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Understanding Indigeneity in West Indian Culture in17th Century Barbados: A Reading of Maryse Conde's *I*, *Tituba*, *the Black Witch of Salem*

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According to Wikipedia internet source,peoples in independent countries are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions. As per Dominic O'Sullivan "Indigenous self-determination, through differentiated citizenship, is as much the product of global developments in extra-state political and mic relationships as it is the product of a group's place within the nation state." This suggests that indigenous self-determination is a result of both global and local factors.The Guadeloupean author, Maryse Conde, awardee of the French Grand Prix for Women's Literature in 1986 for her work *Moi, Tituba sorcière…Noire de Salem*,originally written in French and translated by Richard Philcox, *I, Tituba, the Black Witch of Salem*showcases the values of indigenous learning that Tituba, the protagonist of the novel imbibes from Man Yaya, a Nago tribal woman. She brings to the forethe West Indian tribal life and their beliefs regarding natural cure and healing as well as their knowledge of occult art.But Tituba will encounter severe challenges with her practices in the puritanical New England and will be imprisoned on charges of Witchcraft for more than a decade.Thus, the seventeenth-century Barbados becomes a battle ground confronting the harsh realities of the slave trade and the cold customs of Puritanical Christian Church. The

excitement of the reader doubles when s/he realizes that the female protagonist in Conde's fiction is a historical entity too. She is the only black victim of the "Salem witch trials".Earlier, NathanielHawthorne also took recourse to the same document to write the novel *The ScarletLetter* while Arthur Miller, drawing from the same, *wroteThe Crucible.* But Maryse Condé adds a new dimension to her novel by bringing to life the pain, humiliation, sexism, racism and torture of slave life. Written in the first person, she engaged Tituba in constant conversation giving the minutest details of the lives of her fellow enslaved men and women.

The lesser West Indies, due to its history of colonization by Spain. Portugal and Britain before 17th century, had no French traces at all. But in the 1640s sugarcane cultivation started and this explains the birth of Francophonie there. In 1644 the slave trade first brought workers for the sugar, coffee, and other plantations that the colonists established, and slavery became institutionalized. The black population of the West Indies were stripped of most of their cultural heritage and dumped into a new world. Faced with a new pattern of life and a different language, the blacks with their struggle to survive, were forced to develop a new way of life and even a language (Creole) to meet their needs. Herman F. Bostick points out the difference between African Literature and Caribbean literature by underscoring the multi-layered West Indian culture which is the confluence of African**,** Indian and Chinesecultures**"**Like the Afro- American, the West-Indian is a product of the American Continent with a history, literature and culture uniquely his own" (Bostick). This brings to mind also the notable author and French philosopher, Édouard Glissant's famous concept of "Antillanité" in the 1980s, a literary and political movement that stresses the creation of a specific West Indian identity as against the "Negritude" literary theory that boasts of the uniqueness of the African essence. Hence, the Caribbean literature of French expression deserves to be recognized and given its own space. It should be studied based on its own literary and cultural worth. It is in this background that we need to understand Maryse Conde's aforesaid novel. Alienation is at the heart of the story

and Maryse Conde depicted this boldly with Tituba being uprooted from her own soil, culture and language when she had to leave Barbados, her native city, for Salem and she would long to return to Barbados.

"What was this world [. . .]? which forced me to live among people who did not share my language,who did not share my religion, in an ungraceful and unfriendly country." (82)

"I (Tituba) witnessed scenes of brutality and torture. Men came back bleeding in the chest and back covered with scarlet welts, one of them died before my eyes while vomiting." (18-19)

Alienation of the slaves from their own soil,their loss of identity, total objectification in the hands of the colonial masters, worst even was being a woman in this violent hopeless milieu. So, Tituba,who as per the Salem trial documents which corroborate her status, was imprisoned and acquitted but after that point her knowhow is not known. In contrast to this account, Tituba was made to reborn in Maryse Conde's creation as a strong black mulatto (child born out of the union of a Black and a White), result of a violent union: her mother Abena was raped by a White sailor onboard of a slave ship heading towards Barbados, an eastern island in the lesser Antilles.Abena was then bought at a high price by Darnell Davis to keep company his sick wife, Jennifer. But her pregnancy stood in the way of her camaraderie with Jennifer. A slave woman was thought to be useless once pregnant. So, Abena was now given away by Darnell to another slave, Yao, whom he bought along with her. Fortunately, this turn of event proved to be happy for Abena and her daughter Tituba. Love, empathy, and warmth that hitherto was missing in their lives will be showered upon them by Yao. But soon, Abena will be hanged in her bid to escape from a second rape by Darnell Davis, whom she stabbed.In utter grief,Yao will put an end to his life, and Tituba will be orphaned at the tender age of six.

Soon after, Tituba will be adopted by Man Yaya, an old lady having supernatural powers. The latter will pass on her knowledge of the art of traditional healing, the language of nature, and occult art to Tituba. On her death, Tituba will isolate herself from human surrounding, build her

mud hut on the mountain top, cultivate a kitchen garden, and raise hens, a cow and a pig for her self-sustenance. She was a free marron, a freed slave as her master Darnel left for England and his successor did not take custody of slaves. She will enjoy her independence but soon she will fall in love with John Indian.Tituba decides to follow John Indian to Bridgetown, shunning her freedom to become a slave. She will now fall a victimof the crudest racial discrimination in the hands of the new mistress, Suzanne Endicott. She will be subject to extreme humiliation; Suzanne and her lady friends will treat her like a beast as if she was not a human being having no human feelings or values.

"What amazed and revolted me was not so much the words they said, but the way they did it. It seemed as if I wasn't there, standing at the threshold of the room . . . she erased me from the human map. I was a non-being. An invisible." (46)

She will be forced to recite the Christian prayers which she could not accept from heart, as being initiated to paganism by her godmother, ManYaya. Susanna forces Tituba to clean for hours on end; she also forcibly tries to convert Tituba to Christianity, introducing her to the terrifying concept of Satan.Titubawould react to this ill treatment by becoming vulgar, uglier, repulsive and vindictive to the point that she thought of eradicating Susanna Endicott from the earth. But at the last moment, Man Yaya reappeared before her and diverted her from the misdeed as the 'high knowledge' given by her was to do good only. The couple will be now sold to Samuel Paris by Suzanne and the latter will be the reason for Tituba's trial at Salem for practicing witchcraft. Tituba put to test successfully her knowledge to heal the family of Parris, his wife and the two children but she will receive only condemnation and ill treatment by her master in exchange. The reader feels fascinated realizing that Condé is writing historical fiction as the protagonist Tituba was a real-life character who was tried in the infamous 'Salem trials (1692-1693) in the village of Salem,modernday Massachusetts.Tituba wasaccused along with more than 200 people andher name figured in the list.Tituba was named as accused of practicing witchcraft.

So, Condé is inspired by a real-life character. Coming to the story, we find Suzanne Endicott springs into action to take revenge on Tituba. She sells the couple,Tituba and John Indian to a new master, Reverand Samuel Parris, who embarks for the United States.A sad fate awaits the young woman in Salem, where Reverend Parris has been appointed as the church minister. Tituba is accused of leading the witch craze among the Puritan community and jailed for seventeen months for being a "witch." On the advice of a young woman detained for adultery, Hester (a character borrowed by Maryse Condé from *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne), Tituba, during her interrogation, confesses to being a witch and this confession allows her to escape death. Tituba was acquitted and pardoned. As per Wikipedia, thirty people were found guilty, nineteen of whom were executed by hanging (fourteen women and five men).A majority of people accused and convicted of witchcraft were women (about 78%). The Puritan belief and prevailing New England culture of the time was that women were inherently sinful and more susceptible to damnation than men were.

Known to be Feminist, Maryse Conde borrowed Hester from Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.A conspiracy was hatched by her master, Samuel Parris and Tituba was imprisoned as a witch for having thrown a curse on the children of her master, Samuel Parris. In the prison Hester befriended her and became the feminist preacher to her. Maryse Conde tries to make aware her protagonist regarding female oppression, directly or indirectly, mentally or physically. Hester asks her questions to determine if Tituba is still a slave also in her mentality: "Do you bear the name that a man gave you?" (151). Hester talks of emancipation of the mentality of West Indian women showing that she is limited by the society in which they find themselves whether she is White or Black.

"I (Hester) would like to write but alas! Women don't write! It is only men who overwhelm us with their prose [. . .] (159). [. . .] I would like to write a book where I would expose the model of a society governed, administered by women! We would name our children after ourselves, we would raise them alone [. . .]" (159-160).

Tituba survives the trials and is sold as a slave to a Jewish merchant, Benjamin Cohen. She cares for Benjamin and his nine children but the love between a Jew and a Pagan was not acceptabletothe Puritans and so, they set fire to their house, killing all the children. After this disaster, Benjamin decides to set freeTituba and sends her back to Barbados. She initially stays with a group of maroons (freed slaves), sleeping with their leader, Christophe, who dreams of immortality. She returns to the shack where she had lived with ManYaya and works as a healing herbalist for the enslaved people in the area. The enslaved people bring her a young man, Iphigène, who they thought would die, but Tituba nurses him back to health. He plans a revolt against the plantation owners. The night before the revolt, the couple are arrested. Tituba and Iphigène join the spirit realm, inciting future revolts whenever possible.

Maryse Condé deliberately problematizes the personality of Tituba in her fiction and transforms the rural, simple-minded character to a thinking being, who rebels against atrocities committed on the slaves by the Whites and values the indigenous learning. Unlike a docile female slave of the17th century, Tituba of Condéis intelligent, informed and independent, capable of sustaining herself. She criticizes John Indian as "Black skin, white mask", and denounces him as a blind follower of the White Superiors. Condéidentified her in the Salem trials, gives her a childhood and a youthandput her back to Barbados, her native land by putting an end to her exile. Finally, the author turned herinto a sort of female hero as she would do good to many by using her knowledge.

Witch crafting is one of the major themes to occupy a major place in the Antillean literary discourse, be it in Rene Depestre's "Hadriana dans tous mes reves" or Gisele Pineau's "Chair Piment" to take some examples. Maryse Conde too valorizedthis as a cultural identity and a practice that is beneficial to mankind. In the story, when moved to Salem, United States, Tituba noticed that her lover, John Indian bears a grudge against her and addresses her as 'sorcerer' off and on. This antagonized her. "I noticed in his mouth, the word(sorcerer) tainted with reproach. What do you mean? How? The facility of communicating with the invisible, of keeping a constant space for the invisible, to treat, to heal, is

it not a superior grace likely to inspire respect, admiration and gratitude? Consequently, the witch, if we want to use the word who possesses this grace, should she not be pampered or revered, instead of being feared?" (34).

She became doubtful as the community in Salem was unknown to her and would not understand her. The perpetuation of the myth that the colonized are inferior without trying to understand them and their cultural contribution was a common practice. Below is how the protagonist narrator talks of her knowledge that saved Elizabeth Parris:

I placed my hand on her forehead, paradoxically cold and sweaty. What was she suffering from? I guessed that it was the mind that trained the body as elsewhere [. . .] (66).

I decided to use subterfuge. A maple tree whose foliage was turning red served as cheese maker. Sharp holly leaves and shiny, the Guinea herbs. Of the yellow and scentless flowers, the salapatrius, panacea for all ills of the body and which grow halfway up the hills. My prayers did the rest. In the morning, color returned to her cheeks, mistress Elizabeth Parris. (75-76).

Tituba recounts the emotional and physical torments suffered by her and the like. *Moi, Tituba sorcière… Noire de Salem*by Maryse Condé (1934-), one of the most respected of Guadeloupe's several powerful writers, produced one of the African diaspora's literary classics. The book explores the interwoven psychosocial, racial, and historical effects of the Atlantic slave trade and the sacrificial personal cost of rebellion against it. Above all, Conde reclaims the space for indigenous West Indian beliefs and practices through her novel by empowering her with sagacity, courage and a will to rebel that which the original Tituba was incapable of achieving. She turns her into a female hero and an epic heroine.

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