

The outcasts of the world – Images of the pariahs

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Genealogies and pilgrimage of the *pariah*

“Unknown to all the natives.”

An exotic term on the boats of Portuguese conquerors.

THE INTRODUCTION of the pariah in the Western political culture and vocabulary is marked by paradoxes and ironies. The first - but not the least of all - concerns the term itself, which although originally from India is ... unknown in that country. According to the Hobson-Jobson glossary, an authoritative source of Anglo-Indian words and phrases, at least in its Western sense the term was “unknown to all the natives, except those who learned it from us” (Yule, 1903, p.678).¹ The term coined by the Europeans as a result of the metonymic use of the word *parayer* (plural *parayan*)², drummer, never actually belonged to the Indian vocabulary. Its metaphorical use is understood still today as a colonialist insult that resumes at its own discretion the Brahmanical vision of untouchability.³ The online Dictionary of Indian English includes an automatic warning about the offensive nature of the word,⁴ which has also been either removed from or mitigated in the latest editions of major British dictionaries.

But the pejorative or defamatory senses persist in the use of the English word (*pariah*), the ordinary meaning of which - “outcast”, “rabble”, “abandoned” or “stray” (dog)⁵ has largely prevailed over the critical meanings that designate exclusion, inequality and injustice – which are predominant concepts in France, Germany, the United States and other Western nations. Not that the latter are devoid of colonialism. On the contrary, *pariah* and the different ways in which the word was included in the Western vocabulary are part of the colonial knowledge that accompanies the conquest. The misunderstandings and confusions they entailed are symptomatic of the processes by which Europeans - initially the Portuguese and the Dutch and then the French and the English – came to know the “discovered” populations, their civilizations and their social organization. Going back to the Portuguese settlers, who also coined the first modern names of the African “Other” (cf. Boisvert, 2000), the oldest occurrence I have found, *Pareas*, dates back to 1516 and was used by Duarte Barbosa, a military navigator who served the king of Portugal in India

from 1500 to 1517: “There is another inferior group of pagans called *Pareas*. They do not come in contact with anyone, are considered worse than the devil and shunned by all; just looking at them is enough to be contaminated and excommunicated”.⁶

The first occurrence in the English language recorded in dictionaries dates back to 1613, when the English East India Company began to settle on the Coromandel Coast. Mistaken for the “*non-caste*” or untouchables, the drummers’ caste, which accounted for a quarter of the population of Madras, also provided the majority of domestic workers at the service of Europeans in South-east India (Yule, 1903). The fact that they were in contact with and under the surveillance of Europeans more than any other caste in that region may have contributed to the use of the term to designate all inferior castes, including the non-caste, and to its negative connotations, generalized from the consolidation of the British Empire and the development of their knowledge about Indian society. Like the rest of the information that produced this knowledge, that relating to the *pariah* was part of the Company Orientalism (Ballantine, 2001), i.e., the body of knowledge about the languages, religions and histories of South Asia accumulated by the Orientalists of the East Indian Company from the second half of the eighteenth century (cf. Bayly, 1996). The transformation of the latter into a territorial power led to the access of scholars and, more generally, Europeans, to the Brahmanical culture (Marshall, 1970, and “Introduction”, p.10-2)⁷, which is the source not only of knowledge about Hinduism and the caste system, but also of European perceptions of the inferior castes and the *non-caste*. Pierre Sonnerat, whose *Voyages aux Indes orientales et à la Chine* (1782) contributed substantially to popularize both the term and the reality it encompasses within the public space of the Enlightenment, is a typical example. Sent by the Royal Academy of Sciences to improve knowledge about distant countries, this French naturalist explicitly based his scientific work not only on the knowledge of the languages of India, but also on the effort to represent its “real life” from the point of view of the “*brames* [Brahmins].” To make his observations more authentic, he collaborated with Brahmin scholars, whom he sent to conduct research across the country; the remarkable engravings that illustrate his report were inspired by the company paintings, miniatures made to order for the British by Indian craftsmen, to be adapted to the Orientalist tastes and expectations of European publics (cf. Ly-Tio-Fane, 1976, 1985). In *The Indian Cottage*, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1818, ed., 1792, p.75) describes, with a humor that had lost none of its strength, the conditions under which scholars and academics left their country, like his character, to meet the Brahmins under the auspices of the Company which, “for the honor of the nation and the glory of science,” provided them with a carriage so imposing and majestic that they would have been mistaken for “officials of the East Indies Company.” Not surprisingly, this knowledge is marked by the Brahmanical worldview, which the

hero of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre escapes thanks to a chance encounter with a pariah and their ensuing friendship.

The military and the scholars were not the only ones to convey, in relation to the pariah, the Brahmanical vision of the inferior castes and of the non-caste. The Jesuit missionaries – a prime source of the philosophers of the Enlightenment (Duchet 1971, reed., 1995, p.76-7) - tended to prefer the conversion of the Brahmins over that of the untouchables, although these made up the bulk of their clientele, just like they had already developed the clientele of Islam. The public dishonor imposed by the high castes on the Portuguese who interacted with the lower castes and especially the challenge that the conversion of the Hindus, who personified the acme of spirituality, represented for the evangelizing project of the Jesuits led many of them to approach the Brahmins and adopt their lifestyles. Separating the caste from its religious dimensions, they turned it into an extreme form of class distinction, similar to that which existed in their own societies, and therefore compatible with evangelization. The abbot Dubois, despite having lived for decades among the lower castes – the “subject” of his ethnographic study – believed that the masses of these humble converts were not worth the conversion of a single Brahmin (Mohan, 2004, p.243).⁸ He was convinced that without the “social limits” imposed by the caste system, the “masterpiece of Indian law,” “a society of independent *pariahs* (*sic*) would soon become worse than *the anthropophagic hordes that roam the vast deserts of Africa*” (Dubois, 1985, p.30-1, emphasis mine).

From the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the word “pariah” and the reality it represented - and reestablished - circulated in educated Portuguese, English, French, Dutch and Scandinavian milieus, following the detachments of the military, imperial officials, priests, missionaries and scientists. People talked about *Pareas*, who have “the worst of reputations” and *Piriawes*, who were “obnoxious [...] hated public executioners [...] the vilest, most stinky and disgusting men I’ve ever seen” (Purchas); about a “caste called *Pareyaes* [...] despised by all to such an extent that if another Gentile touched them, he would need to purify himself in the water” (Van de Broecke); about “*Parreas*, the vilest and most unworthy race”, who feed on “mice and rats”, in short, a “despicable, vile and smelly people” (Baldaeus); and finally about *Barrier*, “poor people who eat all kinds of meat and other things that considered impure by others” (Phillips)⁹

Caste: Asian or European despotism?

However, it was only in the late eighteenth century that the word “pariah”, was introduced into European public literary and political spaces. Its emergence was preceded by the introduction into the political vocabulary of the term “caste”.¹⁰ Known in England since 1555, spelled as *cast* (Dumont, 1995, p.37), the term has apparently been used in France since the beginning of the eighteenth century¹¹ and in 1740 it could already be found in the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*. According to Louis Dumont (1995, p.37),

these uses were for a long time characterized by the lack of both a distinction between “caste” and “tribe” and an understanding of the former division of Indian society into four categories. Until the mid-eighteenth century, it was often used in Europe in a metaphorical sense, as synonym with “condition”, “class” or “order,”¹² a meaning that far from being critical or pejorative refers to the social hierarchy seen as a harmonious, or at least natural continuum. If the wisdom of dictionaries is to be trusted, the critical sense of caste as an exclusive group, as in the expression “spirit of caste” was not used in English before 1807 (Dumont, 1995). But in her *Defense of the Rights of Men*, Mary Wollstonecraft (1997, p.87) used it as a criticism back in 1791, by comparing the praise of the privileges advocated by Edmund Burke to the logic of caste of the Brahmins.

In contrast, it was around the mid-eighteenth century that the word began to undergo a semantic metamorphosis in France. In a context where the legitimacy of absolute domination was being challenged, the social organization of India, or what was perceived of it, became the object (and the trope) of a political reflection that has more to do with the social organization in France and Europe than with the hierarchy of Indian castes. When Voltaire, speaking of the four castes of India, says that class inequality comes from the “*primitive inequality of natural talents*,”¹³ he uses the Indian castes to defend a new sociability, whose legitimacy is no longer that of hereditary privileges, but of the legitimate authority of the educated elites. Similarly, when twenty years later the abbot Raynal discussed the hypothesis that the condition of the pariahs would have stemmed from some crime they would have committed, he did not fail to note that this punishment is less barbaric when compared to the fate that his own society reserves for those it defines as criminals. Anyway, soon after the Revolution, when Bernardin de Saint-Pierre was inspired by the travels of Sonnerat and his depiction of the caste system, his report took the necessary liberty to turn the criticism of the castes into a criticism of his own society: his goal, as he himself states in the preamble to *The Indian Cottage*, was to lash out the tyranny of the Catholic Church, as well as any other type of tyranny which, founded in error and prejudice, promotes the hatred, slavery and persecution of Jews and feudal serfdom.¹⁴

There is nothing extraordinary about the instrumentalization of the caste system observed in these uses. The discourse of the extra-European *other* is first and foremost a discourse about *oneself* that at the same time hierarchizes, defines and makes intelligible a European *we*, distinguishing it from and opposing it to *others*. The discovery/invention of the *pariah* is part of an intellectual posture that even in the radical philosophy of the Enlightenment, assumes as established the unilateral power of the European *logos* of naming and defining the other, even when it comes to idealizing him or defending his rights. The glorification of the “savage” does not invalidate this assumption of superiority because, as noted by Michele Duchet (1971, p.19) about Rousseau, “it has no other func-

tion than to denounce the ills suffered by societies founded on inequality, by this radical critique, to prepare their transition to a contract society.” Like Rousseau’s savage or Diderot¹⁵ Amerindian, the pariah of the philosophers participates in unthought-of colonialism that limited - at least until the last quarter of the eighteenth century - the Enlightenment thinking, even when it denounces the barbarism of colonization and slavery. The case of the abbot Raynal, one of the two most important sources of the pariah metaphor, is symptomatic. Published in 1770, his *A History of the two Indies*,¹⁶ the first world history of colonization, starts not from of a critique of colonization, but from the pursuit of the principles on which “we should found it”.¹⁷ In a passage strikingly reminiscent of Locke and his vision of the “discovered” world as a vast wilderness, Raynal also justified colonization and its civilizing virtues:

It is from thence, in a word, that, viewing [*voyant a mes pieds*] those beautiful regions, in which the arts and sciences flourish, and which have been for so long a time obscured by ignorance and barbarism, I have said to myself: Who is it that hath digged these canals? Who is it that hath dried up these plains? Who is it that hath founded these cities? Who is it that hath collected, clothed, and civilized these people? Then have I heard the voice of all the enlightened men among them, who have answered: This is the effect of commerce.

If he lashed out the atrocities endured by the colonized and the “miserable condition of slaves in America,” his concern was to make colonization more just and the situation of the slaves more bearable (Book XI, chap. 23). Ten years later, in the third edition of the book and with the help, it is true, of Diderot, the terms changed (1780): the criticism of colonialism was taken to the extreme, the slaves were treated as subjects of their own emancipation, and the only thing missing was “a chief brave enough to lead them to vengeance and carnage”.¹⁸

It is within this radicalization of the discourse of the Enlightenment that the metaphorization process, which will give the term “caste” a pejorative connotation, is found. It causes a lasting bifurcation in the semantic evolution of the word pariah, from a perspective that we could call “neo-Brahmanical”, because it resumes the view of the upper castes such as they evolved in the nineteenth century, and from another perspective that thematizes the criticism of prejudice and injustice. The first, inherited from colonial history, will make the caste the essence par excellence of an oriental culture that is irreparably hierarchical, immutable and with no common measure with Western civilizations. The second, originated in the Enlightenment and its radical views, will turn the caste into the trope of a criticism of arbitrary authority and exclusion as such. Despite its Orientalist clichés, this trope seeks, under the surface, to compare this type of hierarchy with that of old European regimes.

These divergent developments in the use of the word, its meaning and its metaphorization since the late nineteenth century, are associated with the cir-

cumstances and interaction of different and conflicting imperial and metropolitan histories. using them means neither adhering to the comparative-oriented tradition that postulates two opposing “political cultures”, one “French” and another “Anglo-Saxon”, nor reinforcing the self-complacent ghosts of exception that have been thriving for two centuries on both sides of the Channel. On the contrary, it means avoiding a self-explanatory danger in order to try to understand, in its historical circumstances, the formation not of homogeneous national cultures, but of the political rationales that prevailed in the dominant definition of the word pariah throughout the nineteenth century, shaping its major and minor uses in each language. Springing from social conflicts and precise geopolitical configurations, these rationales clarify, beyond linguistic determinisms, the heterogeneity of uses within the same national context or the same language (for example, in British and American English), but also the ambiguities, overlaps and fluctuations that have enabled the multiple appropriations of this notion.

The loss by France to England in 1763 of virtually its entire Indian empire certainly favored the association of pariah with the criticism of the British Empire in India. Anti-colonialism is always stronger when it comes to the colonies of others. This rivalry also explains, at least in part, the different sensitivities and methods of colonial knowledge production. Linked to the needs of the Empire and its economic and political management, the British production of knowledge about India will be more directly utilitarian, while the French production, which will continue to dominate Indology until the late nineteenth century, will have at more philological and literary interest (Mohan, 2004, p.228 -9). The “English” used ethnography to affirm the impermeability of Indian culture to any change and thus legitimize their civilizing mission in a region where “Oriental despotism” and millions of starving people seem to “impose” on them what Kipling referred to, at the end of nineteenth century, as the “white man’s burden.” For the “French”, India is first of all the land of an ancient civilization fueled by a rich and often ambiguous imaginary of the origins - civilization that a benevolent administration, e.g. the French, could have reestablished by separating a wise, well-thought social organization from the scum deposited therein over time. The translations of this civilization are marked by an “assimilationist” spirit that tends to marginalize or, conversely, approve all that is unique or weird/foreign and therefore difficult to communicate to the Western public. This approach, which is characteristic of the Enlightenment (Figueira, 1991, p. 23- 4, 29-30), is not exclusively French. In the Germany of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries we find the same fascination for Indian literature and civilization. Incidentally, this fascination does not preclude the instrumental and Eurocentric use of and references to Indian religion and philosophy; examples from Goethe or Nietzsche show that these uses are more rhetorical than founded on true knowledge of Indian literature or philosophy (Wilhelm, 1961). All

these orientalisms share a narrowing view of the society and cultures of India: they have in common an almost exclusive attention to Hinduism, a focus on caste at the expense of other historical dimensions of hierarchy (kinship, status, royalty), the tendency to address Hinduism only from the point of view of the Brahmans (Dirks, 1992, p.66) and last but not least the lack of interest or even contempt for Indian Islam. Their difference lies in the appreciation of Indian society which, although perceived through the Brahmanical prism, appears to some in its radical otherness and to others in its relative comparability or proximity to Western societies.

These are, of course, ideal types, heuristic categories that fail to explain the complexity of stances which, moreover, were only truly established by the end of the eighteenth century. For example, the attempt of Sir William Jones, a Supreme Court Judge from 1783 to 1794, to compile Indian laws founded on the laws of Manu¹⁹ implied an Indo-European theory on the affinity between Sanskrit, Greek and Latin that supposed the possibility of cross-cultural comparisons (Majeed, 1990, p.210). But in the 1790s these differences became increasingly more pronounced under the influence, on the one side, of the radicalization of the discourse of the Enlightenment, and on the other of the conservative reaction of the British power – both metropolitan and colonial – to the French Revolution. Fearing the spread of revolutionary ideas in India, but also the geopolitical implications of Napoleon's conquest in Egypt, the colonial administration created, for its elites, the Fort William College of Oriental languages, where a Hindu culture was recreated for the needs of the Empire (ibid., p. 210-1). The concerns about the dangers that the adherence to an "Asian despotism" in the colonies entailed for the freedoms of the metropolis - concerns that Burke expressed eloquently just before the outbreak of the French Revolution²⁰ - were abandoned in favor of a more absolute and militaristic conception of the empire developed throughout the nineteenth century. It will enable reconciling the exercise of a despotic colonial power, supposedly needed to manage this "Asian" population", with the English liberties in the metropolis, so as to make of the English a "free but conquering people".²¹ The production of British knowledge about the laws, practices and customs of India was thus brought down to its "governable dimensions". Breaking with previous historical approaches - which regardless of how Orientalist they may be, kept alive the conflicts that preceded colonization and the traces of a historical evolution of the caste system (cf. Dirks, 1986) - colonial knowledge was underpinned thereafter by a positivist empirical sociology that turned the caste into the essence of a backward but immovable, radically different culture, impervious to any social transformation.

This culturalist discourse (which has marked the Western literature on caste to this day) accompanied and legitimized the creation, by the British administration, of a colonial bureaucracy in which the Brahmans hold privileged positions, thus reinforcing the Brahmanical perceptions and despicable conno-

tations of pariah. As Nicholas Dirks showed in his remarkable critique of a historical construction of the caste system by Western ethnography, the colonial reorganization of the social order in India not only used but greatly reinforced and, in practice, reinvented the Hindu “tradition” of caste it claimed to respect.

By placing the caste in the center of a colonial reorganization, the British administration produced, through a set of administrative, “scientific”, legal and law enforcement practices, a new caste hierarchy that in the early nineteenth century became the organizing principle of the colonial power. In fact, statistical classifications based on caste distinctions, law enforcement, military recruitment, racial and biomedical categorizations of the population according to caste divisions gave, throughout the nineteenth century, new impetus and a new base to the power of the Brahmins, generalized their view of untouchability and reinforced the defamatory connotations of the term *pariah* within the empire. Having acquired a negative meaning as a symbol of oriental despotism, the caste provided, throughout the century, the rationale for the policy that (re) formulated it.

Across the Channel, the same historical context operated in a different direction. In the philosophical discourse of the Enlightenment, the metaphorization process that turned the pariah into a figure of modern Western politics was rapidly radicalized from 1780, adopting a critical view of the caste perceived from the point of view of the ... pariah. Certainly this view is simplistic vis-à-vis the complexity of the caste system, often caricatured for the needs of the anti-absolutist argument. But at the same time the process induced - and strongly established - the requirement for a common measure of justice that belied the radical otherness and the incommensurability of the Indian caste. It ultimately introduced, in the semantic field of the pariah, a negative judgment of the caste that concerned also, and especially, the “civilized” West. Moreover, by adopting the (imagined) perspective of the untouchable rather than that of the Brahmin upper castes, it revealed the affinities between Eastern and Western “despotism”. Thus, while on the one hand the caste was gradually (re)established as the abject but unavoidable element of an unchangeable, immeasurable culture, impervious to history and political action (cf. Dirks, 1992, p.66), on the other, that is, in the discourse of the Enlightenment, the caste, even in its most obnoxious dimension, invited a comparison of the Indian hierarchy with that of the old Western regimes and - later - of modern Western societies.

Montesquieu (1979, p.156), who introduced the pejorative connotation of the word “caste” in France, offers an eloquent example of this dynamic:

A certain honor established by religious prejudices in the Indies makes the various castes hold one another *in horror*. This honor is founded solely on religion; these distinctions by family do not form civil distinctions; there are Indians who would think themselves dishonored by eating with their king. These sorts of distinctions are connected with a certain *aversion* for other

men, very different from those sentiments which *should* naturally arise from difference of rank; which amongst us should comprehend a love for inferiors. (emphasis mine)

Playing, as he usually did, with the “eternal contrast between real things... and the singular, naive or bizarre way in which they are perceived”, (Montesquieu, 1993, p.13), the author of *Persian Letters* suggested at the same time what is close and what is distant in both societies. Close because the principle of caste distinction is reformulated herein in terms of “honor”, and close to the monarchical principle of his own country. Distant because of the “hold one another in horror” associated with this distinction that the philosopher presents as being in opposition to the sentiments that the inferiority of class “should” produce. If his observation reflects a traditionalist and idealized view of the aristocracy, the “astonishment” engendered by the opposition *between them/ between us* announces the unprecedented element that will give the European pariah all its controversial strength: the abjection connected thereafter with the inferiority of class. But the statement “*should* produce” casts a shadow on the true object of astonishment: Is it only the Indian hierarchy that is targeted here, or is this hierarchy also the occasion for establishing new racialized perceptions of class differences, such as those of Boulainvilliers Dubois that the philosopher criticized in the *Spirit of Laws*?²²

The emergence of the word *pariah* in the texts of the Enlightenment radicalized this critical connotation of caste, linking it to a systematic denunciation of arbitrary authority. In the *Encyclopédie*, the words *Paréas*, *Perréas*, *Parias*, as well as *Poulias*, *Poulchis* or *Poulchis* emphasize the inhuman and irrational character of the treatment bestowed to this “class of men” deemed “unworthy of participating in the advantages of humanity”.²³ “This name [*pariah*] designates the idolatrous inhabitants of Hindustan, *a class of men separated from all others*, which is the object of their *horror* and their *contempt*. They are not allowed to live with the others; they live on the outskirts of towns or in the countryside, where they have wells for their use, from which no other Indians draw water. In the cities, the *Paréas* are not even allowed to walk the streets in which the Brahmins live. They are prohibited from entering temples or pagodas, ‘which they would tarnish with their presence’. They earn their living by cultivating the lands of others, building for themselves mud houses ‘and doing the vilest jobs’. They feed on cows, horses and other animals that ‘die naturally’, which is the primary source of aversion to them ...”²⁴

More than any other text from the Age of Enlightenment, however, it is undoubtedly *A Philosophical and Political History of the Commerce and Settlements of the Europeans in the Two Indies* that brings to light, before the Revolution, the fate of the pariahs. From 1770 to 1789, the work of Raynal had, although prohibited, more than fifteen clandestine editions. Catering to the communication of the ideas of the Enlightenment, the keen interest aroused by

the travel narratives and the taste for the exotic facilitated the diffusion of the fate reserved for the untouchables of India. The *impurity* they carried within them as a “birth defect”, the *aversion* to which they were subjected, the “degrading jobs” they held in the social division of labor, the rituals of “separation and purification”, and the “prohibitions regarding commensality” that marked their relationships with the other castes, were all perceived and expressed at the time in terms of “banishment from humanity.”

Besides these tribes, there is a fifth, which is the outcast of all the rest. The members of it are employed in what is called the lowers offices of society. [...]. They are prohibited from entering into the temples and public markets. [...] Such is the degree of horror they excite, that if by chance they were to touch anyone not belonging to their tribe, they would be deprived with impunity of a life reckoned too abject to deserve the protection of the laws. Such is the fate of these unhappy wretches, who are known on the coast of Coromandel by the name of Pariah, even in those places where a foreign dominion has contributed to produce some little change in the ideas of the people.²⁵

Stories and legends of the pariah

*“Il est sur ce rivage une race flétrie
Une race étrangère au sein de sa patrie
sans abri protecteur, sans temple hospitalier
abominable, impie, horrible au peuple entier
les Parias...”*²⁶

(Casimire Delavigne)

Thus, three centuries after the emergence of the word, and when criticism of the arbitrary authority expelled from Europe the hereditary hierarchy and privileges associated with Eastern obscurantism, the notion of “pariah” seemed to suddenly acquire a totally European political relevance and intelligibility. In fact, it was when the concept of *humanity* made its grand entrance as the horizon of the universality of rights, that the figure of the pariah was introduced in the political language of the Revolution to state the perplexity or indignation at the difficulty of fully including in it certain individuals or groups. “Are so many verbiages and citations necessary to prove that a Jew is a man, and that it is unjust to punish him from his birth onward for real or supposed vices that one reproaches in other men with whom he has nothing in common but religious belief?” (Hourwitz, 2001, p.37), wrote Zalkind Hourwitz on the eve of the Revolution. If “according to abstract principles [of the rights of men], it is impossible to explain the exclusion [...] of one half of the human race by the other [...] on what does your constitution rest?” wrote Mary Wollstonecraft to Talleyrand, whose report in 1791 excluded women from public education,²⁷ while in the same period Anacharsis Cloots stressed with rage in his *Petition of the House-*

wives, the persistence of a “proscribed class, an abject class of *Western pariahs*”. Well, this tension inherent in choosing a term taken from the hierarchy of castes to explain a society in which hierarchy becomes illegitimate is precisely what interests us. For therein lies the semantic field that gives the figure of the pariah its “Western” uniqueness, its own historicity and perhaps its perennial nature.

It is under the sign of this tension and of the conflicts underscored therein that words, stories, images and gestures that populate the imaginary of the pariah were invented. An imaginary from which he will draw his strength, his polysemy and his protean ability to enwrap the most diverse forms of subjectivity, to name the most different relations of oppression, inequality and exclusion. Stories we find in the great and average literature, in the specialized press and in the popular press, stories heard and seen in the theater and the opera, discussed and interpreted in the light of experiences, historical contexts and unique individual situations; stories resumed and reiterated in the most varied textual, oral, musical and pictorial forms, in which “the words respeak and the meaning resignifies” (Genette, 1972). Stories that appeal to the imagination - the faculty which, according to Aristotle (1995, 427 b 16-20, p.166), enables us “to represent an object before our eyes, as do those who range things under mnemonic headings and picture them to themselves.” They form a true constellation of images, which linked by a network of analogies enable unexpected approximations between different sources, different times and different versions of the same story. They enable unfolding the hidden correlation “between very distant objects” - the untouchable Indian and the Western pariah, the woman-author, the Jew, the inverted - condensed in the necessarily concise form of the metaphor.

Banishment from humanity. The truth in a cottage

The first of these stories, in chronological order but also from the point of view of its impact, is *The Indian Cottage* (Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, 1818), the philosophical tale that introduced the figure of the pariah to large publics, both specialized and common, European and American. Published in 1791 amidst passionate debates about slavery and the emancipation of “free men of color”, Jews and women, this tale by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre was an immediate success; subsequently published in London, Dublin and Leipzig it was transformed in October 1792 into a one-act opera entitled *le Paria* and staged in the theater on Rue Feydeau in Paris, with music by Gaveau.²⁸ Along with Raynal’s *History of the two Indies*, it was one of the key sources of dissemination of the word “pariah” and one of the most popular readings of the nineteenth century, before switching to children’s literature in the twentieth century. The search for truth by a British scholar in the eighteenth century India is an occasion to oppose, in a mocking and satirical spirit, the Brahmans - and their arrogant claim to the monopoly of knowledge - and a pariah who, excluded from society, maintains enough distance and detachment to have access to wisdom and truth. Inserted in the tradition of the philosophical exoticism inspired by India, *The Indian*

Cottage reverses the direction and hierarchy of the values attached to the caste system. This is quite evident when we compare it to the “Indian” tales of Voltaire and, in particular, to *L’Histoire d’un bon bramin*, in which Bernardin de Saint-Pierre was clearly inspired. As in Voltaire’s parable, here too there is the “objective” point of view of a narrator who ridicules prejudices; as in Voltaire, who confronted the wisdom of his Brahmin with the foolishness of an old, poor, ugly and ignorant Indian woman, *The Cottage* creates an opposition between a Brahmin and a pariah. But while Voltaire’s “bramin” is wise because he is rich (“lacking nothing, he had no need to deceive anyone”), Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s is limited and full of prejudices, at the image of a certain Western clergy he did not refrain from occasionally criticizing. In his tale, wisdom and philosophy are on the side of the *pariah*, whose poverty and marginality are presented as sources of generosity and self-knowledge. The truth, the author seems to retort to Voltaire, is not necessarily the product of education and much less a privilege of the rich. By making it come out of the mouth of a man “who has neither faith nor law,” Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1818, p.109) inflects Voltaire’s perspective according to which “the men more miserable, the more vile, gullible and servile they will be.” Thus, he casts doubt on the monopoly of wisdom that the author of *Candide* attributes to the learned elites. “Taught by misfortune”, his hero learns that the most soothing consolation of all is “that which is found in the resources of his own mind,” reinventing humanity in the solitary meditation on rejection and injustice: “as I could not be an Indian, I made myself a man” (ibid, p.101).

This inversion is decisive, because thereafter the meaning of the pariah is no longer associated with infamy. The target of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre is not only the oppression that weighs on the pariah, but also the association of the Brahmin with wisdom and truth. An association that, in the Enlightenment, showed the superiority of the Brahmin in the eyes of the learned public and that, even today, is at the core of the metaphorical sense of the word *Brahman* in English dictionaries.²⁹ This dimension has not escaped the contemporary men, as indicated by the title the English translator gave its first British edition: *The Indian cottage or A Search After Truth*.³⁰

The immediate success of the book and its numerous translations throughout the nineteenth century (which are the reasons why it is found today in so many libraries in Europe and in America)³¹ are difficult to understand unless situated within the true “pariah revolt in morality”, i.e., the irruption, in the political scene, of those who Burke had qualified, a few months before, as the “swine crowd.” Published amidst the full uproar over the new concept of “human rights”, the *Cottage* incarnated and popularized over successive generations a reversal of the hierarchy of values, ensuring to the inferior status of this “crowd of several heads” a cognitive privilege and even a moral and political superiority. This dimension is constitutive of the meaning of the pariah, as emphasized by

the involuntary tribute from the writers of the classic Hobson-Jobson dictionary to this “aberrant although popular fable,” to which they refer the current use of *pariah* and the “*displaced romantic halo* [...] which, to some extent, is always *associated with this word*”³²

A foreign race in its homeland

*“Je foule un sol fatal à mes pas interdits
Je suis un fugitif, un profane, un maudit
Je suis un Paria!”*

(Casimir Delavigne)

Indeed, this romantic halo that will accompany the image of the pariah in all his pilgrimages “reaches its apogee in Casimir Delavigne’s play” (Yule, 1903), *Le Paria*. The theater, which Madame de Staël qualified as “a Republican genre par excellence”, was considered a privileged channel for educating people and acquiring political eloquence. By attracting audiences from all walks of life, it promoted the image of the pariah in the center of public spaces of commoners then in full development, and at a time when the euphoria of human rights gave way to the disenchantment of those who realized that the inclusion of this “universal” humanity involved “admission tickets” (*sic*), such as baptism, to use Heine’s famous phrase. Two plays, one French and another German, competed to popularize the word and establish its metaphorical sense in the early 1820s.³³

Delavigne’s tragedy is the second remarkable story in the genealogy of the pariah. Staged on December 1st, 1821 at the Theatre de l’ Odéon in Paris, it speaks of the misfortune of Idamore, an untouchable, deprived as such of the right to serve his country, but who, thanks to his courage, succeeds in freeing Benares from enemy occupation. He becomes the leader of the warrior caste, but fails to escape his fate: his origins are discovered and he is sentenced to death by those he had saved. The play is a denunciation of the degradation of human rights to which certain groups are condemned, and was perceived as such by the public at the time. The story obviously happens in India, but the allusions to Europe are numerous and transparent. Thus, Alvar, a former prisoner and Idamore’s confidant, is an excommunicated Portuguese Christian who flees the “rage” of the Inquisition, whose anathema, he tells us, “dried on my forehead the pure water of baptism.” Old or new Christian? We will never know. But the assumption of a reference to the condition of the Jews should not be ruled out in view of the repeated allusions to “an alien race in its homeland”, and especially the dramatic tension of a character undermined by the need to hide his affiliation to a race declared infamous and by the bitter taste of a success that implies rejecting his fellow men. Anyway, Alvar’s story – a tale within the tale as we often see in the stories about pariahs - outlines, in about twenty verses, the traces of a tumultuous and by no means glorious European legacy. He narrates the “quest for conquest” instilled in Europe by Vasco da Gama, which to the

fugitive meant the opportunity to escape his pursuers and hide on the bottom of a boat that was leaving to “plunder” India; then he talks about his deserved arrest (“I brought slavery and was put in irons!”) and his release by the military chief of the natives, who was none other than the pariah Idamore:

*L'erreur t'a repoussé du milieu des chrétiens
L'homme est partout le même et tes maux sont les miens. (Delavigne, n.d., p.57)*

Written by one of the first representatives of French Byronism (Estève, 1907, p.116), this lyrical appeal to the solidarity of all the persecuted bothered some critics. A certain Duviquet says that, “if it is commendable to fight for an outcast and vilified class, it is unjust to entirely sacrifice the upper classes on its behalf”.³⁴ Like Casimir Delavigne’s earlier plays, *The Pariah* achieves immediate success. It is ranked by Stendhal (1823, p.9) among the most popular plays of the time. Almost immediately translated into several languages it provides the content for a considerable number of namesake operas and plays, as well as for lyrical poetry and dances staged in Europe throughout the century. Delavigne’s tragedy will also leave its mark in the romantic works that succeeded it, starting with the manifesto of romanticism, *Hernani*³⁵ (Evans, 1932), this other “outcast” whose story is traversed from end to end by the vocabulary, the tropes and the literary conventions of *The Pariah*.

All... all equal!

*“And all must love the human form,
In heathen, Turk or Jew.”*

(William Blake)

If in Casimir Delavigne’s *The Pariah* the idea of “alien in its homeland” had been already thematized, it was Michael Beer’s play and its impact that explicitly and permanently associated the word to the condition of the Jews after the emancipation. This second tragedy, which turns the pariah into a real metaphor, comes from Germany. The interest in India, present since the seventeenth century, had marked the German Enlightenment, owing mainly to the writings of Herder, the Schlegel brothers and Humboldt. As ironically noted by Heine,

The Portuguese, the Dutch and the English have been dragging home the treasures of India in their big ships. Yet the spiritual treasures of India shall not escape us. Schlegel, Bopp, Humboldt, Frank are our present East India travelers. [The universities of] Bonn and Munich will make good trading stations! (Wilhelm, 1961, p.397)

India is a source of poetic inspiration, as indicated by the poems of Heine himself (see *Lotus flower*) and Goethe, the latter having contributed considerably to popularizing the theme of the pariah. Inspired by a legend mentioned in

Sonnerat's *Voyages*, in 1797 Goethe wrote *Der Gott und die Bajadere*, a poem published in French in 1821.³⁶ Transformed into an opera and later set to music by Schubert,³⁷ it remained very popular throughout the nineteenth century. In addition, his poem *Pariah* came out a year after the publication of Michael Beer's tragedy. It tells the tale of a Brahmin's wife, beheaded by her husband for being unfaithful in thought. Her son tries to revive her, but in the rush he attaches his mother's head to the body of an executed criminal woman, and from this error emerges a new graceful creature that is the goddess protector of all pariahs. The error is timely authorized by Brahma, to whom the last part of the poem *The Prayer of the Pariah* is dedicated. Resumed by Thomas Mann (1997), this legend gave rise to a philosophical reflection on the conflict between body and soul in the novel *The Changed Heads*, which in turn gave rise to theater plays and dance performances. The latest was staged in April 2007 by the Kanopy Danse Company, in Madison (United States).

Michael Beer's play *Der Pariah* presents a much darker and tormented version of the pariah than Goethe's. It is marked by a period of strong upwelling anti-Semitism in Germany following Napoleon's departure, who had suspended the special taxation levied on Jews and granted them civil equality. The restoration of the old powers interrupts the emancipation process: in 1819 *pogroms* occur in several German cities; Jewish students, including Heine, are expelled from the association of German students, and the repeal by Prussia of an 1812 regulation in favor of the Jews excludes them from public office. It is in this context that Beer's play is staged on December 22, 1823 in Berlin, with a true ovation from the audience and public accolades from Goethe. The one-act tragedy describes in vivid colors the inner struggle of a noble nature against the demoralizing effects of a life gnawed by the degrading prejudices that weigh on his "race." The author, Michael Beer, a 23 year-old talented poet and playwright, comes from a Jewish family from the *Aufklärung* (the Enlightenment): his mother owned one of the most important literary salons in Berlin, and his brothers were the composer Jakob Meyerbeer and the astronomer Wilhelm Beer (Hertz, 1999). From the beginning the play was received as a reflection on the fate of the Jews who, despite their adherence to the emancipation project, find themselves facing systematic discrimination and are still regarded as aliens in their own country." Exiled from the ordinary paths of life, kicked off the chain that drags the world," Gadhi, Beer's untouchable hero, has no other consolation than the love of his wife, Maja, an Indian woman from the caste of warriors he had saved from death. But his life is a "long whining" amidst a people who deny his humanity. And as everyone knows, in the era of the nation-state humanity depends largely on citizenship, whose ultimate test is the right to die for one's country: "they pat their dogs and their horses and repel us with disgust, as if nature had given us only the mask of the human figure. Put me at your level and you shall see whether I resemble you. Give me a life and I shall pay it back with interest..."

Found by Maja's brother, who wants to kill the pariah, the two lovers refuse to part and commit suicide together. In the moment of their death, and thanks to the love of the woman who turned "the cottage of a beggar into paradise on earth", Gadhi reconciles with life. But his last words are: "... all, all ... equal"³⁸

Staged in Paris in 1826, with the same success as in Berlin, this play is one of the most important sources of diffusion of the metaphorical sense of the word in Germany and of its lasting association with the situation of the Jews after the emancipation. Beer's *The Pariah* is also the reference of an entire theoretical tradition - starting with Max Weber and his concept of "pariah people"³⁹ - that will turn the figure of the pariah into the conceptual framework of a sociological and philosophical reflection.

Mary, or the divinity of the human face

"All men are alike (tho'infinitely various)."

(William Blake)

*"See Wollstonecraft, whom no decorum checks,
arise, the intrepid champion of her sex;
O'er humbled man assert the sovereign claim,
and slight the timid blush of virgin fame."*

(Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females*)

Giving its untouchable some of the traits of the noble savage, the philosophical tale of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre inaugurated a literary *topos* which gave the pariah the poetic aura with which romanticism will surround the lone individual, the individual crushed by the social norms that either level or repress his deepest impulses. The "fate" of the pariah attracted composers in search of dramatic works that invited imagination and passion, and offered a privileged field for exploring the new romantic aesthetic, as we see it enunciated in the late eighteenth century, in Germaine de Staël:

I endlessly reread some pages of a book entitled *The Indian Cottage*. I know nothing deeper in sensitive morality than the picture of the situation of the *pariah*, this man from a cursed race, abandoned by the entire universe [...] causing his fellows horror without having deserved it for any fault; finally, *the outcast of the world* ... This is how the sensitive man lives on this earth; he, too, belongs to a proscribed race, his language is not heard, his feelings isolate him, his desires are never fulfilled, and that which surrounds him or strays from him approaches only to wound him.⁴⁰

Romanticism gave a strong impetus to the topic of fascination and outrage, which can be seen as coextensive to it, since they fed each other during the nineteenth century. Embodying the subjectivity of the "sensitive man", the pariah speaks to the interiority of the viewer or reader, while paving the way to

the relations between literature and society and politics. With that, he becomes the symbol of the smothered individual, unadjusted (or refractory) to standards, of the terrible fate and loneliness that accompanied this individual in the post-revolutionary period on the two sides of the Channel. As William Blake stated at the end of his life, “Since the French Revolution Englishmen are all intermeasurable one by another, certainly a happy state of agreement to which I for one do not agree” (apud Makdisi, 2003 p.313).

Blake was one of the first to give a powerful voice to this loneliness of dissent, in the verses he sent to a friend when, charged with sedition for his revolutionary convictions, he is molested by conformist crowds.

*O why was I born with a different Face?
Why was I not born like the rest of my race?
When I look each one starts! When I speak I offend
Then, I'm silent & passive & lose every Friend.*⁴¹

Two years later, in his poem *Mary*, he repeats the same terms to denounce the posthumous lynching of Mary Wollstonecraft, after the publication of her unfinished novel *Maria, or the Wrongs of Women*, and of the biography published by her husband, William Godwin (1798). The extra-marital love of his heroine Mary shocked conventional critique and the liberals interested in the conformism of the High Anglican Church [the Anglo-Catholics]; but it was Wollstonecraft's biography published in 1798, a year after her death, that sparked the scandal. Godwin describes, with respect and honesty, his wife's life, without omitting her love for the married painter Fuselli, her connection with Gilbert Imlay, and the death of Fanny, her illegitimate daughter. The book was construed as an “open defense of adultery”, in the notorious words of Hannah More. Certainly the moment was not well chosen, that period of witch hunt, pursuit of Republican activists and religious dissidents, suppression of freedoms, censorship and fear of a social revolution. In fact, a vicious campaign of public slander, whereby the Anti-Jacobin press, throwing Wollstonecraft the coarse fury of the mob uses the “disorder” and independence of her personal life to de-legitimize as immoral, anti-national and anti-natural the ideas expressed in her two *Defenses* of the rights of men and of the rights of women. On both sides of the Atlantic, where she became known as the spokesperson of the English radicals, Wollstonecraft was the prototype of these new monsters, these political women authors who, as worthy bloodthirsty descendants of Lady Macbeth, “un'sexed themselves”⁴²: they instruct, or confuse, us (and themselves), in the labyrinth of politics, or turn us wild with Gallic frenzy”⁴³, wrote Thomas Mathias, in Philadelphia. In the direct line of Burke and his “furies from hell”, Richard Polwhele's satirical pamphlet (1798) against Wollstonecraft, *The Unsex'd Females*, which dominated that campaign, describes the counterrevolutionary language as a platitude that will have a bright future: in a “modern” and secularized version, the ghost of non-distinction of the sexes, of the leveling of society

and of the topsy-turvy world is associated with the entire project of social transformation. “Hyena in skirts”; “philosophizing serpent”; “revolutionary arsonist”; “Jacobin whore”: the very woman who was the first to defend the rights of men, *in the plural*, in the name of “the human face divine” was now a denatured monster who challenged a strict and repressive sexual norm, raised to the level of “law of Nature”. It is this climate of moral lynching that Blake expresses powerfully in the form of children’s songs, using sometimes the narrator’s voice and others the fictitious *alter ego* of the stigmatized feminist:

*Some said she was proud, some called her a whore
And some when she passed by, shut the door.*

He also talks about the desertion of those who, having shared the dream of “equal liberty of each individual,” now turned away offended, or those who, for fear of associating their ideas to sexual promiscuity and immorality, dared not, for conformism, to defend her memory and thus kept an embarrassing silence.

*And Mary arose among Friends to be free
But no Friend from henceforward, thou Mary, shalt see.*

*With Faces of scorn and with Eyes of Disdain
Like foul Friends inhabiting Mary’s mild Brain
She remembers no Face like the Human Divine
all Faces have Envy, sweet Mary, but thine.*

An attitude that Flora Tristan (1981) will be shocked to see on the occasion of her *Promenades à Londres* [*Promenades in London*], in the reactions of “terror” caused, half a century later, by the mere mention of *Defense of the rights of women*, even among the “so-called progressive” women. The French socialist, who identifies herself for more than one reason with her British predecessor, comments bitterly on the efficiency of the “calumny” that “passes its hates on from generation to generation, does not respect the tomb, and even the glory does not check it” (*ibid.*, p.54-5).

“Why was I not born a man?”, asked the character Mary in Wollstonecraft’s novel. It is the question of a young woman who, committed by her husband to a hospice, falls in love with another man and claims this adultery before the court that is trying her. Unable to conform to the norms of femininity and to the double bind to which she is submitted, Mary becomes an outcast, a pariah: “O, why was I born with a different face? / Why was I not born like this envious race?” (Blake, 1979, p.160), writes the poet in behalf of that who is no longer present to defend herself.

*O, why was I born with a different Face?
Why was I not born like this Envious race?* (*ibidem*, v.II, p.733)

Unlike men, with whom she seems to “compete for sovereignty” as a

political female writer⁴⁴, impervious, because of her sexual freedom and independence, to both the standard of femininity and the lifestyles of the women of her time, standing opposite to the new consensus of British respectability engendered by the fear, after 1789, of the “mad hope of a topsy-turvy world,” Mary Wollstonecraft actually does accumulate *different faces*. From this point of view, she is a perfect candidate to the condition of pariah that two years later Madame de Staël (1959 v.II, p.333) will ascribe to the existence of this hybrid that is the publicly recognized woman, not to say the public woman:

Opinion seems to exempt men from all those attentions usually paid to the sex in all that concerns an individual whose superior abilities are generally allowed; towards such, men may be ungrateful, deceitful and ill designing, without being called to account. Is she not *an extraordinary woman*? Everything is comprised in these words. She is left to the strength of her own mind, to struggle as she can with her afflictions. The interest usually inspired by females, the power which is the safeguard of men, all fail her at once: she drags on her isolated existence like the pariahs of India, amongst all those distinct *classes into none of which she can ever be admitted*, and who consider her as fit only to live by herself, as an object of curiosity, perhaps of envy, although, in fact, deserving of the utmost commiseration. (emphasis mine)

A skin disease: a parrot, two little monkeys and a little captive girl

“I lost a red-headed parrot that I was giving to Elzéar, two little monkeys that I had reserved for Mr. de Poix ... I am left with a wig for the Queen, a horse for the Marshal de Castries, a little captive girl for Mr. Beauvau, a guinea hen for the Duke of Laon, an ostrich for Mr. Nivernois ... “

(Stanislas Jean, Knight of Boufflers, governor of Senegal from 1785 to 1787)

“From the darkest side of my soul, through the shaded area comes this desire to, suddenly, be white.”

(Frantz Fanon)

In the reorganization of the moral, religious, political and philosophical order of the post-revolutionary period in France, where an aggressive normativity seemed to crush a recently claimed subjectivity, the romantic motif of an obstacle that stood between the desire of the soul and the object of that desire took the form, in the artistic and political imaginary of the *pariah*, of an “impediment” that separated the individual from the rest of humanity and gave rise, according to Sainte-Beuve, to the exploration of “the sufferings of the heart and self-esteem that such a situation causes[d] to emerge”.⁴⁴ More than a “slave of circumstances” in general, as the romantic hero is often referred to, the pariah

is connected to the circumstances of a particular sociopolitical configuration that builds difference as a diversion and a curse from birth. He mobilizes the theme of the inner exile of a “dis-placed”, out of place humanity in a world that mistakes the unity of mankind for its identity. Although it rises against social injustice, its strength as a *locus romanticus* lies less in the accurate analysis of this or that social relationship than in the exploration of the damage that such an injustice brings to a concrete individual. And it is through this bias, through the deep examination and thematization of this damage, that the figure of the pariah also acquires a precious cognitive potential for the analysis of a social relationship, one of domination, in its daily and structural materiality.

The literary writings of Claire de Duras (1979) provide a fascinating example of exploitation of this inner damage in three different forms, linked to the articulation of gender with the barriers of ‘race’, social position (Duras, 1825) and sexuality (Duras, 1971).

It is appropriate here to dwell on the first of these novels, *Ourika*, because it is also the first work to explore, with a level of penetration and subtlety of a disconcerting actuality, this moral damage that gnaws and destroys the subjectivity of the pariah, while giving visibility to this still unspeakable, unnamed devastating relationship, which is racism. *Ourika* tells the story of a Senegalese girl rescued from slavery and educated as an aristocrat, who realizes, at the age of fifteen, that her love for the grandson of her “benefactor” is “heinous”. The charming, cultured and flattered young lady is thus brutally transformed into a “black, dependent, despised being [...] rejected by a world in which [she] *was not made to be accepted*” (Duras, 1979, p.36-7).

The novel is inspired by the true story of a Senegalese girl of the same name, bought by the governor of Senegal, the Knight of Boufflers, and offered as a gift, in the late 1780s, to his aunt, wife of the Marshall of Beauvau who, like Madame Duras, owned a literary salon in Paris. The Marshal of Beauvau was a member of the Society of Friends of the Black founded in 1788, just like the governor of Senegal who, shortly before his engagement in the abolitionist movement, included the “little captive girl” among the exotic gifts he had purchased for his friends: a parrot, two monkeys, a wig and a guinea hen (apud Little, 1993, p.39). But Mrs. Bouveau seems to have become very fond of little Ourika, whom she would have raised with her own children, as suggested by these lines she wrote when the girl died victim of a disease: “the death of my dear Ourika was as sweet as her life; she did not know its danger, and she was given the most tender and affectionate care until her last moments, by those who are connected to me and cry for her with me” (ibid, p.40).

Claire de Duras, who was part of that same liberal nobility and whose wealth, having come from Martinique, certainly owed much to the slave system, becomes entangled in this ambiguity, rather than simplifying it or pushing it away, and reflects on the complexity and invisibility of racism as a system. Skirting the clichés that since Aphra Behn’s *Oromoko*,⁴⁵ had been introduced in the anti-slavery litera-

ture and made of the *romantic black* an out-of-the-ordinary character, she refuses to give Ourika noble or royal blood, so as to oppose her exceptional superiority⁴⁶ to her ignorant and primitive fellow creatures who represent the secondary characters of nineteenth century black literature; she avoids making her a model of selflessness that cares for the welfare of the “benefactors” or, conversely, a treacherous and violent being seeking revenge against the “white.” Above all, she saves her from the shame of the stereotype of the black woman of vulgar and uncontrollable sexuality, common in the literary imaginary of her contemporaries⁴⁷, to turn this first black protagonist in Francophone literature into one of the most unique and captivating problematic characters of the nineteenth century. Instead of the “romantic black women” whose atypical superiority risked confirming indirectly the rule of the inferiority of the black mass, Ourika is first and foremost a “common” girl of her caste - the enlightened aristocracy that preceded the Revolution - except for the color of her skin which, she says, “nothing indicated [to me] that it was a disadvantage” (Duras, 1979, p.36). She only becomes aware of her “difference” when she learns from Mrs. Beauvau that it is actually an absolute barrier that “would isolate her within society”, leading to “the loss of the prestige [she] had enjoyed hitherto” (ibid, p.37). It is the way she is looked at that distinguishes her from the others and shows her the inconsistency of her mere existence in that refined world. An existence that requires an explanation at all times (“it was necessary to explain how a black girl had been admitted into the intimate company of Madame de B”). And this humiliating look at the difference that disrupts her life is received by the reader with the same brutality, like a whipping. By following “from the inside” her first-person account, the reader witnesses in “real time”, so to speak, the establishment of the difference as a source of inferiority and contempt, following up-close the slow descent into hell of the young black girl crushed not only by the intolerance of a society in which she eventually feels “out of place”, but also by the insulting condescension of her “friends” and “benefactors”.

Several critics have rightly pointed out the remarkable convergence between this disintegration process described by Claire de Duras in 1823 and the analysis of Frantz Fanon (1952, p.68) in *Peau noire, masques blancs* [Black Skin, White Masks]. As “the black humiliated” by the image of herself that white society gives back to her (and shows her insistently), Ourika will go from “humiliating insecurity to self-deprecation and despair”. From the obsessive fear of being alone and “persecuted by contempt”, from the nightmare of marrying a man who, for money, perhaps would agree that his children were black (Duras, 1979, p.37), Ourika develops a violent aversion to herself:

My face caused me horror, I no longer dared looking at myself in the mirror; when my eyes landed on my black hands, I believed to see in them those of a monkey; it exaggerated my ugliness, and this color seemed to be the sign of my reproof; it is what *separated me from all the beings of my kind*, that condemned me to be alone, always alone, never loved! A man, for money,

perhaps would consent that his children were black! All my blood rebelled with indignation at this thought. (ibid, p.38, emphasis mine)

This phenomenology of humiliation, able to arouse the reader's empathy, reveals what's behind this unique experience of racialization - and that becomes all the more effective due to the dual condition of being black and a woman, a *black woman*: "Who will want to marry a black woman?" The question is not whether Ourika wants to marry, but rather "who would consent that their children were black?"

In addition to the concerns of an aristocracy obsessed with purity of lineage, the sinister common sense of the question draws attention to racism codified over the centuries and to the structure that underlies the racist system. It is not just about the overseas slavery reestablished by Napoleon in 1802, but about the invisible corollary, the metropolitan racism established by a draconian regulation reinforced over time. This is intended, as underscored by a ministerial letter mentioned by the abbot Grégoire a few years later, "not to weaken the state of humiliation linked to the *species, at whatever level it may be*"⁴⁸. Hence the immediate loss of function or title by "every inhabitant who marries a black or mulatto woman", a prohibition in place since 1733 and extended by Louis XVI to the use of black domestic servants, so as to prevent their automatic release into the metropolis, coupled with the ban on the entry of blacks in France, which was stricter and more absolute under Napoleon.

Locked in an existential desert populated by her anxieties and phobias, Ourika tries in vain to escape the marks of abjection by covering mirrors and wearing gloves or clothes that hide her skin. She thinks about returning to the country of her ancestors, "but there, too, I would have been isolated: who would have understood me? Alas, I no longer belonged to anyone" (Duras, 1979, p.38). Separated from the society in which she was educated by the barrier of color and her origins because of her social status and education, she "no longer belongs to anyone" and feels "*alien to the whole human race*" (ibid., emphasis mine). Of this "disease of the skin"⁴⁹ she can talk to no one, not even to Charles, her partner and childhood friend. Upon learning that he loves another woman, she gets sick and decides to retire to a convent. It is there that she tells her story to the doctor (and at the same time to the reader), who takes care of her before she "falls with the last leaves of autumn" (ibid. p.64).

Forgotten until very recently⁵⁰ this remarkable novel by Claire de Duras experienced a brief but real triumph at the time of its publication. It caused a frenzy in the literary circles and salons in France, but also abroad, as indicated by the correspondence of the great traveler who was Humboldt, in the years 1824-1826. Edited several times in 1824, plagiarized in France and abroad, translated into English, Spanish and Russian, it moved Goethe to tears, impressed Walter Scott and Chateaubriand, and was denounced by slave owners from Martinique. It inspired rather mediocre poems, some more interesting pictures, and gave rise in the theater to various adaptations in 1824.⁵¹

Published in St. Petersburg in the same year, its reading seems to have urged Pushkin to talk, in his novel *The Negro of Peter, the Great*, about his grandfather, Abraham Hannibal (Gnamankou, 1998), an African slave sold to the Tsar of Russia and who became an important figure in the Russian army. Ourika also left traces in Aimé Césaire's *La tragédie du Roi Christophe*, and in Maryse Condé's *La Migration des Coeurs*, (Little, 2006, p.20).

Despite the oblivion to which it was relegated, Ourika occupies a privileged place and plays an important role in the genealogy that interests us. By introducing in “the literature of the Restoration the tragic character of the black nestled between two worlds, whose skin color is rejected by the society of the white as a *pariah*” (Chalaye, 2005), it announces - and associates with the imaginary of the pariah - the issue of the “dual conscience” to which W. E. B. Du Bois gives a powerful theoretical and political depth in the twentieth century. Far from suggesting the idea that “it would have been better for her happiness to have left the young black woman in her place” (ibid.), the novel thematizes an actually modern impasse that will be linked to this day to that figure: that of a society that while giving rise to “hopes” about the possibility of each one “finding their place”, shows that “much contempt would remain” (Duras, 1979, p.42) for those born on the bad side of the universe.

Notes

- 1 Entry “Pariah, Parriar”.
- 2 See *Parayan* (Petit Robert), *parayar*, pl. *parayan* (Oxford) or *palayan*, *parayer*, *periyer*, according to the linguistic origin of the Europeans who transcribed it, which means “drummer”, a group considered as impure.
- 3 Designated as *Harijans* (children of God), a euphemistic name given to them by Mahatma Gandhi, the untouchables are currently officially known and (self)-designated as *Dalits*, which means “crushed or oppressed peoples.”
- 4 “Do not use this word. It is politically incorrect!” appears on the screen before opening the page on *Pariah*: n. [Tamil] *Outcast. Use of this term is offensive to people belonging to Dictionary of Indian English.*
- 5 Cf. the term “pariah dog” meaning “stray or abandoned dog.” Iraq, Cuba and Libya are currently referred to by the English speaking media as “pariah states”, and Slobodan Milosevic as “international pariah”. Conversely, the word *Pundit*, which has traditionally designated the Brahmins, is used as synonymous with researcher or expert.
- 6 Duarte Barbosa, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa, An Account of the Countries Bordering on the Indian Ocean and their Inhabitants... Completed About the Year 1518*, transl. by Mansel Longworth Dames (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1989 v.1, p.53-8), which is a valuable source for the first decades of the Portuguese maritime empire in Asia. See also *Historia del descubrimiento y conquista de la India por los Portugueses, compuesta por Hernan Lopez de Castanbada, y traducida nuevamente en Romance Castellano* (Antwerp, En casa de Martin Nucio, 1554. French transl. by Fernando Lopez

- de Castaneda, *L'Histoire des Indes de Portugal*, translated from Portuguese into French by Nicolas de Grouchy, Antwerp, Iehan Steelsius, 1554). See 'The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language' (4th ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).
- 7 On the approach of the colonial administration with the Brahmin caste, see also Dirks (2001).
- 8 See also Dubois (1825, 1985).
- 9 Samuel Purchas, *His Pilgrimage, or Relations of the World and the Religions Observed in all Ages*, p.553 e 998-9; Pieter van de Broecke, *Reysen Naer Oost Indien*, 1620, p.82; Philip Baldaeus, *Naauwkeurige Beschryvinge van Malabar en Choromandel, der zelve aangrenzende Ryken, en att machtige Eyland Ceylon*, Amsterdam, 1672, English translation: *A True and Exact Description of the Most Celebrated East-India Coast of Malabar and Coromandel; as also of the Isle of Ceylon*, printed for Henry Lintot. See also François Valentijn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indien vervattende een naaukeurige en uitvoerige verhandelinge van Nederlands mogentheyd in die gewesten*, Amsterdam, 1724-1726, 8v., reed. Facsimile 2003-2004, p.73; J. Phillips, *An Account of the Religion, Manners, and Learning of the People of Malabar in the East-Indies. In Several Letters Written by Some of the Most Learned Men of that Country to the Danish Missionaries*, London, 1717, p.127.
- 10 Word meaning in Portuguese, Spanish and Italian, "pure", "unmixed" or "chaste", but that also refers to the lineage or race in the old sense of the term. According to the Dictionary of the French Academy of 1798, it "designates the tribes into which the idolaters of the East Indies are divided. The Brahmin caste. The Banyan caste [merchants]."
- 11 1659: English *caste* (XVI century), "Hindu caste".
- 12 See Johan Albert Mandelsio, *Voyages célèbres et remarquables, faits de Perse aux Indes orientales par Mandelsio*, translated from German by Abraham de Wicquefort, 1659. See also Thevenot (1684) and Dellon (1699).
- 13 Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, 1756, p.54 (emphasis mine).
- 14 Preamble to *La Chaumière indienne* (Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, 1818, v.V, p.216).
- 15 As emphasized by Yves Benot, the interest in the savage was more a stimulant of political thought, able to shake established and accepted ideas, than a model to be emulated. The projector moves because of the fighting of the Enlightenment, not of ethnographic or anthropological interest (Benot, 2005, p.1-12).
- 16 Abbot Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce européen des Deux Indes*, 1770.
- 17 "L'Europe a fondé partout des colonies; mais connaît-elle des principes sur lesquels on doit les fonder?" (Raynal, 1981, p.14).
- 18 Quoted by Ann Thompson (2003, p.88). See also Benot (1981), who established Diderot as the author of these additions.
- 19 Compilation establishing the Brahmanical caste system, prepared between centuries II B.C. and II A.D. (TN.)
- 20 See also Edmond Burke's positions in the Hastings proceedings, in Marshall (2000).
- 21 See Marshall, 2003, whose title is inspired by Edward Said.

- 22 See Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes* (1993), book XXX, for the different origins of nobility and a critique of both Boulainvilliers and the abbot Dubois, who “created each a system, one appearing to be a conspiracy against the third-state and the other a conspiracy against the nobility.”
- 23 *Poulchis* or *Pulchis*, noun (*Mod. History*) *Encyclopédie or Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences des arts et des métiers*, 1782. v.13, p.204. Emphasis mine.
- 24 See Paréas, Perréas or Parias (*ibidem*, my emphasis).
- 25 Abbot Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique...*, op. cit., p.96.
- 26 “There is a defamed race on this earth / an alien race in its homeland / unprotected, without a hospitable temple / Godless, hateful to the entire people / the Pariahs ...”
- 27 Mary Wollstonecraft (1997, p.103), “to M. Talleyrand-Perigord, Late Bishop of Autun.” Wollstonecraft refers to the *Rapport sur l’instruction publique fait au nom du committee Constitution à l’Assemblée nationale* in 1791, in which Talleyrand argues that the violation of the universality of rights which excludes women from public education is necessary for the happiness of the majority and in particular of women.
- 28 See *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, volume 16, by Grimm, Diderot, November 1792.
- 29 See Concise Oxford and Chambers 20th Century Dictionary, where “Brahman” designates “a person of high social standing and cultivated intellect and taste” or “a member of social and cultural elite”, as in the famous expression “Boston Brahmins”, which has designated, since the second half of the nineteenth century, the old Bostonian elite of Beacon Hill (see Holmes, 1860, ch.1, “the Brahmin Caste of New England”).
- 30 *The Indian Cottage or A Search After Truth*, by M. Saint-Pierre (London, printed for W. Lane at the Minerva, 1791).
- 31 See, for example, J.-H. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *The Indian Cottage*, Dublin, printed for J. Parker, J. Jones, W. Jones, R. White, J. Rice, R. Mc Allister, 1791; J.-H. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Der indianische strohhutte*, Neuwied and Leipzig, Johann Ludwig Gehra, 1791.
- 32 See Yule (1903, p.678), entry *Pariah*, *Parriar*, emphasis mine.
- 33 The Robert dictionary gives the date 1821 for the figurative sense of pariah: “Person banished from a society, a group; excluded. *Treat someone like a true pariah. Live like a pariah*, rejected by everyone. “
- 34 Maurice Duviquet, “*Examen critique du Paria*”, in Delavigne (s. d., p.122).
- 35 Play by Victor Hugo first staged in 1830 (TN)
- 36 “*La Bayadère et le Dieu de l’Inde*, traduit de Goethe”, in *OEuvres complètes de Madame la Baronne de Staël, publiées par son fils*, tomo 17, Paris, Treuttel et Würtz, 1821.
- 37 *Le Dieu et la Bayadère* or *La Courtisane amoureuse*, opera in two acts, libretto by Scribe, music by Daniel-François-Esprit Auber, premiered at the Paris Opera on October 13, 1830.
- 38 *Le Paria*, tragedy in one act, by Michel (sic) Beer, transl. Xavier Marmier, Strasbourg, Impr. F. G. Levrant, rue des Juifs, 1834, p.47.

- 39 Together with the Abbot Raynal (see Raphaël, 1976, 1986).
- 40 Germaine de Staël, *De l'influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations*, 1796, section 3.
- 41 Blake to Thomas Butt, 16 august 1803" (in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, David V. Erdman (ed.), New York: Doubleday, 1988).
- 42 The term "un'sex" dates back to William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act I, scene 5; "Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here / and fill me from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood; / stop up the access and passage to remorse!"
- 43 See Thomas Mathias, *Pursuits of literature: A Satirical Poem in Four Decalogues with Notes*, Philadelphia, 1800, p.204: "Our unsex'd female writers now instruct, or confuse, us and themselves, in the labyrinth of politics, or turn us wild with Gallic frenzy".
- 44 On the development of the female writer stereotype, this the nineteenth century monster, see Christine Plante (1989).
- 45 To resume the formulation of Sainte-Beuve (1960 v.II, p.1049).
- 46 Antoine de Laplace, *Oronoko ou le royal Esclave*, translated from English, Amsterdam, 1745.
- 47 Such as *Bug-Jargal* (1826), by Victor Hugo, *Tamango* (1829), by Prosper Mérimée, and *Atar-Gull* (1831), by Eugène Sue. See also Hoffmann (1973).
- 48 To the extent that Gaspar de Pons, who only thinks about that, decided to rewrite a *Ourika l'africaine*, to make of Claire de Duras' heroine "a young woman from her country", dominated, despite her education, by a wild sexuality in which "the blood of Othello always boils in the veins."
- 49 Henri Grégoire, *De la noblesse de la peau ou Du préjugé des blancs contre la couleur des africains et celle de leurs descendants noirs et sang-mêlé* (1826), introduction by Alain Gresh, Grenoble, Jérôme Millon, chap.1, "Petite collection Atopia", 2002 (emphasis mine).
- 50 According to the expression used by Marie-Ange Somdah (1989, p.59).
- 51 See, among others, *Ourika*. An English translation, by Claire de Duras, transl. John Fowles, Modern Language Association, 1994, Roger Little, *Ourika de Madame de Duras*, study and presentation by Roger Little, *Textes littéraires No. CV*, Exeter, University of Exeter Press, new revised and enlarged ed., 1988.
- 52 Including Merle, *Ourika or l'Orpheline africaine, drame en un acte et en prose*, Paris, Chez Quoy, 1824, F. de Courcy, *Ourika ou la Nègresse*, Dr Vaud, Devilleneuve & Dupeuty, 1824; Alexandre Piccinni, *Ourika ou la Petite Nègresse*, Dr Vaud, Melesville & Carmouche, 1824.

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Abstract – From the 16th to the 18th centuries, the term pariah, coined by Western travelers, imperial officials or missionaries to designate the abjection of the outcasts in India, circulated in Portuguese, English, French, German and Dutch literati circles. In the discourse of Enlightenment – and throughout the 19th century – it acquires a new meaning, related to the increasingly pejorative connotation of “caste”. The metaphor of the “pariah” provides thus an idiom of the critique of arbitrary authority and the persisting social and political exclusion. Thanks to the literature, theater, and opera, it enters the European literary and plebeian public spaces, giving a name to the modern invisible hierarchies, and denouncing the dehumanizing construction of the other in a world claiming as its grounding principle the universality of human rights.

Keywords: Pariah, Caste, Enlightenment, Injustice, Otherness.

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