness is tied with the tension between fulfilment and transfiguration, where to achieve might mean to be something else or change into that which denies the co-existence of black and self, separate from the dominant modern/colonial worldview. A consciousness that demands a ‘dreadful objectivity’ of “being both inside and outside the West”; neither part of or separate from the Western Eurocentric ontology (Gilroy, 1993, p. 30). An objective perspective of understanding the different varieties of subjectivities and identification associated with blackness. Where a distanced position needs to be taken to have an ‘overview’ of the dynamics surrounding racial classifications and what the ‘subjective’ is subordinated to within those dynamics. Within this position there is a tension between the politics of fulfilment and transfiguration. The politics of fulfilment refers to “the notion that a future society will be able to realize the social and political promise that present society has left unaccomplished” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 37). Reflecting on the ‘empty’ promises made and the ‘desires’, both spoken and unspoken, left by previous generations. The politics of transfiguration encompasses the “new desires, social relations, and modes of association within the racial community of interpretation and resistance *and* between that group and its erstwhile oppressors” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 37). The politics of transfiguration reveal “the hidden internal fissures in the concept of modernity” and “therefore partially transcend modernity, constructing both an imaginary anti-modern past and a postmodern yet-to-come” (Gilroy, 1993, pp. 37–38). The tension between the notion of fulfilment and transfiguration is created due to the situation and position that the unfulfilled promises and desires stem from. The politics of transfiguration create new yearnings for future generations, however in this it can contradict, oppose and even overlook the previous promises and desires.

The double consciousness is founded in the “antinomy of diaspora blacks” and can be used as a resolution “towards the core dynamic of racial oppression” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 30). Because it is a consciousness stemming “from a location of oppression whereby one is designated ignorable while simultaneously encoded as subordinate, one is resisting being (only) the self constituted there, denying dominant relationality” (Hoagland IN Sullivan & Tuana, 2007, p. 108). Through the double consciousness it becomes possible to see the world in two ways, that of the oppressed and the oppressor, making it possible to reach another reality that is beyond the ‘idea’ that the other has over the black body and identity.

3.4 Invisibility/Visibility

With the double consciousness comes the question of visibility and invisibility, who is seen and who is made invisible only to be seen through the lens of the ones privileged to sight and have a right to sight. The idea of invisibility can be best understood in Ralph Ellison’s book *The Invisible Man*, where is stated: “I am an invisible man [*sic*]. I am a man [*sic*] of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me” (2016, p. 3). It is about being seen not as what you are but as what is thought that you are, in turn categorizing, stereotyping and eliminating the personhood, and grouping an individual under the filter of the ones privileged with sight. To be seen in this context would mean to be filtered through the prejudice of the person that is looking, and to understand that the idea of sight is linked to privilege.

“Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around” (Ellison, 2016, p. 8)

There is a sense of temporality attached to being invisible or the notion of visibility, where the invisibilized is not part of the singular time flow of which it was excluded. However, in the moment when the flow is disrupted a break or crack is created allowing for the invisibilized to resurface. And it is also the being excluded from the singular temporal flow that makes it possible for the invisibilized to have “a different rhythm of living and being” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 202). It is within the breaks and through being invisibilized that one can freely move through visibility and invisibility. The Puerto Rican culture is not just a way of being it is “*también una manera de transitar por la visibilidad y la invisibilidad, por la ausencia y la presencia*”⁸⁹ (Duchesne Winter, 2011, p. 32). There is the ‘freedom’ of being present or absent or neither; it is about the freedom of being and existing in a different flow of time; a sort of malleability. It is through this malleability, “*a la capacidad de desaparecer y reaparecer en perpetuo proteísmo, mostrada por los sujetos puertorriqueños, que esa operación de limadura, de higienización o castración colonizadora ha fallado en producir los subalternos felizmente gobernables que ambicionó*”⁹⁰ (Duchesne Winter, 2011, p. 32). Through invisibilizing it becomes possible to experience a different flow of time and malleability that allows for the invisibilized Puerto Rican to maintain a sense of autonomy that opposes the submissive subalternity imposed through modernity/coloniality.

The invisible and the visible do not only refer to the condition of the person or how they are perceived, it also refers to the racial boundaries with which Puerto Ricans have to deal with.

⁸⁹ Translation: also a way of moving through visibility and invisibility, through absence and presence

⁹⁰ Translation: to the ability to disappear and reappear in perpetual proteism shown by Puerto Rican subjects, that the colonial operations of filing, sanitizing or castration has failed to produce the happily governable subordinates that it aspired for.

“[Both] black and white social spaces [...] are demarcated by [...] visible markers [that] include skin color, mannerisms, dress, speech, or simply community membership [and] invisible markers [that] might include dismissive or unwelcoming behavior that dissuades non-blacks from occupying certain spaces or staying very long when they do” (Lloréns, 2018, p. 169).

These markers create an invisible line that keeps the other race at a distance and denies them the recognition of being part of the same Puerto Rican population/society. Because of the racial boundary or line that is being drawn it is more difficult to surpass racial exclusions, unite as a society (solidarity) and, establish relationalities. Drawing a clear line gives the impression that the other is not, maybe even never, welcome or included but always outside, excluded. The line is like “an invisible frontier [where you] can only go in and be accepted only so far” (Lloréns, 2018, p. 169). Only so far as there is no contamination of that which the frontier is attempting to exclude the other from.

It is important to understand that there are degrees to invisibility in that the intersectionality of the person determines how invisibilized they will be. The modern colonial order organizes the categorial oppressions in a hierarchal order and links them together with each other (Campoalegre Septien, 2018, p. 23; Mignolo IN Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 158). The categorial oppressions are distinguished by class, race, gender, sex, nationality and ethnicity to name a few; basically, all labels that are created within society to differentiate amongst each other whether that is on an individual or group basis. And it is when these multiple ways of differentiation are linked with each other that we can speak of multiple oppressions or intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). The degree in which the person is oppressed, silenced and invisibilized is determined by which position they have within the hierarchal order. The more intersections that are part of the oppressions, the more it is possible to dominate, negate and marginalize the very existence or presence of the person (Crenshaw,

1991). So, to be ‘poor’, ‘black’, ‘female’ would mean to experience a multiplicity of oppressions that are directed to the single being that is poor black and woman. And the reverse is also part of intersectionality that the condemnation to a plurality of subjections is inflicted “*tanto por negra como por mujer*”⁹¹ (Ramos Rosado, 2012, p. 185). Then the opposite would mean that to be ‘rich’, ‘white’, ‘male’, would be synonymous to being free in a sense. Where there is no ‘oppression’ but autonomy, authority and superiority because for there to be oppression there has to be the opposite that is acting upon the oppressing of another.

With the notion intersectionality it is also necessary to look at the ideas of fusion and purity. Fusion, “intermeshing, coalescence”, is about the “logical inseparability of race, class, sexuality, gender” (Lugones, 2014, p. 73). It is to understand that the discriminatory treatment towards a poor black woman cannot be approached or understood as either a class or race or sex oppression but as a fused form of oppression of the poor-black-woman as a whole. Where intersectionality is used to distinguish the categories of oppressions imposed upon the invisibilized; “fusion corrupts [the] logic of interconnection [that] leaves the logic of categories intact” (Lugones, 2014, p. 73). That is because the “modern categorial logic constructs categories as homogeneous, atomic, separable, and constituted in dichotomous terms” (Lugones, 2010, p. 757). Where when looking at the intersection of categories the absence of the poor black and woman ‘category’ is revealed rather than its presence highlighted. To view the oppressions and invisibility as a coalescence, fusion, intermeshed allows for a positioned understanding that the experience of the poor-black-woman is reserved to the poor-black-woman and cannot be grouped with other experiences that are not the same fusion. This leads to the next logic of or categorial purity where the notion of purity is linked to hierarchical dichotomies. By relating purity with hierarchy it is highlighted that “each homogeneous,

⁹¹ Both for black and for woman

separable, atomic category is characterized in terms of the superior member of the dichotomy” (Lugones, 2010, p. 757). Meaning that when ‘poor’, ‘black’, ‘woman’, are categorized as inferior or at the bottom level of the hierarchy the opposite ‘rich’, ‘white’, ‘man’ is categorized as superior and pure. It also means that each category by itself is making reference or related to the highest form it can present itself. For example, ““women” stands for white women” because the white woman is above (superior to) the black woman, due to their racial distinctions, and ““black” stands for black men” because the black man is ‘above’ (superior to) the black woman in terms of sex (Lugones, 2010, p. 757). Thus, when trying to understand the experience of the poor black woman through the category of class, race or sex as separate things, then the experience of a poor white man (class) or a black man (race) or white woman (sex) is what is uncovered. This makes of the “non-white; black, mestiza, indigenous, and Asian women [...] impossible beings [...] since they are neither European bourgeois women, nor indigenous males” (Lugones, 2010, p. 757). So, when wanting to understand the experience of a black woman it is necessary to look at the intersections that are at play but also at how they are fused together to create an experience specific to the black woman.

In Puerto Rico the invisibility and disavowal of the *afrodescendientes* is huge problem. For example in and through media outlets the systematic racism towards *afrodescendientes* or *negritud* is still present, where even when openly being racist there is the belief that nothing wrong was done. It is to the extent that the “*entretenimiento que se cree con derecho a hacer sentir inferior a la gente negra de Puerto Rico*⁹²” and the “*esferas de gobierno y sus representates que desde su discurso atacan racistamente nuestra integridad*⁹³” ‘get away’ with and think they have the right to belittle and disregard *afrodescendientes* in Puerto Rico (Arroyo

⁹² Translation: entertainment that is believed to have the right to make black people of Puerto Rico feel inferior

⁹³ Translation: spheres of government and their representatives, who from their speech racistly attack our integrity

Pizarro, 2020). It is as if there is a hidden agenda in Puerto Rico to keep the black down in order to ‘remain’ white. This hidden agenda of racism “*consiste en invisibilizar aportes de la negritud, ocultar denuncias del blanco-centrismo, resaltar la hispanidad, promover el mito de la tolerancia a la diversidad y legitimar la degradación cultural folclorizando las raíces afrocaribeñas*⁹⁴” (Godreau IN Torres Martínez et al., 2004, p. 20). As highlighted in the paragraph above the hidden agenda of racism and in Puerto Rican context the rejection of the *afrodescendencia*, is intensified in the context of the black woman experience. Where “*las niñas puertorriqueñas negras experimentan cotidianamente una multiplicidad de experiencias de racismo y sexismo en un contexto de clases sociales*⁹⁵” (Godreau IN Torres Martínez et al., 2004, p. 20). What the Puerto Rican example brings into the mix is the category of age where discrimination based on class, race, gender and sex can be experienced from an early age.

⁹⁴ Translation: consists of making black contributions invisible, hiding denunciations of white-centrism, highlighting Hispanicity, promoting the myth of tolerance to diversity, and legitimizing cultural degradation by folklorizing Afro-Caribbean roots

⁹⁵ Translation: black Puerto Rican experience a multiplicity of experiences of racism and sexism on a daily basis in the social class context

Final thoughts

Although silenced *las Negras* were not forgotten. It is within the silence that they kept on living and “in the great silence of live discursive production that the epistemic is reborn or remembered” (Henry IN Bagues, 2006, p. 272). It is in the silence that *las Negras* were able to keep on living and their discourse was reborn and remembered. Through works such as *Las Negras* the black radical feminist perspective is able to enter and gain presence within the hegemonic patriarchal literary field. And it is through the readers and people that work *with* the novel that it can expand transtextually to different discourses and gain recognition in spaces where the voices of blackwomen are silenced.

Las Negras as a neo-slave narrative attempts a rewriting of the colonial patriarchal History of Puerto Rico through mnemonic fiction. The novel works as an alternative to the colonial History that invisibilizes the enslaved, through the hyperpresence of the black enslaved women. Through connecting passages of the novel with literature on the enslaved analyzed by scholars that positioned the colonial History in its coloniality, situated the novel as an important medium in understanding coloniality and the inequalities that stem from them. The histories told from the perspective of the enslaved tell a story of mass reduction of human life into a commodity, and the loss of home, bodies, family, maternity but it also tells a history of resistance through rebellions and death. The novel tells *her* story, the histories of the forgotten, silenced, domesticized, eroticized and marginalized. It is the story of *las Negras*, in which human agency and recognition is regained through visibility and representation.

This work pays special attention to the visibilization of the black enslaved woman, because they were silenced to the point where they were practically unseen and invisible within history even though they played a big role in maintaining the plantation system. The roles of the black enslaved women were masked and silenced under the notion of the enslaved, where their presence only became visible in contexts of domesticity or grouped with the blacks or

enslaved. Such a visibility meant for the black women that they only existed in relation to a space, the domestic, or the man, the black man. However, the role of the enslaved woman was a lot more fundamental than the social condition assigned to her for being a woman. As she had the ability to singlehandedly sustain and reproduce the plantation system through her reproductive system, the black enslaved woman had a more foundational presence within history than she is given. The belittling of the role of the black enslaved woman to a mere domestic presence highlights the patriarchal frameworks that are present within the colonial History. *Las Negras* provides a space where black enslaved women are visibilized and represented, in turn depatriarchalizing the History in which only the white man is represented as an active participant within history.

The lack of representation of the enslaved with history created a negative stigma and denial of *afrodescendencia* in Puerto Rico. The idea that *negritud* and *afrodescendencia* are unpatriotic, impure and of lower class derives from the predominant colonial History told and the coloniality present within Puerto Rico. The coloniality of Puerto Rico becomes evident through the racism, pigmentocracy, *blanqueamiento* and colorism present within the society. All these phenomena stem from a basis of white and European meaning pure, noble and human, and the opposite black being impure, poor and nonhuman/animal. This in turn created a denial of anything that has to do with blackness or Africaneity, resulting in self-denial, ostracization, ridiculization and elimination of anything associated with *negritud*. It also resulted in the performing of whiteness, where the non-white European attempts a metamorphosis into a pure white; the white European. The intensity in which the negative perception of blackness is felt depends on the intersectionality of the person, where the black (colored) poor woman experiences the most oppressions.

The novel in turn written by an *afrodescendiente* tries to move against the coloniality that is in Puerto Rico, through the rewriting of the colonial History. In rewriting the colonial

History that erases the presence of the black woman, the novel gained a “symbolic power of the tale”, that can be used “as an element of the moral critique that anchors black antipathy to the forms of rationality and civilized conduct which made racial slavery and its brutality legitimate” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 65). The novel poses an overall threat to the patriarchal machista history of Puerto Rico, where it presents itself as an omnipotent power of re-existing and memory that kept breathing regardless of the deoxygenized space the ancestoras and their ancestry were put into. The rewritten historical narrative through neo-slave narratives, such as *Las Negras*, can reclaim a sense of dignity for the *afrodescendientes* in Puerto Rico. This can lead to the creation of another epistemology that combats and goes against the hegemony present within Puerto Rico, and stimulate a process of conscientization (awareness raising) about blackness in the country (Lloréns, 2018, p. 158). The depatriarchalizing is also necessary for the deconstructing of the traditional role of the woman, which the novel achieves by giving the narrator different roles that would usually be ‘impossible’ for them.

Taking the concepts outlined in this work further we can speculate on areas of interest for possible future research. One of the areas could be related with, but not exclusive to, gender performativity. It would be interesting to research the contrast between how the black women performed with the novel with how is ‘expected’ for a black woman to perform in Puerto Rico. To see, if the woman performing in roles out of the traditional is considered a ‘threat’ to the gender constructions within Puerto Rico. This could be expanded and include black feminism or more broadly women of color feminism, because it is a relevant topic to approach from the issues arising from black feminism or more broadly women of color feminism.

With the focus on visibilization of blackness and *afrodescendencia* within Puerto Rico, and not other identities, a black and white view of the power struggles and hierarchies in Puerto Rico can be created. However, there are many more ethnicities, cultural backgrounds and self-identities present in Puerto Rico that make up the *puertorriqueño*. It would be interesting to

see how the notions of pigmentocracy, colorism, *blanquemento* and racism are dealt with in other ethnic groups in Puerto Rico such as Taíno and Boricua for example.

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