

VINDICATING SYCORAX'S ANTI-COLONIAL VOICE. AN OVERVIEW OF SOME POSTCOLONIAL RE-WRITINGS FROM *THE TEMPEST* TO *INDIGO*

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The aim of this essay is to place the Shakespearean character Sycorax as a symbol of anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal resistance. Throughout the analysis of this figure in *The Tempest* and its re-writings, I suggest a change from the theories that turned Caliban into an anti-imperial symbol towards a consideration of Sycorax for this role. I analyse the possibilities that this character opens in terms of re-writing, as well as the relation of the figure of the witch with her community. I also compare the ideas that Caliban personifies (including sexual violence), with those represented by Sycorax (the struggle against imperial and patriarchal forces). I ultimately defend that Sycorax fits better the position as a resistance symbol, since the struggles against masculine dominance must be addressed at the same level as those against imperialist oppressions.

KEY WORDS: *The Tempest*, Sycorax, *Indigo*, anti-colonialism, anti-patriarchy.

Reivindicación de la voz anti-colonial de Sycorax. Estudio de algunas reescrituras postcoloniales desde *The Tempest* hasta *Indigo*

El objetivo de este ensayo es proponer al personaje shakespeariano Sycorax como símbolo de resistencia anticolonial y antipatriarcal. A través del análisis de esta figura en *The Tempest* y sus reescrituras, sugiero un cambio desde las teorías que convirtieron a Caliban en un símbolo antiimperialista hacia una nueva consideración de Sycorax para este papel. Analizo las posibilidades que este personaje abre en términos de reescritura, así como la relación entre la figura de la bruja y su comunidad. Finalmente, comparo las ideas que personifica Caliban (incluyendo la violencia sexual) y aquellas representadas por Sycorax (la lucha contra las fuerzas imperialistas y patriarcales). En conclusión, definiendo a Sycorax como un símbolo de resistencia más adecuado que Caliban, ya que la lucha contra la dominación masculina debe ser abordada al mismo nivel que aquella contra la opresión imperialista.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *The Tempest*, Sycorax, *Indigo*, anticolonialismo, anti-patriarcalo.

The practice of rereading and rewriting canonical texts of the English tradition has been a fruitful field of study within postcolonialism since, as Meenakshi Mukherjee (1996) explains, this area of study provides the theory and practice to question notions that people were taught to take for granted —for instance, in

the study of literature— and allows us to reinterpret some of these canonical texts from a new perspective. McLeod (2000) explains how the canonical English classics have been analysed in the colonies of the British Empire taking into account the issues that I summarize in what follows.

On the one hand, the analysis of the “classics” implied the devaluation of the indigenous cultural practices through the imposition of Western ideology, morals and values. This ideological indoctrination was at the basis of the colonial enterprise and worked to replace the local culture with the imperial one, which was perceived as superior and more sophisticated. The teaching of Shakespeare or Keats —and in general of texts dealing with white characters in rainy cities, with specificities that had nothing to do with the circumstances of most colonial subjects— contributed to creating a notion of Western values and imagery as “correct”, in opposition to those of the native culture, which came to be seen as allegedly primitive and unrefined (McLeod, 2000: 163).

On the other hand, academics have been searching for counter-discourses within texts that deal with colonialism from a perspective of power. Edward Said calls this “contrapuntal readings”, which verge on the awareness that a reader of a text may have of the —more or less— hidden stories upon which the visible, dominant discourses in a literary work are built (Said, 1994: 51). While a text may not directly deal with colonial history, a contrapuntal reading allows the reader to go beyond the explicit meanings expressed in the text and to discover the contexts behind the main story.¹ This opens up the possibility of reinterpreting texts by looking for a breach into the power structures that they seem to uphold and which could otherwise lead us to automatically dismiss them. This is what some authors such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak or Susan Meyer have identified in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and its characterization of Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester’s Creole first wife.² Blaming Brontë for her use of a colonized character, when she was writing in an imperial context in which it was considered normal could qualify as what Said has called the “rhetoric of blame” (Said, 1994: 18). That is to say, applying current knowledge and critical thought to texts from a past that did not —or could not, without the analytical tools that we now have— even consider them. A contrapuntal reading of the ambiguous character of Bertha can, therefore, make evident the interstices where a different story can be read, a space that Jean Rhys took up in her 1966 novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

¹ Said exemplifies this type of reading with Austen’s *Mansfield Park*: Although it is never specified in the novel, the reader knows that the source of the Bertram family’s wealth is the West Indian plantations. The reader can therefore see the hidden context of slavery that lies beneath the novel’s main text.

² Meyer has related Bertha’s rebellion with the uprisings in Jamaica against the British colonists in the nineteenth century, signalling her as “the novel’s incarnation of the desire for revenge on the part of the colonized races” (Meyer, 1990: 254).

Such is the case, also, of Shakespeare's 1611 play *The Tempest*, which portrays the indigenous Caliban as the "other" of the European Prospero, who takes control of the island where he lands after being expelled from Naples. This control includes the enslavement of Caliban and Ariel, the former inhabitants of the island. Another character in the play is Sycorax, Caliban's mother, who dies before the arrival of Prospero at the island and is therefore not physically present during the play, though she is very influential in its plot for reasons to be explained throughout this essay. Sycorax cannot therefore make herself known through her actions, as the rest of the characters do, but through the allusions by the other characters (especially Prospero's). Sycorax is given a voice later on, in 1992, in Marina Warner's novel *Indigo*. This novel joins three different moments in time, connected through the Everard family: the seventeenth-century island of Infant Beaté, where Sycorax lives and which is colonized by Kit Everard; the childhood of Miranda, Kit's descendant, during the 1950s; and the 1980s, when Miranda has grown up and must face her own *herstory* and identity.

Both Rhys and Warner enter what McLeod defines as a "productive critical dialogue with literary classics" (McLeod, 2000: 167). They do not take the "easy option of merely dismissing 'classic' texts", but decide instead to critically engage with Brontë's and Shakespeare's works in order to "make new meanings possible" (McLeod 2000: 167). McLeod explains that Rhys departs from the original novel by taking a subaltern subject, Bertha Mason, and giving her a voice and a story of her own. This is also what Warner does with Sycorax; in fact, both characters share some particularities, starting with their indigenous origins and following with their having been silenced in the classic texts, which stigmatize them as mad (Bertha) and/or evil (Sycorax). More importantly, both of them are female characters "othered" by a male character (Mr. Rochester and Prospero, respectively).

Spivak has also engaged with Brontë's and Rhys's works. Her "desire 'to dismantle' the very tradition of Western thought that had provided the justification for European colonialism" (Morton, 2003: 29) lead her to apply deconstruction to the field of English literature and its teaching. Spivak argues in her "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985) that the role of literary works in the construction of England as civilised or progressive —a representation that was used to justify the imperialist project— could not be disregarded. Spivak analyzes *Jane Eyre* in search of the counter-discourses that might be hidden in the novel, explaining how the figure of Bertha and her relationship with the heroine and with Mr. Rochester is one of subalternity with imperialistic roots. However, Spivak also acknowledges the space that this character opens for the possibility of building a new story, which was undertaken by Rhys in her novel. This new narrative takes place in Jamaica, and introduces Antoinette, a young woman who is eventually married to an Englishman, Mr. Rochester, who takes her to England and psychologically harasses her (among other ways, by

changing her name to Bertha). Spivak explains how Rhys thus provides us with another point of view from which to read Brontë's novel, by giving voice to the silent Bertha and accounting for her behaviour: while in *Jane Eyre* Bertha embodied madness, fear and evil, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* she is a cheerful girl who is dislocated from her warm, homely Jamaica to a dark attic in cold, wet England.

The relation between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is similar to the one that exists between *The Tempest* and *Indigo*, and some parallelisms can be established between Bertha and Sycorax, the indigenous female characters in each pair. In Shakespeare's play, Sycorax is constructed as an "other" by Prospero, embodying everything that he is not: female, evil, absent. She is therefore not given a voice of her own to define herself, but is defined by others. Following Spivak (1985), this opens up a creative space that is taken over by Warner with *Indigo*, where Sycorax is allowed to tell her own story. However, this does not work in the same way as it does in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where Antoinette's story is made to fit the space of the subaltern much in the same way as the novel remains subjected to *Jane Eyre*. In fact, this is one of the criticisms usually made against the strategy of rewriting: the text remains always dependent on the classic, and it is in some way restricted by it. The readers of the rewriting are required to know the source text in order to establish the dialogue between the two works. This means that, in a way, the rewriting and the source text could be mirroring the relation of subordination that the rewriting precisely seeks to challenge. In this view, Rhys could be seen as making use of the limited gap that Brontë "allowed" her, filling the narrow breach that *Jane Eyre* opened. By contrast, in Warner's novel the story of Sycorax, Dulé and Ariel does not exactly fill the gap available in *The Tempest*, but rather presents an alternative story with similar characters (Ariel is not a male spirit but a woman, for instance) and similar locations.³ In *Indigo* the absent ones are Prospero, Ferdinand and the rest of the ship's crew, though they are alluded to in the figure of Kit Everard and his men, since they represent the colonizing forces that take the island, enslave Dulé/Caliban and ultimately kill Sycorax. This difference with Rhys's novel can be understood as an attempt to overcome the accusations against rewritings: while *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s power of subversion is undermined for its subordination to and dependence on the original, *Indigo* seems to widen the space opened in *The Tempest*, creating a new narrative which is independent of the play, though clearly in dialogue with it. The fact that the novel puts Prospero and other patriarchal figures

³ For those who are not familiar with Warner's work, it may suffice to point out that Dulé is the child of an enslaved woman who dies when the slave ship she is travelling in sinks, and whose pregnant body reaches the beach of Sycorax's island. Sycorax then delivers the child from his dead mother's womb and takes him as her foster son. He is later made captive by the colonizers and receives a new name, Caliban. Ariel is a girl from the mainland whom Sycorax also takes as an adoptive daughter, and to whom she teaches everything she knows about plants and medicine.

aside contributes to this result, with Warner's novel engaging with the original in a much more autonomous way.

Although *Indigo* constitutes a fruitful piece of rewriting that addresses the double colonization of native women,⁴ it has been highly difficult to find any reference to this work in most of the sources that I have examined for the writing of this article. There are also hardly any scholarly articles that focus on the character of Sycorax.⁵ In his introduction to *Postcolonial Con-texts*, John Thieme deals with the large number of reworkings of *The Tempest* that have been made. He asserts that “understandably, along with Prospero, he [Caliban] has attracted more attention in postcolonial reworkings (...) than any of the play's other characters” (Thieme, 2001: 128), although he also mentions other “con-texts” and studies that have dealt with Miranda and Ariel.⁶ Thieme even acknowledges that the chapters in his book do “little more than scratch the surface of the vast body of postcolonial texts that have in some way engaged with Shakespeare's last play” (Thieme, 2001: 129). Nevertheless, although his book is from 2001 (almost ten years after the publication of *Indigo*), there are no references to this novel, nor to Sycorax. In fact, it is striking not to find references to Warner's work or to Sycorax in general in barely any index of books dealing with postcolonial literary reworkings or even in the ones that specifically deal with *The Tempest*. While most of them make reference to Caliban and Prospero (male characters), followed by Miranda (a white woman), there is the possibility that postcolonial criticism is —consciously or not— leaving aside the only indigenous, female character of the play, and consequently diminishing the issues concerning native women.

Different postcolonial theorists and writers, such as George Lamming or Aimé Césaire, have dealt with the relation between Prospero and Caliban, ex-

⁴ Term first used by Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford in their edited collection *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing* (1986), and defined by John McLeod as the “ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy” (McLeod, 2000:201).

⁵ However, I would like to refer to Irene Lara's article titled “Beyond Caliban's Curses: The Decolonial Feminist Literacy of Sycorax” (2007), where she also advocates for a renewed position of Sycorax in postcolonial studies.

⁶ Miranda appears as the central character and narrator of L. Jagi Lamplighter's trilogy *Prospero's Daughter*, and there have been many studies about her (Laura E. Donaldson [1988] has described the “Miranda Complex”, for instance). In George Lamming's work *The Pleasures of Exile*, which deals in part with the relationship between Prospero and Caliban, Sycorax is mentioned just in relation to her position as Caliban's mother, while Ariel is analysed in comparison to Caliban as a character in its own right. Finally, in the Arden edition of *The Tempest* used in this essay, the only mention made to *Indigo* in the introduction refers only to the creation of a human, female Ariel as a strategy to “reflect the female voice” (Shakespeare, 2014:109).

plaining that it mirrors that of the colonizer and the colonized.⁷ Their important contributions have led to the identification of Caliban with anticolonial resistance. These authors looked for an antiimperialist symbol within the explicit text of the play, but not within the play's whole discourse, where Sycorax could be found. I would argue that this anticolonial stance should be reclaimed for her rather than for Caliban. Moreover, Sycorax also contributes her anti-patriarchal position.

To a large extent, Lamming based the identification of Caliban with the anti-colonial struggles on the subject of language. In Shakespeare's play, Caliban curses Prospero for having taught him his language: "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language" (Shakespeare, 2014: 1.2.364-366). He expresses himself through Prospero's language, which is a mark of his subalternity, since he can only be defined within the master's parameters, without a system of representation of his own. Yet Lamming asserts that Prospero is afraid of Caliban "because he knows that his encounter with Caliban is, largely, his encounter with himself" (Lamming, 1960: 15). Lamming assigns Caliban "a multiplicity of roles [...] demonstrating the extent to which the seemingly passive colonized subject can play all the available roles", in opposition to the "singular identity" that the colonizer provides her or him with (Thieme, 2001: 131). However, I would argue that Sycorax fits better within this reasoning. Firstly, in *The Tempest* Sycorax performs the role of Prospero's antagonist, as Prospero defines himself and his magic in opposition to her witchcraft. Secondly, Sycorax is more suitable as an example of the passivity and multiplicity that Lamming describes and assigns to Caliban. These two notions are embodied in Sycorax's absence: the passivity is represented in the fact that she does not physically appear on stage, and that she is only made reference to from others' perspectives; and the "multiplicity of roles" emerges precisely from this absence: it is in that void that the space within the colonial discourse is opened, and from where new possibilities for the aforementioned counter-discourses emerge. Caliban does have a voice in *The Tempest*, and even if it is confined within the limits of Prospero's language, he has a body and performs actions that help define him. This restricts the multiplicity of new readings, as they, in one way or another, have to correspond to his activities and behaviour in *The Tempest*. In other words, the readings that place him as a symbol of resistance cannot change the fact that he harasses Miranda in the play, or that he foolishly plays tricks with the two drunkards of the ship,

⁷ Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) reinterprets the story of Prospero and Caliban from a postcolonial perspective, taking into account the historical and cultural specificities of the Caribbean. In it, Lamming proposes Caliban as the anticolonial symbolic figure. Césaire's *Une tempête* (1969) adapts *The Tempest* with Prospero being a white master and Caliban a black slave. Here Caliban represents the rebellion against the master (for instance, by rejecting the name that Prospero gives him).

Trinculo and Stephano. Sycorax is the character that is most open to reworking the “singular identity” assigned to her in the play, since she is set in the gap that allows her to move from passivity to empowerment through the multiplicity of readings she sustains.

Brittney Blystone gives a productive account of Sycorax’s absence in *The Tempest* explaining that, by means of this absence and the construction of her character by Prospero, Sycorax is made a symbol that stands against everything that he represents and believes in (Blystone, 2012: 75). Prospero, as the white European man who arrives to take control of the foreign land, represents both the patriarchal and imperialist oppressive forces. Conversely, Sycorax is a female native, probably of Arab origin, —“PROSPERO: Thou hast! Where was she [Sycorax] born? Speak; tell me. ARIEL: Sir, in Algiers” (Shakespeare, 2014: 1.2.260-1.2.261)— standing for women’s power and female leadership.

Prospero’s descriptions of her entail the fear he feels for everything that she represents. Blystone explains that, “attempting to condemn Sycorax as a ‘witch’ and a ‘whore’, Prospero instead created the model of a powerful woman” (Blystone, 2012: 81). Every time that he mentions her, either to criticise her empowered femininity or her sexuality, he is projecting an image of her that can be ultimately seen as a paradigm of matriarchal power and, in Blystone’s words, “a threat because she is a symbol of a different power structure” (Blystone, 2012: 79).⁸

In *Indigo*, Sycorax’s home tree is identified as a “feminine refuge” and “a metonymy for community and nurture” (Bonnici, 2003: 5). When Sycora “delivers” Dulé from his dead mother’s womb —after the shipwreck of a slave ship that echoes the shipwreck in *The Tempest* and at the same time brings the Middle Passage into the narrative— her own community expels her upon accusations of witchcraft. She decides to build a house on a tree and to “dedicate herself to the building of a community” (Bonnici, 2003: 5), constituted by her and her foster daughter Ariel, until the latter leaves after some years to build her own house. They dedicate themselves to the study and use of plants for the purposes of medicine and the making of indigo. This female society is broken up with the arrival of the colonizers at *Enfant Beaté*: when Kit Everard and his men arrive at the island and find Sycorax’s tree, they try to make her descend —that is, surrender to their illegitimate, patriarchal power— by setting fire to her tree and provoking severe burns on her body (and ultimately, her death). This constitutes a powerful

⁸ Prospero describes Sycorax’s delivery of Caliban in the following terms: “she did litter [him] here” (Shakespeare, 2014:1.2.282). In the introduction to the Arden edition of *The Tempest*, Virginia M. Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan remind us that this is a term “usually applied to animal births” (Shakespeare, 2014:191). Also, Prospero calls Caliban a “bastard” (Shakespeare, 2014:5.1.273), probably referring to his illegitimate birth.

image of the position of Sycorax at the intersection between colonialism and patriarchy.

Her injuries, together with Sycorax's knowledge of plants and the rejection that she suffered for acting as a midwife in Dulé's birth, bring to mind the actual ostracism and extermination of millions of women that was initiated in Europe during the Middle Ages. In her book *Caliban and the Witch*, Silvia Federici explains the evolution of the situation of women through the Middle Ages, the rise of capitalism and imperialism and its shift with the emergence of the colonies overseas. She reminds us that the growing capitalist needs of the sixteenth century required new workers, a necessity that was satisfied either through the bringing of slaves from Africa or through the "severest penalties against contraception, abortion and infanticide" (Federici, 2004: 88) that European governments applied to all forms of birth control and non-procreative sexuality. The female body was subjugated as a productive and reproductive machine. This subjugation required the "destruction of the power of women which, in Europe and in America, was achieved through the extermination of the witches" (Federici, 2004: 63). In this way, infanticide and witchcraft—an accusation which was related to "violations of reproductive norms", either by the use of contraceptives or for practices of abortion—were the main reasons for women's executions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Federici, 2004: 89). Federici also points out the relation between these processes and the change from midwives to male doctors that now took control in childbirth. Women were in this way relegated from roles that had been traditionally considered to belong to the feminine sphere: the practices of caring and well-being became professionalized and moved to the hands of men and every practice of this kind that was not institutionalized was considered less valuable or unprofitable and associated to witchcraft and to other notions related to it in the narratives of many cultures: wickedness, fear, obscurity and ugliness. A case in point is this line from *The Tempest* in which Prospero portrays Sycorax emphasising her ugliness and old age: "The foul witch Sycorax, who with age and envy / Was grown into a hoop" (Shakespeare, 2014: 1.2.258-259).⁹ He defines his own magic—"mine art" (Shakespeare, 2014: 1.2.291)—in opposition to her witchcraft—"sorceries terrible / To enter human hearing" (Shakespeare, 2014: 1.2.264-265).

In *Indigo*, Sycorax's murder at the hands of the colonizers ends up turning her into a symbol for the native peoples of *Enfant Beaté*. When she dies, she is buried under her tree with her head "nearest to the surface of the ground" with "her mouth near the earth and the living who walked on it" (Warner, 1992: 204). This relation between Sycorax and her people remains throughout the years, based on the spiritual connotation that the place acquires after her burial: "Her

⁹ Vaughan & Vaughan account for the meaning of this image explaining that "Sycorax is bent over with age" (Shakespeare, 2014:189)

long death has barely begun, however, for she can still hear the prayers of those who [...] push a tack into the bark of the saman tree and make a wish, they whisper their pleas to the spirit inhering in the tree, as they imagine, rightly (though Sycorax has no power, nor ever had, except in dreaming)” (Warner, 1992: 210).

The following generations of slaves, as well as the postcolonial dissidents,¹⁰ either in the shape of the terrorist group led by Abdul Malik or of the nationalist politician Atala Seacole, find in the place a mystic retreat to connect with their past (Malik), present (the slaves) and future (Seacole). Malik, previously known as Jimmy Dunn, had a settlement near the spring where Sycorax used to go to make natural dyes with the indigo. He and his family were expelled to “make way for Xanthe’s spa” (Warner, 1992: 349). Seacole intertwines her own voice with Sycorax’s after the coup carried out by Malik takes place in the Government House, a decisive moment for her, when she decides to face the neocolonialist tourist industry in the island: “Another voice rose and joined in the babble on the air, not addressing Sycorax directly as a suppliant, but vaulting past her, to speak to someone else, to a public audience beyond, of financiers, of bankers, of international loan brokers, of politicians” (Warner, 1992: 372).

Later on, we hear Sycorax’s impressions about Seacole’s determination:

Then Sycorax hears Atala crying out, in a higher voice that comes through like interference on the waves, her pure and hard call of leadership is breaking into pieces and she is praying too, now [...]. Sycorax would have liked to call back, “You must not fail! You will not fail!” But there is earth in her throat. After you, she is thinking, everything that began all those years ago will be accomplished, and the noises of the isle will be still and I—I shall at last come to silence. (Warner, 1992: 376)

In this way, Warner makes Sycorax engage with her people, to whom the author makes reference as “the voices that pass through Sycorax” (Warner, 1992: 376), in a more entangled and firm way than Dulé engages with them in the novel. He organises the rebellion against Kit Everard and his men, but he is finally enslaved and punished: Kit expresses in a letter that “we have sentenced him to be slit in the hamstrings to be an example to those who would follow him and make him a hero to the people” (Warner, 1992: 200). Sycorax, on the contrary, does not get enslaved and becomes the symbol for the coming generations who seek for hope, inspiration and faith to achieve their dreams or to avoid their dreads. They pray under her tree about “their fear of being burned alive on a barbecue like the young slave who ran away last week”, “their terror of having a

¹⁰ “Postcolonial” is understood here strictly as “the period after the independence of the colonies”, but not as “after colonialism”, since the touristic activities that Xanthe and Sy perform there constitute a form of neocolonialism.

foot chopped off for stealing”, or “the death of the master [and] that the new one may not be worse” (Warner, 1992: 211).

Returning to the contrast between Caliban and Sycorax as icons of anticolonial resistance, Sycorax also overcomes the problems that Caliban presents in this symbolization. Melanie Otto has pointed out the importance of Sycorax as a symbol of the colonized and their struggle. Otto analyses Kamau Brathwaite's poem “Nam(e)track”, explaining that in it the figure of Sycorax (embodied by the unnamed enslaved mother of the poem) “acts as a counterforce to Prospero, reminding Caliban of his African origins” (Otto, 2007: 101). Otto argues that Sycorax is a reminder of the fact that Caliban, and colonized subjects in general, did “have a ‘mother tongue’ (a culture) before the arrival of Prospero. It is this alternative culture that gives him the power to resist” (Otto, 2007: 101). However, this view emphasizes Sycorax and everything that she represents only in terms of her being a mother figure, and not as a heroine in her own right. In Brathwaite's poem, Sycorax is important only as a component of Caliban's identity, as the text links this absent mother figure with Caliban's also absent African past (Otto, 2007: 101). Rather, Sycorax should be valued as a symbolic character herself, independent of her status as Caliban's mother. In fact, granting Sycorax with significance only in terms of her motherhood and her analogy with Africa can imply partaking in the use of women in anti-imperial and nationalist fights only as mother and nation figures. This traditional representation of the nation as a female connects “nation” with notions of motherhood and honour,¹¹ and leads to risky identifications of women with passivity (waiting for men to defend them) and also of the nation with the female body (entailing the analogy between colonization and sexual violence against women). This kind of portrayal also centres the anti-colonial and nationalist struggles on men, leaving aside the contributions of women in these fights. In this way, men are identified with the active warriors that defend their *motherland*. As Carol Boyce Davies states, “nationalism thus far seems to exist primarily as a male activity with women distinctly left out or peripheralised in the various national constructs” (Boyce Davies, 2002: 12). As a result, the recognition of women in anti-colonial struggles is almost inexistent, especially comparing them with their male counterparts. An effort should be made to make the female participation in this resistance visible, as well as to acknowledge the importance of including a feminist agenda in the struggles, starting with the urgency of addressing patriarchal and imperialist oppressions at the same level of priority.

¹¹ As in the constructs of the Bharat Mata in India, Mother Svea in Sweden or Marianne in France. The term “fatherland” is much less common, only found in Germanic languages (*Vaterland*), but curiously, like the Latin-rooted “patria”, they do not entail a personification in a male figure. In Hispanic countries, Spain is sometimes referred to as *la madre patria*, a contradiction that exemplifies the importance of the representation of the female nation.

As previously stated, the conversion of Caliban into an icon of native resistance has some controversial aspects. Firstly, his acquisition and use of Prospero's language, which has been the starting point of many authors to denounce the mental colonization —borrowing Fanon's term¹²— of the slave by the master, is a problematic point if one thinks of Audre Lorde's famous statement: "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house".¹³ The resistance that Caliban offers to Prospero by insulting him can be considered quite incongruous if we take into account that these insults are uttered within Prospero's own system of representation. Secondly, and more importantly for the purpose of this essay, Caliban's ill-treatment of Miranda makes him a problematic figure if one is to assign him a role within the anti-patriarchal fight that many native women undertake while participating in the anti-imperial one. Prospero accuses Caliban of violating the honour of Miranda, to which Caliban responds in a mocking way: "PROSPERO: In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate / The honour of my child. CALIBAN: O ho, O ho! Would't had been done; / Thou didst prevent me, I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans" (Shakespeare, 2014: 1.2.348-1.2.352). It is assumed from this quote that Caliban tried to sexually assault Miranda, and it can also be understood that his final joke suggests an attempt to repopulate the island with his hybrid descendants in order to challenge the power of Prospero, thus entailing an unwanted pregnancy and delivery for Miranda.¹⁴ Consequently, Caliban, as an anti-colonial icon, does not appeal to women who also seek to fight masculine dominance and sexual violence. He only addresses European colonialism —understood in the strict sense of the occupation of a land and its population by a foreign power—, leaving behind other forms of domination that affect native women, such as rape —which he mocks— or, in a more general sense, patriarchal oppression, which obviously does not equally affect him and, therefore, he cannot accurately symbolize the resistance against it.

Sycorax, on the other hand, is the real subaltern character in the play, representing the "othered", silent, colonized subject and, at the same time, offering resistance to the colonizers. Despite her absence, she constitutes an important part of the plot of the play as Prospero's antagonist. Even if she died before Prospero arrived at the island, she is made present through nature itself: "His mother was a witch, and one so strong / That could control the moon, make flows and ebbs" (Shakespeare, 2014: 5.1.269-5.1.270). She is also present through the cha-

¹² Frantz Fanon analysed the psychological effects of colonization in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

¹³ From her 1984 essay of the same title.

¹⁴ British colonizers were much more afraid of miscegenation than, for instance, Spaniards in their colonies. Caliban is in this way threatening Prospero with a hybrid offspring that could depose him, while at the same time affecting the honour and purity of his family line.

acters to whom she is related: her son Caliban is what she literally left on the island to challenge Prospero's power. Moreover, Ariel is Prospero's servant only because Sycorax could not unchain the spirit before she died. Consequently, the witch is, in an unintentional way, the element that triggers the actions, since, without Ariel being Prospero's servant, the magician could not have achieved his plans.

In conclusion, making use of the creative tool of the rereading and rewriting of classic texts, which aims to challenge discourses of power within these works, Marina Warner's novel *Indigo* provides another approach to William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, especially focusing on the subaltern character of Sycorax. Her rewriting gives voice to the native female enabling her to verbalize her own story, instead of being defined by others such as Prospero and Caliban. In terms of the rewriting strategy, there is an important point to be made about *Indigo* and the dilemma of the rewriting being too dependent on —and therefore subordinated to— the classic source text. Contrary to Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Indigo* widens the space that *The Tempest* provided, engaging in a more autonomous dialogue with Shakespeare's play. While *Wide Sargasso Sea* strictly fits in the gap left by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*, *Indigo* provides a more independent narrative starting off from the absent Sycorax of *The Tempest*.

In Warner's novel, Sycorax represents, on the one hand, the figure of the witch, which, as Federici explains, has been used as a justification for female extermination since the Middle Ages. This figure is eventually subverted in the novel, with Sycorax making use of her knowledge of plants and human health to establish a community for the native peoples of the island to go to in search of advice and well-being. This connection between Sycorax and her people continues once she is dead —killed by the colonizers that arrive at the island: her tree (and former home) becomes a spiritual space around which the colonized subjects and postcolonial fighters after her become tightly intertwined with her voice. While she is alive, the house in the tree turns into a symbol of female independence and community, built by Sycorax and inhabited by her and her daughter Ariel. When the colonizers arrive, the tree becomes a powerful image of colonization which literally destroys it together with everything that it stands for (female empowerment and sorority). After Sycorax's death and her burial under the tree, this spot becomes yet another place for the gathering and the sharing of common experiences and feelings for the successive generations of slaves and rebels throughout the centuries. She is in this way constructed as a symbol of defiance and resistance, a role that had formerly been assigned to Caliban by some postcolonial authors. Consequently, and taking into account the limitations that this latter character presents with regard to the anti-patriarchal struggle that native women experience as inseparable from the anti-colonial one, I vindicate the value of Sycorax as the authentic symbol for resistance, since she embodies

both the fight against patriarchal and colonial oppressions that are tightly intertwined in the experiences of native women.

Colonialism means the illegitimate occupation of a land, carried out by a foreign force over its rightful inhabitants, in order to make use of their goods and resources for the colonizers' own benefit. If capitalism understands women's bodies as property that produces both work and —perhaps more importantly—workforce, patriarchy is essentially another form of colonialism, which invades women's bodies in different ways, both at a physical and at a psychological level, in order to keep control over the generation of new workers. This is clearly exemplified by the regular rape of female slaves by the masters of the nineteenth century plantations in order to, on the one hand, ensure the production of more slaves and, on the other, to impose male, white power over the native women's bodies, objectified as an instrument for the master's convenience. Ultimately, colonialism and patriarchy are not only two highly intertwined forms of domination, but rather two sides of the same oppressive coin. This should not be forgotten when dealing with an allegedly anti-colonial symbol like Caliban, and wider perspectives should be considered if a more accurate and stable symbol, like Sycorax, is to be established.

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