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**Title:**

*Womanism and Master-Slave Dialectic in the miniseries of Tropiques Amers (2007) and Roots (2016)*

**Presented by:**

Ms. AMMAR-KHODJA Dihia

**Supervised by:**

Dr. LACEB Rafik

**Board of Examiners:**

**Chair:** Chabane Chaouch Sarah

**Supervisor:** Laceb Rafik

**Examiner:** Bensafi Nadia

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## **Abstract**

*The following piece of research examines the matter of slavery in the TV miniseries of Tropiques Amers (2007) and Roots (2016). This study relies on Alice Walker's Womanism, from In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose (1983), and Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic, from his book Phenomenology of Spirit (1807). This paper examines how these concepts appear in both miniseries, showing the way the producers Jean-Claude Barny and Will Packer portray enslaved women as strong and powerful even in the hard circumstances and also the way black characters are shown as victims at the beginning and how they often become heroes exploring themes like racism, dehumanization, struggle for freedom, patriarchy, identity and resilience. The first chapter analyzes Tropiques Amers (2007) using Walker's Womanism and Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic. The analysis shows how the miniseries portray enslaved women as resilient and courageous, emphasizing their strength even in hard times, while Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic, on the other hand, examines the power dynamics between masters and slaves, focusing on their interdependence and the slaves' struggle for freedom. The second chapter employs the same theories to analyze Roots (2016). This chapter exemplifies similar themes of strength and resilience among enslaved women, as depicted through Walker's Womanism, and it also explores the power dynamics between masters and slaves, as illustrated by Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic. This comparison helps to see if there are differences in how Black people's experiences are shown in the two miniseries. The findings reveal that both miniseries show complex themes in relation to slavery, Walker's Womanism highlights the strength and resistance of enslaved women, portraying them as strong and courageous even in tough times. Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic looks at the power dynamics between masters and slaves, emphasizing on how they depend on each other and how slaves fight to emancipate themselves. This research shows how important it is to look at both gender and power when studying slavery, by using womanism and the master-slave dialectic. This study offers new understanding about the lives of enslaved women and the power dynamics in slavery, highlighting their strength and actions despite being oppressed.*

**Key words:** slavery, womanism, resilience, power dynamics, freedom, identity.

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To

My parents who supported me all along my studies

My sisters and my brother

My dear friends Celia and Lisa

All my teachers

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## **I. Introduction:**

The history of slavery is a dark period marked by the terrible treatment and oppression of millions of Africans and their descendants. Slavery lasted for centuries, turning black people into property that could be bought, sold, and exploited. This cruel system was justified by racist beliefs that black people were inferior to white people.

Starting in the 16th century, European colonizers forcibly brought Africans to the Americas to work on plantations, in mines, and in households. Thus, enslaved Africans endured horrible conditions, including long hours of hard work, physical abuse, and a complete lack of personal freedom, their families were often torn apart, with children separated from their parents and spouses from each other.

Racism was used to justify and sustain slavery. Fake scientific theories and biased religious interpretations claimed that black people were naturally suited for enslavement (Curtin, 1960). These racist ideas became part of legal and social systems, creating a legacy of discrimination that continued long after slavery was abolished. While much has been written about the male slaves who toiled in the fields and fought for their freedom, the stories of black women during this era have often been overlooked or marginalized. These women faced a unique kind of suffering because they had to deal with both racism and sexism. Black feminism, as a political and social movement, grew from the frustrations of black women with both the civil rights movement and the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. However, its roots go back to the 19th century with pioneering thinkers and activists like Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Frances Harper, and Alice Walker. These women fought for the end of slavery and for the rights of black women. Even though slavery officially ended in British colonies in the 1830s and in other places from the 1870s to the 20th century, freedom did not come easily (Davis, 1983, p. 83).

Gender played a major role in this process, as colonial merchants and officials worked with local male leaders to keep things as unchanged as possible. For many enslaved African women,

freedom meant trying to take control of their own lives, work, and bodies. They used colonial institutions like courts to make distinctions between marriage, pawnship (a form of bonded labor), and slavery. While Some women chose to stay in redefined relationships, others left systems of forced labor altogether. Enslaved people tried to free themselves in many ways: Some ran away, forming communities of escaped slaves known as maroons, while others rebelled against their masters or used the courts to fight for their freedom. Besides, many of them used their skills and knowledge to earn money, hoping to buy their freedom or the freedom of their loved ones. However, despite the abolition of slavery, the end of legal bondage did not mean true freedom for black people, racism continued to thrive, showing up in segregation, and violent acts like lynching, they were denied basic rights and opportunities, facing barriers in education, employment, and housing. Finally, The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, led by figures like Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X, fought against these injustices, demanding equality and an end to racial discrimination.

Today the fight against racism is ongoing, black people continue to face systemic racism in various forms, including police brutality, mass incarceration, and economic inequality and movements like Black Lives Matter has emerged to address these issues and to continue the struggle for justice and equality. It is essential to understand the history of racism in order to recognize the depth of the injustices faced by black people and the ongoing efforts needed to combat racism especially black women. As it is stated in the United State of Women Summit "Racism is a persistent stain on our society, infecting every corner of our lives and holding back generations of individuals from reaching their full potential" (Obama, 2018). By acknowledging and learning from this dark chapter in history, society can work towards a future where equality and justice are truly realized for all.

## **The Review of the literature:**

Both the miniseries of *Tropiques Amers* (2007) and *Roots* (2016) are adaptations of novels, they are two powerful narratives that explore the themes of slavery, colonialization and resistance in the context of the Caribbean and the United States. These miniseries have sparked considerable critical discussion from various perspectives. For instance, to start with ‘*Tropiques Amers 2007*’ the first review published in *SensCritique* by Amchi in July 12th 2012 where he compares the miniseries of ‘*Tropiques amers*’ to the one of ‘*Roots 1807*’, he declares:

"*Tropiques amers*" is a bit like the French version of "*Roots 1977*" It's a great historical story about the tragedy of slavery, with some romance mixed in. Sometimes, it jumps forward too many years between episodes, which can be a bit disappointing. But overall, it's a strong TV series, even though it can be tough to watch sometimes. Despite its flaws, it is a really nice tv series, and the ending makes you excited for a sequel. Also, the opening credits are really nice and tell the story of the slaves well. [Translation mine] (2012)

He points out a problem they had with the miniseries that is sometimes, there are big jumps in time between episodes, which can be disappointing because according to him we might miss important parts of the story. He thinks "*Tropiques Amers*" is a strong miniseries, even though it can be difficult to watch because of the tough subject, but it is still a good show. Moreover, he states that he likes its end because it makes us excited for a possible sequel, He declares that the opening credits, which are the images and words shown at the beginning of each episode, are really well done because they tell the story of the slaves in a nice way (Amchi,2012). In “*Critique Tropiques Amers de triste mémoire*” written by Stéphanie Binet also compares the miniseries of ‘*Tropiques Amers (2007)*’ to the old version of ‘*Roots (1977)*’. She talks about how the show explores slavery and life in the Caribbean and compares it to "*Roots*" from 1977. Besides, she discusses the main parts of the story, like when the owner's fiancée arrives at the plantation and how power and treatment are shown through the characters. She also mentions some worries people have about the show focusing too much on feeling sorry for the past. However, Binet thinks the show is good for learning about Creole culture, local language, and

Caribbean history. She likes how the director tells the story and thinks it is interesting and easy to understand.

Dave Shilling reviews "Roots 2016", He provides a detailed and balanced critique about it. He starts by acknowledging the cultural and historical importance of "**Roots (2016)**" in American books and TV. He points out how much popular and influential it is, mentioning that 100 million people watched the last episode of the original ABC series, which is as impressive as a modern Super Bowl audience. This shows how significant "Roots 2016" is in American culture, providing a basis for looking at the new version. He declares, "Each episode hews closely to one protagonist: Kunta in episode one, Kizzy in episode two, Chicken George in episode three and Tom in episode four. This keeps the whole affair fresh and propulsive. This is, after all, a sprawling tale of one family's experience in America" The key part of Shilling's review is his exploration of the miniseries narrative structure and thematic continuity, he declares that he likes how each episode focuses on a different main character. Moreover, he contends about the ongoing theme of chasing freedom and facing constant oppression, he notes that while slavery ends over time, other forms of discrimination take its place. He highlights how important family, identity, and pride are in the story, showing how these ideas remain important today. In addition, he explains the technical and artistic parts of the new miniseries. He declares that he likes the better makeup and special effects, which make the story more real and powerful without being too violent. He thinks the scene where Kunta Kinte's foot gets cut off is very intense and true to history. He also focuses on how well the actors perform. He praises Anika Noni Rose for playing Kizzy with a lot of energy and Regé-Jean Page for his good acting as Chicken George, but he mentions that the white characters are mostly shown as bad people. This, he says, is different from the original series, where they tried to make one white character seem nicer. He thinks this change makes the new TV miniseries more honest about history. Furthermore, Schilling in his comparative analyses compares "Roots 2016" to another movie work of slavery called "Django Unchained" by Quentin Tarantino. He says that "Django" is more like a fun, made-up story, while "Roots2016" is more about what really

happened during slavery. He thinks "Django" is exciting because it shows a black man getting revenge, but "**Roots (2016)**" is more serious and makes the person think. Schilling speaks also about the problems with Alex Haley the writer of the novel of "**Roots**" He declares that there were some issues with him copying from other books and making up parts of the story, but even with these problems. Schilling thinks "**Roots**" is powerful because it shows what millions of slaves went through, even if it is not all true.

### **Issue and working hypothesis:**

The research attempts to explore how Alice Walker's theory of womanism and Hegel's master-slave dialectic are portrayed in the miniseries of **Tropiques Amers (2007)** and **Roots (2016)**. While many critics have discussed these TV series, many have focused on the literary and historical aspects, rather than looking deeply into the psychological and social conditions of oppressed black people. It aims to examine these aspects deeply by highlighting how themes of slavery, racism, dehumanization, resistance, black's struggle for freedom, identity and resilience are shown in **Tropiques Amers** and **Roots**. Then it also delves into how these miniseries depict the oppressive systems and also the roles of the oppressed black characters, who start as victims but they often become heroes. It analyses some events in both the miniseries **Tropiques Amers (2007)** and **Roots (2016)** separately by applying on them the theory of Alice Walker's Womanism from her book *In Search for Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) and Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic in his book *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). By using Walker's womanism and Hegel's master-slave dialectic, I hope to gain deeper insights into how these marginalized black characters are represented, focusing on the hardness women faced during that period and their acts of resistance, I will also explore what it means to be a hero in these stories. This includes understanding how these narratives fit into larger discussions about Marxism and nationalism, which often highlight the fight against oppression, the importance of collective struggle, and their way to emancipation.

This study is based on the assumption that although the two miniseries are written by different writers and produced by different producers, but they both revolve around real stories that

happened in different periods. They both deal with the tough times black people faced and they show how black communities struggled and fought against being treated horribly. By using the theory of womanism and the master-slave relationship, I am going to look at how these miniseries tell these stories. I want to see if there is any difference in how they show black people's experiences.

## **II. Methodological outline:**

### **A. Methods and Materials:**

#### **1. Methods:**

In this part we will deal with the two theories Alice Walker's Womanism from her book *In Search Of Our Mothers' Gardens Womanist Prose (1983)* and Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic from his book *Phenomenology of Spirit (1807)*. We have taken some of the most pertinent ideas and concepts that fits our topic from the miniseries of '**Tropiques Amers (2007)**'.

#### **a) Alice Walker's Womanism:**

Alice Walker is an American writer and activist. She was born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia. She is known for her powerful works that explore themes of race, gender, and social justice that reflect her own experiences as an Afro-American woman, and her commitment to fighting for equality and human rights. In *In Search for Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, she created the term womanism to describe the unique experiences, struggles and empowerment in the fight that black women waged against racism (Davis and Diaz, 2016, p. 6).

A womanist, as Alice Walker defines it, is an empowered black feminist or feminist of color who is confronted with not only class and gender struggles, like feminists, but confronts the challenge of race (1983, p. 6). Then Walker claims that a womanist loves herself and other women, sexually and/or non-sexually, and that this love transcends boundaries to reach out to all of humanity, wanting all people to survive and thrive (1983, p.5). Besides, Alice Walker asserts that womanists value collectivism and community in the sense that the goal of womanism goes beyond individual well-being to the well-being of entire peoples and communities, and then to humanity as a whole (1983, p.233). Alice Walker argues that a womanist has a confident way of speaking with the use of specific linguistic elements and a specific body language that shows her strong personality (Janusiewicz, 2014, p.11). According

to Walker, the behaviour of a womanist demonstrates empowerment, strength and capacity (Davis and Diaz, 2016, p.6). Also, she points out that Womanists' agency is courageous, audacious and willful (Walker, 1983, p. 374). To sum up, Walker states that a womanist is a thinking subject who is always searching for knowledge. Thus, challenging the epistemological exclusions she experiences in intellectual life in general and in feminist research in particular (1983, p.397). In this sense, A. Kennedy argues,

Alice Walker through her womanist perspective offers to women their own women-self, their beauty, physical and sexual strength, motherhood, sisterhood, wife-hood...At the same time she has a strong feeling that the women are to be educated, and made aware of the need to recover from psychological and mental traumas of inferiority. This is possible only if their wholeness and roundness are restored. She specifically aims at achieving this end. (Kennedy, 2018, p.15)

This quote talks about how Alice Walker, focuses on women in her stories. She wants women to feel strong and confident. Even if they face challenges, she believes they can still do things to change their lives, she sees women as whole people, with beauty, strength, and important roles like being a mother or a friend. Besides, she thinks education is key for women to feel good about themselves and heal from past hurts, her goal is to help women feel complete and happy, despite the difficulties they may face.

**b) Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic:**

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) is one of the greatest German idealists and one of the outstanding philosophers of western thought. In his phenomenology of spirit, Hegel tells the story of the development of the human spirit during a history of consciousness. In the section on "self-consciousness" wherein the Master-Slave Dialectic is found, there are two kinds of self-consciousness; a 'master-self-consciousness' and a 'slave-self-consciousness'. He introduced the master-slave-dialectic in order to explore the struggles between the dependent and independent self-consciousness.

Hegel states that initially the 'master-self-consciousness' is self-sufficient and free and the 'slave-self-consciousness' is dependent and that the former enslaves the latter under the threat of death (1807, p. 115). Hegel also argues that through the slave's work, the slave has learnt that he has some control over the master and thus regains his consciousness (1807, p.119).

Besides, he claims that when forced to manipulate nature to create goods for the master, the slave experiences creativity while the master “experiences stagnation by living off the slave’s labor” (Shishido, 2011, p. 113). Furthermore, Hegel affirms that through the slave’s work and the awakening of his consciousness, the slave gradually transformed into a true independent consciousness, which represents a spirit of resistance and revolt against the master (1807, p. 117). Moreover, Hegel states that the two conflicting consciousness want the ‘death’ of the other (1807, p. 113).

Hegel’s master-slave-dialectic sheds light on several aspects of his entire philosophy. The central main goal of this dialectic process is to find out how human being can actualize freedom. After his abstract discussions concerning consciousness, Hegel’s parable situates theory within a social and practical context (Barlas, 2024). In simpler terms, Hegel examines how we become free and what makes us truly human by looking at practical examples in society, and the master-slave-dialectic helps us understand these complex ideas.

## **2. Materials:**

### **a) Summary of Tropiques Amers:**

**Tropiques Amers** is a French television miniseries created by Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias, produced in **2007** by Elizabeth Arnac and directed by Jean-Claude Barny. It has five (5) episodes of 52minutes. Its story takes place in Martinique in a sugar plantation during the 18th century (1799-1810). The miniseries demonstrate the difficult living conditions of slaves at that time and how they emancipated themselves. It revolves around the story of a French Colonial who owns a sugar plantation and fights to keep his right to slavery.

Moreover, it delves into the lives of Adèle, Rosalie, Amédée and Koyaba who fight for their freedom. Adèle in love with Koyaba, she catches the eye of Théophile, loses her son because of her master. Rosalie is in love with her master and gets very jealous of her master’s wife when he gets married and also from Adèle who took her place of the ‘master’s cocotte’. Amédée is the father of Adèle who did everything to please his master at the beginning of the story and how he changed his attitude after that. As the story goes on, lot of things change, Adèle becomes

a very strong woman thanks to the power she holds over the master which is his love to her while Koyaba keeps his fight for the freedom of the slaves. Rosalie gets hanged for her actions, Théophile kills his wife and asks Adèle to marry him.

"**Tropiques Amers (2007)**" shows us a strong and moving portrayal of how harsh slavery was and how people stayed strong through it. The miniseries has well developed characters and an exciting story that teaches us a lot about love, power, and the unstoppable desire for freedom.

**b) Summary of Roots:**

"**Roots (2016)**" is an American miniseries based on Alex Haley's novel published in 1976 and produced in **2016** by a team of executive producers, including LeVar Burton, Mark Wolper, and Will Packer. It consists of 4 episodes, each lasting for more than one hour with each episode directed by a different director. The first episode is directed by Phillip Noyce, the second one is by Mario Van Peebles, the third one by Thomas Carter and the fourth one is directed by Bruce Beresford. The story of "**Roots (2016)**" is based on a true story of Alex Haley's ancestors. It tells the story of Kunta Kinté, an African young man who is shipped to North America as a slave and his descendants. First Kunta Kinté did not accept his life as a slave he tried to escape more than ten times. But when he got captured again and got his foot cut off, he decided to accept his fate to live in the master's Waller plantation as a slave for the rest of his life. He gets married with a woman called Belle and had a little girl who he named Kizzy. As the miniseries goes on, Kizzy made a mistake and master Waller decided to sell her to Tom Lea. The latter got Kizzy pregnant and she gave birth to George who becomes a skilled chicken breeder who trains cocks for fights. George falls in love with Mathilda and got married to her, then they gave birth to seven children.

### III. Results:

Through the exploration of the two TV miniseries, "**Roots (2016)**" and "**Tropiques Amers (2007)**", this research has uncovered various themes and complexities related to the depiction of slavery. By looking at the ideas of Womanism from Alice Walker's *"In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose (1983)*, and the Master-Slave Dialectic from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit (1807)*, this study has deepened my understanding of the experiences of enslaved women and the power dynamics within slavery.

First, both Tropiques Amers and Roots show female characters as individuals who are not only shown as victims but they are strong, courageous, resilient, willful in the face of severe oppression. To start with Tropiques Amers, women are portrayed as powerful characters who maintain their identity and strength despite the hard circumstances of slavery. Characters like Adèle, Rosalie, and Man Joséph show their resilience in their everyday acts of defiance and their efforts to preserve their culture and beloved ones. Similarly, in the miniseries of Roots female characters like Belle, Kizzy and Mathilda are portrayed as individuals with strong determination to fight for their rights and for the well-being of their families by challenging their oppressors and seeking emancipation. The common point in both miniseries is the portrayal on enslaved women as characters who embody strength, courage, willfulness, resilience, challenging the patriarchal system.

Furthermore, concerning Hegel's master-slave Dialectic it offers a deeper understanding of the power dynamics between masters and slaves, emphasizing on the mutual dependency and the struggle for recognition and freedom. In one hand, Tropiques Amers deals with the complex power relationship between masters and slaves, it shows how their relation is based on power and control, the master feels important and powerful because they have control over the slaves, while the slaves are always trying to prove that they are human being with their own worth and rights who constantly seek freedom and a better life. On the other hand, Roots explores the Master-Slave Dialectic and shows how the masters depend on the slaves to make money and make them wealthy to feel important in society. This creates a constant struggle

between the masters who want to keep control and the slaves who want to break free. This miniseries shows also how the slave characters like Kunta Kinté, George and Tom keep fighting against being treated as less than humans and strive to keep their dignity and gain independence. *Tropiques Amers* (2007) and *Roots* (2016) both illustrate Hegel's concept, displaying the complexities of power, dependence, and the fight for freedom within the system of slavery.

Through this analysis, I have come to understand the complex power dynamics within the slave system, highlighting the importance of considering both gender and power when studying slavery. By applying the theories of womanism and the master-slave dialectic, my research offers fresh insights into the lives of enslaved women and the intricate power structures of slavery. Both miniseries, *Tropiques Amers* (2007) and *Roots* (2016) provide a rich portrayal of slavery, emphasizing the agency and resistance of enslaved women, who are depicted as active participants in their fight against oppression.

My work highlights the strength and agency of enslaved women and the different ways power was held and contested within the context of oppression.

Additionally, the analysis reveals the complex power dynamics between masters and slaves, exemplifying the mutual dependency and the struggle for recognition and emancipation. Central themes such as racism, dehumanization, identity, and resilience are very present (prevalent), offering a comprehensive view of the enslaved individuals' experiences. However, there are no significant differences between the two miniseries, except for the locations in which their stories are set. It also underscores the importance of examining both gender and power to fully understand the intricate realities of slavery.

## **IV. Discussion:**

### **1. Chapter 1: Womanism and Master-slave-dialectic in Jean-Claude Barny's "Tropiques Amers (2007)".**

This chapter deals with Jean-Claude Barny's miniseries "Tropiques Amers (2007)". First, it will provide a historical background of slavery in Martinique during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, and then it will examine some of the female characters of the miniseries according to Alice Walker's Womanism and some of female and male characters through Hegel's Master-slave Dialectic. These two theories help to uncover some key themes and concepts regarding the struggle of black women in Martinique during the era of slavery (18<sup>th</sup> century), and it will focus on the discrimination experienced by the black characters in Tropiques Amers, and their fight for freedom.

#### **Historical background of "Tropiques Amers (2007)":**

Slavery in the 18th century Caribbean was a harsh system where people were oppressed and exploited based on their race. European countries like Britain, France, Spain, and the Netherlands set up plantations that relied on slave labor, supported by the transatlantic slave trade. Over 4 million Africans were forcibly brought to the Caribbean to work as slaves and during this time they endured terrible conditions while working on sugar, coffee, cotton, and indigo plantations (A. Missouri, 2022). In the 1640s, sugar farming began in St. Kitts and quickly expanded, leading to the creation of a plantation economy reliant on enslaved Africans. These enslaved individuals were increasingly favored for the harsh work in the hot and humid climate. European planters believed that Africans were better suited to these conditions than Europeans because the climate was similar to that of West Africa. Additionally, enslaved Africans were cheaper to maintain compared to indentured European servants or paid workers (King's College London, n.d.). Enslaved Africans were primarily brought to the Americas due to economic motivations. In 1650, their purchase price was as low as £7, but it increased over time, reaching £17-22 by 1690 and £40-50 a century later. Comparatively, in the 17th century,

white indentured laborers or servants cost planters around £10 for just a few years of work, which was equivalent to the cost of providing food, shelter, and clothing. Consequently, after 1660, the influx of new white servants to places like St. Kitts or Nevis dwindled significantly, as Black enslaved Africans became the preferred labor force (Bridenbaugh & Bridenbaugh, 1972). As a result of these developments, the Black population in the Caribbean experienced a significant surge in the latter part of the 17th century. In the 1650s, when sugar replaced tobacco as the primary cash crop on Nevis, enslaved Africans comprised only 20% of the population. However, by the 1678 census, the Black population had soared to 3,849, compared to a white population of 3,521. As sugar production became fully established in the early 18th century, nearly 80% of the population was Black. This rapid increase in the Black population instilled fear among white plantation owners, leading to harsher treatment as they sought to control a larger, but increasingly discontented and potentially rebellious workforce (Olwig, 1993).

Enslaved Africans endured severe mistreatment, beginning with the horrific conditions during the voyage from West Africa, famously known as the Middle Passage. The mortality rate was alarmingly high, with recent estimates suggesting that between 12% and possibly as high as 25% of all Africans transported on British ships between 1701 and 1807 perished en route to the West Indies and North America. By 1810, close to 350,000 Africans had been forcibly transported to the Leeward Islands (Curtin, 1969). Enslaved Africans suffered a lot during their journey to the Caribbean. Many got sick or were treated very badly, and some felt hopeless that they jumped into the sea, when they reached the islands, they were cleaned up and sold to local buyers. Families often got separated, which was very sad. The plantations, where they worked, were like big farms that focused on growing one main crop to sell. They had to do hard, exhausting work like planting and harvesting crops, often under the watch of overseers who used whips to keep them in line. Life on the plantations was tough. It was especially hard in places like the boiling house where it was really hot. They had to work long hours, especially during harvest time. Many slaves got sick or died because they were overworked, did not get enough food, were treated badly, or got sick from diseases and instead of taking care of the

slaves they already had, many plantation owners preferred to buy new ones from Africa. It was not until 1798, with the Amelioration Act, that things started to get a bit better for the slaves because it forced plantation owners to make some improvements (Bridenbaugh & Bridenbaugh, 1972). Plantation owners began to grant enslaved Africans Sundays off from work, even though many of them did not follow Christianity. During this free time, enslaved Africans utilized some of it to tend to garden plots near their residences and in nearby areas known as 'provision grounds'. Provision grounds were pieces of land set aside by plantation owners for enslaved Africans to grow their own food like sweet potatoes, yams, and plantains. Even though this land was often not great for farming, it was where they could plant crops. They used what they grew to eat themselves and sometimes sold or traded it in local markets, along with animals like chickens or pigs. On the Jessups estate in Nevis, a plantation map from 1755 shows where these provision grounds were located. They were called the 'Negro Ground' and were up in the mountains (Olwig, 1993, p. 29). Slavery in the 18th century Caribbean was a harsh system where people were oppressed and exploited based on their race. European countries like Britain, France, Spain, and the Netherlands set up plantations that relied on slave labor, supported by the transatlantic slave trade. Over 4 million Africans were forcibly brought to the Caribbean to work as slaves during this time. They endured terrible conditions while working on sugar, coffee, cotton, and indigo plantations. During the 18th century, the Caribbean colonies played a huge role in the Atlantic economy. They were like the powerhouses, making a lot of money for many people. However, the money came from slavery. Slavery was the backbone of their wealth. In addition, guess who benefited the most? The fancy folks in charge, who owned many slaves and got even richer from their work. Now, these colonies had these rules called "slave codes." These rules treated African people as if they were not even human. They were seen as property that could be bought and sold, with no rights of their own. Imagine being treated, as you are just a thing, not a person with feelings and rights. It was awful. Despite all this oppression, African people kept fighting back. They rebelled against their enslavement in many ways, like revolts and uprisings. They refused to accept their terrible treatment, and they fought

for their freedom whenever they could. Their resistance showed incredible courage and strength in the face of such injustice (A. Missouri, 2022). *Tropiques Amers* sheds light on the brutal realities of slavery in colonial Martinique, particularly its impact on black individuals and their enduring struggle for freedom and dignity. The miniseries portrays the dehumanizing conditions of enslaved people, emphasizing the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class, while also showcasing the resilience and agency of those who resisted their subjugation.

This chapter will examine these themes through the lens of two theoretical frameworks: Alice Walker's Womanism and Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic. The analysis focuses on how *Tropiques Amers* represents the experiences of enslaved women, who faced different forms of discrimination, as well as the complex dynamics of power and resistance among both male and female characters. By doing so, this study aims to uncover the ways in which the miniseries highlights the perseverance and solidarity of black women, alongside the fight for liberation during the era of slavery in Martinique.

#### **A. Womanism in “Tropiques Amers (2007)”:**

In Martinique, enslaved black women faced tough work, abuse, and sexual exploitation from their masters and also from other white men. They worked in fields and did household chores, experiencing violence and giving birth to mixed-race children who were often enslaved too (Moitt, 2001, p. 20). In the harsh environment of 18th century in Martinique, black women suffered in an endless cycle of pain and endurance. Slavery threw a long and cruel shade over these females, exposing them to many hardships that tested the limits of human strength. They were sexually oppressed and mistreated both at the hands of their masters and other white man. In this sense, bell hooks argues,

Ironically, while the recent women's movement called attention to the fact that black women were dually victimized by racist and sexist oppression, white feminists tended to romanticize the black female experiences rather than discuss the negative impact of that oppression. When feminists acknowledge in one breath that black women are victimized and in the same breath emphasize their strength, they imply that though black women are oppressed they manage to circumvent the damaging impact of oppression by being strong--- and that is simply not the case. (hooks, 1982, p. 6)

hooks highlights the suffering endured by black women, shedding light on their struggles and hardships. She argues that sexism during slavery intensified, and that oppression faced by black women is in fact disregarded by many white-middle classed feminist who failed to address the issue of race. It is obvious that Black women's struggle for equality was overlooked. In addition, bell hooks claims that Black women's oppression has relation with the interconnection of social classification of race, gender, sexuality, and class which must be treated simultaneously.

**Adèle's womanism in "Tropiques Amers (2007)":**

A womanist, as Alice Walker defines it, is an empowered black feminist or feminist of color who is confronted with not only class and gender struggles, like feminists, but also confronts the challenge of race (1983, p. 6). In her *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, Walker gives to a womanist some characteristics that challenge the cultural and societal conditions of black women, the best example to refer to it is the character of Adèle in the miniseries of *Tropiques Amers*. Adèle is portrayed as resilient and courageous with empowering personality traits who manages to stay a strong and a confident black woman despite the injustices and hardships she encounters in the face of the harsh realities of slavery.

Walker claims that a womanist loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually, and that this love transcends boundaries to reach out to all of humanity, wanting all people to survive and thrive (1983, p.5). Adèle's love is shown in the way she formed a deep friendship with the female slaves on the plantation, they work all together. They share their experiences and struggles and offer comfort and bring emotional support to each other. Adèle's interaction with these women showcases her understanding and compassion of the difficulties endured by the black females. In addition, Adèle in the miniseries has always been supportive for the female resistance, she participated and supported every woman's act of resistance against slavery. Moreover, in the first episode of the miniseries, our protagonist had an agreement to a sexual relation with her master Théophile, just in order to save her mother Manon from being sold, despite the fact that she hated him. In fact, Adèle is a compassionate person since she has sacrificed herself to save her mother. More significantly, she tries to save Rosalie who used to

be Théophile's mistress before her from execution by trying to convince him to not hand her over to the judge after he had caught her aborting his daughter Constance. Moreover, the other women that Adèle helped in the miniseries was Constance. She took her under her wing and protected her during all the events of the miniseries, especially after her mother's death and her father's abundance. She also had accompanied her all along her life especially in her preparations for her wedding to Sainte-Colombe.

Besides, Alice Walker asserts that womanists value collectivism and community in the sense that the goal of womanism goes beyond individual well-being to the well-being of entire peoples and communities, and then to humanity as a whole (1983, p.233). Adèle's collectivism is well portrayed in her solidarity with the men characters of 'Tropiques Amers'. First, when the master's wife Thébikia bought Koyaba and brought him to the plantation, Adèle was the only one checking on him everyday and trying to help him with the best she could. Then, she did everything in her power to save her father Amédée from being executed after he betrayed his master Théophile during the insurrection. Amédée had to be hanged till death after his betrayal but thanks to his daughter's help the master let him survive and just got his left hand imputed. Finally, Adèle also saved her son Jean-Baptiste from being punished because of his commitment and political ideas. After the authorities had discovered his revolutionary writings, she made a plan and handed her son to his father Koyaba to escape from Martinique to Haiti and not to be murdered.

Alice Walker argues that a womanist has a confident way of speaking with the use of specific linguistic elements that shows her strong personality (Janusiewicz, 2014, p.11). Adèle's confidence can be remarkable in her way of speaking with the use of specific linguistic elements and in her confident personality. The proof is in a scene that took place in the garden where Adèle was arguing with her father, after she had a fight with Thébekia. While her father was blaming her for her behaviour and telling her that she became mean, Adèle did not seem to be offended by his words, the only thing that mattered to her was how to save her son from being a slave, Adèle says: "dad my son will be a free man even if I have to kill for it" (Tropiques

Amers, 2007, 4<sup>th</sup>episode, 9:10) [translation mine]. Additionally, it is shown in the way she spoke to her master Théophile after he caught her plan to run away with her lover Koyaba, she looked at him directly in the eyes without any fear and challenged him by saying: “what would you do to stop me? Would you lock me up? Would you kill me like you did with your wife?” (Tropiques Amers, 2007, 5<sup>th</sup>episode, 35:10) [translation mine]. This shows her strong personality and determination to achieve her goals whatever it costs her.

Adèle’s womanist personality is also portrayed in her candid disposition toward her entourage. In a scene that took place in the kitchen of the house, Adèle listened very carefully to the trio Amédée, Rosalie and ManJoséph while peeling her vegetables then looked at them for a moment and said: “Life is sweet in the master’s kitchen! You eat well, you are happy, everything is fine! you have no shame? My mother killed herself to leave this place” (Tropiques Amers, 2007, 1<sup>st</sup>episode, 58:25) [translation mine]. Then, she threw the plate on the table and went out. Her straightforward attitude and the words she chose while speaking to others are examples that show her strong personality. More importantly, Adèle in ‘**Tropiques Amers**’ had refused the gift she received from the master Théophile and had always rejected his advances, rather than with her words and her actions. She made it very clear that she does not want any relation with him. It is evident through her body language in each time the master tried to get close to her and also by saying to the women in the kitchen clearly that she does not want to be his whore.

Alice Walker says that a womanist’s strong personality is obvious not only in her way of speaking but also through her body language (Janusiewicz, 2014, p.11). In a scene that took place in the river, when Adèle was bathing and Théophile caught her and discovered that she was pregnant, he thought that the child was his. He kindly tried to caress her belly, but she did not let him: -Théophile: “you’re pregnant! Your belly is getting bigger!” [He looked at her proudly] “you’re not like the others, I’ve always known that” (Tropiques amers, 2007, 1<sup>st</sup>episode, 35:18) [translation mine]. Adèle stepped back, looking at him straight in the eyes picked her dress and left without saying anything. This act unveils her strong personality.

According to Walker, the behaviour of a womanist demonstrates empowerment, strength and capacity (Davis and Diaz, 2016, p.6). Since the first episode of the miniseries Adèle was frequently shown as a strong and a resilient woman, she behaved in a way that shows her capacity to survive with the difficulties and the obstacles she endures in her daily life. Indeed, after the death of her mother, Adèle put a white powder to her face as a sign of mourning. When Théophile saw her, he was angry and commented that she was very ugly and ordered her to go out telling her that he does not want to see her again. Adèle stood there grabbing the plate confidently and did not even lower her eyes for a second as if he was not speaking about her. Then she threw the tureen on the ground violently and turned on her heels with her head held high and went out. What is more, Koyaba and Adèle hit Thébikia, the master's wife, when she discovered their affair. Théophile reserved a punishment to Koyaba because of his audacity to raise his hand on his wife, but he decided to spare his favorite slave because he did not want her to be damaged. When he announced it, Adèle did not even put an effort to look at him or to thank him. Instead, she watched her lover being whipped by Jacquier without any facial expression. She remained strong and did not hesitate to exchange glances with him ignoring everyone else. Then when he escaped, she also did not deprive herself from showing her joy in front of them. Furthermore, Walker's depiction of a womanist is also exemplified in the power and determination of Adèle when it comes to her son Jean Baptiste. In a scene where she had to defend him from the whip of Théophile, she did not hesitate for a second to face him [Théophile] and order him to stop hitting him [Jean Baptiste] and not to dare to touch her son again, out of breath she hit him in return. Moreover, she had the courage to announce to the crowd that the boy who was being whipped was her son. She announced it while looking at Théophile straight in the eyes:

- Adèle: "He is my son!"
- Théophile: "You don't have a son!"
- Adèle: "Ou pa ka songé the one you wanted to kill" [translation mine] (Tropiques amers, 2007, 4<sup>th</sup>episode, 50:50).

Additionally, Adèle behaved with Thébikia in a way that demonstrates empowerment, strength and capacity. It is shown in the scene where Thébikia sold her and all the other slaves

to La Riviere to pay her debts. When Adèle realized that she was going to be taken away from the plantation, she directly went and tried to escape. But Jacquier was faster and catch her, she then started begging him to let her go. It was then that she had the idea to her way out: “Take my jewels from under the cross. Redeem me from Gueule fardée” (Tropiques amers, 2007, 3<sup>th</sup>episode, 47:13) [translation mine]. This is the best example of her capability, strength and empowerment. Moreover, in a scene where Adèle was in the kitchen with Thébikia searching for something to eat, Thébikia was so mean and spoke badly to her, but Adèle quickly turned the situation and she pushed Thébikia to the limit. She pissed her off until she broke all the dishes. While Thébikia was screaming and breaking the plates, Adèle stood there completely ignoring her and as if nothing was happening and at the end she was laughing out loud. Furthermore, Adèle in the miniseries of Tropiques Amers did not only stand up for Théophile and Thébikia, but also for her father when she thought that he killed her son. In a scene that happens in the fields where the slaves were working Amédée was giving water to them one by one. Besides, when the turn of Adèle had come, she grabbed the calabash with indifference without even making eye contact with him and as if he was not her father but her enemy. Amédée also discretely pulled a banana from his pocket and gave it to her but Adèle, who was obviously starving threw it on the ground and a little boy took it. The ability to act with such pride, courage, and power in such situations shows the womanist in Adèle that Alice walker spoke about.

Alice walker points out that Womanists’ agency is courageous, audacious and willful (1983, p. 374). Adèle’s womanist agency is shown in her determined personality to make her plan work and to do everything to save her son from being a slave as her. First, she used her charm and convinced Théophile to let her go and live in Saint-Pierre. Then, she started her own business, she transformed her master’s vocation home into a cabaret and she was working there as a manager. She had the audacity to give only a part of the money she was gaining to the master and the other part she was hiding it to be able to buy her son’s freedom. Moreover, Adèle’s Womanist agency is shown in her way decision-making with her brain and not with

her heart. She made the choice of not running away with Koyaba even if he was the love of her life and the father of her son. Instead, she decided to stay in Saint-Pierre and marry Théophile. She was intelligent enough to know that being married to a white man would give her more advantages than running away with a black man and live the rest of her life as a runagate. Her audacious and courageous personality are shown in the way she informed Koyaba that she was married to Théophile and is pregnant of him. She also lied to him about her decision of escaping with him just to take the revenge of leaving her in the past:

- Adèle: “I just got married Koyaba”
- Koyaba [screaming]: “are you kidding! Are you kidding me Adèle?”
- Adèle: “I am pregnant...from Théophile....do you remember when I announced you the pregnancy of our son? You had nearly the same reaction”
- Koyaba: “it is not the same thing Adèle, I was being chased... [Screaming] and a mixed race one? In Haiti the mixed-races doesn’t have a good reputation, they are not liked, they are killed”
- Adèle: “ah! You want to take me to a place where children are being killed?”
- Koyaba: “no, of course no, I will protect you if it is needed, I am a general and I’ll go back with a pregnant woman, you are not making things easy to me”
- Adèle: “when are you leaving?”
- Koyaba: “tonight. You will find a boat waiting for you at the creek”
- Adèle: “leave quickly, I am tired”
- Koyaba: “are you coming?”
- Adèle: “Of course, I am [translation mine] (Tropiques amers, 2007, 5<sup>th</sup>episode, 43:01)”

Adèle in this scene reproached him what he did to her in the past when she told him that she was pregnant. We can see regret in Koyaba’s eyes. Additionally, she lied to him by making him believe that she was intending to run away with him while deep inside she had made her decision. Therefore, she gets her revenge.

### **ManJoseph’s womanism in “Tropiques Amers (2007)”:**

Walker claims that a womanist loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually, and that this love transcends boundaries to reach out to all of humanity, wanting all people to survive and thrive (1983, p.2). Even though ManJoséph, the cooker of the master’s plantation, does not appear much in the miniseries of ‘Tropiques Amers’. But the few scenes where she was seen, she was always helping other women. This concept of Alice Walker embodies her perfectly since ManJoséph was the eldest women on the sugar plantation. She was like the mother for all the black women who worked there, she had a profound affection and concern for them. She is the one who guided Adèle and offered her support and genuine emotional connection especially

after her mother's death. She was the one who convinced her for not running away with Koyaba and advised her to stay with the master for her well-being. Moreover, when Adèle's mother died, the emotional impact it had on ManJoséph was obvious in the miniseries. Her sadness and grief to this loss shows the deep connections she formed with those around her. The character of ManJoséph beautifully illustrates Walker's notion of womanist love.

Besides, Alice Walker asserts that womanists value collectivism and community in the sense that the goal of womanism goes beyond individual well-being to the well-being of entire people and communities, and then to humanity as a whole (1983, p.233). ManJoséph's character illustrates perfectly her collectivism and commitment to the safety and the well-being of all the black individuals living in the plantation. Her compassion is evident in the way she helped Koyaba when he just arrived to the plantation ensuring his comfort and well-being and the way she reacted to his suffering when he was being whipped. Furthermore, her efforts to warn Amédée from talking about the master with disrespect knowing that it would cause him a severe punishment demonstrate her protective character and sense of community. In addition, ManJoséph's encouragement of Adèle to accept the master's affection because she thought that it would ensure her security and well-being. In 'Tropiques Amers' ManJoséph's acts and intentions demonstrate her dedication to the well-being of her individuals, fitting with the womanist principles. She embodies perfectly the collectivist and community-oriented sense for humanity.

### **Rosalie's Womanism in "Tropiques Amers (2007)":**

Alice Walker argues that a womanist has a confident way of speaking with the use of specific linguistic elements that shows her strong personality (Janusiewicz, 2014, p.11). Rosalie embodies this concept perfectly in the miniseries of "Tropiques Amers", she exemplifies her love towards other women through her devotion to her master's wife 'Thébékia'. She was determined to protect her at any cost, and also, she was the one keeping all her secrets. Moreover, her caring and nurturing for her master's daughter Constance, as her own child, she supported her during her most difficult moments

including when she needed abortion, which caused her own death when the master discovered it. She sacrificed her own life to help another woman, this is the best example of her love to other women.

Besides, Alice Walker claims that womanists' agency is courageous, audacious and willful (1983, p.374). Rosalie's feelings towards the master and her jealousy when he got married reflects the complex dynamics of power and desire, her willfulness to fight to keep her place as the master's cocotte was obvious. She even had the audacity to cut the hair of her master's wife and do magic for it. However, As the miniseries goes on Rosalie discovered that her true rival was Adèle rather than Thébékia and that she was the one threatening her place because the master started showing her affection. He was all the time asking to see her. Additionally, he was offering her jewelries as gifts, Rosalie decided to do all in her power to take her revenge and turn Adèle's life in the plantation into hell, she told her mistress about Adèle's affair with Koyaba. Moreover, Rosalie took the risk to help Constance in her abortion even though she was aware that it could cause her terrible consequences, this is a proof of her courage and strength. These acts highlight Rosalie's exceptional courage, strength, determination and resilience, reflecting the characteristics of a womanist that Alice Walker spoke about.

### **B. Hegel's master slave dialectic in "Tropiques Amers (2007)":**

Frederick Douglas speaks about his own experience as a slave and states that he noticed when his situation is improved it did not make him more satisfied but instead it had the opposite effect, it made him desire freedom slavery: even more because it made him realize that there was a better life waiting for him beyond the confines of slavery.

I have observed this in my experience of slavery, that whenever my condition was improved, instead of it increasing my contentment, it only increased my desire to be free, and set me to thinking of plans to gain my freedom. I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery: he must be made to feel that slavery is right, and he can be brought to that only when he ceased to be a man (Douglas, 2023, p.85)

### **Adèle's master-slave dialectic in "Tropiques Amers (2007)":**

According to Hegel, in the beginning, the 'master-self-consciousness' is self-reliant and free, while the 'slave-self-consciousness' is self-sufficient and dependent; therefore, the master then enslaves the slave by using the fear of death (1807, p. 155). 'Tropiques Amers' introduces Théophile Bonaventure as the Master in the Master-Slave relationship, he is a white rich man who owns a sugar plantation and he is a member of the master class, while Adèle is introduced as a black slave woman who belongs to Théophile. She is not only his property as a slave but also as a sex mistress. He is constantly threatening her to torture, sell and kill her loved ones if she does not accept to sleep with him and to kill her if she escapes with her lover Koyaba.

Hegel also argues that the slave regains his consciousness when he discovers that he has some control over his master, and that is through his work (1807, p. 119). It is shown in the miniseries in the character of Adèle. She started regaining her consciousness from the moment she discovered that she could use her body to make Théophile fall in love with her in order to make it easy for her to manipulate him and get whatever she wants and also protect her beloved ones. Thanks to her secret weapon, Adèle had been able to save her father from death after he betrayed the master. She also could protect her son Jean-Baptiste from the master by ordering him to stop whipping him. Additionally, she used her charm to convince the master to let her go and run a business in Saint-Pierre to help him while in fact it was only to go and be near her son Jean Baptiste and gain money to be able to buy his freedom.

However, when forced to manipulate nature to create goods for the master, the slave experiences creativity while the master experiences stagnation by living off the slave's labor (Shishido, 2011, p. 113). After the court sentence Théophile was ruined because he was fined a million pounds for his betrayal of the French nation and his alliance with the English, Adèle was smart and took the chance to convince her master to let her go to Saint-Pierre and settle her business to earn money and help him. When she settled in the city, she had the idea to transform that house into a cabaret and she ran the business with great profit. Théophile's financial gain was depending only on Adèle's work while he stagnates. Moreover, the creativity of Adèle to

have the idea and make an agreement with Sainte-Colombe that if she convinces Théophile to let his daughter marry him, he is going to give her a million. And since Adèle always gets what she wants from the master, she successfully convinces him and gets the money from Saint-Colombe.

Hegel affirms that through the slave's work and the awakening of his consciousness, the slave is gradually transformed into a true independent consciousness, which represents a spirit of resistance and rebellion against the master (1807, p.117). In addition to the sexual and emotional power, Adèle now holds a financial power over her master and does not feel obliged to obey or respect him anymore. Adèle started to rebel and to take control of her life. In the miniseries it is shown in the change of her way of dressing, wearing jewelry, and her wonderful makeup, she becomes prettier and more confident. Her spirit of revolt against her master is seen when she ordered him to stop hitting her son Jean-Baptiste and in her way of challenging him with her eyes, she seemed ready to tear out his eyes. Also, when Théophile surprised her with Koyaba, it was obvious that she was not afraid at all, she knew that he would not punish her, she provoked him and again challenged him by telling him that she wanted to run away with him because he promised her freedom:

- Théophile: "are you planning to go with him? What does he have that I don't? What did he promise you?"
- Adèle: Freedom.
- Théophile: "Freedom! That's the only word you 'blacks' have in your mouth! As if we, as white, we have the freedom to do what we want".
- Adèle: "What if it were true? What if I decided to run away to be free? What would you do to stop me? Would you lock me up? Would you kill me like you did to your wife?"
- Théophile: "you think I'm not capable to do it?"
- Adèle: "you're capable of everything".
- Théophile: "and if I set you free would you follow him?"
- Adèle: "you'll never do that, you are too afraid, you can't live without me".
- Théophile: "I won't let you go, if I set you free I'll marry you, you'll switch from black code to code Napoléon".
- Adèle: "I don't believe you, you will never marry a black woman".
- Théophile: "as you said I'm capable of anything think about it, marrying a white man not bad right? better than following a jerk" [translation mine] (Tropiques amers, 2007, 5<sup>th</sup>episode, 35:10)

Théophile's decision to free and marry Adèle represent the power and the resilience of Adèle and her ability to achieve what many women who lived at that time were not able to do which is her self-emancipation. She will finally be recognized as a free person rather than a slave.

Adèle's self-emancipation in 'Tropiques Amers' is a powerful testament to the resilience and strength of black women. Through her choices and actions, she challenged the oppressive system that sought to confine and silence her. Adèle's story symbolizes the collective struggle of black women throughout history. It sheds light on the unique challenges they faced and the strength they displayed in the face of adversity. It serves as a reminder of the importance of self-determination and how to break free from societal expectations, inspiring others to strive for their own emancipation.

According to Hegel each of the master and the slave want the 'death' of the other (1807, p. 113). Théophile's marriage to Adèle does not please the white supremacist. Therefore, they burned the sugar plantation. Then the master went to confront them, they killed him. Adèle was indirectly the cause of Théophile's death. It is a role reversal where Adèle turns things upside down in the gender order, she has established herself as a master and the master is the slave. This represents a significant shift in the power dynamics.

#### **Amédée's master-slave dialectic in "Tropiques Amers (2007)":**

Hegel states that initially the master-self-consciousness is self-sufficient and free and the slave-self-consciousness is dependent and that the former enslaves the latter under the threat of death (1807, p. 115). In the first episode of Tropiques Amers Théophile was presented as the master who owns the sugar plantation while Amédée was only his property as a slave. Théophile was constantly threatening him to kill or sell him, or even to sell his wife and daughter if he does not satisfy him and obey all his orders. Amédée was obliged to work hard and obey the master's orders in order to protect his life and the one of his family.

Hegel states that through the slaves' work, the slave has learnt that he has some control over the master and thus regains his consciousness (1807, p. 119). Amédée's awakening consciousness begins from the moment he discovered that he has a certain degree of power and

influence over the master. This is through his indispensable role in maintaining the sugar plantation operational, he discovers a newfound form of power. His recognition of his economic power results a shift in his consciousness and led him to regain his consciousness and becomes independent. In essence, Amédée exemplifies Hegel's philosophical concept, showing how work can serve as an opportunity for self-recognition and it also demonstrates how an individual even in a position of slave may find a way to free their consciousness.

Hegel claims that through the slaves' work and the awakening of his consciousness, the slave gradually transformed into a true independent consciousness, which represents a spirit of revolt against the master (1807, p.117). In *Tropiques Amers* the character of Amédée serves as an illustration to this concept. As mentioned above through the process of labor. Amédée became conscient of his indispensable role in the prosperity of the sugar plantation, it is what pushes him to his rebellion, particularly towards Théophile his master. He became less afraid of him, this shift highlights his growing self-esteem and bravery. During a conversation with Man Joséph, he openly declares: "No, he knows very well I am the one making him money, anyways from now on I will do like the others, I will just say to him ouii mé pani pwoblem mé, I don't care about his plantation and his sugar, he can die!" [translation mine] (*Tropiques amers*, 2007, 1<sup>st</sup>episode, 57 :15). This statement demonstrates Amédée's realization of self-worth and his rebellion against Théophile and it mirrors the concept of Hegel showing how the act of labor lead to revolt.

To conclude, this chapter examined the harrowing and traumatic experiences faced by the enslaved people in Martinique during the late 18th century. The historical information clearly illustrates the cruel and systematic sexual abuse inflicted on black women by their masters, reflecting the disturbing dynamics of power and oppression that were frequent at that time. Furthermore, within the chapter's narrative we have undertaken a comprehensive exploration of the various and resourceful ways in which Martinique's enslaved individuals demonstrated an exceptional resilience in the face of oppression and fight hardly for their freedom.

## **Chapter 2: Womanism and Master-slave-dialectic in “Roots (2016)”.**

This chapter investigates “**Roots (2016)**” miniseries. It aims to provide a rich historical context of American slavery during the 18th century, offering a nuanced understanding of the socio-political and economic dynamics that characterized this important period in American history. It also attempts to explore interactions between the narrative of the miniseries with the theory of Alice Walker's Womanism, examining how the characters and themes align with this perspective. Besides, it will delve into the philosophical theory of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic and how this dialectical relationship is portrayed and explored within its the narrative. By working on these elements together, this chapter will present a varied and insightful study of the miniseries and its broader implications in the themes of cultural critic, philosophy and historical context.

### **Historical background of “Roots (2016)”:**

On August 1916 “20 and odd” Angolans were kidnapped by Portuguese and sent to the British Colony of Virginia, where they were bought by the English Colonists. This arrival of enslaved Africans in the new world marks the beginning of North America’s two and half centuries of slavery. Hundreds of thousands of free and enslaved Africans contributed to the creation and to the survival of colonies in America and the new world. Many consider 1619 to be a key starting point for slavery in America, when the white lion landed 20 enslaved Africans in the British settlement of Jamestown, Virginia. The Africans were taken from the Portuguese slave ship Sao Jao Bautista by the mariners. Throughout the 17th century, European settlers in North America relied on enslaved Africans as a less expensive and more plentiful work source than indentured servants, who were largely poor Europeans. Although precise estimates are impossible to provide, historians believe that 6 to 7 million enslaved individuals were imported to the new world during the 18th century only, taking from the African continent some of its healthiest and most capable men and women. In the 17th and 18th centuries enslaved Africans worked mostly on the southern coast’s tobacco, rice and indigo plantations, from the

Chesapeake Bay colonies of Maryland and Virginia south to Georgia (Onion, Sullivan, Mullen, and Zapata, 2009). These enslaved individuals included men and women. Female slaves did not only experience physical abuse but also sexual one. They were harassed, raped and forced into prostitution by white slaveholders and overseers, they were forced to submit sexually to their masters. Moreover, this abuse was not only limited to women, black men were sexually abused too. (Gupta, 2021). Enslaved people in the North typically worked as house servants, artisans, laborers, and craftsmen, with most of them concentrated in towns. A large number of men worked in the docks and in shipping. In 1703, more than 42 percent of households in New York City had enslaved persons in bondage, the second highest proportion of any city in the colonies, after only Charleston, South Carolina (The nation, 2005). Slave labor was also used in rural communities, mostly in the South, but also in upstate New York and Long Island, Connecticut, and New Jersey. By 1770, there were 397,924 blacks out of a population of 2.17 million in what would become the United States. The slaves of the colonial era were distributed unequally: 14,867 lived in New England, where they made up three percent of the population, 34,679 lived in the mid-Atlantic colonies, where they made up six percent of the population and 347,679 lived in the five Southern colonies, where they made up thirty one percent of the population (Berlin, 2003, p. 16). The agricultural economy of the south became dependent on agricultural commodities, because its commodity crops were labor-intensive, its planters quickly acquired a higher number and percentage of enslaved people in the population overall (Hashaw, 2007). South Carolina had a large number of slaves, especially considering its small area. In fact, by 1860, the only other state that had as many slaves as South Carolina, were Georgia and Virginia, both of which were at least twice its size. The low country's propensity for rice culture contributed significantly to South Carolina's massive slave population. Rice was both labor intensive and extremely profitable, so not only diets planters require more assistance than other planters, but they could also afford it (Trinky). However, in the second half of the 18th century the importation of slaves stopped in most American colonies. Many of the colonial elite opposed the further importation of slaves because they had a fear that it would disturb slavery

and cause a slave rebellion. In 1774, Rhode Island prohibited the importation of slaves, except for Georgia, all of the colonies had banned or limited such imports by 1786, Georgia did the same in 1798. (Morison and Commager, 1931, p.212-220). In order to encourage slaves to fight for their freedom, the rebels began offered freedom to some slaves as a motivation. Washington emancipated slaves who fought in the American Continental army. In 1778, Rhode Island began enrolling slaves and guaranteed recompense to slave owners whose slaves enlisted and survived to win freedom (Nell, 1855). As a result, 20 percent of the northern army were blacks in the war. In 1781, Baron Closen who is a German officer at the battle of Yorktown said that the American army was about 25 percent blacks (Selig, 1997). These black men were among former slaves and black men who were born free. After the American Revolution, many colonists had a significant shift in their point of view. Slavery was relatively unimportant to the agriculture economy in these areas and there was a growing realization among certain individuals that the act of slavery was nearly the same to the oppression that they had just fought against in their struggle for independence from the British rule. This awareness encouraged many Northern colonists to fight for the abolition of slavery since they began to see similarities between African enslavement and their war against the British colonial control. As a result, an anti-slavery movement emerged in the Northern states to stop slavery.

Finally, from 1830 to 1860, the abolitionist movement that aims to abolish slavery in America gained strength, it was led by free people such as Frederick Douglass and some other white supporters like William Lloyd Garrison and Harriet Beecher Stowe (Onion, Sullivan, Mullen, and Zapata, 2009).

The 18th century marked a transformative period in American history, where the country saw the growth of colonies, the beginning of the slave trade, and the fight for independence. This era set the stage for the harrowing experiences depicted in the miniseries of "**Roots 2016**" which brings to life the brutal realities of slavery through the character of Kunta Kinte and his descendants. Understanding this historical background is crucial, as it provides the context

within which both the female and male characters navigate their lives, resist oppression, and seek identity and freedom.

### **A. Womanism in “Roots (2016)”:**

In her 1983 work, Alice Walker compares womanism to feminism by saying, 'Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender' (p. 283). This means that feminism is just one part of the larger idea of womanism.

Womanist theorists explore the effect of class, gender, and race on black life and religious perspectives. They develop strategies to eliminate and combat oppression for black Americans and all people. Womanist theory also examines the marginalization and misrepresentation of black women in literature and other forms of expression. Alice Walker outlines a four-part definition of womanism and womanist theory, which includes the importance of radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, and critical engagement (Longley, 2020). In the miniseries of **Roots (2016)**, the characteristics that Alice Walker attributed to a womanist are exemplified through three female characters who are Belle, Kizzy and Mathilda.

### **Belle in “Roots (2016)”:**

Alice Walker's definition of a womanist underscores the qualities of empowerment, strength, ability, and independence (Davis and Diaz, 2016, p.6). We can see the embodiment of these traits in the life of Belle that was extremely difficult before she gets married to Kunta Kinté. Belle demonstrated courage and determination even in the face of the heartbreaking circumstances in which her owner sold her husband and sons into slavery, separating her from them. She had immense power and inner strength, which allowed her to face such a miserable reality without giving in to hopelessness or despair. Belle's life is presented as a dramatic example of how a womanist can overcome difficulties and stand as a symbol of empowerment and independence.

Alice Walker explains that a womanist has a confident way of speaking with the use of specific linguistic elements that shows her strong personality (Janusiewicz, 2014, p.11). In the miniseries of **Roots (2016)**, Belle serves as a perfect example for this concept. Throughout the entire miniseries, Belle embodies confidence and demonstrates an absolute strength of her

personality. Her unreserved manner of speaking is a reflection of her strong personality and confidence. An example of Belle's fearless nature can be seen in a scene where Kunta Kinté was telling her about his vivid dreams about his African ancestors. Instead of using more sensitive or encouraging language, Belle simply calls them "ghosts". Her use of these particular terms highlights both her sincerity and her courage in confronting delicate topics. Additionally, in the same scene Belle defends herself directly when Kunta overstepped boundaries being mean to her, she screams at him, raising her voice, asking him what he actually knew about her life. This behaviour can be perceived as a reproach. The tone she uses while speaking to him and the way she widens her eyes looking at him angrily demonstrates her unshakable confidence and strong personality. Moreover, her strong personality is manifested in the way she attacked her husband Kunta after he sent Kizzy alone for the training, she was screaming on him:

- Belle: "what if a patrol finds her?"
- Kunta: "my kintango made us do far worse".
- Belle: "I don't want to hear nothing about your Africa! This is our only child". (Roots, 2016, 2<sup>nd</sup>episode, 1:11:20).

This argument shows that Belle was fed up listening to Kunta's stories about Africa, the words she chose to express her disgust about it and the way with which she was looking at him with anger demonstrate her strong personality.

Walker claims that a womanist loves herself and other women, sexually and/or non-sexually, and that this love transcends boundaries to reach out to all of humanity, wanting all people to survive and thrive (1983, p.5). Belle not only has love for herself but also loves other women. Her love to herself is manifested in the way she values herself and does not accept that others disrespect her, it is shown in these two distinct and illustrative scenes: The first one is when she generously offered a pair of boots to Kunta displaying her consideration and generosity; however, he responded to this gesture with a sudden violent kick when she was going to try it to see if it fitted him. Belle was blown up with anger and said to him: "I tell you what! I will never let you treat me like a master in temper" (Roots, 2016, episode2, 22:32). This statement sets a limit by highlighting her refusal to be put up with any kind of disrespect or bad treatment and by showing her self-worth and determination to be treated with dignity. The

second scene that illustrates Belle's love to herself is when Kunta prepared to profess his deep feelings and propose marriage to his beloved. He was very stressed, so as he started his declaration he began speaking about Africa and his things of a Mandinka warrior, Belle's facial expression changed, because she did not expect such a bad proposal, she thought that she deserved a better one; hence, she closed the door on his face and left him standing alone outside.

However, Belle's deep and compassionate love for other women is shown in a tragic scene that happened in the fields. As a black woman was on the point of giving birth and needed support and attention, Belle did not hesitate for a second to go and help her with all she could but the woman died. This event had a strong emotional impact on her, demonstrating her deep affection to the fate of other women. Belle's effort at this moment displays not only her love to other women but also her resistance to slavery's oppressive and abusing conditions.

According to Alice Walker, womanists value collectivism and community in the sense that the goal of womanism goes beyond individual well-being to the well-being of entire peoples and communities, and then to humanity as a whole (1983, p.233). Belle's collectivism is seen in the way she always supported Kunta Kinté and gave him a reason to live and stop running. She was very caring towards him; she stayed with him day and night and nursed him back to full strength using her own knowledge of traditional medicine after he got his half foot imputed in another runaway attempt. Moreover, she thought about the slightest details concerning him, and treated him as her little child in his curing stage. She made a crutch for his mobility and brought him suitable boots that would help him regain his capacity to walk, in addition, she was putting wool aside to knit him socks in order to make his boots more comfortable. Furthermore, her devotion was not only for his physical recovery but also to his emotional and psychological well-being, she was always there making motivational speeches and encouraging him when he was in his bed desperate of everything. It is portrayed in a scene where Kunta was very sad and desperate. She said:

“You might fool Fiddler, but not me. He says you was a...a great warrior in Africa, what kind of warrior waits to die? I have seen plenty of men far worse than you...no strip of skin left on their back, they was bitten near to death, seen women worked to death, girls' bodies used up hard...no older than children, but they found a way to get up.They was warriors, not you” (Roots, 2016, 2<sup>nd</sup>episode ,21:57).

Belle is challenging Kunta Kinté's despair and encouraging him to find strength. She tells him that true warriors don't give up, even in the face of extreme suffering. She uses examples of other people who endured great pain but still found a way to survive. Belle's words aim to motivate Kunta by reminding him of his strength and urging him to keep fighting, showing her deep care and belief in him.

Furthermore, Belle's determination to protect Kunta is obvious in the miniseries of **Roots (2016)** in her acts of subtle apparition that saved him multiple times from the cruelty of the white man who worked for the master. Each time she skillfully manipulated the situation diverting his [the white man] attention away from torturing Kunta. In a scene where he is accusing him of something, Belle interrupted him telling him that she is keeping a close eye on Kunta as the master ordered he. This strategy convinced the white man to leave the room letting Kunta in peace. Furthermore, in another scene, Belle came to Kunta's rescue when the white man took him to kill him.

- Belle [running and yelling]: “Toby! Toby! ”
- The man [screaming on her]: “get back to the farm! ”
- Belle: “I just came to remind Toby [Kunta] that Mrs. Malloy's baby could come at anytime. Toby, you remember Master says you might have to drive him tonight, he will be awful vexed if you are not ready to drive him (Roots, 2016, 2<sup>nd</sup>episode, 31:00).”

Belle once again could divert the white man's attention in the face of his rage. She gently explained that she had only come to warn Toby of his obligations, emphasizing the master's expectations for him to drive him making the white man understand that Kunta had to be alive. These scenes from “**Roots**” exemplify Belle's sacrifice, collectivism, and her determination to maintain protection and safety for humanity and for her beloved ones. In addition, Belle helped Kunta to have an easier job and curb his runaway instincts by convincing the Master Dr Waller to make him his carriage driver and informing him that he had a talent for handling horses adding:

- “Toby could drive for you too Master; you could see more people and not get tired”
- Dr Waller: “yes, I guess I wouldn't buy another driver or a horse trainer, it would appear that I have both right here” (Roots, 2016, 2<sup>nd</sup>episode, 29:30).

Walker then highlights womanists' agency and describes it as courageous, audacious and willful (1983, p. 374). Belle's willfulness is demonstrated in her resistance towards her husband Kunta when she did not let him take baby Kizzy and run away Screaming:

“No, give me my baby, no! You'll have us all killed, babies cry, they cry when they're hungry, they cry when they're cold, they cry when they're scared, when the slave's catcher is a foot away and you hiding on the bushes, babies cry, so we can't run ! I will never make peace with this life, but I'll not orphan a child again, not when I have a choice” (Roots, 2016, 2<sup>nd</sup>episode, 52min).

Her firm determination to remain on her master's plantation despite the fact that her life there was not the one she would have liked to lead shows her courage. She took this decision to protect her daughter and give her a peaceful life. Belle's character demonstrates the willfulness and courage that many women displayed during the terrible days of slavery, giving her a strong representation of womanist agency.

### **Kizzy in “Roots (2016)”:**

Womanists, according to Walker, love other women, sexually or otherwise, and this love transcends borders to reach all of humanity, wishing for all people to survive and thrive (1983, p.5). Kizzy's love towards other women is shown in the close bond she shares with the female characters of the miniseries. In one hand, her relation with Missy her friend. Even though Missy had the status of her mistress and she was the daughter of the master, this did not stop her from devoting her heart and soul in their friendship not because she was the master's daughter but she truly loved her. She remained her constant companion through life's ups and downs, demonstrating that genuine love knows no societal boundaries. On the other hand, Kizzy was very close with the wife's master Patricia and miss Malizy she loved them from the bottom of her heart, they spent a lot of time in the kitchen communicating and listening to each other's problems, she even took the role of a teacher by showing them how to read and write secretly. In addition, Kizzy's exceptional love for others is displayed when she generously offered her wedding dress to her future daughter-in-law Mathilda and was very kind to her during all their life together. Such acts are the proof of Kizzy's big heart and compassion.

Alice Walker asserts that womanists value collectivism and community in the sense that the goal of womanism goes beyond individual well-being to the well-being of entire peoples

and communities, and then to humanity as a whole (1983, p.233). Kizzy's character in the miniseries exemplifies perfectly this commitment to collective well-being and human liberation. Her support for Noah is the best example that illustrates her womanist principles. She stayed with him many nights and did many efforts to help him to learn to read and write. Besides, she became a source of encouragement to him. She was constantly reminding him of his right to be free, and she even made him a plan of escapism. With these actions Kizzy exemplifies the womanist spirit of collective well-being, pushing not only for her own liberation but also for the emancipation of all those around her.

Walker states that a womanist is a thinking subject who is always searching for knowledge, "wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered good for one", Thus challenging the epistemological exclusions she experiences in intellectual life in general and in feminist research in particular (1983, p. 397). Since her childhood Kizzy was seeking knowledge, even though it was forbidden for slaves to educate, her friend Missy the daughter of her master [Dr Waller] secretly taught her the essential skills of reading and writing. As growing up, she continued secretly to develop her knowledge in defiance of societal norms. Moreover, as the miniseries goes on Kizzy's thirst for knowledge only deepens. She took the risk and continued seeking education fully aware of the consequences that it could cause her.

Besides, Alice Walker states that the behaviour of a womanist demonstrates empowerment, strength, ability, and independence (Davis and Diaz, 2016, p. 6). Kizzy was a very strong and powerful woman with the mindset of a warrior. Thanks to her father Kunta Kinté, since the age of 15 she has been trained as a warrior and was able to do things that girls of her age or women could never do. She was able to ride a horse, use anything as a weapon, and defend herself. Additionally, her strength and empowerment are seen in the way she resisted to stay with her family after the master sold her. Also, Kizzy has applied the techniques of the warrior that her father taught her by fighting the two men who were transporting her by fighting them and trying to escape. Furthermore, she resisted her new Master named Tom Lea and did not let him rape her. Even if she did not succeed, but at least she tried. Moreover, when Kizzy

gave birth to her mixed-race son, she was devastated at the idea of losing her family forever and almost drowned herself with the baby. However, with some reflexion she realized that if she does, she will lose the values that were taught to her by her father Kunta. As a result, she was determined to teach her child all she knew about their heritage. Additionally, when Kizzy moved to Tom Lea's farm, she used to make a recitation every morning in order to remind herself that she is a strong woman that will never give up; in this sense, she says: "papa, your strength is my strength, I will be strong like you taught me, I won't fail you" (Roots, 2016, 3<sup>rd</sup> episode, 4:33). This recitation shows her unbroken relationship with her roots and the values taught by her father, it is considered as a proof of her strength. Also, Kizzy chose to stay in Tom Lea's farm with her family and did not accept to go north with her lover Marcellus despite her being aware that she could be a free woman if she goes with him. Her decision to stay with her family was not just driven by a sense of duty, but also by her strong assertion of her feminist values which are strength, empowerment and capacity.

Alice Walker argues that the strong personality of a womanist is evident in the way she speaks confidently and the linguistic elements she uses (Jenusiewicz, 2014, p. 11). Kizzy's character demonstrates this strong womanist attitude through her unshakable self-assurance and capacity to assert herself strongly in the face of serious difficulties. When Kunta found Kizzy alone in the stable with Noah, he was very furious and he screamed on her asking her to leave. However, Kizzy was not afraid of him at all. She was very sure of herself and acted confidently yelling back at him refusing to go telling him that she did not lie and that if he does not believe her. It means he does not respect her. Her stubborn attitude was more than just an act of resistance, it was a declaration that her words held weight and demanded respect. Her strong personality is also seen in the way she looked at her father straight in the eyes defying him and telling him that she will never give up on her education whatever happens. She says: "reading is my way of being a warrior! Of being free inside, if it is jail to me or whatever comes" (Roots, 2016, 2<sup>nd</sup> episode, 1:13:33). Kizzy's confidence and mastery of the language in this scene exemplifies the spirit of womanism as described by Alice Walker. She exhibits the womanist

spirit's strength of character, and linguistic mastery. Furthermore, when her son George presented her his future wife Mathilda and her father the priest. She did not hesitate to speak her mind and criticize their religion during their debate about Christianity. In this context, she declares:

“I am not interested in the white man's god, you even preach from the book of exodus, white preacher don't let no slave preacher man, talk about the Israelites or pharaoh, do they? No slaves marching across the sea to be free, but them pages cut right out your bible” (Roots, 2016, 3<sup>rd</sup> episode, 35:20)

This statement highlights her rejection of a distorted version of Christianity that has been used to justify and perpetuate slavery and oppression. The way she spoke to him and the words she used perfectly demonstrate her strong personality.

Furthermore, when George declared to the black free man, named Marcellus, that his mother does not have a partner, she quickly intervened telling him that it is the way she likes it and that she would never have a man that would give her orders and act like he is her second master. In this interaction, Kizzy not only asserted her desire for autonomy but also, expressed an important point to Marcellus and those around her. She highlighted her strong personality informing them that she does not need a man to affirm her worth or to give her orders. Moreover, when Kizzy heard her son George promising the master Tom Lea to name his firstborn child on his name, she was out of control and was very furious. She scolded George screaming on his face: “you can't name no one in this family after that man, my daddy took whipping night and day to protect his name” (Roots, 2016, 3<sup>rd</sup> episode, 58:58). She went to the point of hitting him and telling him that he does not even measure up to her father's level expressing her disappointment to him by telling him that he is exactly like Tom Lea. To behave and speak in such a way especially with her beloved son is a proof of Kizzy's strong personality.

Walker highlights womanists' agency and describes it as courageous, audacious and willful (Walker, 1983, p. 374). Kizzy in the miniseries of 'Roots' was shown as a fearless woman. Her resilience to learn to read whatever it costs her is the best example we can give, even though it was something very risky that could cost her life but it did not stop her. In a scene that happened in the stable where her father Kunta Kinté was warning her to stop learning

but Kizzy did not seem to be afraid at all. She was stubborn and did not take his words on consideration:

- Kunta: “do you have any idea, how this could end up? In jail, or worse”
- Kizzy: “you can’t frighten me”
- Kunta [screaming]: “you frighten me, you know what they’ll do to you out there?”
- Kizzy [looking at him straight in the eyes]: “reading is my way of being a warrior! Of being free inside, if it is jail to me or whatever comes.” (Roots, 2016, 2<sup>nd</sup>episode, 1:13:33)

Walker’s depiction of a womanist is also seen in the courage and the audacity Kizzy had to take a knife and threaten her master Tom while grabbing him. She says: “I would die everyday, but when George and Matilda will have children, if you ever touch just one, I will kill you and I will be hanged for it gladly” (Roots, 2016, 3<sup>rd</sup>episode, 1:15:23). Kizzy’s action in this scene is a perfect proof of her womanist spirit and of her courage and audacity.

#### **Mathilda in “Roots (2016)”:**

According to Walker, the womanist identity has numerous aspects. One of them is that the affect and behavior of a womanist demonstrates empowerment, strength, capability (Davis and Diaz, 2016, p.6). These characteristics are vividly exemplified in the character of Mathilda in the miniseries of ‘Roots’. Her determination to marry her lover George and establish a big family with him serve as an example to her strength and resilience. Her life took a tragic turn when she lost her husband George and two of her children, leaving her to care for the five others all alone. This act of raising and caring them on her own, despite the obstacles set against her as a slave highlights Mathilda’s determined character and her ability. She also opposed the rules by secretly educating all of her children and teaching them to read and write. Indeed, her womanist spirit is displayed mostly when George returned, despite her excitement at his comeback. She was aware of the danger posed by her Master Frédéric Murray. She continuously pushed George to go away despite being aware that it would break her heart to be away from him once again, but she chose to sacrifice:

“I prayed so hard that you would come back and we’d be free together, even after master Murray sold the children, but if we can’t be free together, at least you’ll be free. I know what mama Kizzy would say, do what your grandfather would do, keep moving north, and don’t ever look back, promise me.” (Roots, 2016, 4<sup>th</sup>episode ,31:00).

Mathilda's character in the miniseries of "**Roots (2016)**" is one that perfectly fit the characteristics that Alice Walker attributed to a womanist she is an example of a powerful, courageous, strong and capable woman. Her ability to overcome difficulties and her capacity to love and sacrifice for her family illustrates the continuing strength of womanism which defies societal limits and celebrates women's determination and capacities in the face of the most difficult situations.

### **B. Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic in "Roots (2016)":**

According to RobertC. Solomon's interpretation of Hegel's philosophy, the core premise lies in the concept that human existence fundamentally hinges on the fundamental notion of mutual recognition. It is through this process of mutual recognition that we achieve self-awareness and, in turn, seek to decipher and construct the social meaning that imbue our life (1988, p. 68). In short, our sense of self dignity and place in the world are rooted in how we perceive ourselves in relation to other individuals in society. It is through our interaction and exchanges with other people that we grow to understand and define our place in the world we live in. The act of mutual recognition, in which we acknowledge and are acknowledged by others, serves as crucial for the formation of our self-identity and social significance. Thus, Hegel's idea emphasizes how deeply our perception of self and society is intertwined with the recognition we give and receive from others.

Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another (Morrison, 2007, p. 111) the difference for a slave between being free and claiming that freedom, explains that while it is possible to be free, it is much harder to claim ownership of that freedom and to live as a free person.

### **Kunta Kinté in "Roots (2016)":**

Hegel states that the two conflicting consciousness want the death of the other (1807, p. 115). At the outset, **Roots** presents Connelly as the mortal enemy of the plantation overseer to the role of master in the master slave relationship, while Kunta Kinte's fate takes an extreme turn and is relegated to the status of a new slave in the plantation. Connelly's persistent

commitment to his role was marked by an intense determination to break Kunta. He hated Kunta and wanted to break him by anyway and cause his death. However, it is Kunta who killed him when he was going to capture him after his runaway attempt. This dramatic turn demonstrates Hegel's essential psychological and existential conflict, in which the role of the master and the slave are intertwined.

Hegel states that initially the master-self-consciousness is self-sufficient and free and the slave-self-consciousness is dependent that the former enslaves the slave under the threat of death (1807, p. 115). This philosophical concept is found in the second episode of "Roots". In this episode, we encounter an unnamed white man who serves as the heir to the role of the master in the overarching master-slave dynamic, while Kunta is relegated to the status of a slave. Kunta was in a situation where his freedom was restricted, the white man's dominance over Kunta by a significant inequality of power. He is forced into hard labor to maintain control, often in the face of severe threats and the continual reminder that his life is in danger. This representation of master-slave relationship highlights the enslaved's natural dependency and difficulty in the face of a system that threatens them with death.

According to Hegel, the slave has learnt that he has a certain control over the master and thus regains his consciousness (1807, p. 119). When Kizzy, Kunta's daughter endured the horrific consequences of her role in Noah's escape and the master decided to sell her, Kunta refused to accept her destiny silently. He confronted the master in a daring move, using his deep secret which is his betrayal for his brother and that Missy was his own child. His threat to reveal this hidden truth is a perfect representation of Hegel's idea. The master realizes that the enslaved Kunta has some level of control over him. Kunta's action in this scene is not only a simple mean of defending his daughter but also the proof of the power he obtained as a result of his recognition.

#### **George's master-slave dialectic with Tom Lea in "Roots (2016)":**

According to Hegel, by working (manipulating nature), the slave realizes he holds a certain power over his master and is thus gradually transformed 'into a truly independent

consciousness' (1807, p.119). This concept is well embodied in the character of George. A changing path of self-recognition begins as George used his talent and devoted himself to the art of chicken breeding and training, it is at that moment that his consciousness began to awaken. He understood that the master relied on his special abilities to earn money, creating an environment in which his work is the source of the master's wealth. The awareness that the master's economic prosperity was dependent on his skills gave George a fresh sense of power and autonomy. He realized that his talent gave him control over the master, and this awareness provoked the development of his independent consciousness. This transition within George matches Hegel's view that working can be a process through which the enslaved individual experiences an important change from dependence to independence by realizing their power and significance George in "**Roots (2016)**" perfectly fits within this concept.

However, when forced to manipulate nature, as Hegel states, the slave experiences creativity while the master on the other hand experiences stagnation living off the work of the slave (Shishido, 2011, p. 113). After his fight with Mr Shubal, Tom Lea was sickly injured and could not get out of his bed, George seized the opportunity and asked his master to give him a part of the money he gains in order to be able to buy his freedom. George says, "then I'd like some of that money to start working to get me papers to be free. I intend to work hard and win every cockfight, make you real rich. I got to know a time gonna come when I can buy my freedom" (Roots, 2016, 3<sup>rd</sup>episode, 54:00). In this scene, George's proposal is not just a request but a strategic move to achieve his emancipation, his desire to work hard, even with the rule of master-slave relationship shows his creativity. This scene in **Roots** is a strong representation of Hegel's philosophical concept. It highlights how in the face of difficulty, the enslaved man can be creative.

Hegel declares that through the slave's work and the awakening of his consciousness, the slave is gradually transformed into a true independent consciousness, which represents a spirit of resistance and revolt against the master (1807, p.117). George now did not just become a very famous cocktrainer known as 'Chicken George' but also he was the only source of the

financial income of the master. Therefore, he did not feel the need to obey his orders or respect him anymore. His spirit of resistance and revolt are shown in a scene when they were preparing themselves to go to a cockfight in Charleston, George was answering the master without any consideration or respect. In this sense the conversation is as follows:

- master: "don't you ever talk to me like that George, goddamn I swear I'll sell your ass in New Orleans"
- George: "and fight your own birds" (Roots, 3<sup>rd</sup>episode, 1h27:50)

George knew that without him the master could not win any cockfight. Thus, he would never sell him, which is where his confidence came from.

The independent consciousness of the slave represents a spirit of resistance and revolt against the master (Shishido, 2011, p. 113).

- Tom: "how could you leave me?"
- George: "I didn't leave you, you sold me to pay a gambling debt, just like you sold my children."
- Tom: "I taught you everything, and what did I get? Patricia run off, old niggers can hardly work, who's gonna look after me George? Who is going to cook and clean? Who's gonna obey me?"
- George [screaming]: "you said you'd leave papers for my family so they free, you swore that to me as they were dragging me away! Said you would set my wife and all my children free? So, did you do it? Where are they? You a man without honor, Tom Lea. You walked your feet out them dirt hills, but not your filthy soul".
- Tom: "you and me have the same blood, boy, I am your daddy"
- George: "no, the blood in me is from Kizzy, not you, blood that kept me strong all these years away, what few good things I done, that's the blood of my granddaddy, and every damn bit of foolishness in me, everything weak, everything selfish ? That is from you Tom Lea, cause that's who you is. You ain't smart enough to change yourself, and the truth is your whole damn life you was a slave too, you just never knew it." (Roots, 2016, 4<sup>th</sup>episode, 08:05)

George's revolt over Tom Lea happened 20 years later when George became a freeman and came back to America. His old master Tom Lea was in a deplorable state, Tom Lea no longer has any power over him, his way of taking revenge from him was by confronting, humiliating him, screaming on him and reproaching him all the horrible things he did to him and his family.

Hegel states that the two conflicting consciousness want the death of the other (1807, p.115). George was going to kill Tom Lea after the death of his beloved friend Mingo. He wanted to take his revenge and the one of his mother and all his family after all the horrors they endured because of him saying to his mother: "you think I don't know I'm his son? I have been drowning that truth in my mind because I want so bad for us to be away from him. We're all gonna be like Mingo and I've been waiting for the right moment to give him everything he gave

us, and right now I'm gonna kill him" (Roots, 2016, 3<sup>rd</sup>episode, 1:22:15) but Kizzy stopped him. Moreover, the other time George wanted to kill Tom Lea is when he did not keep his promise to free him and betrayed him by selling him to the British man to pay his debt, George attacked the master, he was determined to kill him but there were many men that prevented it.

### **Tom's Master-Slave Dialectic with Master Frédéric Murray in "Roots (2016)":**

At the outset, the 'master-self-consciousness' is self-sufficient and free and the 'slave-self-consciousness' is dependent (Hegel, 1807, p. 115). In "**Roots (2016)**, Frédéric Murray is shown as someone with a sense of independence and freedom while Tom was shown as a weak loyal slave that obeys him. He was all the time afraid to make a mistake and be punished; hence, he refused to work with Nancy to help her on her spy mission.

The independent consciousness of the slave represents a spirit of resistance and revolt against the master (Shishido, 2011, p. 113). When Frédéric and his friends were raping his wife, he was full of rage and decided to work with Nancy as a spy against the Murray family. He also decided to do whatever she asks him just in order to take his revenge. Furthermore, Tom's revolt is seen in the way he spoke to Frédéric when the war was finished:

- Frederick: "you niggers ain't going nowhere; you got to pay before you leave!"
- Tom: "don't have to ask you Frédéric, talking to you daddy"
- Frederick: "I want every penny you earned on this farm as a blacksmith"
- Tom: made a lot more money for this farm, goodbye sir"
- Frederick: "you think anything changed cause the war is over, them union boys gonna be home soon enough, but I'll still be here, and plenty of men just like me, we will redeem this country and put you back where you belong, it's just natural law, I won't never see a nigger be my equal"
- Tom: "don't have no interest in being your equal, Frederick". (Roots, 2016, 4<sup>th</sup>episode, 1:19:40)

Tom's cold reaction and facial expressions are the biggest sign that show his independent consciousness and his revolution over his master Frederick.

The master enslaves the slave upon threat of death and to save his life, the slave agrees to do the necessary work (Zerar, 2009, p. 63). Tom's existence is dominated by his master Mr Murray's constant menaces. He works as a blacksmith day and night, forging continuously, not by choice but out of an absolute necessity to protect his life. The constant danger of violence and death shadows him, driving him to endure hard work under his master's menace. This

desperate induration emphasizes the enslaved obligation to work. Tom's depiction represents the awful reality experienced by many enslaved black people who are faced with life-threatening ultimatum, where they are forced to work hard to ensure their survival.

Hegel claims that the two conflicting consciousness want the death of the other (1807, p. 115). This philosophical concept finds an important embodiment in the last episode when the slaves finally became free, he took his weapon to kill Tom, but George was faster than he was, he shot him [Frédéric] causing his death. By this scene, we can conclude that the slave achieved the death of the master, this serves as an embodiment of the conflict highlighted by Hegel.

In this chapter I have analyzed the female characters of 'Roots (2016)' and it is clear that they embody the characteristics of womanism attributed by Alice Walker. Through their strength, resilience, and agency, they challenge societal norms and oppression, forging their own paths despite the obstacles they face. Besides, the analysis of the characters through the Hegelian master-slave dialectic sheds light on the dynamics of power and domination presented in the Hegelian theory. It is obvious how characters struggle to assert their autonomy and identity within a system that seeks to subjugate and control them. The relation between master and slave reflects broader themes of oppression and resistance, highlighting the complexities of human relationships and societal structures.

## **Comparison of the findings:**

The present dissertation discusses and compares the two miniseries of **Tropiques Amers (2007)** and **Roots (2016)** through the concept of Alice Walker's Womanism and Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic. It provides a nuanced understanding of the depiction of slavery during the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Martinique and The United States, especially concerning enslaved women and how black people fought for their emancipation. This section discusses and compares the findings emphasizing on the similarities and the differences in the portrayal of both the miniseries.

First, both **Tropiques Amers** and **Roots** show female characters as individuals who are victims but they are also strong, courageous, resilient, willful in the face of severe oppression. To start with **Tropiques Amers**, women are portrayed as powerful characters who maintain their identity and strength despite the hard circumstances of slavery. Characters like Adèle, Rosalie, and Man Joséph show their resilience in their everyday acts of defiance and their efforts to preserve their culture and beloved ones. Similarly, in the miniseries of **Roots** female characters like Belle, Kizzy and Mathilda are portrayed as individuals with strong determination to fight for their rights and for the well-being of their families by challenging their oppressors and seeking emancipation. The common point in both miniseries is the portrayal of enslaved women as characters who embody strength, courage, willfulness, resilience, challenging the patriarchal system.

Furthermore, Hegel's master-slave Dialectic offers a deeper understanding of the power dynamics between masters and slaves, emphasizing on the mutual dependency and the struggle for recognition and freedom. In one hand, **Tropiques Amers** deals with the complex power relationship between masters and slaves. It shows how their relation is based on power and control. The masters feel important and powerful because they have control over the slaves, while the slaves are always trying to prove that they are human beings with their own worth and rights who constantly seek freedom and a better life. On the other hand, **Roots** explores the Master-Slave Dialectic and shows how the masters depend on the slaves to make money and

make them wealthy to feel important in society. This creates a constant struggle between the masters who want to keep control and the slaves who want to break free. This miniseries shows also how the slave characters like Kunta Kinté, George and Tom keep fighting against being treated as less than humans and strive to keep their dignity and gain independence. **Tropiques Amers (2007)** and **Roots (2016)** illustrate Hegel's concept, displaying the complexities of power, dependence, and the fight for freedom within the system of slavery.

To sum up, the findings from this analysis reveal that both miniseries of **Tropiques Amers (2007)** and **Roots (2016)** provide a rich portrayal of slavery with a strong focus on the agency and resistance of enslaved women, portraying them as active individuals in their fight against oppression. In addition, they emphasize the complex power dynamics between masters and slaves exemplifying the mutual dependency between them and also their struggle for recognition and emancipation. Moreover, they both have central themes like racism, dehumanization, identity and resilience providing a comprehensive view of the enslaved individual experiences. However, the analysis reveals that there are no significant differences between the two miniseries except for the locations in which the stories are set.

## V. Conclusion:

This dissertation analyzed the miniseries *Tropiques Amers* (2007) and *Roots* (2016) to explore how they show the lives of enslaved people. These two historical dramas provide a powerful look at the realities of slavery, showing not only the suffering of enslaved individuals but also their strength, resistance, and struggle for freedom. To better understand these themes, this study used two important theories: Alice Walker's *Womanism* and Hegel's *Master-Slave Dialectic*. These theories help us see the deep emotional, social, and power-related struggles that enslaved people, especially women, went through.

First, Alice Walker's *Womanism* focuses on the experiences of Black women, highlighting their strength, resilience, and survival. Many times, history and popular culture have shown enslaved women as helpless victims who had no power over their lives. However, *Tropiques Amers* and *Roots* challenge this idea by showing female characters who are brave, intelligent, and determined. These women do not just suffer in silence; they resist oppression in different ways. Even though they face extreme cruelty, they find ways to assert their identity, protect their families, and fight for their dignity. Some of them resist in small ways, such as by secretly maintaining their cultural traditions, while others take bigger risks, such as escaping or actively rebelling. By using *Womanism*, we can see that enslaved women were not weak or powerless. Instead, they were survivors who fought to keep their humanity even in the worst conditions.

On the other hand, Hegel's *Master-Slave Dialectic* helps us understand the power relationships between enslaved people and their masters. According to this theory, the master depends on the slave to feel powerful. The master may believe that they are superior, but in reality, their power exists only because of the work of the enslaved people. They rely on them to make money, to maintain plantations, and to build wealth. Without enslaved labor, they would not have the status and control they enjoy. Meanwhile, the enslaved people constantly struggle to prove their humanity. They are treated as property, but they know they are more

than that. They dream of freedom and dignity, and many resist in different ways, from quiet defiance to open rebellion. This theory shows that slavery was not just about one group having power over another, it was a complicated relationship in which both sides were deeply connected, even if in an unequal and painful way.

By applying these two theories to *Tropiques Amers* and *Roots*, we can learn a lot about the roles of enslaved women and the way power worked in slavery. These miniseries show that enslaved women were not simply passive victims; they were active individuals who resisted in their own ways. They fought for their dignity, protected their families, and tried to keep their cultural identities alive. At the same time, the masters, who seemed all powerful, were actually dependent on the people they enslaved. This means that slavery was not just about control, it was also about fear, struggle, and the constant effort of enslaved people to fight for their rights and freedom.

Understanding slavery requires looking at both gender and power. Enslaved women played an important role in resisting oppression, and their actions should not be overlooked. They showed great courage and intelligence, proving that they were not just victims but fighters. Meanwhile, the relationships between masters and enslaved people were not simple; they were filled with tension, dependence, and struggle. This study highlights the need to recognize the strength and resilience of those who lived through slavery. Their fight for freedom and dignity is an essential part of history, and their stories continue to teach us valuable lessons about courage, survival, and justice.

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