

**BLACK CULTURE, WHITE DISCOURSE AND
CREOLE HISTORY:**

**A STUDY ON INTERPRETATIONS OF
AMERICAN SLAVERY**

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INTRODUCTION: SOME PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

The first Africans probably reached America in the company of Christopher Columbus. This first trickle swelled in the following centuries and reached its peak during the 18th century, dying down only in the 19th century. Recent calculations suggest that the total number of African immigrants was between 18 and 20 millions. With the exception of the cold zones in the extreme North and South they dispersed to all parts of the continent. Major concentrations emerged in the present United States, the Caribbean Basin and Brazil, but other areas, for instance the Andean countries and parts of Central America, also received a large share. During most of its colonial history America maintained a close contact with the “dark” continent which nevertheless remained unknown to the majority of the American population and up to the present day stereotypes have predominated over more genuine information.

These stereotypes travelled with the Africans; they had, in fact, preceded them. When they stepped ashore Africans were confronted with an already formed image of themselves which determined what kind of people they were, what their purpose and their destiny had to be and how they were to be controlled. Nearly all of them had been brought to work in the plantations which were considered as the main wealth of the New Continent and the most current stereotypes were concerned with this. First of all, Africans were Negroes and Negroes were slaves. Certainly most European and American whites were aware that somewhere there was a “Dark Continent” where black people must have enjoyed some kind of freedom, but this remained a very abstract idea because until the end of 19th century the only black people that most white people came into contact with were either slaves or former slaves. These “empirically” supported equations produced their own forms of rationality: black persons were slaves by nature because on the one hand their mental capacities and other human attributes were inferior and on the other because they were able to endure very hard work and to survive on very little when forced to. Another equally important stereotype was linked to moral aspects: Africans were “wild” people, i.e. they lacked the human accoutrements of civilisation and, above all, Christianity. Seen from this angle, their reduction to slavery was of benefit to them, but they remained ungrateful either by their nature or by a lack of comprehension; they did not comply with their part of the contract which would provide them with humanity in exchange for work, because they were lazy by nature and needed a strong hand to lead them. In this respect they were like children and the slave master was their father.

Already this short and incomplete list of stereotypes shows two important and interrelated aspects: first they are linked to each other by seemingly “logical” sequences whereby one stereotype leads to others, thus producing syntagmatical chains of arguments which survive without any empirical basis; and second, that most stereotypes have two (or even more) faces and values which often are contradictory. For instance the attribute “wild” connotes, at least since the Renaissance, the quality “good by nature”, producing the image of the noble savage who is unable to support serfdom. Freedom is seen as a basic human quality which produces the “noble savage” who in abolitionist literature is more human than his master. Another important contradiction results from the close association of the “natural” and the moral justification of slavery: when slavery is considered as a school of civilisation and Christianity, any slave who graduated from it would be equal to his master and hence free. This argument, in fact, besides having certain material advantages, was used as a powerful inducement to adaptation to the colonial ways. The “colonial promise” was never kept and it converted into the “colonial lie” infuriating the “good savage” and turning him into a resentful and rebellious subject.

The basic opposition of adaptation and resistance is, right from the beginning, a central theme of this study and closely related to its main topic: creolisation. Before we

elaborate on it we also have to take a step back to the first peculiarity of the stereotypes we enumerated: their structural dependence from each other which transforms them into a chains of *syntagmata* based on their own “logic” reality. This leads to important termino - “logical” questions.

So far we have used the term *stereotype*, but it is not satisfactory because being too general it does not reproduce the idea of a concatenation and argumentative dependence. The terms *prejudices* and *archetypes* which were part of the provisional title of this study, had been discarded for the same reasons, though the latter - archetypes - had been retained as title of Part II indicating well - known basic oppositions which are not subject to further reductions. *Ideology* is certainly a term which would come very close to our requirements, if it were not so closely associated with Marxism and sociology who determine it by opposition to other terms - as for instance “reality” - whereby it contains an implication of moral rectitude. Instead we chose the “modern” and relatively neutral term of *discourse* which needs some explanation which is based on something more concrete: the *text*. By this term we do not only understand written texts which necessarily are the hard core of this study; more important, particularly for any study on slavery, would be the multitude of oral texts, for instance conversations between slaves, masters and between both groups. The majority of these text will remain for ever the invisible part of an iceberg; some of the oral texts acquire a more stable form of records at court, of songs, of tales etc.; finally some, in fact very few, survive as documents which add to our knowledge on slavery.

All texts consist of various textual elements: the stereotypes as for instance Africa as “dark continent” or the Africans as “wild” persons. They form intertextual relationships which determine the significance of textual elements, for instance “wild” associated with “tropical agriculture” has another meaning compared with its association with Christianity. One of the purposes of our study is to determine such textual elements and to demonstrate their intertextual relationship with others. An essential feature is that these relations may support each other to such an degree that other functions of the text - for instance that of being a useful representation of the “reality” - disappear altogether. A striking example is the planters’ conviction that the black slaves are “stupid animals” which is supported by the textual elements of the “dark continent” and the mindlessness of the work they were expected to perform. Thus the argument becomes self - supporting and prevents the planters from gaining a closer insight into the complex social and spiritual dimensions of the slaves’ universe. The price the planters pays is the ignorance of “real” plots and rebellions. But the consequences reach far beyond this pragmatic problem: colonial society was the almost exclusive source of more permanent texts on which our knowledge on the slaves’ life is based and our study will show extensively the difficulties in overcoming the image of the slaves’ society as an undifferentiated mass of victims who had no life of their own.

Discourses - which thus in simplified form may be understood as clusters or aggregates of stereotypes obscuring the view of “reality”¹ - acquire different dimensions. It is obvious that on the level of slaves’ culture they appear to be temporary: their discourses are “broken” or “éclaté” as Glissant understands them, first because slaves had little access to more permanent means of conservation such as the written text; second because they were continuously repressed by the dominant discourses of colonial and white society. In opposition to this colonial discourses are of long duration - a quality which - as has been

¹ On this level of conceptualisation “reality” is a term difficult to handle. It does not exist outside of representations but remains as a implicit category which, on a pragmatic level, *should* serve as the means to test the applicability of a discourse, i.e. its continuing validity.

stated - is not necessarily an advantage because it obscures the perception of any “reality”. One of the largest discourses of the “white world” is related to History as it appears during the 19th century. Its most fundamental textual elements were *unity* (of the nation as the only significant social body), *homogeneity* (of its populations) and *continuity* (as interpretation of the past and its projection in the future). The new American states whose emergence was closely connected to, and in fact dependent, on this discourse had to adopt an image of themselves which did not correspond to their “reality”: they were never united, nor homogeneous, nor could they look back at any continuing History as Nations. The discourse of “nation - building” - which was still very alive until the sixties and seventies of our century - had devastating effects on the perception of the Indian populations which, however, were offered a thoroughly ambiguous way of escaping from the verdict of History: in legitimising the existence of the new states they served as a symbol of continuity. The black slaves who - not accidentally - experienced abolition in the same period were not as lucky. Certainly they were unfortunate victims, but they also counted as “immigrants” whose history was to enter the mainstream of Colonial and National History.

There were many more reasons why the century - old contacts with Africa left few traces in the conscience of the Americans. Feelings of guilt and deep - rooted prejudice had a part to play, but we also should not forget that before the beginning of the twentieth century Africa still was *terra incognita*; during earlier centuries, it was inconceivable that anything like African History or African culture might exist. Former slaves who were becoming citizens of the new nations saw few reasons to be proud of their origins. The old discourse of the redemption of the African through slavery was expanded by a second redemption through abolition. Booker Washington still understood the time of bondage as an “apprenticeship” which was crowned with the admission of black persons into the new National Societies. Latin Americans saw this apprenticeship as a series of stages which were defined by a particular vocabulary: the “wild” African slave, the *bozál* became a *ladino* and his offspring finally reached a stage of relative perfection as *Creole* slaves.

The central theme of this study is history. It is not presented as History as a continuity of data and events which emanate from a distant and impersonal authority but as the fragmented discourse of representations which includes the reflection of its origin, i.e. the “historian” - in the largest meaning of the term - and his own historical position. The most basic distinction, obviously, is related to the question of whether the historian himself forms part of the community which had suffered from slavery or whether he speaks from an outside position. It is evident that this difference has important implications when the object and the subject of the discourse coincide the purpose changes and so does the attitude of the historian. The problem of the black historian is not subjectivity which is entirely legitimate, it is the precariousness of his position. “Je suis noir. D’autre part j’ai toujours considéré le culte de la science comme le seul vrai, le seul digne de la constante attention [...]”. This pathetic excuse, opening a large study of Anténor Firmin (1885: XII), an eminent Haitian anthropologist of the 19th century, illustrates the dimensions of the problem: the overwhelming power of the “white” discourse reduces, quantitatively and qualitatively, the possibility for the black subject to express himself. His problem has many dimensions, for instance the question of sources which are predominately “white” and which, given the bias in favour of the written text, never paid sufficient attention to oral texts and the collective memory. They are certainly more difficult to handle because they are fragmentary and they require an intimate knowledge of their context and purpose, a requirement which implies the acceptance of subjectivity.

Thus subjectivism becomes the realm of black historians. When they want to avoid the misgivings of a radical and “fundamentalist” attitude, they have to rely on a different genre which opposes white “objectivity”: fiction. In Part I of this study we will

demonstrate that fiction - as opposed to “truth” and “authenticity” - is a doubtful category as far as discourses on slavery are concerned; we substitute it with the criterion of distance between the author and his text which finds its concrete expression in the question, as to how far the author and his subjectivity are part of the text. This explains why Afro - American discourses - like Latin American discourses in general - are not marked by a clear distinction between the scientific text and its fictional counterpart: fictional texts include present - day novels or biographies such as that of Equiano as well as the essays of Glissant and Benítez-Rojo; their common point is that they draw widely upon a collective memory as well as their personal experience creating a genre which Gilberto Freyre called a *roman vrai*.

After this general discussion on Afro - American history and the historians, Part II of this study concentrates on a more specific issue: the question whether specific “archetypes” of slave societies can be identified historically as well as geographically. We have to be aware that this is a territory full of pitfalls because the necessity of creating general concepts of Afro - American cultures comes very close to over - generalisation which is a breeding ground of prejudice. This problem has been accentuated by the ingenuity of certain comparative studies of the 30ies and 40ies of which Frank Tannenbaum’s study *Slave and Citizen* was the most prominent example. It provoked allergic reactions against any kind of comparativism during the following decades right up the present day, favouring narrow studies on functional contexts on a small scale (Mörner 1993:60). We want to emphasise therefore, that it is not our intention to rehabilitate large scale comparisons for their own sake; in fact, the extent of our discussion as well as the material presented would be far too insufficient for such a purpose. The objectives of this section are twofold: first there is a further extension of the notion of archetypes in its relation to an Afro - American cultural sphere; in spite of its dangers and pitfalls, it is necessary if we continue to use the concept of Afro - American Culture which implies that there is some relationship between its individual areas on whatever level. Second, comparison is needed for pragmatic reasons. As this study covers many different areas without analysing any of them in a continued and systematic form, we have to provide a comprehensive matrix which allows us to locate the relative position of each of them in relation to the whole of the discussion. Part II thus is an essential presupposition to Parts III and IV.

The purpose of these two parts is to discuss the different “archetypes” of slavery in relation to different discourses on Afro - American identity. From the very beginning of the study, the discussion of literary texts in Part I, two well - known basic options are postulated: adaptation and resistance. They appear first as alternatives in the attitudes of the individual slave, and even determine each of his actions and choices. Should he submit to the colonial order and its constraints and thereby run the risk of losing his personal integrity and his cultural identity, or should he resist its demands thus putting at stake his physical well being and even his life? It is evident that none of these single alternatives would be satisfactory; the difficulties of life in slavery favour pragmatic decisions which take into account the particular circumstances of the moment. Many intermediate forms between adaptation and resistance are possible, for instance an outward compliance to the masters’ demands accompanied by subversive thoughts or acts, a behaviour which is responsible for the extreme ambiguity of Afro - American cultures. Nevertheless certain historic circumstances - the mode of production in the colony, the extent of social polarisation between white and black populations, and the relative proportion of African - born slaves amongst the slave crews - resulted in increasing or diminishing the degree of social conflict inherent in all societies based on slavery. Thus certain colonies, mostly on the American mainland, appear as more integrative compared with the insular colonies where large sugar plantations dominated. This is the basis on which certain “archetypes”

may be identified, but their outward appearance is fallacious to a certain degree. Slavery as a historical experience remains engraved in the memory of all black populations in America; when integration seems to gain the upper hand, black movements - which appear as “fundamentalist” - accentuate their difference as the recent examples of North America and Brazil demonstrate.

How do they constitute this difference? This question raises a complicated issue which will be discussed fully in Part III. The image of Africa, we mentioned in the beginning, is very vague; it has acquired an obscure and symbolic value which has either been enhanced and exaggerated or else reduced since the times of slavery, opposing the stereotypes mentioned above: a “dark” and “barbarous” continent on the one side, empires of old and peaceful cultures on the other. The emotional charges linked to these images have also invaded the cultural sciences which deal with various aspects of Afro - American cultures, reproducing the euphoric discovery of African traits during certain periods and their absolute negation in others, and dividing scholars into “Afrocentrist” and “Eurocentrist” groups, the latter clinging to the prejudice of a systematic separation of African cultures and ethnic groups. This study does not pretend to resolve the debate on the African heritage present in America; we rather propose a more realistic look at what the impact of African cultures in the New World might have been and how they faded out, thus gradually acquiring the quality of a myth. Our argument against the rapid disappearance of the African identity of new slaves is based on a reappraisal of the data and on the reconstruction of social structures in New World slave societies; but, beyond this, it is also essential for the understanding of the new black cultures which emerged in America.

Within the dialectic of adaptation and resistance, African cultures and African personality are usually associated with the latter. This is, on superficial level, certainly correct and is also corroborated by data and the fears of the masters. But its interpretation has always been conditioned by the prejudicial juxtaposition of categories which obscure the process of a gradual transition which probably lasted for centuries: African slaves on their often slow journey to the Atlantic shore certainly changed and adapted their cultural and ethnic allegiances according to the new circumstances; they continued to do so on arriving in the New World, even several times if they were shipped to other territories and sold to new masters. Thus they - and later their children - entered a process of “Americanisation” which was marked by many intermediate stages, ruptures and reverses. African ethnic names as well as the colonial terms of *Bozál*, *Ladino* or *Criollo* (or its correspondences in other colonial languages) subdivided a long process into categories which had their own significance according to colonial interests.

This does not by any means imply that these cultures were not African. The meaning of the term however changed considerably. We will demonstrate in Part III that already in the Old World it could designate either historic ethnic groups and cultures, or various new groups which resulted from the migrations and cultural changes initiated by the slave trade; in America it referred to the African Nations and manifested itself in religious associations which frequently changed during centuries of slavery and even more so after abolition. Thus the concrete significance of the term African depends on its context according to the period, the colony, the single plantation and the various groups.

In this respect the term African seems to be similar and in some way connected to another term which will appear right at the beginning of our study: the term Creole. We have a good reason to define it fully only towards the end of our study in Part IV. It is a historic concept which appears first with the colonisation of America and it appears to be even more elusive than “African”, because never in its history does it refer to a particular historic ethnic or cultural group; in fact it appears as a generic term which - referring initially to any variation or deviation from historic ethnic cultures - is opposed to any

concept of particularity. Thus it has been associated with white, black, and mestizo populations, but in specific contexts it may also be related to linguistics, architecture or cuisine. In plantation colonies the term creole was narrowed down to designate slaves and their culture which bore the hallmark of a colonial origin; this meaning prevailed and, often confounded with the terms mestizo and mulatto, became universally known as part racial terminology.

But also its cultural meaning continued, very often on a popular level. Thus traces of its original signification, that of a variation or a partial realisation of white norms, was maintained. As it was continuously opposed to a “genuine”, i.e. African black culture it became more and more associated with the idea of mixture or even, in context with the idea of evolution, with the image of an intermediary stage on the way towards the white (and “superior”) culture.

This is where the principal difficulties associated with the term arise: speaking of colonial history and using contemporary material we cannot just go around the unpleasant connotations and redefine the term according to our present needs. Colonial sources continuously differentiate between the Creole slave and his or her African counterpart and, by doing so, draw on stereotypes which are very important for our study: “African” slaves are simply wild, barbarous and unpredictable; Creole slaves are, to a certain extent, also unpredictable, because they are “half - casts” and thus treacherous by nature, but they also were closer to “civilisation”. More recent theories now tend to restore the original cultural meaning of the term and even incorporate it in post - modern cultural theory. Here, creolisation is associated with a global process of cultural mestization where it is used to designate a particular variant: “mestization without limits”.

We take account of these latest developments in the two last chapters (IV.3. and IV.4.) when we distinguish between creolisation in terms of continuous processes of convergence of cultures and other processes which stress divergence, i.e. black “fundamentalism” as part of an understandable quest for identity. Here the “Return to Africa” - i.e. a subjective image of Africa based on its positive and even negative stereotypes - becomes an important part of new referential systems fomenting identity. On the other hand we have tried to complement it with an “objective” research of what the African influence on American societies had been and could be: an essential part of Creolisation which would, in fact, be a very one - sided process, if there were not the notion of an “African” personality acting as the presupposition as well as the counterpart to it. Seen from one angle, the role of Africa is equal to that of Europe in present - day Afro - American cultures: both are part of representations and on this level they appear as opposed; but seen from a different angle they both are the basis and an essential part of the creolisation.

PART I

TALES OF THE PAST

I.1. MEMORIES OF AFRICA

One day in the year 1756 in an Ibo village in West Africa an event occurred which was tragic, but also unfortunately quite common in this part of the world: an eleven year old boy and his sister were alone at home while their parents worked in the fields, when suddenly slave hunters - two men and one woman - entered the village, seized the two children, tied them up and took them to the woods. This was the abrupt end of a peaceful and idyllic childhood and the beginning of a different life; as a slave the boy became a sailor and trader; he lived on the islands of Barbados and Montserrat and in other parts of America and he learned to speak and to write English. After buying his freedom, he became one of the great travellers of his time, known for his biography which was published in London in 1789. Gustavus Vassa - this was the European name under which he was known - was thoroughly adapted to English culture and the manners of his time; but he used his old African name Olaudah Equiano as well -, thus demonstrating the profound ambiguity of his personality: he was both African and English.

There are few testimonies which go back as far as this one; we want to juxtapose it with another story which also extends back to the moment of capture in Africa and which is similar to Equiano's experience in many ways, but nevertheless differs significantly, particularly in its genre. It is the history of a Malinke boy named Kunta Kinte who lived in a village on the Gambia river in the second half of the eighteenth century. In spite of having been repeatedly warned against it, the young boy made a little excursion in 1766 to the bush nearby to choose a tree suitable for cutting and making a drum. Unarmed, he was knocked down by a white slave hunter, bound and brought down to the sea in a dug - out via the Gambia river. His account is not autobiographic in the same sense as that of Equiano; it is recounted in a novel by Alex Haley, a black American author who nevertheless claims a certain authenticity for the story: the hero Kunta Kinte is presented as Haley's own ancestor; his original name as well as the circumstances of his capture had been memorised and transmitted, in bits and pieces, from generation to generation within his family. Armed with these stories, Haley himself had travelled to the Malinke country, and after complicated investigations found a *griot* - one of the traditional African minstrels who conserve the history of their people - who remembered the story of a boy who had gone to the bush to collect a tree trunk for a drum and who never came back. Thus, these two ends of the story fitted together and Haley used them to write his *Saga of an American Family* which recounts the wanderings and the slow social advancement of his family which results in his becoming a *modern griot*, a writer and investigator of his family's past.

How far can these oral traditions and family memories, the ethno - historical sources used by Haley, be a substitute for written history? From the time such oral traditions became a subject of interest to the ethnographer, it appears that they were - or had been, since they are rapidly disappearing now - more numerous than investigators had imagined, but, they also tended to be sketchy. For example there were the kind of memories W. Levine (1978: 86 - 88) had collected which sometimes appeared similar to those of Haley's family:

“Pappy was an African. I knows dat. He come from Congo over in Africa, and I heard him say a big storm drove de ship somewhere on the Ca’lina coast. I ‘member he mighty ‘spectful to massa and Missy, but he proud too, and walk straighter’n anybody I ever seen. He had scars on de right side he head and cheek

what he say am trive marks, but what dey means I don't know." (quoted by Levine, *ibid.*: 87)

The principal problem in dealing with oral memory is, however, less one of chronology than the difficult question of truth or authenticity which appears to be more a question of the functions and social use Afro - Americans make or can make of family stories, be they fictional or not. We may first remark that both of our stories - those of Equiano and of Haley - are usually placed in the same genre known as *Slave Narrative*, i.e. the life stories of slaves either written or at least told by the slaves themselves. The genre is remarkably prolific: the United States alone can count more than 6000 slave stories, most of them written during the nineteenth century and usually written in favour of the cause of the abolitionists (Gates 1987: IX). The result of this abundance of evidence was at least partially negative: the public grew tired of such stories which reiterated again and again the same horrors, accusations and appeals to reason and human feelings. It was almost too obvious that white abolitionists had been involved in the writing of most of these stories, at least by submitting standard models of the typical slave writing:

"There can be little doubt that, when the ex - slave author decided to write his or her story, he or she did so only after reading, and rereading, the telling stories of other slave authors who preceded them" (Gates 1987:X)

Thus, *slave narrative* becomes a collective art:

"In this process of imitation and repetition, the black slave's narrative came to be a communal utterance, a collective tale rather than merely an individual's autobiography. Each slave author in writing about his or her personal life's experiences, simultaneously wrote on behalf of the millions of silent slaves still held captive throughout the South" (*ibid.*).

The multiplicity of personal slave histories adds up to a form of chorus which makes the individual voice disappear. It was not the life, not the personal expression of the individual which counted, but the presentation of his story and its social meaning. The essential feature of slave stories was its testimonial character; in this they resembled "*testimonios*", a modern genre which was defined much later in Cuba, in conjunction with a fine example of slave biography: *El Cimarron*, told by the former slave Esteban Montejo and "edited" by Miguel Barnet. In fact, Montejo's biography and the ensuing debate about it was not only instrumental in forming the modern genre, but also in helping to understand the methodological problems which arise with any slave narrative; the most important is the inevitable presence of a second person who participates in the creation as a second author, or as editor, agent or, most generally, as a "mediator" between the (oral) testimony and its (written) publication². This mediation is presented as necessary, either because the witness himself is illiterate, or because he has no experience in producing the type of text which the potential Western middle class reader is used to, or because the witness would not understand the importance of telling his experiences to the outside world. Usually, most testimonial texts would never have been published and distributed without the help of a "mediator" who, in some way, "guaranteed" its quality and importance, not least because he had arranged, corrected and edited the text.

We may suppose that virtually all known slave biographies had their mediators, but usually it is difficult to know the degree of interference involved. Barnet admits his role in

² Miguel Barnet who admittedly had put into writing the oral testimony of his witness calls himself a "gestor", a role which he describes rather cryptically as "desdoblamiento": "Uno deja de ser uno, deja de vivir su vida para vivir también una otra vida, la de su personaje" (Barnet 1983a: 36; cf Fleischmann 1995)

the production of Montejó's text, but understandably he refuses to reveal what his own role had been; most texts of traditional slave narrative never give us a direct clue regarding the presence of a mediator. In the case of Francisco Manzano who wrote the only known Cuban slave autobiography we know of, the text originated from a *Tertulia*, a subversive literary circle presided over by the abolitionist Domingo del Monte and was "corrected" by another member of this circle, Anselmo Suárez y Romero (Bremer 1993: 493) who himself had written a famous abolitionist novel. Suárez y Romero kept, however, the numerous spelling mistakes of Manzano's text, certainly because they conferred an impression of authenticity. This is easy to understand: even Equiano, who was one of the most highly educated men of his time, had to defend himself against the insinuation that "it is not improbable that some English writer has assisted him in the compilation, or at least the correction of his book, for it is sufficiently well written"³.

The role of the mediator helps us to understand the hybrid character of Slave Narratives in general and the in particular complicated relationship between Alex Haley's modern novel and Equiano's autobiography. Both of them have been placed within the same genre and, by drawing a picture of slave life seen from inside, they share certain aspects of content and approach. But we should not ignore the considerable differences between them, particularly if we look at the historic relationships between the authors and their texts: Haley's novel for example has nothing to do with abolitionism and he does not describe his own life. However, there is a common denominator which is not too difficult to see: we can consider Haley's role as that of a "mediator". At least in his narrative approach he offers certain parallels with Miguel Barnet and other "editors": by demonstrative references to the his family memories and investigations, Haley tries to bridge the authenticity gap. It is important to him that his readers take his story as a "true" one, an assumption which certainly is questionable if we understand "true" in the sense of "verifiable". The question is whether we have a better and more trustworthy chance of verification if we consider the classic examples of Slave Narrative written by people who, when writing down their personal experiences, were subject to the control and interventions of their abolitionist friends, to their criteria of selection directed by the polemic purpose of their texts. Any of these interventions could become, in the same way, a voluntary or involuntary form of censorship which, for instance, tended to erase from the slave stories anything which was related to the "savage" life in Africa. The collective as well as the individual consciousness are less than, but, in another sense, also greater than a mere description of "true" events: They omit some "facts" and enhance - or even invent - others, depending on the social context and purpose of the text. The differences between Equiano's tale and that of Haley are explained less by their respective "authenticity" than by their changing relationship to the social context and the social purpose of the story at the time of its creation.

In fact, most critics state that the question of authenticity is the most arduous and often also the most paradoxical problem of slave autobiographies⁴: when they are well - written and when they comply with the literary taste of their time, they will be accused of being manipulated or even of being counterfeit; when they fail to please or to move the reader, they run the risk of being rejected as a further proof of the black man's inability to know and handle European languages and literary models. It is difficult to avoid such

³ Monthly Review, June 1789, p. 551, quoted by Edwards (1967: XIV).

⁴ See the introduction of McDowell/Rampersad (1989: VIII) "From the start, the field was mired in arguments about the authenticity of these books and their depiction of bondage, about whether they were actually written by slaves and ex - slaves or were mainly pernicious frauds by the enemies of an institution indispensable to the Southern culture"

pitfalls because they belong to the function of literature and of the literary hero as a model of identification. Therefore, abolitionist literature, particularly in the age of Romanticism, tended to present the slave as a nearly white person with European mannerisms and feelings, or at least as an African prince or nobleman⁵. Occasionally a portrait of the slave author is added in order to demonstrate that he does not really differ from an average free American⁶. The life stories themselves underlined the same image, selecting the examples of American - born mulattoes of very clear complexion and bourgeois patterns of feeling and behaviour; they were, purposefully, presented as people “like you and me” who, as the result of an unjust and even anti - constitutional political system, were forced to accept the undignified role of a slave, waiting desperately for the moment of liberation in order to become ordinary American citizens and good patriots⁷. The slave authors were an elite amongst the slaves, men and women who would have been able to speak for themselves and to defend their rights within a society which was their only frame of identity and social reference⁸. Their experiences and their suffering had little in common with that of the majority of slaves in most parts of America: the African - born field hands working in plantation colonies without the safeguard of a large and complex civil society. Compared with those of the slave authors, their contacts with the dominant white culture were scarce and in most cases their life span in America was too short to allow for acculturation, let alone for acquiring the competences necessary to write and to tell the story of their lives. It is significant that the existence of a Slave Narrative consisting of thousands of sample life stories is a phenomenon restricted to the United States; in the plantation colonies of the Caribbean and the Latin American continent where slave life was much harder, we do not find more than a dozen comparable slave autobiographies. The reasons for the difference are obvious: the evolution of a bourgeois society in North America; the contradictions between the slave culture of the South and the civil society of the industrialised North; and finally the complexity of North American economic structures which favoured and financed the emergence of literature as an independent institution of self - reflection and social criticism. Paradoxically, the American abolitionist novels of the “Uncle Tom” - type appeared in a society which treated its slaves relatively well in comparison with the Caribbean plantations.

These “archetypes” of slave societies and their differences will be discussed more extensively in part II; our first approach serves merely to demonstrate how collective memories and their specific form of conservation depend on the social context in which they are embedded. We have chosen the life stories of Equiano and Alex Haley’s hero Kunta Kinte as our first approach to the question of “memory”, not only because they constitute the most distinguished texts of this kind, but also because our heroes Equiano and Kunta Kinte, being African - born slaves, are *not* members of the usual group of creole

⁵ Examples are numerous; cf. Victor Hugo’s *Bug - Jargal*, Gertrudis de Avellaneda’s *Sab*, or Alexandre Dumas’ *George*, all slave heroes of novels of the same titles.

⁶ Contemporary editions of Linda Brent’s well known *Incidence in the Life of a Slave Girl* are adorned with a daguerrotyped portrait of the author, presenting her as a dignified white lady.

⁷ Olney (1987: 4/5) demonstrates that the wording of the title of the famous “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself” not only alludes to other well - known autobiographies of the time - as for instance Benjamin Franklin -, but also expects the reader to note the incongruence of the words “American”, “Slave” and “Writer”.

⁸ Cf. Andrews 1987:62 who comments Booker T. Washington’s praises of American society after abolition: “The postbellum writer [...] compares slavery to a school, in which he and his fellows received, rather than lost, social purpose and from which they graduated not by violence but by sanctioned behaviour like industry and dutifulness”.

slave narrators we have described above. Their life stories reach back to Africa and thus cover a larger geographical and cultural distance; as well as recounting the classic slave narrative they have also to take account, rightly or wrongly, of the black slaves' Otherness. This means that they have to represent in some way the clash between their original freedom in Africa and their subsequent American bondage and to show in concrete terms how their heroes endured and survived the emotional stress as they stepped ashore in America. This, certainly, is very subjective data which can neither be generalised nor quantified; but just as modern approaches to Afro - American cultures assume that the initial contact situation is a key to understanding their present state (see III.1), then also literary testimony has some value. We will see that it provides us with useful information - as we have said, not so much on proven "true" facts but as to how Afro - American communities view the arrival of their ancestors in the New World. It was, we may presume, more relevant and also more dramatic than abolition and the acquisition of citizen rights which are the principal topics of Slave Narrative. Equiano's autobiography and Haley's novel describe emancipation and freedom as well, but these events - however emotive they may have been - are represented rather as the successful logical accomplishment of a process which the new slave had to assume as soon as they entered the New World. Consequently, in both stories emancipation occupies a considerably smaller, less detailed and less colourful portion of the story than arrival in America and the events which precede it.

The African part of the biographies can be divided into two relatively separate narrative elements which, although complementary, differ in perspective and tone. The first element is a less personalised representation of life in precolonial Africa; both heroes evolve slowly from the background of a peaceful village life which ends abruptly with the intrusion of the slave hunters, transport to the shore, the middle passage and the first moments in the new continent; this second part now centres exclusively on the principal protagonists, their suffering, their confusion and their despair. Thus the description of African life functions as a form of "pre - history" which nevertheless is quite voluminous: in Equiano's autobiography it embraces one chapter out of a total of twelve; in Haley's novel 33 chapters out of 120, or one fourth of the entire novel.

In common with most slave narratives, both accounts begin with the birth of the hero and future slave. It is noteworthy that both Equiano and Haley indicate the precise year, i.e. the European date of an event embedded in African conceptions and measurement of time; thereby both authors show from the beginning that African history has become embroiled in world history, just like Equiano and Kunta Kinte, although their home villages still appear as peaceful still separate from the historical process. Both authors offer substantial detailed descriptions of rural Ibo and Malinke cultures, which might even be labelled as "ethnographic" studies. But can texts which are more than two hundred years apart be described by the same relatively modern term? In fact, both descriptions reflect attitudes and purposes which differ considerably. Haley is greatly indebted to modern ethnographic studies, and paints a large epic picture of a Malinke childhood and its most important events: birth rites, ceremonies of naming, rites of passage, storytelling and other social events, agricultural techniques and family life. This whole section could pass for an ethnographic essay, but for a particular narrative attitude characterised by the subjectivity of the hero: as child and adolescent Kunta Kinte stays at the centre of these experiences and links them to a chronological story. Thus, Haley's position remains that of a novelist. By contrast, Equiano presents himself as a man of science whose text is not structured by personal experience but by the principles of logic. Thus he proceeds from the most general data - the geographic situation of his country, its coastline and neighbouring countries - to more specific descriptions: plants, agricultural techniques, trade, government

and social institutions. Finally he describes more intimate details: the clothes worn by men and women, their food, their festivals and finally their religion which he says is based on the belief in a single God and Creator of all things.

The result appears paradoxical. Haley draws his knowledge, as he admits himself, from indirect sources: from the stories of Malinke *Griots*, from archives and from ethnographic reports. He uses the same investigation techniques as ethnographers but presents his text in the form of a personal experience (Haley 1976: 711 - 728). On the other hand Equiano, who could justifiably use his personal experiences to present himself as an “ethnographer”, presents a seemingly conventional text along the lines of early reports on “exotic” countries.

But the seeming paradox is not difficult to explain. As a writer of renown, Haley enjoys a social and professional position which is unassailable. He knows that the story which he has investigated and created corresponds neatly to the identity quest not only of black Americans but of American citizens in general. When writing his “American Saga”, he is conscious of the fact that the collective memory can not be based exclusively on the reconstruction of “true” events, but also that the presentation of history has to be significant, i.e. correspond to the needs and wishes of its readers, his role as modern *griot* which legitimises his filling the gaps between his investigations by “plausible” inventions; he does not even have to recoil from “correcting” historical data if they do not conform with his intention of creating the image of a hero congruent with the identity quest of his public.

Equiano’s position is different. His legitimacy as a writer depends on his position within the abolitionist movement; outside of it he remains a marginal, even suspect writer, for he is something that should not really exist: a former slave who has been born amongst “savages”, but claims to be at the forefront of contemporary arts and sciences. To tell of his “real” childhood in Africa would not serve his cause well. He prefers to adopt the pose of an “ethnographer” who, in the manner of an educated man of his time, exposes “curiosities” from a distant country, but who also tries to use his particular competence to demonstrate that Africans are not as savage and inferior as most people were claiming. Therefore he insists on the monotheism of the Ibo people (1789: 19); he describes their cleanliness (ibid.: 15) as well as their simple and healthy form of life and their love of poetry and art. Their clothes are similar to those of Scottish people, but their colour is “richer than I have seen in Europe”; the perfumes they use remind him of Smyrna (ibid.: 14). Equiano does not also avoid sensitive subjects, such as for instance magical practices, but he claims that they are limited to priests and wise men who are the historians and the medical doctors of tribal societies. Finally Equiano touches on a particularly important subject: the existence of slavery in Africa itself, an argument used currently in order to legitimise American slavery. He insists that in Africa bondage is limited to prisoners of war who as soldiers knew that there was such a risk, and that in Africa the life of slaves did not differ from that of their masters. Finally, Equiano argues strongly: “Those prisoners which were not sold or redeemed we kept as slaves: but how different was their condition from that of the slaves in the West Indies!” (ibid.,19)

Such arguments of Equiano appear “modern” even today; nevertheless his observations are guided by two principal strategies of the abolitionists. The first of these centres on the image of the “noble savage” who lives an idyllic and happy life; the only vices he knows appear with the European slave trade and change the formerly noble traditions of war and slavery, subverting Africans by encouraging them to get used to merchandise imported from Europe. In order to sustain his thesis of the African “noble savage” he uses an argument well known in the debates on the nature of the Indians: that the black people of Africa are the descendants of Abraham and Keturah and that they

belong to the Jewish tribe lost since the time of the Old Testament. The black skin would be a modification caused by climate (ibid.:22).

This argument is already connected to the second of the two strategies: the extensive reference to the scientific authorities of his time. It is part of a more general need to have African culture reaffirmed by comparing it with other world cultures; Equiano does not hesitate to find the most extravagant similarities between West African Ibo culture and, for instance, Scottish or Turkish, and above all, Jewish.

Both of these strategies have to be interpreted in close relation to Equiano's main objective which is the abolition of slavery. When speaking about his African home, Equiano intends to demonstrate that black slaves are not savages but men equal to - or even better than - any people anywhere. Thus the slave trade cannot be justified in terms of a different level of civilisation. It is noteworthy that he does not consider his own experiences as a black man and former slave a sufficient base for his arguments; he deems it more appropriate to adopt a "neutral" attitude by which he condemns not (or not only) on moral grounds, but also on those of presumed scientific errors.

Who finally gives a better and more reliable testimony of slavery: Equiano or Haley? Equiano has the considerable advantage of speaking about his own experiences as a slave, but we should also remember that he left Africa at the age of eleven and his memories of home are those of a boy of that age. The image he gives of his native continent is remote and abstract. This is not only due to failures of memory; more important was his extraordinary success in life and his high level of personal acculturation. For Equiano, who culturally has become a European, Africa is reduced to an element of abolitionist rhetoric. Haley, on the other side, has to reconstruct and even invent a time and a life which he does not know personally; navigating between his roles as family historian and novelist he unearths enough historical facts to make Kunta Kinte appear authentic, and yet at the same time he provides him with such a stubborn and non - submitting "African" character so that he qualifies as an ancestor whom most Afro - Americans would regard as suitable today. The figure of Kunta Kinte is legitimised by his social success among today's public, just as Equiano had been considered, because of his high level of acculturation, as an astonishing person among his contemporaries. It is obvious that the degree of public acceptance of each text depends less on its authenticity or the fact that it is a "true story" than on the degree of emotional commitment it offers to its readers in the respective period. Though both texts pretend to be in some way ethnographic, it is not this quality which counts, but the image of a peaceful and harmonious African life as opposed to the brutal experience of slavery.

Capture and violence are thus the necessary counterparts of African life; they create an emotional identification within the reader. How did our two heroes survive this terrible transition from an idyllic African prehistory into a life dominated by avarice and cruelty? How, to what degree and within what period did the two adolescents change from African "tribesmen" to American slave? How did they accept enforced submission and adaptation to a foreign culture? Did they resist it? Again it may appear strange if we try to answer these important questions - which will be examined historically during the entire part of section III - from literary and fictional documents, but we will see how rewarding they are in order to give us an initial idea about stereotypes and their respective social contexts.

As we said previously, both Equiano and Kunta Kinte were alone (or almost) when they were ambushed by the slave hunters who themselves were not numerous. This form of furtive kidnapping was not unknown, but was relatively infrequent during the 18th century when the demand for slaves was at its peak, and necessitated large scale organised

expeditions which resulted in attacks leading to the extermination of entire villages⁹. It is difficult to say why both Equiano and Haley describe such an untypical form of slave capture. Anyway, from a literary point of view, the occasional raid is more impressive, for it highlighted the abrupt end of youth within a close African community and the dramatic entry into a new world of suffering and solitude. Equiano exploits such a setting according to the Romantic view of the time, as when, for example, on his way down to the shore, the young captive meets his sister for last time when they spend a last night together “clung to each other in mutual embraces, unable to do anything but weep” (Equiano: 29).

Both Equiano’s and Kunta Kinte’s first reactions were confusion, disorientation and numbness which included fits of fainting and the refusal of any food and human contact. Equiano had the advantage of being sold and resold after a short time when he was still in Africa - a common fate in this period (see III.1). Thus he became used to his new condition and to a relatively gradual change in his surroundings for several months before he arrived at the sea shore and the shipping port. He mentions that during these travels he was able to learn several local languages and thus to maintain contact with people. This certainly had a some psychological influence on his capacity of perceiving, understanding and handling new situations and unknown people. Such open - mindedness coupled with a natural curiosity facilitated his rapid adaptation to his new circumstances.

Kunta Kinte’s destiny was completely different. Immediately after his capture he was brought down to the shore chained, either lying on the bottom of a boat travelling down the Gambia River, or marching in a slave caravan. Only just surviving in a state of feverish numbness and abandon, Kunta Kinte remembers solely his suffering and other extreme emotions: refusal, revolt, despair, but also a deep disgust towards the filth of his personal conditions and those of his companions who knew nothing of the beliefs and customs of Islam. Unlike Equiano, Kunta Kinte refuses any compromise and after his arrival he spends years determined not to forget Africa, his old language, customs and culture as well as his religion which he considers superior to any other. Many years later he bestows his memories on his only child, a daughter, a sacred heritage which is then transmitted and memorised from generation to generation, until it reached the new *Griot*, Alex Haley who used it as a starting point for unearthing the family’s history and thus accomplishing a duty left to him by his first American ancestor, Kunta Kinte.

Our analysis shows that the two slave biographies portray two very different characters and forms of behaviour: On the one hand there is the “successful” slave, Equiano, who eagerly grasps any opportunity in order to learn, to understand his new situation and to make the best of it. It is clear that he does not accept slavery, but pragmatic and flexible as he is he tries to get the upper hand and beat the white world on its own terrain; by reasoning. Adaptation, we learn from the example of Equiano, does not

⁹ “In the dead of the night the village would be encircled by the chief’s warriors. At dawn the attack would be launched. They would set fire to the huts. Any man trying to resist would be put to death. The women and children would be taken for auction. The spoils would be shared out evenly between the chief and the warriors” (Gueye 1979: 151/152).

There is also a very short contemporary African description of such an attack which is interesting, for it shows, by its uncoordinated and strange diction, what “authenticity” means in comparison to Equiano’s and Haley’s texts:

“A great many people, whom we called Adinyés, set fire to Egie in the morning before daybreak; there were thousands of them. They killed a great many, and burnt all the houses. They stayed two days, and then carried away all the people whom they did not kill” (The Negro Boy’s Narrative par Louis Asa - Asa (1883), appendice to Mary Prince (1987: 240).

necessarily mean acceptance; it may be the transfer of resistance to a more effective level; but this also poses the problem of personal identity.

Characters like Kunta Kinte would understand such an “arrangement” as a form of betrayal, not so much perhaps, because they do not perceive the need for such behaviour, but because it involves conceding a first victory to the slave holder. Kunta Kinte does not create a new identity; he desperately clings to the old one, his African personality.

In fact, Equiano and Kunta Kinte represent two basic types of behaviour we will meet again and again - not only in relation to reactions towards slavery, but also in terms of the pragmatic and intellectual options of today’s Afro - American¹⁰. Equiano and Kunta Kinte are “heroes” in a very basic sense, “archetypes” who represent different forms of human behaviour and identity in relation to specific situations of crisis. “Archetypes”, we should note, are not real; real historic persons do not present archetypally consistent forms of thinking and acting; they are mostly complex mixtures of different motivations and evaluations of specific contexts. It will be demonstrated, particularly in part II of this study, that certain historical and cultural circumstances favour the emergence of an Equiano and other circumstances the emerge of a Kunta Kinte type of behaviour: size of plantation, mode of production, mercantile relations, proximity to a free population and access to Europeans are some of the variables which condition the emergence of one or other type of behaviour. In this respect it is instructive that the Kunta Kinte form of resistant slave is not truly representative of the American South; it corresponds more to the fully developed plantation societies of 18th century. The presentation of archetypes never reflects social realities, but merely general guidelines for the interpretation of these realities.

I.2. SLAVERY AND BLACK HISTORY

How is it possible to single out, among the unlimited number of cases of bondage and labour relations in human history, a particular phenomenon which is “slavery”? There is no doubt that the Atlantic slave trade and New World slavery are historically and geographically delimited “events”; but there are major studies - e.g. by Orlando Patterson (1982) and Robin Blackburn (1997) - who place it within the context of traditions which reach back to antiquity. Though the manifestations may be very different, it seems that among the varied forms of bondage the term slavery designates a hard core which is institutionally secured by laws and/or by ideological discourses serving to legitimise and justify slavery. In spite of their variety these ideological discourses can be divided into two main categories: one which is “racist” in the broadest sense of the word, for it justifies slavery because of the existence of people who are slaves by their nature; and the other which defines the institution of slavery by particular economic and social circumstances into which certain people are placed. We do not have to explain extensively that historical forms of slavery can combine both factors and that they mostly do: a slave is a person who is assigned an already existing social role because he shows certain characteristics. Nevertheless it is useful to separate analytically both approaches: the present section discusses American slavery as an institution defined by the existence of slaves; the following section starts from a more modern perspective of slavery as an economic necessity which arises in a specific historic context.

¹⁰ See part IV; they are the base of an opposition which we characterize there by the opposition of “fundamentalists” attitudes to creolisation.

The most direct form of justification is that which defines the “natural” as belonging to another species¹¹. Though arguments of this kind appear occasionally also in the American context and are often quoted, they remain erratic and eclectic. The wider cognitive context might be the assumed existence of monsters who live at the edges of inhabited earth, or the assumption of a polygenetic origin of mankind, but there is no systematic reference to it. The frequent comparison of black slaves to “animals” seems to be more metaphorical than the expression of a real belief¹². Sometimes it is useful to attribute particular physical qualities to black slaves: tolerance of tropical climates, physical strength, insensibility to physical pain¹³. Other “natural” distinctions have a juridical origin: French legislation, in particular the *Code Noir* (art. 44) has to define slaves as “meubles” which, in case of insolvency become part of auctioned property; this is necessary to avoid incompatibilities between slavery and Natural Law. The ambiguity of such “subterfuges” is obvious: although the slave is defined as an object, he appears as a juridical subject when performing certain tasks and duties¹⁴. Legislation had to make these strange detours in order to take account of the realities of life in colonies, where, in spite of prejudices, discriminations and violence, black slaves were treated as some kind of “partners” of the colonial enterprise.

The more the legislation was usurped by enlightenment, the more urgent it was to find means whereby the use of anthropological models allowed the inclusion of black slaves in the human species but conferred on them an inferior quality. Earlier works of this kind had been based on the Old Testament, conceding that the black race descended from Adam and Eve but had been taken a different evolution. Best known and most harmful in its consequences is the story of Noah’s curse which gave Ham and his descendants a particular social and moral quality: to be “servants of servants” (Genesis 9:18 - 27). Josiah C. Nott, professor of anthropology in Louisiana, claims that only the Caucasians descend from humans saved by Noah; all other races derive from inferior groups which survived far away (1844: 208/209). Nott and numerous other intellectual defenders of slavery in the Southern States are strange products of 19th century scientific racism which, on the one side, recognises the unity of mankind, but on the other uses the new anthropometric methods in order to demonstrate the “natural” differences between human races¹⁵.

Generally we seem little aware that most of our actual perception of slavery and racial prejudice is conditioned by 19th century racial theories. This determined the view of the black race in the sense that it was seen as part of the human race but did not take part in its evolution. Slavery was seen as an essential part of those migrations which spread the

¹¹ We exclude from the discussion tautological forms of argument as, for instance, presented by Meillasoux: “Par leur origine étrangère, les esclaves sont définitivement d’une espèce différente et naturellement inférieure, tolérée, s’ils maintiennent leurs distances, vomis s’ils manifestent la moindre velléité d’identification aux “humains” (1986: 76)

¹² In most cases these comparisons have a metaphoric character, for instance when Atwood (1791: 266) claims that African slaves “appear as wild as brute beasts”.

¹³ A curious, because recurring opinion concerns the crane of the black which as Nott (1844: 223) claims, are thicker than that of the Caucasion. Already Oviedo claims the same on behalf of the Indians.

¹⁴ In court slaves may appear as witnesses, but the law (*Code Noir*, Art. 30) specifies that “leur dépositions ne serviront que de mémoires pour aider les juges à s’éclaircir ailleurs, sans que l’on puisse tirer aucune presumption, ni conjecture, ni adminicule de preuve”

¹⁵ “The difference to an Anatomist, between the Bushman or Negro, and the Caucasian, is greater than the difference in the skeleton of the Wolf, Dog and Hyena, which are allowed to be distinct species.”(ibid., 224)

black race around the countries of the world; but, due to their congenital inferiority, they never played an active part in the history of these countries. In all the countries where the superior races had brought them, the black race became a substratum of evil - a perfect theory of racial exclusion after the achievement of emancipation. The first North American scholar to contest the ubiquity of these prejudices not only theoretically, but also by empirical anthropological research was Melville J. Herskovits.

Published first in 1941 and up to the present day the best known and still controversial study of "Black History", his major study, *The Myth of Negro Past*, was meant to be an answer to current North American prejudices which Herskovits enumerates in his first chapter:

1. "Negroes are naturally of a childlike character, and adjust easily to the most unsatisfactory social situations, which they accept readily and even happily, in contrast to the American Indians, who preferred extinction to slavery;
2. Only the poorer stock of Africa was enslaved, the more intelligent members of the African communities raided having been clever enough to elude the slavers' net;
3. Since the Negroes were brought from all parts of the African continent, spoke diverse languages, represented greatly differing bodies of custom, and, as a matter of policy, were distributed in the New World so as to lose tribal identity, no least common denominator of understanding or behaviour could possibly have been worked out by them;
4. Even granting enough Negroes of a given tribe had the opportunity to live together, and that they had the will and ability to continue their customary modes of behaviour, the cultures of Africa were so savage and relatively so low in the scale of human civilizations that the apparent superiority of European customs as observed in the behaviour of their masters, would have caused and actually did cause them to give up such aboriginal traditions as they may otherwise have desired to preserve
5. The Negro is thus a man without past" (Herskovits 1941: 1f)

It is interesting to look more closely at this collection which Herskovits never justifies by indicating its origin. We have to suppose therefore that it is a condensation of what the author considers as essential elements of a popular viewpoint of the white majority regarding black American citizens and which appears to the author important enough to be the basis of his book. But the five elements of this view do not provide an obvious logical or argumentative order; only the fifth point is connected to the four previous ones in the form of a conclusion: the Black American has no history. But why does he lack a history? The first four arguments do not really substantiate this claim, but they appear strangely familiar. They all belong to well known ideas in the 19th century which had been related to nation building processes. To be more precise: they are now isolated remnants, popular "prejudices" of previous scientific ideas and it is worthwhile to reconstruct their logic and argumentative context. But first we have to say a few words on the particular role of the 19th century in the development - the "modernisation" - of our current racial prejudices. Herskovits does not directly refer to this period; nevertheless he implicitly recognises its role as a decisive period in the establishment and conscience of the Afro - American communities. They are conditioned by very important changes: the 19th century is the period when the process of nation - building - linked to certain concepts of modernity - reached America; and it was the period of slave emancipation in both

Americas. Both developments converged into a new question: what will be the role of the former slave, the new black citizen in the modern nation? From the point of view of intellectual history and of the history of ideas it is very revealing to see how the old - fashioned set of prejudices rapidly “modernises” by putting on a scientific garb in order to prove that the community of ex - slaves had no historical part to play: neither in the various “national histories”, because they had no part in the rise of their host nations, nor in “universal history”, because the black race had not yet entered within it. By becoming the basis of a counter - ideology to the new black citizens’ claim to participate on equal terms in the “race for progress”, racism and racial prejudice reached their peak in the 19th century. They assembled all previous existing racist ideas from the past century and amalgamated them into a large “scientific theory” which did not last very long, but survived long enough to penetrate popular prejudices and thus survive in the various incoherent form which Herskovits has listed.

The first of the prejudices Herskovits quoted is a striking example of this development. It actually consists of an amalgamation of several prejudices which are deeply rooted in the history of slavery. First there is one is the metaphor which attributes to black slaves the role of children, one of the oldest prejudices and the main basis for the legal arguments for slavery. It uses the image of the family in order to demonstrate that people are “naturally” unequal; such natural inequalities convey correspondent differences in rights, duties and privileges: being less capable and competent, the child is dependent on his father who is the rightful owner of everything the child produces under his supervision. On the other hand the “father” owes his child maintenance and protection. The complementary nature of such roles makes the image of the family not only a model and a justification of feudal relations, but also of all forms of institutional and traditional dependence which have no otherwise established economic objective. The identification and the historical succession of these two types of dependence - the family model or the economy model - is recurrent in any discussion on slavery; it appears in the controversial explanations of African slavery¹⁶ as well as in the Tannenbaum hypothesis and its critics¹⁷. The “family type” of slavery is - even to the present day - presented as a benign form of serfdom. The counter - arguments to abolitionism use it frequently, stressing the aspects of protection of the slave who, like a child, is not able to survive independently. This may lead to an absurd inversion of roles: the slave exploits the good will of his master¹⁸.

During the 19th century the image of the black slave as a child acquired a new dimension. Biology became the leading science and provided models in the terminology and the theoretical approaches of other sciences, for instance cultural and social sciences. In this context, the hierarchy of biological ages in the human life became a current metaphor in order to explain the history of peoples and nations. History was seen as a universal process of evolution, in which all nations participated, but their relative position

¹⁶ See Meillassoux 1986 (14/15) who criticises vehemently a theory represented by Miers and Kopitoff, who see the origin of African domestic slavery in customary family relations. These include the non - paid labour of younger brothers and poor parents; according to Meillassoux, real slavery always has an economic dimension within larger society

¹⁷ See chapter II.1. Tannenbaum’s typology advocates a fundamental opposition between a more human and integrative type of slavery in the Iberian peninsula and a “capitalist” type represented by England and France.

¹⁸ One example among many is Dominique Rouquette, a poet from Louisiana who in his poem *Rxil et patrie* (1839), invites the European intellectual to visit the Mississippi:

“Viens voir le nègre heureux pechant au bord de l’eau:
Esclave, il voit un père où tu vois un bourreau”

differed considerably. Some have reached maturity or “manhood”; some are already beyond their best years and are entering in “old age” and decay. Others again, the black race in particular, have hardly even entered into history: they still are “children”. We should note that this stream of ideas - “the black race as the children of mankind” - may acquire, in certain contexts innocent or even positive connotations: Europe is the old and dying continent; its young men go to Africa in order to search a cathartic and rejuvenating experience: “Le candide bonheur des premiers ages. French literature from the end of the nineteenth century - Zola, Ernest Psichari, Pierre Loti and others known as authors of the “roman colonial” - are full of images of Africa as the continent of youthfulness. But we do not have to emphasise that the American slave remains far from these positive stereotypes: he is never “the noble savage” and - abolition literature notwithstanding - hardly ever fills the role of a romantic hero. He is servile by nature, according to the stereotype quoted by Herskovits, in contrast to the noble Indian who would rather die than live in servitude.

This form of comparison between Indian and Black is typical of 19th century Romanticism and became a favourite subject of literature. An existing example is the epic poem *Tabira* (1846) by the Brazilian Gonçalves Dias who evokes in a grand manner the battles between the Indian groups of the Petiguara and the Tabajara in the Brazilian North East, comparing it to the life “debaixo do açoite” of the “homens de pel’ côr da noite (“colour of night”)¹⁹. Praise of the Indian who prefers death to slavery is, at first sight, a strange intellectual hypocrisy from those who live on products obtained by slaves; but even stranger are the intertextual relations which point towards the origins of these stereotypes in the early 16th century. In 1516 Bartolomeo de Las Casas asked the Spanish King to make provision for the importation of African slaves to replace Indian slaves. His principal intention was to stop the enslavement of Indians; African slaves were suggested as a possible alternative, not for being black, but for being slaves and available in sufficient numbers (cf. II.1). It is significant that these ingenuous suggestions of Las Casas became distorted in the course of the following centuries (cf. Brady), whereby today Latin Americans as a whole - including black people - think that Las Casas preferred the use of black slaves, because they would be better adapted to slavery and hard labour under tropical conditions and, above all, because they were able to endure slavery. It is a fact that during the first years of the Spanish Conquista the mortality rate amongst Indians was extremely high; it was due, in the first place, to the clash of extremely different cultures, to new diseases unknown to the indigenous population, to warfare and the subsequent destruction of indigenous food supplies, and finally also, to some degree, to the ruthless exploitation of Indian labour. But it would be absurd to think that Africans were more capable of supporting suffering and serfdom than the “noble” Indians or that this view became the justification for a systematic substitution of slave populations. The image of the noble Indian who would rather die than submit to slavery was, at least partially, the product of a North European Protestant propaganda directed against the Spanish claim to the exclusive rights of colonising the American territories. Vivid images of Spanish cruelties, resulting in the collective suicide of the desperate Indians²⁰ were widely known, and are copied and circulated even today. On the other hand Africans were considered to be

¹⁹ The principal sources for the image of the “Noble Indian” in Latin America are the reports of Chateaubriand who is quoted in the beginning of the poem: “Les peaux rouges, plus nobles, mais plus infortunées que les peaux noires, qui arriveront un jour à la liberté par l’esclavage, n’ont d’autre recours que la mort, parce que leur nature se refuse à la servitude”

²⁰ The best known version is that of Theodore de Bry in the Fourth volume of his *America collection* (1594). The Protestant bias of De Bry is obvious and well known.

incapable of committing suicide; yet our forthcoming argument will show that the suicide of black slaves was one of the major problems of plantation slavery (see III.3)

The second prejudice quoted by Herskovits alleges that there is a fundamental difference between Africans and Black Americans, to the detriment of the latter. We may note that the reverse prejudice is not unknown; Haitian intellectuals of the 19th century, for instance, claim that “en Haiti [...] il s’est produit [...] une amelioration, puis une vraie transformation intellectuelle et de plus une très notable sélection physique”²¹ The most immediate source of these prejudices is presented by the biological theories of the 19th century which presuppose the separate evolution of human species in different climatic and geographic conditions, and, above all, through the process of positive or negative selection²². More frequent is the view which discriminates against the American Black; in fact, certain aspects of this argument already indicate an escape from crude racism through the statement that, if there are congenital defaults among American Blacks, these are not to be attributed to the black race as such, but to the institution of slavery. This change of paradigm will be discussed more extensively in the next section (I.3); here we just want to remind ourselves that the first studies of Black Americans, for instance Nina Rodriguez in Brazil or Fernando Ortiz in Cuba, originated from a criminologist’s interest in the black lower classes and their “culture of evil” (cf. Bremer 1993b).

The argument of the degradation of the black race in America, however, transcends the scientific context of that century and infringes in a paradoxical way on the problem of the moral justification of slavery. At first sight, it offers a surprising inversion of the official moral position held for centuries: that slavery as a road to Christianity and civilisation resulted in a general improvement of the black race in America so that for example Creole slaves born in America were superior to the African - born. One explanation would be that the official ideologies of justification do not match with popular beliefs; but the subject is even more complex: christianised and creolised slaves were more expensive on the slave market and more useful on the plantation, but, being culturally and professionally very close to their masters, they would be a constant threat to white supremacy. Acculturated slaves would be ridiculed as impostors, and this rejection increased after abolition. Finally Herskovits wrote his book at a time when ethnology had discovered and assessed African cultures and art; people whose knowledge of Africa had been fashioned by the image of slaves, began to think about it in terms of statuary and precious handmade cloths. In contrast, the black peoples of America appeared as miserable and culturally deprived “nigger clerks” as the German ethnographer Leo Frobenius put it (1933: 14).

In this context we have to understand Herskovits’ third prejudice: the destruction of African cultures and languages due to the systematic separation of ethnically related slaves. It is the most dangerous of the prejudices and it obviously influences most of Herskovits’ book which is an attempt to reconstruct Afro - American culture from its African past; this present study also dedicates its entire third part to the question of African origins. We can therefore confine ourselves here to a few remarks on the ideological context of the supposed de - africanisation. Its influence results from its high degree of credibility: it is presented as scientifically founded, repeated again and again and has a devastating influence

²¹ Janvier (1884: 24). Very similar is the opinion of Anténor Firmin, a well known politician and anthropologist of his time who claims that “la race africaine, après avoir commencé une lente évolution, par la seule influence du milieu, a enfin reçu l’empreinte de la vie intellectuelle et morale [...]” (1905: 277)

²² The way Herskovits presents the prejudice, it may appear that he refers to the process of selection which took place in Africa at the moment of capture. This appears as a rather unconvincing 19th century rationalisation of a much older discourse on differences between the African and the Creole slave

on the personal and collective identity of Afro - Americans of all walks of life. In order to demonstrate its cognitive implications we may compare it to Christopher Columbus' first comments on the Indians of Hispaniola: their nakedness extends to the total absence of all material, cultural and spiritual properties, to the point that, according to Columbus, they do not even have a language; thus they appear as good and beautiful human forms who just lack everything what defines them, and therefore Columbus recommends them to his king as future good citizens of Castile who can be shaped easily in accordance with the Christian and Spanish model²³. In the same fashion, but for different and less positive reasons, they are presented as having entered Western Civilisation as culturally and linguistically undefined beings. In this respect, Afro - Americans had to accept the dominant colonial culture or at least a deviated form of it; in none of the former slave colonies is the black population considered a minority which may claim its own history and identity²⁴. It is revealing that in his *Teoria do Brasil*, the Brazilian anthropologists Darcy Ribeiro brackets the black population with people of European origin: "O negro [...] como agente da europeização que assegurou às áreas onde predominava uma completa hegemonia ligüística e cultural europeia" (Darcy Ribeiro 1978: 72).

Herskovits' fourth myth is a logical extension of the third, adding as a new element the wilful and voluntary rejection of African culture. The rating of cultures through the terms "savage" and "superior" is based on evolutionary theory which endows them with a seeming objectivity: social Darwinism is the yardstick by which different cultures are valued in absolute terms; even people who are bound to "primitive" cultures are able to recognise the superiority of another culture.

The myth is based on a viable empirical observation: people who try to obtain a better social and economic standing within a highly competitive situation tend to accept and even internalise the cultural standards of the dominant social class. This process characterises today's Afro - American populations as well as Creole slaves in colonial times. There is, however, a limit to these attempts to "whiten" culturally: people who have accepted and taken over socially successful cultural norms but continue to be rejected for other reasons - such as skin colour, will adopt a non - conformist attitude by underlining cultural difference instead of cultural achievement. African cultures did disappear from the Americas, not because their members considered them as "savage", but for a number of historical reasons: the end of the slave trade severed relations with the old continent and increasing mobility favoured languages which transcended the former African "nations" and allowed for larger ranges of communication. Afro - American and Creole cultures which replaced the old cultures of African origin, are not arbitrary and low class variations of dominant cultures. They are part of a genuinely different identity which allows for an insertion into the larger majority society but is also the foundation for its rejection and corresponding social distance. This is what Herskovits had characterised with regard to Haitian peasants as a "socialised ambivalence", a very distinct trait of Afro - American identity to which we will return on several occasions.

"The Negro is thus a man without past" - the concluding myth continues on from the preceding myths, but also advances beyond it. Western 19th century societies had a particular understanding of history and of historiography which has left its traces until the

²³ These comments appear recurrently in his diary during the months of October and November 1492. See also Todorov: 1984, 41 - 45

²⁴ This statement of course does not apply to the Caribbean societies where the black population is majoritarian. The country which comes nearest to assigning a minority status to the black population is Colombia.

present day. First of all it is conceived as a *history of nations*, i.e. the account of circumstances and deeds which is seen as significant for the identity of nations. In this sense it has a normative character which implies - and creates! - the homogeneity of human communities which not only claim a common origin and future, but also have been able to impose their difference by creating a "nation state". The following arguments are centred around and propagated by that part of the population which sees itself as the most representative part.

Minorities in general have difficulties in claiming their own separate history, especially Afro - Americans, because they lack a historic territory and community. They may be included in national histories to a degree which varies according to historic circumstances: absence during the times of slavery; controversial or condescending admission after abolition; growing integration into the mainstream and, at the same time, recognition of "otherness", though a black (and female) "post - modern" critic comments bitterly "the discursive practice [...] dominated mainly by the voices of white male intellectuals and/or academic elites who speak to and about one another with coded familiarity" (Hooks 1993: 511). Arguments on slavery remain unchanged in many respects; though it is rarely glorified within national history, its "actors" are situated within the dominant society. The abolition of slavery, for instance, is presented as the result of debates between abolitionists and defenders of slavery; slaves themselves have no part in it. In this sense they continue to be regarded as mere objects, just as they had been regarded under colonial legislation.

A second aspect of the representation of (former) slaves in history is conditioned through the conflict between history and ethnography, the latter being the precursor and substitute for historiography in tribal or folk societies who lacked written records (cf. Foucault 1966: 378 - 382). Superficially the difference is that of obtaining data: in illiterate cultures it has to be elicited through oral accounts and - indirectly - through the examination of the material culture which shows traces of migration and contact. More important are implicit connotations referring to concepts of time and history which exclude change and evolution in "pre - historic" and "pre - modern" societies. Whatever the cognitive value of this model in relation to other "folk societies", in regard to Afro - American communities it served as a fatal confirmation of existing prejudice. Miguel Barnet's *Testimonio, Biografía de un Cimarrón* may be seen once more as example; it was based on the memories of an old slave recorded by the author who was, at that time a professional ethnographer. Later Barnet added two more testimonios²⁵ with the obvious intention of creating a trilogy covering the entire Cuban *national history*. In this new and different context the Cimarrón story acquired a particular significance: that of a pre - national history which ended on the day of Cuban Independence. The protagonists of the two later testimonios were white, that of Cuban "pre - history" was a black man; Barnet - as Caribbean writers do very often - presents the black man as a legitimate representative of the indigenous population which had so quickly disappeared (Barnet 1983b).

A third aspect follows from the two previous aspects: the question of tradition and techniques in the preservation of memories. Historical sciences have pronounced bias in favour of the written word as a medium of its own text as well as that of its sources: not only that, the written word alone guarantees the persistence and inalterability of the "historic fact" in presence of changing interpretations; it also enables it to be independent from chronicler or historian, thus achieving stability across generations. Afro - American history did not develop within a culture exclusively oral; but large and significant parts of it - the experience of capture and of transport to the Americas; life in the slave quarters and

²⁵ *La canción de Rachel* (1969) and *Gallego* (1981).

the continued existence of African “nations” in the New World; the strategies of deceiving the masters and of plots to escape - were bound to culture without writing. Moreover colonial documents, even if they did not reflect exclusively the opinion of the slave owners, omitted certain subjects - for instance family history - which were of little interest to colonial society.

It appears today that Afro - American history - to the extent to which it exists at all as a separate level of discourse - is divided into two parts: one tries to reconstruct the history of slavery as an economic and social institution mainly from contemporary written sources; and there is a second approach which is more recent and essentially limited to the United States which attempts to conserve the dwindling personal and family memories saved - as Alex Haley put it - as “family sagas” and which have difficulties in resisting the mass media, mobility and modernity (cf. Levine 1978).

This leads to the fourth problem of an Afro - American historiography: that of continuity. The traditional historiographic discourses tend to be “of long duration”; they are expected to give an uninterrupted account of a community’s progress and a list of all important events within that community across centuries; oral and family history is naturally limited regarding the range of time it covers; it may include important events which are fundamental for appreciating the ethnic identity, but which are not centred on them. In view of this current opinion that oral history - as compared with written history which covers a long period unaltered - has a tendency to lose track of time and of the importance of events Richard Price’s experience with the Saramacca Maroons of Surinam is of prime importance. Price demonstrates that the Saramaccan, in spite of their essentially oral culture, are “acutely living in history, of reaping each day the fruits of their ancestors deeds [...]” (Price: 5). The recognition of this history is essential for their lives and their identity: “As I heard a man reminding another, ‘ If we forget the deeds of our ancestors, how can we hope to avoid being returned to whitefolks’ slavery?’” (ibid.: 11). It is surprising to see that the Saramacca discourse on these events - which are also part of a “white”, and later “national” history - certainly differs from the latter insofar as subjective evaluation of acts and motives is at stake; but there is no fundamental difference which we would take it into account when speaking of (oral) *myth* and (written) *history*. Even the gathering of historical knowledge does not differ fundamentally from that of Western history: Saramacca historians have to travel in order to find witnesses and they have to “sit” for long periods of time, in order to listen carefully to various first - hand accounts of events before really knowing “First - Time things”, i.e. the singular events which constitute their identity.

It is questionable whether the Saramacca way of preserving collective memories is open to many other Afro - American communities. The Saramaccan are descendants of Maroons Groups who succeeded in building relatively undisturbed settlements in the jungles of Guayana. The new forms of ethnicity and community life were the origin of new cultural traditions and corresponding roles which could not be possible for other groups living in a modern and urbanised setting. Literary fiction becomes more and more the medium of a paradigmatic quest for identity by the appropriation of time and space. Alex Haley’s *Roots* is just one, yet because of its epic character very evident example of such seminal texts which have been surprisingly successful. In United States the earliest of these

texts had been William Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk* (1903); later Ralph Ellison and, recently, Tony Morrison acquired a similar fame²⁶.

An impressive example of the use and function of contextual metaphors is the use an Afro - American critic, Melvin Dixon, makes of Frederic Douglas image on the "disremembered time" which needs to be "re - membered" which means "repopulating broad continuities within the African Diaspora" (Dixon 1994: 21).

Of similar symbolic value was the concept of "con - naissance" used in French language *Négritude*. These attempts to find hidden meanings in current words are more than skilful word - plays; they point at what Aimé Césaire and others have called a new "invention" of the inherited colonial language²⁷ which should not merely describe facts and objects, but also symbolically refer to its new user, the black ex - slave. *Négritude* became the most comprehensive movement which advocated the recreation of the past through fiction; but in doing so it also showed the limitations of this endeavour: the difficulty of eluding to the "white" semantics of colonial languages which are historically bound to slavery and discrimination.

I.3. THE PLANTATION: IDEOLOGICAL AND LITERARY CENTRE OF AFRO - AMERICA.

Black movements such as *Négritude*, *Afro - Cubanismo* or *Negrismo* appeared so suddenly during the culturally fertile period between the two World Wars, that the most important new studies on Afro - American cultures were the results of an ideological *salto mortale* at the beginning of 20th century: Fernando Ortiz in Cuba, Nina Rodriguez and even Gilberto Freyre in Brazil had been raised in the traditions of 19th century "scientific racism". and their academic study of black cultures was motivated first by their interest in the genetic disposition of the black race. In the course of their studies they abandoned this race - orientated view: the "evil" was no longer to be blamed on race *per se*, but was the consequence of slavery as an institution. Though it meant a reversal of previously held views, it did at first not lead to the abandonment of racial prejudice against Afro - Americans; on the contrary: they were sacrificed to save the black race as a whole from general prejudice. Thus Nina Rodriguez, medical doctor and raciologist starts his major study with a surprising statement:

"A raça negra no Brasil, por maiores que tenham sido os seus incontestáveis serviços à nossa civilização, por mais justificadas que sejam as simpatias de que acercou o revoltante abuso da escravidão, por maiores que se revelam os generosos exageros dos seus turiferários, *há de constituir sempre um dos fatores da nossa inferioridade como povo*" (1906:7; italics are mine)

The Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz, "figura magnífica, gigante" (Barnet 1983: 74), who wrote 27 books and innumerable of articles on Afro - Cuban culture, demonstrates the most amazing "conversion" (Bremer 1993: 119): being a student of the famous Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso he published several articles on the genetic

²⁶ A collection of essays, edited by Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally (1994) resumes fairly well the state of the question, including other cultural traces of memory such as commemorative celebrations or tomb stones.

²⁷ Césaire 1933: 40; See an impressive example of this technique in Glissant 1981b: 77, where the principal protagonist, Cinna Chimène meets the old Quimboiseur; both try to redefine French words: "la glace c'est quand l'eau accouche une roche qui laboure ta chair et le vin c'est quand la messe est à midi en plein soleil et te rend fou [...]"

effects of Cuban ex - slaves: “En Cuba toda una raza entró en la mala vida” (Ortiz 1916: 28). But already in the course of his study the criminological interest gave way to a genuinely ethnographic orientation. At the end of his career, in 1944, Ortiz published a large study which was to prove that any concept of race was based on scientific error.

Ortiz’s example demonstrates that the change of scientific paradigms was fundamental and necessary, but it also resulted in the “disafricanisation” of black cultures in America²⁸. Diachronic deductions had become suspicious; the call was for a present - orientated and structuralist sociology. Thus Franklin Frazier asked of traditional historical anthropology:

“Could one ignore the fact that the Haitian and the Jamaican are parts of different cultural systems which had been determined by European socio - cultural systems transferred to the West Indies? Africa traits may continue to be discovered in the West Indies but will they not have a new meaning and significance, if not a new “form” in the context of the new societies which are coming into existence?” (1957:VII)

Curiously, it was a Latin Americanist, Charles Wagley, who coined the new term of Plantation America which was to take account of the obvious similarities in American black cultures. His first objective was to range all American societies into three cultural spheres: *Euro - America*, i.e. the Northern part the most Southern tip of North and South America which were, because of similar climatic conditions, suitable for European peasant settlement; *Indo - America*, i.e. those parts of Central America and the Andes which were marked by the highly developed Indian civilisations and a correspondingly dense indigenous population; and finally *Plantation America* which according to the new definition included areas which reach

“[...] from about midway up the coast of Brazil into the Guianas, along the Caribbean coast, throughout the Caribbean itself, and into the United States” (Wagley 1957: 5)

In this classification geographic characteristics of the area - such as fertile tropical soils and the proximity of coast and harbours - play a secondary role; it is termed a “cultural sphere” and comparing the term *Plantation America* to that of the other spheres we have to note that Wagley deliberately avoids ethnic labels like “black” or “African”, but uses a term related to economic history. According to him, there is no part of the Americas which is “African” in the same way as the others are Indian and European.

In Part II we will come back repeatedly to the question of the historic and causal relationship between slavery and the black race in America. It will appear that this question cannot be answered, either by observation or empirical studies, or by historical analysis. Its importance is primarily epistemological opposing historic and structural perspectives; secondly it is political, because it determines how today’s black Americans have to see themselves: as the descendants of Africans or as the descendants of slaves. From a purely historic point of view this may appear as a “false” question, because both factors were interrelated: only Africans were called slaves, and slavery in the New World was African. Thus it would be a chicken and egg situation, if it were not compounded by another question: which came first: racial prejudices or a particular labour relationship called slavery? We have seen, that insisting on the Africanness of the (former) slave gave rise to

²⁸ See the rather feeble protest of historians like Artur Ramos who stated: “A tese de[...] Gilberto Freyre, que não podemos estudar povos negros no Brasil, mas sim, exclusivamente negros escravos, e interessante e rica de resultados, mas inaceitável como generalização” (1979: 241)

important and possibly detrimental consequences in the 19th century; thus slavery and plantations seemed better options for determining the “cultural sphere” because they avoided any hint at a possible congenital inferiority.

Wagley was not the first to insist more on the quality of labour relations than on the fate of the black race in America. Yet much better known and more explicit has been the thesis of Eric Williams (1948) who was to become later the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. His principal argument is that slavery was a form of labour relations prior to race prejudice, as the very similar living and working conditions of white servants demonstrate. Only later, from the middle of the 18th century, the worsening living condition on the plantations required an ideology of a labour force which seemed to be predestined to slavery by its very nature²⁹.

In fact, colonial defenders of slavery often argued that it was only a particular form of labour relations which was not basically different from others. Ducoeur - Joly, planter in Saint-Domingue and author of a *Handbook for Planters* explains it this way:

“L’esclave est moins à plaindre que ne le sont les paysans en France. Le premier, lorsqu’il est bon sujet, est aimé de son maître, il est assuré de son logement et de sa subsistance et s’il a une petite famille, elle est à la charge de son maître, qui en a tout soin possible” (1802: II, 83).

Atwood (1791), chronicler of the Island Dominica, underlines the patriarchal connotations of these bonds: the planters’ attitude towards their slaves is that “of a parent to his children” (ibid.:255); their life is “by no means unenviable and preferable to the situation of thousands of people in Great Britain, with all the accompaniments of their fancied liberties” (ibid.:256) Freedom is, according to the author, not the principal problem. Like his white counterpart the black slave only wants to be assured of his subsistence: a reasonably good house, sufficient food, some rum and, from time to time, an occasion for music and dancing.

The most surprising point about these statements is that they come from a particular period and from particular islands where sugar production had already reached its peak. There is no doubt that at the end of the 18th century the gap between the treatment of a plantation slave and a European worker had considerably widened (cf. Blackburn 1988: 442/443) and that the owners wanted black slaves because they seemed physically and morally better suited for this type work. The worse the working conditions became, the more Africans had to be imported. The idea of a structural correspondence between European and American working conditions is valid only for a certain period which lasts, as we will see, until the first decade of the 18th century. The era of plantations which then began, was socially and culturally marked by a strong African presence.

Wagley and others of his generation - mainly social anthropologists and linguists - do not deny the African presence, but see it rather as one aspect within a general pattern of “multi - racial societies” (Wagley 1957:7) which includes other peoples such as the East Indians and Chinese who arrived in the Caribbean after abolition. “Race” or the cultural origin of the plantation population was not of particular interest to plantation theoreticians; Wagley (1957: 7 - 9) gives preference to social and economic criteria such as

- “*Plantation System and Monocrop*” as dominant economic systems
- “*Rigid Class Lines*”:

²⁹ For a more extensive discussion of Williams’ approach see II.2 and II.3

“The emerging middle class often attempts to share [...] upper class values. The lower class still suffers socially from the stigma of manual labour and often from the stigma attached to having the physical characteristics of their slave ancestors”(Wagley 1957:7)

■ “*Weak Community Structure*”, which Wagley understands as a consequence of the rigid class lines.

■ “*Peasants*”, i.e. the importance of small landowners and sharecroppers which restrict and complement the dominance of the plantation system.

■ “*Family*” , i.e. the presence of “maternal family organisation and a high illegitimacy rate”

In fact, the concept of Plantation America had been a valuable tool, for it contributed towards overriding the obscuring factor of national and cultural borders and to showing cultural similarities in the entire region “which derive often from similarities in environment, often from the common historical background, and often from the presence of such a large population of African origin.”(ibid.:9) Other inventories, often from smaller regional segments as the Caribbean islands, enumerate similar characteristics (Mintz 1971: 21 - 33; Benoist 1972). Their principal problem appears to be their representative value for the whole area of Plantation America. For example, if we examine more closely the last of Wagley’s criteria, family structure, we find not only the presence of matrifocal extended families, but also the existence of traditional families of the Western type; the same is true of religious behaviour which is not only marked by syncretic cults, but also by particularly bigoted forms of Catholicism and Protestantism. The same process is observable throughout all social and cultural attributes of Plantation America and finally also within the very origin of the term: the plantation - and even less so the sugar plantation to which Wagley refers - did not encompass all parts of the region all the time. For large periods of the 16th and 17th centuries, and equally large areas as the Bahamas were exempt from it, just as were the considerable amount of lands cultivated by small holders in all parts of “Plantation America”. Finally we do not only have to state that historical and regional differences were considerable, but that they tended to present themselves as opposites: family types or forms of religious behaviour complement each other as do market - oriented plantations and subsistence - oriented small holdings; it appears that Afro - American culture is marked by two sets of institutions and behaviour which are the cause and the result of a “generalized ambivalence”³⁰. The very term Plantation America is an excellent means of demonstrating the inadequacy of the traditional concept of cultural spheres in general; in our own case, these problems shed a light on the special nature of Afro - American cultures and cultural spheres. It therefore seems appropriate to describe cultural areas of this type not as forms of cultural reality, but as relationships and processes. Sidney W. Mintz has demonstrated these classification problems with respect to the

³⁰ Cf Herskovits 1937: 294/295 on the Haitian peasants: “Stated in general terms, an explanation might be sought in the influence which cultures in contact bring to bear upon the individual who must meet the demands of two traditions which, in many respects are in anything but accord. As regards the Haitian, it must be recognized that the ancestral elements in his civilisation have never been completely merged. As a result, his outwardly smoothly functioning life is full of inner conflict, so that he has to rise his defences in order to make his adjustment within the combination of differing modes of life that constitute his civilisation.

The kind of adjustment that seems to dominate may perhaps best be called socialized ambivalence, since more than any other phrase , it describes this tendency to manifest those rapid shifts in attitude toward people and situations that characterize the Haitian peasant to such a marked degree that the same man will hold in high regard a person, an institution, an experience, or even an object that has personal significance to him, and simultaneously manifest great disdain and even hatred for it”

Caribbean area, stating that “no attempt to generalise about the entire area can deal adequately with the distinctive features of any single component society” (1971:19); he therefore comes to the conclusion that

“the various societies of the Caribbean area may be viewed in terms of a multidimensional continuum, rather than in terms of some single abstract model” (1971:21).

Despite all the epistemological and methodical difficulties it cannot be denied that *Plantation America* is a useful term for describing a large area characterised by similarities which every attentive visitor could enumerate: individual houses with verandas surrounded by vegetable gardens, particular forms of food and drink, the preference for dried and salted foodstuffs which harked back to the diet of slaves, a particular folklore of animal tales, riddles and songs, religious ceremonies, dancing and music styles, and finally the gestures and appearance of people themselves. It is evident that much of this common culture is not, or at least not exclusively, a heritage from Africa. Instead the New World Plantation became an ideal point of reference, because it combined economic and cultural factors; in fact, it was an overwhelmingly powerful and all - embracing institution which was more than merely economic in its impact, and influenced every aspect of the daily life of the people who lived on it.

Attempts to define and describe the experience of black immigration to America - or to parts of it - by reference to the cultural history of the plantation, became numerous after Wagley. Most of these attempts agree on the constitutive criteria, but differ on both methods of approach and on goals. The smallest common denominator was the continuing attempts to contrast Plantation America with other parts of the continent. Worthy of mentioning is the well - known study of West and Augelli based on an examination of the two principal contrasting forms of exploitation in Central America: on the one side the mainland Hacienda and on the other the coastal plantations of the rimland:

“The Rimland plantation has been more than an economic institution. With some modification, it has persisted as a way of life from the colonial period to the present. It has been an important, and often the chief, determinant of racial composition, population numbers, densities and distribution, land tenure, commerce, transportation and other cultural aspects of the Caribbean”(West/Augelli 1966: 16)

These studies, however, do not solve the fundamental problem: a coherent geographic and social sphere for the black cultures of America, can not be identified. The principal difficulty is the lack of congruence with national or state borders; in two of the main areas - the United States and Brazil - the Afro - American cultural sphere is smaller than the corresponding national states which tend to define a comprehensive identity superseding that of the minority. The third area, the Caribbean, presents another problem: it is larger than the single national states and includes societies with varying heterogeneous cultural and political traditions. This diversity, not hampered by the obscuring pretence of a “national unity” proved to be very fertile in understanding the nature of new cultures which appeared in the backyard of colonialism. It was not by chance that Wagley developed his concept of a Plantation America within a Symposium of Caribbean Studies or that Mintz had had formulated his new theoretical conceptions of cultural spheres and spaces in relation to this area. Some of these were enlightening and will be discussed hereafter - not in the totality of their theoretical implications, but inasmuch as they are related to various interpretations of slavery.

The first one, which will have to be developed in a later Chapter (II.3) is in its approach purely economic and thus is vaguely related to the ideas of Williams (1944) and

Wirtz (1984) But it is more stringent in its underlying theoretical orientation that slavery and the slave - based economy can be reduced to a “pure model”. The authors, economists Karl Levitt and Lloyd Best, define it presupposing an economic relation between metropole and peripheral colony whose “raison d’être was to produce a staple required for metropolitan consumption” (Levitt/Best: 39); the authors’ viewpoint involves an interpretation of the plantation not as a historic phenomenon, but as approximation to a principle of rationality: under what circumstances and conditions does the plantation comply best with its particular task of production? The answer can be summarised in a list of ideal needs and requirements:

- “it tends to be a self - contained unit (...) with its own resident labour force” (ibid.: 42) which has to be inexpensive and available at any time
- it has to become a “total economic institution’ so as to encompass the entire existence of the work force” which means that there is “virtually no distinction between economic organization and society” (ibid.: 40). This makes the plantation an “isolate” which tends to produce the majority of goods and services it needs within its own boundaries.
- the ideal colony would be an aggregate of such self - contained units, in such a way that urban centres and public services would be reduced to an absolute minimum
- the best colonies are islands because they can be dominated entirely by the plantation system, leaving no or little space for alternative forms of society and life:

“Mainland plantation hinterlands differ significantly from those which are ‘islands’. By the former term we do not refer merely to the geographic concept, but to the existence of large areas of cultivable land not engrossed by plantations” (ibid. 39)

- These colonies have to be bound to the metropole by an “overall mercantilist framework” which controls the division of labour and relations between centre and periphery, the correspondent transportation and distribution systems as well as the monetary system.

Certainly the authors have to admit that the “pure plantation economy” is an ideal type and no exact historic counterpart exists” (ibid.: 41); we will see that historic plantations did not correspond to this ideal setting (II.3). But the model serves a valuable purpose: it allows us to construct a “multidimensional continuum” of the plantation if we can succeed in establishing a list of the necessary variables which prevent plantation colonies from corresponding to the “ideal type”.

The obstacles are twofold, geographic and historical. Besides the overall conditions of climate and soil, the geographic conditions consist mainly of those external factors which determine the possibility of seclusion: in fact, islands were “better” colonies in terms of profitability, and worse in terms of slave treatment. In large continental colonies - Brazil or the United States at the end of the slave period, - the “pure model” was less implemented; slavery was correspondingly milder, because the existence of a civil society outside the plantation system could not be prevented. Plantations tended less to be self - contained units and whenever slaves won their freedom either by manumission or by flight, there was social and geographic space available to accommodate them. Islands offered fewer such alternatives; an important indicator of this form of constraint was the relative absence of urban structures or of social relations on a monetary basis.

Historic variables are, of course, less systematic. We will amply discuss the differences between those societies - mainly Spain and in some respects Portugal - where

slavery, because it was a historic institution controlled by civil society, was dominated by economic considerations to a much lesser extent. Another important factor is the actual date and the conditions under which plantation slavery reached a particular colony; in terms of efficiency and profits the best colonies were those where a plantation economy was established at the beginning of the 18th century in relatively “empty” territories, where the expansion of a latifundia system was not hampered by existing populations or by pre-existing economic systems. These were the circumstances which explain the extraordinary success of French Saint-Domingue.

Based on these factors the “multidimensional continuum” of Plantation America can be subdivided into a number of typical constellations. Along with Saint-Domingue Jamaica, Barbados, Martinique and several other former French and British island colonies form the hard core of the plantation constellation followed by the non - Spanish mainland colonies, i.e. the three Guyanas, British Honduras and, of course, the Plantation South of North America; Brazil can also be counted within this group, though it is more difficult to classify. A third category consist of the Spanish islands: Cuba, Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo; the least Afro - American territories and the least marked by slavery are the Spanish mainland colonies.

These subdivisions may appear rather abstract; but more descriptive studies arrive at similar conclusions. One such is Benítez Rojo’s *The Repeating Island* which also takes the plantation as a base to explain the conflicting patterns of “differences and similarities, [...] these centrifugal and centripetal forces at work in the Caribbean [...]” (35/36). According to Rojo’s perspective, the point of departure was in the islands of Spanish influence, particularly Hispaniola where the early successful start of the “pure model” ended in its failure because of the intervention of the Spanish authorities, i.e. the “devastation” of 1604 (see our chapter II.4). The end of the mercantilist and metropolis - orientated economy forced the remaining population to depend for its survival on subsistence farming, hunting and contraband and it encouraged a grass roots creolisation³¹; it differed, on one side, from the mainland where the social and cultural contradictions were more marked by the presence of the Indians, an alternative constellation which meant that “the Negro was gradually assimilated by the mass of ladinos” (ibid.: 57). On the other side Benítez-Rojo contrasts the Creole culture of the Hispanic islands to that of the non - Hispanic plantation societies, particularly Haiti:

“when [it] emerged as a free nation the African components of its culture not only dominated the European ones, but were more active, or *if you like*, on the offensive [...]” (ibid.: 67, emphasis by me).

Thus Benítez-Rojo arrives at the very same sub categories which we considered as approximations to the “pure model”. The differences between him and the author of the original model are created first by their respective points of view: the one - dimensional scale which Levitt and Best offer originates from an abstract position, that of the hypothetically “ideal” plantation. This perspective is legitimised from the seemingly scientific authority which the authors claim; consequently it is presented in a seemingly neutral and factual language which does not betray its authors’ prejudices.

On the other hand, Benítez-Rojo does not hesitate to show his own historic position, the island world created by Spanish colonisation. This “case” is *not* an abstract model, but a real situation which conditions the view of the author: it is a “normal”, every - day position

³¹ *Creolisation* is seen here as an increasing social and economic autonom i.e. the emergence of a new regional culture.

and the other examples - the mainland Creole model, the “Africanised” model of the non - Hispanic Caribbean - are presented as variants or even deviations of the “normal case”. Taking into account this historic position of the author is interesting to see that Benítez-Rojo emphasises the contradiction between the urban civilisation of Spanish colonies and the rural background of the “pure model”:

“*I mean* while Havana grew like a city similar to those in Spain [...] Kingston grew like a city of the Plantation; that is, scarcely more than an urban precinct dominated by sugar warehouses, commercial offices, the governors’s house, the fort, the docks, and the slave shacks” (ibid.: 63, author’s emphasis).

Besides this implicit legitimisation of the Benítez-Rojo’s position - that of an urban Spanish civilisation - this quotation and the one preceding it show another particularity of Benítez-Rojos book: the author includes himself in the text. He appears as a historic person who, by the means of unobtrusive interjections, - “I mean” or “if you like” directs himself personally to the reader and includes him in the context. The relative importance of this implicit dialogue might be small; nevertheless it changes profoundly the character of the whole text introducing a narrative tone and style which marks the transition to another genre: the fictional text.

Thus we come to probably the most important narrator of the plantation world: Edouard Glissant. With regard to his essays he has often been compared to Benítez-Rojo, but he is also his opposite whose home is not the “Spanish town” but the plantation universe of Martinique. Glissant never provides a historic or structural analysis of the plantation system. In his essays this is mainly presented as an obscure but omni - present power which - comparable with the “pure model” - encompasses the entire existence of Caribbean man, particularly the inhabitants of the French *Départements d’Outre - Mer*. Though formally no longer colonies, they perpetuate by their dependence on France the “overall mercantilist framework” of colonial times which now encapsulates the collective neurosis of the former slave: “Libéré’ en 1848, il se retrouva en Martinique prisonnier d’un double carcan: l’impossibilité de produire par et pour lui - même” (1981a: 18) The essays of Glissant are a form of diagnosis of this collective evil apparent in a high incidence of mental disorder which is the consequence of a collective alienation (Edouard/Boukxon 1975, Rumpf). Glissant’s impressive number of novels is proposed as a paradigmatic form of re - acquisition of time and space by the alienated individual. The principal hero of nearly all his novels is a modern historian, Mathieu Beluse, who alternates between dominant objective historic thoughts and his need to transform these ideas into other more subjective discourses meaningful to his own identity.

The process of narration is similar to the multiple migrations in time and space which are the main theme of the novels. “Telling stories” is part of a dismemberment, but also of a reconstruction of history. Its centre is the plantation, the slave quarter: “Un des lieux de la mémoire antillaise a bien été le cercle délimité autour du conteur par les ombres de la nuit” (1990: 51) Having failed to grasp the meaning and the multiple aspects of post - slavery society in by the abstract analysis, the writer goes back to this primordial situation, telling stories which extend successively from the immediate surroundings to the ultimately more distant parts: the plantation, the island, the metropole, the world; but the storyteller and his audience remain in the middle of these concentric circles. The tale or novel becomes the basis of another “multidimensional continuum”; its point of reference, however, is not an abstract model, but the concrete experience of the narrator and his public.

I.4. SEARCHING FOR AN ALTERNATIVE HERO: THE EPIC MAROON

At the beginning of his second novel, *Le quatrième siècle* (1964), Edouard Glissant describes the arrival of a slave ship which, we learn later, happened in 1788. Suddenly the onlookers who had gathered are startled by an uproar: two newly disembarked slaves start fighting each other silently and ferociously and are only separated by the armed intervention of the planters and merchants. No one understands or tries to understand the reasons of this struggle: “Il n’y a pas de raison, chuchota Senglis, vous ne les connaissez pas!” (1964, 26)

This episode has a seminal importance within the whole fictional and philosophical world of Glissant, which aims at the symbolical recreation of an Afro - American universe with its own particular mythical background and its own different notions of time and space. The two newly arrived slaves, later identified as Béluse and Longué, represent the first men in a New World. In terms which deliberately remind the reader of the Old Testament, it is shown how they procreate and multiply and become the ancestors of two large families³² The fact that there are two ancestors - in contrast to Adam - indicates the inherent duality of the Caribbean and Afro - American World, which is of mixed origin. Béluse submits and adapts to the conditions of slavery; he stays within the coastal plantation area and becomes quite a “successful” slave, but has to pay the price, which is the loss of his own history. Longué, on the other hand, - “comme s’il prenait son parti de l’histoire, avec un air de dire qu’il remettait à plus tard les règlements [...]” (ibid.:27) - takes flight shortly after his arrival, towards the jungle of the mountains. His maroon family continues, even after the abolition of slavery, to cultivate African knowledge and sorcery as a means of resistance towards the new imported “modernity” and its alienating effects.

But within the limited space of a Caribbean island the cultivated coast and the wild interior - which become gradually part of the “landscape” of a human person - are never far apart. The later Béluses and the Longués continue to be intertwined in a love - hatred relationship. Somewhere up in the impenetrable interior there is always a “Papa Longué” an old “quimboiseur” (sorcerer) to whose wisdom the modern Béluses can recur when they are at a loss to explain the world according to European values.

It is interesting to note the extent to which, for Glissant, the secular opposition between the obedient slave and the rebellious maroon determines the position of the authentic Afro - American writer. Within *Le quatrième siècle* the history of the Béluse and the Longué family is told as part of a long conversation between Mathieu Béluse - the young historian and principal hero of several Glissant novels - and the last Papa Longué. Uneasy with the interpretations of modern “French” history, Mathieu came to see the old sorcerer so as to find that part of his past which is not in the “books.” Longué, conscious of being the last possessor of the authentic oral knowledge, bridges the gap between the two worlds and the two families, tries to recover the “word” and to structure it within an interpretation which is not a mere chronological enumeration of facts, but a summary of their significance. In a later novel, *La case du commandeur* (1981), we learn that Mathieu has failed in his efforts to find an authentic Martinican view of history, but that his wife, Marie Celat - who, as an offspring of the two families, incorporates to an even greater degree the contradictions of Afro - American historical traditions and consequently becomes insane - sets out once more to find Papa Longué within the deep jungle (of her mind). Desperate to find an unalienated Caribbean tradition, they begin at its very foundation, the redefinition of the words of their language which, being the language of the colonial dominator, is no

³² “Car l’ancêtre avait engendré Melchior et Liberté le fils, et Melchior avait engendré Apostrophe et Liberté la fille [...], etc.” (Glissant, 1964: 16).

longer able to reveal their own reality³³. Several years later, another author from the French Antilles used the same historical opposition between the alienated slave and the authentic maroon as a basis of her work: Simone Schwarz - Bart's *Ti Jean L'horizon* (1979), whose hero leaves for a mythical voyage in order to save his island Guadeloupe. He comes from the (fictional) village Fond - Zombi, which represents the poetical image of a spiritual universe. Fond - Zombi again is divided into two parts: the lower town, which is an ordinary Guadeloupean village of the present day. Up in the mountain, near the volcano, lives a very different group of people:

“Les solitaires du plateau étaient [...] les plus pauvres du monde entier. Mais ils s'estimaient supérieurs à tout l'univers, car descendaient en droite ligne des esclaves qui s'étaient révoltés autrefois, avaient vécu et étaient morts les armes à la main, bien souvent, sur les lieux mêmes où s'élevaient aujourd'hui leurs cases délabrées. Ils ne se tourmentaient, comme ceux du village, ne s'interrogeaient pas sur la couleur de leurs boyaux: savaient, savaient qu'un sang noble courait dans leurs veines [...]” (Schwarz - Bart 1979:14)

These people who do not plant sugar cane and do not use money, are reputed to be sorcerers whose science “venait en droite ligne d'Afrique” (ibid.:16); they maintain their traditional knowledge by telling “histoires d'animaux d'Afrique” and the life of their maroon ancestors,

“[leurs] combats désespérés dans l'ombre, et la course et la chute finale, le foudroient; et tout soudain, à un moment toujours imprévisible, il tombait du ciel un drôle de silence à l'intérieur duquel les héros remontaient de la terre, devenaient perceptibles à chacun”.(ibid.:14)

When, after the abolition of slavery, the maroon descendants came down to the lower village in order to tell the story of their heroes, they were laughed at, for “il ne pouvait s'agir de vrais événements car, enfin, en quels livres étaient - ils écrits?” (ibid.:15)

This last questions on the nature of “true” events - as well as the incapacity of Mathieu Béluse to grasp the essentials of “real” Martinican history - has quite a number of implications. Afro - American history, as it appears in the “books,” is essentially a history of slavery by Europeans, of abolition granted also by the European powers, of measures of emancipation imported from abroad; Afro - American man seemingly unable to control his fate, remains a grateful or resenting object. Certainly there were events which have to be interpreted as acts of resistance against slavery, and no serious history of Afro - American slavery omits to mention them: sorcery, use of poison, the escape of slaves, individual or collective rebellions. But these usually appear as isolated and desperate reactions against oppression and never constitute more permanent patterns of resistance, offering an alternative life - style or an alternative history of Afro - American people. Partly responsible for such a bias is the medium: the written text, the book. As far as it has to rely on data drawn from historical documentation, it necessarily offers a view of the dominant society, which was the only one to keep written records. “Décrire la vie des esclaves d'après ces sources est un paradoxe,” states the historian Gabriel Debien, “Ce ne sont jamais eux qui parlent, qui témoignent, mais les gérants ou les maîtres, qui sont blancs et s'expriment en colons.” (1974:8).

³³ They do so by isolating themselves from the dominating tradition and connecting themselves to immediate poetically connotative experiences: “[...] pensant la glace c'est quand l'eau accouche une roche qui laboure ta chair, et la vin c'est quand la messe est à midi en plein soleil et te rend fou [...]” (Glissant 1981b; 77)

This is particularly true for maroonism on a large scale. Poisoning and sorcery on the plantation, suicide or slave rebellions are still relatively well documented, because they affected the functioning of the plantations and the economic interests of their owners. The handbooks written for the benefit of planters give extensive advice on how to proceed when the terror of sorcery or poison haunts the populations of entire plantations (see III.4). The various laws in English, French and Spanish slave legislation deal largely with the problems of runaway slaves and the punishment provided for them, which reaches from jail and flogging to branding and mutilation. There are finally also numerous accounts of military expeditions against maroon communities, which include the reasons for their success or failure. All such documentation shows just how frequent acts of resistance were, but they never constitute a complete picture of social organisation of resistance and its cultural background. Nevertheless a still vivid although rapidly vanishing oral tradition - the one quoted poetically by Glissant and Schwarz - Bart - describes the maroon communities, their warfare and their retreat. It elevates leaders like Mackandal in Haiti, Cudjoe and Accompong in Jamaica, Gabriel in French Guyana, of Zumbi in Brazil or Azaïs in Guadeloupe to the status of heroes, who for decades waged cunning and successful guerrilla warfare against far more numerous and better equipped colonial troops and - as was the case in Jamaica and Surinam - finally won their right to an independent existence by honourable peace treaties³⁴.

The tales of the maroon communities and their leaders, their quest for freedom from foreign domination, their attempts to establish against all odds their identity in a new world, their success and also their tragic failures might have been excellent material for an epic literature, and it is quite surprising that it has never been further developed in this sense. This is, as we suppose, also the background of Edward K. Brathwaite's comments, who, after enumerating the famous maroon communities of the past, and after considering their historical importance for the slave societies, states:

“And yet, there are very few creative works in English, known to me, which attempt to come to terms with even one aspect of this experience; and I suspect that the story is very much the same in the rest of the region. This, again, is a tribute to European brainwash. Many Caribbean writers don't even *know* that these communities existed and that some still exist; and the few who do are too cut off to conjure line or metaphor from this matrix.” (1986: 229f.)

Though Brathwaite avoids determining more explicitly the reluctance of Afro - American writers to take up the popular maroon myths, his observations and the following critical remarks on Wilson Harris' *The Secret Ladder* (1963) are very pertinent. We wonder whether the novels we mentioned above and which were obviously unknown to him, would fill the gap³⁵. Both authors, whose success is more due to the French and the international public, are deeply entangled in the web of contradicting stereotypes of black cultures, so that the evocation of the maroon tradition cannot be more than the designation of a relative position within a continuing intellectual conflict. When they refer

³⁴ These peace treaties, however, made them allies of the colonial troops, which now used them very often to track down runaway slaves. “The change from Protector to Hunter was a frightening one. It must have shocked the slaves of the eighteenth century and it shocks some Jamaicans now” says Carey Robinson. (1969:9) Oral records, however, highlight the aspect of heroes who, generally, owe their fame less to moral qualities than to their bravery however frightening it may be.

³⁵ We do not claim either to have covered all novels where maroonism plays a part. Of some interest in relation to our subject may also be the following titles: Bertène Juminer: *Au seuil d'un nouveau cri* (1963); Jean - Louis Baghio'o: *Le Flamboyant à fleurs bleues* (1973); Dany Bebel - Gisler: *Léonore* (1987); Victor Reid: *Nanny Town* (1983).

to maroonism, they use it for a literary and ideological purpose, which goes far beyond the epic tale. Their literary aim is not the creation of a “mythe fondateur,” which as Glissant himself (like other writers) states, is conspicuously absent in the whole Caribbean and Latin American literatures (Glissant 1981a: 246ff). He, as well as Schwarz - Bart, cannot simply be accused of “European bias”. Their uneasiness in dealing with the subject of marronage is more a symptom of the difficulty of Afro - American intellectuals to come to grips with their history. It is reflected by the poverty of historiography in general and the historical novel in particular, within which the absence of the epic maroon novel is a particularly striking feature.

Paradoxically - but not surprisingly - a few romantically inspired descriptions come close to an epic picture of maroon life and warfare, but these also show its profound ambiguity. The maroon slave is, in the first place, an idealised image of the strong and proud male, who rejects any kind of bondage; within this context maroons appear, occasionally, to be very similar to the classic “noble savage,” the Indian. But it should not be forgotten that the economic interests of the planters dictated that the reverse side of the stereotype should also be emphasised. The rejection of slavery implied also the denial of civilisation, of Christianity and of an orderly life. One of the ambiguous delights of the Romantic imagination are the maroon camps, and particularly their nightly assemblies around a camp fire where, against the background of drumming, chants and dances, mysterious half - naked figures concoct evil plans. Sorcery is ever - present:

“Autour d’un vaste boucan se groupe la bande silencieuse de marrons, encore toute agitée des terreurs superstitieuses que lui a inspirées la vieille Iviane (a witch). Une blanche fumée s’élève en colonne épaisse jusqu’à la voûte de verdure et se suspend aux branches des arbres en immenses draperies [...] Accroupis ou couchés sur des lits de feuillage, les marrons présentent une partie du corps au reflet de la flamme” (Levilloux, qtd. in Corzani 1971: 209)

This image of the Guadeloupean “Béké” - writer Levilloux usually considered as “liberal,” is soon animated by the arrival of dancers, sorcerers and poisoners who dance and sing themselves into a frenzy. All this, spiced with acts of cruelty by omnipotent chiefs, with unrestrained passion, intrigue and violence, conjures up an image of savagery, which was very much to taste of the public and belongs to a stereotype which, though the actual context may vary, is surprisingly homogeneous³⁶.

The persistence of these stereotypes as well as their ideological importance is such that even more recent authors have had to take strange detours in order to avoid possible traps. An example is the novel *Dominique, nègre esclave* (1951), the life story of a slave told by the Martinican Léonard Sainville. Being a historian, Sainville is one of the few who claim historical authenticity particularly for the part, where Dominique, after having escaped his cruel masters, joins the maroon gang of Azaïs in Guadeloupe. Though the author offers a rather realistic image of the difficulties of maroon life - the constant dangers of attack, the lack of food and the subsequent necessity for raids on the cultivated areas, the demographic instability due to lack of women and children - he also emphasises the delight maroons take in music, poetry and art:

³⁶ Even well known writers used it deliberately, as for instance Victor Hugo in his novel on the Haitian Revolution *Bug - Jargal* (1818), where the rebellious Negroes are presented again and again in nightly dancing scenes which contain all the quoted ingredients as well as the appropriate vocabulary, for instance: “danse lascive”, “Figures horribles”, “attitudes grotesques,” “horrible rire,” “la sorcière nue” - all these within two short paragraphs. (Chap. XXVI).

“Telles étaient les distractions que, régulièrement, on s’octroyait au camp de Saint-Rose. Elles concordent peu avec l’image hideuse et abhorrée que la tradition nous a laissée des Nègres marrons, de ces êtres solitaires, hirsutes, féroces surgissant en plein jour ou la nuit, au coin d’un bois, et se saisissant, sous peine de mort violente, de tous les biens que le voyageur imprudent avait cru bon de devoir emporter”. (Sainville 1978:81)

Sainville nevertheless finds it necessary to emphasise his four principal heroes - Dominique, his wife Léontine, his friend Moko and the latter’s lover Anne - Marie, who happens to be the sister of the chief Azaïs - who, being more “civilised,” “avaient en commun le mépris dans lequel ils tenaient une grande partie des habitants de la forêt.” (ibid.:84). They do not avoid a typical conflict with the main body of the maroons: Azaïs wants to marry his sister to the leader of another maroon gang, but the girl, deeply in love with Moko, refuses a marriage of convenience. Trying to escape, the lovers are surprised by the tyrannical chief, who savagely kills Moko; Anne - Marie denounces the murder to the colonial authorities and shows them the way to the hide - out of the maroons, who subsequently are defeated and executed.

Though Sainville is considered a *Négritude* writer, this particular story carries an impressive number of conventional elements, i.e. the moral elevation of the heroes, a fact which, of course, casts a doubtful light on the rest of the community, particularly on the chief, who is portrayed as a despot in the African tradition. There is the cruel and bloody revenge, which engenders treason, and the tragic destruction of a community, which has failed to dominate its passions. Finally there is the importance of the love match which, also by contrast, is related to a question that the conventional reader will more or less expect: the sharing of women and promiscuity among the “savages”³⁷.

In this sense the story of Dominique is closely related to another novel: to *Black Albino* (1961) by Namba Roy, who himself is a member of the Jamaican Accompong Maroon community, and who dedicates the novel “to the spirit of my maroon ancestors.” In his “more than romantic tale of ‘brave warriors’ and internecine conflict” (Brathwaite 1986: 230) the hero Tomaso, a fictional leader of a maroon community, is also a highly idealised figure of incomparable moral and physical qualities, who is able to subdue, by mere strength of his arms, all his adversaries. His main opponent is Lago, a cunning but ugly and treacherous crippled dwarf³⁸ who unsuccessfully tries to seduce Tomaso’s wife and win the chieftaincy. Captured by the colonial militia, he leads them to the village, which would have been destroyed, if Tomaso, by an act of bravery, had not reversed the situation. He nearly loses his life, becomes insane, and his children are lost, but a dramatic succession of events finally produces a happy ending.

The fatal combination of passion, violence and betrayal, which lead to a possibly tragic end to the community, make a rather insuspicious feature of romanticism and would, just as well, serve an epic setting. Applied to a “savage” community of escaped slaves, these features acquire unpleasant connotations, which the authors are not able to avoid. Though

³⁷ Sainville does not fail his readers, when he describes quite openly the multiple sexual adventures of Dominique, who loses Léontine in the course of the destruction of the maroon village; only at the end of the novel does he find once more his true love.

³⁸ As extraordinary as such incredible physical qualities, the deformation of the opposing characters is also a feature of these novels; for example one of the lieutenants of the maroon leaders, Bala in the novel of Levilloux as well as the hideous counterpart of *Bug - Jargal* in Victor Hugo’s novel mentioned above. Finally, also the famous maroon leader Mackandal is also described as lacking one arm, which had been mangled in the mill when he was grinding sugar cane.

(or perhaps because) they are not literary masterpieces, the authors show a pleasant ingenuity of vision, which enables them to present a closer approach to maroon life and culture. For various reasons they are, in opposition to well - known writers such as Glissant, Schwarz - Bart, and Wilson Harris, not over - aware of possible misconceptions when divertly describing the maroon myth: Sainville, because he understands himself as “historian” in an innocent way and Namba Roy for conceiving himself as a direct representative of the maroons. Thus they do not have to assume a distorting intellectual pose when entering into the twilight world of myth and history.

Another aspect of intellectual distance appears more directly in two Cuban novels. One of them is, rather surprisingly, just a document, which is not only presented as an authentic description of maroonism by a person who is introduced as a direct witness, but had been conceived deliberately as “obra de fundación” (Barnet, 1983, 41), as the epic base of nationality such as Glissant had seen it. It is the above mentioned account *El Cimarrón* (1967) which his “editor”, Miguel Barnet, attributes to his source, the former maroon Esteban Montejo. Though within our context it may be important, we cannot discuss here at full length the involved question of to what extent it is fiction or documentary (see I.1.). In any case what is significant is which part of Esteban’s life is presented by Barnet: it is not only his life as a maroon (as the title may suggest), nor is it the entire life of the narrator. The story actually ends with the independence of Cuba, which makes Esteban a hero and a representative of colonial history. Barnet’s implicit idea leads to the conclusion that maroonism is, within the context of national history, not only anti - social, but also pre - social. As related to slavery, it is not only just an alternative, but also the only possible alternative, as long as the modern nation state (or even the revolution) is not at hand. Montejo is an ambiguous “hero” within the course of Afro - American history, typical of a period when the lack of positive social models resulted in his withdrawal from the human community as far it was possible at that time.

This explains at least partially the strange description of Esteban’s maroon life as it is told by Barnet. Since maroonism appears as a personal solution to a now resolved historical problem, Esteban’s adventures as a runaway slave remain strictly personal: “Un firme sentimiento individualista que le dirige a vivir aislado [...]” as Barnet admits in the preface. (1980:10) He neither joins a maroon community nor does he create one, but hides away for years, until the news of the abolition of slavery, in a cave in a remote part of the forest. For his subsistence he depends almost entirely on nature, to which he develops a very close relationship. He lives on wild vegetables and the animals of the woods; birds and trees are his companions, as he distrust any kind of human companionship: “La verdad es que yo no confío ni en el Espíritu Santo.[...] Nada más que oía a los pájaros y a los árboles y comía, pero nunca conocí a nadie.” (ibid.:57)

Barnet has admitted several times that he arranged his first three *testimonios* in a way that they cover, in the form of a trilogy, the entire history of Cuba. This explains how the maroon part of Esteban’s life is to be understood: as a representation of prehistoric man, who, as Esteban, has to create his own material culture, eat without salt, has difficulty in making fire etc. Esteban’s “robinsonade”, the bourgeois dream of recreating the world in an uninhabited land, remains, however, necessarily incomplete, because the civilised world does potentially exist, and he just survives by waiting until it reaches the state he needs for self - fulfilment. There is no need to establish oneself definitively in a new existence, for progress is inevitable and the Cuban Revolution is its proof.

Maroonism, therefore, cannot serve as an entirely positive symbol for new nations, which plan their future along the lines of modernity. We have an earlier example within Cuban literature which may indicate that this particular image of maroonism is neither tied to Barnet’s perspective nor to that of the Cuban Revolution. Already in 1946, Alejo

Carpentier had written a short story now relatively unknown which at that time nearly won him a literary award and provoked a controversial discussion. Entitled *Los fugitivos*, it tells of a slave and a dog who, after having run away independently, share a difficult life in the woods. We find the same accessories as in Barnet's work: the cave, in which they live, the hunting of wild animals and a close communion which makes them peers. In fact a large part of the story consists of the descriptions of their thoughts, which are, both for the man and the dog mere reflections of instincts. The necessity of society appears for both to be motivated by sexual drives and the corresponding search for female companionship, and in relation to this crucial question, Carpentier's negative view of maroonism reaches its peak: chasing a female, the dog is able to join a gang of wild dogs and, thus, establishes definitely his independent life within a new group. The maroon, also, "desde luego había optado por las mujeres" (126), but in order to satisfy his needs, he has to rove around the plantation, violating all the women he can get hold of, and therefore finally gets caught. It is interesting to see that Barnet's Esteban, who is already a model of the rational bourgeois, deliberately avoids this danger, by renouncing the female companionship of which he is generally very fond. But the instinct for self-preservation is greater than the sexual drive. We may also note, that he has only contempt for the "African religion" of his fellows and the "tricks" of the black sorcerers.

Maroon life, in both stories, is reduced to a mere satisfaction of primary needs and instincts without any vision or projection of an independent future. Its protagonists are not legendary heroes or brave warriors, but humble persons who, as in the case in Carpentier's short story, do not even deserve a name. The author, however, takes up the maroon subject once more when he introduces, just a few years later, the famous historical maroon leader Mackandal in his well known novel *EL reino de este mundo* (1949).

Though Mackandal, who lived near Limbé in Saint-Domingue, was executed some several years before its onset, he is considered in Haiti as one of the ancestors of the Haitian Revolution and War of Independence. In order to understand the meaning of Carpentier's Mackandal, it is interesting to see how his struggle against the French colonists appears in the historical account of C.L.R. James:

"For six years he built up his organisation, he and his followers poisoning not only whites but disobedient members of their own band. Then he arranged that on a particular day all the water of every house in the capital of the province was to be poisoned, and the general attack made on the whites while they were in the convulsions and anguish of death. He had lists of all members of his party in each slave gang; appointed captains, lieutenants and other officers; arranged for bands of Negroes to leave the town and spread over the plains to massacre all whites". (James 1963:21)

It is surprising to see that unlike Toussaint L'Ouverture, who represents the "official" resistance, Mackandal hardly ever appears in the voluminous Haitian literature. The only exception we know is a short story, *Un double crime* (1943), by a relatively unknown writer, Jean - Joseph Vilaire. In it two women slaves see a beautiful, but poisoned apple(!), and prevent, for personal reasons, their masters from eating it. Both know that they have failed the plans of Mackandal and are, themselves, bound for certain death. Mackandal himself does not appear within the story, but is perceived as a legendary, secret and never-failing power:

"Mackandal, Mackandal était passé!..."

L'être invisible le jour, perdu dans les montagnes lointaines venait rôder dans l'obscurité complice autour de demeures closes des blancs endormis. Dans chaque plantation de nombreux esclaves, fervents affidés de sa secte l'accueillaient et il

faisait naître en eux le délire qu'apporte dans l'âme africaine l'apparition des puissances du vaudou. Aucun de leur dieux n'était plus redouté que lui et par cela seul, aucun n'était plus adoré. A genoux en silence dans la nuit fauve de la lueur des boucans tordus par la brise, ils le recevaient." (Vilaire 1943: 79f.)

As we can see, these Mackandal images continue to carry quite a number of the conventional features of the maroon theme. Carpentier takes up a few of them: the mutilation of his arm, his use of poison, the furtive power of the maroon over the other slaves, the use of voodoo, his capture and, extensively, his execution by fire. What he insists upon, however, is the "invisibility" of his hero which he, Carpentier, interprets as the capacity of miraculous transformation into animals. Instead of being a legendary organiser of slave resistance, Mackandal becomes a fairy tale figure, who cannot be part of the reality either of the reader, nor of the author. Carpentier's Mackandal escapes into another world where his main function is to become witness of an intellectually conceived opposition: the one between European "reality" (or even surreality) and the "marvellous reality" of the black race:

"Que sabían los blancos de cosas de negros? En sus ciclos de metamorfosis Mackandal se había adentrado muchas veces en el mundo arcano de los insectos, desquitándose de la falta de un brazo humano con la posesión de varias patas, de cuatro élitros o de largas antenas. Había sido mosca, cienpiés, falena, comején, tarántula, vaquita de San Antón y hasta cocuyo de grandes luces verdes. En el momento decisivo, las ataduras del mandinga, privadas de un cuerpo que atar, dibujarían por un segundo el contorno de un hombre de aire, antes de resbalar a lo largo del poste". (Carpentier 1949: 48)

When, a few pages later, Mackandal is executed, he disappears before the eyes of the spectators, who already had anticipated the marvellous salvation of their hero. When thus Carpentier hints at the transformation of the historical hero into a collective myth, we should, however, be aware that Carpentier, even when encroaching upon a known popular hero, invents that myth, as well as he invents that public and its quest for a miraculous salvation. His Mackandal does not reproduce the autonomy of any possible popular knowledge on maroon heroes, but functions, just as well as the Papa Longué or the storyteller of Schwarz - Bart, within an intellectually conceived system of oppositions, the roots of which are only superficially the different cultures of the Afro - American middle classes and the black masses. They are to be found within the uneasiness of those middle classes themselves, who, in manifold attempts to recover their own identity, comply with the expectations of their international reading public and constitute maroonism as a dialectic alternative to an unsatisfactory daily life.

This, of course, does not impair the literary and aesthetic value of the novels we quoted. It just indicates that - as Brathwaite states - Caribbean and Afro - American intellectuals simply do not know any longer the legendary history of maroon resistance. It faded out before it had a chance to become part of the collective knowledge of Afro - American people, because it did not resist the negative stereotype and racial prejudice on the one side, and the dominating ideology of modernity and civilisation on the other. Myth and legends do not thrive within such surroundings, but nevertheless the need for them is even more pressing. So the historic maroon is replaced by the imagined maroon, the "inner maroon", whereby a "maroon literature" is produced.

In his novel *The Secret Ladder* (1963), Wilson Harris describes this process in a set of striking metaphors: Fenwick, a modern - minded survey engineer, moves with his crew up the Canje River into the interior of Guyana, which is settled sparsely by a poverty - stricken black population of maroon descendants. The climate, nature and strange circumstances

make Fenwick gradually lose the control over his rational mind, particularly when he meets Poseidon, the leader of the river people:

“Rumours had created a tortuous and labyrinthine genealogy for Poseidon, the oldest inhabitant of the Canje. His grandfather had been a runaway African slave who had succeeded in evading capture and had turned into a wild cannibal man in the swamps, devouring melting white cocerite flesh wherever he spied the mirage of high baking land [...]” (Harris 1963: 21f.)

Poseidon, however, turns out to be less a god of the rivers, than a miserable old chap, who organises a poor resistance by his people against the survey which they understand (rightly) as a first step towards dispossession of their land and their freedom. In the conclusion we find, once more, the stereotypical setting of traditional maroon stories, when in a nightly clearing, next to camp fire and a cave, the “maroons” gather together. They get hold of two members of the survey crew, and when Poseidon is killed by accident, they intend to kill the strangers in a last act of frenzy. But they desist from their savage act because they are afraid of the police: “Time was prepared to bind its possessions above these unknown relics and over no other origin or abyss than itself [...]” (ibid.:126)

In the last example, the invention as well as the loss of the maroon fantasies become touchstones within an existential crisis of the Afro - American intellectual, as it is lived by Samuel, one of the many heroes in Maryse Condé’s large historical novel *Segou*. He is an educated young man of African origin, who lives in London; his mother is an immigrant daughter of the Trelawny maroons of Jamaica, who had told her son the fabulous tales of the deeds and the spirit of her ancestors. Samuel, who is upset by his experiences of white prejudice and black passive acceptance, finally travels to Jamaica in search of “his” people. What he finds is a miserable and isolated village, where the inhabitants, violent and suspicious of foreigners, are unable to understand the motivation of this strange young man. In danger of being executed as a “spy,” he flees, feeling profoundly deceived:

“Il lui semblait que sa jeunesse était restée dans le cirque de Maroon Town, et que c’était un vieillard qui retournait vers Stony Gut. Un vieillard désabusé, amer. Eh oui, les Marrons n’étaient plus qu’un ramassis de meurt - de - faim, féroces et stériles. Il fallait s’accoutumer à cette idée. Alors, qu’est - ce qui donnerait du prix aux instants désormais? Rien. Rien. Rien.” (Condé 1985 II: 260)

PART II

ARCHETYPES AND HISTORY

II.1. SLAVERY IN THE OLD WORLD

New World slavery, especially if connected with the plantation system, is a particular and unique experience, “an anomalous institution in Western culture” (Curtin 1977: 3). Never before, to our knowledge, had there been a form of human bondage which was as homogeneous and institutionally secured and which had affected so large areas and so many people on two continents. It is difficult to find other examples of societies which were dominated by conflict and oppression³⁹ so profoundly and for so long, whereby a particular and distinct culture emerged.

On the other hand, New World slavery is part of the one large family of forms of human bondage which can hardly be delimited externally nor differentiated internally, even if there are institutional and legislative criteria: the fate of a slave “logman”, who cuts timber in Belizean jungles and can easily walk away whenever he feels that he is not well treated or does not receive his fair reward, can hardly be compared to that of a Jamaican field slave or even an indentured servant who nominally is not a slave. Comparisons across national boundaries and historical periods are even more difficult, because the meaning of technical and juridical terms is fallacious. In Spanish America of the 16th century, very different terms - *naboría*, *mita*, *encomienda* and outright slavery - were used to name the bondage of the Indians; but what they really meant varied according to the particular decade and the local conditions:

“La plupart des sociétés esclavagistes possèdent un vocabulaire étendu recouvrant diverses conditions d’assujettissement qui n’ont plus d’équivalents dans nos langues et qu’on rend uniformément par ‘esclave’” (Meillassoux: 9).

Curtin, referring to Igor Kopytoff, defines slavery as “a bundle of rights one person can hold over another” (ibid). He demonstrates that not only may this bundle be entirely different in distinct cultures, but also it may be enforced to different degrees according to changing economic necessities.

Generalisations therefore have a limited value; nevertheless it seems reasonable to consider separately two faces of New World slavery: one is seen as part of the tradition of human bondage, in particular those who had prevailed on the Iberian peninsula and in Africa; the other is linked to specific products or forms of production, and reached its peak in the period of early capitalism. Very often the first more traditional form is seen as belonging to an Iberian form of New World slavery; the second, the capitalist variant, appears as a result of specific economic developments in Britain and France. As we will see in the last part of this chapter, this is a simplification of historic realities which were subject to social and economic circumstances rather than to national traditions and “mentalities”; nevertheless this simplification is helpful in understanding a period when new institutions appeared in the American continent and had to be accommodated and legitimised according to Old World traditions. But we should be aware that the historical foundations of slavery

³⁹ This assumption had been, in the early sixties, subject to a debate around the understanding of the term “plural society” which, according to Braithwaite (1960: 880), supposed the existence of a minimal consensus and cooperation as a basic requirement of any human community, whereas M.G. Smith (1965: Introduction) considered the (Caribbean) plantation society as an historical example of society founded exclusively on conflict and oppression.

reflect complex processes of convergence, by which, to varying degrees, both sources, the traditional Iberian and the modern “capitalist” variant, and even other influences may be found. The reason for these convergences are not always national traditions and requirements, but again local and historical circumstances. On the other hand, we will find that New World slavery had already acquired a high degree of internationalisation in the 17th century. In spite of constant rivalries, the different colonising powers cooperated in the defence of an institution whose ethical foundations were more and more questioned; they agreed on its institutional frame, its legitimation and legislation and, above all, on its purpose, homogenising more and more New World slavery. In the 18th and 19th century a slave was a well - defined “thing”.

This does not apply to slavery in the Old World; it seems that even the terms “slave” and “slavery” had been used retrospectively to describe a very wide range of forms of dependence and serfdom and had acquired connotations which rather belong to the inventory of civil rights and liberties characteristic of the beginning of the age of Enlightenment: freedom of movement, the right to possession and to personal safety or general protection under the law - in other words those qualities which make up a person considered as “free” in the legal sense. It is well known that in traditional societies - in the European Middle Ages as well as in (pre - colonial) Africa - these liberties and rights were not a “natural” part of any person but are connected to a status acquired by birth or conferred (or withdrawn) by other persons who appear as the “owners” of others who depend on them. Obviously, however, in any functioning social system there exist certain traditional rights which are not easily withdrawn: the guarantee of shelter and subsistence necessary to survive, a certain protection against wilful mutilation or murder and the right to found a family and to procreate in a biological and social sense. But even these prerogatives may be absent or waved in certain cases, as for instance in the case of prisoners of war.

In fact there are no general criteria which allow us to distinguish slavery from various other forms of serfdom and vassalage. Historically the generalisation (and internationalisation!) of the term of slavery has been utilised to justify the international trade of persons of bondage who, in reality, by being sold from one place and one culture to another, acquired an entirely new (and generally worse) status compared with the one they had before: an African family slave would, by being sold to a Muslim trader, be considered more “alien” and inferior than in his previous surroundings; his situation would again be worse when he was sold to a Portuguese, and would deteriorate even more when he was transferred to the New World⁴⁰. The moral evaluation of these changes, however, could run in the opposite direction, using the argument of a spiritual salvation; both, Muslims and Christians, claimed that a heathen slave, by being sold to them, would acquire notions of civilisation and true religion and thus could better his previous condition.

A well known example of this “offer” to negotiate one’s body against spiritual advantages is the plea of Las Casas to replace the hitherto free Indian slaves by Africans who were already in bondages. Later the abject condition of slaves in Africa was enhanced and continuously exaggerated to show how fortunate African slaves were when they were

⁴⁰ Cf. Curtin, *op.cit.*,9: “When the European on the African coast purchased a slave, he bought a bundle of rights over that slave. Whatever the African content of that bundle, the bundle of he sold in the Americas was dramatically different. The new owners could define their rights as they chose, often going beyond the kinds of powers a slave owner could legitimately exercise in the Mediterranean, partly, because human rights were hard to enforce in the Americas, even more because the slaves were not only aliens, but racially distinct aliens, and more still because slavery in the new society was no longer a marginal institution affecting a minority labour force.”

sold to Europeans. The current image is that of an despotic and greedy petty African “king” who would not hesitate to murder dozens of slaves at a whim or to sell his own kin for tobacco and guns. The following quotation from Father Pelleprat (1655: 51/52) is still moderate, but interesting, as he describes Africans as “natural” slaves who need subjugation and who accept it even without necessity:

“Il arrive quelques fois que les Rois vendent leurs propres femmes, qui dans leur captivité conservent toujours quelques marques de leur première dignité: elles gardent tant d’empire sur les Esclaves de leur nation, que si estant chargées de quelque fardeau elles les rencontrent en leur chemin, et les obligent de le porter. Tous les Esclaves qui ont été sujets des Rois leurs maris les respectent autant, et leur obéissent aussi ponctuellement que si elles estoient encore leurs reines. Tant ces peuples ont de vénération pour la Royauté! Si par hazard elles les rencontrent sous un même maistre qui ayant esté leurs sujets, elles leur font souvent faire tout le travail qui leur est ordonné, ou achever celuy qu’elles ont commencé, cependant qu’elles les regardent & qu’elles se reposent. Les prétendus vassaux ont tant de soin de leurs Reines, qu’ils contribuent tout ce qu’ils prennent à leur nourriture, et à leur entretien, allans pêcher ou chasser les Dimanches et les Festes, et mesmes dérober ce qu’ils trouvent de meilleur, et de plus délicat, pour leur apporter.”

On the other side, abolitionists who supposed that freedom is a natural and absolute desire of any man, tended to describe slavery in Africa as a an ill - named form of natural dependence which is very close to that of children and wives in an extended family. This is the view that Equiano defends (1789:19):

“those prisoners which were not sold or redeemed we kept as slaves: but how different was their condition from that of the slaves in the West Indies! With us they do no more work than other members of the community, than even their masters; their food, clothing, and lodging, were nearly the same as theirs, except that they were not permitted to eat with those who were free - born; and there was scarcely any other difference between them than a superior degree of importance, which the head of a family possesses in our state, and that authority which, as such, he exercises over every part of his household. Some of these slaves have even slaves under them, as their own property, and for their own use”.

Most modern authors would rather subscribe to Equiano’s point of view, that in pre - colonial Africa, slavery had been entirely different or at least more “lenient” in comparison to New World slavery. “Slaves” were members of the household, in which they ate and slept and they could generally not be sold (Crété 1989: 84). This domestic form of slavery - the most wide - spread in Africa (Renault/Daget 1985: 60 ff) - took many different forms, most of which cannot be clearly differentiated from traditions of serfdom. According to Meillassoux an essential quality of these “slaves” is that they are not genetically related to the clans, lineages or single households and they are denied social procreation (1986: 35ff), but in the appendix he gives another more economic definition of slavery (“esclavagisme”): “système social fondé sur l’exploitation d’une classe de producteurs ou de prestataires de services renouvelée essentiellement par acquisition” (1986: 327)

This definition already refers to cases which may be delimited more easily: first to more complex political entities with a highly developed division of labour, where “slavery” may be related to special occupations and the social roles of particular castes. These could be the acquisition - either by war or by trade - of ethnic foreigners known for certain abilities, such as masonry or the art of “singing” (Renault/Daget 1985: 27), or of eunuchs who were the main export of Bournou (ibid: 37, 59); most common was the acquisition of

soldiers who constituted huge slave armies (ibid: 61). But again, it would be difficult to draw a line between slavery and vassalage: the *tyeddo* or slave warriors of Senegambia were directly subject to warring princes and enjoyed considerable power and privileges: they were highly feared as tax collectors or when punishing dissident villages which they pillaged at random (Crété 1989: 84/85).

The existence of slave armies is related to another aspect of African slavery which is essentially different from domestic slavery. Its main feature was the trade in slaves which, being the principal economical activity, created an important socio - economic and political network. Within the realm of traditional domestic slavery the buying and selling of slaves was not entirely excluded; it was, however not customary. Amongst most traditional societies, the personal accumulation of wealth did not offer any social advantage and might even been considered as suspicious, because it could be interpreted as a form of opposition to the established sovereign. The essential factor of production, the land, was collective property; often it belonged in a symbolic way to the ruler who allocated it to the various families or clans.

The major changes in this system of communal property were brought about by Islam⁴¹. Since the seventh century the Muslim countries on the Northern borders of Africa absorbed a growing number of black slaves which according to rough estimates grew annually from 100.000 persons at the beginning of this period to 2 millions from the fifteenth century onwards (Kake 1979: 169/179). This trade created a new professional class: the "Arab" slave merchant who for his activities had to rely on established trade routes, trading posts, wayside stations and local help. Services, various forms of supply and secondary trade brought wealth and urban development which bypassed the traditional centres of power. Trade towns as Timbuctu, Jenne, Agadez or Darfour acquired a relative (though never total) independence from the surrounding aristocratic powers; the establishment of security services and armies and the need of food supplies involved a growing number of people who very often were also slaves. The penetration of Islam furthered this change in economic behaviour: "(il) introduit les conditions sociales nécessaires au développement d'une économie individualiste de profit" (Meillassoux 1986: 241). This strange mentality and the fact that the merchants and their slaves were ethnically strangers prompted the traditional rulers to remain aloof from the slave trading centres, though they would never entirely renounce their sovereignty (Meillassoux 1986: 237).

This form of institutionalised African slave trading is important because, as had been mentioned previously, it served as a justification and a model for the Atlantic slave trade at least in its initial phase. According to the Spaniards it was beneficial, because it saved the Indians; this argument was still used, even when the fate of the Indians was no longer at stake. It was, however, not as clear as it seemed, for it implied that Christian nations legally recognised the status of people who had been imposed by heretical or even godless rulers. This was all the more surprising if one takes into account that the granting of personal freedom, rights and privileges was based - amongst Muslims and Christians alike - on religious grounds, over which the two competing religions virtually never agreed. But hardly any other community followed the example of the Bordeaux council which had forbidden slave trade within its communal borders as being unworthy of a Christian and civilised nation.

⁴¹ Several authors raise the question whether Islam as a religion encouraged the institution of slavery. This does not seem to be the case; it rather takes it as granted and allows enslavement of the unfaithful, particularly captives, but not without imposing certain regulations concerning their treatment.

Already during the Middle Ages, slavery had been an internationally recognised reality; without tacit agreements of this kind, the international slave trade would not have been possible. One of the more paradoxical origins of this internationalism had been the never ending wars between Muslims and Christians: the crusades, the invasion and the Reconquista of Spain, the Portuguese attacks on Ceuta and other places in North Africa and finally the increasingly common Mediterranean piracy⁴². Prisoners, sometimes noblemen and princes were part of the booty; they were enslaved but often redeemed; human beings thus became, on both sides, a commodity to be exchanged. Thence it was only a small step to the buying and selling of black slaves; they seemed to be an inexhaustible source of labour which their own rulers were more than willing to sell:

“En estos primeros momentos del contacto de los reinos guineanos podemos pensar que la obtención de esclavos sería relativamente fácil, dada la abundancia con que contaban los propios reyezuelos y que, sería siglos más tarde, cuando las racias tuvieran que robar los habitantes de las regiones de negros paganos y alejados de todo contacto con los proveedores” (Cortés Alonso 44).

Nearly all European nations accepted more or less openly the existence of slavery, but its importance varied from country to country. Until 1500 Spain was the leading slave keeping and slave trading nation and Seville was known as the largest slave market. Through the previous centuries a small trickle of African slaves reached Europe through Arab - Spanish commercial contacts; the main bulk, however, consisted in Moorish captives, mostly prisoners of war who remained in constant supply during the centuries of the Reconquista. They were supplemented by a number of Guanches, the indigenous population of the Canary Islands and, from 1493 onwards, by American Indians; but also Turks and Russians, and even a few Spaniards appeared on the slave lists. Slavery was by no means a matter of race or nation. It appears that Moors fetched the best prices, followed by Africans and Canary Islanders; last were the American Indians who did not adapt well to life in Seville⁴³. The end of the century seems to have been a turning point: the number of Moors diminished, though there was some reinforcement due to later Moorish revolts; Guanches became scarce and the import of American Indians stopped. The number of black slaves rose sharply as a result of direct Portuguese imports from 1462 (Cortés Alonso: 39), but the slave markets of Lagos and Lisbon began to become more important than Seville and other Spanish slave markets.

How did Seville slaves live? How does slavery in Spain compare with African and Muslim slavery? In medieval Spain the accumulation of wealth was not frowned upon, as long as it was done in a socially accepted way. Honour and the legitimate exhibition of wealth was more important. In this sense slaves would be acquired as domestic servants and sometimes more than were actually needed: “Muy pronto, la novedad o el simple exotismo burgués los convertiría en símbolo de status social” (Sáez 1994: 29). Many slaves, however, particularly those who had special skills or knew a trade, did not enjoy such a comfortable life: They were bought as an investment and either employed by their owner or hired out. As guilds controlled the distribution of lucrative and honourable trades, slaves

⁴² Ibn Battuta himself tells how, in 1335, he only just escaped from being caught by Christian galleys between Marbella and Malaga; when he got to Malaga the next day, he went to see the judge whom he met counting the money from transactions of slaves and prisoners (Cortés Alonso 1986: 36)

⁴³ The first Indian, a girl of seven years obviously imported by Columbus himself, appeared on the slave market in 1595; being an exotic rarity, she was sold for an enormous price. Very soon, however, the price of Indians fell dramatically; this reflects their being of little use in Spanish society, but also the problems of their legal status: the first of many royal orders to free all Indian slaves was published already in 1496 (Deive 1995: 68f)

very often had to content with “trabajos considerados viles y despreciables” (Silva 1988: 262), except Moorish craftsmen who knew how to produce leatherwork, brasswork and other typical Muslim handicrafts. Employment of slaves in agriculture, particularly on large estates seemed to be rare, “porque en el campo la mano de obra era más barata, más numerosa y por supuesto, más experimentada que la esclava en esas lides” (ibid.: 263). It is noteworthy that small peasants were cheaper than slaves (cf. also Klein 1986: 17); we will see that in the New World the situation was reversed: estate owners claimed that they could not afford European servants.

Generally speaking, slaves were well treated, in any case no worse than other low class people (Prada 1978: 266). It is noteworthy that they enjoyed a certain legal protection through the *Siete Partidas*, Alfonso the Wise’s 13th century collection of laws. According to these, slavery was considered as an accidental and unnatural state of a human being whose “natural” condition is freedom⁴⁴. Slavery was legal, but exceptional; slaves were ordinary persons who had lost some of their rights through a “just war” against heathen nations (Laviña: 45) or by other personal circumstances, such as the breach of a contract or the failure to pay debts. Freedom could be bought either by the slaves themselves or by their relatives, though it was expensive. Most slaves, however, would regain their freedom during their lifetime, very often on the death of their master, when he, traditionally, would grant this in his will (Silva 1986: 32); this corresponded to the stipulations of the *Partida V*, título VIII, that “la obligación que uno hiciese de servir a otro por toda la vida [...] sería contrario a la libertad natural de las personas” (cf. Olea 1979: 10). In many cases, when the master had publicly expressed his will, but died without leaving a written declaration, legal disputes arose. It is noteworthy that in certain cases the public authorities would intervene and prevent or revoke manumission in cases of bad conduct or, more often, when the slave did not convert to Christianity. But when all such conditions were met, the former slave became free; he automatically enjoyed all civil liberties, would generally not suffer any discrimination, and could go to any place he wanted, often returning home (Cortés Alonso 1986: 35). This, no doubt, also applied to black slaves, who, surprisingly, were the most frequently manumitted (Silva 1988: 268).

To what degree was the Spanish institution of slavery carried on in the New World colonies? It is difficult to give a straight answer to this question. Peninsular Spain’s civil jurisdiction continued to be very restrictive on the question of perpetual serfdom⁴⁵, but as with other European nations, slavery in the American colonies became a special case. This became already apparent from the fact that black captives were not subjected to the “act of confession”, a declaration of refusal of the Christian faith, which served to prevent arbitrary acts of enslavement. Black slaves were, without further question, considered as “enemigo de la fe católica” (Cortés Lopez 1986: 19). It is obvious that these amendments reflected the early experiences of plantation slavery in Santo Domingo, which included a major rebellion of black slaves in 1521 (see II.4.). It demonstrated that the social reality of slavery in the New World had overtaken the traditional institution and from the 17th century onwards important religious writers, such as Alonso de Sandoval and Pedro Claver, advocated its being treated separately. To a certain degree the later Spanish American slave legislation, up to the *Código Carolino* (1784) and the *Código Negro* (1789), still defended a

⁴⁴ “Naturalmente se deben doler los hombres de los de su ley cuando caen en cautivo en poder de los enemigos, pero ellos son desapoderados de libertad que es la más cara cosa que los hombres pueden haber en este mundo... La libertad es la más noble cosa del mundo; así por el contrario, la servidumbre es la más vil cosa del mundo...” (part. 2, Ley 8, título 22, part. 4, quoted by Cortés Lopez 1986, 13)

⁴⁵ 1583: “[...] el arrendamiento hecho por toda la vida es nula”; these clauses appear also in the adaptations of the Code Napoléon and in the laws of 1851 (Olea 1979:10/11)

number of principles of the *Siete Partidas* alien to other slave legislation: the slave was not just an object, but had certain rights which he could claim in court. But the application of these laws was difficult to control and always met the severe opposition of the planters (see II.4.). The *Código Negro* of 1789 was the last great attempt of the Spanish Crown to submit the question of slavery to a general legal regulation. Although it reflected certain specific enlightened tendencies of the period, it also demonstrated the perennial Spanish problem: the huge gap between a highly idealistic and legalistic approach to the question of serfdom on the one side, and the continuous failure to implement it in the face of the particular interests of both the old and new feudal aristocracies.

Compared with Spain the Portuguese attitude to black slavery was more pragmatic. The main reason for the difference was the direct link between the expansion of Portugal as a maritime power and the acquisition of black slaves. From the beginning, slaves were seen as a commodity with which Portuguese overseas expansion could be financed; capturing and selling slaves was a part of the new trade relationship which entirely transformed the Portuguese empire. It had begun many decades before the discovery of the New World with the conquest of Ceuta in 1415 and subsequent attempts to open a new maritime route to the Spice Islands of the East by circumnavigating the southern tip of Africa. Its main instigator was Prince Henry the Navigator, and although he did not live to witness the final stage, the rounding of Cape Horn in 1488, his influence led to the gradual increase of maritime technology and geographical knowledge. As a member of the royal family and as a master of the wealthy Order of Christ, he had not only the necessary material means at his disposal, but also represented the three great columns of the Portuguese state: the Crown, the church and the bourgeois merchant class.

The main intention of the various Portuguese expeditions was to undermine the Muslim trade system in every respect, and this included the capturing of slaves by using Muslim techniques of slave raiding. Slave raids were a natural adjunct to the numerous expeditions along the West African coast and involved in the seizure of unfortunate individuals and attacks on villages (*filhamento*), creating a climate of insecurity in this area which had been hitherto unaffected by Muslim slave trading. When the ship's crews felt secure enough, they also undertook incursions (*resgate*) along the rivers into the interior. The justification for these activities was wide - ranging, but the conversion of heathen savages did not figure in the first place⁴⁶. The capture of slaves was part of the commercial success of the expeditions; the Algarvian town of Lagos became the most important European slave market. It was inaugurated in 1444, one year after the the discovery of Arguim, which was to become the most important Portuguese trading station on the West African coast, and from the 16th century onwards it surpassed Seville. Compared with the later Atlantic slave trade the 15th century, however, the initial stages of the Portuguese slave trade were not dramatic. The Portuguese brought only 700 to 800 slaves to Europe each year (Latour/Carreira 1979: 121). Nevertheless, it signified the beginning of a new era.

The acquisition of slaves by means of arbitrary and haphazard raids very soon proved to be ineffective:

“As populações ribeirinhas passaram a olhar com grande desconfiança a presença de navios e de homem brancos, e não se aproximavam das praias, receosas de serem capturados. Passaram ao mesmo tempo a atacar os brancos e pôr vezes a impedir o seu desembarque.” (Carreira 1979: 15/16).

⁴⁶ The chronicler Zurara mentions five reasons: scientific curiosity, commercial interests, the probing of the limits of Muslim power, the search for isolated Christian kingdoms and, finally, the conversion of pagans (Carreira 1983: 14ff).

In order to avoid these problems the Portuguese government promulgated a number of measures: reducing and controlling the number of slaves who could be extracted from a certain area by issuing *licenças* and *arrendamentos*, and by exploring more coastal areas hitherto untouched by the slave trade. These attempts to reduce the impact of Portuguese slave acquisition were ineffective due to the lack of money and organisation to implement them. In the long run it became preferable for the Portuguese to buy slaves from the local rulers rather than capture them by force.

This strategy encouraged the development of new institutions and trade relations which corresponded to Muslim trade relations, but which, in the context of the New World trade, acquired a different historic importance: the establishment of a network of contracts and friendly relations with local traders and African “kings”. The best example of this technique was the series of Portuguese treaties with the Congo Kingdom discovered by Diogo Cão in 1483. In a second stage, the Portuguese secured a continuous presence along the West African by the establishment of *feitorias*, *i.e.* trading posts and strongholds. Other European nations followed rapidly in sending garrisons and traders, competing for the best shore sites and often constructing their own fortifications, as happened on the Gold Coast and the Slave Coast, in close proximity to those of other nations. All this served to create an image of a strange and distorted trade which characterised West African daily life for centuries. Pierre Verger gives an eloquent description of this situation when gathering historic information on the fate of the Portuguese Fort of Ouidah: slave ships, sailors, soldiers and traders of all nations, living in a state of continuous tension, wait, often for months, until enough slaves are brought ashore to fill the ships. For the sake of their own security they had to cooperate, but they also competed and fought among themselves. The traders and the kings, above all the king of Dahomey, decided upon the distribution of the human merchandise; despotic and greedy themselves, they are constantly harassed by their European clients. Nobody pauses to redefine the traditional concept of African slavery. Continuously wars are triggered off just to satisfy the increasing need of prisoners to be sold; undesirable persons are condemned to slavery for minor offences by their own kinsmen; even members of the same family sell each other to settle debts (Carreira 1979: 21/22). Insecurity and political intrigue characterise the whole coastal area; its depopulation is alarming, leading to more wars and slave raids further inland. Right from its beginning the Atlantic slave trade had been an international affair, opposing, but also uniting traders of different European nations, Muslims, traditional and new African rulers. Its victims were the African nations who were depopulated, dispersed, isolated and cut off from any form of internal development (Devisse 1988: 114ff).

II.2. INDENTURED LABOUR AND DOMESTIC SLAVERY

To the average reader it may appear accidental that both the heroes of the typical life stories we discussed in the beginning (I.1.), had been acculturated in structurally similar areas of the New World: Kunta Kinte had been sold to a small Virginian estate where he lived most of his life; Equiano was first brought to Barbados and from there went to Virginia, to a place which we easily recognise as Chesapeake Bay:

“a river a good way from the sea, about Virginia county, where we saw few of our native Africans, and not one soul who could talk to me” (Equiano 1789: 38/39).

Kunta Kinte had the same experience of sudden isolation: He hardly ever encountered an African - born slave and none who ever spoke his own language. Thus his

linguistic acculturation was very rapid, though he remained reluctant⁴⁷. The largest part of Equiano's acculturation occurred when he went as a sailor to England and other European ports: He eagerly grasped any kind of knowledge or skill he could acquire and even began to learn to read and write. He now compares the foreign ways of life positively to his native customs:

“ [...] in seeing that these white people did not sell one another as we did, I was much pleased. I was astonished at the wisdom of whites in all things which I beheld” (Equiano 1789: 43)

Equiano's and Kinte's fates were exceptional. In the late 18th century, when they were captured, there was a very high probability, that they would, like most African - born slaves, become field hands in a sugar plantation and end their miserable lives within a few years, leaving no known descendants or anything else to be remembered by. Both our heroes learned a trade, Equiano as a sailor, Kunte Kinte that of a buggy driver; their value increased, they lived close to white people and this was a certain guarantee of good treatment and personal security.

Is there any explanation for this exceptional destiny? Michael Mullin, in his excellent study on acculturation and resistance in American slave societies chooses Virginia, particularly the Chesapeake Bay, and the Island of Barbados in order to illustrate a type of slave economy which he contrasts with two other examples: Jamaica and South Carolina, which he considers as mature plantation societies. Virginia and Barbados had, for geographical or historic reasons, been settled early by relatively large white populations:

“Not only was the average slaveholding much smaller in the Chesapeake Bay region than in the Caribbean and along the rice coast (and so new Negroes were less likely to encounter other countrymen), but tobacco cultivation also extended far inland. Small buyers carried new Negroes to farms located well off the major river highways.... Even if they were purchased by wealthy slaveholders ... the effect was still the same: new Negroes were isolated. The rich sprinkled them among people - usually Creoles well entrenched and protective of the same - who lived on small and remote satellite plantations, called *quarters*. These circumstances, which channelled their social life in ways unknown to slaves in the other regions, made Africans in the Chesapeake Bay region more susceptible to rapid and thorough deculturation than they were elsewhere” (Mullin 1994: 19).

The main variables which conditioned this type of slave economy were: a relatively balanced ratio of free whites and black slaves; a diversified economy which included various types of skilled crafts; the corresponding existence of a market town and some urbanisation; the comparatively small size of the average holding; a balanced ratio of male and female slaves which again is part of another important indicator: the self - reproduction of the slave population (cf. also Williams 1944: 26).

All these factors were not very likely to be found in most of the Caribbean Islands and the sugar growing areas of Brazil: African slaves had to be imported in an increasing number to replace those wasted in field labour. Equiano who had been sold for three years to a plantation on the Island of Montserrat and who is a keen observer, notes this wilful

⁴⁷ “His learning to speak the toubob tongue, he realized, had played a big part [...]. In his everyday talking, he seldom even thought of Mandinka words any more, excepting those few that for some reasons his mind still clung to. Indeed, by now - Kunta grimly faced it - he even thought in the toubab tongue. In countless things he did as well as said and thought, his Mandinka ways had slowly been replaced by those of the blacks he had been among” (Haley 1974: 328)

waste of human resources, when he compares the dreadful working situation in Montserrat⁴⁸ to the still relatively benign slavery on Barbados:

“Even in Barbados, notwithstanding those human exceptions which I have mentioned and others with which I am acquainted that justly make it quoted as a place where slaves meet with best treatment, and need fewest recruits of any in the West Indies; yet this island (Montserrat) requires 1000 negroes annually to keep up the original stock, which is only 80 000. So that the whole term of a negro’s life may be said to be there, but 16 years” (1798: 76).

The living conditions of slaves varied widely according to historical and geographic conditions, to the size of the colony and to the crops it produced; but most scholars agree that the question of whether and to what extent a slave population was able to reproduce itself is an important indicator which generally divides slave societies into two groups: those, obviously a majority, where the slave population did so and the rest which were entirely dependent on the continuous importation of new slaves. This difference highlights two types of colonial exploitation which allow entirely different answers to a central question: To what extent were slaves able to lead a “normal” life which included the maintenance of their physical and mental health, a minimal amount of social life and of communication within the society where they lived, and the possibility of creating a family and to reproduce their kind? One statistic which may indicate the differences in living conditions, is the percentage of slaves shipped to the different areas of the New World during the years of slavery: 48 % of the total number went to the Caribbean, 38 % went to Brazil, 10 % to the rest of Latin America and only 4 % to North America (Curtin, quoted by Mörner 1981:17). Given this information it is not difficult to see, where the hardcore, slave - consuming plantation societies are to be found: Brazil, where the Portuguese plantation system had been installed to, but also the comparatively small Caribbean area - exclusively the non - Spanish possessions. Another way of computing survival and reproduction rates is to calculate the total number of slaves imported to an area and to compare it with the number of slaves still surviving on the day of abolition; in the Caribbean it was only 1/3 of the total number of persons imported and this compares unfavourably to the United States where, during the same period, the number of black slaves multiplied by eleven (Lowenthal 1972: 43). These statistics explain, why Equiano tried by all means to leave the Caribbean and its destructive form of plantation economy.

The distinctions between “tough” and “lenient” slave societies are a delicate subject, because there has always been a tendency towards their being either underestimated or over - interpreted. Underestimation of differences may, for instance, be the consequence of particular and recurrent approaches which define the classical 17th century sugar plantation colony as the final and “mature” form of colonial exploitation. Most interpretations of Plantation America focus on the plantation at a “mature” stage as the most conspicuous phenomenon: large latifundias with at least 200 to 300 slaves, the majority of them *bossales* from Africa; a low life expectancy among the slaves and the correspondent necessity for importation; and finally a high degree of social tension and a corresponding level of repression. It is obvious that this culminative phase of the plantation system was limited both historically - mainly to the 18th century - and geographically - to a few tropical islands. Alternative examples, such as that of Virginia, would therefore appear, in relation to this

⁴⁸ The Island, in the late 18th century, was divided up into 42 estates with 9000 slaves and (1788) 434 whites (Mullin 1994: 219). This makes a ratio of roughly 20:1, which is nearly as bad as that of Saint-Domingue at the beginning of the Revolution (cf. p.290f). It is therefore not surprising that the island experienced one of the major slave rebellions in 1768.

one - dimensional level, to be transitional, even if Virginia, like many other regions, never became a sugar producer.

It is, in fact, very tempting to suppose an evolutionary process which leads from the domestic slavery in Spain towards similar institutions in the New World, upon which the “mature” capitalist forms of plantation economy were grafted. Though this evolutionary model is important for some human sciences, it very often does not coincide with the concrete data: in large parts of the North - American South and the Latin American mainland slave labour continued to be used on a domestic or feudal level; even the North East of Brazil with its large sugar production appears, in some respects, as an intermediate case, as the Brazilian plantation economy continued to depend on exchanges with a subsistence farming and cattle - breeding interior. As we will see in the next chapter, it even seems doubtful whether plantation economy of the “pure” or “mature” type could thrive elsewhere than on islands and in island - like areas. On the other hand, the case of Santo Domingo will indicate (II,4) that Spanish colonies also could rush into a fully fledged plantation economy with all its negative aspects which rapidly declined, thus demonstrating an “evolution” in the opposite sense. The rise and fall of plantation economies did not depend exclusively on cultural matrices and their internal dynamics, but also on a number of external factors, such as international markets and political crises.

Another reason for simplification may be ethical: it seems improper to differentiate between “good” slave societies and “bad” ones, especially if such an *a priori* evaluation serves to condemn certain societies - the French and the English - and to exonerate others as the Tannenbaum argument did. Furthermore we may have the problem that the discussion of mild forms of slavery under “good masters” easily slips into dubious connotations: scarce historical facts and their literary or ideological interpretation form an inextricable mixture. Particularly this aspect makes it advisable to stay away from generalisation and to focus the following discussion on a very limited, though significant range: the Caribbean areas under non - Iberian domination during the 17th and partly 18th century, before they were invaded by the sugar industry and thus became, in a true mercantilist sense, “ideal colonies”.

As the Caribbean islands were, like the entire American continent, a Spanish claim, the first British and French landfall in 1615 was rather unobtrusive: Companies of both nations landed a handful of humble white settlers on the island of St. Kitts; it was followed by the subsequent colonisation of most islands of the Lesser Antilles and the later acquisition of larger territories: Jamaica, conquered by a British expedition in 1655 and the Western part of Santo Domingo (St. Domingue) ceded in 1697 by Spain to France, according to the Treaty of Rijswijk. All these acquisitions were colonised by private societies, the respective mercantile “Companies”; certainly, these companies were financially and politically very close to the state interests, but the governments preferred, for various reasons, to keep a low profile: first, they wanted to avoid the accusation of encroaching upon Spanish territories and interests; second, the companies represented the growing independence of the “national” economies from traditional and religious concepts of statehood; third, private companies had, unlike Spain, less difficulty pursuing a policy of settlement and economic exploitation which was determined exclusively by the principles of utility.

In reality, however, the beginnings of French and British colonisation were not particularly rational. The chartered companies lacked previous experience in colonisation and, moreover, had to cope with an already existing population, albeit floating and marginal. Reports of the French Governors of Saint Domingue give an eloquent picture of early colonial society as a rather unsteady and heterogeneous phenomenon:

“Cette colonie est composé de trois sortes de gens. Il y a des Habitants, des flibustiers ou Corsaire, et des Boucaniers.

Les premiers sont en plus grand nombre. Ils se sont fixés et resident actuellement pour cultiver la terre.

Les seconds qui sont les flibustiers font tous les ans des courses sur l’estranger et rapportent leur butin qui se consomme parmy lesquels ils vivent pendant le temps qu’ils ne prennent pas estre en mer.

Les troisièmes qui sont les Boucaniers en résidence de mesme après qu’ils ont esté faire leur challet dans les bois.

Il peut y avoir mille et douze cent habitants dans les Cul de Sac de St. Domingue, cinq à six cent flibustiers et environ cent boucanniers qui sont tous gens très fort libertins accoustumés a la debauche et a vivre independans sans reconnoistre aucun chef parmy eux”⁴⁹.

The *Flibustiers* are the remnants of the former mighty “Brotherhood” of Pirates, who were particularly numerous in Saint-Domingue, but also travelled and lived in other parts of the tortuous shorelines and islands of Central America and the Caribbean; *Boucaniers* were their allies and counterparts on shore, often retired or disabled pirates who, by means of subsistence cropping and hunting of cattle, provided seafaring pirates with food, in exchange for gunpowder and other manufactured goods. Another partner of these “anarchic” communities (Sander/Steger 1973: 186) were the last Carib Indians and the first fugitive slaves. All these groups added up to an often exploited romantic picture of a good life in early times, when a man was able to live an adventurous life in freedom, within a lush natural environment, far away from constraining authorities, hard work and moral restrictions.

D’Orgeron’s report seems to confirm this image, but, at the same time demonstrates the low esteem in which Flibustiers and Boucaniers were held; in fact their days of liberty were numbered, as, from the end of the century onwards, the main powers controlling the Caribbean, became more interested in the area’s stability. Accordingly, the governors continuously pleaded with the colonial authorities at home to send more “habitants”, white peasants. Another indication of these endeavours to overcome the demographic and social instability of the new colonies, are the frequent pleas to send more women:

“Il seroit à propos de faire passer les filles à la coste, a fin d’y attirer des habitans, et d’y attacher des ménages, mais il n’en faut point de débordées, elles ruinent la santé des hommes [...]”⁵⁰

In the same report the Governor asks for other attributes of a civilised society: honourable priests, for the few available are “des apostats, sortis de leurs convents par libertinage, et l’on a peu de respect pour eux” (ibid.); or a small detachment of 25 (!) soldiers to be able to arrest drunkards and petty thieves, for the colonial inhabitants would not collaborate with the authorities.

The only guarantee of a prosperous future for the colonies was the presence of the “habitants”, the white settlers. What kind of people were they? The companies had

⁴⁹ D’Orgeron, Memoire sur l’Etat de la Colonie de Saint-Domingue, Ms, Archive d’Outre - Mer, Aix - en - Provence

⁵⁰ Memoire du Sr. Pouïancay concernant la Colonie de l’Isle de la Tortue, et Coste de St. Domingue... , 1681, Archive d’Outre - Mer, Aix en Provence.

recruited the first generation of them amongst the landless peasants, had brought them to the colonies and assigned to them the task of trying to cultivate various colonial products, through “trial and error of individual groups who had to make decisions for themselves” (Augier, Gordon, Hall 1960: 38). Some of the products succeeded - especially tobacco, indigo and coffee - and brought some profit, others failed. To live without friends and women, to clear tropical forests and to plant unknown and incalculable crops, was not the paradise the new settlers had imagined. Some of them defected, others, the seasoned and experienced craftsmen, were sent to other islands, where new colonies were to be founded and where they had to begin all over again (Chaudenson 1992: 56f). Thus, the demand for settlers and field hands never ceased and the companies, which themselves were always close to insolvency, had to find inexpensive ways to recruit and bring them across the ocean. The answer to their dilemma was a class of new immigrants, whom the British called *Indentured Servants* and the French *Engagés*: poor peasants without land property or vagrant persons who were granted free passage against a contract which obliged them to work for a determined period (usually three years). At the end of their servitude they were granted a piece of land and sometimes a limited money subsidy which was intended to enable them to begin a new life as independent peasants⁵¹.

In the beginning this scheme worked well and effectively. An already established settler would call upon poor relatives, neighbours or other people he knew from the home country. These would travel to one of the known ports, sign the contract and, upon arrival in the colony join their employers who had paid for the passage. Usually both the employer and the servant came from the same region and the same walk of life, and often knew each other. This was the basis of mutual trust and protected the servant; personal relations gave birth to relatively egalitarian regional communities in the New World which left its traces in the development of local Creole languages (cf VI.2).

The detailed researches of Debien (1974) show also how this system deteriorated very rapidly due to the “natural” development of various interests: the colonial governors would pressure the home government to send more labour; the authorities at home would seize the opportunity to clean their cities of vagrants and other undesirable persons; and, most important, the captains could fill every available space in their ships with servants acquired by dubious means and “sell” them to future employers. Williams (1944: 10ff) provided impressive documentation on these new practices:

“The merchants and justices were in the habit of straining the law to increase the number of felons who could be transported to the sugar plantations they own in the West Indies. They would terrify petty offenders with the prospects of hanging and then induce them to plead for transportation” (ibid.: 15).

Notorious also were the strategies of professional agents who would hang around the harbour inns, offering some money and plenty of liquor to some miserable fellow who, when waking up from his alcoholic haze, found himself on ship with a dubious contract in

⁵¹ See the description of Pelleprat (1655: 20/21): “Les Engagés sont des Européens qu’on transporte aux Isles pour y servir les habitants; on les appelle Engagés, parce qu’ils sont obligés de servir pendant trois ans ceux qui ont fait les frais de leur voyage qui peuvent céder ou vendre à d’autres le droit qu’ils ont sur leur personne, et sur leur liberté pendant ces trois années, lesquels étant expirés ils reçoivent pour salaire de leurs services cent livres de Petun (= Tabacco); & et demeurent en liberté de retourner en Europe, ou de travailler à y établir leur petite fortune”

his pocket⁵². Already by 1655, Father Pelleprat was denouncing the kidnappings which captains themselves condoned; the image he gives of the servant's life in paradise is dark:

“Ils s'en trouve d'assez méchants, et d'assez fourbes pour leur (les engagés) faire entrer dans leurs Navires, sous diverses pretextes, et quand ils y sont ils les retiennent par force, et leur passent malgré eux dans les isles où ils les vendent bien souvent à de Maistres qui les nourrissent très - mal, les font travailler excessivement, et au dessus de leurs forces, et ils les traitent avec tant d'inhumanité, que plusieurs y meurent en peu de temps” (1655: 21/22).

Captains become traders, servants become merchandise:

“Servitude, originally a free personal relation based on voluntary contract for a definite period of service, in lieu of transportation and maintenance, tended to pass into a property relation which asserted a control of varying extent over bodies and liberties of the person during service as if he were a thing” (Williams 1944: 16).

At the turn of the century the trade of indentured servants slowed down and, around 1725, came to an end. The bad fame of the contracts and the resulting difficulty of persuading even the most miserable rogues to sign them, is one reason; more important is that indentured labour was no longer competitive, neither in its price, nor in its performance. Sugar estates had become large enterprises and their owners

“font les diffiles sur le engagés qu'on leur propose parce que ce qu'ils veulent ce ne sont plus des ouvriers agricoles surtout, mais des artisans, des tonneliers, des charpentiers de moulin, des forgerons, des commandeurs, des cadres blancs indispensables à la bonne marche de leurs nouvelles plantations agrandies, équipées de gros moulins, pourvue de centaines de bêtes, peuplées de cinquante noirs et plus” (Debien 1952: 185).

As a mere field hand

“the Negro slave was cheaper. The money which procured a white man's service for ten years could buy a Negro for life” (Williams 1944: 19).

Governor Pouancey, desperately worried about the security of the colony of Saint-Domingue, already in 1681 was trying to support the immigration of white servants:

“Le soing que les habitans ont pris de faire passer á la coste grand nombre d'Engagés, est ce qui a le plus contribué à la peupler de Francois, sy on y avoit porté quantité de Nègres les habitans se seroient fournis et auroient négligés de venir de France des Engagés qui leur coutent beaucoup plus que les Nègres, ainsi la colonie seroit demeurée foible et exposée aux insultes des Espagnols”⁵³.

Therefore the importation of black slaves was to be limited to 150 each year - a ridiculous small number in comparison to quantities of later years.

Williams' extensive discussion of white servitude in the West Indies is the corner stone of his hypothesis that black slavery was merely an extension and further institutionalisation of labour conditions which had developed out of embryonic capitalism;

⁵² In the British possessions there existed other though less common forms of contract, such as those provided to the Redemptioners who agreed to pay their passage to the Captain within a specified period hoping that they would succeed in finding a landlord who would redeem them. Thus Redemptioners would be able to negotiate their form of serfdom according to the the circumstances (Wirsching 1992: 154ff)

⁵³ Memoire du Sr. Pouñancay concernant la Colonie de 'Isle de la Tortue, et Coste de St. Domingue... , 1681, Archive d'Outre - Mer, Aix en Provence

racism just added a further though decisive ingredient to it. This view is certainly one - sided, as it neglects other historical sources which we have outlined: Muslim, Spanish and Portuguese slavery traditions had developed without passing through comparable forms of New World serfdom. Williams' famous thesis on capitalism and slavery may, in some of its aspects, be considered one - sided; but it also confirms, particularly in its discussion of indentured labour, the difficulties in distinguishing slavery at a structural level, from other forms of serfdom. During a relatively short but decisive period in the late 17th century, when the sugar economy made its way into the islands, the conditions of white servitude and black slavery overlapped and influenced each other.

According to Williams even the ill - famed middle - passage would be identical for poor whites and black slaves:

“a ship full of indentured servants” so the comments of a “Lady of Quality”, “should banish any ideas that the horrors of the slave ship are to be accounted for by the fact that the victims were Negroes” (1944: 14)

We might however be suspicious: comparisons between the life of black slaves and white proletarians are a recurrent apology of slavery; white servants were certainly not put in chains and ill - treated during the passage. Nevertheless, the Governor D'Orgeron deems it necessary to add to one of his pleas for furthering the importation of white servants, that only the Captain and his officers should be entitled to use corporal punishment on the passengers:

“Tous les françois qui seront dedans (i.e. in the ship) seront traittés avec toute la douceur possible sans permettre que les matelots ne les frappent sous pretexte de les chatier, ce qui sera reservé au Capitaine, au pilote et au contre - maistre”.⁵⁴

Each non - French passenger, we may conclude, can be beaten up by any member of the crew.

The “Happy Islands” had lost their aura of freedom and plenitude, long before black slaves came in large numbers. In fact, they were still relatively scarce in this first century of non - Iberian colonisation. Statistics and, more important, numerical ratios are readily available: In 1664, in Martinique 529 out of a total of 684 holdings (*habitations*) had less than six slaves; even in 1704 a contemporary source states that “dans la plupart des exploitations, les noirs sont moins nombreux que la famille de leur propriétaire” (Chaudenson 1992: 95). In 1680, twice as many whites than black slaves lived in St. Domingue (Klein 1986: 52); fifty years later there would be only one white for every 12 slaves. Most scholars think that a numerical relation of one to one is the critical line which indicates a transition towards a “mature” plantation colony; but, as Chaudenson underlines (1992: 55), statistics do not tell the whole story. It is more important to see the economic and social situation to which they refer.

Living conditions in the first decades of colonisation were hard. As there was no steady supply from the mother countries, the holdings depended on a multiple economy of subsistence which included a varied agriculture as well as all basic crafts; only a few large estates could take the risk of producing larger quantities of cash crops, mainly tobacco and indigo, some coffee and sugar. Many activities required particular skills, which often had been learned from the neighbouring Indians: the building of houses (“ajoupa”), the preparation of Cassava bread, the curing of tobacco leaf, the fabrication of tools. Nevertheless, at the beginning of a colony we may suppose that the level of professional

⁵⁴ Letter of Gouverneur d'Orgeron 1666. Archiv d'Outre - Mer, Aix en Provence.

specialisation was very low and did not foster the development of social hierarchies: all able bodied men - whether free, servant or slave - had to cooperate in most economic and domestic activities which often coincided with specific seasons. Most economic relations were based on the exchange and the borrowing of goods in which the slaves as well participated. This close cooperation was also visible in the sharing of common living space: a clearing, in which slaves, servants and masters built their frugal houses, the latter's differing only in few details. The basis of social relation were the daily activities in which the group participated, the personal relations and good companionship, in which slaves joined in as well as other servants and their masters. This adds up to an idyllic image of men knit together by their common "robinsonade":

"Ils travaillent aux champs, pechent, chassent ensemble, logent dans les mêmes 'cases' de bois et de 'feuilles', souffrent les mêmes maux, connaissent le même manque de nourriture dans les même dnuement" (Chaudenson 1992: 97).

This idea of an egalitarian society certainly did not last, as Father Pelleprats dark picture of the servant's life and life expectancy shows. Social differentiation arrived very quickly and affected the white servants as badly as the slaves: Indentured Servants had to live on food allowances which were so insufficient that they had to be regulated by law in 1700 (Debien 1952: 202/203). Like the slaves, servants had to provide their own clothing using a small provision of material which they were handed out once a year and which did not include shoes (ibid.: 201). Though they still were considered as "persons" in the legal sense, they could not marry or conclude any contract without the consent of their masters (ibid.: 215f) and they were liable to be sold or loaned to other persons (ibid, 199ff). Shortly, the servant was "une chose de son maitre"; Moreau de St. Méry, the main chronicler called the white servants "des espèces d'esclaves blancs" (1797: I, 45).

It is particularly remarkable that they had to suffer the same punishments as provided for slaves by the Code Noir: whipping, marking with hot iron if they ran away, or even mutilation as cutting off ears (Debien 1952: 204 ff). Maroonage of white servants was as common as for black slaves: "Quelque bon traitement que les habitans fassent aux engagés ils sont tous aussy inclinés au marronage que les nègres" complains Governor Gallifet to his Ministry and he adds a legal problem: Who has to pay the reward for bringing back a run - away servant? When a slave runs away, his master was liable to pay for his capture; as far as servants are concerned, the legal obligation is not the same. Finally the governor decides that the owner has to pay but will be compensated by an extension of the servants' contract by adding six more month⁵⁵

Living under similar circumstances, white servants and black slaves mixed together easily. They continued to live together in the same quarters; they worked together in the fields. Planters liked to complain about the "débauchage des négresses" by white servants, by which they meant their running away together; for simple concubinage was a "peccadille" without interest (Debien 1952: 205); even marriages are "événements familiais" (ibid: 256). Nevertheless, there was a considerable difference: the servant expected to be free within a predictable time; being French and European he would merge with the dominant society and, eventually, become a slave owner himself. Being a potential and badly needed member of colonial militias he enjoyed a certain protection by the authorities. As the numbers of white servants dwindled, colour bars became more important and began to separate former companions.

⁵⁵ Report of Gouverneur Galiffez, (29.3. 1700), Arch. d'Outre - Mer, Aix - en - Provence

Chaudenson's vision of a "robinsonade" is based on the image of a patriarchal society smoothed by the circumstances which prevailed in new colonies in their first 10 or 20 years. Though it was short-lived, it left an ideology of unity and mutual dependence of master and slave which continued to be used by anti-abolitionist even when its basis had long since disappeared. We will find it, almost in the same terms as Chaudenson described, in the romantic image of the "Good Old South" based on the reciprocity of destinies:

"Go through our southern states, and every where you see the negro slave by the side of the white man, you find him alike in the mansions of the rich, the cabin of the poor, the workshop of the mechanic, and the field of the planter. Upon the contemplation of a population framed like this, a curious and interesting readily suggest itself to the inquiring mind. Can these two distinct races of people, now living together as master and servant, be ever separated?" (Dew 1852: 22)

Chaudenson's intention, of course, is entirely different, but not less significant in our context: he wants to demonstrate that Creole cultures and Creole languages are the heritage of this close social amalgamation of Europeans and Africans within a specific period and that they therefore are essentially European. We will not debate here the complex question of whether this conclusion is correct and can be demonstrated. It, however, coincides in some way with Mullin's description of Chesapeake society which, although certainly not egalitarian, manifests some of the traits of a former "robinsonade": Acculturation of the black slaves was rapid: "The isolation of the Africans shaped encounters between the two peoples in which the slaves' past was generally ignored and forgotten" (Mullin 1994: 19). Chesapeake Bay and the North American South in general did not experience maroonage and slave rebellions: Slaves lived relatively well but had to pay the price of losing social and cultural difference, a fact which Kunta Kinta resented very much and Equiano accepted easily.

II.3. SUGAR AS LIFE STYLE AND "SOCIAL DEATH"

When in the years after 1640 sugar cane cultivation advanced victoriously into the Caribbean area, it was by no means an unknown crop. Herbert S. Klein (1986: 18ff) and, very extensively, Philip D. Curtin (1990) have described the tortuous ways by which sugar cane reached the New World. Being of Asian origin, it came to Europe through Islamic conquest and was successfully cultivated in Cyprus, Sicily and the South of the Iberian Peninsula from the 12th century onwards, then went to the Atlantic Islands. In the 15th Century these recently discovered lands - Madeira, the Azores, the Cape Verde Islands and São Tomé - offered climatically still more suitable conditions for production, the two latter archipelagos outdoing the former. In São Tomé and the Cape Verdian Islands cane planting was associated with black slavery and exported to Pernambuco where climatic conditions were similar, but land was more plentifully available. Between 1580 and 1640, Portugal had been a part of Spain which also dominated parts of the Netherlands, so Dutch planters and merchants were able to take over Pernambuco sugar production. When between 1640 and 1653, the Portuguese slowly reconquered their most important territory in Brazil, the Dutch settlers left and brought the knowledge's of planting, processing and trading sugar products to the Caribbean.

With increasing trade and internationalisation many crops went around the world: coconuts, yams, dates, breadfruit and more. None of them had so disastrous consequences for a entire part of the world as sugar cane, none became so ill-famed and none has been at the emergence of such a vast literature - not so much regarding on the techniques of planting, as its concomitant social symptoms. What is so particular about it?

When looking at its different stages of expansion, it appears that sugar has always had many potentialities for increasing its output and profits. It can be grown on relatively poor and dry soils and there are many examples where it could also fit unobtrusively into the crop rotations of small holders. Although yields might often be relatively low, there were many ways to increase productivity enormously: in rich and humid soils; by developing sophisticated technology which, in order to be profitable, required large estates; by providing a large labour force which is needed only seasonally, because mature cane cannot be stored without a considerable loss of its saccharine contents; and, not least, by developing a complex system of transport and marketing, because the increasing quantities could not be consumed locally.

Thus, migration was accompanied by optimisation: Mediterranean production disappeared when the more humid Atlantic Islands were discovered. Madeira particularly was dominant in the market for a short time until the end of 16th century, with possibly as much as 150 sugar mills. Due to the rugged landscape and the early system of land distribution (*sesmerias*), these plantations were not really large and efficient enough (Greenfield 1977: 546f), but brought considerable wealth to their owners, due to the scarcity of the produce. After 1486 several royal edicts led the sugar production to shift to São Tomé, and Madeira fell into decline. São Tomé offered not only better climatic conditions where cane could grow three times faster; it also had easy access to black slaves, first used as a local labour force and subsequently for exportation (Ballong - Wen - Mewuda 1988: 123ff). The corresponding development of sugar technology and a slave economy migrated to Pernambuco, leaving São Tomé as a worthless possession, until, by the beginning of the twentieth century, cocoa production brought new riches to the island. Pernambuco sugar expansion was stopped when the Dutch planters emigrated to the Caribbean, taking with them sugar production technology and the access to Central European markets. Barbados now became the foremost colony and Pernambuco industry stagnated (Klein 1986: 67f). In the 18th century, finally, Saint-Domingue won the accolade of being the “richest colony of the world”, because it not only offered optimal climatic conditions, but also had no disturbing smallholders to hamper the expansion of huge estates. The territory came nearest to Levitt and Best’s “pure model” of a plantation colony (cf. I.3): it was not a place for living, but for production, an achievement which was not viable and ended by a revolution, leaving space for more moderate newcomers such as Cuba.

The transition to a plantation economy was the most dramatic and has been the most abundantly described in the Caribbean colonies, because it occurred within a relatively short period (1640 - 1700) and brought into opposition two very distinct systems: a “white” smallholder or feudal agriculture and a system of large estates with predominantly black labour. It has been described from different but interrelated points of view:

- as a change of products and production processes, e.g. Fernando Ortiz in his well - known study on sugar and tobacco (1983)
- as part of a economic - historical process where the arrival of the Dutch planter - merchants in the Caribbean coincided with a disastrous decline in tobacco prices on the world market, due to the competition of Virginian tobacco planters. It forced many white smallholders out of business, because the price of land became unaffordable to them (Batie 1993)
- as a history of migration which drove white Caribbean settlers to other parts of the world, mostly to North America and initiated an unparalleled increase in the slave trade.

- as a legal problem, for it involved new forms of labour relations and led to subsequent attempts to establish a slave legislation
- as a structural societal change which is generally and amply statistically documented, involving the abrupt decrease in the number of estates and the change in the proportions of white (and free) people in relation to black slaves.

Usually, Barbados is quoted as the most striking example⁵⁶. The proportions of slaves to white settlers which we computed from the indications of Sheridan (1970: 29, 35, 41, 49) show that St. Domingue was, in the long run, worst:

	1670-1680	1700-1710	1730-1740	1750-1760
Barbados	1,6	3,6	4,0	3,8
Martinique	2,0	2,8	4,0	5,6 (1770)
Jamaica	1,1	6,4	9,8	10,8
St. Domingue	0,5	?	10,5	12,1

Large scale statistics do not necessarily give an accurate image. The proportions, in fact, were much more accentuated, for a considerable number of whites did not live on plantations, but were employed in public administration or were part of army detachments. By the end of the 18th century there was an average of 100 slaves per plantation (Forster & Forster, eds. 1996: 13) and in Saint-Domingue it was considerably higher. The disproportion became a considerable security risk, of which the authorities are well aware. In the last years of the 17th century they tried to limit the number of newly imported slaves in a way that they would not be more numerous than the indentured servants. This policy of favouring white immigration still is visible in the demands of French Governor of Saint Domingue, De Cussy who wrote in 1684:

“Je crois aussi vous informer, Monseigneur que si Messieurs de la Compagnie du Senegal envoient à cette coste plus de cent cinquante naigres (sic) par an que ce sera l'unique moyen de diminuer cette colonie au lieu d'augmenter ne s'estant établie que par le grand nombre d'angagés que l'on y a fait passer, lesquels ont fait ensuite des établissements”⁵⁷.

His successor, Governor Gallifez, demonstrated a few years later, in 1700 a total change in policy, disputing every black slaves which is send to Martinique and not to St. Domingue:

⁵⁶ Cf.Klein (1986: 50/51): “In 1645, on the eve of the big shift into sugar, over 60% of the 18300 white males were property owners and there were only 5680 slaves. Tobacco was the primary crop, and the average producing unit was less than 10 acres. By 1670s sugar was dominant, the number of farms were down to 2600 units, or only a quarter of the number of farms that were in existence fifteen years before. Total white population had declined from some 37 000 to some 17 000 and for the first time in the island's history blacks outnumbered whites. By 1680 there were 37 000 slaves on the island - (almost all of whom were African - born) - some 350 sugar estates [...]

⁵⁷ Memoire pour Monseigneur Le Marquis de Seignelay 18/8/1685, Archiv d'Outre - Mer, Aix - en Provence

“Parce qu’il est certain qu’entre tous les moyens que l’on peut mettre en usage pour former et grossir des Colonies, il n’y en a point qui reussisse si surement et si promptement que celui de procurer la multitude des nègres..”⁵⁸

Security and profits could no longer be reconciled and all corresponding attempts fail: in 1707 a new royal order determined a numerical relation of white to black slaves of 1:10; in 1718 this was again changed to 1: 20. But planter still preferred to pay fines rather than to comply with the orders which, as they knew, were not unreasonable⁵⁹. They were aware of sitting on the top of a volcano, but they wanted - and had to - continue, hoping to be able to quit it before it erupts. “The colonies are coming to an end” wrote the Martinique planter Pierre Desalles to his mother,

“and you know the extent of my fortune and my expectations. I must not give up either until it is no longer possible to do otherwise. I am determined not to leave Martinique until I have invested enough money in France to maintain myself there along with my family. I must save from shipwreck all that is possible” (Foster/Foster, eds. 1996: 39)

This describes perfectly the general attitude of the planters. Sugar production has always been risky: hurricanes could destroy an entire harvest, there were nearly continuous wars between competing powers and enemy attacks could devastate the colonies; and since the rebellion of Saint-Domingue the planters were haunted by the idea of large scale slave rebellions. But they would not give up: sugar production was like gambling; to invest in security would reduce the risks, but also the profits; the less land owners were security minded, the more the colony approached the “pure model”, i.e. the optimisation of yields and profits. The planters attitude to Government authority was ambivalent: on the one side they complained that it did not provide enough security; on the other they resented any kind of interference as an encroachment upon their business activities which they alone knew how to conduct. This point must be emphasised, to avoid the mistake of trying to understand plantation life only from official sources. It certainly had some sort of logic, but above all it was a life style, which had its own irrational laws and values.

The New World sugar plantation was, according to Chaudenson (1978) an “isolate”, i.e. a self - sustaining entity which entertained only minimal relations with the surrounding larger society. We will suggest that this view is not entirely correct; like the “pure model” of Levitt and Best the idea of the “isolate” is an abstraction which accentuates the economic purpose of the plantation on one side, and the bonds with the metropolis on the other. The base of all these models is the idea of a complete dependence rationally organised in order to achieve one objective: the production of certain goods designed not to be consumed in situ. The fulfilment of its economic goal required the provision of certain goods and services: machinery, transport facilities, food and health services for the labour force. These necessities, if not provided by the metropolis, are produced on the plantation itself, or at least controlled and distributed by the planter; the purpose was to bind the labour force to the planter and to the economic goal he represented. The “total institution” thus became a small world in itself which included all activities, in fact the entire life of those who worked on it. The domination of the slave involved not only in the absolute

⁵⁸ Report of 6/5/1700, Archiv d’Outre - Mer, Aix - en - Provence

⁵⁹ This is emphasized by the Governors of Saint-Domingue in all their reports. The planters claim that, for economic reasons they cannot comply with the law (still the proportion 1:1 !), “en me faisant cognoitre que la chose estoit si avantageuse que quand bien mesme ils n’y seroient pas obligez par une ordonnance, ils s’y porteroient d’eux mesmes [...]” (De Cussy in a report of 27/8/1687, Arch. d’Outre - Mer, Aix - en - Provence)

power of the owner expressed in acts of brutality and humiliation, but was also founded, perhaps principally, in the lack of alternative opportunities. Therefore the island is the perfect setting for a “mature plantation system” because it lacked an “outside world” with alternative means of production and sustaining life. As the example of Surinam shows, the mere existence of a hinterland with uncontrolled spaces and an Indian population unconnected to the plantation economy, can be a strong incentive for slaves to try another life. In “ideal”, i.e. insular plantation colonies, the nearly entire space is occupied by plantations; the problem was not to escape, but to survive afterwards. Often the fugitive had no alternative but to stay near the plantation until he was caught, or “revenir d’eux - mêmes, poussés par la faim à retrouver la servitude” (Chaudenson 1992: 82)

Thus islands and areas secluded for other reasons were, by their geographic conditions, an ideal place for a further optimisation of the plantation system, because they are a clearly delimited “small world” without any visible alternative. The island of Barbuda offers an extreme example: from one end to the other, it was covered by one single plantation; still today the capital bears the name of its former owner: Codrington. On larger islands such a monopolistic single plantation would be difficult to achieve; they tended to be divided - still according the “pure” model of economic efficiency - into estates of an optimal size which appeared to be “islands”, the colony itself thus being only a loose aggregation of self - sufficient plantations. The role of urban centres was limited to providing the port facilities needed to sustain trading relations with the metropolis and to exercising some basic administrative functions which the planters often considered as unnecessary. There was little need for teachers, doctors and other public functionaries and nearly none for artisans, because the “mature” plantation had its own surgeons and various professionals for operation and serving the machinery - mostly highly valued skilled slaves. A feature of this situation is the notorious lack of money, for all financial transactions - selling the sugar, buying necessary provisions and necessities, disposing of the surplus - were effected in the metropolis; the absence of money was significant, because it also involved the absence of social relations based on money, and the lack of any surplus within the island. This meant that no independent professional classes developed; that there was no art, printing or publishing; that there was - at least in the model colony - no social space for shops or markets⁶⁰; there was, finally, little tax levying which would allow the development of social services open to all⁶¹. These circumstances created a considerable problem for manumitted slaves who were to enter the (non - existent) labour market. One of the worst abuses was the freeing of old or disabled slaves who were no longer useful within the plantation and deliberately exposed to starvation.

Within such a model exclusively determined by economic goals, the slave became an asset according to a crude financial equation. This was based on his cost: the minimal prize of his acquisition and maintenance - and his output, calculated according to the value of his performance. A male slave who has a value between 1000 and 1500 *Livres des Iles* is expected to earn a daily amount of 7 livres (Girod 1972: 108; Vanony - Frisch 1985:43 -

⁶⁰ In reality the weekly market was important also for the slave population, but the base of most trading was barter.

⁶¹ The British authorities were aware of this problem when abolishing slavery, thus setting free a labour class dependent on basic public services. The preferred solution was to pay an indemnity to the planters which they were to use to pay the labourers. This would have started the circulation of money and created a tax yield. The plan failed in a significant way: The planters, mostly highly indebted, used the money to pay their creditors abroad; so the money never reached the islands. Public institutions rapidly became insolvent and were unable to provide basic services to the rapidly growing urban and rural proletarian classes which was one of the reasons for the Morant Bay Rebellion and other forms of social unrest

47). The relationship between costs and performance determined the period of his amortisation. During the heydays of the slave trade when supply was abundant and prices where low, the period of amortisation was short; the slave could be “discarded” after a few years. From the 19th century onwards, when the slave trade was proscribed, thus becoming more hazardous and more expensive, the slave could expect a better treatment. Even punishments could - again theoretically - be subject to the calculation of expenditure and output, the ideal balance being chastisement which would enhance the performance without damaging the production capacity for instance by heavy chains or mutilation⁶². Finally the question of procreation of a slave population was decided according to balance of input and output: At times of sufficient and accordingly inexpensive supply it was more advantageous to buy new slaves instead of raising children up to the age when they could work (Cf Mörner 1981)

While these calculations appear absolutely inhuman, they became an essential part of the plantation economy. Their obscenity was not so much the direct violence of the owner, but the latently violent subject - object relation between the owner and his “possession”. It deprived the slave of most means of common self - determination. When all alternatives of escape were blocked, there only remained one ultimate possibility to dispose freely of his fate: to destroy himself and, thus, the investment of his owner. This could be done indirectly by attacking his master, a crime liable to capital punishment; more often, it meant committing suicide. Slaves’ suicide, in fact, was a major problem on most plantations. It was frequently a problem with new slaves from Africa who were unable to withstand the shock of their new surroundings and their new conditions; planters assumed that the slaves thought that suicide would bring them back to Africa. Most suicides, however, are the blunt result of what the planters called “despair”. It was often the result of a crisis, for instance when a slave had been unjustly or extensively whipped and by his subsequent behaviour provokes more and more new punishment. A few cases of suicide were ugly enough to be remarked by the colonial authorities. The Governor of Saint-Domingue, Gallifex, lists several cases in one of his letters:

“Un nègre ayant tué sa femme en presence de leur maitresse, s’est pendu luy meme dans les bois, on pretend que c’est un effet de desespoir a cause de l’extreme cruauté de leur maitresse [...]

Un autre nègre vient de s’étouffer la nuit dernière avec la langue durant que son maitre le faisoit fouetter. Il y a peu de temps qu’on a condamné un particulier en une amende a de gros frais pour un pareil sujet, cela arrive aussi frequement y ayant des negres assez desespérés pour se tuer et [...] de causer cette perte a leur maitre”⁶³

Lasalle, who is considerably annoyed by the number of suicides amongst his slaves, reports an even more impressive example:

“This morning, M. Chignac (a very “harsh” overseer) noticed that the canal (driving the mill wheel) was not properly closed up, summoned Césaire, who was in charge of the operation, and had fifteen lashes given to him. At noon, M. Chignac, thinking that Césaire was drunk, had another 30 lashes administered. This negro was in despair but received the chastisement without a murmur. A half - hour later, Chignac was startled when he heard all the negroes in and around the buildings cry,

⁶² See Goveia (1965: 134): according to British slave laws, punishments should not impair “limb and life”, though she emphasises that the enforcement of this rule was difficult.

⁶³ Report of 24/7/1701, Archives d’Outre - Mer

“Césaire tué corps li” (Césaire has killed himself). He immediately went to the place where the body lay and found it in the most horrible condition. He questioned the Negroes, and Marie - Luce told him that, when she saw Césaire on top of the mill wheel and asked him what he was doing there, he replied, “Hello, all of you, say hello to M. Chignac, and tell him that he wont find Césaire to beat him again” and then threw himself down.” (Foster/Foster 1996: 58)

Césaire had not only “escaped” but also had taken his revenge on the generally hated Chinard who had considerable trouble with the owner and was dismissed some weeks later.

These are concrete human examples which transcend the abstraction of a “pure model” helping to explain a number of specific traits of the plantation in real terms. The “pure” model has considerable shortcomings for explaining plantation society, even on the level of the white masters whose behaviour is much more ambiguous than it may appear at first sight. They were also “historic persons” and not merely factors in an structural economic model which, as the excessive mortgaging of the plantations and their incapacity of innovation show, functioned badly enough. Planter in the 18th century were in no way pure capitalists, even according to the standards of their time. Many of them, especially the French planters, were members or descendants of European noble families who had migrated to the colonies in order to escape the economic and political changes at home. Their goal was not primarily economic; they wanted to return to their former status of feudal lords as it had been before the bourgeois revolution or even before absolutism. They did not, therefore, aspire primarily to wealth, but to a life style modelled on feudalism; this involved ostentatious spending which hampered their economic rationality⁶⁴. Historically, the feudal model also implied a certain reciprocity: the lord required services from his serfs, but also had certain obligations; he has to protect his people, help them in cases of need and was expected to give donations at particular events, such as the birth of children, marriages, or death. Slavery, certainly, is different from feudal relations, because obligations dwindle and donations become voluntary; they become acts of grace which are more difficult to grasp because they depend on the character of the master and his personal relations with individual slaves. But the general frame work is still a feudal life style demonstrated by the frequent comparisons between slaves` conditions and those of peasantry in Europe (see I.2).

The little specified term of “despair” as a reason for escape or suicide demonstrates the cleavages between the planters view and those of slaves. Dessalles is completely at a loss, when he tries to understand, why his slave Jean - Baptiste ran away:

“This Negro was happy, and he lacked nothing. He has been keeping house for us since I brought him from Guadeloupe in 1813. He never ceased to do his duty with zeal, and there was only one occasion when I had him whipped; a gourmand by nature, he would sometimes steal food to eat. I often scolded him, but closed my eyes to this character flaw [...]” (Foster/Foster: 102)

⁶⁴ It is highly questionable, whether slavery had ever been economically rational even at that time. At the time of British abolition of slavery, the British government sent two commissioners to the islands to report on the consequences of this measure. Their published report is certainly biased in favour of the abolition law, but they give an impressive number of examples where free labour appears considerably more economic than slavery. An Antiguan reports, that in 1834 he had 110 slaves of which only an average of 17 to 20 were really working in the canefields; nevertheless he spent on his slaves £ 27 per week. After abolition he employed 57 free workers which cost him £ 15 per week. “The abolition Act” they conclude, “emancipated both Planters & Negroes” (Sturge/Harvey 1838: 62)

These lines from a personal diary show surprising aspects: Dessalles is less annoyed by the economic loss of his slave than by his deception; in fact, the term “ingratitude” is frequent in his diary. He sees it as a congenital defect: “I have little faith that good can come from such an evil race” he had mentioned in a letter years before (ibid.: 50). Attitudes oscillate between utter racist contempt and sentimental dependence. A valuable document to understand this ambivalence is Gilberto Freyre’s famous *Casa Grande & Senzala* (1933), because the author offers not only a scientific analysis of the plantation world, but also bids a melancholy and affectionate farewell to a life style which he and his family were part of⁶⁵.

Its significance can best be grasped from the strong sexual connotations which accompany Freyre’s view of the history of Brazil: the proud male Portuguese conqueror comes ashore and takes the women (in this case Indians) and the land which offer themselves readily; this act of taking possession turns later into emotional dependence: the planter’s sons are brought up by black nurses, have their first sexual experiences with black slave girls, the only girls who can offer them full satisfaction. But planters would not and could not found an “orderly” family with them; this part of the planter’s life was reserved for white women who bore his (legitimate) children and established his respectability. But being only a small and unattractive part of his life, white spouses were frustrated and became malicious. It is interesting to see, how Freyre views the male coloured: he is a good worker and servant, but his sexual appetite is small. Planters, in their personal lives, are haunted by the image of the size of their slaves’ male organ, which becomes a symbol of power. Freyre reduces its size (1933: 306, 409); Dessalles magnifies it, fantasising of “young women accustomed to the vigour of broad - shouldered domestics endowed by nature with enormous instruments!” (Foster/Foster: 96)

Like many other planters, Dessalles has sent his wife to France after having given birth to a number of children, and strongly advises her to stay there, though this is a further strain on his precarious financial situation. There are many pretexts: children need education which is not available in Martinique; the island is unhealthy and generally “accursed” (ibid.: passim); plantation life is not suitable for the sensibility of women. Not only the plantation, also the planter himself is an “isolate” having very difficult relations with his family and other white planters: a lonesome ruler of an empire of 200 slaves, amongst whom he chooses his only intimate companions and who nevertheless never fail to deceive him. Again we find Freyre’s basic paradigm of possession and dependence: Dessalles owns his slaves and he sets very high standards of “good” and “orderly” behaviour; he admonishes and marries them according to the principles of Christian faith, though he believes that “religion [...] will never be understood by a class of people who always be part animal” (ibid.: 103); he distributes favours and withdraws them, he punishes and forgives at will. Living so closely amongst his slaves, he becomes a strange part of their world: he readily takes up any gossip of poison and magic and accordingly punishes the whole gang collectively to “show firmness” against these vices (ibid.: 68). Most ambiguous is his relationship with the slave boy Nicaise who is his personal servant and sleeps in his room:

“My young Negro is of an elegance that has caused a lot of attention. People are surprised that I give him so many pretty things. He is a bit of a spendthrift and

⁶⁵ In fact, he “sells” it, as we have demonstrated in another article, as the last asset the traditional Brazilian North - East can offer to the modern and “alienated” South of the country: a genuine identity which has its roots in history and an original style of life (1986b)

loves dissolute parties, so I always tremble that he will catch a nasty disease. He assures me that he is not after women, but can I count on that?" (ibid.:98)

Nicaise, of course, also betrays Dessalles, but "my affection for him was still very much alive, and I forgave him" (ibid.:97)

Though Dessalles reiterates that he would leave this "accursed island" if he were not concerned about the fortunes of his family. Martinique is the only place where he can live. During the short periods when he visited France, he continuously talked about his plantation. France is the country where rumours of future abolition originated and where laws were issued by "Europeans who have only a very imperfect understanding of our colonies" (ibid.: 76)

In this respect, Dessalles does not see himself as "European"; his attitude is, even today, reflected in the thinking of the *Béké*, the small caste of Martinican whites descending from former planters. They too are deeply suspicious of the French administration and the numerous Metropolitan whites who are unable to understand the country and make themselves respected by the blacks (Cf. Beaudoux - Kovats/Benoist 1972: 130). As modern agricultural techniques and minimum wages of free labourers are contrary to their traditional life style, they have given up their plantations and gone into the import - export business. But they still own the land and they lease it, mostly free of charge, to "their" blacks; this is the basis of a continuing patriarchal relationship with the coloured population, with whom they share the Creole language and certain patterns of daily culture⁶⁶.

"There is", remarks Kreiselman (1952:56): "indeed, in Martinique a 'white' and a 'native' culture, but paradoxically the carriers of those two subcultures are reversed when speaking of the *béké* and the *mulâtre*. The *mulâtre* are behaviourally white, but not the white of the island. The *béké* culture is found nowhere else except in Martinique and can therefore be called 'native'".

Dessalles is, like his slaves, part of this regional "native" culture; it determines his values and guides his actions. We have to keep in mind this simple, but often neglected fact, when we try to understand what is a "good" master or a "bad" master. Purely ethical criteria are not very helpful; but there are others which for the slaves are real and important, as many testimonies show: a "good" master is one who is embedded in the local plantation culture; even when he acts and responds in an unjust, discriminating and arbitrary way, he remains calculable. That endows the slaves with a certain, limited freedom of action: though Dessalles would never admit this, it is often obvious that he is manipulated by his slaves. Some owners were more aware of this - and enjoyed it as a part of the exotic setting and as a confirmation of their power and vanity. A good example is the "Monk" Lewis who describes the ostentatious joy of his slaves when he returned to Jamaica:

"All this may be palaver; but certainly they at least play their parts with such an air of truth and warmth, and enthusiasm, that after the cold hearts and repulsive manners of England, the contrast is infinitely agreeable" (1834: 82).

There is, however, a factor which reduces this freedom of manipulation considerably: absenteeism of the owners and the subsequent appointment of

⁶⁶ For instance the creole tales which have been a very important instrument of acculturation, as Elodie Jourdain (1956: 231) remembers: "[...] de là vient que les petits blancs étaient bercés par leurs "das", leurs nourrices noires de ce récits fantastiques ou sataniques et qu'ils en gardaient non seulement le souvenir, mais encore le goût [...]"

administrators. It is a general rule that subordinate whites, managers, overseers and even technicians would be more inclined to hard treatment of slaves than masters, for they were in an awkward position: they did not have the masters authority, but were held responsible for the poor achievement of the slave gang and damage to the equipment of the plantation. Dessalles letters show how readily he criticises his employees:

“Montard [...] is still a bit rash. Chignac practices a despotic manner that I am constantly obliged to tone down” (Foster/Foster 1996: 51)

Worse are those managers who were left behind by their absentee owners; their behaviour probably corresponded most to what the “pure model” implies, because they generally had only a selfish “economic” goal: to become as rich as possible before their contract expired. The form of contract varied, but usually provided, beside an annual salary, a percentage on the profits (Debien 1974: 110); sometimes the manager had to transfer a certain minimum amount in merchandise or money and would keep the surplus. In both cases the result was the same: the manager exploited the plantation to the maximum. Slaves were undernourished, their free time was reduced, accidents were frequent, because necessary repairs of the machinery were neglected; “despair” and suicides were the consequences.

“Le nègre Francisque est mort des suites des mauvais traitements du gérant, mérités ou non.[...] Neuf nègres marrons depuis longtemps ... ne voulaient pas rentrer malgré la promesse formelle qu’il ne leur serait rien fait! Cette obstination m’a fait soupçonner la vérité, et étant allé aux informations sans que cela pût nuire au bon ordre, j’ai découvert beaucoup de dureté de la part du gérant, beaucoup de négligence sur les soins que l’on doit avoir en général et surtout à l’hôpital. J’ai pris le parti de changer le gérant et M. Valsemey se trouve remplacé par M. La Berthoinnière... Je ne pouvais faire de meilleur choix de toute manière”⁶⁷.

Switching managers often does not help because the next might be worse. The owner of the plantation Clérisse, for several months does not know what or whom he should believe: the reassuring reports of his manager Allard, or the reports of his neighbour. Finally he suspects the truth:

“qu’il s’y passe un derrangement affreux sur l’habitation, que les nègres manquent totalement de tout, tant pour la nourriture que pour les vetements, malgré qu’il y aye une grande abondance de vivres qui leur passent sous le nez, qu’il en est mort plusieurs [...] et qu’on n’y fait de mauvais sucre et en très petite quantité, et que les ouvrages de l’intérieur de la place sont totalement négligez, et qu’enfin tout d’administration en général va au plus mal; on attribue ce desordre à Allard [...]”⁶⁸

We have quoted these testimonies extensively, because they once more demonstrate the strange reality of the plantation, demonstrating how difficult it was for the absentee plantation owner to find out what was going on the plantation: complaints or reports of slaves, whenever they were forwarded to a responsible person, were either discarded as not admissible or as not trustworthy and social relations amongst planters themselves were highly competitive and constrained. In the opinion of the owners, the plantations, especially those of absentee owners, came very near to “isolates” of the pure model and for

⁶⁷ Papiers de la plantation Bréda, quoted by Debien (1974: 110)

⁶⁸ Papiers Clérisse, Archives d’Outre-mer, Aix - en - Provence.

the slaves certain plantations, above all those administered by managers very close to “social death”.

But how is this term to be understood? The picture of an army of zombies whose sole purpose was to work in the canefields, savagely whipped, without sufficient food and rest, carries many aspects of a myth created by abolitionist literature, nourished by feelings of guilt, but also by delight of horror. There were many forms of slave resistance: manipulation, sabotage, poison, escape, rebellion and ultimately illness and suicide, as the examples of the reports above show. Physical death preceded “social death”.

These remarks are not meant to extenuate the image of plantation slavery. It is essential to realise that slaves, in spite of their condition, had a life of their own; they had their own social system and order, their values, their culture and traditions. Planters were never really able to understand them and even Dessalles who lived so intimately with his slaves, was constantly at a loss when trying to guess what really went on in the slave compounds. He and his fellow planters were continuously manipulated and fooled, first because they were considered as enemy, and second because believing themselves so superior to the slaves, they lacked the capacity of a sympathetic perception of others. It is certain that his slaves understood their masters much better.

II.4. SPANISH AMERICA AND THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF NEW WORLD SLAVERY

It is not unreasonable to assume a certain uniformity of the institution of slavery in the Americas. Similarities in slave legislation, in the management of plantations, in slave culture and slave resistance corroborate this assumption which is implicitly the basis of the few cross - cultural studies available. The existence of different basic types of slavery which we discussed in the previous chapters does not necessarily contradict it; rather they suggest different phases of development of the institution due to historic and geographic circumstances: the relative development of the respective colonising powers who, in the beginning, conceived differently the use and utility of colonies and colonial population for the mother country and who may, for historic or geographical reasons opt for different crops and modes of production. In this sense the transfer of old world slavery patterns, the implantation of European peasant societies and finally the impact of mercantilism and capitalism can be understood as phases within the same continuum which ended in what had been called the “mature plantation complex” which different colonial powers reached at different times.

Generally, however, the empirical base of this model is poor. “Internationally comparative studies are still very scarce [...] there still exist surprisingly few modern comprehensive comparative studies [...]” complains Klein (1986: Preface) and Curtin (1977: 3) deplores an “extreme parochialism”:

“But this nation - centered view of history is a commonplace of Western culture. Any British account of the slave trade draws most of its evidence from the British sector, just as French accounts deal almost exclusively with the French sector, and Portuguese accounts emphasise the trade to Brazil.”

The consequences of this narrow approach are exacerbated when the insights gained from a specific case are transferred out of context to others as a study of Chaudenson (1992) demonstrates: proceeding from his researches on slavery in the Indian Ocean Islands he extends the result to the Caribbean and, by adding seven pages on the “mystery of Spanish colonisation”, to the whole of Latin America (cf. Fleischmann 1994: 11 - 15).

In fact, the case of Spanish slave colonies is the most intriguing. Although most scholars would no longer subscribe to Tannenbaum's description of Iberian slavery as a particularly mild variety, some of his observations cannot be refuted out of hand: the higher incidence of racial mixing in these societies, the higher reproduction rate of slaves, or - in order to insist more on the Spanish case - the influence of the *Siete Partidas* on slave legislation and the refusal to particularly participate in the slave trade⁶⁹. It seems that the Spanish colonies participated only marginally in the continuum mentioned above; this might be explained by the fact that Spain had already lost its role as a political and economic world power by the end of the 16th century and henceforth participated only marginally in later developments.

In the following section we will look more closely at two Spanish examples from different periods, in order to demonstrate that Spanish slave policy was far more complex than it is generally assumed. The first example is Santo Domingo in the 16th century, which is particularly intriguing because it is widely held that large scale sugar plantations had been a specific feature of Portuguese colonialism and reached other parts of the New World only from about 1650 when Dutch planters had to leave Pernambuco and brought the necessary techniques to the Caribbean area (see II.3). This is, however, not the case; in fact, Spanish colonists in Santo Domingo very early acquired and lost techniques which other nations would only reach in the following centuries.

Santo Domingo, first European settlement in the New World and for some decades its political and cultural centre, was the first testing ground of Spanish population politics and slave laws: The Tordesillas Treaty which granted Spain exclusive rights to the new continent had stipulated that only permanent settlement by Spain could correspond with the interests of the Crown and the Christian Faith; colonisation, at the beginning of the new era, was equivalent to the politics of the *Reconquista* of the Iberian peninsula and meant that Spanish society and its institutions were transferred to the New World. Moreover: in order to avoid the exportation of Iberian social and religious problems and to comply with its missionary mandate, the Crown decreed that only the best elements of Spanish society would be allowed to emigrate to the colony. In 1501 a request of Governor Ovando asked that

“[...] no consentiéis ni daréis lugar que allá vayan Moros ni Judíos, herejes, ni reconciliados, ni personas nuevamente convertidas a nuestra Fé [...] (In: Sáez 1994: 204).

This was the general policy maintained and supervised by the *Casa de Contratación* in Seville; but Ovando mentions in the same order one notable exception: “[...] salvo si fueren esclavos negros u otros esclavos negros o que hayan nacidos en poder de cristianos, nuestros súbditos y naturales” (ibidem)

Why were black slaves - then and later - exempted from the restrictions? Very soon, at the beginning of the new century, colonist had begun to cultivate cane and produce sugar. The plants and the production techniques had been brought from the Canary Islands. Here, during 16th and part of 17th century, sugar had been produced on a small scale, using slave labour. The size of the holdings and the number of slaves varied between 15 and 35 persons according local conditions; the technical equipment - hydraulic presses for the extraction of the juice, its concentration and crystallisation through boiling in

⁶⁹ There is a certain confusion, because Tannenbaum, in an enthusiastic appraisal of Gilberto Freyre's *Casa Grande & Senzala*, draws his data mainly from Brazil but extends them to all Iberian colonies.

kettles, using fire wood - was technically advanced and corresponded with only a few modifications to that of the later American estates (Lobo Cabrera 1996).

Santo Domingo sugar production was an offspring of this Canary Islands' experience⁷⁰ and was administratively and fiscally bracketed with it. But within a few years the Santo Domingo estates outstripped those of the Old World, mainly by increasing the size of the single estate⁷¹. The reasons were not only the abundance of fertile land and the good climatic conditions, but socio - economic circumstances: it had very soon become apparent that Santo Domingo was not as rich in gold and precious metals as it had been expected and after the conquest of Mexico a steadily increasing number of disappointed colonists began to leave the island. Sugar was a highly prized commodity, and the only hope left of making Santo Domingo a profitable colony. Many of the best known and politically best placed colonists of the first generation invested in sugar estates. Its *diezmos* - a territorial tax destined mainly for clerical institutions - was a considerable source of revenue, the main contribution for the construction and maintenance of the cathedral. Their twofold importance in politics and the economics of the island made the estate owners a powerful pressure group which succeeded in obtaining a number of privileges: they were exempt from the payment of duties on all machinery for sugar production they had to import; the estates and their equipment could not legally be seized for non - payment of debts; they had the privilege of not being divided according to the laws of heritage (Moya Pons 1974: 76/77). One of the most important issues was the colonists' plea to import slaves which the Crown continued to control in the interests of a Spanish and Christian development of the colony. The numbers of slaves on each estate varied between 60 and 500, as high as 900 in a particular case - incredibly large numbers, even when compared to later "mature" plantation colonies. Nevertheless the planters continued to plead for more slaves to be imported, arguing that it would be the only way to maintain the colony:

“[...] el año presente no se sacará oro ninguno en dicha isla Española [...] y Vuestra Alteza perderá en esta Isla más de 53.000 castellanos, y se acabará de despoblar la Tierra”⁷²

For the king the answer was not at all obvious. Seen from an economic point of view the planters were right; but it also involved a gradual replacing of Spanish settlers with a non - Spanish population and therefore a fundamental change in the agrarian structure of the colony which was meant to be a model for the whole continent. Population statistics, as far as they are available, indicate these rapid changes: in 1546 the ratio of black slaves to free Spanish settlers was already 2,5 to 1; at its peak, twenty years later, it had risen to 4:1 (Sáez 1994: 561) and thus indicated clearly a “mature plantation economy”.

⁷⁰ The technological advance and its way from Sicily and the Canary Islands is described by Watts (1987: 112ff.) : “two upright rollers to squeeze cane and extract cane juice on the ‘cloth - wringer’ principle, the rollers being operated by a series of geared wheels” (ibid.: 113) Differences depended on the type of power used to move the wheels: the “trapiche” - wheels were driven by animals; the more efficient “ingenio” - type depended on water power. Remnants of both types can still be seen in the Nigua river area close to San Cristóbal in the Dominican Republic.

⁷¹ Their number - 25 in the year 1527 - is not very impressive, but the descriptions and their remains show that they were large and complex enterprises. The best example is the estate of Diego Caballero at the mouth of the river Nigua which the owner described extensively in a petition of 1538

⁷² Carta de los Comisarios Jerónimos al Emperador Carlo I, instiuyendo en el envío de esclavos negros en la isla (Saez 1994: 216f)

Even more significant was the type of slave imported into the island. Oviedo's letter of 1501 (quoted above) had requested christianised Ladino slaves from Spain. 1526 a *Real Cédula* of Carlos I, prohibited strictly the importation of those slaves

“porque acá no se quieren servir de ellos, e imponen y aconsejan a los otros negros mansos, que están en la dicha isla, pacíficos y obedientes al servicio de sus amos, han intentado y probado muchas veces de alzarse [...]”⁷³

This prohibition which later was extended to all parts of the Spanish “Indies”⁷⁴ illustrates the early abandonment of the original intention to hispanise and christianise the New World. What had produced this total change of opinion within such a short time?

Even as early as this the fear of a slave revolt was not entirely unfounded: in 1521 twenty slaves on the plantation of Columbus' son Diego Colon revolted, and after killing a few Spanish settlers more slaves joined, 120 in all! After a battle the survivors fled and tried to hide, but were all found and executed (Oviedo 1988: 122 - 126). Despite its “fortunate” end, the event was a shock to the white settlers who became aware of their isolation, but it falls short in explaining the *Cédula* of 1526 mentioned above, for Oviedo, the chronicler of the event, clearly states that the instigators of the uprising were “los más de la lengua de los jolofes”⁷⁵ (1988: 122). It was not a rebellion of “negros mansos”, but a rebellion of *bozales*, based on a particular ethnic group, the first of many more to follow. Nevertheless, Carlos I. reiterates the ban on importing *negros ladinos* in another *Cédula* issued in 1526 (Sáez 1994: 228).

How can we understand this apparent contradiction? An initial explanation might be that of an error either by Oviedo or by the Spanish Crown in identifying the type of slaves liable to rebel. This is not very probable, for it corresponds - as will be discussed later (see III.4) - to a pattern in nearly all later slave rebellions: particular ethnic groups and not Creole slaves headed the rebellions, and it were also the *bozales* who seems to be more inclined to run away and found *palenques*, i.e. permanent settlements of fugitives which were a considerable danger to the colony after 1525. All security aspects certainly would have favoured the importation of Spanish and Christian slaves as the letter of 1501 had stipulated.

The solution of this enigma is significant: the preference for *bozales* reflects the prevalence of economic arguments over security aspects. Spanish slaves, as well as *indios*, were not very useful as field hands: they were less resistant to hard and dull work in tropical climates and, moreover, being more Spanish and Christian, they tend to pose more moral and ethic problems when worked to death than African “monsters”. Even at this early stage and even in Spanish legislation which tends to be more idealistic and protective than any other, features appear which were characteristic of later “mature” plantations: the absolute priority of the planters' economic interests over matters of state and public security.

Later on it will become apparent that the early Santo Domingo plantations preceded the British and French plantation systems in every aspect: size of estates, number and origin of slaves, maintenance of African cultures, rebellions and run - away communities. It

⁷³ Real Cédula del emperador Carlos I. pobiendo el envío a la Isla de negros ladinos sin su expresa licencia. In Saez 1994: 228

⁷⁴ “Real Cedula a los oficiales de la Casa de la Contratación que no den licencia parar a Indias a ningun esclavo que sea mulato” Barcelona 1543 (Archivos de la Indias, Indif. 1963, L.8, F.188v - 189)

⁷⁵ Wolof, an important ethnic group in the coastal regions of today's Senegal

is difficult to decide whether there had been direct historic links between the early Spanish forms and the later “mature” systems⁷⁶ or whether, from 1650 onwards, the plantation system had been “reinvented” in the West Indies. In any case, the growing internationalisation of the sugar industry was obvious and it transcended all the rivalries which haunted the plantation colonies. The Santo Domingo sugar complex, however, collapsed rapidly during the years 1570 to 1580, apparently substituted by the more profitable ginger plantations (Moya Pons 1974: 88f). But it has been demonstrated that the switch to ginger was not the cause, but a symptom of a general decay:

“lo que se produjo en Santo Domingo, al finalizar el siglo XVI y al empezar el XVII, fue una crisis general que abarcó todos los aspectos de la sociedad, como la economía, la demografía, la educación, la religión, etc” (Peña Pérez 1985: 134).

The most important part of this general decay was the regional isolation of the island due to the breakdown of its sea communications: In 1586 the pirate Francis Drake conquered and pillaged Santo Domingo, and Spain, deprived of its Armada shortly afterwards, decided to concentrate its resources and forces in order to secure essential access and transit routes. Santo Domingo which had already proved difficult to defend was no longer part of the American strongpoints of gold transport.

The Santo Domingo experience is symptomatic: bound by its medieval Christian and Imperial duties the Spanish Crown failed to grasp and sustain more modern economic developments of which Central America became the centre (Sandner 1985: 74 - 85). When the gold transport ceased, the Spanish Caribbean colonies become peripheral and survived as centres of smuggling; the illegal activities provoked the *Cédulas* of 1583 and 1604 which ordered and obtained the destruction of all Spanish settlements outside the immediate control of Santo Domingo. For nearly two centuries, Santo Domingo became a colony of subsistence farmers, hunters and smugglers. The number of slaves diminished to less than 3000, mostly urban slaves. The very few slaves outside the town lived within patriarchal extended families; neither their social status nor their living conditions differed considerably from those of their masters (see IV.4.). Due to geographic reasons the isolation of Dominican rural estates was extreme, but it seems that within the Spanish Caribbean and most parts of the Caribbean rimland the situation was not very different.

During this period other parts of the area experienced dramatic changes: the failure of peasant economies based on indentured labour, the growth of sugar plantations, the excessive import and “consumption” of slaves on the one hand, and the growing resistance from the European bourgeois enlightenment and the slaves themselves on the other. The non - Spanish Caribbean had become a battleground of contradictions and the Spanish colonies were in some way affected by them. The most interesting battle grounds of principles were the slave legislations of the different colonial powers, as they expressed their respective capacities to come to grips with their antagonistic colonial interests.

During the 17th and 18th centuries slave legislations of different nations tended to converge; it might seem surprising that they did so more in the detail and practical questions of slaves’ treatment and labour management, than in the general sense and in the various legal superstructures. Most restrictive and in some aspects most inhuman were the British slave laws, firstly, because according to the principles of representative government they were issued by the local assemblies of each colony, i.e. by the slave - owning ruling classes themselves who would rather protect their property than favour the interests of the

⁷⁶ They might have existed through former relations between the Canary Islands and Madeira which, again, indirectly influenced Brazil and, through Dutch migration, the Caribbean area.

slaves; and secondly, because the British legal system defined the slave most clearly as an object which could be mortgaged or sold by auction. Damage done to a slave is defined less in relation to the slave's interest, than as loss of the slave owner's property. In general, little attention was paid to slaves rights, not even to their religious education (Goveia 1991: 349 - 354).

In contrast to the British diversity French legislation is centrally coded. It consists in the *Code Noir* of 1685, which remained the basic law during the whole period of slavery. It maintained the contradictions in the juridical perception of the slave's person who on the one hand is defined as "meuble" (art. 44) which cannot take active part in any law suit, but who, on the other, has certain rights, for instance that of a Christian education. Other rights followed from it: a Christian marriage which prevented his being sold separately from his wife and children; access to church on Sundays which provided contact with slaves from other plantations. These rights were highly disputed, because planters understood that they were opposed to their own interests, but their application was, at least in theory, supervised by the representatives of the church⁷⁷.

The Spanish slave legislation is the most complex, because as distinct from English or French practice, it was not a modern creation specially adapted to the American situation, but was based implicitly on prior legislation mentioned before: *Las Siete Partidas*. Its adaptation to American conditions consisted of a very large number of amendments which were imposed through Royal *Cédulas*; most of them concerned very particular and concrete questions, some of which often were unthinkable in French and English colonies: the ban on slaves and free coloured people from holding Indian slaves (1551) or on carrying weapons (1665). Attempts to replace this patchwork of laws by a consistent legal framework appeared at the end of the 18th century as a typical concern of enlightened central government. First it was limited to particular territories (*Código Carolino*) and finally resulted in the *Código Negro* of 1789, a systematic and comprehensive collection of laws. Its formal structure, the topics it treated and their enumeration show that it had been modelled according to English and French legislation. Some of the clauses, such as the attention given to the Christian education of the slaves, reflect particular Spanish views, but most of the items incorporate regulations which belong to the international practice of slavery. In some aspects the *Código Negro* seemed to defend slaves' rights more than other slave laws: it limited the working time ("de sol a sol" - from sunrise to sunset) - and the number of strokes a slave might receive (twenty) and, above all, set the principle of punishment of masters who did not comply with the regulations⁷⁸.

Was the *Código Negro* directed by humanitarian considerations, as the Spanish planters claimed? Certainly, in the first place it had to fulfil certain practical purposes: to adapt and defend the institution of slavery, "stimulating the agricultural development of the mother country in order to regain Spain's power" (König 1993: 143) In this sense it was a complete failure: for the ordinary Spanish slave owner the regulations appeared as an impractical and unnecessary attempt by the state to interfere with an institution which seemed to function well either according to long established traditional rules or the accumulated experience of generations of planters in the entire region. A long

⁷⁷ Being slave owners themselves the priests' interest and that of the planters coincided on many points. A permanent reason for conflict was the observation of Sundays and holidays and the permission to attend church services. Planters felt not only deprived of the slaves' time, but considered church attendance as a dangerous opportunity to gather and to conspire (Cf.III.2.)

⁷⁸ Konetzke 1962, doc 308. This is an original and important contribution of the *Código Negro*, because other slave laws provided either nothing or else inadequate possibilities for slaves to sue or to be witnesses.

memorandum submitted by a self - constituted committee of Cuban planters to the Conde de Floridablanca, the principal reformer of Charles IV, exhibited their hardly concealed indignation⁷⁹: How was it that the Crown who until then had not shown any particular interest in the affairs of the American planters, dared to meddle in such a delicate matter as the administration of a plantation? It was, they claimed, in the planter's own interests "tratar bien a sus esclavos, en cuyos brazos vinculan su propia subsistencia y el progreso de su haciendas", but it would be fatal if the expression of humanitarian considerations resulted in legal claims by the slaves: "Nadie será capaz de contenerlos su orgullo". The limitations of working hours "from sunrise to sunset" was not compatible with the requirements of plantation work; sugar production especially depended on seasonal night work and would be obliged to close if it was forbidden. The long list of technical arguments against the Código Negrero was, however, not the crucial point of the memorandum; more important seemed the recurrent demand not to interfere with the feudal relations of a plantation where traditions and natural interests were the best mediators. If enforced, the Código Negrero would have fatal consequences: "Vemos ya arruinadas nuestras haciendas, miserables nuestras familias". The state himself would feel the reverberations:

"Destruídas las Rentas Decimales: Aniquilado el Comercio de este Puerto, abandonados nuestros campos [...], y nuestros esclavos sublevados, si que se nos esconda el funeste espectáculo de sangre que sería preciso derramar para contenerlos."

The Código Negrero had to be repealed five years later because the planters refused to implement it; its failure was just another, albeit prominent example of the problems which arose whenever the Spanish state tried to regulate the problem of agricultural work and work relations according to its national and Christian principles. Whenever they were confronted, the Spanish planters objected that the pressures they had to face were neither national nor European; they were American, regional, very similar to those of their immediate French or English neighbours: the producing and selling of plantations crops within a tight regional competition which was distorted by preferential prices paid by other governments; the handling of a fluctuating and reluctant labour force; the capture of run - away slaves who hid in neighbouring territories; and finally also the interminable slave rebellions which would tend - if not locally contained - to become regional and international. When the Cuban planters evoked the danger of bloody rebellions, they did not yet know of the Saint-Domingue rebellion which would start in 1791; their comment, however, showed how deeply the whole region was disturbed by the new enlightened and humanitarian tendencies which kept arriving from Europe.

The Saint-Domingue war offered a new dimension to the internationalisation of American slavery. The administrations of the slave colonies were deeply concerned that the Saint-Domingue events were only the tip of an iceberg. During subsequent years the correspondence and the reports circulating between Crown and administration demonstrated a growing awareness and fear that the entire region was covered by a network of clandestine routes by which news, fugitive slaves and conspirators travelled about; a situation which the colonial authorities ignored or even abetted when they protected foreign fugitives or when they sold and bought slaves. Now "dances" and other forms of slave gatherings heightened the suspicion of conspiracy; fugitive slaves from other

⁷⁹ Archivo de las Indias, Sevilla, Estado 7/ 4, Letter of 5/2/1790 by the Marqués de Cárdenas de Monte Hermoso and Miguel José Peñalver y Calvo, representatives of Cuban planters to the Conde de Floridablanca.

islands who had been welcomed before, were refused because they might be messengers from the French islands. In 1802, the *Capitán General* de Caracas warns Spanish planters to buy inexpensive slaves from French islands because French authorities “aprehenden y recogen todos los mulatos y negros rebeltosos para venderlos fuera de su territoria sean o no esclavos” (Sevilla, Estado 60/30)

But unrest and rebellions were not only a danger; they also offered new opportunities within a highly competitive regional economy. Already on former occasions slave rebellions led to temporary shifts in the availability and demand for colonial products and now, on a considerably larger scale, the world’s greatest sugar colony, French St. Domingue, flared up and ceased to produce. The island that profited most immediately was, for a number of reasons, Cuba. In the same way as Santo Domingo had anticipated the sugar colonies of the XVIIIth century, Cuba became the last traditional sugar economy at a time when the surrounding territories had to abandon sugar. Exports which hitherto were minimal, rose to 128 000 long tons per annum between 1830 and 1835 and more than quadrupled again by 1864 (Knight 1977: 44); the import of black slaves increased from 2534 in 1790 to 25841 in 1817 (Grötsch 1989: 38)⁸⁰. In a similar process to that which had changed the economic and social structure of the Lesser Antilles during the late 17th century, the majority of small holders sold their land to big estates: “After 1838, there developed a pattern which unmistakably signalled the conversion of the island into a one - crop economy” (Knight 1977: 39)

The reasons and circumstances of the Cuban sugar “miracle” have been largely described, particularly in the publications of Franklin W. Knight (1977, 1991). Some support came from the Spanish government which modernised land tenure legislation and from 1789 onwards, liberalised the slave trade to Spanish free ports, permitting Spanish traders to participate; finally even the much criticised *Código Negro* influenced the new boom because it implicitly supported slavery at a period when abolition was already a possibility. Many reasons, however, were external, due to political events and changes within the area: the breakdown of Saint-Domingue sugar production and the corresponding increase in demand and prices; the immigration of fleeing Saint-Domingue planters who brought capital, technical knowledge and slaves to the neighbouring island which offered equal good or even better soils. After the sale of Louisiana in 1802, more French planters came, bringing more capital to Cuba; finally the independence of the Latin American states had the same effect, for conservative and loyal planters fled to the last important Spanish colony. In its own anachronistic way Cuba profited from the manifold political and social crises of the area, offering a conservative haven within the rapid course of history.

In spite of its conservatism, the new plantation society formed in the 19th century was bound to differ in some important aspects from the earlier model. First it did not owe its existence to metropolitan, i.e. Spanish activities but to those of an international class of entrepreneurs who brought their capital and knowledge; they, as well as the Cuban capitalists who had made their money mostly through profitable land sales, could not hope for trade privileges or preferential prices. They were bound make their investment profitable. They did not constitute an absentee class speculating on subsidies or other forms of political advantages, but tried to manage their estates in a relatively rational way:

“[...] the Cuban were starting when science and technology offered new scope for profits and production in the sugar industry. With no obsolete machinery on

⁸⁰ Indications of the later years are unreliable because England began to enforce its prohibition of the slave trade and the Cuban slave trade became clandestine.

their hands, the Cubans began with the latest equipment and the most proven formula for sugar production” (Knight 1977: 18/19).

From 1830 onwards, when British naval forces tried to implement the ban on slave trading, machines were even more necessary, because slaves were expensive and difficult to come by. Labour supply became the dominant problem of the Cuban sugar industries; several attempts to use local or imported free labour (e.g. Chinese) failed, as long as slavery existed and free labour had to be afraid of being treated in the same way. On the other hand, scarcity and the high price of slaves led not only to their relatively fair treatment, but also to a considerable interest in their reproduction. Other than in the former plantation societies, female slaves were highly valued.

More important even was the general social context. 19th century Cuba certainly was not a modern society according to the European standards of the time; but four centuries of colonial history had left relatively complex social structures which included a local peasantry, rural and urban handicrafts, liberal professions and an intellectual life with all necessary ingredients: printing presses, local newspapers and even an embryonic literature. This corresponds with a high level of urbanisation which increased rapidly during the 19th century; Havana alone grew from 94,023 inhabitants in 1827 to 200,448 in 1887. This increase alone makes it an example of what Claudio Véliz sees as the characteristic Latin American “preindustrial culture” (Véliz 1980: 218ff); within the Caribbean area where urban life developed only after the abolition of slavery, the Havana case is a notable exception.

How did this large urban population sustain itself economically?

“The answer is simple:” Véliz tells us, “they serve each other; they were employed in the service, or the tertiary sector of the economy and included domestic servants as well as lawyers, teachers, dentists, civil servants, salesmen, politicians, soldiers, janitors, accountants, and cooks”

The urban culture developed on the wealth gained from the sale of colonial produce in rural areas (ibid., 235). In the Cuban case this meant that the money earned from sugar was not transferred to the metropolises as was the case in other colonies, but remained in the colony and nourished a complex and splendid urban life, famous in the Caribbean and Latin America. Such a society, unlike the simple and one - dimensional old plantation colonies, created and emphasised its own contradictions, questioning the base of its existence and wealth: slavery. Outside the United States, Cuba became the only plantation colony which produced its own abolition movement and a correspondent literature: the romantic abolition novel.

The mere existence of literature is a remarkable phenomenon in the 19th century Caribbean, let alone the emergence of a continued literary discourse⁸¹ which serves the political critics and “modern” intellectual countercultures to express their discontent; even more surprising is its social establishment within a *Tertulia*, a literary society founded by a Venezuelan immigrant, Domingo del Monte y Aponte which existed until 1843. Most writers who would sooner or later engage in anti - slavery novels were associated to Del Monte’s literary societies: the mulatto poet Plácido Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (1809 - 1844) who was executed in the course of the supposed conspiracy “de la Escalera” (1844); Anselmo Suárez y Romero (1818 - 1878) who had written the first anti - slavery novel *Francisco o las delicias del campo* (1838) and also the most famous of this generation, Cirilo

⁸¹ The only comparable example is the Haitian literature of the 19th century which, obviously, defends causes entirely different from the Cuban.

Villaverde (1812 - 1894), whose novel *Cecilia Valdés* (1882) offers an all - embracing panorama of Cuban society and the devastating effects of slavery on every part of it; finally - the most significant member of the society - Francisco Manzano (1797 - 1894), a slave poet whose autobiography had been published by the British abolitionist Richard R. Madden, supervisor of the British - Cuban slave trade agreement. Manzano's fate became a notorious case within the international abolitionist movement (see I.1.). Other Cuban anti - slavery novels however had no direct relation to Del Monte, above all Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda's novel *Sab* (1841).

For obvious reasons all of the novels mentioned had difficulties in being published in Cuba and were unknown to the larger indigenous public. Del Monte saw them as a Cuban contribution to the international anti - slavery movement. The relation between the Venezuelan author and Richard R. Madden constituted an important link; thanks to it, Manzano's autobiography, the novel of Suárez y Romero and maybe also that of Cirilo Villaverde circulated amongst abolitionist circles mainly in the United States. It is therefore not surprising that the Cuban anti - slavery novel shows many similarities to the corresponding North American genres: abolition literature and slave biographies. The protagonists are in no way ordinary slaves; they are endowed with extraordinary faculties and physical beauty and cannot, either by their colour or by their behaviour, be identified as slaves. They are incarnations of all bourgeois virtues: industry, humility, loyalty to their masters. A slave hero would not resist the unjust treatment his master inflicted upon him; silently he endures all possible tortures and vexations. A recurrent theme is the transfer of house slaves to field work: this allows the juxtaposition of these two main forms of slavery and demonstrates arbitrary decisions and the revenge which the planter could impose on his servant whenever he wished. The main plot of all these novels is a love intrigue: a slave loves a woman - slave or not - whom the master claims for his bed. A particular variation of this motif is the incestuous love (*Cecilia Valdés* and other novels) of a planter towards a coloured woman who turns out to his half sister born from a liaison between his father and a slave woman. The literary objective of these love plots is obvious: they serve to denounce a perverted society where true love is no longer possible and where the most basic moral standards have been lost.

Like their American counterparts the Cuban anti - slavery novels are romantic also in the sense that they confirm a world of bourgeois values: industry, confidence in God and his justice, the capacity to endure hardship, true feelings and sobriety. In this respect the black slave retains nothing of the alien and wild barbarian being of former descriptions. The end of slavery is approaching; the United States, Brazil and Cuba are the last, though important territories marked by an institution which has become anachronistic. The last slaves do not represent Africa in any sense; they are described as future members of modernising societies. The slavery which holds them back has to be overcome not only for humanitarian reasons; its abolition becomes a symbol for the advent of a new and modern bourgeois world: in the United States it is associated with the victory of the industrial North over the agricultural South; in Brazil abolition is associated with the victory of republicanism over the old - fashioned Empire; in Cuba abolition symbolises the general struggle for a political emancipation which will free the island from obsolete political and economic bonds. The struggle against slavery and the fight for independence are so closely intertwined that the genuine intentions of Cuban anti - slavery literature has been questioned: does it preach the general freedom on the base of universal human rights or is the question of slavery just a lever used to remove the effects of centuries - old Spanish traditionalism?

The cases of Santo Domingo and Cuba demonstrate the complexity of the relationship between Spanish slavery and other regional variants of this institution on the

one hand and its modifications which appear in relation to different stages of modernity on the other. At first sight both cases show that Spain does not avoid on principle the sugar dominated plantation colony and its effects on the slave system. Nevertheless this form of exploitation remains geographically and - as both cases demonstrate - historically marginal. The main reason for this is that Spain soon became a weak and backward colonial power more interested in safeguarding its imperial interests within its huge continental territories than in sustaining and optimising colonial production within a mercantile system. Santo Domingo and Cuba are out of focus; they became sugar colonies not because this type of production was encouraged and subsidised by the mother country. In some sense it can be said that they were sugar colonies *in spite* of Spain's colonial policy, but such a statement would overestimate the impact of Spanish colonialism. Such an overestimation of the will and the capacity of Spanish colonial institutions to regulate and control development within its territories has been enormous; it was the basis on which a particular moral form had been attributed to Spanish slavery, designating it as an old - fashioned and mild form more similar to traditional Old World feudal relations than to New World slavery. It may be true that the Spanish government had a particular moral attitude towards the institution of slavery; but in Santo Domingo as well as in Cuba it did not insist when sugar became profitable business on those islands. In most cases yielding ground was a wise attitude, because in any case the Spanish institutions lacked any efficient means of controlling the implementation of their colonial policy. Spanish planters were more inclined to observe closely the conditions of production and marketing by their American neighbours than the legal or moral aspects presented by their government.

The generalisation of Spanish slavery as a "good" or "mild" form of serfdom is the consequence of a misunderstanding which overshadows all research on slavery: it is based on the assumption that slavery in America had been a "rational" institution controlled by regulations and laws which reflected its daily reality. The following part will demonstrate the huge gap which separated slavery as an American reality and its "rational" image which appears in written documents of all kinds.

PART III

BETWEEN AFRICA AND AMERICA

III.1. AFRICAN IDENTITIES: ORIGINS, “NATIONS” AND LINGUISTIC CHANGE

How did an African feel, when some time after his capture he emerged in an American port, was sold to his new master and faced a new status and unknown work? What were his first steps towards settling in the New World? These are the most crucial question in understanding slavery and Afro - American cultures while at the same time being the most difficult to answer. There are momentous gaps of investigation, as Michael Mullin (1992: 269) rightly states:

“The first, African, phase of resistance and acculturation may be depicted by unseasoned new Negroes fresh from the slaver [...] The important period between when the gangplank lowered and new Negroes arrived at the plantation, is uncharted territory, which is a loss because the Africans’ first experiences and the whites’ reaction to them constitute nothing less than the clearest view we have of the beginnings of African - American institutions and values”.

All we may presume is that the first encounter with another world must have been, on the emotional level, most confusing and even agonising, an experience of utter loneliness, perceived by an personality which is still African and bound to its own linguistic expression. Upon arrival, the new African slaves were “desperately foreign”, states Mullin commenting on their seemingly “irrational” behaviour (ibid.: 60). The few later accounts of these moments of transition - Equiano’s memoirs as well as Haley’s fiction (I.1) - had gone through the filter of acculturation, but it is not surprising that the experience of transition “remains, with a few exceptions, a not dwelled upon item in the mosaic that constitutes African American collective identity” (Binder 1993: 555). The encounter of cultures on the slave market and during the first days of plantation life will probably remain a “black box” to our understanding. Universally shared emotions and cautious interpretation of some circumstantial evidence will offer some clues, but we have to beware of compensating for the lack of documentation by accepting too easily the planters’ view or our own rationality.

The four chapters of this third part of our study will be dedicated to plantation life from the inside, centring on the slave and the process of adaptation and acculturation he had to go through. It is bound to be insufficient and sometimes inadequate; but there is enough material available to counterbalance and reject some of the assumptions which are still firmly held and which, in my opinion, have considerable consequences for the understanding of Black America. One of these - probably the most important which deserves most attention - is the assumption that the new African slave rapidly lost his cultural heritage through the process of acculturation.

The basis for this assumption is twofold. Firstly it is structural and empirical, claiming that none of today’s Afro - American cultures show consistent patterns of genuinely African origin. A well - known study of Haitian culture - which usually is seen as being the most African of the Afro - American cultures! - goes a long way to prove,

“que l’africaniste, - et a fortiori l’Africain - qui considère Haiti avec l’oeil du comparatiste, n’y retrouve jamais l’Afrique, si ce n’est dans les traits d’une généralité telle qu’ils pourraient s’appliquer à n’importe autre partie du monde” (D’Ans 1987: 238)

We will have to deal with this argument later in this chapter and in others when we consider the problem of mestizo cultures. But we should not forget that this statement as

well as others of a similar nature has to be placed in an epistemological context of prejudices and counter - prejudices: the general discrimination against anything African in the American colonies, the corresponding backlash, when, in the time of *Négritude* and similar movements (see I.3.) everything African was idealised, and finally the anthropological structuralism which makes a virtue of the “de - africanisation” of the New World blacks. Roger Bastide, one of the main experts on Black Culture in the Americas, puts forward the argument that any affiliation to Africa would be discriminating:

“En soutenant en effet que le noir a dû s’ajuster à un nouveau milieu, mais qu’il l’a toujours fait à travers sa propre mentalité et en réinterprétant l’occident à travers l’Afrique, ne reconnaît - il pas, par là même, que la mentalité de l’Africain ne change pas; ne donne - t - il pas ainsi raison - d’ailleurs sans doute malgré lui - à ceux qui affirment que le Noir est inassimilable?” (1967:9)

The second argument countering the assumption of African continuity in America is entirely different; it is based on a historic level, and we have to deal with it extensively during the whole of the third part of this study. It claims the systematic dispersal of Africans in the New World leading to a disruption of traditional ethnic ties. Isolation rendered obsolete traditional knowledge, techniques, capacities; cut from his original culture the slave was like a “tabula rasa” which had to be filled in by a new master and a new culture - a stereotype which is frequently repeated of the relationship between colonised and colonisers⁸². The abnegation or at least depreciation of the cultural background of black people is such a well - known and recurrent part of colonial ideology that we do not have to emphasise or repeat it. But its application to new African slaves is different, because it is apparently sustained by historical evidence corroborating the assumption that the planters and the colonial authorities intentionally separated the African slave from other members of his “tribe” in order to prevent communication and conspiracy.

Both arguments - the lack of visible African cultural traits today and their wilful destruction in colonial times - at first sight seem to support each other. Nevertheless many questions remain open. First, it is entirely possible that African cultures continued to survive intact during at least a part of the colonial times and only disappeared later, for instance after a closer integration of the whole society. Second, none of those commentators who allege the rapid destruction of African cultures in America, elaborated on what they understood by those cultures and to what degree they needed to be preserved to be called “African”. Third, even if they survived in a “hybridised” or acculturated form, would it not be a quasi - colonial pose, if we deny them a priori the quality of “African”? These are essentially the questions which will steer the subsequent discussion, but first it is useful to enlarge on another topic by focusing on a particular trait of culture: language. It is one of the cornerstones of ethnicity and its continuation, and furthermore it is the most important tool of communication and of resistance and conspiracy which the planters feared most.

A discussion of languages and language use amongst slaves illustrates the pattern we have traced above. There are two aspects which are methodologically different, but seemingly self - supportive. The first aspect is historical: to what extent African languages have continued to be spoken in the colonies? An answer has to rely on indirect and

⁸² It already appears in Columbus’ diary where the Indians encountered are described as people deprived of clothing, weapons, language or religion. They appear as perfect, but empty forms of human beings which when filled with corresponding contents would, as Columbus puts it, become perfect citizens of the Spanish Empire (Cf Todorov

circumstantial evidence, for planters had little interest and knowledge of the linguistic origins of their servants.

The second aspect is linguistic: Where African languages had been spoken for any considerable length of time, they ought presumably to have left traces within the usage of the colonial languages, particularly on the colloquial level, and above all in the Pidgin and Creole varieties. The question of a possible African substratum of these languages has been a major subject of debate since they became an object of linguistic consideration. During colonial times the white masters would not have shown any marked interest in the “gibberish” of their slaves. Later, at the beginning of the twentieth century, interest in the “African” character of Creole languages became overstressed: linguists, very often amateurs, discovered Creole languages as a hidden treasure of the African heritage, attributing the conspicuous “European” origin of Creole vocabulary to a *reflexification process*, which covered the African origin of the Creole grammatical structure⁸³. As soon as linguistic structuralism gained the upper hand, the idea of an “African grammar” was entirely discarded. Until now, the majority of linguists would deny any relation between present day Creole languages and African languages; it is not surprising that linguists use the very same historical argument as anthropologists. The introduction to the first large inventory of Creole linguistics, the Mona Conference of 1968, shows this:

“No one African language can account for all or even a majority of the ‘African’ elements in Caribbean Creole, nor is any significant ‘African’ feature in Creole shared by all or even the majority of native languages of the slaves. Furthermore, plantation owners deliberately acquired slaves with the greatest possible variety of languages in order to make native - language communication among slaves impossible and thus reduce the risk of insurrection” (DeCamp 1971: 20).

Apart from a few recent investigations (mainly Alleyne, Boretzky and Mufwene) all major studies on Creole languages since 1960 insist on the idea of a “rupture” in the linguistic biography of the new slave: the former speech community disappears, African languages become obsolete and are no longer used. In order to communicate, African slaves have to use either existing forms of vehicular languages (monogenetic theories) or even invent new linguistic tools from a rudimentary knowledge of colonial languages (polygenetic theories). Most important for these explanations is the aspect of rapid loss of former competence and the subsequently urgent need for new languages resulting from the incomplete acquisition of the colonial tongue. But many Afro - Americans do not feel comfortable with such theories which may appear entirely rational and reasonable, but hark back to earlier discriminatory views of colonial linguistics⁸⁴. We may add that sociolinguistic and sociohistorical perspectives do not correspond with this idea of a linguistic catastrophe

⁸³ As a linguistic theory the idea of an “African Grammar” appeared first in 1883 in a study of Lucien Adam (*Les idiomes négro - aryen et maléo - aryen*) and had since then been defended mostly by local linguists in quest of an “African” identity. Notable is the case of the Haitian linguist Charles Fernand Pressoir, who after a first study on *Débats sur le créole et le folklore*, (1947) continued to expand his ideas in newspaper articles where he labels Haitian Creole languages as “fongbé haitien” (*Le Nouvelliste*, 13.1.64) or “Ewe - Fon - Créole” (*ibid.*, 17.4.1964). Better established in linguistic theory are the monogenetical theories which also suppose a common grammar of all Creole languages, which, however, is not necessarily “African”. During its migration to other colonial territories it was adapted to the dominant language, i.e. “relexified”.

⁸⁴ When describing native languages “il ne pouvait s’agir réellement de décrire des langues [...], mais tout au plus de se pencher avec commisération sur les gargouillis barbares dont la place était au musée ou au cirque” (Calvet 1974: 51)

which leaves “Africans in complete linguistic disarray waiting with mouth open to pick up bits of baby - talk generously handed out by their masters” (Alleyne 1972: 111).

The foregoing discussion leads us to consider more closely the conditions and possibilities of ethnic separation of the slaves at the African trading posts and in the colony, considering three principal factors: first the possibility of obtaining and shipping ethnically divergent slave cargoes from Africa; second the identification of ethnic groups; and third, the attitude of the planters regarding the advice to separate slaves from the same ethnic group. Regarding the first point we have little precise information. Generally, nearly all slaves came from the Western sub - Saharan part of Africa, most of them from the coast and the immediate interior. Traders would try to fill their boats at one of the fortified trading posts of their own nation and this might have led to the concentration of particular ethnic groups in particular slave ships and some particular colonies. The Portuguese held a virtual monopoly in slave dealing during the sixteenth century and had their fortifications on the Gold Coast at El Mina, founded in 1482. They lost it a few decades later to the Dutch. Later on British merchants arrived in the same area, and the slave trade became more highly competitive. The same African chiefs served traders of several nations, who even bought and sold slaves from one another. In this competitive situation the nations involved tried to establish protected trade relations or monopolies in less frequented areas: the French had their stronghold on the La Gorée Island which gave them relatively easy access to Senegambian slaves; from the middle of the 17th century onwards the Portuguese established themselves in Angola, thus replacing their former preponderantly Gold Coast slaves with Bantu - speaking people. British traders, on the other hand, tried to come to an arrangement with the Niger Delta States which gave them access to Ibo and River People. But all this changed the composition of the slaves’ stock only insignificantly. Especially in the course of the 18th century when the slaves were difficult to come by, slave ship tended to curtail long and insecure waiting periods by roaming along the whole coast, stopping and trading at random at villages and little coastal towns. During this period an increasing proportion of slaves was brought from the interior, thus increasing the variety of ethnic affiliations. Slave traders sometimes tried to ascertain the origin of their merchandise, but usually did not bother about it; their first concern was filling the ship.

Their customers in America were more concerned about ethnicity. Their aim was to buy a slave who suited their purpose and this was determined by the sex, the age, the physical strength and the state of health of a slave, but also importantly by his presumed ethnic origin, his “nation”. Recognising the different African Nations, their qualities and their shortcomings, was part of the professional knowledge of the planters. All colonies had inventories of current “ethnic” labels which were used in slave inventories or in newspaper advertisements to describe slaves on sale or runaways, and which became part of the slave’s identity⁸⁵. The larger groups are easy to localise, but difficult to delimit: The term *Nago* refers to a large ethnic group known today as the Yoruba of Western Nigeria and East Benin, though it is uncertain whether it includes the Islamic regions. *Nagos* are known as good field hands, but are prone to rebellions. *Ibos* as well are numerous amongst the slaves. They are located east of the Niger river. The term *Ibo* often includes another Niger Delta people although *Ijo*, *Ibibio* and *Calabars* could be quoted separately. *Ibos* were not always highly esteemed because they were of delicate health, did not adapt well to the different food and life in the colonies and were subject to sickness and suicide. An

⁸⁵ Inventories of these qualities have been compiled by various authors. An important colonial source is Moreau de Saint-Méry, vol. I, 47 - 55. One may also consult Daget 1990, 120 - 122; Vanony - Frisch 1985: 33 - 36; for British territories and North America: Herskovits 1941: 33ff; Mullet 1994: 282 - 288; for Brazil Queirós Mattoso 1994: 15ff.

extensive and complicated ethnic label was that of the *Congos*; the name originally applied to slaves traded by the King of Congo; the term extended to all ethnic groups which lived or were sold in the surroundings of the Congo River and further South, including slaves from Angola (*Congo - Angola*) who, however, might appear under different names, as for instance *Benguela*. *Congos* are ideal slaves, “magnifiques, robustes, durs à la fatigue, [...] doux et tranquilles, façonnés à la servitude” (contemporary judgement, Debien 1974: 50).

A high percentage of slaves came from the Gold and Slave Coast, but they appear under widely different names. In French colonies the current term was *Arada*, referring to the town of Ardra (Allada); British and Spanish sources would rather speak of *Minas*, *Judas* (Ouidah) and above all of *Coromantee* who were ill - famed for their bellicose character and the numerous rebellions for which they were responsible. Minas were considered just as dangerous by the Spaniards, but French planters seemed to like them (Daget 1990: 120). All these names refer to ports of shipment and fortifications and they include larger areas of the hinterland. The important Ashanti kingdom is never mentioned.

Further North, the deltas and courses of the Gambia and Senegal rivers gave access to important catchment areas which included Islamic groups. The *Mandingo* were best known, most frequently in British colonies, but familiar elsewhere as well. Most numerous in the French colonies were the *Senegals*, who included several ethnic groups of the lower Senegal river. From the interior, *Bambaras* were mentioned, but *Haoussas* and *Fulanis* also appear in the literature. *Wolofs*, the first consistent ethnic group in Spanish Santo Domingo (cf. p.148f), are rarely named, the equally important *Serer* never at all; we may surmise that all of them are included in the large group of *Senegals*. All these “nations” are not well regarded as slaves, because they were influenced by Islam and therefore considered to be difficult to control.

Besides these more common names many others are used - more than hundred in French Santo Domingo alone, as Fouchard (1988: 147/148) demonstrates. Many of these “ethnic” names can no longer be identified, especially those which refer to interior peoples. The nearer to the shore and to the shipping ports, the easier the more precisely the correct geographic area can be identified. Nevertheless it is difficult to elicit accurate information from these indications; particularly the use of slave ports as quasi - ethnic names is irritating, because it is obvious that the majority of slaves who arrived there did so after long journeys which brought them from probably completely different ethnic groups. Therefore one can not rely on such information for precise ethnographic details, and so scholars who try to reconstruct the ethnic background of modern Afro - American societies are sure to be particularly frustrated. Thus it seems logical to reject the term “African nations” altogether and to consider the patchy attempts at ethnic identification as questionable:

“[...] le terme de ‘nation’, dont on use dans les textes anciens pour désigner ce que nous serions tentés de regarder comme des ethnies, est lui - même source d’erreurs. [...]” (Chaudenson 1992:55)

This is certainly correct if viewed from the perspective of a modern ethnographer or linguist, but it is still worthwhile to reconstruct the contemporary meaning and value of these “ethnic” denominations. Hardly any of the planters had been to Africa; few had any idea of the large open spaces of this continent, nor of the origins of the ethnic groups they were buying, nor of their relationship to other ethnic groups. “Ibo”, “Nago” or “Congo” meant to them primarily a trade mark which helped them to acquire the type of slave they wanted or needed. In this sense, any information about the slaves’ “nation” seemed useful, and it would be difficult for slave owners to recognise the intrinsic weakness of the system. For if a Nago slave who was purchased showed no inclination to field work, the owner

could blame his hard luck for having hit on a Nago who was not typical; or he would blame the trader of having been cheated; but he would have no reason to question the conventional view which held that Nago slaves were good field hands or that Coromantee slaves were dangerous. What ever the true ethnic background of a Coromantee slave⁸⁶, the qualities attributed to him became to a certain extent a self fulfilling prophecy. It created an identity which had real consequences. Today we know that Coromantee was not more than a harbour town and most slaves shipped from there came from numerous distant locations in the interior. Nevertheless the “Coromantee” slaves were specifically held responsible for nearly all rebellions in Jamaica (cf.III.4.)

One should not thereby understand or assume that the New World slave accepted any ethnic label which traders or planters unwittingly bestowed upon them. The interpretation and creating of new identities was a complex process in which both planters and slaves took part. We may suppose that some of the newly arrived slaves were of uncertain origin, or that a planter doubted the “ethnic” label under which a slave had been sold. In such a situation the buyer would call upon another slave who was a “recognised” Nago or Coromantee to test the new slave’s language: A “Nago” was a slave who was able to understand another Nago. This seems to be a reasonably good test, but today we know that it was less reliable than it appeared, for various reasons.

For most slaves the lapse of time between enslavement and arrival in America was considerable: at the least several months but sometimes years, during which the slave was sold and bought several times and travelled considerable distances until he or she reached the port of shipment. Equiano in his biography reports such peregrination which put him into contact with several different linguistic groups:

“From the time I left my own nation I always found somebody that understood me till I came to the sea coast. The languages of different nations did not totally differ, nor were they so copious as those of the Europeans, particularly the English. They were therefore easily learned, and while I was journeying thus through Africa I acquired two or three tongues” (1789: 28/29)

Equiano might have been a particularly open - minded and adventurous person, endowed with a great zeal of learning, but his experiences were far from unique. Most parts of West Africa of this time, not only the coast and the trading centres -, were deeply affected by the slave trade which by then had existed for several centuries. Rivers and land routes became highways which opened the interior and left few villages in complete isolation. The Journals of Mungo Park (1795 - 1806) show the extent to which it was usual to meet slave caravans as they journeyed down to the coast, or to come across abandoned dying captives or fugitives. Thieves and robbers were a constant threat as were even more so the arbitrary infringements of local rulers. Traditional customs had been abandoned or were perverted; oracles played an important part in justifying enslavement and protecting kidnappers and raiders (Obichere 1988: 49). Old established empires depended more and more on the revenues created by the slave trade. A significant, but not unique example was the old kingdom of Dahomey where slave raiding and trading had become the only source of income (Cf Hallett 1970: 108ff, Renault Daget 1985: 108/109) to the extent that in an interview published in 1849 by the British newspaper *Globe* the king of Dahomey pleaded desperately against the entire abolition of slavery. The power and the splendour of the kingdom, and the well - being of his subjects depended entirely on its maintenance, so he

⁸⁶ It had been claimed that they had an Ashanti background. Compare footnote on p. 249

feared unrest, revolt and even destitution if the English Crown did not at least compensate him for part of his losses⁸⁷.

Resulting from the slave trade, new states appeared on the political map particularly in the Niger Delta. The well established social system disappeared, and rural occupations were replaced by new trades and professions: “food sellers, medicine men, dentists, barbers, even cosmetologists” (Obichere 1988: 51). Their social ties were no longer based on traditional allegiances or the lineage system, but on self - interest. Changing names and identities was a common feature in such turbulent times; it certainly entailed at least a partial change of language identity. Often people had to migrate from various, often distant areas and they needed a lingua franca for daily communication. Pierre Verger quotes an interesting seventeenth century example from the area around the slave port of Arder (Ardre, today Allada) on the Gold Coast:

“C’est une chose fort singulière que ces nègres méprisent leur langue maternelle et ne la parlent presque point, pour en apprendre une autre qu’ils ont toujours à la bouche, nommée Ulcumy”⁸⁸

The idea of a systematic disappearance of African ethnic and linguistic groupings upon arrival in the New World emanates from the image of a multitude of small and isolated “tribal” languages which are separated by distinct ethnic and linguistic barriers. It is certain that this picture did not correspond to the linguistic reality of West Africa during the heyday of slavery when high geographic mobility created continuous contacts between different linguistic groups. It is also questionable whether the image of small isolated speech communities was ever true. The linguistic situation of the West Coast, particularly that of the main slave trading areas, is characterised by two large linguistic groups: the Bantu languages which reached from the present northern border of Cameroun down to the Southern tip of the continent, and the large group of the Kwa - languages which includes Ibo, Yoruba, Ewe, Fon and the Akan languages of the Gold Coast. Whoever travels today from the east of Nigeria to Ghana along the coastal road in the company of Africans, will probably realise the facility by which means of communication are established. Upon being asked, travellers and locals will explain either that - like Equiano - they “speak” several of these coastal languages, or that these languages are so similar that a foreigner can easily make himself understood. Of course, a number of slaves, mostly from the interior, came from linguistic groups which were not or only distantly related to the dominant language families, but unless they were really isolated, the speakers usually were capable of understanding the dominant *lingua franca* of the area.

The idea of a linguistic separation of West African languages is - we may suppose - rather a projection by Europeans who transfer their own experience of a seemingly hermetic separation of language communities and norms. African speakers handle their languages differently:

“Divergences in their structure, i.e. in their grammatical, phonological and semantic systems, are frequently less extensive than their divergences of vocabulary, and - relative to the structure of European languages - West African languages are found to share many widespread structural features. As a result, Africans are often

⁸⁷ The Globe, June 1849; we consulted a Spanish article of this article in the archives of Madrid (Legajo 8042). In this context the article was quoted as a plea in favour of slavery and slave trade, but seemed to be based on a genuine report.

⁸⁸ d’Olfert/ Dapper: Description de l’Afrique. Amsterdam 1686, quoted by Verger 1966: 23. Ulcumy was one of the Yoruba Kingdoms which left had its traces in the secret cult language of Cuba, called Lucumí

well experienced in operation divergent sets of vocabulary, as they master a variety of local languages, but in doing so they are able to retain many of the grammatical phonological and semantic rules which they have acquired as part of their original mother tongue.” (Dalby 1970: 6)

Seen from this perspective, planters would have had considerable difficulties in preventing communication between slaves, even when they tried to reach a perfect balance between different nations within their slave gangs. But we can go even further in this line of argument, if we return to our initial question: what does the concept of “nation” among New World slaves really mean? To the European master it pointed to the likely value of a slave or the likely problems to be expected from a slave in the colonial context and so if he wanted to investigate the origins of a new slave, he might observe his way of speaking when in contact with other slaves: a genuine Nago slave should be able to communicate with other Nago slaves. But how could he be really sure? The slave in question might have originated from a variety of language communities and could have learned the Nago language during his journey to the shore. But, having found somebody to talk to, he would be happy to join the local Nago group, thus breaking his isolation and, when being accepted, winning support from his fellow slaves. This involved the first step towards what must have taken place whenever slaves arrived from Africa: the construction of new ethnic groupings and solidarities, imperative in overcoming the first stages of alienation and helplessness in new and unknown surroundings.

According to the investigations of Klamon Kopytof

“these processes of ethnic redefinition must have started before the Africans reached the New World. We know that slaves who shared the middle passage considered themselves kin; and even before that, in the slave factories and baracoons of the African coast, African captives in their fear and sorrow may have found comfort in asserting kin ties with others who, if they did not come from the same village or chiefdom, at least came from a part of their known world” (1976: 35)

It is important to realise that the term “rupture” used to describe the arrival of the slaves in the New World, carries a metaphoric and connotative value which conjures up a mythical picture: the ingenuous tribesman pulled out of his rural idyll and thrown into a turmoil of events which transform him into a docile object without any will of his own. For centuries, life was precarious in the areas affected by slavery. Local proverbs show that people were aware “that slavery could befall anyone in the course of his or her life” (Obichere 1988: 46) Enslavement involved a personal disaster, but it did not strike like a flash. Already during his long trip to the port the new slave met hundred, if not thousands of companions in misfortune: Waiting and travelling allowed sufficient time to exchange experiences, to compare customs and to adjust their cultural luggage so that they did not arrive culturally empty - handed in the New World.

What did the commonly - used expression “nation” mean to the African slave? Chaudenson (1992a:74 - 76) goes a long way towards demonstrating the European genealogy of this term and speculating on its significance to the planters; finally he concludes that “ces designations [...] **n’ont aucune valeur d’appartenance ethnique réelle**” (ibid., 74; bold type in the original). But what does “real ethnicity” mean? Its base always has been referential: beliefs and myths of a common ascendance, of a common culture, of a special origin and a special destiny. There are many examples of how these myths have been altered in the course of disastrous historical changes. It is in our view Eurocentric to believe that the term “nation” was only relevant to Europeans and that the slaves had to adjust to it when referring to their own communities. Certainly it is not

feasible that slaves would only understand it with reference to their own role within the colonial system; for them it also had a primordial African meaning which remained “desperately foreign” to the planters.

It is remarkable that slaves from whatever African origins continued to use the European term “nation” to describe their own ethnic reorganisation. This linguistic arrangement points to something which is characteristic of Creole plantation culture: an inherent ambiguity of terms, behaviour, rites and cultural institutions as a particular form of resistance to acculturation. There was a common colonial language at the necessary minimal consensual level to ensure the functioning of the plantation and to avoid continuous conflict; but Creole languages and other Afro - American speech varieties, up to the present day, are noted for their institutionalised ambiguity. Haitians call it “pale endaki”, “English” Afro - Americans speak “signifying”; both mean the same thing: a discourse which according to the context and to pronunciation may have different meanings. Though this linguistic strategy has been described various times⁸⁹, linguists seem to have difficulty handling systems of language where the same signifier refers to a range of signified items which differ not only according to the “normal” range of connotative variations but also according to various divergent cultural systems within the same speech area. This characterises the “African nation” as an complex cultural system which, as the following chapters will demonstrate, plays an important part within the social and cultural setting of the plantation society.

III.2. SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN NATIONS IN PLANTATION COLONIES⁹⁰

On the first arrival in the New World some experiences must have appeared familiar to the slaves, because they resembled African initiation ceremonies. Alagoa (1971:280) describes how, in the Niger Delta States the “households” - the local foundation of the lineage system - had adapted to the high turnover of the slave trade area:

“The House system itself was designed to turn a foreign slave into a member of his community and kin to all other members of the House. A slave had his hair ceremonially shaved and was given a new name to symbolise his rebirth. He was then handed to a senior woman in the House who became his `mother. Thenceforward, other members were expected to treat him as one of themselves. Other social and economic forces also induced slaves to acculturate quickly and completely”

Washing, shaving and the delivery of new clothes were a necessity when reaching the plantation after the filth of the middle passage. According to the slavery laws the newcomer had to be baptised and few masters omitted to give him a new name. Afterwards it was

⁸⁹ Cf. Reisman 1971: “Features of Creole phonology aid the ambiguity process by lending themselves to the production of multi - meaning utterances which may be taken by the hearer in the way he is predisposed, without his ever becoming aware of alternatives” (410). Cf. Schlieben - Lange 1983: 92f.

⁹⁰ One of the problems of investigation into colonial life are the limits of the data available; detailed descriptions like that of Craton and Walvin (1970) or that of Jacques Cauna (1987) refer to cases of single plantations. Examples are usually compared to others on a broader level, but the research remains biased: the “representative” cases are exclusively sugar plantation with a population between 300 and 500 slaves; we know little on coffee, tobacco and indigo plantations where the social structure was certainly different. We have stated this before (2.3.): large sugar plantation - certainly a significant form of slave economy - dominate our knowledge of the slave societies of the New World.

customary to put him under the care of an older slave for a period usually of three months, in order to adapt to his new life and to learn his new work.

But soon, the new slave must have found out that this form of “initiation” did not correspond to what he was used to. His new, imposed name, was, in most of the cases, a special name which marked him out as a new slave, because it differed from the names of Whites and Creole slaves. Baptism proved equally to be a source of discrimination, even when it protected the new slave “de l’injure adressée aux non - baptisés; quoique les nègres Créoles les appellent toujours baptisés débout” (Moreau de Saint-Méry I: 55) Above all the slave realised that nothing of the enrolment procedure made him kin to anybody and that the society he was forced to live in, was highly hierarchical and competitive. He learned that in order to survive he had to adjust his behaviour towards two contradictory patterns: he had to adapt himself to the norms, values and demands of his white master and eventually even dissociate from his companions in order to make small steps towards a better life; and at the same time he had to assure himself of the solidarity of his slave companions who were the only people who knew him and his needs and who could give him whatever little support they could muster. Thus, torn between European and African matrices of culture and behaviour, the new slave began a double life.

As we have mentioned before, the slave’s personal name became a symbol of his new contradictory and precarious status. Few planters kept his original African name even in a Europeanised form; forenames also were hardly ever used, even if slaves had been baptised. They were replaced by a variety of names which were contemptuous and ridiculous, and the slaves knew it: names from classical mythology and history: Apollo, Cicero or Pyrrhus; names of weekdays or months; geographic terms from Africa or from Europe; caricatured references to parts of the body or the temperament like *Haute - Fesse* (High Buttocks) or *Sansraison*; finally, purely fanciful names such as *Black Prince* or even *Sansnom* (No name)⁹¹ - all names “distressingly similar to those of the estate’s cattle” (Craton 1978: 157).

But the African names were not forgotten; they were remembered and used by fellow slaves. Masters usually did not know them and therefore they do not appear on any lists. We are fortunate to have access to a list of 92 slaves from a sugar plantation in French Guyana which mentions the colonial names as well as nicknames and African names:

“Jean, dit Jean de la Place, et appelé par les noirs Agouya [...] Annique, sa femme, dite par les noirs Ouagouaou [...] Paul ou Pallé appelé par les noirs Bazan,” etc. (Debien/Houdaille 1964: 167/168).

Debien generalises this data:

“Donc le nom d’Afrique est resté sous - jacent au nom chrétien. Il est à croire que cette pratique devait être générale. L’Afrique ne mourait en un jour dans l’âme et les moeurs de l’esclave” (1974:73)⁹².

⁹¹ Examples have been taken from the list of Jean Fouchard (1988: 229 - 233) and Gabriel Debien (1974: 61 - 73)

⁹² See also Craton/Walvin (1970: 148/149) about Jamaica: “[...] it is highly likely that all African - born slaves retained their native names among their fellows” (149). It seems that in early colonial history African names here were more likely to be used generally than in other colonies. This may, however be a unique example in the plantation investigated, reflecting the fact that a Christian baptism was not obligatory in British colonies. Moreover in the Spanish colonies it was unusual and furthermore forbidden to mention the former African name of a slave (Ortiz 1916: 165)

Finally Debien highlights a significant fact: Maroons are never known by their colonial names; for them the ambiguity ends when they leave the plantation. Those who stayed behind had to get used to their ludicrous names. Emancipation finally brought the right to choose a family name⁹³; seen from the logic of adaptation and alienation it is not surprising that most slaves took the name of their former owner or at least another well - known colonial name (Craton/Walvin: 149). Slaves in Spanish colonies did the same although here most African - born or Creole slaves already had a second name which was their African nation - name and which helped to distinguish the various *Juans* and *Franciscos* amongst the slaves (Ortiz 1916: 165; Patterson 1982: 56/57; Zeuske 1997: 39). Virtually none of them retained this African name, but by irony of fate, they still could be recognised as ex - slaves because their had only one family name whereas any Spaniard of social standing had two names (Zeuske 1997: 40ff).

So interpreted, slaves' names are an eloquent example of the social hierarchy which is expressed and reinforced by particular cultural patterns in different colonies. The process of naming, and thus conferring an identity, is an act of power; indirectly it imposes a cultural standard yet at the same time refusing this standard to the slaves. In Spanish territories the Catholic Church claims such power and through a "Christian" name it conferred a Christian identity; its competitor in power, the slave owner, stigmatised the new identity by adding the mark of origin: Juan becomes Juan Congo. In the non - Spanish colonies there were no secular or priestly authorities to hamper the owners' absolute power. He could impose whatever name he liked and therefore did not need to register a black slave's identity by referring to his origin, because everybody knew what names such as *Apollo* or *Carefee* stood for; meanwhile the African name, not used by the colonial power, was free to become a name of resistance, a Maroon name. The African identity became a counter model which opposed the official system; we have to look at both identities to understand how they functioned.

The dominant social and cultural hierarchy of the colony was simple and unequivocal; it depended on criteria which did not need much interpretation: status, i.e. free or not free; skin colour, i.e. white or not white; and origin, which included a cultural stigma: African or non - African. The two extremes of this scale are, on the one side, the white free person of European origin, and on the other side, the black, unfree African person. Most planters and colonialists would have preferred, for ideological as well as practical reasons, that the whole colonial population could fit into these two clear categories, but intermediate stages could not be avoided. One of these consisted of free people of colour, and it will be discussed later (IV. 3 and 4); the other category consisted of the Creole slaves born in the colony. To a certain extent, white planters depended on these Creoles, firstly because they were culturally closer to them, and secondly because many of them held those particular skills necessary for the good functioning of the plantation.

If comparisons are possible, the most privileged status was enjoyed by domestic servants: they were closest to the white masters who had to confide in them and therefore were interested in keeping them good humoured, satisfied and loyal. The house servants, amongst them the cook, would find at the master's house a better, more copious and more varied diet than that found by any other slave; they would receive better cloth and various other favours; above all, living with white people all their life, much closer than they ever were to any other slaves, they became specialised in knowing and serving white people. Most of them were Creole slaves, sometimes mulattos, and they shared with their master a

⁹³ In *La Case du Commandeur*, Glissant describes the distribution of family names as an event worthy of carnival

profound distrust of African - born slaves. The next category were the skilled professions: carpenters, coopers, blacksmiths, sugar technicians, but also dentists, doctors and nurses. The variety of professions depended on the type of plantation and its size; certain products like tobacco needed more skilled workers and also large plantations tended to have more professional services; they would have special cattlemen, rat catchers or weed gangs, all tasks which, on small plantations, were part of the normal duties of the field gangs. Nevertheless the ratio of field hands to professionals favoured the latter ones on small estates, because a certain standard of services could not be spared. A very special caste were the foremen and related professions who had to organise and watch the different working gangs and who were held responsible for bad work and delays. Privileges in the distribution of food, cloth and rum were the most important tools in dealing with these professionals who were called “Head People” in the British possessions:

“When these distributions (of clothing material) took place, normally on an annual basis, the ‘Head People’ received more than the ordinary slave [...]. Conversely the withholding of an allocation could be used as punishment for wayward slaves” (Craton/Walvin: 141).

On the plantation referred to - Worthy Parks - food allowances were poor, so that ordinary slaves, particularly the field gang, were constantly hungry and undernourished; the *Head People*, however, received more than they needed. This considerable difference in treatment was a part of the planters’ policy. Father Labat whose journal sometimes appears like a planters handbook, gives this advice:

“Il est bon de distinguer toujours les Nègres ouvriers des autres, soit en leur donnant plus de viande, soit en leur faisant quelque gratification. Rien ne les anime davantage à chercher l’occasion d’apprendre un metier. Tel qu’il puisse être, il est toujours d’une grande utilité pour la maison. Les profits que font les ouvriers, les attachent à leurs maitres, et leur donnent le moyen d’entretenir leurs familles avec quelque sorte d’éclat, et le plaisir d’être au dessus des autres, contente extrêmement la vanité dont ils sont très - bien pourvus. J’en ai vu qui étoient si fiers d’être Maçons, ou Menuisiers, qu’ils affectoient d’aller à l’Eglise avec leur règle et leur tablier” (1742, vol. II: 286).

In other words: the desire for privileges should keep competition on a high level. Compared to this, real mobility was, however, very low. Very few slaves, an even lower percentage of African - born slaves, and virtually none of the field slaves could hope for an improvement in their living conditions:

“Wherever prospects of changing jobs existed, they simply involved a transfer from one unpleasant manual labour to another; it was generally a lateral than an upward movement” (Craton/Walvin: 140)

It is worthwhile to have a closer look at this continuously frustrated competition. In the sugar plantations⁹⁴ there was a certain number of slaves who not only received the lion’s share of the available food, but who also could count upon some social and psychological satisfaction: masters and overseers would know them personally because they were essential for the good functioning of their plantations and they were valuable even in terms of their market prize which increased with their growing professional experience. On the other hand there were the majority of field hands, overworked and undernourished whose worth, due to their miserable living conditions, diminished rapidly

⁹⁴ In other types of plantations the demand for skilled workers was higher, and thus also the upward mobility for anyone who had learned his trade.

until they had amortised their value, mostly in less than five years; their death after this period was “normal” and hardly noticed. They were classed as wastage and, witnessing the huge death rate amongst their companions, they knew this. As their initial chances of upward mobility were poor, they had to find alternative means of satisfying their material, social and psychological needs and they found them among the members of their African Nations.

We are aware that we are approaching the most controversial part of the argument concerning the African nations. Representatives of various disciplines - historical, linguistics and neighbouring sciences - might admit that Africans of different origins might have associated in their own continent, but the idea that these groups succeeded in gathering together and communicating in the American colonies and even managed to create clandestine organisations, directly contradicts the current argument of ethnic dispersal. We will demonstrate in the next chapter that ethnic reorganisation is closely connected with the development of syncretic cults in the Americas and, in the last chapter of this part, we shall suggest that the nations were involved in organising slave escapes and rebellions. But first we have to look at the external conditions which the African Nations met when they reached the New World.

It was suggested in the last chapter, that slaves tried, whilst crossing the ocean on the ill - famed middle passage, to overcome the diversity of their origins and to reconstruct new “ethnic” ties. In the past perhaps too much attention was paid to the question of language; we will see in the next chapter that language was not the basic constituent of the nations, but nevertheless it remained important as a means of communication. It is known that customers in the slave markets paid attention to the ethnic origin of the slaves, which they saw mainly as linguistic ties amongst them. It might appear surprising that many of the planters had no intention to break such bonds and to isolate the slaves - on the contrary: Caunas characterised the interests of the masters when buying new slaves:

“En règle generale ce sont les circonstances que décident: arrivées des négriers, troubles, guerres, dépenses imprévues... mais quelques grands principes subsistent: combler au moins le déficit annuel de la population, *n’acheter que par petits groupes d’une douzaine, de même ethnie et age*, pour faciliter l’assimilation [...] (1987: 109; emphasis by me)

Debien (1974:84) also finds some evidence of this purchase strategy and reaches a similar conclusion: “L’expérience dictait donc de n’acheter de nouveaux que par petits groupes et autant que possible de même race”. Diversification was not a primary concern of the planters. Certainly there was always the risk of conspiracy, but producing sugar in the islands was a risky business anyway and the planters had more immediate problems, such as: how to reduce the enormous mortality rate among new slaves who had difficulties in adapting to the different food and eating habits in the colonies and to the discipline of the plantation. How was the planter to overcome the depressions which befell new slaves when they realised that they would spend the rest of their lives in slavery far from their countries and their own people? “Death by despair” was a regular happening. It did not always involve outright suicide, but included many forms of illness, mostly digestive; “eating dirt” was one of the most feared “vices” of the new slaves.

There were few remedies against such self - destructive tendencies. One had to watch the new slave closely and, above all, put him at ease for the first few months after his arrival: reduce his work load, give him, whenever possible, the food he was used to, and put him in the company of older slaves possibly of the same origin who understood his cultural background and language. Ducoeur - Joly’s *Planters’ Handbook* describes

extensively this technique which the English named “seasoning” and the French “acclimatisation” of new slaves:

“Les anciens compatriotes les adoptent ordinairement par inclination; ils les retirent dans leurs cases, les soignent comme leurs enfants, en les instruisant de ce qu’ils doivent faire, et leurs font entendre qu’ils ont été achetés pour travailler, et non pour être mangés⁹⁵ [...] Leurs patrons les conduisent ensuite au travail, ils les chatient quand ils manquent, et ces hommes faits se soumettent à leurs semblables avec une grande resignation” (1802, vol. I: 23)

Moreau de Saint-Méry reports that the Ibo slaves’ inclination to suicide was even proverbial. Planters would refrain from buying them,

“[...] mais d’autres par cela même qu’ils en possèdent déjà les préfèrent parce qu’ils sont très - attachés les uns aux autres et que les nouveaux venus trouvent des secours, des soins et des exemples dans ceux qui les ont devancés” (I: 51).

“Seasoning” obviously implied the use of an ethnically based community spirit among slaves and this confirms that planters saw an advantage in forming ethnically homogeneous slave gangs. Debien quotes a letter of an absentee plantation owner sent to his local administrator. He states:

“Vous avez acheté six jeunes nègres Congo. Sans doute vous n’avez pas trouvé d’inconvénient à placer des nègres de cette race sur l’habitation dont *l’atelier est, à ce que nous pensons, tout Arada*” (quoted by Debien 1974: 51, my emphasis)

This quotation refers to an indigo plantation where the whole slave gang belong to the same “nation” - a rare, but not singular case. But it should remind us that we have to be precise in defining the level of colonial society to which we refer when talking about ethnic homogeneity: the whole colony, a single plantation or a part of it? This should help us avoid misunderstandings which appear, for example, when Chaudenson analyses the slave lists of the Fleuriau plantation presented by Caunas: 27 Congos, 24 Nagos and Aradas, 16 Haoussas, some members of smaller nations⁹⁶. He concludes:

“À une époque où les plantations sont devenues très importantes et leur main d’œuvre servile fort nombreuse (l’habitation Fleurieau étudiée possède, entre 1777 et 1790, un nombre total d’esclaves qui varie entre 250 et 300), l’achat d’esclaves par groupes d’une douzaine d’individus d’une même nation ne conduit nullement à une homogénéisation de l’ensemble” (1992a: 74)

This is certainly true, but the initial question was different: did the planters succeed in atomising the ethnic structure of the slaves in such a way that communication in their own African languages was impossible? It is difficult to understand why the 27 Congos or the 24 Nagos would not have communicated in their own languages. Fortunately for us, we have access to computations which Debien made from the slave lists of Saint-Domingue at various different levels: the entire colony, particular regions and single plantations (1974: 52 - 68). These show that, besides the Creole slaves which were at any given moment the most important single group, certain nations constituted the majority of the slave population of Saint-Domingue: Congos, Nagos, Aradas and Ibos; other nations - in all a total of 23 -

⁹⁵ This fear, similar to the European prejudice of the “savages”, was widespread amongst new slaves. Cf. Equiano: [...] there was much dread and trembling among us[...] insomuch as that as last the white people got some old slaves from the land to pacify us. They told us we were not to be eaten, but to work, and we would soon go on land, where we should see many of our country people” (37)

⁹⁶ Caunas 1987: 106. Chaudenson quotes from the wrong page

together constituted less than 10% of the entire slave population. On the 30 single plantations the number of slaves belonging to the four principal Nations corresponds more or less proportionally to their representation at the colonial level. But, it is noteworthy that the minority groups were concentrated on a few plantations: the 18 *Sosso* slaves lived on two plantations, 16 of them on a single plantation; all 9 *Téménés* lived on one plantation, a.s.o. On no plantation was a member of one of the minority nations left alone. Even if there was a total of only two, as for example from the Nation of *Dangora*, the two slaves were together; planters did not like to leave slaves all to themselves.

The fact that 35% of all slaves belonged to only four African “Nations” confirms Friedeman’s view that “debió llegar un momento cuando las posibilidades de mantener esa heterogeneidad fueron desbordadas por la abundancia de esclavos con afinidades culturales” (1988:5). It was simply not possible to prevent the fact that members of a slave gang were ethnically related. It seems that on every large plantation at least one African language was in daily use. For this reason Father Labat decided to learn the Arada language:

“Comme une partie des nos nègres du Fonds Saint-Jacques étoient Aradas, et qu’il m’étoit important de sçavoir que se passoit entre eux, j’en obligeai un de me donner quelques principes de cette langue, et en très - peu de tems j’en sçus assez pour comprendre ce qu’ils disoient et pour leur expliquer mes pensées” (vol.II, 395)

Father Labat was aware of the danger of conspiracies; nevertheless he did nothing to prevent his slaves from speaking Arada or any other African language. How could he have done so? How would he or any other planter have been able to watch the daily language of his slaves either in the fields or at night in the slave quarters? The preoccupation of the planters and of the administration was elsewhere: to prevent the slaves of one African nation conspiring throughout a colony or part of it, as did the Coromantee Nation in Jamaica. Therefore the planters tried - without much success - to limit the mobility of slaves, in order to isolate the different members of African nations in a particular plantation. This seems to be the real background of the alleged “ethnic separation” of the slaves, and we have to deal with this question in regard to conspiracies and rebellions in Chapter III.4.

The idea of the “ethnic separation” of New World slaves is a striking example of certain notions which expand and survive for long periods, even though any close examination would show that it contradicts the most basic experiences of human behaviour. The stubborn ingenuity by which it persists, feeds on a number of problems and prejudices: first, the idea is needed to explain another prejudice, the absence of African culture in America; second, being repeated again and again, it creates a vicious circle of self - support; third it corresponds to current images of “primitive” cultures of a limited range and resistance which crumble rapidly whenever they enter into contact with more advanced cultures.

“The planters made deliberate efforts to break the slaves’ spirit and loosen their links with Africa by judicious separation of tribes, by teaching them only the masters language [...] At the end of the seasoning, the usual result was the slave’s past being annihilated and their tribal *mores* abrogated”,

claims O. Randford (quoted by Chaudenson). Adaptability, says Chaudenson (1992a: 88/ 89), is the most appreciated quality of a slave and it opens channels of upward mobility to him. These may exist to some degree, but we have to be aware that they are limited.

We presume that beside the official hierarchy and the scales of values which corresponded to it, there existed another hierarchy which reversed or overturned the colonial order. The less a slave was regarded within the official hierarchy, the more he had

to rely on the counter - culture. African - born field slaves were, on the one hand, the most lowly esteemed inhabitants of the colony; but on the other hand they were fascinating and frightening, for they belonged to a strange, barbarian culture with secret knowledge of poison and black magic. The foundations of the African Nation's power were based on the mystical field of African religion and sorcery.

III.3. THE POWER OF THE AFRICAN GODS

From July 1824 onwards the Martinique planter Pierre Dessalles (cf. II.3) begins to mention in his letters a wave of poisoning which ravages the district where he lives. First only his neighbours lose livestock, then Dessalles himself reports again and again the death of oxen and mules; autopsies reveal the poison - always an occurrence expected and feared in plantation colonies. Generally the blame for these "epidemics" is put on those slaves who try to sabotage the property and the work schedule of the plantation. Though Desalles is convinced he is the victim of "criminal slaves", his reactions show a characteristic ambiguity: he first attributes the deaths' natural causes because he knows how easily slave gangs panic whenever the suspicion of poison arises. He also asks his correspondents to conceal these events from their European compatriots "who have only a very imperfect understanding of our colonies" (Foster & Foster, 76) But Dessalles' own reactions demonstrate that he himself is not exempt from panicking. His reactions oscillate between the collective punishment of his entire slave gang, the torturing of some five or six suspects, the identification of a single responsible "poisoner" and the belief that the evil comes from outside and that the best remedy would be the complete sealing off of his own plantation. But whatever measures he takes and however positive the results may appear, the poisoning goes on.

"Poisonings" and the correspondent hysterical reactions are common in all plantation colonies. Denunciations and confessions which are mostly extorted, and even the incarceration and the killing of suspects may calm the general panic, but only temporarily⁹⁷. The difficulty of distinguishing between perpetrators and victims serves to increase the confusion and produces a generalised paranoia; Labat describes in detail such an occurrence which ended with the killing of an old Arada slave who obviously became the scapegoat (Labat II: 421) It is not surprising that in such a situation many planters and white employees came near to believing in the supernatural abilities of their slaves, especially those who were African - born.

"Presque tous les Nègres qui sortent de leur pays en âge d'Homme" warns Labat, "sont sorciers , ou au moins ils ont quelque teinture de magie, sorcellerie ou poison" (II: 395). Ducoeurjoly (I:25) sees magic power as the most important base of an internal and secret hierarchy. Being part of a closed cultural system, magic is not a problem of facts or deeds, but of belief; everybody who takes part in it, can be victim as well as culprit:

"Tous nos nègres, de quelque partie de la Guinée qu'ils viennent, ceux - mêmes qui naissent parmi nous, sont entièrement livrés à la superstition. Ils ajoutent foi aux maléfices, et à de prétendus sorciers; ils les redoutent. Ils pensent qu'il n'est pas de moyen , même surnaturels qui ne soit en leur pouvoir pour nuire aux autres."

⁹⁷ "Cette hantise du poison c'est bien le symptôme le plus indiscutable de la grande peur du planteur; on ne veut pas entendre parler d'épidémie ou épizootie, et les mauvais chirurgiens au service des habitants concluent généralement leur rapport d'autopsie dans le sens de la commune croyance de leurs employeurs" (Debbasch 1962: 25/26)

White masters are in no way beyond the effects of black magic. The example of Pierre Dessalles demonstrates how deeply their long cohabitation had affected the planters. They could not simply ignore the gossip of the slave quarters, but they rightly surmised that they never would reach the whole truth. The use of coercion and force would not help: slaves were very skilful in avoiding questions or the disclosure of information which would endanger the informant. “Witchcraft” was a source of power, the only form of power at the disposal of slaves; it meant terror which could be directed against fellow slaves whenever they dared to reveal any information about it. Mrs. Carmichael’s diary offers a vivid description of the atmosphere of terror which surrounded everything related to what is called *obeah* in Jamaica and other British colonies and which is presented, in the first place, as a wholesale concept for everything related to African sorcery in the British colonies:

“There is not perhaps a single West Indian estate, upon which there is not one or more Obeah man or woman; the Negroes know who they are, but it is very difficult for white people to find them out. The way in which they proceed is this: suppose a Negro takes a dislike to Negro or Negroes [...] he goes to the Obeah woman or man and tells them that he will give money or something else as payment, if they will obeah such and such persons. The Obeah (woman) then goes to those people, and tells them that she has obeahed them [...]: slow poison is at times secretly administered, but in by far the greater number of cases the mind only is affected; the imagination becomes more and more alarmed, - lassitude and loss of appetite ensue, and death ends the drama.” (1833 I: 253)

Like most planters, Mrs Carmichael refuses to consider Obeah as a form of religion or as part of a larger organisation; for her it consists of unrelated acts and beliefs in superstition which do not, to her understanding, differ considerably from those in Scotland. In spite of such appeasing remarks she implicitly recognises Obeah as a foreign art which does not come to terms with her own rationality. In its most accessible form it appears as a kind of medicine using herbs and other substances and though even in this form it is strictly forbidden⁹⁸, planters would accept it when it enables a sick slave to go back to work. Most of the effects would depend on the suggestive skills of the sorcerer, but these may also lead to what feared most: poison⁹⁹

Monk Lewis who generally has a better insight than most of slave culture and daily life, belongs to the few commentators who are able to put Obeah art into a wider social context. Conversion, he realises, is difficult, when the earthly pleasures of African magic are at stake:

“[...] the joys of the Christian paradise will be seen to kick the beam, when they are weighed against the pleasures of eating fat hog, drinking raw rum, and dancing for centuries to the jam - jam and the kitty - katty.” (1834:345)

A few pages later, in relation to the criminal charges against a “sorcerer”, Monk Lewis describes an Obeah ceremony which “always commences with what is called, by the

⁹⁸ See the 1760 “anti - witchcraft law” of Jamaica which stipulated:” Any Negro or other slave who shall pretend to any Supernatural Power, and be detected in making use of any Blood, Feathers, Parrots’ Beaks, Dogs’ Teeth, Alligators’ Teeth, broken Bottles, Grave Dirt , Rum, Egg - shells, or any other material relative to the Practice of Obeah or Witchcraft [...] upon Conviction [...] (shall) suffer Death or Transportation” (quoted Mullin 1994: 176)

⁹⁹ Monk Lewis (1834) mentions several poisons Obeah men would use: Cassava juice, “arsenic” beans, and alligator liver (329f.)

Negroes, 'the Myal dance'"(ibid.: 354). According to Lewis, its purpose is to demonstrate, by an act of symbolic killing, the supernatural capacities of the Obeah - man.

“He sprinkles various powders over the devoted victim, blows upon him, and dances round him, obliges him to drink a liquor prepared for the occasion, and finally the sorcerer and his assistants seize him and whirl him rapidly round and round till the man loses his senses, and falls on the ground to all appearances and the belief of the spectators a perfect corpse” (ibid.: 355).

A resuscitation through the application of herbs completes the demonstration which, in the opinion of Lewis, only serves to deceive the public. Mullin (1994: 180) is certainly right when deducing from this description certain elements - “dancing, dream, and visions” - of syncretic cult ceremonies, but above all the reader will notice the utter contempt with which Lewis holds any expression of slaves’ culture and spiritualism.

To Lewis, to Mrs. Carmichael, to Dessalles as to most planters the African sorcerer constitutes a danger: he is able to manipulate the slaves and thus encroach upon the good working of the plantation. It is therefore surprising to see how little the planters seem to know about these aspects of slave culture which could be of vital importance. Secrecy and deliberate deception through the slaves is only a part of the picture; it appears that the planters and, though to a minor degree, the colonial authorities wilfully ignored the existence of gaps in their knowledge of cultural and social forces amongst their slaves which were not only beyond their control, but which also would have upset their prejudices of the childlike nature of the slaves and their condition of complete dependence and despondency. Nevertheless none of the white owners could ignore what they called “drum dances” or “dances au tambour”: nightly gatherings of slaves in remote parts of the plantations which sometimes were so noisy that the neighbours and the police had to interfere (Debien 1972). General opinion, however, was surprisingly ambiguous. Even at times when colonial governments tried to proscribe or at least restrict the “drum dances”, planters continued to consider them an innocent pleasure and a cheap reward for good work, sometimes even considered also as a sexual stimulus liable to boost the future slave population. Panicking fear of black magic on the one side, compliance on the other - from the colonial reports it is difficult to determine the true purpose of the “drum dances”: were they recreation or conspiracy?

Fortunately we have access to one testimony which offers a more perspicacious view. It's author, Moreau de Saint-Méry was not an established member of colonial society but an inquisitive and highly educated lawyer who had taken part in - we do not know how - a Voodoo “dance” in Saint-Domingue, which, as he says, “n’a lieu jamais lieu que secrètement, lorsque la nuit répand son ombre, et dans un endroit fermé et à l’abri de tout oeil profane” (I, 65). Later he mentions, however, that other whites, and even the police took part in the ceremony and that the police, though sworn enemies to the Voodoo gods, even had to yield to the “puissance qui force à danser” (ibid.:68).

The ceremony was presided over by two priests (“ministres”) named King and Queen or Papa and Maman. In the name of the deity, represented by a grass snake¹⁰⁰, they held an absolute power on the assembly and the society which organises it:

“Ce sont eux qui déterminent si la couleuvre agrée l’admission d’un candidat dans la société; qui lui prescrivent les obligations, les devoirs qu’il doit remplir; ce

¹⁰⁰ In Moreau’s report it is a live snake which - though not poisonous as all Haitian snakes - still makes the rural population run in panick. Until today certain Voodoo deities are symbolized by snakes, but today they are substituted by forged irons or drawings on the floor in form of a snake.

sont eux qui reçoivent les dons et les présents que le Dieu attend comme un juste hommage; leur désobéir, leur résister, c'est résister au Dieu lui - même, c'est s'exposer aux plus grands malheurs" (ibid.:65)

The ceremony itself is divided in two parts; the second, the proper Voodoo dance, appears similar to present day ceremonies: drawings on the floor, the use of herbs and liquors, a trance session initiated by the Queen in which most participants join frenetically. More interesting is the first, introductory part of the ceremony, because it portrays the Voodoo society as the basis of collective and communal activities. It begins with the member declaring their personal wishes to the deity: The Queen answers in the name of the god, by granting or refusing their wishes; then everybody has to give a financial contribution:

"C'est du profit de ces oblations qu'on paye les dépenses de l'assemblée, qu'on procure des secours aux membre absens et présens, qui en ont besoin, ou de qui la société attend quelque chose pour sa gloire ou son illustration"

This community - related aspect appears to Moreau as a means for conspiracy and mayhem:

"On propose de plans, on arrête des démarches, on prescrit des actions que la Reine Vaudoux appuie toujours de la volonté du Dieu, et qui n'ont pas aussi constamment le bon ordre et la tranquillité publique pour objet. Un nouveau serment, aussi exécrationnel que le premier, engage chacun à taire ce qui s'est passé, à concourir à ce qui a été conclu, et quelquefois un vase où est le sang encore chaud d'une chèvre, va sceller sur les lèvres des assistans, la promesse de souffrir la mort plutôt que de rien révéler, et même de la donner à quiconque oublierait qu'il s'est aussi solennellement lié" (ibid.:66/67)

Such a description as well as others which are similar show that Moreau de Saint-Méry is not too indulgent with the Voodoo cult ceremonies; on the contrary: he is concerned about the apathy of colonial society which underestimates them. The ceremonies are, according to Moreau, manifestations of powerful organisations based on a strong leadership and the tight cooperation of the members and they serve specific everyday purposes: they organise mutual assistance between cult members, and they legitimise and use violence as forms of punishment and resistance against the colonial structures. Moreau also gives us valuable indications regarding the legitimacy of the cults based not only on religious but also "ethnic" principles: "... les nègres Arada qui sont les véritables sectateurs du Vaudoux dans la Colonie, et qui en maintiennent les principes et les règles[...]"(Ibid., 64) We may recall that the Arada belonged to the Akan people from the Gold Coast, as were the Coromantee slaves in the British colonies who were held responsible for most of the slave rebellions there (see III.4.). Under their different names these Nations were powerful organisations who controlled several subversive activities: the sabotage of the plantation economy, the execution of traitors, the establishment of escape routes and, most important, armed rebellions. The strength and influence of such Nations - as well as others less notorious - depended on criteria whereby religious and ethnic elements complemented each other in a way which was highly legitimised according to African traditions and yet at the same time was flexible enough to correspond to the demands of the new situation.

It may seem strange that the planters and the colonial authorities were unaware of the close connection between Slave Nations, drum dances and subversive activity in the colonies; though they were, now and again, concerned about such phenomena, their own prejudices prevented them from realising that they were the tip of the iceberg with its main body hidden under water. Until the beginning of our century, Drum Dances were

dismissed as forms of “primitive” folklore; essential elements of the cult ceremonies, such as obsession and trance, were presented as forms of collective hysteria, and even today most participants would deny, when asked by strangers, that they participated in cult societies or even that such cults existed in their region or country. Similar prejudices, disguised by more modern arguments, appear in the most recent scientific literature, where scholars claim that the newly arrived African slaves, the most miserable and most despised people in colonial societies, were psychologically and materially unable of building up their own social organisations. Obviously, the predominance of the social and cultural hierarchy established according to the norms and values of the European population cannot be ignored, but we have to remember that plantation society was based on social conflict, that access to these predominant values was extremely restricted, and that social mobility was correspondingly reduced. It is not surprising that such a society leads to the rise of subcultures and counter - cultures. It would contradict all human experience if the slaves had not tried to develop alternative forms of social organisation which would offer, on a different level, the satisfaction of those psychic and material needs which colonial society denied them, such as help in desperate situations, social recognition and respect within and outside the group, and, as we will see, even freedom.

Because of the lack of historic documentation, our argument must always remain somewhat speculative, as we try to understand the extent to which these Nations and cult societies functioned. Nevertheless there are a number of indications. We mentioned before that the identity of language and culture had never been the main basis of “ethnicity” in West Africa. Though generalisations are dangerous, it seems that the most important factors are lineage and clans based on kinship; the local and territorial unity results from a shared oral knowledge about the genealogies, their ramifications and the relationships between these lineages which were mainly kept alive by professional “storytellers”, such as the *Griots*; “chiefs” and “kings” may derive their power and privileges from other sources, such as Islam, but they also tried to prove their claim to legitimacy through the establishment of corresponding ascendancy myths via clans and lineages which defined relationships, obligations and rights.

It is obvious that such a type of ethnicity did not survive the capture and enslavement of people, for the original lineage story and its memory - depending on oral knowledge and its social context - were scattered and lost forever. We have seen that probably all African cultures used institutionalised means of accommodating foreigners through ritualised forms of kinship, but this does not explain the reconstruction of ethnic communities in the New World where all traditional kinship groups were widely scattered. In this situation the religious cult associations which exist in nearly all West African societies acquired a new importance: they were communities which, though not being based on kinship, cultivated close personal relationships between their members and required their unconditional solidarity. This fact, as well as the penalties provided against offending members of the association reminds strongly of the description of Moreau de Saint-Méry¹⁰¹. It is also interesting that in Africa such religious associations closely resemble kinship groups: they are based on a spiritual parenthood which makes them kin and a deity which protects them and which they worship as their spiritual ancestor. The creation of a

¹⁰¹ Cf. Staewen / Schönberg, about the Yoruba cult groups: “Jedes Kultmitglied ist zur Hilfeleistung an alle anderen Mitglieder des gleichen Kults verpflichtet, und es gilt als eines der größten Verbrechen, heimlich etwas gegen ein anderes Kultmitglied zu unternehmen(...) Wird eine Verfehlung rüchbar, so wenden die Ältesten eine bestimmte Praxis an, wahrscheinlich unter Verwendung einer “Medizin”, um den Verdächtigen zum Geständnis zu bringen [...] Die Gemeinschaft der Hilfsbereitschaft unter Kultmitgliedern, insbesondere des gleichen Ranges, ist beträchtlich und entspringt ohne Zweifel einem sehr starken Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl” (101; cf also 162).

new “ethnicity” would therefore mean in the first place the adoption of one or several new protective deities by a community which - though being of heterogeneous origin - creates itself a new identity different from that of the white people and of the Creole slaves, but also from other discrete Nations. In Trinidad, for instance, the veneration of Shango became the unifying factor amongst the heterogeneous slave population:

“Historically, what eventually emerged as a product of this “confusion” was a single cult with Shango, the Yoruba hero - king, as an eponymous ancestor to all devotees and patron - god of the cult. This is an indication of manifest inter - tribal unity, a powerful adaptive phenomenon. [...] the groups simply federated themselves thereby facilitating the emergence of a single ekklesia with a common ethos projected in the concrete form of the Shango cult.” (Elder 1996: 27/28)

These groups still use words and cultural elements which evoke their African origin. African languages or their remnants may serve as ritual language in various cult ceremonies; the Gods, although being identical in most cults, carry “ethnic” surnames (e.g. Ogoun Badagri¹⁰² in Haitian Voodoo or Tap Kromanti¹⁰³ in Surinam). Nevertheless most cult groups would also try to accommodate ethnically “foreign” slaves, provided that they accepted their gods, their rituals and established leadership. In this particular context, the term “ethnic” would mean that, during their journey to America or after their arrival in a particular colony, slaves of similar and neighbouring origin and culture would aggregate and try to impose their form of worship and organisation on the slaves of a particular plantation, neighbourhood or even an entire colony. The relationships between different Nations and cult groups, at the level of the colony or of single plantations, were generally marked by conflicts and competition and it is said that planters even encouraged the formation of Nations because they regarded discord and strife as beneficial to their own safety (Bastide 1967: 97). In Spanish and Portuguese colonies the authorities tried, customarily, to reduce possible conflicts by openly admitting the African Nations as *Cofradías (confrarias)* or *Cabildos de Nación*, in order to control them and even to transform them into an instrument of acculturation:

“Con respecto a los negros libres, específicamente los africanos de nación las autoridades favorecieron la constitución de cofradías, institución que ya era conocida en España entre los africanos y sus descendientes. Las mismas eran corporaciones adscritas a templos católicos, constituídas sobre una base étnica. Es decir, que se trató de entidades enfiladas a promover la simulación religioso - cultural” (López - Valdés 1996: 87).

Despite the fact that African Nations competed with each other, they nevertheless agreed in their fundamental opposition towards Creole slaves who were hardly ever admitted to the Nations, firstly because they seemed to have adapted to colonial society and therefore were not trustworthy; and secondly because as Creoles they would not contribute to the particular spiritual task of the African Nations: the maintenance of a collective memory of their origin and of their African identity.

The collective memory of the Nation contained a kaleidoscopic range of knowledge, traditions, ritual prescriptions and actions and taboos which concerned many aspects of life: first the memory of the African gods, their particular relations to the group, their appearance and signs, the food, the gifts and the colours they preferred, the drums and the rhythms used in ceremonies; but also the knowledge on the group, its location and its

¹⁰² Badagri is a harbour town and former slave shipping centre in West Nigeria

¹⁰³ Bastide 1967: 107

history; finally also traditions of daily life, knowledge on the qualities of particular food items, of traditional medicine and concepts of body and soul.

Most of this knowledge was shared by all members of the group; but some parts of it - particularly the role of the priest - were the domain of particular people who received it through family traditions or through long years of initiation. As long as slave trade lasted, connections to the Old Continent were still alive, for the arrival of new allowed to check the knowledge on deities, ritual, drum rhythms and even poison comparing it to the African traditions. Though syncretic, i.e. creolised variations certainly existed at this period, there was bias favouring “purer”¹⁰⁴, i.e. more powerful African forms; priests were, as the colonists suspected, mostly new slaves initiated in Africa. This umbilical cord attached to the Old Continent was severed when the slave trade was abolished during the first half of 19th century and the cult groups, in order to assure their survival, had to accept creolised forms; a similar rupture in traditional concepts of “purity” and identity occurs at the present when cult groups have to decide whether they should accept white persons as members¹⁰⁵

Most syncretic cult groups use notions of authenticity and African “purity”; from a European point of view this might appear as absurd because syncretism implies the notions of “mixing” and “contamination”. The difference is that in the context of Afro - American beliefs “purity” is not related to a “truth” which would invalidate other more creolised variants; the “African” variant is conceived - under certain circumstances and for certain purposes - as more “powerful” and more effective. Even today believers from the French Antilles or the Dominican Republic, where syncretic cults are more creolised, would refer to Haitian Voodoo priests for certain services, because their practices are considered closer to their African origins (Alexis 1976).

There are some suggestions which indicate that this need for a periodical rejuvenation of the cult and the cult’s societies had already appeared during the period of slavery, particularly during the 19th century, when the ending of the slave trade began to terminate the ties between Africa and the American diaspora. Queirós Mattoso quotes an example from the oral tradition of the Nago nation in Bahia who sent in 1830 for an priest (*babalorixa*) from the holy town of Ife in Nigeria to found a “true” cult society (Queirós Mattoso 1979: 171). In the same year occurs a similar event recorded by Fernando Ortiz which shows that the dynamics of relative ancestry do not only apply to Gods and ceremonies, but also to anything connected with them, such as ritual objects. An important variant of Cuban ‘*Santería*’ dates its restoration of Yoruba ancestry back to the year 1830, when a renowned cult priest and a master drummer met in Matanzas:

“Noting that the drums played in Havana were of an inferior, profane type, they decided to pool their resources and managed to not only construct and consecrate the first set of batá, but also to institutionalize the patterns whereby one set of drums ritually ‘gives birth’ to another, thus setting in motion a process which, by the time Ortiz studied its results, had let to the proliferation of about 25 legitimately consecrated sets of *Batá* among the spiritual heirs of the *lucumí* in western Cuba” (Palmié 1993: 339/340).

¹⁰⁴ The term “purity” is problematic, because we should be aware of European connotations which mostly appeared during 19th century. reflects more pragmatic than ideological issues.

¹⁰⁵ This discussion is most important in Brazil where the white middle class seems to be very attracted by Candomblé cults and spiritualism. Traditional sectors claim that white persons cannot have a genealogical line which connects them to an African orixa: “Branco não tem axe”.

When we examine the implications of this quotation, we gain an insight into what the term “*ethnicity*” really means in African and Afro - American cultures and social systems: being originally based on birth and genealogy it may also, in times of crises and rapid social change, become based on initiation and appointment, allowing religious groups to embrace new members to enhance their power and importance or even to ensure their survival. Such newly incorporated individuals may, just like new ceremonies, new ritual objects or new Gods become, if they are successful, the ancestors of the new generations of members, Gods, or objects which open the road to increasing creolisation.

In this respect, Creolisation appears to be a “manipulation” of ancestry and nations; it is, however, a form of manipulation to which most African cultures - at least whose which were prominent in the New World - were susceptible; a form which, as we have seen, existed already in Africa (see III.1.). It was a form of “crisis management” which responded to outside pressures: the disruption of traditional ethnic contexts, the predominance of white culture, and a social context characterised by conflict. Perhaps certain relatively isolated communities may have been less affected by gradual creolisation and thus show former stages of this process. Such an example has been described by Elder in the Trinidadian village of Gasparillo, where the Nations - Hausa, Congo and Yoruba , are still today the basis of comprehensive forms of interaction which are not limited merely to religious ceremonies, though ancestors cults are an essential part of the nations’ identity. It is supported by a number of criteria which Elder describes as follows:

“(a) linguistic relics, (b) place names in Africa which the ‘older heads’ associate with the preslavery life of their grandparents, (c) type of cult religion adhered to, (d) mythological relics, (e) personal and place names, (f) the ancestors cultic music, dance and musical instruments” (Elder: 6)

A slow creolisation process is initiated through the neighbourhood of oil refineries which attract newcomers:

“By intermarriage with the ‘Africans’ these Negro late - comers entered the social stream as mere followers of the African cult at first, subsequently being gradually absorbed as they acquired membership in their own right as fictive ‘relatives’” (ibid.: 5)

Despite these moves towards creolisation, the traditional nations of Gasparillo exhibit their particular “African” identity as being intricically different to that of the new villagers who seemingly have no knowledge of their ancestors, their beliefs and cultural traditions, and at the same time are involved in other more modern professions, social roles and economic activities, such as the petroleum industry. The Gasparillo case is particularly interesting because it demonstrates how the difference between an “African” identity and a “Creole” identity is linked to a difference in roles in the actual societies and produces the phenomenon of engendering the typical phenomenon of “compartmentalisation”. A similar case has been observed on the island of Saint-Lucia, where a minority group of *Djinés* (Guineans) are clearly distinguishable from the general population who are called *knéyòl* (creole.) The Djiné are noteworthy distinct because of their veneration of ancestors whose origin in the Old World is acknowledged, because of their strong family identity, and above all because of the celebration of the *Kélé* - cult, a complex of beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, which are surprisingly little syncretised (Kremser 1986: 80/81). They seem to have derived from the Ogun and Shango cults of the Yoruba - group of Ekiti:

“These religious rites, directly imported from their African homeland, were termed as “pagan customs” by the members of the Christianized creole population and met with strong disapproval” (Kremser 1988: 94/95)

It is also noteworthy that the Kélé “successfully managed to build up a reputation as being dangerous Obeahmen [...]” (Ibid.:95).

In both of these examples, the Gasparillo Africans and the Djinés, the authors mention the use of African languages not only in a ritual context, but also in daily communication where they serve as “secret language vis - à - vis outsiders” (ibid., 95) Referring to Gasparillo, Elder reports furthermore:

“I have had opportunity to test the authenticity of the claims about the identity of the language which the Yoruba use in their traditional songs and which is retained in phrases in their stories and myths which they narrate on the occasion of their ceremonies” (Elder: 6).

This leads us to raise once more the controversial question of the relationship between the Nations, the cults and the use of African languages. The knowledge of a determinate African language certainly was not a prerequisite for membership of an African nation or a cult group, but according to the evidence it is probable that the use of a particular ethnic language served as one of the identifying signs of the group and as its secret language; not only the examples of the Gasparillo people and of the Djiné testify to this, but also the relics of various other African idioms which have been documented: *Yoruba* (*Nago* in Brazil, *Lucumí* in Cuba), *Twi* in Jamaica and other former British colonies as well as in Surinam. It is reasonable to suppose that during the heyday of slavery and the slave trade, while many of the slaves were still first generation Africans and while the activities of the cult groups concentrated on mutual help and defence involving large segments of the social life of the Nations and their members, the African languages, transformed by the convergence of various neighbouring idioms, were the daily language of most of the new African slaves. If they lived long enough and if they overcame the isolation of their slave quarters and work in the fields, they became more and more fluent in a particular European language or its Creole counterpart; in other words they became more and more bilingual. In the 19th century several factors caused a dramatic change in language use: the arrival of new Africans came to a halt and the gradual abolition of slavery created a new mobility in the geographical as well as in the social sense. As a consequence, the role of both the cult societies and the African languages changed: the cult societies gradually lost all their secular functions and became predominantly religious associations, and correspondingly the African idioms were no longer used in daily life; some aspects survived as specialised sacred languages used in ceremonies. Certain terms would be used in prayers, but most people would no longer understand the meaning of the words.

As Gasparillo and St. Lucia demonstrate, there are a few isolated and discrete areas where earlier stages of this linguistic history still persist. One of the best researched examples is the the *Palenque of San Basilio*, situated in the mountains behind one of the principal slave trading centres of the New World, Cartagena in Colombia. The Palenque of San Basilio village, an early hiding place for fugitive slaves of mainly Bantu descent, demonstrates the coexistence of various linguistic codes, amongst them a creole Spanish form and a very cryptic “African” language which is used for the lumbalus, the traditional mortuary songs. Most of the today’s performers of these songs do not have a clear understanding of the words, many of which contain still recognisable Bantu roots, but a large part of them are invented, as the American linguist Armin Schwegler demonstrates:

“Según las ancianas cantadoras de lumbalúes, una ‘buena’ y auténtica composición siempre debe contener vocables africanos o fórmulas ancestrales con sabor africano, y es a menudo el carácter xenoglósico o críptico de tales segmentos lo que les da valor especial y un evidente sabor de religiosidad. Aún más, es precisamente la inserción de lexemas africanos o africanizantes lo que, en cierto

sentido, autentiza la ancestralidad de los textos rituales que, a pesar de articularse en lenguaje gramatical esencialmente moderno, supuestamente se remonta a los primeros tiempos del heroico pasado palenquero” (Schwegler 1996 I: 52)

The poets and performers of the lumbalus have a surprisingly correct image of Bantu phonology which helps them to africanise Spanish words. They do so, because in a ritual and religious sense, “African” language has more power, especially when death and the ancestors are involved. But the example also shows that “Africanness” is no longer a reality, but merely a symbol within an unstable multicultural context.

III.4. CREOLE AND AFRICAN RESISTANCE

A slave health was constantly threatened by overworking, by undernourishment, by physical harm either through working conditions or by the master’s cruelty, but finally also by mental stress. There are obvious reasons which have already been mentioned such as the “despair” of being separated forever from the former life, the family and the country of birth. Less visible, but nevertheless sometimes indirectly apparent, are other forms of stress which often led towards suicide, such as the continuous insults regarding their religious beliefs, affective or social bonds, in brief the almost permanent assaults on the integrity of the slave’s personality and dignity. A “successful slave” was one who learned, the faster the better, to lead a life of ambiguity:

“A song of the slaves delineates this succinctly: ‘Got one mind for the boss to see; Got one mind what I know its me.’ Perceived as lazy, stupid, ignorant dumb animals by the master, the slave found it to his advantage not to prove his master wrong.” (Campbell 1977: 390)

Many traits of black culture and black personality are the heritage of this particular ability to adapt to ambiguous situations: not only the art of playing the grinning, good - hearted fool, but also that of “double speech”, the art of “signifying” the true intentions to others. All Afro - American societies cultivate traditional tales which oppose two types of heroes: Brother Tiger in former British colonies or Bouqui in Haiti who are strong, but naively stupid and on the other hand their adversary who is the cunning, but weak spider Anansi or Ti - Malice. It is always the weak who, by careful planning and cheating, outwits the strong. Most of these stories originate from Africa, but within plantation society they convey a particular meaning: Survival involves the ability to submit to rules and unjust treatment, to conceal animosity, to hide anger and pride and to forego the feelings of hatred and revenge, until the enemy was more vulnerable - in other words, to wait for the day when organised resistance would be more likely to be successful.

A multitude of European stories and novels - written both by defenders of slavery and by abolitionists - contributed towards establishing the image of the dumb, grinning and childlike slave whose well - being depended entirely on the mercy of his white masters. Both slavery and its abolition are portrayed as merciful gifts which most often are not properly regarded and certainly not understood by those who experienced them. Many studies concerning slavery and plantation life openly or implicitly even today bear the mark of such stereotypes. One of the principal problems of Afro - American historical discourse is that the slave always appears as a passive victim, but never as an actor, as an “owner” of his own history. A good example of this point is the typical French view which depicts the two great French movements towards abolition - during the French Revolution of 1789 and 1848 - as “generous gifts of a humanitarian France”, while ignoring the fact of the reintroduction of slavery by Napoleon in 1802, which caused ferocious rebellions in Saint-Domingue and Guadeloupe. The final act of abolition in 1848 is entirely attributed to a

white politician, Victor Schoelcher from Alsace who, until today, is acclaimed as the great benefactor of black people. Each village of the French Caribbean has its *rue Schoelcher* and its Schoelcher monument; numerous schools and even a town in Martinique are named after him. It is only in the seventies that we witness some attempts to reduce the overwhelming image of Schoelcher, by presenting evidence, for example that the law of abolition had at first been ignored by the Martinican planters and that a major slave rebellion was necessary in order to force the local government to implement it (Darsières 1974: 10 - 28). Nevertheless the publication of this previously forgotten history did not change the overriding view of events.

The several different historical interpretations of abolition in Martinique shed a light not only on the problems of the historiography of slavery, but also on the growing awareness of its shortcomings at a more general level. In a previous chapter (I.4.) we largely exposed different forms of perception in the making of history, such as the search for the epic hero within the collective memory of Afro - American communities which had been suppressed by, the “relation of true events written in books”, as Simone Schwarz - Bart puts it. There are some attempts to complement this historiography by the collection of oral traditions (Richard Price, Levine), but the bulk of the history of slavery is still dependent on contemporary written sources which - apart from a few exceptions - reflect the dominant ideology of the slave owners. Among such sources resistance to slavery appears nearly always to be placed between two categories: either it consists of single actions of “despair” which are reactions to circumstantial problems, or it is presented as the sudden outburst of “natural savagery” which may acquire a collective nature. Two main forms of resistance which we have dealt with in previous chapters - i.e. suicide and poisoning - are usually explained according to this pattern: suicide is the reaction to particular, mostly affective conflicts, such as jealousy, insult, theft or destruction of plantation property; poisoning, being related to other forms of black magic, is part of the seemingly irrational and destructive behaviour of the “savage”. None of the contemporary sources seem to understand these as reactions towards the institution of slavery itself and to plantation life in general; both explanations share an emphasis on the spontaneous and “wild” side of slave resistance which excludes any long term planning or objectives.

This chapter is dedicated to those forms of resistance which cannot be explained exclusively in accordance with these arguments: Maroonism, i.e. the flight of slaves and large scale rebellions. Both were frequently recurring phenomena in all American slave societies and they transcended the limits of the single plantation, putting at stake the security of the colonies and the very institution of slavery itself. Maroonism and larger rebellions therefore are destined to form the foundation of positive discourses on Caribbean history and identity, but - despite the fact that a few publications, such as for instance Mullin (1994), give a different picture - some persist in presenting an ambiguous, if not outrightly negative image especially of Maroonism. The viewpoint presented by D’Ans is representative of this school of thought:

“On a investi beaucoup de lyrisme sur la question du marronage dans les Antilles, où toute une littérature, de nature plus mythologique qu’historique, s’acharne à voir dans le marronage une sorte de résistance spontanée à l’esclavage, viscéralement présente dans tous les Africains déportés, et dont le caractère irrépressible préfigurerait les Indépendances à venir. En fait, au XVIIIe comme au XVIIe siècle, qu’il s’agisse d’engagés blanc ou d’esclaves noirs, le marronage n’a jamais représenté qu’une solution d’infortune [...] En tout cas ne pouvant se solder - après une période de vagabondage plus ou moins prolongée - que par la reddition

ou par la mort, le marronage ne déboucha jamais sur des perspectives de libération” (D’Ans 1987: 106)¹⁰⁶.

The most surprising aspect of this statement is its reference to the colony of Saint-Domingue. On some of Caribbean islands, in fact, Maroonism never became an important occurrence, particularly on small islands, such as for instance Barbados where Maroons were not able to find uncultivated and inaccessible land sufficiently far away from the plantations. On the other hand, plantation societies on the American mainland were generally limited to a coastal rim and offered a large hinterland where Maroons lived for long periods without being harmed; Brazil and Dutch Guayana were regions where Maroon communities, such as the Palmares and the Bush Negroes acquired a certain stability¹⁰⁷. Most colonies can be placed somewhere between these two extremes; Saint-Domingue, though being an island, offered good conditions because Maroon communities established close to the border and so they were able to retreat, depending on the particular political situation, to the French side or, more frequently, to flee into Spanish territory. The large description of Esteban Deive (1989) offers a comprehensive picture of the ups and downs of these communities during a period of 250 years. Jamaica presents another example of active Maroon communities, but by necessity conditions in other Caribbean territories were less favourable.

French colonial terminology takes account of these different external circumstances when distinguishing between *grand marronage* and *petit marronage*. The latter is more relevant to the picture presented by D’Ans: the spontaneous and desperate flight of individual slaves when for example a punishment was imminent. All slave colonies were aware of these problems and slave laws provided drastic forms of punishment which might include the death penalty or mutilation; but in most cases of *Petit Marronage* there were certain social mechanisms which allowed for a relatively non - violent reintegration of the slave into the plantation when he gave himself up. For instance, he could deliver himself up to a neighbouring planter who might promise to plead for leniency, whereby the original owner might agree to the slave’s return so as to restore a valuable “asset”. This mechanisms did not work when *Grand Marronage* of several months or even years had occurred, for the capture of such fugitives required armed expeditions whose costs often exceeded the value of the slave. The persecution of these long - term Maroons was the task either of professional and mostly self - employed slave hunters - the Cuban *rancheadores* or the Brazilian *Capitães - do - mato* for example - ,or of the colonial militias who had to defend plantation areas against the Maroons.

It is evident that the two forms of Maroonism differed in many other respects, particularly regarding the degree of independence to which the Maroon might aspire. “Petty Maroons” who left the plantation in panic, would usually stay in the immediate neighbourhood which they knew well and which guaranteed certain opportunities of food and shelter, either by hiding in the quarters of slaves they trusted or by stealing food from the plantations they knew. These forms of survival, obviously, did not allow for a stable life, and capture was for ever imminent. Grand Marronage, on the other hand, always involved some planning: the slave waited for a moment when his absence would not be immediately noticed; he would then try to leave as quickly as possible the neighbourhood

¹⁰⁶ It is not really surprising that Chaudenson subscribes entirely to the negative view of Maroonism as a form of colonial petty banditry (1993: 81ff).

¹⁰⁷ Palmares was the largest and most stable Maroon community which was said to have controlled 27000 qkm on which 20000 to 30000 persons lived in various villages (Hofbauer 1995: 134)

where was known; his escape route was well planned and his final destination was already established, such as a known Maroon community or even another colony.

From the material available it is evident that these two forms of Maroonism were entirely different and should not be confused (cf. Hoogbergen 1993: 180); the “miserable maroon”, i.e. the half - starved rogue who - as described by Chaudenson (1993: 81) - lives on herbs, roots and occasional thefts has little in common with the Maroon who lives far from plantation society in a subsistence - orientated economy. Certainly there are many intermediate forms, particularly in areas which offer few possibilities of complete escape and where Maroon communities, being constantly harassed by colonial militias, cannot lead a normal untroubled life and therefore are reduced to regular assaults on neighbouring plantations. But whenever Maroons succeeded in reaching uninhabited lands, they began to build up “towns” , developing forms of handicraft, and according to the circumstances, they cultivated the land, hunted and fished.

Their material culture was, according to the circumstances, a blending of traditions from Africa or from plantation culture. It is less the material culture which impresses the investigators of the more permanent Maroon communities, but the social and political life which they developed. The Brazilian *Quilombo* (Maroon Community) of Palmares - which probably had the longest uninterrupted existence - is described as a “centralised state” (Freitas 1978: 101) which extends its control over a considerable number of towns and villages (Queirós Mattoso 1994: 181). Brazilian authors like to conjure an image of Palmares as a “republic” based on “eletividade e igualdade”¹⁰⁸ (Freitas 1978: 104), i.e. the government of a civil authority based on a representative system necessary in order to “acomodar e agregar grupos étnica e culturalmente heterogêneos e aglutinar forças para a luta contra o inimigo externo”[...] (ibid.). Many other accounts emphasise a similar structure of Maroon societies which combine the segregation of ethnic communities and a central government. Such was the case regarding the government of the Jamaica Maroons; Barbara Klamon Kopytof sees it as “some sort of federated structure” as shown in a document of 1792:

“[...] a great many People both Mulattoes and Negroes (from) all Countries and each Country had a Division of the Town, and built Houses for the reception of the New - Comers” (quoted by Klamon Kopytof 1976: 45).

Yves Debbach in his important essay on Maroonism also presupposes a federate structure of their communities (1962: 91ff.) based on African ethnicity:

“Ces nègres, dit un memoire de la fin XVIIIe siècle, sont partagés en bandes différentes, composées de différentes nations d’Afrique qui paraissent avoir une espèce de gouvernement différente” (ibid.: 90/91)

All these testimonies raise the important, even crucial question, whether and to what degree Maroonism was related to African ethnicity. In the case of Santo Domingo Carlos Esteban Deive makes a categorical denial, pointing out the cultural and ethnic diversity of the fugitives (1989: 276). It has been demonstrated that this argument is not conclusive with regard to all of slaves on a single plantation and it is even less relevant to Maroon gangs whose composition was the result of particularly severe selective processes. Most of what we can surmise is based on circumstantial evidence, but it adds up to a total picture

¹⁰⁸ There are, however, contemporary descriptions as that of the Dutch Captain Blaer who testify “que entre eles reinava o terror, principalmente dos negros de Angola” (quoted by Chiavenato 1980: 158). The opposition between the these two extreme opinions is another example for the problem created by the lack of trustworthy data.

which seems rather consistent. First we have to presume that certain groups of slaves were less likely to become permanent Maroons than others, particularly those Creole slaves who were born in the colony. In comparison to the *bossales* they had a better life and had adapted to the plantation. Their motivation to run away was nearly always short-term and rarely definitive: knowing the ways of the colonies and of their masters, they would rather hide in or around the plantation, giving the master time to cool his temper and to start negotiations with the help of neighbouring planters, priests and even the colonial authorities. Creole slaves had the advantage of knowing the surroundings of their plantation, of speaking the colonial or the Creole language and they were able to behave in a way whereby they were not immediately recognised as being fugitives¹⁰⁹; but this also prevented them from fleeing into remote uninhabited areas, because they had never learnt to survive on their own, as had their African counterparts.

Many new slaves tried to escape shortly after their arrival¹¹⁰, driven by fear and despair. Fouchard (1988: 299 - 311), who with his study on newspaper advertisements is the only one to offer certifiable quantitative evidence, insists on his findings that most runaways were new Africans and that they were the people who made Maroonism such a serious threat to the colony, because they did not only pursue their personal goals but fought against slavery itself. Only they were able to organise themselves as permanent self-defensive gangs to whom freedom was such a highly esteemed goal that they would endure any hardship and danger to maintain it.

Again it may be argued that Fouchard tries to establish the image of the “heroic Maroon” as an early manifestation of the Haitian desire for liberty. We have already dealt extensively with the image of the Maroon as a national myth (I.4) which might - as Chaudenson and others see it - tend to substitute “historic truth” for myth (1993: 81); we may add that sometimes Fouchard shows a tendency towards an over-generalisation of some of his findings in order to idealise Maroon societies. For instance it appears that among slaves who recently had arrived and had difficulties in adapting to their new condition, incidences of Maroonism were frequent, although rarely successful, because they lacked the most elementary knowledge of the local surroundings and the customs of the local people.

The successful Maroons tended to be African-born people who had survived their first years of slavery. They had carefully planned their escape which involved primarily a pragmatic solution according to the nature of the slave conditions. Such living conditions were determined by the historic circumstances of each colony; the most important factors were the availability of remote and cultivable areas in which to survive and the degree and determination of pursuit by the colonial authorities. When conditions were favourable, Maroon communities would settle, cultivate the land and even exchange their crops in order to obtain the goods they did not produce themselves. This was rarely the case, save in the hinterlands of the continental colonies or after peace treaties have been made in the others. In most cases the Maroon communities lived in a constant state of danger, because - unless they reached the jungles of Surinam or the hinterlands of Brazil - colonial societies continued to suspect them of fomenting raids and rebellions, or at least of abducting slaves; even in periods of relative truce Maroons were harassed by slave hunters who profited from the bounties for capturing fugitives. The sorties of the colonial militia could rarely

¹⁰⁹ See Röhrig Assunção (1996: 436) who elaborates on the two types of maroon settlement in the State of Maranhão in Brazil, stating that mulattos preferred to stay near the plantation or tried “passar por livres”.

¹¹⁰ Fouchard bases his estimations on newspaper advertisements of Saint-Domingue and concludes that the majority of Maroons were new slaves (Fouchard 1988: 305)

cope with the guerrilla tactics of the Maroons, but the militia would destroy their crops and houses, trying to kill as many escapees as possible. Such a situation forced the Maroons to act according to plan: to raid the plantations in order to obtain food and to increase their numbers. Such actions by the Maroons provoked predictable reactions by the planters - a vicious circle which forced the two participants to maintain hostile relations¹¹¹.

There is much evidence which suggests that Maroon groups had allies on most of the surrounding plantations¹¹². This network was useful to both groups, to the Maroons who received shelter and information, and to the slaves who maintained contact with the world outside the plantation and with possible escape routes if ever they were forced to flee. The most vulnerable point of this network was the threat of betrayal; in fact it was important in all successful expeditions leading to the destruction of a Maroon community or the capture of an important Maroon leader, as for instance Mackandal in Saint-Domingue. The Maroons therefore depended on the loyalty of slave groups and on their means of ensuring such loyalty. It is obvious that the best and most faithful allies were the African nations and the corresponding cult groups who had the most efficient means of punishing traitors. This, of course, presupposes that the Maroon communities were themselves organised along the lines of their ethnic affiliations. There are a few examples that planned escape involved the nations inside and outside of the plantations. In fact, the advertisements consulted by Fouchard occasionally mention that various slaves and Maroons of the same nation are connected with the escape of a particular slave¹¹³. The nation provided a trusted member of its group with the necessary information as to where to direct himself on the route and how to join a Maroon community which normally avoided any contact with strangers. Sometimes a fugitive would be accompanied into another territory, especially into a Spanish possession which, for political reasons granted freedom to foreign slaves.

Thus cult societies and Maroon communities were based on and functioned according to similar principles; their links were based on a loyalty which was older and perhaps stronger than all other obligations: African ethnicity. Although elaborate descriptions are limited to the best known historical Maroon communities in Jamaica and Brazil, evidence suggests that Maroon culture was essentially African. A part of the "technical" vocabulary connected to Maroonism - as for instance the word *Quilombo* - is African (Hofbauer 1995:128, 136f) and all known Maroon leaders bore African names. Queirós Mattoso sees the Brazilian *Mocambos* and *Quilombos* as a "retour aux pratiques africaines loin de la domination du maître" (1994: 180; cf. Freitas: 104). Contemporary sources indicate that the religion of the Palmares Maroons was an ill - defined form of catholicism (Hofbauer 1995: 135f), but it is improbable that the colonial chroniclers really understood the nature of religious syncretism. As Robinson states in respect to Jamaica "Maroons kept their religious practices very much to themselves, and [...] Europeans were able to learn very little about them" (1971: 68). Dallas, the most important contemporary source, indicates that "The Maroons continued to believe, like their forefathers, that Acompong was the God of Heavens, the creator of all things, and a deity of infinite goodness" but he also adds "they never offered sacrifices to him, nor had any mode of

¹¹¹ Research on the history of Maroon communities shows that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between "independent" Maroons who practised subsistence agriculture and Maroons who lived by robbery and theft (Röhrig - Assunção 1993: 347)

¹¹² In Palmares "Não faltava sequer um serviço de inteligência que se valia da cooperação dos escravos das plantações e dos engenhos" (Freitas 1978: 102)

¹¹³ "La maronne est présumée avoir été retirée par quelque nègre ouvrier de sa nation" Or: "on soupçonne qu'il (the fugitive) a été debauché par des nègres de son pays" (Fouchard 1988: 303) Equally instructive to this respect are the records of an interrogation of a captive Maroon in Price 1996: 312 ff.

worship” (1803: I, 93). Equally contradictory are indications regarding the language of the Maroons which Dallas describes as “a peculiar dialect of English, corrupted with African words” (I: 92); yet other sources indicate that in particular situations the Jamaica Maroons used the “Coromantee language” (Robinson 1969: 47), i. e. some Akan dialect and this correlates with recurrent contemporary observation that Akan slaves did not accept easily slavery and were known for their fomenting rebellions. But this brings us back to the initial question related to African culture: would the Palmares Maroons of Brazil and the Trelawny Maroons of Jamaica - communities who were numbered in thousands - have any interest in cherishing a form of African ethnic particularism which would make large - scale common action at least difficult? The solution of this problem would be the combination of a central power and a federations structure as Freitas, Debbach or Klamon Kopytoff have described. It allows for the splitting into small and relatively independent communities of similar African origin, providing simultaneously the possibility of joining forces for a larger strategy. This particular political structure was based on the bicultural and bilingual character of the successful Maroons who - as had been shown before - were born in Africa but also had lived for some time in the colony. The resulting seemingly double orientation of language and of culture allowed for a corresponding two - sided aspect of the Maroon communities who were “African” when operating in small groups, and yet became “Creole” when they planned larger strategies.

The further evolution of this federated structure appears in the organisation of larger Maroon towns mentioned in the source from 1792 (see p.248). The Jamaican Clarendon Maroons became a legendary and seemingly invincible force, when “they decided to merge all their gangs into a single unit and to choose one man to lead them” (Robinson: 33), the famous leader Cudjoe. His great contribution was to strengthen the central power of the group by furthering the creolisation process:

“[...] having experienced that the Divisions and Quarrels which had hapned amongst Themselves, were owing to their different Countries and Custom which created Jealousies and uneasiness, He prohibited any other language being spoken among Them, but English [...]” (a document of 1792 quoted by Klamon Kopytoff 1976: 45)

This meant that the newly unified gang was more aggressive; due to their sheer number they had to attack plantations in order to survive. We may thus conclude that successful Maroons and Maroons groups became more and more bicultural and bilingual¹¹⁴ and that the accentuation of one or other cultural pattern depended on the situation of the group and on the requirements of a particular enterprise which might involve more or less people; the same goes for the entire “network”, i.e. the connections between plantation slaves and Maroon communities which - according to the objectives - might be based purely on the level of a particular African nation or else on a Creole level. The difference between these two, and the relative extent of both social systems and, ultimately, their particular problems will emerge when we examine them and compare them with historical slave rebellions which might involve different groups of the servile population and different objectives. We would expect that a rebellion, in order to be successful, would have to be “Creole”, i.e. it would have to muster a great number of slaves and Maroons irrespective of their national origins and, above all, count on the support of the Creole slaves. It may therefore seem surprising that the majority of rebellions were, at least in the

¹¹⁴ This evolution is confirmed by Röhrig Assunção (1996:461) when he states: “Podemos conjecturar que os grandes quilombos coloniais eran liderados por africanos, como João Congo, ao invés dos quilombos tardios, que eram em geral chefiados por negros “crioulos”, isto é, nascidos no Brasil, e portando mais integrados à cultura sincrética afro - brasileira em formação”

beginning, “African” and often even limited to one single nation. The reason is that on the level of Creole society group interests were widely different and solidarity of group members was poor. Thus, large scale rebellions were more exposed the risk of betrayal, even before they started. In order to have a closer look at these differences, we shall in the following pages restrict our analysis to major areas of rebellion on which we have enough data: one - the so - called *Maroon Wars* of Jamaica - an example of an “African” - type rebellion, and on the other hand the *Revolution of Saint-Domingue*, presenting a “Creole” case.

Speaking generally, Maroonism and slave rebellions were closely linked; the latter played an important part in the strategies of the Maroons:

“Slave rebellions on the plantations served as a conduit by which means slaves joined maroon communities. The result is that these newly arrived Africans soon gained ascendancy in the hills in terms of sheer numbers, and by the beginning of the 18th century they were decidedly in a leadership position [...]”(Campbell 1977: 409).

It is still difficult to understand how a particular African group - the *Coromantee Nation*¹¹⁵ - acquired the fame of being extremely warlike; nevertheless, virtually all of the numerous rebellions in British Caribbean in the eighteenth century had been ascribed to this particular nation. Regarding our previous discussion it is not surprising that most reports of the conspiracies connect the uprising with religion and religious ceremonies, particularly in the first phase when it was accompanied by an oath triggering off the insurrection. The ceremonies which Craton reports from a insurrection in the island of Antigua (1735) remind us very much of the Voodoo ceremony reported by Moreau de St. Méry (see III.3):

“The oaths, administered in at least seven different places, sealed with a draft of rum mixed with grave dirt and cock’s blood, and included to killed all whites, to follow the leaders without any question, to stand by each other, and to observe secrecy on the pain of death” (Craton 1980: 7)

It is very instructive that these ceremonies draw a clear line which excludes Creole slaves:

“[...] the Ceremony of the Oath in the Coromantee language was adressed by the Court, the bystanding Slaves hazzaed three times, the Coromantee knowing, but the Creoles not understanding the Engagement they entered into by it. For to some who knew it, the thing appeared so audacious and terrible[...].” (a document of 1737 quoted by Craton, *ibid.*: 8).

It seems that the African slaves had, for practical reasons, to include Creole slaves, but they never treated them fairly and never considered them as reliable allies. A characteristic setting was a plot which occurred in Jamaica in 1742:

¹¹⁵ The name is one of those numerous pseudo - ethnic terms which refer to a slave port on the Gold Coast, an area inhabited by people of the Akan group. According to Shuler the Coromantee were Ashanti who followed their own specific tradition (Shuler 1991: 378). It seems however, that the oath ceremonies belonged generally to the religious culture of the slaves. The origin of the Coromantee fame may have been a particular group from the Akan area which devoted itself to the service of a war - like god. e.g. Ogun. This reputation might have been extended either to all Akan groups who formed the majority of slaves; or to all servers of Ogun. Finally it is possible that their reputation resulted in a self fulfilling prophecy: all trouble makers were retrospectively identified as *Coromantee*. Nevertheless planters preferred them to other slaves; Edward Long suggested stopping their arrival in Jamaica “by laying a duty equal to a prohibition” (II: 471). In any case, it would be interesting to have more information on the making of a slave nation to which had been attributed such conspicuous qualities as those of the Coromantee.

“Participants later revealed that they envisaged the Akan Maroons murdering all the blacks born in the woods (Creoles), or who belonged to other ethnic groups. In turn, the plotters, together with African - born Akan of other plantations, would murder all the white people and join their Maroon compatriots in the wilds” (Shuler 1991: 376)

This passage contains all the elements necessary for the understanding of a very complex social situation. The revolt includes Akan Maroons who however would not trust anybody apart from other Akan (or “Coromantee”) and envisaged, after killing the whites, persecuting all other non - Coromantee slaves and Maroons. Long - term collaboration was impossible, not least because the ultimate objectives of the Coromantee insurgents excluded all non - Coromantee, and particularly the Creoles and the whites:

“(the) object was no other than the entire extirpation of the white inhabitants; the enslaving of all such Negroes which might refuse to join them; and the partition of the island into small principalities in the African mode; to be distributed among their leaders and headmen” (Long II: 447).

In contrast to this, the Haitian Revolution of 1791 did not lead to the restitution of an “African kingdom”, but ended with the proclamation of a republic. Notwithstanding this objective conceived according the principles of French enlightenment, the rebellion also started with an oath: a Voodoo ceremony which took place during a thunderstorm and which involved a sermon linked with the drinking of goats blood. All the other paraphernalia of the ceremony, e.g. the quoting of a romantic poem on liberty (Hoffmann 1996) are later inventions and additions. On the other hand, Haitian tradition does not include the participation of African Nations and of Maroons. Nevertheless, Wim Hoogbergen thinks that the Maroon contribution to the war might have been considerable:

“But once that the rebellion had started, the Maroons did have as substantial part in the battle. Maroon leadership, Maroon bands, Maroon tactics, Maroon consciousness (use of voodoo in politics), all these distinctive marks of marronage could be found in the early stage of the Haitian revolution” (Hoogbergen 1993:165).

Hoogbergen’s source is an article of the Haitian Leslie Manigat, as far as we know the only one dedicated to the role of the Maroons in the Haitian war of Independence (Manigat 1977). A reader of this article would be surprised to find very few concrete historical data on the subject itself. Instead the author offers a highly argumentative debate around the various forms of Maroonism within the French Caribbean which serves to

“assess critically the two schools of interpretation of marronage, the first represented by scholars like Gabriel Debien and Yvan Debbash, who tend to ‘banalize’ it by denying it any revolutionary content or potential, and the second, exemplified by men of letters like Jean Fouchard and Edner Brutus, who tend to enoble it by directly attributing to it the emergence, the dynamism and the successful outcome of the Haitian revolution and by classifying the insurgent slaves of 1791 as maroons as if this last assertion was so obvious that it needs no evidence”(Manigat 1977: 420/421)

Manigat’s position and his problems are obvious and significant. First, there are hardly any historical accounts of the activities of Maroons during this particular revolution. This is rather surprising, because during the entire 18th century there were many continuous and documented incidents of Maroonism not only in the area near to the “Spanish” border, but also in all mountainous areas of the colony and even very close to the plantation areas near the capital in the north (Debien 1979: 109); it is very probably that the Maroons played an important part in assuring communications between the different plantations

right from the outbreak of the first insurrections. The numerous accounts of the war - from the Haitian historian of the past century until the comprehensive study of C.L.R. James - do not mention any contribution of the Maroons because it would not fit into a national historiography which was impregnated by the Mulatto point of view of an enlightened nation; the realities of Maroon life - continuous danger, hunger, violence, cruelty and African customs - did not fit into a heroic picture of the Maroons and the later ideological attempts to incorporate them into the national history - C.L.R. James as well as Edner Brutus - are part either of an ingenuous patriotism or of a "flirtation with Marxism", where "marronage is an expression of the class struggle in a slave - master society" (Manigat 1977:424). As in fictional literature (see I.4.), Maroons are the "wild men" of national history and their image has to be adapted to fit.

Nevertheless, Manigat's article contains some pertinent data and considerations which correspond with the general theme of this chapter. According to Manigat the pre - revolutionary period was characterised by

"the existence of a network of more intensive communications between slaves of different plantations and ethnic origins through "creolization" [...]" (ibid.:421)"

Later he adds that "Creole reached maturity as a unifying language between different Maroons [...]" (ibid.: 435). Manigat's view suggests that the Haitian war already belonged to a different historical period, because, apart from the Maroon wars, it became the cause and the effect of a growing integration of the different servile classes. This meant that, in fact, the Maroons now accentuated the "creole side" of their culture, thus merging and disappearing more and more inside a society where in the course of events the distinctions of colour, culture nation and status tended to be subordinated to the difference between the warring parties.

Did this mean the extinction of African cultures and languages in the course of the Revolutionary Wars? A contemporary report recently published (D'Ans 1997) indicates that notwithstanding the Creole language being mostly used during the war, African languages continued to be the idiom of conspiracy and ethnic solidarity. Years after the War of Independence, in 1812, when Roi Christophe laid siege to Port - au - Prince, did his adversary Petion still rely on the African languages as a weapon:

"On dit aussi qu'il mit sur les remparts de Port - au - Prince des Ibos, des Congos, des Aradas qui criaient dans leurs idiomes africains aux gens de Christophe: Malheureux, passez de notre côté; vous y trouverez l'abondance et la liberté! Si les officiers demandaient aux soldats de ces nations ce qu'on leur criait, ceux - ci répondaient qu'on leur disait des injures, et grâce à ce mensonge l'embauchage continuait sous les yeux mêmes du tyran" (D'Ans 1996: 117).

Contrary to his former beliefs (see the beginning of this part) D' Ans concludes from this source that

"vingt ans après l'arrêt de la traite esclavagiste, il existait donc encore en Haiti pas mal d'individus parlant des 'idiomes' africains" (ibid.)

PART IV

CREOLE CULTURES AND THEIR COUNTERPARTS

IV.1. MESTIZOS, MULATTOS AND CREOLES: TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Columbus' arrival in the "New World" and its ensuing colonisation brought into contact races and cultures which had not known each other before. Right from the beginning, this contact was not temporary; colonisation made it permanent. Biological and cultural miscegenation was a continuing experience and a number of terms came into use which served to describe and to categorise this new experience: Mestizos, Mulattos, Creoles were only a few of the most significant of these new racial designations; as the experience of miscegenation became permanent, the new terms multiplied and turned into a frenzy of naming racial differences. Like other encyclopaedias¹¹⁶ the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* lists 21 denominations to designate persons of different racial mixing:

"acholado, albarazado, atravesado, calpamulo, cambujo, castizo, cuarterón, cuatrato, chino (de india y zambo o de zamba e indio), cholo, genízaro, jíbaro, mestizo, morisco (de mulato y europeo o al revés), mulato, pardo, roto, saltatrás, tenteenclaire, tornatrás" (Olaheca Labayen 1985: 124).

Some of these denominations are openly discriminating (*atravesado*, *saltatrás*); most refer primarily to the miscegenation of races, but they also carry cultural connotations; some of them, such as the terms *cholo* or *jíbaro*, have in some of their meanings to be understood mainly or exclusively in a cultural sense. This sometimes vague relationship between biological and cultural terminology is typical of the general difficulties in dealing adequately with the miscegenation of cultures and races: most of the numerous terms used in relation to it are not the result of abstractions, but of historical processes; subsequently their significance varies according to time and place. The following attempts to deduce and to systematise are therefore necessarily imperfect; but nevertheless they may prove to be useful.

Miscegenation is a human experience from time immemorial; it is deemed necessary, but awe - inspiring at the same time. In the act of procreation two parents have to participate who have to be of different origins in accordance with the precise definition of exogamy rules. Marriage, i.e. the acceptance of a alien person within the kinship group always threatens its "purity"; the danger of this has to be neutralised by rituals which are amongst the most complex in nearly all known human cultures. They are the base of the future recognition of offspring within the kin group; similar complex rituals may be necessary when a child is baptised and named, because they confer an important right: the right to a spiritual, social and material heritage which will be bestowed upon the child either at a certain age or when his father dies. The recognition of the heritage rights of one group generally implies the loss of others, i.e. of the "alien" lineage. An open conflict between the two heritages is prevented again by deeply entrenched rites and rules by which patriarchy or matriarchy, patrilocality or matrilocality are imposed; these principles are generally legitimised as part of the sacred cultural heritage given by god or by the founding fathers, in

¹¹⁶ A German Encyclopaedia of 1894, for instance, lists the following groups: Mulattos, Pardos, Mestizos, Mamelucos, Cholos, Zambos, Chinos, Aribocos, Cafusos, Caburets, Tercerones, Quarterones, Quinterones (which are the same as Creoles), Zambos, Cabernos, Cubras, Zambaigos, Zamboclares, Cambujos, Coyotas, Cascos (Meyers Konversations - Lexikon, Leipzig - Wien 1894)

other words by an authority who assigned to the group its culture and its place in the world.

These general considerations give us important information upon the nature of miscegenation and also of what Taguieff calls “mixophobia” (1985:338): first, that interbreeding is a very common phenomenon; second, that human communities tend to confine it and to cope with its effects by special sacred actions. Miscegenation is generally seen as dangerous, for it gives room to chaos; it opens a door to a world which is not segmented or classified. In an abstract sense it is a world prior to language, a primordial state which would re - appear if we ignored or abolished conceptual limits. Linguistic capacities are cognitive capacities which establish and organise the experiences of the world in a meaningful way and thus establish relations between man and his surroundings¹¹⁷.

A third conclusion may appear obvious, though basic for our subject: miscegenation and its logic counterpart, the myth of “purity”, have to be understood as simultaneous processes which determine our perception of the world. Miscegenation signifies the invasion of the unknown into the world of the known, the return to “purity” would be the attempt to reorganise it. Miscegenation emphasises the processual aspects of experience; purity the state of experience which is stabilised by the process of naming. Both parts of the experience are necessary: without miscegenation the purity would degenerate into sterility; without the creation of “purity” the world cannot be fully perceived. The desire to give a name to all possible results of racial interbreeding are an eloquent example of the vain attempts to contain the confusion generated by “impure” categories.

The large historic process of *Mestizaje* initiated by the age of discovery and in particular by the colonisation of the Americas shows, however, qualities which cannot be deduced exclusively by the daily process of miscegenation. Throughout the history of mankind the arrival of particular situations amplified the ordinary forms of miscegenation: wars, conquest, the invasion of one ethnic group by another, or peaceful migration. Basically, the process of miscegenation produced by these events is, on a larger scale, similar to that which happens in the foundation of families: ethnic groups mix and intermarry but after a certain time they will forget their history of heterogeneity and invent a foundation myth which makes them unique and “pure”. They give themselves a name by which they underline their distinction from other groups, and they define themselves by myths and rituals which are legitimised by their divine origin - until new contacts and events again occur to initiate fresh changes. This circular movement of opening and closing a society to outsiders, however, was never completed in the case of modern colonisation. “Mestizaje” is a process which never reached a stage of accomplishment: inhabitants of the New World perceive themselves, even today, either as “pure” whites, blacks or Indians or as mestizos and mulattos. Several circumstances contributed to the fact, that mestizaje presented, like an scratched record, the repetition of the same tune again and again: first the enormous differences in the cultures which came into contact; second the differences in social and economic privileges which contributed towards keeping the groups separated;

¹¹⁷ Mary Douglas (1966: Chapter 3) demonstrates this relation between social or ethnic organisation and language from the genesis of the people of Israel as presented in the Old Testament: They are the “chosen people” who had received their laws directly by God. This establishes a particular relation between man and God which is the base of most, if not all ethnic organisations. Among those special laws appear are those referring to the classification of animals, determining whether they may be eaten or not. These food laws may appear a trivial subject for a pact between God and His people. They are, nevertheless, a perfect example how a tribe of herdsmen creates and legitimates concepts which serve to segment and identify the world in a way which is meaningful to them. These concepts serve to delimit the sacred from the profane; it is the base of their ethnicity, for only they, the chosen people, know and follow these concepts and the rules they contain.

finally the continuing existence of the original ethnic affiliation: as long as “pure” Indians and “pure” Whites existed and were identifiable, mestizos would perceive themselves not as an ethnic group in its own right, but as miscegenated individuals who belonged to two or more different groups.

We know that in the initial phase of colonisation the Spanish and the Portuguese Crowns favoured miscegenation (Konetzke 1983: 63ff; Martínez Peláez 1985: 263) for several reasons: first the small number of people the Iberian nations could spare in order to conquer and hispanise the newly conquered territories was insufficient, meanwhile the rapidly growing number of mestizos who adopted the cultural standards of their fathers offered the chance of bridging the gap between the Hispanic and the indigenous populations; second the Conquistadores, lacking women, had from the beginning used and abused indigenous women who seemed readily available; by encouraging the marriage of Spanish men and Indian women the authorities hoped to bring order to the existing libertine life. This liberal attitude to miscegenation was, however, restricted already in 1549 by a *Real Cédula*, which stipulated “que ningún mulato ni mestizo, ni hombre que no fuesse pudiesse tener indios, ni oficio real ni público, sin tener para ello especial licencia nuestra” (cit. Konetzke 1983: 113). The question of inherited privileges became the crucial point in the social acceptance of persons of mixed blood, for two reasons which are common to many situations of miscegenation: first the non - miscegenated group tries to make the *limpieza del sangre* a quality which gives it access to wealth, power and other privileges; second the government tends to grant these privileges to the non - miscegenated, because the mestizos, belonging genetically to two separate groups, may be less loyal to the Crown than those who are not liable to different loyalties.

The Cédula expresses openly the hostile or at least marginalising attitude towards the “half - castes” who had certainly appeared beforehand. Already the terms mestizo and mulatto carried derogate connotations. The origin of *mestizo* is, obviously, the Latin word *mixtus* (mixed), probably in the late vulgar form *mixticius*; *mulatto* is related to the word *mule* (Spanish: *mulo*), both going back to Latin *malus* - “bad” (Chaudenson 1992b: 24/25). It seems that originally the two terms had been nearly synonymous; the semantic differentiation which distinguishes between an European - Indian origin (mestizo) and European - African origin (mulatto), occurred later and tends, as far as the term mesticism is concerned, to disappear.

Since the 19th century, mestizos and mulattos are considered mainly according to the criteria of an interbreeding of different races; rejection and prejudices are, however, nourished as well particularly by the existence of “cultural mestizos”, i.e. persons who, irrespective of their parental affiliations, had little or no direct experience and connection with the mother country. This is the primordial semantic background of a very complex and ambiguous term of colonial origin: the term “creole”. Its first documented appearance in a Spanish document of 1567 provides an interesting meaning of the word: The text describes the population of the American territories :

“[...] los más de ellos son biejos y muchos se an muerto y en succedido sus hijos en sus rrepartimientos y an dexado muchos hijos por manera que esta tierra esté llena de criollos que son estos que acá an nacido, y como nunca an conocido al rrey ni esperan concello[...]”(cit. Stein 1982: 162).

The term creole, as is suggested by its etymological history¹¹⁸, originally refers to persons who have been brought up in a different environment and who have a different view of the world - different semantics make Creole men and women, even though they continue to speak Spanish, distinct and different persons. Their language and cultural backgrounds are not conceived as the result of mixing of two cultures, but as a deviation which has been caused by their long absence, i.e. by a process of alienation from the mother country.

In the 17th century the term *creole* appears in all languages of European nations engaged in New World plantations and trade: English, French, Dutch, Danish, Portuguese and so on. A collection of early French examples shows how this transposition is accompanied by a change of meaning. In 1692 a travel account of Martinique still emphasises the “couleur pâle” of Creoles and another report of 1698 determines as creoles “tous ceux qui naissent aux Indes Occidentales”. Five years later a slight change occurs when, though in friendly terms, the dark colour of creoles is mentioned:

“Par le mot de créoles, il faut pas entendre des personnes aucunement difformes de nature aussi bien les hommes et les femmes dont il se trouve de très jolies et fort bien faites. Leur couleur de chair est un peu brune, mais douce”

Father Labat in 1722 understands by the term Creoles “ceux qui sont nés dans le pays” (Chaudenson 1979:10).

In both the French and the British Caribbean the term creole changes its meaning at the beginning of the 18th century, i.e. during the heyday of the plantation economy; it now acquires a racial signification, but does not entirely lose its former cultural content: Creole slaves are termed as those who have been born in the colony and thus are familiar with Creole habits, who enjoy Creole food and speak the Creole language. In this and other contexts the term *creole* still reproduces the original notion of an unspecified variation or declination of a cultural norm. The notion of “mixture” does not usually belong to the term and the fact that the new concept of creole culture is related to black populations is not reflected in it. The most obvious reason for the deliberate exclusion of Africa from the formation of Creole culture is to be found in the master’s abysmal ignorance of anything which was concerned with the Dark Continent: taking into consideration an “African culture” would have appeared an absurd idea. The continually predominant reluctance to attribute any value to African factors in the formation of Creole cultures and languages is at least partially a reflection of terminological history.

The semantic constriction of the term *creole* occurred mainly in the French and the English language and it is closely related to the rise of the plantation economy during the 18th century. In is significant that the semantic change appears likewise in Brazil where even today, the word *crioulo* is used to describe a black or coloured person¹¹⁹. The situation is more complex in the Spanish colonies, where the growing internationalisation of slavery

¹¹⁸ It derives from the Spanish/Portuguese root *criar* = to rise, to bring up (cf. Morris Goodman 1964:10). Orlando de Albuquerque supposes that the Portuguese terms *criadouro* or *criacao*, both designating servants, have been an intermediate stage. (1975: 222)

¹¹⁹ The *Dicionário Aurélio* (ed 1985) indicates the following meanings of *crioulo*: 1) White person born in the colonies 2)Dialect of this person 3)Black persons born in America 4)Things belonging to people of a specific area 5)Dialect spoken on the Capeverdean Islands and other parts of Portuguese Africa; 6) Ordinary chicken 7)Black person in general. According to De Albuquerque the term *crioulismo* would refer to mixed cultures; thus it would be synonymous with *mulatismo*, except that it carries the positive notion of a new culture: “No mulato, que também é o resultado de um mestiçamento, tal como o crioulo, nao há uma individualisação, uma metamorfose, que leve à criação de um homem, língua ou cultura novas... (1975: 226)

brought semantic changes to the Spanish colonies, whereby the word *criollo* has a double significance: “Americanos descendientes de europeos” and “negro nacido en America” (Albuquerque 1975: 222). The close relationship between these two meanings which give emphasis to a cultural specificity, would however not be adequate enough in mature plantation colonies where racial connotations were more important. To designate a slave as creole would not seem appropriate if the use of this term would put him on the same level as his creole owner. Thus in Spanish plantation colonies (but also in Brazil) there appeared an additional term which draws a clear line between a white *criollo* and his black counterpart: the latter would be called *ladino*, a term which means “intelectualmente fino” or “astuto” (Diccionario Aurelio), but which has, according to Martínez Peláez (1985: 271), negative connotations, “pues se refiere a todas las personas que en la sociedad colonial no eran indígenas o descendientes puros de españoles”. *Ladino* is in some way equivalent to *criollo* in societies where the social and economic order favoured racial discrimination¹²⁰. It is complementary to *bozal* (french: *bossale*, portuguese: *boçal*) which means “stupid”, “rude” and is used to designate slaves who have been brought from Africa.

All these terms - creole, ladino, bozal - are part of the technical vocabulary of the plantation economy and administration. They were doubtless impregnated with discrimination and contempt against the slaves and their race, but they served above all to convey a special knowledge about the various types of slaves and how to handle and control them. It is a curious though very understandable phenomenon that the 19th century brought not only abolition, but also new and more dangerous forms of racism and above all of mixophobia: the scientifically deduced and legitimised prejudice (Cf. I.2). Its social and scientific background is manifold: the abolition of slavery which made the former black slave a competitor on the labour market and within sexual relations on the one hand; the development of biology as the model science on the other. The main impact came from the extremely popular evolutionary theories which attributed the different levels of development of human races to the influence of such natural factors as soils, fertility and above all climate, within their own habitat. These theories, commonly summarised as “Darwinism” postulate that the biological differences between people are the result of an adaptation which began at the dawn of time. Interbreeding would destroy these specific traits and with them the age - old labours of nature; its results would finally be a useless, dull and destructive mediocrity. “Les peuples ne dégènerent pas tout de suite et en proportions de mélanges qu’ils subissent, et dans la mesure de la qualité de ces mélanges” (Gobineau, quoted by Taguieff)

Pure races are seen as good and, in a purely theoretical sense, as equal, as they all represent an adaptation to the challenges of their particular habitat. In reality there would be differences in quality because some environments - cold climates, poor soils and difficult labour conditions - would be more demanding and would favour the development of a material culture; the warm climate, the fertile soils and the abundance of natural food supply in the tropics would encourage laziness and a carefree life. Europeans were considered as generally more ingenious and industrious than colonial natives, though these, owing to their natural specialisation, were deemed indispensable for certain kinds of work. In the nineteen thirties *Colonial Ethnography* was a recognised discipline; its objective was the maintenance of the colonial population and labour force and it advocated that native

¹²⁰ According to Chaudenson (1992: 86) a ladino is an “esclave amené depuis assez longtemps (plus d’un an) et ayant une compétence linguistique regardée comme suffisante”, differing from the “bozal” (“introduit depuis moins d’un an et parlant peu ou mal la langue du pays”) and the “criollo” (“esclave créole, c’est - à dire né dans le pays”). These definitions contain a conceptual logic and generalisation which are unusual at this period

populations should be kept away from too close a contact with their masters, so as to prevent not only sexual contact between the two groups, but also all forms of cultural contamination¹²¹.

The highly prejudiced views of the 19th century - which in most cases are just sophisticated and para - scientific variants of the common mixophobia we had mentioned at the beginning - did not allow for an understanding of mestization and the cultures which it had created. Most Latin American countries with high proportions of mestizo peoples never favoured the mixophobic aspects of scientific racism, even when, during its heyday, they had accepted the general condemnation of coloured races. Increased mestization appeared, on the contrary, as the best way “to save the country”¹²². During the nineteen twenties and thirties a number of well known essays - for instance *La raza cósmica* (1927) by José Vasconcelos or *Casa Grande e Senzala* by Gilberto Freyre (1933) stipulated that mestization is the foundation and the future of Latin American cultures. In this sense the famous Cuban “mulatto poet” Nicolas Guillen is seen as the founder of a particular Cuban identity:

“Es imposible concebir o plantearse la identidad nacional de Cuba, desconociendo o hasta relegando la condición mestiza de su esencial naturaleza. Los diversos elemento formativos de la nación cubana se funden en una sola substancia, en aquella que, precisamente, busca un rostro en la más legítima independencia nacional” (Morejon 1980: 29).

Accepting mestization, even adopting it as the principal ingredient of a new national culture has considerable implications on the process itself as well as the ideological perception of culture. It is noteworthy, for instance, that not only the Bahian carnival, but also the religious syncretism of Candomblé - both intrinsic elements of Brazilian slave culture - have been adopted by the national middle classes transforming them into assets of a Brazilian national culture. Brazil, in fact has become the Latin American society which is most advanced in amalgamating black and other heterogeneous cultural elements into a homogeneous “creole” form which is functional towards creating an identity on the national level. This would seem to indicate that here we will find the closing of the circle which attributes to the former heterogeneous components the myth of a new singularity, a process of “creolisation” on the national level which will be examined more closely in Chapter IV.4. But we should also note that, not very surprisingly, important sections of the coloured population reject this process of absorption and its highly rhetoric presentation as a “national culture”, arguing first that it obscures the existing social and economic inequality and second serves to a further “whitening” and “occidentalising” of the former slave population. The present - day cultural expression of Brazilian *Crioulos* seems sometimes less marked by an all - embracing national culture than by the distinction of a black culture of the “trios elétricos”, the Zumbi - revivalism and Poesía Negra: an old and new black fundamentalism.

¹²¹ The “große Völkerkunde” of 1939, vol., edited by Hugo Bernatzig dedicates a whole part of the first volume to the question of Colonial Ethnography, providing ample documentation on the negative effects of civilisation and denouncing the activities of missionaries, in particular their interfering with the dressing habits of the “natives”

¹²² This was the case in Mexico which had been the most important showcase of positivist racism. “El mestizo es susceptible de gran civilización” writes Francisco Bulnes, one of the “científicos” at the turn of the century. “Es decir al mestizo puede salvar facilmente el Estado y la inmigración.” (1972)

IV.2. A PARTICULAR CASE: CREOLE LANGUAGES

Creole linguistics deserve special attention because it is the only discipline where the term *creole* has entered a modern scientific discipline. This, however, created the problem that within the scope of various different theories the term acquired connotations which do not reflect any relationship to the original meaning of the term “creole”. Whereas historically the term was virtually restricted wholly to American black cultures, linguistics tended to enlarge it, though in a different direction. The term “creole” is used here to designate a group of languages which originated from particular contact situations and which have specific traits in common: regularity, lack of redundancy, certain grammatical features, i.e. characteristics which often are seen as simplifications in comparison to colonial languages considered as “natural”. Being of relatively recent origin, these languages - which before the sixties were usually classed as “dialects” - seemed to offer insights into the development of human language in general. Thus an important aspect of Creole linguistics is the construction of hypotheses regarding their genesis. Without advancing too far into this complex area we may state that nearly all the hypotheses tend to generalise and de - historize the conditions under which those languages appear. Creole languages are just one particular case within the large group of contact languages which they may occur anywhere and at any period of time. A map charting the occurrence of 80 documented contact languages (Hancock 1971: 510/11) nevertheless shows us that the majority of them appear within a tropical belt suitable for the establishment of plantation economies and slavery. But these are not the relevant criteria used for their classification, which also includes cases like the *Russo - Norsk* spoken at the Arctic Sea, the *Chinook* Trade Jargon of the North American Indians, the Anglo - Irish Pidgins and a number of African cases which do not involve European languages. More than one third of these languages, mostly those of Asian origin, have no relation to black cultures at all. Only 26 of the 80 entries are based in America which is the home of the term creole; only 10 are related to cultures which would identify themselves as “creole”.

This more exclusive group - mainly in the Caribbean, but also involving some non - American communities¹²³ - have a particular and ambiguous understanding of “Creole languages” which includes their history as slave languages. Local speakers would, at different occasions, advance contrary opinions on how they view their language or speaking. Though nearly all of them would agree that creole speech is a variation of “base” language such as French, English, Spanish or Portuguese, they might often note that a certain person used a very “good” creole, thus implying that there is an innate normative yardstick setting the language apart from any other; on different occasions, however, they would claim that there is no wrong or bad way of using creole, because, they say, it is “wrong” language and thus they deny explicitly the existence of any norm. These evaluations are vaguely related to the existence of different variants of a Creole language: one type of variation the linguists name the “basilectal” form of a given creole language and which is defined as the one most distant from colonial language. On the other hand we find the “acrolectal variations” which most approximate colonial speech. It is evident that real speech acts always are a “mixture” of these idealised variations. One of the most controversy debates on creole languages was on the question whether intermediary stages can be identified and eventually denominated; it should be noted that this issue is not purely linguistic but is linked to the general question of segmentation of complex realities which - as the preceding section demonstrates - had already appeared in relation to the problem of identifying and denominating racial mixtures within an hitherto undivided

¹²³ mainly islands in the Indian Ocean (Mauritius, the Seychelles and Réunion) and some former Portuguese African territories as Cape Verde Islands, Guiné Bissau and São Tomé.

range of phenomena. With respect to language creolists still see the transition from basilects to acrolects as a continuum which does not allow the compartmentalisation or description of the intermediate stages; others, however, consider the intermediate stage as consolidated “mesolects” which can be identified and named after a thorough linguistic investigation¹²⁴. The paroxism in identifying “mesolects” is reached when a researcher quotes different phrases - which supposedly should have the same meaning - in order to demonstrate the different mesolectal forms¹²⁵.

To the creole speaker himself his language is a very fluid instrument which indicates not only different degrees of acculturation to dominant language, but also the speakers intention to adapt also to extra - linguistic factors as, for instance, socio - cultural differences between the speakers (which would require an acrolectal version) or their relative equality (which then are allowed to use a basilectal version). In fact, linguistic competences of the speakers may even be neglected; what counts is their intention to use an acrolectal or basilectal form according to the social meanings they convey. Even monolingual Haitian Creole speakers - i.e. most of the Haitian peasant population - would “invent” a quasi - French form of speaking if the situation required it. This is expressed by the use of the hyper - correct forms in which educated Haitian delight when they are presented on stage. Proposals of marriage - a very formal occasion which custom requires to be written in “French” - is another opportunity for the use of an invented, hyper - correct French.

Another factor closely connected to these ambiguities is their relationship to various identity myths and concepts of the particular speech communities. Sociolinguists differentiate between referential and vehicular functions of a language. The first makes language part of the cultural heritage of the speech community; its members understand the correct use of the native idiom - which includes intrinsic knowledge of different stylistic levels and their social significance - as a “passport” which determines the state of integration of an individual within the speech community. Variations in style, redundancies and irregularities may be viewed as stumbling blocks which reveal the non - native speaker incapable of mastering a linguistic tradition grown up over centuries. The vehicular function aims at the opposite: it stresses communicational efficiency regardless of correctness and linguistic subtleties.

The relation to the aforesaid is evident: referential functions of a language are used for “fundamentalist” ethnic differentiation, whereas vehicular functions characterise open, non - differentiating communities in which frequent contact with strangers is essential. It is obvious that in any language both functions coexist and may be freely alternated depending on temporary or long term speech strategies; they are part of the social use of language. It

¹²⁴ Cf. Bickerton 1973, p. 644/645 on Guyanese Creole: “‘Approximations’ are not strictly speaking misinterpretations, but rather selections of a genuine part (though only a part) of the actual target rule; this we may call the tendency towards partial selection. Its effects are reinforced by those of the second tendency, which is to make the minimal adjustment in one’s grammar consonant with new data[...]. As a result of the operations of the two tendencies the panlectal grid which has “deep” creole as one of its boundaries and standard English as the other, gradually becomes populated as more and more intermediate isolects are realised by actual speakers”.

¹²⁵ Cf. Funk, p. 31, who quotes four variants of a sentence in Martinican Creole (When his child saw what it had done, it fled and hid in a canefield until the rain began to fall” a) Lheù iche - li oué ça i té fait i sauvé, i serré co - i a - dans you champscanne, jusse laplie té coumencé tombé” - b) Lheu zenfant - i oué ça i jà fait, i sauvé co - i, i serré dans un champscanne, jusse laplie coumencé tombé; c) Quand zenfant - i a oué ça qu’il a fait, il sé caché dans un champs - canne, jusqu’à la pluie a commencé tombé.d) Quand son enfant a vu ce qu’il a fait, il s’est sauvé, il s’est caché dans un champs - cannes jusqu’à la la pluie a commencé de tomber”. Not only that some of the changes are suggested by a change of orthography, it is also very questionable how the interviewer found an individual (or several) able to repeat the same sentence in four different forms.

is also understandable that in colonial situations where different language groups have to communicate, there will be a certain bias in favour of the vehicular functions, though the referential purpose of language use may have some importance as a means of discrimination. In considering the speech habits of plantation colonies in general and of black slaves in particular, linguistic interests and presumptions were exclusively directed towards the vehicular functions. This seems reasonable when taking for granted that not only white masters and black slaves needed a vehicular tongue, but also black slaves who were seen as originating from different language groups.

This interest favoured exclusively research into the vehicular aspects, neglecting the referential, i.e. identity - related aspects. The general trend of Creole linguistics was, by the way, reinforced by another ages - old interest: that of origin of language. Being of recent origin, it was hoped that creole languages would give at least a hint at the general evolution of languages from the first simple and amorphous attempts at communication towards more complex structures. This predominant interest into vehicular functions became the basis of a model which served to situate Creole languages within the evolution of contact languages. Again we are confronted with attempts to “name” stages within a very fluid situation:

- *Jargons* are the first stage to appear when contacts are scarce and sporadic. Jargons are not systematic; naming and charting them is a problematic enterprise because jargons do not constitute definite bodies of linguistic features, though some of them have been known during a considerable length of time, e.g. the Chinook Jargon or the Mediterranean *Sabir*¹²⁶

- a *Pidgin* was defined

“as a language which is very, very sharply reduced in both its grammar and its vocabulary, usually not having more than 700 - 1500 words, and not being the native language of anybody that uses it” (Goodman 1964:12)

The combination of internal linguistic features (reduction) and external reasons (mother tongue) makes this definition ambiguous and of little use. It has been necessary to introduce an intermediary stage,

- the *Extended Pidgin* which still is not the mother tongue of the speakers, but which has gone through a process of expansion due to its stability as a second language on the national level (p. ex. Niugini Pidgin)

- a *Creole* language has been defined

“as a language which has developed out of a Pidgin language by becoming the first language that a group of people grow up speaking, and which, of course, then expands and becomes, either from its own resources or from other resources, suitable for the use of a whole group in exactly the same way as the so - called natural language” (Goodman 1964:12)

It is possible to add further stages by including the dissolution or “death” of a Creole language produced by its close proximity to the highly valued colonial language. It may influence, gradually deform and finally absorb the creole language. The intermediate forms which will appear are the *mesolects* we have mentioned above.

¹²⁶ The word Sabir is used as a specific term related to Mediterranean as well as a general term for contact languages. From this we may conclude that historically it does not designate a specific language but rather “way of talking”

It is not our task to discuss this classification on linguistic grounds; our interest is its application to the concrete situations of slavery as we have discussed them principally in previous chapters. But some general remarks cannot be avoided: Speaking of linguistic reduction in relation to black slaves is never value free; the term is, in fact, congruent with prejudices on black savagery and inferior mental capacities. During the 19th century and even beforehand it was directly discriminating, attributing the “deficiencies” of Creole languages to the inferiority of black slaves. French Creole is, as an English resident of St. Lucia saw it, “the refuge of ignorance and the less you know of French, the greater aptitude you have for talking Negro” (Breen 1844: 185). In our century explanations tended to be less discriminatory, putting the responsibility for the reduction on the European who would not use ‘good language’ when talking to black slaves. Famous linguists as Hugo Schuchardt¹²⁷, Leonard Bloomfield¹²⁸ and Robert A. Hall (1966:4) retreated to the *Baby - Talk Theory* which blamed the colonial masters for not offering a correct model of their language to the native populations; but the innocence of these explanations was invalidated by openly fascist linguistics which held that baby talk language was a friendly concession by Europeans to the congenital ignorance of “lower races” (See Schultze 1933: 410)

Apart from the problem of prejudice, the principal deficiencies in these modes of explaining creole languages is the attempt to reduce a complex linguistic situation to a model situation where a “typical” slave - like a foreigner - has to make himself understood in an unknown speech community. Many analogies go into this direction: Creole is seen as an example of an “undirected language acquisition” analogous to that of foreign workers, children or patients recovering after a stroke; even monkeys acquiring basic elements of human speech are mentioned. All these comparisons imply the absence or the abrupt loss of means to make oneself understood; it is understood as a “rupture” in the linguistic biography of an individual: the slave arriving in the New World without any useful linguistic tools at hand.

This unidirectional model of language evolution is, by its epistemological purpose, unable to take into account the complex social and hence linguistic setting of slavery. When within this general frame Pidgin and Creole language are presented as more stable variants, this is done for the sake of synchronic identification and description; beyond this and on a larger scale they are seen as ephemeral stages of what had been called a life cycle of Pidgin and Creole languages (Hall 1962). At the same time, both stages are presented as *diachronic* and socially determined variants, the Pidgin obeying the need for a vehicular linguistic tool, whereas the Creole form would correspond to the growing need for a referential instrument. In fact, we know a number of cases where the respective development of slave and post - slavery societies show *synchronically* either one or the other orientation in language development; for instance the Portuguese Creole of the Cape Verde Islands has acquired the qualities of a referential tongue¹²⁹, whereas its cognate variety in Guiné - Bissau remains largely - though not exclusively - on the level of a vehicular language (Fleischmann 1987:59/60).

¹²⁷ “Alles Radebrechen einer Sprache geht von deren Erbesitzern aus, ähnlich wie die Kindersprache auf der Ammensprache beruht” (1909: 443)

¹²⁸ “The subject, in turn, deprived of the correct model, can do no better now to acquire the simplified the simplified ‘baby - talk’ version of the upper (!) language. The result may be a conventionalised jargon” (1933: 472)

¹²⁹ Each of the nine islands insists on preserving and cultivating its own variety though they are still similar enough to be understood by all Cape Verdians. This attitude is a major obstacle to the implementation of an interinsular norm (Cf Fleischmann 1984)

In the latter case, Portuguese Creole is partially an “imported” language¹³⁰ brought to Guiné - Bissau by the numerous Cape - Verdians who had immigrated, but also used by the numerous African communities who use it for communication on a national level. In this respect, the language situation of Guiné Bissau contradicts the idea of a “life cycle”, because it demonstrates that, in certain - probably most! - historic situations, Pidgin and Creole varieties may be spoken simultaneously within a speech community. As already stated, vehicular and referential languages are not necessarily successive stages of language evolution, but they may appear as stylistic variants of a language which appears as a unity insofar as it is used by all (or most) speakers.

We have emphasised the case of Guiné - Bissau - which was not a true slave and plantation colony -, because it demonstrates aspects which are similar to the historic American plantation societies: the close co - existence of African ethnic communities and a Creole population. The major objection to this comparison is obvious: it presupposes that in the American plantation colonies African speech communities continued to exist and to survive. In fact, if we admit the aforesaid definition of Pidgin language - that it is a vehicular variety of a population which continues to use their own native tongue as a means for referential purposes -, the stage of pidginisation presupposes the continued use of African languages in America. This is the major epistemological argument against the idea of a “rupture” in the linguistic history of the African slave brought to America. If this were the case, the stage of pidginisation of a new slave would be reduced to a short period of individual language acquisition preceding his full integration into the new speech community. Pidgin, in this case, would be no more than a learner variety, but never a language. Considering an eighteenth century plantation colony with the continual arrival of new slaves from Africa, we have to choose between two models: either we see it within the theoretical context of the linguistic integration of any immigrant population - like the Italians in Argentina at the beginning of our century - or we presuppose the setting of a multilingual society where many linguistic varieties were spoken simultaneously. It is obvious that we have to choose the latter model, for the plantation society was not integration - orientated as was Argentina in the aforesaid example. In fact, the Italian immigrants had many learner’s varieties, but they never developed a Pidgin or even Creole language¹³¹.

This line of argument demonstrates the importance of deducing the origins of Pidgin and Creole languages from a large - scale historic investigation rather than from the necessarily abstract construction of the linguistic biography of a “typical” individual. The appearance and dominance of Pidgin and Creole variants is more easily explained via the historical phases the slave societies of the New World had gone through and, simultaneously, it helps to explain, why Creole languages appear and survive in certain colonies - mainly the French and English possessions in the Caribbean - and why they have no relevance in the continental colonies or the Spanish Caribbean.

Most of necessary data have been elaborated in the preceding chapters: The most general and useful variable is that of the integrative potential of the different slave societies which, again, is dependent on a number of factors: historic development, nature, produce, number of slaves imported, reproduction of slaves etc. These data allow us to differentiate between societies with a relatively high integration potential - such as the Spanish colonies

¹³⁰ Many linguists refuse to accept this idea of migration, attributing to Guiné - Bissau its own and historically separate development of a creole language.

¹³¹ See Whinnom (1968) who discusses the differences between the “Cocoliche” language spoken by the Italian immigrants in comparison with the Pidgin - Creole model.

or the colonies on the mainland, particularly those which did not produce sugar - as opposed to the non - Spanish sugar producing islands of the Caribbean where we find a high incidence of Creole languages. But even amongst these territories we have to differentiate between periods: the initial stage was determined by a larger variety of products and a higher proportion of white settlers, mostly indentured servants; and the second stage of the “mature” sugar colony by a high proportion of African - born slaves and by a low potential for integration. It appears that the appearance of Creole languages and their successive stabilisation is due to the rapid and sudden succession of these two stages. As I have elaborated this view in various studies (1983, 1986a, 1993a), only the main points will be summarised here.

As shown in chapter II.2., the first phase in the development of Caribbean slavery is characterised by the presence of a large number of ethnic groups with different languages. Land was easily available and favoured the settlement of European peasant communities which reorganised according their background in different regions, with their own languages and “dialects”; black slaves were still few; they lived in close contact with the European settlers and integrated relatively easily in a social as well linguistic sense. In this period a probably undetermined number of different vehicular languages and contact languages were used in a multilingual setting, one or several of them being close to the future Creole.

The principal trait of this first phase was the relative equality of all parts of colonial population; its structure and internal differentiation was less social than geographic. In this respect the situation changed dramatically when sugar production began to dominate at the beginning of the eighteenth century: the white smallholders emigrated while African - born slaves arrived in large numbers. Social differences and the conflicts emerging from them grew rapidly, favouring the development of a socially determined language stratification which reduced the prevailing multilingualism; the present creole forms gained the upper hand, probably because they were the linguistic vehicle most used by the black population (and also by the last remaining Indian groups). The linguistic situation which arose resembles in some aspects the more recent examples from Africa: the dominant colonial language is (or was) not accessible to most of the Africans without school education, but their African languages alone were no longer sufficient, when new multiethnic towns, markets and means of mobility appeared. This favoured the emergence of a third level of linguistic tools: vehicular languages on the base of either the European language (e.g. the “petit nègre” in French colonies) or of African languages (e.g. Lingala in Zaire).

The linguistic situation in “mature” plantation colonies was structurally similar: African slaves who arrived in large numbers tended - as had been shown previously (III.1 and III.2) - to reorganise into African ethnic and linguistic groups. Large parts of the interaction within the slave community itself was based on these African languages, but other important activities also required inter - communication by all the slaves on a plantation as well as occasionally some understanding between masters and slaves, i.e. a vehicular tool. In plantation societies depending on the continuous import of new slaves, the referential functions of language use will favour the African languages of the slaves as well as the colonial languages of the masters - a specialisation which underlines the lack of social integration in the sugar producing colonies. At this stage, Pidgin and Creole languages were, to most inhabitants of the colony, merely vehicular tools; they have little integrative power, because the number of Creole slaves remains relatively small. In more integrative colonies with a large number of Creole slaves and free coloureds the creolisation process becomes part of a more general process of “Americanisation” of language which leads to the evolution of American English or Brazilian Portuguese considered as variants of their respective European bases.

This genetic theory of Creole languages on sociolinguistic grounds, “très vraisemblable” according to some critics (Manessy 1995: 211), involves a number of questions and implications which are important for understanding slave societies and black cultures in America: first the role of African languages and the reasons for their disappearance in America; second the relation between Pidgin and Creole languages as stages of a linguistic evolution; and third, the nature of creolisation as a general process of cultural change. These questions had appeared already at various stages of this study, so we may limit ourselves to some concluding remarks.

The problem of the continuing use of African languages during slavery has been amply discussed. We have tried to demonstrate that the “rupture”, i.e. the sudden disfunctionalisation of African languages certainly is a linguistic construction. A slave from an isolated language group, and even more so the majority of slaves who came from large closely related linguistic communities - through travelling through Africa, through staying at the shore for some length of time, through communicating with his companions during the middle passage, through being “seasoned” by other slaves and by entering into a cult “nation” -, was subject to a number of processes of linguistic convergence. Besides this historic evidence, the continuing presence of “African” languages as a referential tool corresponds to a sociolinguistic and even linguistic necessity, because otherwise it would be difficult to explain why the creole languages had acquired and maintained their correspondent and still very obvious vehicular traits. Finally, it is difficult to imagine the concrete linguistic situation in a plantation colony which needed the continuous import of new slaves from Africa who, according to the traditional definition, spoke a Pidgin language, whereas the Creole slaves spoke Creole. It is very probable that Africans and Creoles spoke the same tongue, Africans maybe less frequently and less fluently than the Creole slaves; we may even presume that creole slaves simplified their Creole speech - i.e. they “repidginised” it - when talking to less competent Africans, in the same way as Creole slaves still knew some of the African languages of their parents and friends. This means that, placed between referential systems of the African and the colonial languages, Pidgin and Creole were not successive stages of a language evolution per se, but simultaneous variations of one language which need to be perceived either as stylistic variants or as different communication strategies. The use of African languages was gradually discontinued, when the import of new slaves stopped and the number of Creole slaves increased; Creole language, becoming the referential tool of the black community, lost most of its vehicular functions (though some of those traits still exist today¹³²). This also implied the disappearance of the African communities as general and all - embracing reference groups; the emancipation of black slaves transformed them into religious societies, i.e. syncretistic cult groups. African languages then became sacred tongues used for the communication with the African gods whereas most everyday activities were absorbed by the Creole society.

Until now we had been using the various terms - Pidgin, Creole, but also Jargon, Mesolect etc. - according to the established linguistic terminology which, at all stages, is confusing, because it suggests implicitly (and even explicitly) that linguistic variations can be defined, described, labelled and seen as stages in an evolutionary process. The real situation very probably was (and is) very fluid favouring the concomitant use of all these transitional phases. The terms Pidgin and Creole may have a certain descriptive value insofar as they indicate the useful distinction of the vehicular and the referential functions of any code within this imbroglio; but it is also apparent that the linguistic use of the term

¹³² They can be observed for instance when a monolingual Haitian Creole speaker simplifies his language in order to communicate with a French - speaking foreigner.

Creole differs in some important aspects from the historic use of this term as was outlined in the preceding chapter. This may be demonstrated when we have a closer look at the creolisation process as such: when and how did it begin?

When he was caught, an Ibo slave like Equiano spoke a language which belonged to the Ibo group; it contained a certain vision of the world, of his village, of its activities and customs, and its gods. From this moment onwards the slave underwent a painful process of adaptation which lasted for the rest of his days; certain elements of language and of his understanding of the world changed fast, others were retained for a period of time, some he would keep for his entire life. The priority in changing language and culture is determined by a large number of factors, for instance their importance to his personality and culture and their similarity to other names and objects known to him: he will accept new names for familiar objects or ideas as well as extending familiar words to new objects. This process - which implies a continuous process of semantic change - went on as he travelled to the coast and was brought to America, in short during all the phases of adaptation which he went through.

In spite of all these processes of convergence he still is identified as an Ibo both in Africa and in the colony; those who came from a less well known ethnic group would receive a new ethnic identification label and might see it as being advantageous to accept some of this new identity; but still they retained elements of their former life. Further modifications appeared when the slave gained more insights into colonial culture, when he understood the necessity to accept more and more parts of it, and when he tried to incorporate them not only into his primordial personality, but also into all former stages of adaptation and apprenticeship. This process of integration continued, when, eventually, the slave received the label of Ladino or Creole or any other which the colonial world allocated to him. Each stage was accompanied by new forms of linguistic and cultural convergence which contained and superseded all former forms of convergence.

Creolisation is the process as well as the result of all these individual and collective attempts to integrate old and new experiences. Denominations - "bozal", "ladino", "criollo" - try to subdivide this process into concepts and groups, and to stick a stereotyped label on them; but a person of Ibo origin is no longer the same "Ibo" when he reaches the shore; a person of African origin is no longer the same "African" when he lives in the colony; the semantics of the denominations have changed as well as the roles attached to them. In the most general - and also original! - sense of the term they are all Creoles: persons "who do not know the king" as the first definition said (cf. p.) because they have lost their original home and have not yet acquired a new one. In this sense it is meaningful that some very committed Creole Speakers of Haiti or of Mauritius refuse to call their language Creole; it should be named Haitian or Mauritian in order to underline its referential character.

IV.3. BLACK "FUNDAMENTALISM" AND THE MISGIVINGS OF THE HETEROGENEOUS SOCIETIES

The final victory of the rebellion of Saint-Domingue, the only successful example in the history of slavery in the Americas, had been won by two warring factions who, during the course of the war, also had fought each other more than once and who finally united their efforts only because there was no other solution to twelve years of war. The objectives of the different parties, however, remained unreconciled: the concern of the black majority of black slaves was to win their freedom and to defend it under whatever government, whether colonial or independent. The other faction were the free coloured people who both then and today were called *Mulattos*, a popular term which we will

continue to use for reasons which will become apparent. We should note, however, that the term *Mulattos* is historically inaccurate, because a considerable part of them were black slaves who had bought or won their freedom; in fact the African - born Equiano, whose biography had been discussed in the first chapter, would qualify as an illustrative example of “Mulatto” in the Haitian sense. Historians generally prefer the more technical term of *Anciens Libres* (old free), which rightly refers to their most important quality, that of having been free before the revolution started. Consequently freedom was not their principal reason for fighting; their objectives were more complex and often directly opposed to those of the slaves. Mulattos had a bad reputation among the black insurgents; they were regarded as vain and treacherous people whose main interest was to be recognised as equal to white Frenchmen, to dress and behave like them; having been slave owners themselves, they did not really support the abolition of slavery. These different interests and mutual distrust continued after the war; despite the exhortations of the Haitian coat of arms¹³³, despite the first constitution¹³⁴ and despite a large patriotic poetry, this cleavage continues until today. It can not to be understood in terms of the simple opposition of two political parties or factions; it opposes diametrically two identities and options of development which to begin with may be characterised by the headings *resistance* and *adaptation*. As these concepts always resume basic identity conflicts in all Afro American cultures and as they are, in their historical form, rooted in corresponding conflicts during slavery, a closer look into the Haitian case may be profitable.

French Saint-Domingue had been the “best colony in the world” in the sense of the “pure model” of a plantation colony (cf. Chapters I.3./II.3); that means that it consisted of large number of black slaves on large estates and a relatively small number of whites, most of whom lived in the urban areas. The slaves were very aware of two facts: first that race and skin colour had become the basis and justification of their serfdom and that this condition could not be negotiated. The second fact was the numerical disproportion between them and their oppressors which was big enough to reverse the colonial order by force. But the slaves also knew that a rebellion against slavery was to be unconditional and merciless, because the absolute character of colonial interests and the subsequent socio - economic purpose of race prejudice did not allow for negotiation between the two. In fact, compromise - general freedom and equality in a French colony under a black governor - was short - lived and when Napoleon reintroduced slavery in 1802, there could only be one solution: the proclamation of a new republic dedicated to fight slavery wherever it was.

There is a considerable number of texts written either by French commentators or by future Haitians which justify the uprising of Saint Domingue by describing the horrors of slavery and by pointing out that personal freedom and liberty are primordial rights which supersede all other considerations. To that extent the slave’s position was absolutely clear and unequivocal. His form of warfare was not subject to European norms; his leadership did not have to correspond to European customs - on the contrary: the strange rituals of investiture used to consecrate an “African chief” of absolute power, bloody oath ceremonies and magic practices begetting power and invulnerability, guerrilla fighting and other such tactics unknown to Europeans were an advantage, as long as they confused and frightened the enemy. To appear and to behave as culturally alien, “ferocious” and unpredictable was a weapon which it appears that black slaves were willing to use whenever it seemed useful.

¹³³ It bears the inscription “L’union fait la force”

¹³⁴ Art. 14 stipulated: “Toute acceptation de couleur parmi les enfants d’une seule et même famille dont le Chef de l’Etat est le père devant necessairement cesser, les Haitiens seront désormais connus que sous la dénommination générique des noirs” (cf. Price - Mars 1953, vol.I, p.39)

Mulatto tactics and attitudes were very different, corresponding to their different problems and aims in fighting the war. Having been brought up in colonial and Western surroundings they could never entirely cast these off, even if there was no place for them in a new society organised along colour lines¹³⁵. Their “vain” desire to be entitled to wearing the same clothes and carrying weapons like white people conceals another, more important problem: a society of white masters and black slaves offered little social and economic room for a free coloured person. A slave set free was mostly exposed to starvation¹³⁶; his freedom would be nearly meaningless in a society where any white could apprehend a coloured person and request proof of his being a free man and not a runaway slave.

Some of the Saint-Domingue Mulattos were rich, often richer than whites; at the outbreak of the fighting they owned one third of the land and one quarter of all slaves (Leyburn: 18, Fouchard 1953: 104). The inheritance they received from their white fathers was small and uncertain, but they succeeded in buying the largest estates and exploited their slaves more successfully than their white counterparts, because this was their only means of surviving both socially and economically. C.L.R. James describes their ambiguous situation as follows:

“They began to amass property and the whites, while adding unceasingly to the number of Mulattos, began to restrict and harass them with malicious legislation. The whites threw as much as possible of the burdens of the country upon them. On attaining their majority they were compelled to join the *marechaussée*, a police organisation [...] After three years service in the *marechaussée*, they had to join the local militia, provide their own arms, ammunition and accoutrements, and, without pay or allowance of any kind, serve at the discretion of white commanding officers. Such duties as the forced upkeep of the roads were made to fall on them with extra severity. They were excluded from the naval and military departments, from the practice of law, medicine and divinity, and all public offices of trust. A white man could trespass on a Mulatto’s property, seduce his wife or daughter, insult him in any way he chose, certain that at any hint of resentment or revenge all the whites and the Government would rush out ready to lynch. In legal actions the decision nearly always went against the Mulattos, and to terrorise them into submission a free man of colour who struck a white man, whatever his station in life, was to have his right arm cut off” (1963: 37/38)

The living conditions and behaviour of the Mulattos were “mestizo” in more than one way. They were suspended between an ascribed status (being “black”) and an acquired one (being free and wealthy) which did not coincide; they were assigned all the burdens of their status without any of its privileges; finally they were distrusted, discriminated against and disliked by whites as well as by black slaves - in short, they seemed to correspond perfectly to the general prejudice of a hybrid “bastard”. The Revolution of Saint-Domingue not only gave them the opportunity to demand the recognition which they had been denied; it also upset the whole social structure and eliminated their white rivals, so that the Mulattos could hope to get to the top of the new society. But above all, the close connection between the Haitian and the French Revolutions provided the Mulattos with

¹³⁵ It is noteworthy that the Spanish slave laws of 1680 were similarly restrictive when issuing prescriptions upon the clothing of free coloureds. According to Goveia (1991: 349) this reflects attempts to make racial mixture less attractive.

¹³⁶ Slave legislation usually contained clauses which should prevent the manumission of disabled and old slaves.

their own place in history and human society, allowing them to regard themselves as modern and progressive - an attitude which merits some attention.

The essayists' and literary interpretation of the Saint-Domingue Revolution had been considerable (cf. Hoffmann 1972, Bremer 1982, Fleischmann 1989) and, at the beginning, positive. To the enlightened public of Europe the Saint-Domingue case appeared as a show case and a proof of the indestructible human desire for freedom; for a very short time the black slave was perceived as a noble savage, as *Un nègre comme il y a peu de blancs*¹³⁷. The "change of paradigm" (Bremer) came rapidly, when the first more detailed description of the uprising reached France and the bourgeois class realised that the destruction of the colony meant also the loss of their principal source of wealth and power. Thus the "noble savage" and freedom - fighter was changed into an arsonist and murderer of white women and children; the new romantic image presented the "good" black as a *Nègre comme il y a peu*. Strangely enough, the ideological framework justifying this new image was as "enlightened" as the old one; the only difference was an inversion of the logical and chronological order: civilisation had to be a prerequisite to freedom which no longer was a natural quality but a right which had to be acquired by the demonstration of a correspondently humane and noble attitude. Black Magic, ferocity, the burning of plantations and the killing of children excluded freedom *a priori* and the events of Saint Domingue served as an indication that freedom without civilisation would result in barbarity.

It is obvious that this change in opinion follows corresponding developments within France itself, particularly the final fall of Jacobinism; aesthetically it reflects as well the change from enlightenment to romanticism. In this respect the rebellion of the Saint-Domingue becomes an issue of international repute and a topic used also by writers who have little or no direct information of the events, such as the young German author Heinrich von Kleist. Nevertheless his novel *Die Verlobung von Santo Domingo* (1811) provides us with an impressive example of the way the Mulattos were regarded outside of the colonies. Already the general setting is revealing: on the one hand there is a group of raving and revengeful black slaves who live by robbing and murdering white travellers: on the other a family of ingenuous Swiss(!) people who would have suffered the same fate as other white travellers if it was not for the girl Tony who falls in love with one of the young Swiss and saves him and the others by sacrificing her own life. Tony is the daughter of the "terrible old Negro Congo Hoango" who heads the murderers, but she is a mulatto girl. In the view of Kleist the treason Tony commits against her family is sufficiently motivated first by the closeness of her skin colour to that of the Swiss, and second by the human feelings of the girl. In this she is diametrically opposed to her black kinfolk; though Kleist exhibits some understanding for the feelings of revenge by the black protagonists, the final victory goes to humanism and civilisation represented exclusively by white - or nearly white - people.

The Saint-Domingue mulattos had no difficulties in complying with the ideals of civilisation of the international elite. Separate from the black slaves and also different from the white slave owners, many mulattos were literate and acquired as much education as one could muster in a colony where writing and reading were considered acts of subversion. It is difficult to generalise about the attitudes and behaviour of "Mulattos" because of the particular heterogeneity of this group; their only common bond consisted in belonging neither to the class of white owners nor to that of black slaves. Many of them, particularly the manumitted blacks, led miserable lives, others were small artisans and traders, but all of

¹³⁷ This and the following word plays are titles of pamphlets published in France during the Haitian War (see Bremer 1982)

them invested whatever wealth they had in acquiring education and status. In the stagnant society and economy of Saint-Domingue they were the only modern and mobile group following closely on the rapid development of the most progressive sectors of French society:

“They guarded their fortunes solicitously, provided their daughters with dowries large enough sometimes even to lure a white husband, educated their sons in Paris - behaved, in short, as if they had been pillars of society in provincial France” (Leyburn: 179)

Certainly, the Mulattos opposed racial prejudice, but in an ambiguous way. For them “black” was not a question of skin colour but of culture. In the mulattos’ view the uprising of Saint-Domingue was a part of the French Revolution, but only insofar as they succeeded in transforming the hordes of half - naked barbarians into an army of well - equipped, well - trained and disciplined troops, capable of chivalrous behaviour and honourable fighting; the final victory would be internationally acceptable only if it led to the foundation of a modern and civilised state which could be created solely by them. The opposition of *freedom* (as a native term) and *civilisation* (as an imported good) is the main determinant of Haitian politics up to the present day, even when the original meaning sometimes is lost and substituted by more immediate interests. For the first 130 years Haiti was almost exclusively governed by Mulatto politicians who, as previously, made civilisation and progress their catchwords leading to a politics of empty rhetoric which is as strange as it was tragic¹³⁸. They associated in small family clans which later were called castes¹³⁹, monopolising wealth and power and discriminating against their black fellow citizens whom they continued to consider as atavistic barbarians. On the other side the still newly rebellious black faction contested the Mulatto’s right of representing the country in any respect, still exploiting the traditional prejudice of the mulatto being a bastard without a fatherland:

“Esclaves nègres ramassés de partout sur les côtes africaines, négresses similaires voués à la concupiscence des maîtres, rebuts d’humanité blanche perdus de dettes et de crimes et aussi cadets de France empanachés d’orgueil nobilaire - c’est de leur contacts sexuels que naquirent les premiers sang - mêlés” (Price - Mars 1939: 30)

Years later, in 1958, the political Indigenism of François Duvalier made every effort to annihilate or expatriate the old Mulatto families:

“[...] le mulâtre, lui, sous l’apparence des belles manières dissimule la psychologie de ces forbans, pirates et corsaires, tous aventuriers cynique et audacieux qui, au début du 18ème siècle (sic), par leurs rapines, pillages et déprédations suscitèrent la terreur sur les côtes de l’Atlantique” (Denis/Duvalier 1958: 76)

¹³⁸ It became the main subject not only of an extensive historiography but also of literature. The only Haitian novel before the end of the century is an allegoric description of the Revolution from a Mulatto point of view. The black slaves appear as uncivilised brutes, but, at the end, the author excuses them in a paternalistic way: “Les temps avancent pour toutes les races; la civilisation ne reculera pour aucune d’elles” (Bergeaux 298)

¹³⁹ Leyburn (1966:109) used this term to characterise the elite groups; Price - Mars (1953:I,109) opposed to it, demonstrating rightly that they were not entirely endogamous and occasionally but reluctantly accepted social newcomers

These quotations - which repeat, at the level of the written word and intellectual argument the current popular prejudice - illustrate a surprising aspect of the continuing anti - mulatto feelings: they neither refer to contemporary political antagonisms nor to the historical role of the Mulattos in the young republic, but to a quasi mythical time of creation or foundation, as if the term Mulatto described an ethnic category. But at the same moment these images deny ethnicity: Mulattos are labelled “bastards” and considered a biological evil. Obviously these opinions are absurd and contradictory: even most illiterate Haitians are aware that the terms *Mulatto* and *Blacks* are no more than convenient labels in order to mark social and political groups which emerged in colonial times and consolidated themselves during the following two centuries. Social markers which really count are family history, wealth and the display of cultural traits¹⁴⁰. Nevertheless racial literature exists which tends to refer to biological connotations as a last resort. The anthropologist Jean - Luc Bonniol who dedicated an entire study (1992) to this phenomenon, describes it as follows:

“A partir donc d’une hétérogénéité initiale (à la fois culturelle et biologique) se constituent de groupes humains dont la caractéristique essentielle est de prêter une attention extrême au type physique et à la transmission des caractères: il tiennent en permanence un discours biologique, dans la mesure où la diversité phénotypique et l’hérédité sont utilisées comme matériaux de la différenciation sociale”(1992:13)

The “biological discourse” thus substitutes and accentuates other arguments which appeared later, for instance the contradictions between urban and rural societies, between peasants and liberal professions, between Creole and French cultures and languages. Though not being entirely absent from their discourses, these relative and historical positions are continuously overridden by another, “alluvial” contradiction which absurdly appears as ethnic (ibid.: 77).

The Haitian case is a perfect illustration of the misgivings not only about “race” - mixture which was discussed in the previous chapter; it conjures and uses as well the purposes and the power of “naming”: Mulattos are ascribed not only a quasi - ethnic denomination; but also by tracing back their history to the initial sexual contact of pirates and errant slaves it appears as if they are attributed a foundation myth, but it is an ignoble one which reveals intrinsic qualities: being of double origin, mulattos could not be loyal to any of their roots; they are of “impure” blood, whereas the blacks see themselves as “pure”. The importance of these notions of “purity” is their metaphorical meaning as being historical as well as ontological - circular: on the one side the dialectics of freedom and civilisation explain the social and, above all ideological formation of the two warring parties of Saint-Domingue and of the new state; on the other a deeply rooted fear of and the prejudice against the Mulattos results in an archetypal or “fundamentalist” fear of the disorder which is linked to the existence of a unbound and uncommitted group within a strictly hierarchical society:

“Le mulâtre participe donc de deux groupes opposés, portant sur sa personne le stigmate de la couleur mais jouissant souvent du statut d’homme libre; il ébranle ainsi dans ses fondements mêmes l’ordre socioracial dès qu’il s’élève [...]” (Leiris, quoted by Bonniol 1992: 59)

But what precisely does this fear, this ontological evil relate to in the context of slavery? It is evident that the existence of Mulattos gives rise to certain prejudices and fears within (post-)colonial and heterogeneous societies which go beyond the simple rejection of

¹⁴⁰ Haitians are also very aware of the true nature of racial affiliations. They often quote a saying which is attributed to a revolutionary army leader, Acau: “nèg rich sé milat; milat pov sé nèg” (A rich black is a mulatto, a poor mulatto is a black)

biological crossbreeding as well as the social role of half - casts. Already during the period of slavery the mulatto became, by his mere existence, a symbolic representation, a very visible and phenotypic image of a transgression: he represents the “*black - who - wants - to - become - white*”, the process of mestization which the highly hierarchised plantation society perceives as dangerous to its established order. This process was perceived in several transitional forms which are present in historical types: the first one is the *creole slave* who adopts more or less successfully the cultural symbols pertaining to the world of power; the next type are the *free coloured* who claim social status and participation in the political power process usually reserved for the white ruling classes; the third stage, finally, represented by the *mulatto* who tries to bridge the physical and phenotypic gap which separates him from the white masters. The Mulattos become the spectre of the colonial societies: they represent the final dissolution of colonial order, a dissolution which had started long time previously when a class of free coloureds came into being.

Usually neither the colonial ideology nor modern historiography differentiate systematically between the general denomination Free Coloured in general and Mulattos in particular. Both groups are the great paradox: if the colonial order had been perfect, they would not have existed. Both represent a violation of the colonial rationales which, however, should not be seen merely as the rationale of production as was postulated for instance in the “pure model”.

In the preceding chapters we came to the conclusion that the fear of mestization and cross - breeding was, in some aspects, universal. Seen in this context it appears to be less incomprehensible that the colonial rationale of a clear separation of classes was also shared by the African slaves. Both main groups, white and black, behaved as if there was a tacit agreement of mutual avoidance and permanent conflict. Nevertheless a minimum of contact and co - operation could not be avoided in daily life, and it also served as a necessary security valve: the inevitable development of human relations and sexual contacts between masters and slaves on the one side, the possibility of reward good work and showing affection by the act of manumission on the other. Beyond this, politics and legislation offered the possibility of mediating between the conflicting interests of security on the one side and humanitarianism on the other: they could, by means of laws and edicts, either facilitate manumission or make it more difficult. Their implementation would require correspondent previous decisions which - when they were coherent and rational - would have to take into account general views of the present and of the future state of the colony: a recently acquired and sparsely populated territory would stimulate a liberal population policy favouring the growth of a coloured class; the same would apply to the abundance of cultivable land designated to the production of small holders crops. Finally general socio - economic considerations would also influence this decision: was the colony destined for settlement or simply for exploitation? All these factors should make us expect that in a “mature” plantation colony there would be less interest in the growth of a free coloured class than in less specialised colonies. In fact, the French Caribbean colonies in general and Saint-Domingue in particular were not very propitious areas for the development of a large coloured class. Already in 1713 it was decreed that acts of manumission had to be authorised and confirmed by the local government in order to be valid; the edicts of 1721 and 1743 corroborated these regulations and from 1745 manumissions were subject to considerable taxes (Debien 1974: 374/75). Besides this, local authorities could oblige the planters to pay regular pensions to manumitted slaves to prevent begging and prostitution, for it is obvious that in a mature plantation society free coloureds would have considerable difficulty in making a living. All these obstacles made manumission a difficult and costly

procedure¹⁴¹. They had considerable effects not only on the numbers of manumitted slaves but also on their selection, for they favoured the formal liberation mainly of the planters' own illegitimate offspring born of slave women who legally would become slaves because of the slave status of their mothers. 'Merited' black slaves - faithful house servants, mothers of six or more children, slaves who saved their masters or had revealed conspiracies - were no longer set free formally, but received "la liberté de savane", the right to dispose freely of their time while continuing to live on the plantation.

Abolition was, within these societies, a highly dramatic event; even when it was not achieved by rebellion, it resulted in upsetting the entire colonial structure. The metropole which had imposed abolition, had expected that the former slaves would remain on their plantations, establishing themselves as free and remunerated labourers. It is revealing that they did not: the traditional gap between plantation owners and slaves did not favour the establishment of an intermediary class such as free labourers. Wherever land was available the former slaves left the plantations and settled as subsistent farmers, trying to avoid - as Haitian peasants still do to this day - any involvement and close contact with a "national" society which they do not consider as their own.

Those who have no land have to continue as plantation workers, as *gens casés*. They are pitied, even despised by the smallholders who continue to regard them as a kind of slaves. To them the difference seems only gradual, such as to the surrealist writer André Breton who, almost 100 years after abolition visited the island of Martinique and was shocked by

“[...] ces spectacles truculants à la mode d'autrefois Où quelques personnages agréablement éventés, munis d'un fouet visible ou non, épient l'effroyable lassitude des nègres toujours esclaves qui, pour un salaire de sept francs en 1941, continuent sans espoir à couper et lier les cannes, sur un fond de nature prodige” (Breton 1941: 79)

IV.4. CONCLUSION: ETHNIC CONSCIENCE AND UNIVERSAL CREOLISATION

The historical roots of Haitian black "fundamentalism" become more apparent when we compare the French colony Saint-Domingue to its Spanish neighbour Santo Domingo. A look at population statistics shows that in spite of their historical role during the Revolution, Mulattos were a minority in the French colony: there were 30,000 of them compared with 400,000 slaves when fighting started in 1791. These figures acquire their true significance when compared to those in the neighbouring territory: in 1788, Spanish Santo Domingo was inhabited by 80,000 free coloured persons; they constituted the absolute majority of the entire colonial population and were considerably more numerous than the 15,000 slaves. In order to understand this enormous difference, we have to remember the different types of slave societies (Cf. Part II) and the historic case of Santo Domingo (cf. II.4.). Here, after an early boom in plantation society slavery ceased to be profitable, particularly when compared to the newly booming plantation societies; the lack of slaves and the continuous expansion of the coloured society is related to what has been called the "centuries of misery" for the colony. They were the result of a number of measures the Spanish Crown had taken against the colonial system (cf. II.4), particularly

¹⁴¹ In this respect the view of Lowenthal (1972: 45) is certainly erroneous when writing: "In one respect West Indian slavery was less onerous than in America: the case of manumission and opportunities for economic advance. West Indians slaves could and did gain freedom more often and more rapidly than slaves in the Southern states could." Elsa Goveia (1991: 352)) also indicates that the British slave laws of the same period tend "to make the achievement of manumission more difficult, because more costly"

against the “overall mercantilist framework”, thus reducing significantly the trade between the colony and the metropolis. In this context, the “misery” had strange ramifications. It involved some forms of abundance; cattle meat, for instance, was so plentiful that only the best pieces were eaten, but the salt and the spices necessary for their preparation were unaffordable and difficult to come by (cf. Peña Pérez 1985: 157ff). These and other particularities constitute a picture of patriarchal and subsistence oriented communities which maintained very few ties between the centres of administration and trade and even less with the metropolis. Due to the chronic lack of cash, slavery was practically unknown in the rural areas¹⁴²; moreover, in order to attract more people and to annoy foreign powers, the Spanish Crown granted freedom and land to all foreign slaves who succeeded in reaching a Spanish territory¹⁴³. All this resulted in the development of a egalitarian and economically self sufficient rural society where social classes and colour lines had little importance. All Dominicans of whatever skin colour took pride in considering themselves as authentic Spaniards, as “blancos de la tierra”; still today the notion “black” is rather a cultural and ethnic than a racial term; it served to describe (and to discriminate!) the neighbouring French slaves and later the Haitians (Fleischmann 1993b: 117ff).

A high number of Free Coloureds compared with a relatively low number of slaves thus points to a type of society different from that of a sugar exporting colony. The population statistics that Klein computed (Klein 1986: 221) support this: in all Spanish colonies, particularly the continental territories, free coloureds outnumber slaves by a large margin. On the other hand, in the British and French Caribbean colonies the number of free coloureds is insignificant compared to the number of slaves. There are, however, some important exceptions: first the United States where sugar production was insignificant compared with production of cotton; most parts of the Southern states were lenient slave holding societies, such as Chesapeake Bay as described by Mullin (1992: 230 - 234) which were marked by a rather differentiated social and professional structure offering many niches to a free coloured class. Nevertheless, as far as Free Coloureds were concerned, the relative proportions of the different groups in 1790 were worse than those in Saint Domingue: The entire South of the United States counted only 32000 Free Coloureds, a tiny number compared with 658 000 slaves. These statistics are even more striking when we compare them with those of Brazil, a colony with high sugar production and a rather harsh slave regime; nevertheless a census of 1872 counted 4.2 million free coloureds, nearly three times as many as the 1.5 million slaves, and also more than the 3.8 million whites. It appears that there is a type of colony which, independent of its mode of production and of its social structure, offered better opportunities for integration before as well as after abolition and had less difficulty in accepting former slaves as citizens of the forthcoming nation. What are the criteria which determine this process?

The second part of this study in which various types of slave economy were described, led to the conclusion that the institution of slavery in various colonial systems, though relying on different juridical and moral conceptions, went through a process of internationalisation; the result of this evolution was the homogenisation of the means to use and treat slaves, which finally led to similar forms of slave legislation and a subsequent collaboration between slave holding nations; if there were differences, they were due rather to local circumstances than to national differences (II.4.).

¹⁴² Most slaves were house servants in Santo Domingo; only cocoa plantations near the town produced cash crops exported to Mexico and allowed a very reduced rural slavery (Moya Pons 283 ff)

¹⁴³ Deive 1989: 111. This policy was a cause for continuous annoyance to British and French slave holders. As for Puerto Rico see Morales Carrion 1974: 63 - 68.

This incontrovertible internationalisation of slave culture did not necessarily reach beyond the institution itself; i.e. it did not affect the image a society projected of itself beyond the institution of slavery. From the very beginning of colonisation and in spite of their cruel treatment of the indigenous populations, the Iberian nations had accepted the idea and conceded the necessity for the future societies of America to be *mestizo*. This particularity of the Iberian nations which is manifested in colonial laws as well as in the fact of a high incidence of racial mixture in Spanish and Portuguese America, has been traced back to the early mestization processes at the time of the reconquista which in spite of apparent religious and ethnic differences resulted in the blending of various Iberian and Moorish cultures. This rediscovery of a particular Latin American identity appeared first in a quasi - mythical form in various authors of the nineteen - thirties and forties¹⁴⁴. This myth became part of the subsequent interpretation of Spanish - Portuguese slavery for which the American anthropologist Tannenbaum was the best known exponent:

“The Negro Slave arriving in the Iberian Peninsula in the middle of the fifteenth century found a propitious environment. The setting, legal as well as moral, that made this easy transition possible was due to the fact that the people of the Iberian Peninsula were not strangers to slavery” (1946: 42).

It is interesting to see that through this perspective the former Iberian perspective of their societies in general and the institution of slavery in particular which were “pre - modern” compared to Britain and France, are now offered as an even more “modern” and today even “post - modern” alternative, insofar as they anticipate a new type of society based on the utopia of a mestizo society devoid of racial prejudice. In fact, the American societies of Iberian origin thus succeed in conceiving of themselves as an alternative model of development and nation - building which eclipsed the model of “modernity” seen today as an erroneous way leading towards deadlock. The Brazilian anthropologist and writer Darcy Ribeiro provides a classic example of the image of a mestizo society as the new utopia:

“Eu não sou europeu, felizmente. Sou esta estranha coisa perplexa que o europeu desgarrado da Europa gerou, mesclando - se com indígenas e negros”

And he adds:

“Nossos povos morenos, nossos países ensolarados, revelam - se de repente, para nós, como a gente melhor e como a província mais privilegiada da Terra para aqui reedificar o humano” (1979:36).

It is certain that the appraisal of the mestizo society as a new utopia is, at his time, above all the solution of a historic dilemma which appeared at the moment of independence of the former Iberian colonies. As sovereign states they entered into a “universal history” characterised by competition on an international level. The issue was “modernisation” and “progress” which, at this time seemed to be linked to the “homogeneous” nation. The disadvantage was not only limited to heterogeneity on the national level but also put the blame, as in the Essays of Gobineau, on the “heterogeneous person”, the mestizo who was presented as the outcome of “negative selection”¹⁴⁵. Though

¹⁴⁴ E.g. José Vasconcelos (*La raza cósmica*, 1925), Gilberto Freyre, Mario de Andrade, Alejo Carpentier. The latter one is of particular interest as he understands mestizaje as a particular trait of Spanish cultural history (Cf. *El camino de Santiago*)

¹⁴⁵ The different races, according these theories, are the result of a natural selection adapted to the soils and climates of different parts of the world. Interbreeding blurs the positive aspects of the consequences of this selective process

most Latin American intellectuals adhered to the Scientific Racism of the late 19th century they refused to follow this condemnation of the “impure nations” and particularly the *mestizo* which threatened the basis of their national existence. Though racism was accepted as a part of their quest for modernity, they hoped to reach a future homogenisation of their societies by the amalgamation of all the different races¹⁴⁶. Seen on a national level this allows them - more so than in other societies, particularly those in North America-, to envisage a future for their nation after the abolition of slavery: the black person, though he might be considered a “natural” slave and treated as such, is also seen as a potentially free person and as a future member of the society which will incorporate him and his race. In contrast to British or French colonies the emancipation of slaves appears to be a natural consequence, or even to be the very objective of slavery. It therefore was never subject to taxes; manumission was a right to which the slave was entitled whenever he had the money to purchase his freedom. In Brazil the price could not be more than the price the slave had been bought for and it could be paid by instalments. Beyond the immediate economic necessity, the administration considered the purchase of slaves as an investment in populating the colony. Marriage was protected as the base of its procreation; it is remarkable that in Brazil marriages between slaves and free persons were not prohibited and were even common place amongst very poor free women who otherwise would not have found a husband. In this respect slaves were not placed outside the social hierarchy (Goldschmidt 1986/87: 5ff).

This resulted in an “Iberian” form of racism which appeared to be less “fundamental” and more “circumstantial”. Based on this difference present day Latin American societies, when comparing themselves to the United States, claim to be less racist. The main argument is the high degree of mestization:

“Falar de racismo no Brasil é algo complicado. Em primeiro lugar, porque existe o mito que “todos os brasileiros” tem alguma gita de sangue negro, o que não é verdade. Mas este mito faz com que qualquer conversa séria sobre racismo acaba em brincadeira. Rápidamente, todos ficam de acordo que não se pode ser racista num país em que a maioria da população é miscigenada e o contingente de pessoas negras é enorme. Ou seja, a discussão da realidade é sistematicamente escondida pela discussão da idealidade” (Freire Costa 1994: 2).

This is an ironical, but pertinent summary of an attitude which can be found currently in most Latin American countries, above all in Brazil. On the other side, any attempt to adorn racism in Latin American countries - particularly Brazil, but also Colombia - would immediately provoke violent reactions based on two principal arguments: first the undeniable fact that considering professional status, income, education and other public services, persons of darker complexion and “African” features are less privileged than their “white” compatriots; and second, that the myth of a multiracial democracy not only obscures the actual colour bias but also prevents persons of African origin from assuming their own particular history and identity which, very obviously are different from those of the mainstream population. It is therefore necessary to emphasise that the following considerations do not deny the eventual necessity of a political “fundamentalism” but still are centred on the terms “creole” and “creolisation”, i.e. cultural

¹⁴⁶ See for instance the Mexican philosopher Francisco Bulnes who, after a wholesale condemnation of the “lower races” concludes: ““El mestizo es susceptible de gran civilización, si el sabe combatir en él el alcoholismo y lanzarle junto a otro obrero, que lo ponga en alternativa de perecer o trabajar. Es decir al mestizo puede facilmente salvar el Estado y la inmigración. El porvenir irrevocable del indio lo explico al final de este libro (Francisco Bulnes: Las tres razas humanas. Mexico 1899)

processes which started with colonisation and which, in the long run, provide different answers to the question of ethnic and racial consciousness.

These changes already have a palpable historic dimension which again appears most clearly in the case of Brazil where the relatively late abolition of slavery was accompanied by the emergence of new ideas which developed even at the period characterised by Scientific Racism. Here abolition was in many senses revolutionary because it was the only possible, radical solution to the increasing contradictions between a slaveholding feudal monarchy and the growing modern middle classes (cf. Roberto Schwarz 1981, 13 - 25); but it upset the racial balance of Brazilian mestizo society by the sudden appearance of a large number of new black citizens about whom the middle class intellectuals had very little useful information beyond the general prejudice provided by Positivism and Scientific Racism on the one side the context of feudal relations on the other.

Nevertheless the society into which the freed slave entered was relatively tolerant. Unlike the United States and unlike Saint-Domingue the prevailing mestizo character prevented a rigid colour line:

“The newly freed slaves moved into the paternalistic multi - racial social structure that had since long taught free men of colour the habits of deference in their relationships with employers and other social superiors” (Skidmore: 39).

Social structure particularly in rural society was very hierarchical and did not exclude prejudice, but it belonged to an old order highly contested by the new middle classes and the intellectuals. Even the most prominent Brazilian raciologist at the turn of the century, Nina Rodrigues has no problem in assuming obvious contradictions when talking about the black race in general (“o negro [...] quase não se civiliza”, 1906: 7) and the future of his own country:

“O problema do negro’ no Brasil tem, de fato, feições multiplas; uma do passado: - estudo dos negros africanos que colonizaram o país; outra do presente: - negros crioulos, brancos e mestiços; a última, do futuro: - mestiços et brancos crioulos” (1906: 10)

The idea of an all encompassing mestizo nation was truly revolutionary at this period and it still is an intellectual adventure to retrace the various subterfuges which Brazilians of this time used and created in order to escape the verdict mixophobic theories had prepared for Latin American societies. It centres on the ideas of the “Tropical Nation” which has qualities entirely different from its European counterparts. Its domain is, in the first place, not Culture, but Nature which has to serve many purposes. First it is home; it is the only common and unifying frame of a new and heterogeneous population, the only factor which binds everyone together. Second, it is “tropical” and thus opposed to the nature of the cold countries, for it is not limited, organised and dominated. It does not serve a purpose; tropical nature does not need a justification as an instrument in the acquisition of civilisation and progress. It simply *is*, thus deflecting the attention from the future and the end of history towards the present. Its extension is not limited as well by the number of species which it contains, because it is home to all of them. Being unlimited, varied and presence - orientated, it defies European rationality and favours sensuality. It escapes the finality of concepts, but offers the infinity of existence. Its domain is not in logical discourse but in emotion and poetry; it is not argument, but style. Impurity and variety thus, on a different level, become virtues. Tropical nations are different from European nations; their existence and destiny are not be measured by European yardsticks:

“O tropical não pode ser correto. A correção é o fruto da paciência e dos países fríos; nos países quentes, a atenção é intermitente” (Araripe, *Estilo tropical*. A fórmula do naturalismo brasileiro, quoted by Ventura 1991: 18).

The idea of “mestizo” thus transcends the concepts of racial and ethnic definitions: it is a cultural “style” (Ventura 1991: 44ff). In this respect it has little in common with the traditional image of the mulatto who, as in the Haitian case, is suspended between two classes and betrays the black part of his existence, when becoming more racist than his European counterpart ever had been. Its symbol is rather Rita Baiana, the sensual and seductive Mulatto woman as portrayed by Aluísio Azevedo in his novel *O cortiço* (1896): she lures the industrious immigrant into a happy laziness.

We should note that the image of sensual Rita encroaches on a gender discussion which was already popular at this time. Years later Gilberto Freyre pursued the theme in a similar way creating and depicting correspondent paradigms of a Brazilian history which, to a surprising degree, met the expectations of the Brazilian intellectuals (Mota 1980: 70 ff). Indians and, above all, Negroes - according to Gilberto Freyre - were not Brazil’s problem but Brazil’s advantage. They were amongst the best breed Africa had to offer and the manly and lascivious Portuguese conqueror who had jumped ashore in order to fertilise the country and its women had all the freedom of choice. Brazilians were the result of a natural selection made by proud males amongst beautiful and consenting females; they began a secular and still continuing process of mestization which created, as Freyre puts it, “bons animais” (Freyre 1933: 33).

It is understandable that Freyre’s theory still provokes many angry reactions; from a historical distance it is obvious that some aspects of its underlying argument are related to his own background as a descendent of the vanishing seigneurial class of the North East who, raised by black nannies, became emotionally and sexually dependent on them (cf Fleischmann 1986b). Nevertheless, *Casa Grande & Senzala* was a huge success because it succeeded in offering to the Brazilians a foundation myth which integrates their heterogeneity and convergence in a positive sense, encroaching upon well - known stereotypes as the sensual mulatto woman or the tasty Creole cuisine. It is however not - at least not in the sense we use the term here - a *creole* apologia - for two principal reasons: first it does not integrate the racial minority as subjects giving legitimacy to their historical experience and identity; and second it remains on the level of traditional national ideology which, in the last instance, does not transcend the function of other national discourses, i.e. providing an image of the Brazilian as one national personality differing from other national personalities. This means, on a more abstract level, that Freyre - like many national myths - uses the description of convergence in order to establish divergence.

Creolisation - again in the sense we use the term here - means the continuous convergence of heterogeneous cultural and ethnic traits which never reach the status of divergence and which, therefore, may be perceived on a local or universal level, but never on that of “national character”. Creolisation appears in the form of an ambiguous identity in every phase of daily life and, other than mestization, never leads to the “invention” of one personality. Madeleine Cottinet - Hage characterises the difference as follows:

“Le concepts de ‘créolisation’ marquant le dépassement du concept de ‘métissage’, dans la mesure où il s’agit non plus d’une réinscription de l’Un [...], mais d’une ouverture à la multiplicité, la mouvance, la redéfinition perpétuellement recommencée” (Penser la créolité 1995: 15)

Edouard Glissant had defined it in a similar way (1990: 46):

“la créolisation nous apparaît comme le métissage sans limites, dont les éléments sont démultipliés, les résultantes imprévisibles”.

Creolisation, thus, is an unending process of multiple convergences which necessarily acquires more and more universal dimensions. It started five hundred years ago when the colonial experience initiated a large scale confrontation of racially and culturally divergent populations. One of the most interesting parts of Glissant's theory are those related to the question of the epic tale¹⁴⁷. Epics generally are (or are related to) the foundational myths of nations; basic elements may for instance include a contract with God who endows his chosen people with capacities, gifts, and duties which distinguish them from other people, providing them with an outstanding destiny and, eventually, the right to rule others. Glissant chooses the history of the last Zulu Emperor Chaka to demonstrate the epic tale of the colonial age: not the origin, but the anticipation of the end of an ethnic group is the major theme. Chaka's final battle and the victory of the colonial invaders mark a desperate moment: the end of ethnic seclusion and the beginning of “relation” to the Other, which produces continued processes of adaptation and new relations. Examples which confirm Glissant's perspective can be found in Afro - American cultures, for instance in the Jamaican Maroon “Nation”:

“[...] the maroon interpret the peace treaties (with the British Government) as sacred charter or documentary evidence of their genesis as a ‘peaceful society’ since then, which enables them to organize themselves without being threatened with complete extinction. [...] The Maroons conceive the ‘critical’ (in the sense of controversial) passages of the treaty (for instance the obligation to deliver fugitive slaves) in no way as a sell - out of their ideals, or as a betrayal, as some radical Blacks argue today, but as a foundation of their stipulated freedom and self - determination.” (Zips 1988: 71)

Today we have witnessed the appearance of the new Republic of South Africa which is based on a new perception of difference accepting numerous and never - ending processes of creolisation.

Black communities had and still have good reason to be very suspicious of this interpretation, for they are aware that the old concept of the homogeneous nation is hard to eradicate and integration would eventually mean the predominance of “white” and occidental cultural norms. “Mestizo society” would be - and in fact often is - just a rhetorical cover for a process which in Brazil is called *branqueamento*, i.e. “whitening”. In contrast to the United States Brazil and other Latin American societies tend to obscure the existence of a particular black identity beyond the elusive image of “multicultural society”. It may disguise a new form of prejudice which has been described as a *racism of inclusion* opposed to the *racism of exclusion* of the United States which at least does not blur the front lines in the continuing struggle not only for equal opportunities, but also underlines the claim to form a separate community and to reject a “national” history which they do not consider as theirs. In fact all demonstrative programmes of integrating the black population into the “national project” have been countered by a revival of fundamentalist attitudes as, for instance, Négritude in the French territories or the Black Muslims in the United States. In Brazil the *branqueamento* policy had the same effect: it led to the emergence of numerous black groups who combined cultural activities with social - political programmes (cf. Skidmore 1993: 207 - 218). One such movement, the *Grupo Palmares* is of particular interest because it may be understood as an counter - programme to Glissant's Poétique de

¹⁴⁷ Glissant 1981a, p. 246ff. This chapter shows, already by its title - which is the same as his most important essay (1990) - the fundamental significance within his writing.

la Relation and the “epic of encounter”: the quest for a place and a person which are - or may be - the birthplace of the collective black memory of Black Brazilians: Palmares, the largest and most permanent Quilombo of fugitive slaves in the hinterland of Alagoa and Zumbi, its legendary leader, serve as an epic hero and founder of a black nationality in Brazil. But do they really serve as a symbol of “difference”? Its *Manifesto Nacional* (!) proclaimed on the day Zumbi’s execution contains a number of significant passages which modify the picture: Palmares is “o autêntico berço da nacionalidade brasileira, ao se constituir como efetiva democracia racial” (Gonzales/ Hasenbalg 1982: 57/58).

Is Zumbi, the fugitive rebel, a precursor of a new mestizo society? We remember another epic novel by which we began our discussion: Alex Haley’s *Roots* which bears the subtitle *Saga of an American Family*. The adaption and integration - we may also say “creolisation” - of its hero Kunta Kinte is a long and difficult process accompanied by many attempts to rebel or to flee. Having been constrained to abandon his fundamental beliefs and customs he finally becomes the ancestor of an *American* family. The enormous success of this epic tale amongst black readers as well as white is, as we suggest here, due to the fact that slavery is described as a constituent part of *American* History in which both sides, slaves and masters participated and which transformed both. Slavery also was a form of “encounter” in which both sides, though in a historically distorted way, were actors and victims and had, voluntarily or not, assumed the destiny of a common history: being the *Creoles*, citizens of a New World.

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