

From Coramantein Nobility to Surinamese Slavery: Displacement in *Oroonoko*

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After a long period of undeserved neglect, Aphra Behn's position as a novelist and dramatist is receiving increasing acclaim in the canon of English studies. *Oroonoko* is undoubtedly recognized as the best example of Behn's literary output. Many critics have been interested in this novella especially because it shows an apparent gap between the mindset of Behn's age and the attitude she expresses in this work. More scholarship of *Oroonoko* is focused on gender, class, slavery, and other issues stimulating special curiosity in contemporary students and scholars. In addition to the literary, gender, and cultural theories that have been used to investigate this novella, the concept of *place* deserves, I believe, some attention in order to establish a better understanding of this work set in two different places: Coramantein and Surinam. In particular, I argue that displacement, as a postcolonial concept, contributes to the complexity of the relationship between the identities of Oroonoko and Imoinda and their new forced "settlement" in a colonized environment in Surinam. More specifically, the displacement of Oroonoko and Imoinda is looked at in light of their enslavement, removal from their country to Surinam, and the way they react to this displacement.

Introduction

*Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave: A True History*¹ is a text that invites a reading informed by postcolonialism theory and particularly, the concept of displacement. It was written in a period of time when the interior and the exterior of England were marked by political tension, when English colonization started to emerge, and when colonial rhetoric increasingly occupied a place in the official and literary circles. Janet Todd and T. J. Cribb agree Aphra Behn² had a political consciousness when she wrote *Oroonoko* in 1688, the year in which there was tension in England due to "the announcement of the Queen's pregnancy and the birth of a male heir to the Catholic James" (Cribb 173). Beyond this domestic tension, the novella was also

written with a consciousness of the English colonial enterprise being established at the time. Particularly, Surinam³ in that year was finally handed (or completely *displaced* from English colonization) to the Dutch.⁴ Surprisingly enough, after mentioning how it would not be “easy” for her father to give Surinam to the Dutch, all that Behn mentions afterwards describes how vast, beautiful, and useful the land is: “[It] reaches from east to west one way as far as China, and another to Peru: it affords all things both for beauty and use... the shades are perpetual, the trees bearing at once all degrees of leaves and fruit, from blooming buds to ripe autumn: groves of oranges, lemons, citrons, figs, nutmegs, and noble aromatics continually bearing their fragrances” (70). Undoubtedly, Behn laments the displacement of Suriname, but this rhetoric seems to ignore the fact that what makes the English crave this beautiful country is exactly what makes the Dutch take over⁵. Important in this regard is the fact that even though its events took place during the English colonization of Suriname, *Oroonoko* was written during that period (of colonization) and thus, as Sackville-West puts it, was retrieved from a twenty-three-year-old memory (40).

in *Displacement: Derrida and After* Mark Krupnick maintains that displacement is a concept constantly present in some modern theories and their linguistic canon, such as the literature of post-structuralism and some of Freud’s texts (2-7). It is also one of the major issues or terms in postcolonial theory.

Theories of Displacement

Within this theoretical context, displacement is sometimes interchangeably referred to as diaspora, which explains why *Post-Colonial Studies: The Essential Glossary* does not mention it in an entry by itself (distinct from the existing diaspora). Yet, from this book’s definition of diaspora, we get displacement defined as the forced removal of Africans during slavery or other non-voluntarily movements over borders due to religious or political persecution, leaving issues of identity and culture widely open for discussion and consideration (Thieme 77-78). Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur emphasize the importance of diaspora studies without ignoring the critique directed to them, but they also call for analyzing diaspora within the context of global displacements. They argue that coteremporary displacements and the understanding of their political contexts can help us in rethinking national identities and exploring the questions that are “inextricably linked to a theorization of diaspora” (3). As he attempts to revisit the postcolonial migration and the narratives of “cultural and political diaspora,” as well as the “poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees,” one major issue that Homi

Bhabha is concerned about is how “the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities” defines the demography of the new internationalism (6-7). Darko Suvin, on the other hand, attempts to establish a typology and phenomenology of displacement by distinguishing between such displacement-related issues as immigration, exile, and refuge. He also sorts out these issues in terms of single or mass departure and the possibility of returning to the original place. In the opening of his article, Suvin illustrates the magnitude of displacement: “To be displaced from one’s country of origin and upbringing—the experience of over 175 million people in the world, on a conservative estimate—is a wrench perhaps comparable in impact to that of war, long-term hunger or imprisonment” (107). Similarly, Angelika Bammer sees displacement as “one of the most formative experiences,” and defines it as “the separation of people from their native culture either through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, exiles, or expatriates) or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture” (xi). The fact that Behn’s novella has its main characters influenced by such a concept highlights its significance as it adds further dimensions to the way the work can be read or interpreted. Yet, both the work and the concept raise awareness of how hard displacement is on human beings.

As the writers of *The Empire Writes Back* point out, place and displacement play a vital role in defining the identity of the displaced:

It is here [the issue of place and displacement] that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being, the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place... a valid and active sense of self may have eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or ‘voluntary’ removal from indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 8-9).

In this critical analysis, the self, identity, and consciousness of the displaced people are ostensibly seen as fragmentary. Caused by the far-reaching imperial expansion, this fragmentation not only makes the enslaved and colonized collectively unite in experiencing displacement—instead of being in a “national,” original place of their own—but also impacts the way they individually represent their identity, and as such interact with the “new” place. Furthermore, as we will see in *Oroonoko*, displacement can have continuous influence on the people removed from one place to another, creating a situation where the colonizers and the colonized altogether enter a sphere of

power and resistance. "Needles to say," as Jonathan Crewe concludes, "projects of conquest and settlement in the competitive realm of early modern empire-building produced mixed results... the logic of displacement rather than of fixed place remains pertinent even now to an understanding of the Anglo-South African as a 'displaced person'" (34). Obviously, since displacement creates an awareness of difference, alienation, and even nostalgia, it creates a distorted identity of the displaced individual-which is seen in *Oroonoko* from the angle of how Oroonoko and Imoinda resort to self-destruction, as they realize nothing else can avail their dying hopes of going back home and regaining their original identity as free people.

Displacement in *Oroonoko* fits well in analyzing the dynamics of action and reaction, as a result of the awareness of the locale in which the characters are placed. Oroonoko and Imoinda experience a bitter, unfortunate displacement from Coramantein to Surinam. Therefore, their identities develop both a strong rejection of the new locale and a genuine, ceaseless affiliation with their home place. These two characters interact with this new reality, the colonized Suriname, while still having an identity formed in a place and community (Coramantein) they departed. This act of enforcement manifests itself clearly in *Oroonoko*: through slavery as an individual and collective experience and by colonization as an experience that goes beyond the individual (to the whole land). Behn particularly shows the violent reaction to the former enforcement, and as such intensifies the dramatic reaction to displacement by closing her novella with Oroonoko and Imoinda vanishing while trying to terminate the abuse of their identity. Their death is a response to the threat that their identities will be perpetuated as slaves, their displacement will last forever, and most threatening of all, they will hand down these (present) threats as (future) realities to their child, if born in Surinam.

Surinam and Displacement

Displacement was the characteristic of the major portion of the Surinamese population at the time When Aphra Behn wrote⁶ A large number of slaves were brought to work in the plantations and other farming labor. Indians were also imported to Surinam from different places, as stated in a seventeenth century pamphlet written by George Warren, whose aim is to give a brief description of the seventeenth century Surinam. Warren's account illustrates these Indians are "several Nations... more numerous than the rest, and are settled upon all the Islands & in most of the Rivers" (23). Another population that settled in as a result of displacement was the Jews. Starting in 1634 many Jewish people went to the colony as refugees from Spain and Portugal, considerably increasing the population (Morris 358). Based on the

recent findings on the history of the Caribbean slavery, the big numbers of African and Indian slaves formed, according to Prem Poddar and David Johnson, a “high point” of the stage of slavery history from the 1650 to 1850, and about “40 per cent to 50 per cent of the 10 to 12 million African slaves who arrived alive in America during this period were sold to work on the sugar, tobacco, and coffee plantations of the Caribbean” (440). Oroonoko and Imoinda, who were also brought to work in the plantations, exemplify the negative effects of displacement and represent a damaging reaction to their specific situation in being displaced. This situation of European settlement in colonies such as Surinam and displacing the non-white Europeans could be seen clearly as one of the worse scenarios a colonized country might have. As Prem Poddar and David Johnson show, it has been argued by many writers that, “colonialism precipitated the destruction of whole Caribbean societies, as well as the enslavement, *dislocation*, and disenfranchisement of African societies” [my emphasis added] (12). This dislocation, which is parallel to displacement and has a strong,⁷ is also analogous to creating fragmentary population, coming from everywhere through different kinds of enforcement. Yet, the lack of accommodation to the original identities of these displaced people is the springboard of rebellion against displacement, which *Oroonoko* brilliantly illustrates.

This novella is at the heart of our understanding of displacement as a result mainly of colonization and/or slavery. The colonizer places certain people in a certain locale, creating a demographical reality that serves his ends in a place that does not belong to him. He moves natives from one place to another, denying them the place to which they are naturally attached. By force he locates the displaced somewhere against their will, according to his choice. These natives go through a forceful alteration of their identities-to be slaves, though they are not originally so, or to be people without a certain state of being and location, and have had their identities formed therein. The displaced people are sold and resold and drift from one place to another according to the market and land needs for working hands. The concept of original place is denied to these people as they fall victim to the colonization project transforming places into a space where only the colonizer’s existence matters and his presence is the center while the “others” are merely in the margins. The colonized is placeless, without an identity other than the one given to him by the colonizer. He is *there* because the colonizer is there. By extension, the Surinamese story of Oroonoko is *there* just because the English and Dutch⁸ were there, colonizing and displacing people. And by the same token, *Oroonoko* was written because Aphra Behn⁹ was there, witnessing colonization and recording one aspect of its daily life.

Both Oroonoko and Imoinda are victims of what Robin Cohen describes in *Global Diaspora* as African diaspora. This diaspora implies displacing an African subject and relocating him or her anywhere his or her masters want. These enslaving masters-like the seventeenth-century chief agent of the Dutch West India Company, William Bosman-argue slavery exists because there is a European necessity for slaves (Cohen 34). However, Bosman, who recommends that the barbarian treatment of slaves should be reconsidered (34), does not come close to admitting how hard slavery is on the enslaved, especially when they are removed from the place where their real identities are rightly recognized and duly represented. Unlike Bosman, Behn shows clearly that slavery brings about displacement which puts slaves in a different locale but cannot delete their attachment to their own homeland, simply because this attachment defines their identity. Because her work demonstrates the complexity of displacement, we can imagine Behn's agreement with Cohen's statement: "All diasporic communities settled outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories, acknowledge that 'the old country'-a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore-always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions" (ix). Behn shows how Oroonoko and Imoinda can hardly live in Surinam with complete abandonment of the identity formed in the no longer inaccessible homeland.

Immediately after describing the native people in Surinam, Behn portrays the process of transferring the slaves from Africa to America. In so doing, there is a balance struck between the slaves' usefulness as food suppliers and the natives' value as labor providers. Behn also centralizes the role played by those who make the process of displacement possible. Among these people are the ship captains by one of whom Oroonoko is kidnapped and displaced:

[Negroes] are transported thither in this manner. Those who want slaves, make a bargain with a master, or a captain of a ship, and contract to pay him so much apiece, a matter of twenty pound a head, for as many as he agrees for, and to pay for them when they shall be delivered on such a plantation: so that when there arrives a ship laden with slaves, they who have so contracted, go aboard, and receive their number by lot... Coramantien, a country of blacks so called, was one of those places in which they found the most advantageous trading for these slaves, and thither most of our great traders in that merchandise traffic. (5-6)

The act of bargaining with the master for these slaves shows that this person has power in two places: the country where slaves are taken from and the country to which he delivers them. This practice of ordering slaves, buying

them, and delivering them shows that displacement is a systematic process administered by certain agents.

Surprisingly enough, one of these captains that controls the displacement of slaves is Oroonoko's friend, who uses this very friendship to kidnap him and, as Behn puts it, betray him into slavery (25). Another interesting fact is that upon the arrival of slaves at their new place, there is usually no accommodation that considers their homeland's status. The only type of accommodation waiting for them is the one that "fits" a slave: to have the colony as his/her place and to work (mainly) in its plantations. Related to this settlement (or reversely, displacement) of slaves is the etymological background of the word "colonization" which, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, comes from the Latin *colonia*. This word means "farm,' 'landed estate,' 'settlement,' and was esp[ecially] the proper term for a public settlement of Roman citizens in a hostile or newly conquered country" ("colony, n."). However, the slaves in Suriname, including the displaced Oroonoko, are not allowed to form a community, which creates a private space that separates them from the colonizers, as is the case with other types of colonization. Instead, the European colonization in the Caribbean was "slightly different from, India, Africa, and Ireland. Through slavery, virtually all Africans were, at least initially, thrust into a contact region, and removed entirely from autonomous regions....[They] carried particularly fresh memories of their culture" (Hogan 6). In fact, not only memories were carried but also carried was the bitter contrast of who they really were and who they became after displacement.

Oroonoko and Displacement

Oroonoko's condition of displacement-as opposed to a former state of nobility, authority, and residence-carries with it the dichotomy that the subtitle of the novella indicates: "The Royal Slave"-which sounds like an exception to a previous argument implying that in a typical situation of enslavement, there is no accommodation for the original status of the enslaved. Yet in the long run, this dichotomy proves to be very complicated and as such becomes a dynamic activator for Oroonoko's (and even Imoinda's) resistance to slavery based on his identity as a royal person. As soon as Oroonoko is recognized as a prince, his masters grant him special treatment and promise him to be free in due course, a promise that will never be fulfilled. When his fellow slaves discover him to be a prince and treat him as such, Oroonoko is psychologically relieved from the humility of slavery. He instead looks at himself as a displaced nobleman, which makes him abide to the slave identity only for a short time. Still, due to the sense of displacement that Oroonoko has, this new identity as a slave is hardly ontological, as Franz Fanon argues

in regard to slave and identity. Fanon believes that the black man “has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has to place himself. His metaphysics, or less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did know and that imposed itself on him” (110). To break these frames means to rebel against slavery and to achieve the essence of the identity that belongs to “past” places, which is exactly what Oroonoko does. He dares to lead a rebellion against the masters, contributes to raising awareness against slavery, which is equally rebellious, and strives aggressively to achieve the ultimate goal of going back home: a goal that he fails to achieve. The displacement-based, dichotomical identity in this regard causes a split between Oroonoko’s racial identity as a black and his social identity as a noble, which is a legitimate identity (unlike his identity as a slave that started by kidnapping). As time goes by, the split between these two identities gets wider. That is why his final solution is the dramatic murder of his wife and their unborn child. This murder seems to be an attempt to avoid having this child settle as a slave with an ontological identity as such, instead of being born to a royal father.

Once displaced, both Oroonoko and Imoinda lose their identities and become identified not as they used to be or as they want to be. Oroonoko is no longer known by his original name (and neither is Imoinda). He is no longer Prince Oroonoko or the romantic lover who once could dare to have full possession of his beloved, Imoinda, even though he had to challenge the highest authority, the King. This scenario is not just a classical occurrence of *Rota Fortunae*, where one person rises then falls again, or vice versa according to the imperatives of fate, but also a typical case which Edward Said¹⁰ describes as the logic of displacement. In Said’s view, if one is weak, then one’s “affirmation of identity for its own sake amounts to little more than saying that...[one wants] a kind of attention easily and superficially granted, like the attention given an individual in a crowded room at a roll call” but “though the powerful get acknowledged by the sheer force of presence, this commits them to a logic of displacement, as soon as someone else emerges who is as, or more, powerful” (379). It appears to me that Oroonoko attempts to defy this logic because his own displacement takes him away from the country he belongs to and in which he is strongly established, both as a leading figure and as a potential heir to the ageing King. Additionally, displacement gives him a foreign name, Caesar, which is associated more with the colonizers’ culture than with his own. His original name, just like Imoinda’s, is dehumanized by the colonizers: “Christians never buy any slaves but they give them some name of

their own, their native ones being likely, very barbarous" (Behn 41). Furthermore, the displacement, which wrongfully identifies him as a slave, allows his love affair with Imoinda to be celebrated as long as it keeps him forgetful of his original identity: "They soon informed each other with their fortunes. And equally bewailed their fate; but at the same time they mutually protested, that even fetters and slavery were soft and easy, and would be so happy to possess each other, and to be able to make good their vows" (Behn 46). But all this satisfaction with the status quo lasts just for a short time. They will both take a drastic shift towards regaining their identity, sacrificing for this goal their celebrated love, stability, and even life.

When Oroonoko decides to regain his and Imoinda's lost identity and to fight his way back home, he faces many difficulties. Some of these difficulties are the impossibility to undo the control the masters have on them and the inability to return to their original place of identity as free human beings. His "fellow slaves" show a weak will to fight the usurpers of their identities, though he uses strong rhetoric strategies to appeal to them:

"And why," said he, "my dear friends and fellow-sufferers, should we be slaves to an unknown people? Have they vanquished us nobly in fight? Have they won us in honorable battle? And are we by the chance of war become their slaves?... Will you, I say, suffer the lash from such hands?" They all replied with one accord, "No, no, no; Caesar has spoke like a great captain, like a great king." (Behn 41)

It is ironic that after saying, "No" three times, they follow it by indicating how eloquently and stirringly Oroonoko addresses them, as if it were a matter of being fully moved by the speech not by the cause itself. Therefore, Oroonoko's coalition for the purpose of fighting back hardly formulates an organized body to stand against their abusers. On the other hand, these abusers will always benefit from incomplete success of opposition to increase their control. Nevertheless, the blame for the weak support Oroonoko receives from his fellows can be due to the sense of despair to return home that prevails among them. According to Patrick Colm Hogan, "[d]espair is the complete loss of that sense of identity-based possibility and hope, the loss of those goals and wishes" (323). Therefore, Hogan blames colonialism for breeding despair. Colonialism, he claims, "suddenly destroys indigenous systems of work, law, politics, ritual, and thus shatters the people's practical identities" (Hogan 105). Yet, the novella still has a contrasting image that Oroonoko and Imoinda illustrate, the image of those who keep up the fight for their cause until their last breath. In particular, Behn narrates with admiration what Imoinda could do in the fight: "[H]eroic Imoinda, who, grown big as she

was, did nevertheless press near her lord, having a bow and a quiver full of poisoned arrows, which she managed with such dexterity that she wounded several, and shot the Governor into the shoulder; of which wound he had like to have died" (43). Oroonoko and Imoinda demonstrate exceptional acts of resistance because they are driven by their original identities as free people. They are also fighting aggressively because these identities are endangered by displacement, whose goal is to changing them into placed slaves.

As a displaced person, Oroonoko compromises-for a certain period of time-his original identity as a prince for a new one as a slave. He soon recovers from the illusion that he can be a displaced person and, at the same time, a recipient of the privileges he enjoyed in his original homeland; that is, to be brought as a slave to a different place and to be treated as a royal based on his original identity. That is why once he realizes that he is being *settled* not as a displaced prince but as a slave he revolts and takes strong action to put an end to his wrongful identity as a slave. His revolution symbolizes an act of disorder that responds to the disorder that has been inflicted upon him, his soul-mate (Imoinda), and his fellow people. However, as a former prince and a "proclaimed general" (Behn 5), he starts with these people who share his suffering of displacement. In an attempt to gain freedom by force, Oroonoko gives his fellows an eloquent speech to try to raise their awareness of how their slavery degrades them to the level of animals, an analogy which also indicates the similarity between these people and animals in the sense of being removed from one place to another according to the will of their owners.

Caesar, having singled out these men from the women and children, made an harangue to 'em, of the miseries and ignominies of slavery; counting up all their toils and sufferings, under such loads, burdens, and drudgeries as were fitter for beasts than men; senseless brutes, than human souls. He told 'em, it was not for days, months, or years, but for eternity; there was no end to be of their misfortunes: they suffered not like men who might find a glory and fortitude in oppression; but like dogs, that loved the whip and bell, and fawned the more they were beaten: that they had lost the divine quality of men, and were become insensible asses, fit only to bear: nay, worse; an ass. (Behn 40)

Oroonoko here appeals to their consciousness as human beings, implying they should resist being treated like animals, with no identity, place, or action. This passage also shows how distinguished he is as a displaced person, for he uses his original identity to represent himself as a free royal figure, even at the risk of having to confront his captors.

The revolution Oroonoko leads against the proprietors of the Surinamese

plantations can be seen as a desire to place himself in a position of authority from which he has been displaced. He was-and still thinks of himself as-a prince and therefore he wants to occupy the place occupied by his "masters." This desire-which slaves have towards their masters' place of power-is more explained by Homi Bhabha: "The very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting. The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master's place while keeping his place in the slave's *avenging anger*" (63). This attitude of looking for a place occupied by power is an outcome of displacement, which is the loss of identity. Stuart Hall maintains that this loss of identity phenomenon "has been integral part to the Caribbean experience" (394). That is why someone in a situation like Oroonoko will momentarily demonstrate the fantasy to be in a position of power, to be just like his masters who are not willing to allow him such a position. Nevertheless, Oroonoko stays loyal to his cause of gaining his identity, and tries to recruit his fellows against their collective loss of identity.

When considered in juxtaposition to Oroonoko's displacement, Imoinda's case starts earlier. She is removed from a position of freedom-where she used to have "love and joy that could not be dissembled, insomuch that 'twas past doubt whether she loved Oroonoko entirely" (Behn 8). When obliged to move to the old King's palace, she starts to lead a life characterized by the absence of freedom, especially when she later becomes a slave. As a matter of fact, the King enjoys so much power over his subjects that the sense of belonging to him is even greater than that of a slave belonging to his master. As Behn remarks, "the obedience the people pay their king was not at all inferior to what they paid their gods; and what love would not oblige Imoinda to do, duty would compel her to" (8). Therefore, as a result of being forced to comply with this "divine" duty, she accepts the King's invitation to move to his place or, to put it as it really is, to his bed. This physical movement to the King's harem, which is known as "the royal veil," happens when the King realizes that she (emotionally) belongs to someone else, Prince Oroonoko. He knows that she is in love with Oroonoko and "this gave the old King some affliction; but he salved it with this.... no sooner [he] got to his apartment but he sent the royal veil to Imoinda; that is the ceremony of invitation: he sends the lady he has a mind to honor with his bed" (8). The King knows that she does not have a place for him in her heart; yet, since he can *remove* her to his place, and as such displace her, he seems to be satisfied with this practice of *power* over her. But since it is unlikely that the displaced would settle down, especially when they have some power to object to this displacement, Imoinda does not seem to give up. Indeed, one of the remarkable parts of the novella is the description of how Imoinda defied her displacement by persis-

tently seeing Oroonoko and assuring him that she still loves him and belongs only to him.

Seeing Oroonoko secretly shows Imoinda's rejection of her early displacement. This rejection creates a sense of disorder in the new place in which she unwillingly finds herself. The climax of this disorder is when she defiles the place, where she is trusted to be the King's bedmate, and allows Oroonoko access to it. Oroonoko, who has just come from a hunting trip, rages wildly in response to the news that Imoinda was gone. He then does not consider himself violating the King's place by secretly meeting with Imoinda, because he thinks that she is still his legal mate. Instead, he finds it his duty to undo this displacement and regain his beloved:

But it was objected to him that his case was not the same; for Imoinda being his lawful wife by solemn contract, 'twas he was the injured man, and might, if he so pleased take Imoinda back, the breach of the law being on his grandfather's side; and that if he could circumvent him, and redeem her from the otan, which is the palace of the king's women, a sort of seraglio, it was both just and lawful for him so to do. (10)

Nevertheless, the balance of power always goes to those who displace. Therefore, the King uses his authority to inflict another displacement upon Imoinda since the first one proved to be a total failure (for he could neither gain her heart nor take her body). Therefore, motivated by revenge for his honor, the King wants Imoinda to be "out of place." Consequently, her second displacement happens to be in Suriname, the country where she will be by no means reachable by Oroonoko, who is falsely told that she is killed. The high tension that dramatizes Imoinda's displacement is that she is now sold as a "common slave" (Behn 18). This happens despite the fact that she has an identity characterized by being the *free* daughter of a late hero general, the mistress of Prince Oroonoko (and then his devout spouse), and even the wife of the King.

Interestingly, the King seems to be more satisfied with displacing Imoinda than with the idea of killing her. His reasoning for this choice might be that he wants punishment to match the crime. Therefore, the disgrace of displacement that Imoinda will suffer from would be the "just" punishment to the disgrace she brought to his place. Furthermore, the King does not want to wash the disgrace Imoinda brought him by merely killing her. He thinks that he "ought to have had so much value and consideration for a maid of her quality as to have nobly put her to death" (Behn 28). But from the perspective of the displaced, such as Oroonoko and Imoinda, displacement is presented in the novella as the gravest destiny one can ever have. Therefore, even

when the King alternatively decides to sell Imoinda out as a slave, he cannot make it public because of Oroonoko. It is beyond the King to imagine Oroonoko's disastrous reaction to learning Imoinda was sold as a slave: "Oroonoko would highly resent this affront...and to that end, he sent a messenger to the camp, with orders to treat with him about the matter, to gain his pardon... but that by no means he should tell him she was sold, but secretly put to death: for he knew he should never obtain his pardon for the other" (Behn 28). Oroonoko believes the story that Imoinda is killed and he promises the King that he will not pursue any revenge. At this point, every thing seems to get normal: the King avenges his honor, Imoinda is announced to be killed for violating the King's honor, and the sad Oroonoko does not seem to be threatening or dangerous. Nonetheless, Oroonoko will change once he is displaced. Unlike the Surinamese Oroonoko, the Coramanteinian one is willing to accept what comes from his culture even if it causes him some pain. The totally uncompromising Oroonoko is in fact the displaced one, the one who is looking for his real identity in his real place.

Imoinda, who was obedient to her masters in Coramantein, is not dutiful to the norms of Suriname, where she becomes uncompromising, dismissive, and unwilling to get along with life around her. Yet, once she meets with Oroonoko, she shows complete submissiveness to him, as he represents-and reminds her-of her real identity. Even the name, Clemene, which was given to her earlier in Suriname, is not used once she has someone (Oroonoko) who knows her by her real name. Moreover, she keeps her identity as a noble woman, the same way as Oroonoko keeps his as a free prince. Her rejection of Christianity, for instance, confirms her loyalty to her original identity: "[W]e have christened her: but she denies us all with such a noble disdain that 'tis a miracle to see that she who can give such eternal desires should herself be all ice and unconcern" (Behn 29). The only love she is able to express is the love that goes to Oroonoko. The death, which was likely to be the destiny imposed upon her by her king, comes in Surinam from the lover whom she trusts. Therefore, we can say here that if the first death that she missed in Coramantein is known as a "noble" one, the one that she receives from Oroonoko's hands is a timely one: it puts an end to her being displaced.

At the end of the novella, when liberty seems to be impossible, Imoinda becomes ready to receive death from Oroonoko. In so doing, she wants to keep her worth, which has been decreased since she came to Suriname. Nevertheless, some critics believe that Imoinda is more "valuable" in Surinam than she was in her homeland. In their Marxist analysis of the novel's concept of honor, Stephanie Athey and Daniel Cooper Alarcon argue that Imoinda became a subject in an economical meaning, based on value:

In both Coramantein and Suriname, Imoinda is a unit of exchange, yet the value assigned to her body changes. When finally both Oroonoko and Imoinda are relocated in colonial Suriname, the aristocratic contest over Imoinda's hymen becomes an interracial struggle over African female body. For Oroonoko, this change in meaning begins to register when Imoinda becomes pregnant.... Once pregnant; Imoinda has increased her worth and that of Oroonoko in the slave economy. (434)

Though it is understandable why such an argument can be valid in a context of such an interpretation, I argue that Imoinda reaches the point where she feels life is increasingly invaluable, especially when she sees Oroonoko's and her hopes of liberty are vanishing. The fact that she is giving birth to a would-be slave is another reason why she is not willing to live until she becomes the mother of a slave child. So even if the masters (the colonizers) feel that her pregnancy is increasing her value, she however sees that this pregnancy is a total loss. If she is to give birth in Suriname, the child will be related to her and to Oroonoko only biologically. His identity will be as a slave. Therefore, Imoinda and Oroonoko will be identified as parents (producers) of a slave, which definitely decreases their value as innately free human beings.

Both Imoinda and Oroonoko find no meaning to perpetuate slavery and displacement by surviving until their child is born, which represents the beginning of a new slave generation. If this generation is *settled*, in a land that is not theirs and with identities not their original, it will be hard for identities to be regained. Obviously, when Oroonoko and Imoinda realize their displacement will never end, they come to the conclusion that their life is worthless and meaningless. Therefore, Oroonoko's decision to self-destruct and annihilate his entire family is due to his realization that their displacement has reached a point of total placement and that there are no hopes of returning home. This decision comes after his hopes are no longer possible, liberty becomes unfeasible, and the child is about to be born a slave. It is true that he adapts to the displaced life at the beginning, but he has always been waiting for something to happen, to regain his freedom and go back to his original home with his wife. Behn illustrates the moment when his hope starts to vanish. She depicts his feelings when he finds out that he is deceived by his masters' promises. These masters' deception finally leads him to develop a sense of uncertainty in the meaning of (displaced) life:

I took it ill he should suspect we would break our words with him, and not permit both him and Clemene to return to his own kingdom, which was not so long a way [sic] but when he was once on his voyage he would quickly arrive there.... However, he assured me that, whatsoever resolutions he should

take, he would act nothing upon the white people; and as for myself, and those upon that plantation where he was, he would sooner forfeit his eternal liberty, and life itself, than lift his hand against his greatest enemy on that place. (32)

Obviously, the novella depicts Oroonoko as someone who strongly resists displacements forever. He is also depicted as someone whose “greatest enemy on that place” is not the white people but rather the fact that he is displaced by them. The novella also shows the psychological effects of displacement, the effects are so great that they make death an easy option. Death in this work is not just an end to a displaced life, but also an end to the life that has not started yet, the life of their child. If born in Suriname, the child will be a placed citizen. He will be identified according to a geographical identity, which makes Surinam as his/her homeland. Also, the child would have no historical identity relating him to his origin. Instead, the child will be alien to the past that formed his/her identity, and his/her history will start like this: a born slave in colonized country. Neither Oroonoko nor Imoinda can accept such a fate for their child. Therefore, death comes as the only alternative, after hopes of returning home vanished.

If seen as motivated by displacement, the aborted pregnancy of Imoinda is a unique human response to one's need to preserve his or identity by all means possible. Stephanie Athey and Daniel Cooper Alarcon point out that “Imoinda's pregnancy is the first literary characterization of the pregnant female slave” (443). Nevertheless, this unprecedented representation of pregnancy becomes more intriguing as this pregnancy ends so tragically, blaming displacement for such a miserable outcome. It also raises possible interpretations of the reason behind such an act. A likely interpretation goes to the fact that Oroonoko's disappointment with the unfulfilled promise to return home oblige him adopt the Machiavellian pragmatic principle of “the end justifies the means.”

This principle, which is ironically designed for princes, is likely to be the driving factors that lead Prince Oroonoko to kill his pregnant wife. Since returning home and gaining their real identity, which is their main end, becomes impossible, killing Imoinda is one of possible means to escape eternal displacement. The ethical justification lies also in the fact Oroonoko has planned to kill himself afterwards. Moreover, he is a man of honor and he has lived all his life pursuing what accumulates his honorific nobility, both as a brave fighter and as a prince. Even when he was being displacement from such a royal life to the life of humility and servitude, the first thing he said upon seeing the land of Surinam was: “Come, my fellow-slaves, let us descend, and see if we can meet with more honor and honesty in the next world we

shall touch upon" (Behn 26). Thus because this end (this honor as an objective in his life) is missing-as he and his wife have no chance to return and hence their child will be, shamefully, born as a slave-he acts upon the need to resolve the problem of losing honor by getting it through death.

Finally, Patrick Colm Hogan remarks that the "practices that are normal and natural in indigenous culture are often inappropriate, and are almost always denigrated, in colonial culture" (10). For that reason, Oroonoko's murder of his wife is obviously seen as a primitive and brutal act. However, not less brutal is his being kidnapped like an animal. Equally brutal is also his murder on the hands of those who displaced him, deceived him (by not given him his frequently promised freedom), and did not try to understand the motives behind his actions. Nevertheless, we can see, however, that some of the people around Oroonoko can understand and even admire his reaction towards the miserable displacement he and Imoinda are going through. This admiration comes especially after Oroonoko is cruelly slain in a way that his body is cut and placed in different places, which ironically and metaphorically shows that the fate of displacement follows Oroonoko even after his death:

They cut Caesar in quarters, and sent them to several of the chief plantations: one quarter was sent to Colonel Martin, who refused it, and swore he had rather see the quarters of Banister, and the Governor himself, that those of Caesar, on his plantations; and that he could govern his negroes without terrifying and grieving them with frightful spectacles of a mangled king. Thus died this great man, worthy of a better fate, and a more sublime wit than mine to write his praise. (51-52)

In this scene, displacing Oroonoko's body echoes the notion that as a displaced person he has had a fragmentary identity and here, as he dies, his body is "fragmented." His body is cut into pieces, which reflects that once displaced, both the body and the identity find no place of belonging, except the one where the body first existed and the identity was formed. Death in the case of Oroonoko and Imoinda shows that since they have had free identities, they cannot live but free, and when they finally took the matter of displacement into their own hands and died, they died free, but still completely out of place.

Conclusion

Even though it is not typical for critics to read a European text as a postcolonial text, I have tried to show how Behn's *Oroonoko* can in fact be read as such.¹¹ Behn depicts a picture of displaced lives struggling against colonization with a high sense of longing for freedom and regaining sover-

eignty. These lives struggle to maintain their identity and as such oppose the new one forced upon them by the agents of displacements: slavery and colonization. Though the attempts to gain liberty sometimes fail, those who have a strong attachment to their original homeland do not surrender without showing an identity-driven resistance against enslavement and displacement. As we have seen, though unable to undo displacement, Oroonoko and Imoinda stand against it until the last breath. In so doing, Oroonoko shows his “fellow sufferers” that has spoken like a king, lived like a king, and died like king, because he is royalty displaced and enslaved. Imoinda, on the other hand, shows consistency in rejecting the identity given to her by those who displace her. She is ready to die on the hands of Oroonoko instead of perpetually living as a slave or giving birth to one.

Oroonoko demonstrates how acute Aphra Behn’s skills are in drawing characters that behave in a consistent frame, the frame that allows displacement to control the lives of Oroonoko and Imoinda, but only physically. As I have shown, Behn creates in this text noble heroes and complicates the perception of them, illustrating the inner feelings of characters whose struggle for asserting and reasserting their identities defies the imperialistic erasures of such identities. By analyzing the complicated questions that arise from such erasures, which is dramatically forced on protagonists due to displacement and dislocation, there remain more unsettling problems to be explored. It is hoped that this critical and close reading of *Oroonoko* will be a step followed by more efforts in revisiting not only Behn’s writings but also the creative production of seventeenth-century women, those emerging writers whose aesthetic expressions remain in the context of imperial and colonial projects. Even though such contexts are now widely studied, particularly by postcolonial scholars, the place of these authors in the canon is yet to be recognized.

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Notes:

- * I would like to thank Professor Edward Jones of the Oklahoma State University Department of English for his encouragement and advice throughout the writing of this article.
- 1 - In "New Evidence on Aphra Behn's Stay in Suriname," N&Q 42, 1 (1995): 40-41, Bernard Dhuicq acknowledges the "autobiographical and factual elements" of the novella, but he argues that it still "offers ground for discoveries," which is why critics continue to assess the accuracy and falsification done in the text. In "Truth, Wonder, and Exemplarity in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko." *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*. 47.3 (2007): 573-594, Vernon G. Dickson examines the reception of Behn's narrative as containing or lacking factual truth and details but assumes that there is a moral example, in terms of late Renaissance humanism, that Behn wanted to establish. For Dickson, Behn frees her noble hero and source from "full accountability by relating the tale in such a way that shows her mediation as the narrator tells us of things that neither she nor Oroonoko could have known: events private to Imoinda and the old king, conversations between Aboan and Onahal" (585).
 - 2 - On the life and critical and historical study of Aphra Behn, see Derek Hughes and Janet Todd. *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*. Cambridge U P, 2004; Spencer, Jane. *Aphra Behn's Afterlife*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000; Duffy, Maureen. *The Passionate Shepherdess: Aphra Behn, 1640 - 89*. London: Methuen, 1989; O'Donnell, Mary A. *Aphra Behn: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2003.
 - 3 - I am referring to the country with this spelling, instead of the modern way of writing it as Suriname, because this is the way it was written during Behn's time.
 - 4 - See Chamberlain, Mary. *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*. London: Routledge, 1998. pp. 1-19. Catherine Gallaghers introduction to the critical edition of the novel (Boston: Bedford, 2000. 3-25) offers a selection of historical materials exploring geography and background facts.
 - 5 - Behn romanticizes Oroonoko's struggle against the colonizers to regain his nobility and freedom, but I do not think she completely rejects the imperial enterprise prevailing in her age. Rather, we can safely say she artistically condemns some practices associated with it, such as the violence depicted, which is not necessarily accurately reported but sentimentally conveyed. The irony in her narrative about Surinam being taken by the Dutch echoes the debates among scholars about the texts treatment of slavery. For more on this debate see Beach, Adam R. "Behn's Oroonoko, the Gold Coast, and Slavery in the Early-Modern Atlantic World." *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*. 39.1 (2010): 215-233; Aravamudan, Srinivas. *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999. pp.29-66.
 - 6 - For more on the writing career of Behn, see Goreau, Angeline. *Reconstructing Aphra: A Social Biography of Aphra Behn*. New York: Dial, 1980.
 - 7 - In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Avtar Brah points out that location should not be out of focus when approaching dislocation and the strong association with such notions as diaspora and displacement (204).

- 8 - For more on the history of Surinam, see Goslinga, Cornelis C. *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam*. The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1979. A review of the imperial legacy in the country can be found in James S. Olson and Robert Shadles *Historical Dictionary of European Imperialism*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1991. pp.185-188.
- 9 - One can assume the connection here between colonization as an act of exploration and literary production (of the time) as a medium to record such processes as attempting to know the other (inferior or victimized), to create and recreate him or her, and to allow them in fiction to play roles hardly recognized in reality.
- 10 - In *Power, Politics, and Culture*, Gauri Viswanathan asks Edward Said if, as a displaced person, he could find solace or affiliation in reading modern or modernist European literature, which is largely "about exile and displacement." Said answers that he "wasnt always exiled and displaced" but "always felt slightly divided," (259), adding that he particularly likes the study of the twentieth century because of its "expatriate figures" and "wanderers." See Said, Edward W, and Gauri Viswanathan. *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2001.
- 11 - In "Surveying "the Map of Slavery" in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko. " *Journal of Narrative Theory*. 36.3 (2007): 314-340, Adam Sills introduces a different reading of the text, highlighting the shift among critics from reading it as an "influential precursor to eighteenth and nineteenth-century realist fiction," (due to its penchant for details, documentary-style narration, and description of actual places) to resituating it "within a genealogy of seventeenth-century literary texts, including plays, prose, and verse" that had "generic possibilities such as allegory, pastoral, romance, masque, tragicomedy, heroic drama, and satire" (315).