



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova
Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Triennale Interclasse in
Lingue, Letterature e Mediazione culturale (LTLLM)
Classe LT-12

Tesi di Laurea

***The Zong case at the crossroads of history, law
and literature***

Relatrice

Prof.ssa Renata Morresi

Laureando

Gianluca Rosella

N° matricola: 1142100 / LTLLM

Anno Accademico 2024 / 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	p. 3
Chapter One: The trans-Atlantic slave trade and the Middle Passage	p. 5
1.1. Pre-colonial Slavery and the birth of the Atlantic Slave Trade	p. 5
1.2. Liverpool's Economic Significance in the British Slave Trade	p. 8
1.3. The Middle Passage	p. 14
1.4. The Zong case as an example of brutalities aboard slave ships	p. 18
Chapter Two: The Zong Case and its Impact on the Abolition of the Slave Trade in Britain	p. 21
2.1. The ship Zong	p. 21
2.2. The Journey to Jamaica	p. 23
2.3. Tragic Choices: Navigational Errors and Jettison on the Zong	p. 26
2.4. The Gregson v Gilbert Case: Unraveling Inhuman Marine Insurance Policies	p. 28
2.5. The Relevance of the Zong Case	p. 30
2.6. The Road to Abolition	p. 34
Chapter Three: The Zong Case in Arts and Culture	p. 43
3.1. The Zong in Painting and Literature	p. 43
3.2. The Zong: Theatrical and Cinematic representations	p. 48
3.3. Public Memorials and Commemorative Installations	p. 50
Conclusions	p. 55
Abstract in Italian	p. 61
Bibliography, Websites, Figures	p. 65
Ringraziamenti	p. 75

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation aims at recounting the obscure case of the Zong massacre from an historical, legal and literary point of view. In 1781, a consortium of Liverpool merchants, headed by the slave trader William Gregson, decided to purchase what appeared as a bargain in the African coast. Unfortunately, the Liverpool syndicate was unaware, or perhaps not, of what would have happened only a few months later. The Zong was carrying a cargo of approximately 470 enslaved human beings in the Atlantic ocean when the crew realized they made a critical navigational error that extended the voyage and water was not enough sufficient to reach land. With the idea of limiting the economic losses, the captain decided to organizing three different batches to throw overboard more than 130 African slaves (the exact number is still unknown).

The first chapter explores the historical development of the Atlantic slave trade, exploring pre-colonial African slavery in order to understand how “chattel slavery” developed. Particular attention is then given to understanding how the triangular trade system was developed and their major contributors. The “triangular trade” consisted of three voyages: on the first leg, ships carried goods that were brought to Africa and were traded for slaves; on the second leg, Africans were brought to the Americas to be sold; and on the last leg, American products were carried to Europe. The term Middle Passage refers to the second leg of the journey through which slaves were brought from the coast of Africa to be sold in the Americas. This journey was a nightmare for slaves, who were forced to remain stuffed like animals in tiny, filthy, low spaces, lacking any human rights, and fed just to avoid their death. Then, the focus will shift into an in-depth examination on how the British dominated the Atlantic slave trade in the 18th century, using Liverpool as a case study in preparation for the understanding of the complex implications of the Zong case. The historical-generic description of the Middle Passage will be further examined, uncovering the details and issues of this treacherous journey.

In the second chapter, my studies will focus on a more uncommon aspect of the slave trade, which is the marine insurance law. It was a complex subject that disguised dark implications that allowed slave societies to dehumanize human lives during the Atlantic voyage on board slave ships, legitimizing their killing. The Zong case will be deeply investigated to try to uncover the actual reasons that led to the mass killings and the deeper meaning behind this culture of violence profoundly rooted in the British mercantile society. The abolitionist discourse will eventually be explored, investigating on how this horrifying chapter of British history led officially the end of the slave trade and, later, slavery.

Artistic responses to the Zong massacre will be discussed on this last chapter. Ranging from William Turner's controversial painting *The Slave Ship*, to literary works such as David Dabydeen's *Turner*, Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* and NourbeSe Philip *Zong!* that offered fascinating and unique reinterpretations of the harrowing incident, to further performing arts such as theatrical plays, film and eventually public memorials and commemorations. I choose this topic in 2020, precisely when the news of George Floyd's death was circulating all around the media. The idea behind this dissertation arose when this murder brought the public's attention to the debate about historical memory of slavery and colonialism. At that time, I was studying for Anglo-American literature exam when I came across Turner's *The Slave Ship* and remain astonished by the brutalities it represented and how the human life was reduced to a mere insurance issue.

CHAPTER ONE

The trans-Atlantic slave trade and the Middle Passage

The Zong case is proof of brutal realities that happened on slave ships during the Atlantic slave trade and represents a pivotal moment for the later growth of the abolitionist movement. To understand those times this first chapter analyze the origins of the slave trade, beginning from the insights of pre-colonial African slavery to the development of first model of trade, the triangular trade, employed by the Portuguese and then embraced by other Europeans, dwelling in particular on the treacherous journey of the Middle Passage. The Zong was acquired during the peak of the British slave trade. Thus, a particular focus will be on the British trade, examining how crucial the slave trade was for Liverpool's prosperity and how deeply it became ingrained in its urban culture, mainly driven by politics rooted in mercantile self-interest.

1.1 Pre-colonial Slavery and the birth of the Atlantic Slave Trade

The practice of enslavement in Africa differed significantly from the cruel system of chattel slavery that would emerge later during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Instead, these people were as indentured servants, considered by Africans and African leaders as the primary asset capable of sustaining the African economy with activities such as agriculture, extraction of mineral resources, such as gold, iron or salt, manufacturing and craftsmanship. These goods were essential for local consumption and trade (Perbi: 2001, 6 and Falola, Warnock 2007: 352-354, 393). Understood in this manner, slavery was widespread throughout Africa with numerous regions and communities participating in this practice. In pre-colonial Africa, slavery and the slave trade operated on two different levels, the internal dimension and the external one, based on the context and scale. The internal dimension basically refers to the trade that occurred within the African continent, while the external dimension includes vast networks that crossed the Sahara, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The Atlantic slave trade belongs to the last phase of the

external trade from the 15th to the 19th century, together with the Oriental and Islamic worlds (Perbi: 2001, 3).

People were enslaved as a punishment due to criminal acts, to extinguish debts, as a result of raiding and kidnapping or after being prisoners of war and even if they were mentally unstable. These enslaved people could be acquired by tribute, pawning (utilized as a guarantee to borrow money) or purchased through marketplaces situated across the continent (Falola, Warnock 2007: 60, 353, Perbi 2001: 4-6). As pointed out previously, slaves were considered as an essential productive power for the continent, but also could be used as serfdom, for private personal usage or sacrificed, and serve in military operations both in the field or as security for the potentates and in administrative functions (Perbi 2001: 6, 7).

African pre-colonial societies were characterized by a kinship-based social structure, linked by consanguinity, lineage, marriage, membership in a village that formed social groups (Perbi 2001: 7, Falola, Warnock 2007: 354). The integration of slaves into these groups differed depending on where it took place, however mostly were adopted or assimilated by their owners' family, as they commonly did for instance the Bambara in the Middle Niger Valley or the Igbo in Nigeria. This practice of integration led slaves to become pivotal figures as they directly contributed to the expansion and growth of these social groups (Perbi 2001:8).

As slaves they were imposed a series of disadvantages such as the possibility of being sacrificed, the requirement of working harder than free men and women, the prohibition of making decisions without the master's consent, that would belong to their status forever unless they gained freedom (for instance, in Ghana slaves could be freed under monetary payment). Despite that they possessed rights and privileges that let them live a decent life, unlike the later form of slavery in the Atlantic which treated people as commodities and did not provide any such rights or privileges. The pre-colonial enslaved were indeed entitled to receive proper sustenance, clothing, and shelter, the possibility of getting married, as well as legal protection and in some cases even decide to change their owner if they experienced assaults. In addition, as

far as the economic and ownership side is concerned, they could earn a salary and own property (Perbi 2001: 9-12, Falola, Warnock 2007: 354).

The beginning of slave exploitation outside the African internal trade is deeply linked with the Portuguese explorations of the African coast in the 15th century, influenced by the events of the Reconquista in the 13th century, which drove the Portuguese to seek for expansion due to religious, political and economic reasons. After years of explorations between 1419 and 1460, the navigator Infante Henrique or “Henry the Navigator” successfully established on a series of strategic islands outposts, including Madeira, Azores and Cape Verde Islands, which became crucial bases in the Portuguese expansion process eventually leading to their arrival on the Gold Coast in 1471 (Falola, Warnock 2007: 23, 307, Blackburn 1997: 99, 100).

In the early stages, slaves were seized randomly from the African coast and used as servitude in Portugal (Falola, Warnock 2007: 308), however, soon followed regulations to organize the European purchase of slaves (Portuguese and later Spanish, Dutch, French and British merchants), through licenses, the payment of taxes (paid by the occupier of forts) and commissions that has to be paid to local brokers, employed to capture slaves, during the trade (Falola, Warnock 2007: 27, 149, 356). For instance, when the Portuguese reached agreements with African rulers to be allowed to trade slaves, the Portuguese monarch introduced a paid license for merchants who wanted the right to trade there. (Blackburn 1997: 102) Under the payment of a fee in order to use the El Mina fort as gold trading post, the Portuguese engaged in a trade which consisted in acquiring gold in exchange for slaves, as well as a series of goods including “cotton cloths, panther skins, palm oil and some blue shells with red stripes” (Perbi 2001: 4, Blackburn 1997: 106, Falola, Warnock 2007: 27).

Later in the mid-fifteenth century, Infante Henrique the Portuguese pioneered the plantation-based sugar production system in the Atlantic Islands, primarily in Madeira, which relied on coerced labor from Africa, foreshadowing the New World colonial economy. In 38 years, between 1456 to 1494, the sugar production increased more than tenfold, reaching over 1.000 tons, so much that a production limit was imposed, even though it would be

ignored by the producers. The sugar output continued to grow in Madeira until the early 1500s, before the production stabilized about two decades later due to competition from São Tomé and Canary Island. (Falola, Warnock 2007: 308, Blackburn 108-9).

	Brazil					Totals
	Amazonia	Bahia	Pernambuco	South-east Brazil	Brazil unspecified	
1501-1600	0	5,647	18,571	3,955	0	28,173
1601-1700	1,096	312,196	220,337	220,715	1,869	756,213
1701-1800	71,281	814,149	329,063	755,254	15,086	1,984,833
1801-1900	69,397	413,015	256,341	1,280,062	33,093	2,051,908
Totals	141,774	1,545,007	824,312	2,259,986	50,048	4,821,127

Figure 1: Estimates of the Portuguese slave trade disembarkations to Brazil (16th-19th century), *slavevoyages.org*

The sugar plantation business was later expanded in Brazil during the early 16th century, particularly in the southeastern and northeastern region of the country. This expansion continued throughout the 16th and mid-19th centuries, making Brazil one of the major sugar-producing regions in the world.

As shown in the Figure 1 above, it has been estimated that more than 4.8 million Africans disembarked to Brazil (embarkations amounted to 5.5 million), with the South-east Brazil having the highest total number of landings over the four centuries followed by Bahia, Pernambuco, Amazonia and other unspecified regions (SlaveVoyages 2024: Estimates, Falola, Warnock 2007: 71). Portuguese were the pioneer of the triangular trade, named after the new trade model, becoming the basis of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Thus, they established the template for this trade network, sailing from Europe to Africa to exchange goods for enslaved Africans, whom were then transported to the Americas to be traded for valuable commodities such as sugar, tobacco, and cotton. This model revolutionized trade in the Atlantic, influencing other European countries to adopt and adapt it to their own practices (Falola, Warnock 2007: 46-7).

1.2. Liverpool's Economic Significance in the British Slave Trade

The Atlantic Slave Trade, or triangular trade, was the worst nightmare for millions of Africans from the 15th to the 19th century. As anticipated at the end of the previous paragraph, this trade system, which involved Europe, Africa, and the Americas, consisted of three main stages. The first leg began with slave ships departing from European ports such as Liverpool, Nantes, Lisbon, and Seville. Then, loaded with goods and manufactured products including trinkets, slave beads, guns, ammunition, copper, and cloth, these ships headed to Africa to purchase African slaves majorly from the Bights of Benin and Biafra, the Gold Coast and Kongo. Then, on the second expedition, the most traumatizing and grueling for slaves due to the inhuman conditions they were subjected to, the slave cargo started its journey through the Atlantic Ocean, in the so-called Middle Passage, to sell or barter slaves to the Americas, mainly in Brazil, the British or French Caribbean, Spanish mainland and the United States. The last leg of the journey focused on exporting goods produced by the enslaved labor force, such as tobacco, cotton, rum and sugar back to Europe. At the heart of this complex network of trade routes was the Portuguese model of the triangular trade. As previously mentioned, alongside the Portuguese several European nationalities including majorly the British, French, Spanish, and the Dutch, each with their own distinct trade organization, were involved in the transatlantic slave trade. For the purpose of this dissertation, the focus will be solely on the British one (Falola, Warnock 2007: 46, 154, 165, 275-6, 376).

The early involvement of the British in the slave trade dates back to the mid-16th century, precisely in 1562, when John Atkins undertook the first English slave-trading voyage transporting 300 Africans from the coast of Guinea to the Spanish West Indies (Falola, Warnock 2007: xviii, 72, 82). Great Britain had a dominant presence in the slave trade, importing a substantial total of about 2.75 million of slaves, of which 2.2 million destined solely to the British Caribbean, making the British amongst the major importers of slaves during the 18th century (SlaveVoyages 2024, Estimates). Their contribution to the slave trade lies not only in the massive number of slaves they imported into

their colonies in the New World but also in the decisive effort they put into bringing the trade to an end.

Their participation in the abolitionist movement was crucial to bringing slavery and the entire slave trade to cease, not solely in Great Britain but also in the other European countries involved, all the way to the United States. The abolitionist path taken by the British will be explored in depth in the second chapter along with the analysis of the Zong case, the obscure event at the crossroads of history, law and literature of the late 18th century that triggered a profound shock in public opinion, which greatly influenced the development of the British abolitionist movement (Walvin 2011: 96, 98-9).

The English slave trafficking was initially conducted by the Royal Africa Company (RAC), which was granted the monopoly of the slave trade by the monarchy in 1672 in order to supply slaves to the British colonies of North America and the Caribbean. Almost 40 years later, private companies were allowed to engage in slave trading to the British colonies upon payment of a special 10% tax to the Company. Merchants' criticism about the performance of the RAC is validated by the fact that the Company soon lost its monopoly in 1698. Subsequently, by 1712 the free trade took hold and the English trafficking began to be carried on primarily by private merchants and companies, unlike other European trades which were predominantly driven by state support (Falola, Warnock 2007: 83, 266, 330). For instance, the French and the Dutch government-chartered companies, such as the French West India Company and the Dutch West India Company, were granted the monopoly of the slave trade directly by the state (Falola, Warnock 2007: 148, 187-8). In contrast, the Portuguese and Spanish permitted the trade of slaves through the *asiento*, a contract between slave traders and the Spanish crown that enabled the sale of slaves in the Spanish colonies. Again, it was the state, in this case, the crown, that regulated the slave trade as a result of the unification of the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns (Falola, Warnock 2007: 49).

Eventually, due to a high presence of European competitors as well as American ones, which were also highly present in West Africa, and poor administration in England, the Royal Africa Company ceased its involvement

in the slave trade as its financial struggles led to its bankruptcy, further confirming the previous criticism of the merchants. In 1752, the RAC was succeeded by a new trading organization, the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa, marking the end of its significant role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Thus, in opposition to the other European slave trades, the British one was characterized by a unique mix of private enterprises and government support in its slave trade activities (Falola, Warnock 2007: 330-1).

Within the complex web of the British slave trade, the city of Liverpool loomed larger than any other in shaping the destiny of this insidious commerce. Largely discussed on Walvin's *The Zong: A Massacre, the Law and the End of Slavery*, Liverpool is defined as "*The city built on slavery*". The author helps us grasp and delineate the essence and the distinctive features of Liverpool during the peak of the British slave trade, elaborating on its historical significance and contextualizing its role in the events surrounding the Zong massacre (Walvin 2011: Ch.2, 30-40)

Among the principal English ports of the 18th century, such as London and Bristol (Falola, Warnock 2007: 306), Liverpool managed to distinguish itself remarkably due to a series of determining factors, including its strategic trading hub, the use of the bills of credit, investors' know-how and wealth along with their business connections. As a result, in the second half of the 18th century until the abolition of the slave trade, Liverpool became the leading British player in the slave trade. The ship Zong was purchased in 1781 by some influential Liverpool merchants, major culprits in the tragedy of the ship itself, the Gregson syndicate. By that time the British slave trade had reached its peak. Thus, a combination of factors strongly influenced the path that made Liverpool a thriving and prosperous city, both in economic and commercial terms, as well as in its aesthetic and cultural dimensions. The expansion of maritime trade of slaves and goods played a pivotal role in the city's development, initially leading to a demographic growth, transforming Liverpool into a genuine urban center surrounded by the establishment of infrastructures such as hospitals, parks, churches, drinking clubs, as well as theaters and libraries, which were intended for gentlemen and merchants.

Additionally, coffee houses provided spaces where, in addition to leisure, the latter could engage in business and monitor information about upcoming slave ships (Walvin 2011: 31-2).

The mercantile influence was therefore deeply rooted in the urban culture, from the city's infrastructure to the political dynamics. In fact, from the late 17th century until the end of the 18th century “Liverpool was steered towards its commercial prosperity by an elite of merchants who dominated local politics”, as stated by Walvin, who gathered in syndicates and managed the slave trade in all its aspects, whose focus was to make as much money as possible by concentrating their energies to enhance the city’s wealth, all at the expense of enslaved people. Liverpool even had three representative delegates in the Company of Merchants, further consolidating its role in the slave trade (Walvin 2011: 31-2, 35, 37).

However, it's important to note that Liverpool status has not always been thriving and prosperous. From the mid-16th century until the construction of the first dock in 1715, the Old Dock, the growth of the city was sluggish due to the absence of port facilities and maritime trade routes. Around 1700, its population ranged from 5000 to 6000 people (Earle 2015: 1, Falola, Warnock 2007: 264).

The governing body of Liverpool, the Corporation, invested in the construction of new port infrastructures and the expansion of trade routes in order to counter this unfavorable trend. The inauguration of the first dock turned out to be a great investment and a critical step toward the success of Liverpool’s seaborne commerce. Then, in 1757, the development of a network of new canals in the city's hinterland significantly increased the volume and the variety of goods transported, enhancing Liverpool's trade opportunities by connecting the city to inland coalfields. Liverpool received a wide range of goods via these new canals from various regions, including Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cheshire, the Midlands, north Wales and the Thames Valley, that were destined for Ireland, Northern Europe, Africa, the Americas and other parts of England, thereby allowing Liverpool merchants to expand their trade opportunities and exert their influence beyond local boundaries in the

commercial ocean (Walvin 2011: 34-5). The favorable geographical position of Liverpool turned out to be a further advantage for merchants, especially during the War of the Austrian Succession in the 1740s and the subsequent Seven Years' War. In fact, their ships sailed to the Atlantic through the North Channel, the water passage between Ireland and Scotland, avoiding encounters with enemy warships. This route proved to be a significant advantage over its major competitors in London and Bristol, which navigated through the less safe English Channel (or *la Manche* in French), which was often frequented by French enemies. The Figure 2 below highlights both the North and the English channel (Walvin 2011: 33, OpenStreetMap 2023).



Figure 2 Map of the North Channel and the English Channel (© OpenStreetMap, 2023)

In addition, Liverpool's merchants could benefit from quality ships provided by the city's flourishing shipbuilding industry, which, unlike their British competitors, ensured faster vessels at cheaper service fees and consequently leading to an increase of profits and a decrease in travel time and costs. It was no coincidence that 26% of all the British ships employed in the slave trade in the 18th century were built in Liverpool. As a consequence of this flourishing shipbuilding industry, the slave trade increasingly entrenched

its roots also in the business of local craftsmen and industries. Among these, the gun-making industry, in particular, developed significantly, with slave ships as its main customers (Walvin 2011: 38-9).

A further essential aspect that contributed to Liverpool's rise was the appearance of slave-trading entrepreneurs. In the African coast, where Liverpool ships operated trading for slaves mainly on the Bight of Biafra and West Central Africa, with secondary attention given to Sierra Leone and the Windward Coast, establishing relationships and connections with local African traders was crucial. In fact, all this information was then shared with syndicates, groups of wealthy and experienced slave-trading entrepreneurs, who managed the slave trade and made the fortune of Liverpool by creating a unique slaving community, another crucial weapon that fueled Liverpool's thriving economy. Other than commercial contacts and know-how, these men shared their fortune to finance slave voyages and the risks of the trade, they covered insurance costs and eventually shared profits. Moreover, usually, they came from high social class families and became businessmen by working as apprentices at merchant houses or by holding jobs near ports (Walvin 37-8, 65, Falola, Warnock 2007: 264-5).

One of Liverpool's most influential merchants was William Gregson. He stood out among the major Liverpool slave traders over the second half of the 18th century due to his substantial contributions to the city's economic and political landscape. His involvement in the slave trade was an essential source for the British economy, including a total of 152 slave voyages and nearly 60,000 Africans shipped, of which 49'053 survived, that certainly left a profound impact economic-wise (Walvin 2011: 63-4). Moreover, his mandate as mayor obtained in 1762 and his participation in the Corporation committees enabled him to directly participate in the civic affairs of the government and act in favor of slave traders and merchants, deeply influencing the major city enhancement discussed earlier and further shaping the political trajectory of the city (Walvin 2011: 68).

The Gregson syndicate represents the perfect example to grasp the importance of expert men in the slave trade business in driving the success of

Liverpool's slave industry. This is evident when analyzing how swiftly the *Zong* was acquired, underscoring the dynamism that the Liverpool's trade was pursuing and the importance of knowledgeable, well-connected, wealthy and enterprising businessmen but also of attentive slave captains to capitalize on emerging opportunities, strong weapon of Liverpool's prosperity (Walvin 2011: 40). This example also reveals how quickly and easily ships were purchased on behalf of the syndicates through the use of the bills of credit. Through this method of acquisition and the availability of merchant's capitals, ship captains were able to seize the most sudden opportunities on the shore, as captain Hanley did with the *Zong* (Walvin 2011: 58). Eventually, Gregson's emblematic role not only contributed to elevate Liverpool's trade to its peak, but also led to its decline when he decided to proceed against the insurance company in the *Gregson v Gilbert* trial, unintentionally fueling the burgeoning abolitionist movement (Walvin 2011: 23).

1.3 The Middle Passage

The second leg of the triangular trade indicates the famous voyage undertaken by enslaved Africans, forced to abandon their homeland to sail from the African coast to Europe and the New World in order to be traded or sold and be at the service of their masters in sugar, cotton, tobacco and rice plantations or mines. The crossing of the Atlantic Ocean was anything but effortless for slaves, indeed, what happened in slave ships during the Middle Passage aroused interest among abolitionists, who especially through slave narratives or thanks to events such as the *Zong* massacre, created written material to support their cause and rapidly spread knowledge to educate people of what was happening and convince them to support the abolitionist movement (Walvin 2011: 23, Falola, Warnock 2007: intro. xv, 155, 220, 407).

Multiple aspects characterized the cruelty of the Middle Passage, beginning from what happened to slaves prior to boarding. After their capture, slaves were shackled and brought into cells or prisons called barracoons, located inside slave-collecting centers where they had to live until slavers-made ships were ready to departure, sometimes for months or even a year.

These centers also served as hubs for business discussions between ship captains and local slave agents. (Falola, Warnock, 2007: 55, 155).

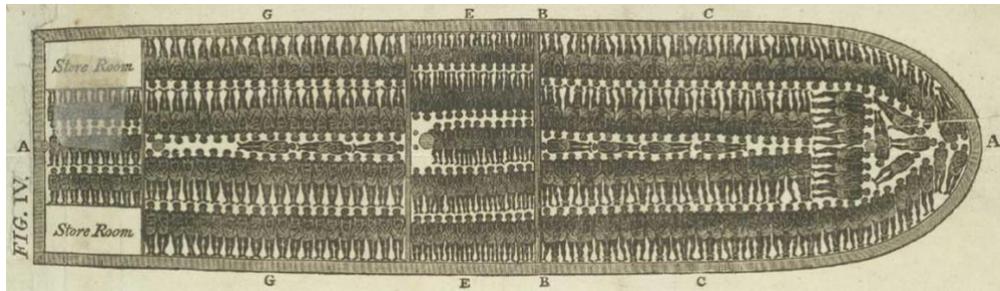


Figure 3: Part of the Diagram of the Brooks slave ship (published by James Phillips, George Yard, Lombard Street, London, 1787)

The figure 3 is one of the most iconic images of the Middle Passage, it depicts how slaves were stored on cargoes holds to undertake the journey in the Atlantic. This is in particular the Brooks slave ship that sailed from Liverpool to Jamaica, taking 454 slaves from the Gold Coast (Diagram of the Brooks, 1787). The diagram was largely copied and published in major communication channels, from books to newspaper, pamphlets and posters, and turned out to be a successful resource for the abolitionist propaganda to spread awareness of the brutalities of the slave trade (Walvin 2011: 16, 41, Falola, Warnock 2007: 87-8-9, Wikipedia, 2024)

After the slaves were being fed with an abundant meal, the embarkation began. Slave ships were generally overcrowded, packing from 150 to 600 slaves in the most efficient way to occupy the entire available space in order to transport them in the largest amount possible. Men and women were shaved to facilitate cleansing, separated most of the times in different holds, shackled in pairs and placed nude one close to each other they could hardly move or even sit properly. Slaves had to live like this for the entire trip, except for little breaks conceded during daytime, when the weather was favorable. This was the time of the “Dancing the slaves” practice, which consisted of slaves performing compulsorily in a sort of figurative “dance” in front of the attentive gaze of the ship’s crew. This mandatory activity was established by the surgeon in charge of the examination of slaves throughout the entire journey and was useful to

maintain their physical and mental condition, again only to bag more compensation from the sales. The crew also made good use of this time to clean the deck (Falola, Warnock, 2007: 132). Sleeping one close to each other and since crewmembers didn't clean the area day by day, slaves had to suffer each other's blood, feces, urine and vomit of which the floor was filled with. These conditions would obviously not be healthy for any human being, as a matter of fact those places were a massive hive of diseases, the major cause of death. Of course, diseases were not only caused by the unsanitary conditions but also by the poor diet and the scarce quantities of water they received on a daily basis. In addition to diseases, many other factors increasing the death rate were violence, torture, suicide, rape and drownings. Women and children were highly subjected to the sexual assault of the crew especially on day-time. Scholars believe that suicidal behaviors were more prone to be associated to women than men. This contributed a lot to the transmission of diseases on board the ships (Falola, Warnock 2007: intro. xxiii, 98, 132).

The crossing lasted two to four months, depending on the location of departure, the itinerary, the weather conditions, which could provoke accidents, or slave rebellions and it was the captain's concern to try to complete the voyage in a short time to prevent as many deaths as possible among the slaves since reaching destination with a higher number of slaves meant obtaining a higher profit in sales. As far as accidents and shipwrecks is concerned there was a particular part of the ocean that slave ships tried to avoid called "sea of thunder", due to the fact that it was at that point of the journey that diseases were proliferating the most because of the bad weather and consequently no cleaning was done by the sailors. This area was located at about 1000 miles from São Tome towards Cape Verde Islands. The Gold Coast was the leading supply of African slaves, and because of that it was the main point of departure followed by Senegambia, Angola and the South East Africa. (Falola 98, 147, 218)

Shorter trips had certainly multiple advantages on reducing death rate: firstly, it could avoid the spreading of diseases such as smallpox, dysentery, measles, malaria, fever and ophthalmia since the process of cleaning was

conducted only during good weather; secondly, lower chance to be exposed to a series of risks and accidents during the crossing, such as unfavorable weather that could cause shipwrecks; and lastly because a shorter voyage would have mitigated the stress these horrendous conditions procured them. Of course, even slavers' lives could have been saved with an early arrival to destination, because yellow fever, smallpox and other intestinal diseases affected them too, and could be avoided with shorter journeys along with the risk of drowning or undergoing slave rebellion (Falola, Warnock, 2007: 121, 276).

Records of deaths from drownings were frequent during Middle Passage. In this regard Olaudah Equiano wrote: "One day, when we had a smooth sea, and a moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen, who were chained together (I was near them at the time), preferring death to such a life of misery, somehow made through the nettings, and jumped into the sea: immediately another quite dejected fellow, who, on account of his illness, was suffered to be out of irons, also followed their example; and I believe many more would soon have done the same, if they had not been prevented by the ship's crew, who were instantly alarmed" (Equiano, 1790). Olaudah Equiano in this passage taken from his *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, written by Himself*, recounts a miserable moment happened while he was traveling on a slave ship during the Middle Passage, trying to make it clear what an abyss those people fell into after suffering all the violence, abuses, tortures described above, so much as to push them to drown themselves into the ocean to avoid the uncertain future that awaited them. Equiano was a former slave recognized for his narrative in which he recounts his life as a slave from his abduction in Guinea to the crossing of the Middle Passage to reach the New World. He was also able to purchase his freedom and live as one of the most influential abolitionist figures in London (Falola, Warnock, 2007: 159).

Finally, after months of sailing on the Atlantic Ocean, slave ships landed in the Americas: here, slaves were cleaned and prepared to be more appealing at auctions where the buyers made their purchases and subsequently

employed them for agrarian labor, mining silver and gold, or as artisans. (Falola, Warnock, 2007: 45-6)



Figure 4: Slave Auction, Virginia (Cranstone, 1862)

A few stratagems were utilized to make slaves appear healthier or younger: for example, some slaves were shaved to hide grey hair or patches that made them look older, other were oiled and the scars provoked by punishments were covered with tar. Even the destination and the competition with other slave ships present at the same time in the same port affected the price of Africans. Slaves were sold at auctions, during which an auctioneer controlled the offers and the winner was the highest bidder, as shown in the painting above (Figure 4). Another form of auction was called the “scramble” which consisted in selling enslaved people at a fixed price; buyers could pick slaves from open areas created specifically. Weaker slaves were cheaper and more likely to die because of their consideration was even lower than the other slaves, so their owner had no intentions to treat them with any regards. In conclusion, the process of buying and selling of slaves was another horrifying experience for slaves, who were forced to withstand this mass of people exploring their bodies without any regards on their dignity at all (Walvin: 2011, 93, Falola, Warnock: 2007, 236, Kelly: 2012, 1-21).

1.4 The Zong case as an example of brutalities aboard slave ships

The English slaver *Zong* departed from Liverpool on the 5th of March 1781 to reach the African Gold Coast. The obscure case saw more than 130 slaves (no accurate number exists at the moment) thrown voluntarily overboard due to a number of complications, particularly a confuse governance of the ship, the lack of leadership and poor administration of resources (Walvin 2011: 60, 87-89, 93, Falola, Warnock 2007: 406). On the 6th of September 1781, the *Zong* sailed from Africa to Jamaica with an exaggerated number of slaves for its dimension, approximately 440. As a consequence, one of the main issues aboard was the overcrowding which caused the loss of half of the slaves for a large part due to diseases spreading during the voyage. To prevent running out provisions and lose other profitable Africans, someone between captain Collingwood and the crew (it is still unclear by now) gave the order to throw the slaves alive into the ocean in three different stages, certain to claim them as a loss to the insurance company, so as not to lose the profits he would have earned from their sale (Walvin 2011: 41, 132, 174-5).

The case between the insurers and the shipowners was brought to court by the latter and aroused great interest among abolitionist and shock among the public sphere and eventually gave the obscure case of *Zong* the possibility to emerge and become “a highly visible political and legal issue” (Walvin 2011: 23). The next chapter will delve more into the various legal and insurance aspects of the trade by analyzing the vicissitudes of the *Zong* case.

CHAPTER TWO

The Zong Case and its Impact on the Abolition of the Slave Trade in Britain

This chapter recounts the chronicle of the Zong case, from the initial acquisition of the ship to the legal and insurance aspects that the controversial Gregson v Gilbert trial unveiled. Ironically, the event was exposed to the public by the Gregson syndicate, the owners of the ship, who decided to sue the insurers to receive compensation for the people murdered by their own crew. Examining the approach of the marine insurance law towards slaves, we will uncover greater issues concerning the topic of slavery and the collective outrage and determination that emerged from this tragedy that eventually led to the end of the slave trade and later slavery in Britain.

2.1 The ship Zong

The story of the slave ship Zong began the summer of 1781 when Richard Hanley, the captain of the English slave ship William owned by the Liverpool merchants William Gregson and his two sons James and John, together with James Case, Edward Wilson and James Aspinal, was headed to Guinea to buy slaves and eventually sell them in Jamaica. It was on the African coast that Captain Hanley first decided to purchase the Zong and then to appoint Luke Collingwood, previously operating in the William as a surgeon, as the captain of the new slaver. But, besides his medical abilities, Collingwood had no experience in commanding a ship and his disastrous administration will reveal to be fatal for the success of the expedition (Oldham 2007: 299, Walvin 2011: 70, 72, 73, Baucom 2005: 10).

The Zong was previously a Dutch vessel named Zorgue that along with the Aurora and the Eendracht was seized by the British ship Alert early in 1781. The Dutch were considered enemies by the British since, during the war against the North American rebel colonies, they supported the American rebels alongside the Danish West Indian islands and, above all, the French and the Spanish, who sought to exploit the war to take control of slave islands abroad

and expand their territories in strategic locations and thus finding themselves in a more favorable position in the slave trade (Walvin 2011: 72). The three ships were seized with the assistance of the letter of marque and reprisal: basically, a license given to merchant ship captains by The Lords of the Admiralty or the Vice-Admiralty court that authorized the crossing of international border in order to capture enemy ships or vessels. It was also useful to fight the unauthorized reprisal of ships and vessels, thus to deter maritime piracy. The *Zorgue* proved to be a great deal for the Gregsons, save for the crew, which Captain Hanley later assembled. It was a ship ready to sail with 244 African slaves already aboard, but Hanley chose to send Collingwood to find more in Cape Coast and Accra, where he stayed for about five months before setting sail for Jamaica (Walvin 2011: 72, 76).

The crew was formed by 20 people, incorporating three members from the old Dutch crew, twelve transferred from the *William*, including the surgeon Luke Collingwood, the first mate James Kelsall, the second mate Joseph Wood, a passenger by the named Robert Stubbs and the rest were mostly unemployed miserable men from the coast who had no other choice of joining a slaver (Walvin 2011: 56, 61). Particular attention goes to Robert Stubbs, a controversial figure whose role was anything but positive for the outcome of the *Zong's* journey. Although he boarded as a mere passenger to get to Britain, we can assume that he was welcomed on the *Zong* for his past experience as captain of a slaver, feature that captain Hanley, desperately searching for a crew, would not have despised. To this day, Stubbs is given credit for being the sole to testimony in person (the other testimony was given by James Kelsall but in written form, since he was never called to testify in court), who provided most of the knowledge we possess of this tragic event during the Gregson v Gilbert trial. It's true that his recounts can be viewed as a non-reliable source simply for the fact that the daily logbook of the *Zong* had disappeared before the ship came back to Liverpool on May 20 1782, (Falola, Warnock 2007: 406, Webster 2007: 289) and consequently, it is impossible to prove the truth of Stubbs' (and Kelsall's) claims or to compare his testimony with a tangible and reliable source. It's also worth noticing that even with the logbook in our hands,

the captain may have falsified some information, although, its apparent disappearance leads us to believe the opposite, as Webster explains (Webster 2007: 290). On top of that, Stubbs' malevolent personality may be another reason to question the credibility of his words. His history of failure and incompetence as master slaver and governor says it all. At sea, he lost a cargo of 230 Africans during his term as a master of the *Black Joke* in 1757 when the ship was seized by the French. However, his reputation plummeted further during his governance at Anomabu, a trading fort owned by the Company of Merchants trading into Africa. Appointed as governor in 1780, Stubbs proved unsuitable for the position, lacking literacy and neglecting his administrative duties (Walvin 2011: 78-9). He was despised by both whites and blacks, accused of cheating by local traders, and had a contentious relationship with the governor of Cape Coast, John Roberts. The two described as “entirely given up to Drunkenness and every Species of Riot and Debauchery” (Walvin 2011: 82) caused chaos in the forts, resulting eventually in Stubbs' dismissal precisely when the *Zong* was berthed on the African coast waiting to embark new slaves and set up a crew, in 1781. In the end, shortly before his boarding, he was physically assaulted and humiliated by a group from Cape Coast Castle. Thus, fearing for his life, he decided to leave Anomabu and join the *Zong* (Walvin 2011 78, 81-86).

According to Walvin, both Stubbs and Kelsall accused Captain Collingwood, who died shortly after the arrival in Jamaica, of making the decision to throw the slaves overboard. By accusing the now deceased captain, in a certain way they safeguarded themselves, the Gregson syndicate, the members of the crew, which oddly were never called to testify at the trial and the insurance law (Walvin 2011: 126, 133, 149). Opposing the accusations against Collingwood was Reverend Gregory, an abolitionist who was familiar with the surgeon and considered him as "well-intentioned man". Gregory did not excuse Collingwood for harboring the same unjust prejudices that belonged to those involved in the slave trade but wanted to point out that to be blamed was the entire slave system, not a single man (Walvin 2011: 149).

2.2 The Journey to Jamaica

From the outset, it becomes evident that the *Zong* encountered numerous difficulties. Firstly, the ship's troubles began with its initial purchase, as it was already loaded with slaves whose backgrounds and characteristics remained unknown to the crew. This lack of selection and examination hindered the upcoming voyage, as the captain and crew commonly required familiarity with the slaves they would be dealing with throughout the treacherous journey. Understanding the slaves' behavior was crucial, and this omission made their handling considerably more challenging. Additionally, the hasty assembly of the crew exacerbated the situation. The men barely knew one another, aside from a group of twelve who had previously sailed together from Liverpool to the African Coast. This absence of cohesion among the crew members and the presence of characters such as that of Robert Stubbs, further complicated decision-making processes, creating an uncomfortable and inefficient environment on board the ship. Nevertheless, this marked merely the beginning of a disastrous journey, characterized by a relentless chain of errors and misfortunes, starting with a disorganized command hierarchy, to the utter inhumanity of whoever made the decision to kill hundreds of people alive in a desperate attempt to salvage a voyage that turned out to be a complete economic failure for the British company anyway.

The 18th of August 1781 the *Zong* finally departed from the African coast towards São Tomé to pick up their last load of provisions in preparation of the voyage into the Atlantic (Walvin 2011: 74). The ensuing incident was greatly influenced by this little diversion, proving the immediate signs of a disordered crew, which resulted in the substantial leakage problems.



Figure 5: The route taken by the Zong, 18 August–22 December 1781 (Walvin 2011: 21)

On September 6th the Zong left São Tomé and headed towards Black River, Jamaica, carrying an excessive number of African slaves for its size. As we know, overcrowding was a major issue and not to be underestimated, especially aboard a British vessel that weighed merely around 100 tons. To get a better idea, the Zong, compared to other English slave ships of the same weight, should have carried a maximum of 193 people. However, astonishingly, it was burdened with an excessive cargo of roughly 440 people (again no precise data exists at the moment). This extreme overcrowding highlights the disregard for basic safety and human welfare in the pursuit of maximizing profits. For comparison, The Brooke, another famous English slaver, had a capacity of 609 slaves but it weighed more than twice as much as the Zong (Walvin 2011: 41).

Just over three months into the voyage, precisely the 22th of November, only a few weeks before the arrival in the south coast of Jamaica, a huge leakage of water was discovered. Unfortunately, the situation was already dire as the water leak was discovered too late, perhaps once more due to poor organization on the assignment of the tasks. The first mate James Kelsall was indeed in charge of monitoring the situation of the provisions before departure and throughout the Atlantic voyage, and knew that the water casks were

trimmed by unidentified coopers in São Tome, as the Zong's were unavailable (Walvin 2011: 75). But, four days before the discovery of the water leakage, Kelsall was suspended from his position by captain Collingwood, possibly delirious due to the illness he was affected, and therefore, tragically, the least reliable of the crew, Mr. Stubbs, was put in command (Walvin 2011: 88-9).

Nevertheless, an extra amount should have been guaranteed from the beginning of the journey, when Kelsall was still in charge of the water supplies: in fact, the 3/4 of a gallon of water per person, per day embarked in the Zong was considered an average amount for Liverpool ships (this measurement was not imposed by the law but it was determined taking into account the experiences of past voyages in the Atlantic; the French ships for example used to embark double the amount of the English, that is 8 pints per person, per day), capable of sustaining a voyage of 8 weeks, but ignoring several crucial variables such as accidents, leaks, contamination, a prolongation of the voyage due to unfavorable weather conditions, navigational errors, or simply activities such as cooking or washing, that could have altered the appropriate quantity sufficient to pursue a sustainable trip, as occurred in the Zong. (Walvin 2011: 75, 89)

2.3 Tragic Choices: Navigational Errors and Jettison on the Zong

The lack of water proved to be fatal for the subsequent decision to throw the slaves overboard, especially because another serious mistake compromised the voyage. On 27-28 November, about three months after leaving São Tomé, the Zong sighted Jamaica but mistook it for the French enemy territory Cape Tiburon, a region situated in Haiti. As a result, the English slaver advanced farther than its intended location, jeopardizing both the lives of the slaves and the crew by extending the length of the voyage.

In the 18th century, following the right course at sea was complex, even when ships were in expert hands, due to the limited technological advancements of the time that caused difficulties in determining a ship's longitude. Although the position of the sun at noon was used to calculate latitude, there was no defined method for calculating longitude. In general, in

order to identify the position of a ship, one would try to find the intersection between the coordinates of both longitude and latitude (Walvin 2011: 90).

The method of lunar distances and the use of chronometers were the main ways by which longitude was measured, but neither was considered reliable because deemed too inaccurate. The first did not rely on costly instruments but instead required a high level of mathematical expertise. In contrast, chronometers did not need much effort to use but were expensive, requiring at least three for higher accuracy, which made them accessible only to officers who could afford them. In addition to that, they were part of the standard equipment that the Navy provided to the British Warship in the 1840s, but in the early 1800s only very few British ships carried one (less than 10%). For these reasons the lunar method was the most widely employed during the Zong years, whereas chronometers began to spread and become more affordable by the mid-nineteenth century taking the place of the challenging lunar method as the principal and improved means of calculating the longitude at sea (Rodger 2004: 484-5, de Grijns 2020: 495).

This error certainly aggravated the situation, causing an extension of the trip and the need of finding a solution to make sure that the remaining supplies were sufficient to reach Jamaica. The simplest idea that could have spared the lives of many slaves, could have been to try diminishing the rations of water and food per person (Walvin 2011: 89). Apparently, this idea was shared by slaves onboard the ship as Kelsall claimed in his affidavit (Walvin 2011: 137), but this option was not even considered. Instead, what came up during the reunion between the crewmen was to kill a number of slaves by throwing them at sea (this decision actually had a specific reason which we are going to deal later in the chapter) (Walvin 2011: 93). Thus, another incident after the water leak occurred under Stubbs' command, which was appointed five days before the Zong sighted Tobago by captain Collingwood, who, still unavailable due to his illness, relied on the murky passenger instead of following the prescribed procedure and promote the first mate, James Kelsall. This was probably the worst decision that Collingwood could have taken, considering the questionable background of the former governor (Walvin 2011:

78, 86). Basically, since Stubbs was appointed captain, three pivotal episodes happened: firstly, a lack of organization in monitoring water supplies resulted in a huge delay of three months before the leakage was noticed; secondly, the journey was further compromised due to a navigational error; in the third place, the crucial event of a mass killing was enacted. Since Kelsall was reinstated as first mate the same day the jettison began, it is unclear whether he or Stubbs gave the order to the crew (Walvin 2011: 132).

The jettison took place over the course of three days, beginning the 29th of November and the other two following days of December 1781. African slaves were chosen randomly, handcuffed to prevent any insurrection against the crew and thrown overboard in three batches; according to James Walvin respectively 54 people the first, 42 the second and 38 the third one, then 10 more committed suicide after realizing what was happening to their companions (Walvin 2011: 94, 136). The number of slaves is another uncertain information that varies from a range of 130 to 150, although 132 appears to be the most precise number (Faubert 2018: 17-8). Further deaths occurred during the voyage due to disease spreading, which added with the mass murder resulted in a remaining cargo of about half its original size (Falola, Warnock 2007: 406). At this point, the Zong, loaded with merely 208 slaves, finally reached Jamaica the 22th of December 1781. The same day, the remaining Africans were ready to be sold (Walvin 2011: 95).

2.4 The Gregson v Gilbert Case: Unraveling Inhuman Marine Insurance Policies

It is essential to understand that the Gregson v Gilbert case does not refer to a murder trial, but to the request of compensation that the owners of the Zong brought to court against the insurers for the loss of the 132 slaves that their crew voluntarily killed by throwing them at sea (Walvin 2011: 23, 96). Let's seek to understand how marine insurance policies worked and why insurers initially lost the case in favor of the owners, beginning with a passage from the standard insurance policy:

Touching the Adventures and Perils which we the Assurers are contented to bear and do take upon us in this Voyage, they are, of the Seas, Men-of-War, Fire, Enemies, Pirates, Rovers, Thieves, Jettisons, Letters of Mart and Counter-Mart, Surprisals, Takings at Sea, Arrests, Restraints and Detainments of all Kings, Princes, and People, of what Nation, Condition or Quality soever, Barratry of the Master and Mariners, and of all other Perils, Losses and Misfortunes that have or shall come to the Hurt, Detriment, or Damage of the said Goods and Merchandises and Ship, &c., or any Part thereof. (Oldham 2007: 301)

Maritime insurance law in the 18th century was a very complex and ambiguous topic and certainly the standard policy cited above, although providing several examples, remains too vague and leaves a lot of room for interpretation. Particularly the last part, the most relevant to our case, which states that “all other Perils, Losses and Misfortunes that have or shall come to the Hurt, Detriment, or Damage of the said Goods and Merchandises and Ship, &c., or any Part thereof” are covered by the insurance, in which the case of “jettison” could easily fit, and that is precisely what the solicitors of the owners did, interpreting to their advantage the “perils of the sea” to justify the crew of the Zong casting overboard more than 130 Africans inside the declaration drafted for the trial. Although without any evidence that proved the state of the vessel, the solicitors claimed that due to the “perils of the sea” (in this case strong winds and unfavorable currents refers to “all other perils”) the ship turned out “foul and leaky” thus creating the condition of absolute necessity to throw slaves overboard (Walvin 2011: 104-6, Oldham 2007: 313).

Insurrection was another condition under which the Solicitor-General Lee could use and had used to motivate the killings, except Stubbs declared they wanted to prevent it from happening, not that it actually occurred (Oldham 2007: 309). This specific condition, when actually met, gave the insurance company liability for the African losses as examined in John Weskett’ studies *A Complete Digest of the Theory Laws and Practice of Insurance:*

The insurer takes upon himself the risk of the loss, capture, and death of slaves, or any other unavoidable accident to them: but natural death is always understood to be excepted: – by natural death is meant, not only when it happens by disease or sickness, but also when the captive destroys himself through despair, which often happens: but when slaves are killed, or thrown into the sea in order to quell an insurrection on their part, then the insurers must answer. (Walvin 2011: 104)

By analyzing the passage of the *Weskett*'s studies above, two crucial points are clarified. In the first instance, death caused by jettison was responsibility of the insurance company solely in order to suppress any potential insurrection. Secondly, deaths classified as natural, including suicides or illness, were excluded from coverage. This explains why the crew decided to cast the Africans overboard in the first place. In fact, they might have increased the likelihood of natural death, if they had decided to simply cut or eliminate the ration per person, in which case they would not have been compensated for their loss. The jettisoning was therefore the fastest way to get rid of slaves and at the same time permitted to spare Liverpool company the completion of an already doomed voyage and incurring with major economic loss (Webster 2007: 296, Walvin 2011: 104-5).

When the case was brought back to court by the insurers in May 1783, major flaws in the declaration of the plaintiff's solicitors were discovered. Inconsistencies between Stubbs' testimony and the plaintiff's solicitor's declaration exposed a lack of evidence proving that the ship was "foul and leaky", thus dismantling every possible justification for the absolute necessity of jettisoning the slaves at sea. Moreover, the declaration included no mention about a possible captain's negligence, implying that it was solely due to the perils of the sea that the incident occurred. On this argument, Mr. Justice Buller, on the part of the insurer, stated that "the Underwriters are not liable for a mistake made by the Captain" (Oldham 2007: 315), while Solicitor-General John Lee and Alan Chambre, on the part of the owners, opposed by stating that insurers are excluded from reimbursing owners only if the captain's negligence

is so serious that it is punished directly by the ship holders. Eventually, it was determined that the circumstances of "absolute necessity" did not subsist, as there was no imminent danger that would have justified the jettisoning, and therefore, the insurers would not be held liable for these losses. Lord Mansfield was finally prone to a retrial when from the review of Stubbs' written testimony emerged that a batch of 26 slaves were thrown overboard only after "the Rain had fell several Days" (Krikler 2007: 37), in which case the problem of water supplies should have not subsisted (Burnard 2019: 2). Sadly, these allegations not only pushed Lord Mansfield to hold a new trial, which no evidence proves that was held, but most importantly implies that under certain circumstances the murders occurred before the rain were justified, confirming that deliberate killings were actually possible (Krikler 2007: 37-8, Walvin 2011: 135, Oldham 2007: 313-5).

2.5 The Relevance of the Zong Case

Understanding the background of the Zong case is crucial, as it reveals a chilling culture of violence intertwined within its narrative. The culture of violence was mandatory at sea, it was a core component of the entire system in order to survive onboard a slaver, as it consented to control the ship by disseminating terror among the slaves to complete such hideous voyage. Killing a slave was counterproductive for the pockets of both the captains and sailors, who received a bonus for every successful voyage, and mainly for those of the owners, as each wounded or dead slave corresponded to a partial or total reduction of the slave's value resulting in a profit loss. This proves that violence was not being done for pleasure, indubitably with numerous exceptions, but rather it became an intrinsic immoral act that was induced to sailors by the slavery society (Walvin 2011: 52, 53). The Zong case was undoubtedly one of the numerous instances of slaves being jettisoned during the slave trade era, but none of it had such impact. Therefore, why can the Zong case be considered of such relevance and what differentiates it from other cases of slaughter in slave ships?

Throughout the slave trade era, before and after the Zong case, these kinds of episodes occurred regularly on board of slave ships in the Atlantic, such as on board the slaver Sally in 1765 where 80 slaves were thrown overboard in order to quell an insurrection. A similar course was followed by the African slaves on the Nassau, purposefully drowned since their physical condition "ruined" by scars and wounds inflicted by gunshot would have reduced their value in a future sale (Walvin 2011: 104, Rediker 2007: 290).

Major evidence of these terrible episodes can be found inside the slave narrative, a literary genre that includes over 6000 autobiographical tales written by slaves about their experiences during enslavement. In addition to slave narratives, we can find several recounts from people who worked on slave ships as naval officers, slave captain and sailors, telling their life involvements in the slave trade period and eventually their conversion in favor of the abolitionism (Walvin 2011: 102-3). Some remarkable people who experienced the slave trade were Olaudah Equiano, former slave known for his contribution in the abolition campaign and for his *Interesting Narrative* (1789) (Falola, Warnock 2007: 159), where he recounts his experience as a slave from the very beginning when he was abducted in Guinea and then throughout the journey that brought him to the New World via the Middle Passage; John Newton, a former slave trader and captain, famous for his hymn 'Amazing Grace' symbolizing "a penitent slave trader giving thanks for his deliverance from the sinfulness of slave trading" (Walvin 2011: 53, Basker 2002: xxxiv, xxxv); Thomas Branagan, a former sailor on board slave ships and a foreman on a sugar plantation in Antigua, whose experience led him to convert in favor of abolitionism and become an itinerant preacher and writer, most known for his poems 'Avenia' and 'The Penitential Tyrant' in which he focuses on the evil of slavery (Phillips 2009: 605).

Now, back to the initial discussion on violence, given the tremendous effort and cost that was spent in acquiring, transporting and eventually selling slaves, and the economic loss that would have resulted for each death, most of the time these brutal actions were premeditated, and those who committed murder were surely aware of having their backs covered, economically

speaking, by the marine insurance (Walvin 2011: 56, 106, Rediker 2007: 340). As far as the Zong case is concerned, the confidence of the Liverpool company on having the right to accomplish those brutal acts, reinforced by the apparently invincible slave trade due to the positive economic impact it gave to British commerce, prompted the owners to sue the insurance company, lest they lose the value of the deceased slaves. Indeed, the Zong trial began as a request for compensation and not to condemn the murderers of the Africans who drowned at sea. In this way, the Gregson syndicate not only declared complicit in the murders but, above all, they revealed the incident to the public sphere, leaving society in a state of astonishment at the depths of the whole affair. Great disappointment also resided in the offensive language used in the courtroom to refer to African slaves. Lord Mansfield for instance, explained the meaning of 'natural death' law-wise by equaling the compensation for the loss of the Africans "as if horses were killed, they are paid for in the gross" (Walvin 2011: 134). The Chief Justice's remark reflected the inhumane thoughts ingrained in the minds of those who experienced the slave trade. A troubling progression which started in the form of expression to then manifest in reality, in ideologies and eventually in law, which viewed a potential loss of slaves, animals or goods as the exact same thing, financially and ethically speaking, showcasing the disturbing normalization of human beings being treated as commodities (Oldham 2007: 316, Walvin 2011: 75, 134).

Here, an interesting passage stated in *Black Imagination*, explaining how during the slave trade, "monetary language" was deeply linked with the dehumanization of slaves:

freedom and personhood depended on money in a slaveholding economy. The profit motive, which had occasioned the slaves' transatlantic passages in the first place, was inscribed in the social structures of the "peculiar institution" with startling consistency. Treated as chattel and assigned a cash equivalent, the slaves were depersonalized further by the degree of abstraction inherent in monetary language, which screens contextual relations and reduces

vastly different activities, objects, and relations to a common denominator. (Diedrich, Gates, Pedersen 1999: 117).

The courtroom of Lord Mansfield also kept on referring to slaves by using terms such as “chattels, goods, property” (Walvin 2011: 134, Hoare 1820: 239, 240) and refrained from defining the case as a “slaughter” or a “massacre” (Walvin 2011: 135, Hoare 1820: 242-3), offering hints on what kind of path the English law was following, in the form of acceptance of the culture of slavery, of the language and values of the men involved in the slave trade in first person and who decided to give an economic value to the life of other men who became “Visible only as pieces of property, [slaves could] not [be seen] as human beings” (Diedrich, Gates, Pedersen 1999: 118). From the brazenness with which the case was brought to court by the Liverpool merchants, to the ease in which slaves were killed, as well as significant issues such as equal rights and slave ownership, (triggering subject for Granville Sharp’s later studies to prove that slavery was illegal in England), the Zong case raised a number of issues which converged all into the cult of slavery (Walvin 2011: 130, 138), which drastically drove the abolitionist campaign. These are the main reasons why the Zong case has garnered much greater attention compared to numerous similar instances, remaining striking evidence to the brutality inflicted during the era of slave trade.

When the news of the Zong was reported by the Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser in 1783, the fact that the perpetrators of such a massive murder went unpunished and, on top of that, were able to profit from those deaths as a result of the jury’s decision, prompts disbelief among the public. Subsequently to the sentence given at the end of the trial that begun on 6 March 1783, the very first time the case was brought to court by the Gregson, the case was reviewed on 21-22 May 1783 as the insurers did not want to give in and certainly did not agree about the decision made by the judge (Walvin 2011: 123). Therefore, to counter the allegations of the Liverpool company, the strategy of the insurers’ advocates, consisting of Mr. Davenport, Mr. Pigot and Mr. Heywood, was to shift the main topic beyond a case that was purely found

on insurance matter, to a deeper argument concerning politics, ethical and moral discourses. It was decisive in this maneuver to have the cooperation and support of Granville Sharp, pivotal figure in the whole Zong affair and the subsequent abolitionist campaign, the man who, throughout the trial, acted as counselor of the insurers legal team, whose purpose, surely distinct from the latter, was to bring murder charges against the crewmember of the slave ship (Walvin 2011: 124).

2.6 The Road to Abolition

The massacre of the Zong has resonated so strongly that contributed significantly to the development of the abolitionist society that led to the successful outcome of the abolitionist campaign against the slave trade and later slavery in Britain. As we explained before, the case became important evidence of the barbarity of the British slave trade that took place on slave ships during transatlantic journeys and increased concerns about human rights, as well as spreading knowledge about the matter of maritime insurance law, which turned out to be inclined to favor slavery for the benefit of Liverpool's thriving economy, being the slave trade deeply linked to the country's prosperity at the expense of those human beings enslaved and dehumanized to such an extent that they were legally considered as bargaining chip and, in a sense, explicitly encouraging potential murder decisions (Walvin 2011: 109, 114).

In the mid-18th century something was changing, people in Britain began to repudiate the slave system condemning slavery in favor of a growing abolitionist sentiment. Particularly influential in this process was the figure of Granville Sharp, one of the pioneers of the British campaign against the slave trade, highly involved in the background of the Zong case and other slave freedom-oriented cases, firmly believer in the illegality of slavery in Britain (Walvin 2011: 114, Merrill 1945: 382), whose anti-slavery sentiment was highly inspired by the encounter with Jonathan Strong. It was 1765 when Sharp met Strong, a young black man 'imported' from Barbados, severely beaten and then abandoned on the street by his master, who two years later noticed him on the street and confident of his rights as a slaveholder, decided to request the

Lord Mayor's officers to detain the boy pending his sale. Sharp was eventually able to save Strong by obtaining his release confronting directly the Lord Mayor's office, shocked at the alarming ease with which slaveholders could get support from the authorities in cases involving enslaved men. This episode deeply touched Sharp, who now came to know about slavery in England and the power that slaveholders had over slaves' freedom. It became evident to him that the English legal system was far from inclined to provide any form of support to those seeking liberation from bondage in any way (Walvin 2011: 110). Thus, caught up in this complex subject concerning the legality of slavery in England, he decided to further explore the topic, beginning to review the opinions of York-Talbot dating back to 1729, respectively the Attorney and Solicitor Generals of a group of West Indian traders and planters, in which he discovers that slaves were not freed by coming to England nor by baptism. Moreover, he confronted his legal advisors, who confirmed the power of masters to bring slaves back to slave colonies even against their will, exactly as the planter Lisle hoped to accomplish with Strong. Obviously, planters in England supported the York-Talbot opinion of 1729, so that they could continue having full control of their slaves. Sharp, instead, did not support any of these ideas, nor did he approve the fact that these opinions had become customary in the courts' standard of judgment, despite the judges kept having persistent concerns on the argument (Walvin 2011: 115).

From then, Sharp, highly motivated by the suffering that slaves had to endure due to lack of clarity on the matter at hand, decided to dedicate his life on studying assiduously the law until he was able to prove slavery illegal in England. After two years and now confident of his knowledge on the argument, he finally decided to give a voice to what he learnt by publishing a tract inspired by the Strong case, titled *A Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery; or of Admitting the Least Claim of private Property in the Persons of men, in England in 1769*, an attack to the slave trade that enclosed legal evidence to demonstrate England never declared slavery legal. Although his idea was clearly at odds with that of two prominent figures such as Yorke and Talbot, the tract was a success and received great approval

(Walvin 2011: 110-1, 115). From there, his anti-slavery and political-activist spirit emerged and started to investigate additional kidnapping instances who made him “the defender” of Africans, up to the Somerset case in 1772 in which a crucial decision of Lord Mansfield reversed the York-Talbot opinion by placing restrictions on owners' rights to remove African "servants" from Britain against their will (Walvin 2011: 116-7, Oldfield 2021: 1, Merrill 1945: 384-5). This case was a huge step forward for the black community, empowering them to advocate for and successfully secure their freedom not only in London but also in other regions, including Scotland and North America. The outcome of the case led to a widespread misconception that Mansfield had abolished slavery in England, leading to a significant decline in slave advertisements (Walvin 2011: 120-1).

Nine years later, the occurrence of the Zong massacre shattered the illusion of distance for the British people, confronting them with a harsh reality that was simply at hand, right in their ports and in the midst of their own society or as Walvin states “[...] slavery was not distant, foreign, out-of-sight. It was as British as a sweet cup of tea.” (Walvin 2011: 152). In the Atlantic carrying millions of enslaved humans from Africa to the Americas were indeed thousands of British sailors and British ships; just as the mass murder of 132 slaves was committed by British sailors onboard a British ship, judged in a court and subjected by a law that were also British. Therefore, anything but distant from the English reality. The Zong case despite not being able to end slavery in the first place, became a model for authors’ writings and allow them to express their dissents and frustrations about slavery, accentuating that growing abolitionist sentiment that we mentioned earlier (Walvin 2011: 151-2).

That sentiment also affected Dr. Peter Peckard, a liberal man, abolitionist theologian member of the low-church, highly inspired by the anti-slavery tract of Granville Sharp, who took an interest in and opposed the slave trade precisely after hearing about the Zong massacre while he was Master of Cambridge's Magdalene College in 1781. Other than for preaching his abolitionist sermons, Peckard is recognized for the essay prize organized in

1784 at Cambridge University for the best Latin essay on the matter of slavery entitled "is it lawful to make slaves of others against their will?", with which he "discovered" the future central figure of the later abolitionist movement. The question was answered brilliantly by Thomas Clarkson, excellent student at St John's College, prompted to slavery and the slave trade by the curiosity on the matter at hand, something he was initially completely ignorant about but later became totally devoted to and eventually won the prize writing *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1786), one of the foundational texts of the abolitionist campaign, that soon made him link with a circle of other Slave Trade opponents, including Sharp and later William Wilberforce (Walvin 2011: 155, Oldfield 2021: 4, Carey publication date not available).

In 1787, the foundation of the S.E.A.S.T. organization (The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade) ratifies the beginning of an actual movement against the slave trade (Walvin 2011: 160). The committee was originally constituted by nine Quakers, and later joined by Granville Sharp, soon appointed as chairman for his veteran experience as abolitionist, Thomas Clarkson, an indispensable interrogator of sailors who sought crucial evidence regarding the slave trade through his interviews, and lastly William Wilberforce, the key political presence of the movement in parliament, whose persistent zeal for humanitarian issues brought important victories to the movement (Merrill 1945: 384-6). In the beginnings, the organization decided to distribute Clarkson's essay but in a shortened and more accessible version in order to engage more public. In addition to publish and spread cheap and free literature, the association employed further strategies to spread the abolitionist message, increase awareness and to foster support inside and outside of the political sphere arranging meetings, advertising, selling and dispensing tracts, letter writing and also utilizing visual symbols such as the medallion with the kneeling slave and the slave ships Brookes. This early stage was positive, resulting in a great number of abolitionist petitions sent to the parliament (Walvin 2011: 160, Oldfield 2021: 4, Merrill 1945: 388-9).

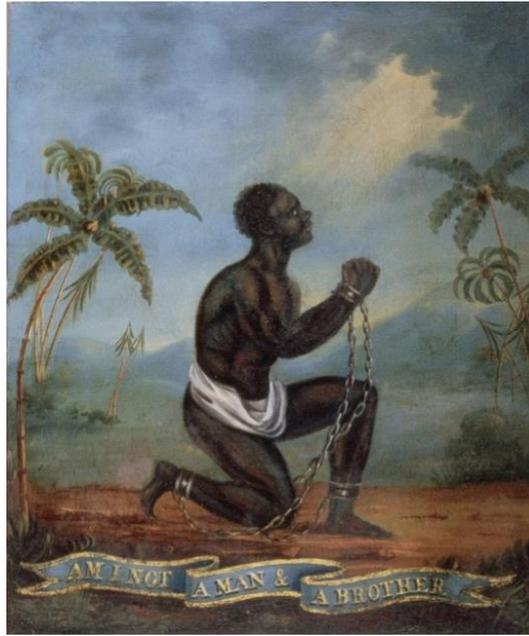


Figure 7: "The Kneeling Slave, 'Am I not a man and a brother?'," oil on canvas, unknown artist of the British school, c. 1800

The direction of the campaign swerved from 1788. William Pitt the Younger, Prime Minister of Great Britain, took over the place of the sick Wilberforce, demanding the House of Commons to revise the abolitionist petitions, while Charles J. Fox, member of the Whigs faction, solicited for the immediate abolition of the trade. The same year the Dolben Act was presented, proposing a bill that established restrictions on the number of slaves a ship could carry, based on its tonnage, “the first Act to regulate British slave shipping” (Webster 2007: 1). Hence, pro-slavery began their delaying strategies to contrast the new act and protract the session to deflect the topic by claiming that the well-known practice of the “dancing of the slaves” referred to a moment of joy that slaves experienced during the voyage, but they were immediately contradicted by Pitt's cross-examinations and the Dolben Act eventually passed (Merrill 1945: 389).

Wilberforce made his first parliamentary speech in 1789, supporting his arguments by citing slavers' testimony, spacing from the horrors of the trade to the economic impact that would result with its abolition. He stated that suppressing the trade would not result in a major economic disaster as the business of Africans impacted minimally on the entire Liverpool commerce

and could also be beneficial to save hundreds of sailors' life that would instead die at sea every year due to the outrageous voyages in the Atlantic (Merrill 1945: 390-1).

The next years the abolitionist movement lost steam due to the pro-slavery advocates employing various tactics to delay the examination of the issues, demanding additional testimonies and supporting evidence. They sought to redirect the focus of the slave trade debate, based essentially on moral aspects, towards an economic narrative. Additionally, exploiting the revolutionary climate in France, they accused abolitionists of aligning with the Jacobins during the Reign of Terror, aiming to tarnish their reputation (Merrill 1945: V, 392) (Oldfield 2021: 7). Despite the fact that it was a time of deadlock and overall loss in enthusiasm caused by the pro-slavery counter attack, the early years of 1790s saw the beginning of a popular counter-movement, which consisted of nearly three hundred thousand people boycotting sugary products of slave labor from the West Indies, avoiding eating candy, drinking sugar-free tea, and ceasing to sell West Indian products, preferring the consumption of free labor products from the East, which increased dramatically (Merrill 1945: 395).

During the next years, Clarkson kept searching for testimonies while Wilberforce continued to lobby in parliament, both demonstrating constant determination and devotion to the abolitionist cause. Their effort combined with that of the S.E.A.S.T. committee as well as the Haiti and Santo Domingo uprisings, induced PMs to consider abolishing the slave trade to prevent further revolts and protect slave colonies. In 1804 Wilberforce victory in the House of Commons was a premonitory event of the upcoming achievements, proving that his perseverance was leading to positive results. Although an abolition bill faced failure a year later, the abolitionists maintained a strong sense of confidence. In fact, the Foreign Slave Trade Act, which forbid British slavers and merchant to supply slaves to foreigners, was approved by the parliament in 1806, setting the right circumstances to finally abolish the slave trade. A year later, after defeating the opposition of future king William IV, the Slave Trade Abolition Act was enacted, obtaining 100 votes to 35 in the House of Lords in

January and 283 votes to 16 in the House of Commons in February (Merrill 1945: 395-7, Oldfield 2021: 9), effectively ending Britain's participation in the transatlantic slave trade and prohibiting British insurance to cover slaves and slave ships (Walvin 2011: 166).

Nevertheless, Britain government and abolitionists had to remain vigilant even after the Slave Trade Act (1807), which did not outlawed slavery, and set out to implement agreements to encourage other European countries, such as France, Spain, Portugal, (also non-European countries including Brazil and Cuba were seeking for slave labor) who were still interested to continue the trafficking of slaves in the Atlantic, towards the abolition of their slave trafficking. The British government's international agreements, again supported by Thomas Clarkson, allowed British and American navies to stop suspicious ships in the Atlantic, but the plan had some flaws. The ships used for seizures were few in number, mostly slow and were easily seeded by slave ships. Furthermore, instances of "jettisoning" murders like the Zong incident on ships escalated, as a means to eradicate any evidence of the African slaves on board and thereby avoid condemnation. In the end, of the 2.8 million slaves transported to the Atlantic after 1807, only 125,000 were freed. In short, the entire project was a total failure, causing, for the umpteenth time, the death of further innocent human beings (Walvin 2011: 167-8, Oldfield 2021: 9). These events proved how slavery was still a huge widespread issue and needed to be abolished immediately.

Thus, a team of anti-slavery activists including again Wilberforce, Clarkson, the English MP Thomas Buxton and many other, established the Anti-Slavery Society in 1823, which mission verted to limit abuses to slaves and demand the gradual abolition of slavery. Women associations were also highly involved in this new emancipationist movement, especially the Birmingham Ladies Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves, which acted similarly to the SEAST in distributing anti-slavery pamphlets, books and gadgets of various kinds. It was indeed precisely Elizabeth Heyrick in her pamphlet *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition*, to anticipate the new path that would have been taken by the new Agency Committee (1831), founded in

response to the stand-off provoked by the colonial legislatures presided over by slaveowners, who kept thwarting the abolitionists' proposals. At this point, the newfound Committee relied on the parliament to take immediate action to solve the situation once and for all (Oldfield 2021: 11). British emancipation was eventually reached with the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, signing the end of slavery in Britain.

The Zong case emerged as a powerful manifesto, igniting the flames of the abolitionist campaign and forcing the British world to confront its complicity in the horrors of slavery and the slave trade. It posed a profound challenge to a nation that had reaped immense prosperity and power from this abhorrent system, yet was now forced to confront the immeasurable suffering, atrocity, and death it had caused. The ensuing “legal saga” captivated the public, shifting the discourse to encompass wider issues of humanitarianism and politics. Never before had a single act of murder aboard a slave ship triggered such a far-reaching debate, ultimately propelling the abolitionist campaign toward its ultimate triumph. The Zong case stands as a testament to the unimaginable sufferings endured by slaves and the resilience of those who fought tirelessly all in their collective effort to end the despicable institution of slavery (Walvin 2011: 29, 102).

CHAPTER 3

The Zong Case in Arts and Culture

The Zong case aroused great interest and evoked profound responses across various artistic fields. This chapter will give an overview of the major works created in response to the Zong massacre, beginning with the controversial painting of J. M. W. Turner moving to the literary works and critiques inspired by this horrific event. Further, cinematic, theatrical representations and installations will be explored to complete the picture of how this tragic case has been reinterpreted across different forms of art.

3.1 The Zong in Painting and Literature

William Turner's *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon coming on* or *The Slave Ship* is one of the most evocative and discussed works related to the brutalities that occurred in the ocean during the Slave Trade. This oil painting on canvas, exhibited for the first time at the Royal Academy of London in 1840 (Shanes 2008: 222, Walvin 2011: 23, 26) depicts a vessel threatened by an impending storm, with black bodies drowning in the turbulent waters of the ocean (Figure 1, Walvin 2011: 24).



Figure 8: *The Slave Ship* (J. M. W. Turner, 1840)

The painting has often been associated by scholars with the tragic case of the ship *Zong*. However, as highlighted by James Walvin on *The Zong: A Massacre, the Law and the End of Slavery*, this is a misconception that persists to this day in popular belief but cannot be completely confirmed. In fact, Eric Shanes, a distinguished art historian, author and Turner specialist (Postle 2017), in *The Life and Masterworks of J.M.W. Turner* first states that Turner may have been inspired by the massacre after hearing it from Thomas Clarkson. Then he mentions McCoubrey (1998), who, instead, stated that the painter may have been influenced by those years in which, although the British Empire had abolished slavery in 1838s, the Slave Trade had not been completely eradicated by the time the painting was presented. Spain and Portugal were still actively trading slaves and their ships continued to transport enslaved Africans to the Americas. As explained earlier in the second chapter, slavers often threw their human cargo overboard to lighten the load and increase their chances to escape the British Royal Navy, which was trying to suppress the trade. Furthermore, the poem *Summer* from *The Seasons* by James Thomson seems to have greatly shaped the creation of the painting, particularly the passage in which a slave ship is caught in a typhoon, metaphorically representing the destruction of the slave trade, as suggested by Walvin, and slaves being devoured by a shark (Shanes 2008: 222, Walvin 2011: 28).

Ultimately, Shanes and Walvin offers two different interpretations of the work. While the first, analyzing the lines from *Fallacies of Hope* used by Turner in the in the exhibition caption, claims that *The Slave Ship* represents a critique against the inhumanity induced by the pursuit of profit, Walvin suggest a different view: the painting represents a powerful means to criticize the calculated extermination of enslaved Africans at sea (Shanes 2008: 222, Walvin 2011: 23). Eventually, according to Walvin, *The Slave Ships* remains an extraordinary artistic achievement symbolizing a visual testimony that although it may not directly depict the *Zong*, keeps the memory of the atrocities committed during the slave trade alive (Walvin 2011: 26-7).

After examining J.M.W. Turner's dramatic painting *The Slave Ship*, it is worth mentioning how this work is reinterpreted in contemporary literature.

Particularly interesting is David Dabydeen's long narrative poem *Turner* published in 1994. The poem, 40 pages long divided into twenty-five sections, is a critical perspective on how art can represent and, in some ways, "aestheticize" suffering. Indeed, one of the author's major interests, as Ward says, is "the interaction between literature, history, and art." (Ward 2011: 19, 105). Dabydeen, motivated mostly by Ruskin's interpretation of Turner's canvas that focuses primarily on highlighting the use of colors and representation of the nature, criticizes the marginalization of the slaves' suffering (Ward 2011: 104). In *Turner*, this problematic is addressed by focusing explicitly on the slaves, making them the central subject of the poem rather than relegating them to the background (Ward 2011: 105-6). The main characters are the narrator, which is a slave drowning in the background of *The Slave Ship* to whom Dabydeen gives voice, and a stillborn child that appears in the beginning of the poem. Both are tossed overboard by the slavers' captain, which was named Turner, as a direct critique to the creator of the emblematic painting, which was accused to "have savoured the sadism he publicly denounced" (Craps 2010: 469, Fulford 2005: 2, Ward 2011: 101). According to Howley, "the ocean is constantly in flux and as such can be a creative space while simultaneously being destructive", which highlights the dual significance of the ocean in which the narrator is drowning: a place that at the same time erases and preserves memory (Howley 2016: 9). The stillborn child, instead, depicts Dabydeen's idea that any attempt at memorializing slavery is inadequate, as it fails to capture the profound suffering of a slave's past. Instead, such suffering should be represented in its raw reality, which, as suggested by Ward, is undoubtedly marked by death (Ward 2011: 106).

Aligned with this idea of memorializing slavery by depicting the true suffering of slaves, Guyanese author Fred D'Aguiar gives a subjective and slightly revised interpretation of the historical account of the Zong massacre in his 1997 fictional novel *Feeding the Ghosts*. His choice of mixing historical facts with fictional elements derives from his personal connection to the history of slavery, which he claims as being part of his own past and present personal identity (Labaune-Demeule 2017). Thus, through the perspective of fictional

characters — particularly the protagonist Mintah, a female slave who miraculously survives after being thrown overboard, as well as those of other Black slaves and crewmembers aboard — the novel recounts and re-imagines the terrifying experience of the Middle Passage, the events that led to the jettison and the subsequent trial between the Liverpool owners and the insurers of the *Zong*. Following the harrowing times aboard the *Zong* during the Atlantic journey in the Middle Passage, the last section that precedes the epilogue, details Mintah’s life in Maryland and Jamaica, “haunted by memories of the *Zong*” (Craps 2010: 467, 471). Professor Stef Craps and Professor Florence Labaune-Demeule provide two different arguments to better understand the meaning of D’Aguiar’s novel. The first uses Derrida’s concepts of hauntology and mid-mourning to highlight how *Feeding the Ghosts* and Dabydeen’s *Turner* engages with unresolved historical traumas through the lens of spectrality. Therefore, according to Craps the novel emphasizes the ongoing impact of the *Zong* massacre, challenging readers to confront and reflect on the persistent impact of slavery. Labaune-Demeule, instead, explores how the fictional discourse allows the reader to engage and understand the past through both authentic facts and imaginative elements, such as the romantic story between Mintah and crewmember Simon, which represents a glimpse of humanity inside an environment dominated by oppression and violence. By reimagining historical events with fictional characters, Labaune-Demeule asserts that D’Aguiar’s novel offers a poetic 're-visioning' of the historical facts reported in the Archives of the Black Atlantic, enriching the reader’s emotional engagement with the legacy of slavery (Craps 2010: 467, 471-2, Labaune-Demeule 2017).

Dehumanization of slaves was certainly empowered and fueled by the language employed by maritime insurance law during the Atlantic Slave Trade, as discussed in the previous chapter. On this subject, author M. NourbeSe Philip employed an untraditional and innovative approach in writing her 2008 collection of poems entitled *Zong!*. Central goal to this work is the practice of “untelling”, which means that Philip deliberately avoids conventional narrative structures in order to represent the massacre and refuse coherence to an event

space that carries their shared memories and where the voices of the slaves try to emerge. (Howley 2019: 14)

Howley highlights how Philip, similar to Dabydeen, seems to have been motivated by the need to confront the erasure of the enslaved voices from history. Therefore, Philip's aim is to give voice to the African slaves silenced by colonial narratives by reappropriating and rearranging the legal language of the Gregson v. Gilbert appeal of the Zong, while Dabydeen, as seen earlier, do that by condemning Turner's painting. Thus, through the chaotic structure of *Zong!*, Philip disrupts Mansfield's legal letters and challenges the reader to engage more deeply with the trauma and permanent impact of the Middle Passage (Fehskens 2012: 408, Howley 2019: 2, 4, 5).

3.2 The Zong: Theatrical and Cinematic representations

The Zong massacre has also echoed within performing arts, inspiring powerful and compelling interpretations across both stage and screen giving thus a different impact than literature. Theatrical plays like *The Meaning of Zong* (2022) and *An African Cargo* (2007), together with the movie *Belle* (2013), offer, each with their own interpretative key, evocative retellings of this harrowing historical episode, with the purpose of challenging contemporary audiences to reflect on the atrocities of the slave trade and their enduring impact (Monzon 2022).

The Meaning of Zong, written by Giles Terera, is a stage play about the Zong massacre, based on the Gregson v Gilbert trial, which aims to "humanise the concept of justice", as described by Japheth Monzon in his article regarding the play for the Black South West Network (Monzon 2022). The trial, as explained in the previous chapter, was focused on insurance matters rather than being a murder trial that sought justice for disrupted human lives, which were considered as cargo by the law. The play examines abolitionist Olaudah Equiano's emotional and personal struggle towards emancipation, seeking to engage the audience through an emotional and captivating narrative. Terera's outstanding performance as Equiano, awarded as Best Performance in a Play for the Bristol Old Vic's production of *The Meaning of Zong*, and that of the

other actors in the cast – such as Kiera Lester, Bethan Mary-James, and Alice Vilanculo as three fictional women fighting against the slave trade, as well as Michael Elcock and Paul Higgins playing Ottobah Cugoano and Granville Sharp –, managed to arouse deep collective emotions in the audience, so much that many needed time during the intermission to gather themselves, claims Monzon. Moreover, the fact that the play took place in the major cities involved in the British Slave Trade, such as Bristol and Liverpool, added weight and significance to the performance, offering today’s audience a unique experience that not only served to reflect on brutalities of the slave trade but also to reflect on important thematic such as racial justice, that still impact today’s life (Visit West 2022, Monzon 2022).

Fifteen years before Terera’s dramatization of the Zong massacre, Guyanese author Margaret Busby presented *An African Cargo* at the Greenwich Theatre in London, undoubtedly named after the term ‘cargo’ employed in marine insurance law to refer to Africans enslaved on board slave ships. Much like *The Meaning of Zong*, this play offered a powerful reinterpretation of the Zong tragedy, aided by the soulful music rooted in the African diaspora, spanning West Africa, the Caribbean and Southern USA, which added a human dimension to the legal narrative. The play also included the story of Dido Elizabeth Belle, a Black girl raised by Lord Mansfield, which later became the inspirational story for the subsequent film *Belle* by Amma Asante (Black Plays Archive n.d., Cross n.d.).

Dido Elizabeth Belle was not a made-up character, but a real woman raised in the 18th-century British aristocracy at Lord Mansfield’s household as his nephew, John, a naval officer, had a relationship with an enslaved woman aboard a captured Spanish ship (Krikler 2007: 40). However, Asante depicts a fictionalized version of the life of the Black woman who lives inside the aristocratic bubble of Mansfield household, exaggerating the financial support she received from them and depicting her as completely unaware of the horrors of slavery, until her romantic encounter with fictional abolitionist John Davinier.

Professor Kehinde Andrews criticized the movie claiming that it minimizes Black agency even though *Belle*, which is a Black woman, plays the protagonist. It is, in fact, her love interest, Davinier, who acquaints her with the events that occurred in the Zong ship, which her uncle was presiding on, who serves as a driving force in her involvement in the judge's final verdict on the abolition of slavery. The movie, with this final ruling, doesn't actually reflect historical facts, distorting reality again, this time by presenting Mansfield as a hero of abolition, given that the actual trial didn't even consider the murders, but instead concerned solely insurance matters and certainly not the definitive abolition of slavery (Andrews 2016: 444-5-6, 450). Additionally, despite some instances of racism against Belle, the movie clearly distances itself from the depiction of brutalities and violence of slavery that were central in the life of a slave, focusing mainly on aristocratic settings, unlike other films about slavery such as *Twelve Years a Slave* or *Django Unchained*, which instead are not afraid to portray those harsh realities (Andrews 2016: 447-8-9). Overall, Andrews argues that while *Belle* brings a remarkable historical figure to light, its narrative choices eventually obscure the actual complexities of the Zong case, as well as the broader historical context of race, the power of the institutions and Black agency of the 18th-century, "to present Britain and Whiteness in the role of savior" and making the viewer feel like slavery is a resolved issue that belongs to the past (Andrews 2016: 451).

3.3 Public Memorials and Commemorative Installations

Beyond literature, theatrical representations and films, public memorials and commemorative installations can offer a more "tangible" approach to this brutal historical event, transforming remembrance into a form experience where people could feel more involved and creating new pathways and spaces for understanding, learning and mourning its lasting impact. In remembering the massacre, a replica of the Zong ship (Figure 3) was presented on the Thames in 2007 for the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade (MJR n.d.: "The Zong Project", Walvin 2011: 172). This first exhibition, which allowed visitors to experience a glimpse of life aboard a slave ship along with

an onboard exhibition concerning the legacy of slavery, was a success and aroused a positive interest among visitors, which reported an increased understanding of the Zong massacre and colonial slavery.



Figure 10: The Zong Ship replica (MRSC, 2007)

As part of the Zong Project launched by the Movement for Justice & Reconciliation, this ship was opened to the public for three weeks purposely to raise awareness about the Zong case and serve as launching pad for a broader project which also included the creation of a community-led space called Zong Centre (MJR n.d.: “The Zong Project). As stated by the MJR, the Zong Centre would have served as a comprehensive space addressing both the educational needs of the visitors, whether school visits or ordinary people, and offering crucial support for marginalized communities affected by the legacy of slavery. Unfortunately, the Zong Project was put on hold in 2019 as the MJR couldn’t raise enough funding to support the whole project. Despite this setback, which Jessica Moody addresses as “another absence in the history of the memory of the Zong and its financing” (Moody 2020: 264), an exhibition was opened and is still accessible to the current date for free as a stand-alone resource, as well as online, for educational purpose on the legacy of slavery (MJR n.d.: “The

MJR Exhibition: Colonial Slavery and its Legacy”, “The New Voyages of the slaveship Zong”).

One of the destinations the Zong replica was supposed to visit in 2020 for the Zong Project is Lubaina Himid’s installation *Memorial to Zong*, an immersive exhibition of paintings, informative panels, ceramics and sketchbooks of the artist displayed at the Maritime Museum of Lancaster in 2021, which is now accessible only through a 360° virtual tour format online (Lancaster Maritime Museum 2021, Lancaster City Council 2021, Moody 2020: 264). Himid defines herself as a “painter-cultural activist”, as noted by the Greene Naftali art gallery, whose work focuses particularly on marginalized narratives, drawing attention to erased histories, including the Zong massacre, and the resilience of Black lives within cultural memory (Greene Naftali Gallery n.d., Hollybush Gardens, n.d.). She dedicated years promoting Black art by establishing spaces where community of Black artists could gather not only to exhibit their works but also to connect, collaborate and engage, similar to the MJR’s vision for the Zong Centre, which, as seen earlier, aimed to serve as a community space for education and healing (Greene Naftali n.d., Tate n.d.: “Who Is Lubaina Himid?”). As a key figure in the British Black Arts Movement of the 1980s, Himid’s work has always focused on elevating stories of the African diaspora, underscoring the perspectives of Black individuals affected by colonialism and enslavement (Greene Naftali n.d., Tate 2017: “Turner Prize 2017: Lubaina Himid”).

Himid’s *Memorial to Zong* contains a mixture of paintings, personal sketches and a few pieces of the 100 ceramics from the 2007 installation entitled “Swallow Hard: The Lancaster Dinner Service”, specifically two plates, *The Clergy Eating the Profits of the Slave Trade* and *The Vomiting Toff* and a ceramic jug. Himid, interviewed by Dr. Lottie Whalen, explains that the ceramics used are anything but precious, sourced and meticulously selected from “junk shops and markets” to represent her art pieces as they evoke everyday familiarity (Whalen 2020). The scene depicted in the first plate, as predictable by the title, shows a critic moved to the involvement of the clergy in the Slave Trade, while the jug depicts the portrait of an enslaved African, to

whom Himid gives an imaginary name, visible on the inside, so as to “name the unnamed”, says the curator of the installation Professor Alan Rice (Rice 2021). By adding portraits and historical references to such accessible items, she confronts viewers with stories often erased from traditional narratives.



Figure 11: *Memorial to Zong* (Himid, 1991)

Furthermore, speaking of the painting that gave the name to the installation shown in figure 4, *Memorial to Zong* came from Himid’s 1991 exhibition entitled *Revenge*, which symbolized precisely her “revenge” against the marginalization of Black women artists, a battle she fought during the 1980s and beyond, by asserting her presence as a Black women artist (*Memorial to Zong* panel 3, year). The painting represents a direct response to the absence of memorials to the lives of African slaves in European cities that were central to the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, condemning, instead, their memorialization of their brutalities. As stated by co-editor of the catalogue of Himid’s installation researcher Andreas Sillis, "in the European cities [...],

instead, we find memorial art that glorifies the institutions and people who became rich through their involvement in this repulsive trade.", highlighting, as an example, the statue of 17th-century Bristol slave merchant Edward Colston (Sillis, 2021). In this painting we see, again, the importance of water: here the sea, represented by the colour of the background, depicts a space to grief all the African died by the Slave Trade hand. Himid, interviewed by Rice, reminds us that those thrown overboard "are still there and... still contributing" as an enduring part of this painful legacy, suggesting their presence in both the body of water and as ongoing contributors to society. Further, the pillar supporting the cup is depicted as on the verge of collapsing, symbolizing both the hypocrisy of European commemorative architectures and a call for the dismantling of racism (Sillis, 2021, Rice 2003, Facing the Past n.d., Memorial to Zong 2021). Thus, it is through a powerful mixture of paintings, informative panels and ceramic works, that Lubaina Himid's installation *Memorial to Zong* creates a symbolic space that honors the memory of the lives lost, but also critiques the glorification of oppressors and reclaims forgotten identities by amplifying their voices.

Conclusions

This thesis examines why the Zong massacre stands at the crossroads of history, law and literature aiming to provide an in-depth analysis of the historical and legislative conditions that allowed such atrocities to occur, the crucial role this horrific event played in advancing the abolition of the slave trade and slavery and its enduring legacy in artistic expressions and public memory.

Chapter one traces the historical path that led to the beginnings of the triangular trade and the subsequent involvement of the British. In pre-colonial Africa, indentured servants played a crucial role for the African economic sustainability. The study reveals that, unlike the later trans-Atlantic “chattel slavery”, these people had rights, they could live a decent life, getting married and buy properties. The beginning of large-scale exploitation of slaves is associated with the Portuguese expansion in the African coast and their revolutionary plantation-based system of sugar production, which relied heavily on coerced African labor, setting the foundation for the colonial economy of the New World. The increasing demand of sugar led to a new model of trading, the triangular trade, which became the basis of the slave trade in the Atlantic, involving Europe, Africa and the Americas.

From 1672, the Royal Africa Company monopolized the English trade until 1712 when, after the transition to the free trade, Great Britain emerged as one of the main European powers to dominate in the Atlantic slave trade. Private merchants and companies carried the British slave trade, making a huge positive impact in the country’s economy. This is clearly evident when studying the case of Liverpool and its rapid expansion in the 18th century. Crucial in this prosperity was the mercantile influence, as these merchants, entrenched in local politics and driven by the pursuit of wealth, shaped the city with new merchant-only infrastructure and docks, thus giving priority to what enriched them the most, the slave trade. The wealth of slave traders came at the immeasurable expense of millions of human lives that had to endure an ongoing status of slavery, which began in Africa and, for those who survived, continued in sugar

plantations. The Middle Passage was the second leg to this dehumanizing and traumatizing trafficking, which enslaved people had to endure under the most harrowing conditions via slave ships across the Atlantic Ocean. This horrific experience carries with it the unimaginable sufferings, beginning that began from the initial capture until the preparation to the auctions in the Americas where Africans were sold. The Zong case epitomizes the extent of this inhumanity, highlighting the merciless priorities of profit over human lives.

Chapter two recounts the Zong case in its entirety, from its seizure on the African coast to the events that led to the jettison and the subsequent legal battle, concluding with its crucial role in galvanizing the abolitionist movement that led to the abolition of the slave trade and later slavery in Britain. Analyzing the Atlantic journey and the navigational errors that culminated in the massacre of more than 132 humans, we understood how incisive the role of a crew was aboard a slaver. The hurriedly crew assembled by Captain Hanley was certainly inadequate, resulting in one of the major causes of the disastrous management of the Zong. Then, examining the standard insurance policy we learned how vague and open to interpretation marine insurance law was, particularly the ambiguity surrounding the “perils of the sea”. Meanwhile, the Weskett’s studies revealed the insurance responsibility to compensate the jettison only when practiced to suppress an insurrection. The Gregson’s Solicitor used these two conditions to justify the jettison at the trial, thereby making the insurers liable for the loss of the slaves. Despite these accusations were later dismantled and no evidence of a retrial exists, what emerged from this analysis is the disturbing reality that deliberate killings could, in certain circumstances, be legally justified by the marine insurance law. The trial has also exposed the use of dehumanizing language when referring to enslaved Africans, such as “chattels” or “horses”, underscoring how deeply ingrained their commodification was in legal discourse and how it seriously alimented the culture of violence. These human beings were seen as mere financial assets and the law was legitimizing it.

The final verdict, which initially ruled in favor of the shipowners, turned out to be a loss for defenders of the slave trade, due to the shock it

provoked to the public about the brutalities of the slave trade, making the Zong case crucial evidence that galvanized the abolitionist campaign against the slave trade and slavery in Britain. Thanks to the abolitionist Granville Sharp, previously informed by Olaudah Equiano, the Zong case started circulating. The success of Sharp's tract against the slave trade, which included evidence challenging the legality of slavery in England, inspired and influenced the birth of new abolitionist figures, such as Dr. Peckard and later Thomas Clarkson. In 1787 the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was founded, providing the abolitionist cause a solid institutional presence, ensuring political and public mobilization against the slave trade. Led by nine Quakers, Sharp, Clarkson and William Wilberforce, the society played a pivotal role in organizing petitions, lobbying Parliament, and coordinating abolitionist strategies. As part of the initial strategies applied by the Society, Clarkson's *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* became foundational to the abolitionist cause and was strategically dispensed to the public to gain support. The next significant milestone came with the Dolben Act of 1788, which imposed limits on the number of enslaved people that could be transported aboard slave ships. A few years later, the widespread boycott of sugar products succeeded in countering pro-slavery stalling maneuvers. In the meantime, political allies helped William Wilberforce in advancing abolitionist petitions in Parliament. In 1804, the great efforts of the S.E.A.S.T. committee resulted in the victory of Wilberforce in the House of Commons. Two years later, the Foreign Slave Trade Act was passed, marking a crucial turning point in the abolitionist discourse, as it prohibited both British slavers and merchants from supplying enslaved people to foreign nations and insurances to work with them. The later Slave Trade Abolition Act, eventually, officially ended Britain's participation in the transatlantic slave trade and legitimized the blockage of all ships suspected of having slaves on board, at least theoretically. In fact, the approximately 3 million slaves transported across the Atlantic after 1807, proven that the slave trade still persisted until 1833, when the Slavery Abolition Act finally sanctioned the decisive end of the slave trade in Britain.

Chapter three explored how arts and culture reinterpreted the Zong case in various forms: first through paintings, literary critics and rearrangements, then through theatrical plays and film and ultimately by memorials and exhibitions.

One of the earliest artistic responses to the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade was Turner's *The Slave Ship*, a painting often associated with the Zong massacre for its depiction of a disrupted ship and enslaved people being thrown overboard. However, analysis revealed that this connection remains uncertain, as, according to Eric Shanes, multiple influences other than the Zong case, may have shaped Turner's creativity. Nonetheless, despite it may not directly depicts the Zong, Turner's work is acclaimed by Walvin, who considers it an important artistic memorial to the brutalities of the slave trade.

The debate over the painting's significance goes beyond visual art and extends to literature, where its impact has been critically reexamined. Dabydeen's *Turner* offers a direct response to J.M.W. Turner's *The Slave Ship*, criticizing how visual representations marginalizes the real suffering of slaves in favor of artistic beauty. In fact, by giving voice to the drowning slaves in the painting, Dabydeen shifts the focus from the aestheticized suffering to the brutal reality of enslavement, as for him memorialization should only represents the raw reality, and thus place those slaves as central figures of the poem. Also, the water of the ocean, in which the narrator is drowning, is portrayed as both a site of destruction and space of memory.

Similarly, D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* blends historical fact with fiction, offering a narrative that reimagines the experiences of those aboard the Zong. Labaune-Demeule highlights how the novel, by inserting personal and emotional depth into historical events through fictional characters like Mintah, allows readers to engage with the lasting impact of slavery beyond historical records, introducing moments of humanity that contrast with a dehumanizing reality. Meanwhile, as Craps argues, the novel engages with unresolved historical traumas, through Mintah's new life after surviving from the jettison and enslavement, emphasizing the ongoing impact of the Zong massacre and compelling readers to confront slavery's enduring presence.

In contrast, Philip's collection of poems *Zong!* takes a completely different approach in reimagining the massacre to reclaim the erasure of enslaved voices. The author willingly avoids conventional writing, focusing on dismantling the dehumanizing legal language of Mansfield's procedures in order to rearrange it and create a disjointed and confused text that depicts the chaos and violence characterizing the massacre. This stylistic approach called "untelling" serves to reveal the inability of traditional language in recounting and memorializing such harrowing history.

The Zong case further echoed within performing arts, particularly in theatrical plays, including *The Meaning of Zong* and *An African Cargo*, as well as in the movie *Belle*. Both the plays offer a powerful dramatization of the Zong case, with the first centering the plot on Olaudah Equiano's journey to emancipation, focusing on engaging the audience emotionally by depicting his struggles for freedom. *An African Cargo*, instead, incorporated the story of Dido Elizabeth Belle, directly inspiring Asante's movie. *Belle* moves from the historical realities of the plays back to fiction, following historical facts but recounting a simplified version of the Zong case and its final ruling, with a romanticized narrative that, according to critics, risks abridging a labyrinthine case portraying slavery as a resolved injustice rather than an ongoing legacy.

Lastly, the study reveals that there have been only few public memorials dedicated to the Zong case. Among them, the ambitious The Zong Project aimed at raising awareness about the legacy of slavery and its lasting impact on society by educating people about the Zong case and support those still affected by racial disparities. The initiative proposed the creation of the Zong Centre, a dedicated space to welcome visitors and help marginalized communities. Similarly, Lubaina Himid's installation *Memorial to Zong*, proposed a series of works to honors the memory of the murdered, criticize the slave trade and its supporters, but, also, denounce the lack of commemoration in European cities involved, which, instead, celebrate the wealth built on brutalities. As demonstrated by the temporary failure of the Zong Project to secure sufficient funding and despite the efforts of exhibitions, public commemoration of the Zong massacre remains scarce.

The thesis highlights how this interdisciplinary research has reconstructed the broad and complex historical context in which the Zong case occurred, demonstrating its fundamental contribution to the successful British abolitionist campaign, and also creating a relevant precedent in the history of British maritime insurance law. This brutal historical event has left a strong imprint in the collective memory, including analyzing the way it has been reimagined over the years. Hopefully, the Zong case will continue to be the subject of study and reflection over time and be understood not only as a past historical event, but also as a powerful symbol in the battle for human rights.

Abstract in Italiano

Questa tesi esamina i motivi per cui il massacro della Zong si trova all'incrocio tra storia, diritto e letteratura, con l'obiettivo di fornire un'analisi sulle implicazioni storiche, legali e culturali del sinistro caso, evidenziando inoltre il suo ruolo cruciale nel promuovere il movimento abolizionista britannico e l'eredità che ha lasciato nelle espressioni artistiche e nella memoria pubblica.

La ricerca parte da uno studio sull'Africa pre-coloniale, con un interessante approfondimento storico sulle dinamiche della schiavitù Africana antecedente alla tratta atlantica, fino allo sviluppo del sistema di piantagioni di zucchero fondato dai Portoghesi che ha richiesto il crescente bisogno di manodopera forzata. La tratta Atlantica, o triangolare, ha quindi preso forma; gli schiavi sono sottoposti a viaggi lunghi mesi nel *Middle Passage* (il tratto di oceano dall'Africa alle Americhe) in condizioni terribili, maltrattati, stuprati ed esposti a numerose malattie, il tutto nella totale assenza di igiene e con un'altissima probabilità di morire. Gli schiavi, a differenza del periodo pre-coloniale, vengono letteralmente disumanizzati e considerati come vera e propria merce.

In seguito viene analizzata la tratta britannica, soffermandosi soprattutto sull'importanza centrale di Liverpool nel commercio degli schiavi inglese. Esaminando come la città riuscì a svilupparsi fino a dominare la tratta nel Diciottesimo secolo e a raggiungere una fiorente prosperità economica sulle spalle di milioni di vite umane, si evince l'impatto devastante che ebbero gli esperti mercanti di schiavi in questo processo, i quali, con un fondamentale mix tra know-how, contatti schiavisti, potere politico e un'ingente quantità di denaro portarono l'industria schiavista al successo. La Zong venne acquistata nel 1781 dal sindacato dei Gregson proprio durante il periodo di picco della tratta britannica. William Gregson, membro del sindacato e tra i più influenti mercanti di Liverpool, faceva parte della politica locale che in quel periodo, durante tutto il Diciottesimo secolo, era dominata dai trafficanti di schiavi ed era guidata da un forte interesse mercantile.

Dal secondo capitolo lo studio si estende al complesso caso Zong, esaminando le reali dinamiche e i possibili motivi che hanno portato al massacro, per poi concentrarsi sull'analisi dell'assicurazione marittima del Diciottesimo secolo prendendo come esempio la polizza assicurativa standard, la quale ci fornisce delucidazioni in merito ai “pericoli del mare”, e di un estratto degli studi di Weskett, in modo tale da esaminare l'ambiguità e la complessità delle leggi che legittimarono l'equipaggio ad uccidere brutalmente più di 130 esseri umani per ricevere un compenso dall'assicurazione.

Il contributo al movimento abolizionista è stato considerevole soprattutto dal punto di vista propagandistico, causando profondo turbamento tra la gente. Grazie al caso Zong, divenuto prova determinante contro le brutalità che avvenivano a bordo delle navi negriere durante la tratta, il sentimento abolizionista crebbe tra la gente spingendo figure come Granville Sharp e Thomas Clarkson a scrivere contro la schiavitù e la tratta, traendone ispirazione.

Nel terzo capitolo vengono studiate le rappresentazioni artistiche del massacro, evidenziando, come ogni visione sia differente ma allo stesso tempo abbia un obiettivo comune, la necessità di far fronte alla soppressione delle voci degli schiavi. Il controverso dipinto di J.M.W. Turner *The Slave Ship* seppur rappresenti in maniera evidente un caso di *jettison* (l'essere gettato a mare), sembra essere ancora sotto esame tra gli studiosi riguardo il suo significato e se effettivamente ritragga o meno la Zong. In letteratura, *Turner* di David Dabydeen critica il dipinto per aver estetizzato la sofferenza degli schiavi marginalizzandone il dolore in favore di una resa artistica. Per questo motivo, l'autore mette in primo piano gli schiavi e le loro sofferenze, ribaltando ciò che nel quadro viene trascurato. *Feeding the Ghost* di Fred D'Aguiar, invece, ripercorre in prima persona l'esperienza del massacro attraverso Mintah, protagonista immaginaria che sopravvive sia all'abbandono in mare che alla schiavitù, dando così voce sia alle vittime del massacro che agli schiavi che raggiunsero la Jamaica ma non vennero mai ascoltati in tribunale. Infine *Zong!*, un'opera particolarmente interessante di NourbeSe Philip che attraverso un innovativo metodo di scrittura frammentato, si serve degli atti legali di Lord

Mansfield per scrivere un “untelling” e dare voce alle vittime altrimenti silenziate dagli archivi storici. In teatro invece, la vicenda è stata rielaborata aggiungendo elementi coinvolgenti ed evocativi, come le fatiche di Olaudah Equiano nel raggiungere l’emancipazione in *The Meaning of Zong* o le musiche Africane e la storia di Dido Elizabeth Belle in *An African Cargo*. Il film di *Belle* di Amma Asante, invece, è stato criticato anch’esso per aver omesso la cruda realtà della schiavitù, romanticizzando e semplificando la complessità storica per coinvolgere maggiormente il pubblico.

La tesi si conclude approfondendo i vari tentativi di commemorazione pubblica contemporanee dedicate al massacro. Il recente progetto dell’MJR The Zong Project attraverso il caso Zong vuole creare uno spazio dedicato in grado di accogliere ed educare il pubblico riguardo la schiavitù e il commercio degli schiavi, andando inoltre ad aiutare le comunità ancora oggi colpite dalle eredità del colonialismo e dalle disuguaglianze razziali. Analogamente, la pittrice attivista culturale Lubaina Himid che per tutta la sua carriera ha combattuto per valorizzare e dare maggiore spazio all’arte africana, raccoglie nella mostra antologica *Memorial to Zong* alcune delle sue opere più significative, tra cui quadri, ceramiche e sketchbook, ma anche pannelli informativi sul caso Zong, creando uno spazio unico in cui ricordare gli schiavi Africani che hanno dovuto sottomettersi alla tratta e alle sue crudeltà.

BIBLIOGRAPHY CHAPTER 1

Falola, Toyin, and Amanda Warnock. *Encyclopedia of the Middle Passage*. Westport, Conn. London, Greenwood Press, 2007, pp. xv, xviii, xxiii, 23, 27, 45-7, 49, 55, 60, 71-2, 82-3, 87-9, 98, 121, 132, 147-9, 154-5, 159, 165, 187-8, 218, 220, 236, 264-6, 275-6, 306-8, 330-1, 352-4, 356, 376, 393, 406-7.

Walvin, James. *The Zong: A Massacre, the Law and the End of Slavery*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011, pp. 16, 23, 30-40, 41, 58, 60, 63, 64, 65, 68, 87, 88, 89, 93, 96, 98, 99, 132, 174, 175.

Earle, Peter. *The Earles of Liverpool*. Liverpool Uni. Press, 2015, p. 1.

Kelley, S. (2012). Scrambling for Slaves: Captive Sales in Colonial South Carolina. *Slavery & Abolition*, 34(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2012.709040>

Perbi, Akosua. "Slavery and the Slave Trade in Pre-Colonial Africa." *University of Illinois*, 5 Apr. 2001, pp. 3–12, www.latinamericanstudies.org/slavery/perbi.pdf (Accessed Aug. 30, 2023)

Estimates Database. 2024. *SlaveVoyages*. <http://www.slavevoyages.org/estimates/HgOJSTcq> (Accessed July 6, 2024).

Estimates Database. 2024. *SlaveVoyages*. <http://www.slavevoyages.org/estimates/Uv7JwgU5> (Accessed July 6, 2024).

Figure 1: Estimates Database. 2024. *SlaveVoyages*. <http://www.slavevoyages.org/estimates/GgYv84sB> (Accessed July 6, 2024).

Figure 2: © OpenStreetMap contributors. 2023. "Map of the English Channel and the North Channel." OpenStreetMap, <https://osm.org/go/esnI?way=1180740942> and <https://osm.org/go/et6uR?way=653031284>. The two maps were combined and modified. OpenStreetMap is open data, licensed under the Open Data Commons Open Database License (ODbL) by the OpenStreetMap Foundation (OSMF). For more information, visit <https://www.openstreetmap.org/copyright>. (Accessed 9 July 2024).

Figure 3: Wikipedia. 2024. "Diagram of the Brooks Slave Ship". Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Passage#/media/File:Brookes_slave_ship,_British_Library.jpg (Accessed 24 June 2024)

Figure 4: Cranstone, Lefevre James. 1861. "Slave Auction, Virginia". Wikimedia Commons. Available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lefevre_James_Cranstone_Slave_Auction,_Virginia.jpg (Accessed 24 June 2024).

BIBLIOGRAPHY CHAPTER 2

Basker, James G. *Amazing Grace : An Anthology of Poems about Slavery, 1660-1810*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002, pp. xxxiv, xxxv.

Baucom, Ian. *Specters of the Atlantic Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*. Duke University Press, 2005, p. 10.

Burnard, Trevor. "A New Look at the Zong Case of 1783." XVII-XVIII. *Revue de La Société d'Études Anglo-Américaines Des XVIIe et XVIIIe Siècles*, vol. 76, no. 76, 31 Dec. 2019, p. 2, [journals.openedition.org/1718/1808](https://doi.org/10.4000/1718.1808), <https://doi.org/10.4000/1718.1808>. [Accessed 23 Jan. 2023](#).

Carey, Brycchan. "Thomas Clarkson: Biography and Bibliography." Brycchancarey.com, brycchancarey.com/abolition/clarkson.htm. Accessed 12 Mar. 2023.

Diedrich, Maria, et al. *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage*. IV. Series: W.E.B. Du Bois Institute (Series). ed., New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 117–8.

Falola, Toyin, and Amanda Warnock. *Encyclopedia of the Middle Passage*. Westport, Conn. London, Greenwood Press, 2007, pp. 159, 406.

Faubert, Michelle. *Granville Sharp's Uncovered Letter and the Zong Massacre*. Cham, Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 17, 18.

Hoare, Prince. *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq.* 1st ed., London: Printed for Henry Colburn and Co, 1820, pp. 239–40, 242–43.

Krikler, J. "The Zong and the Lord Chief Justice." *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 64, no. 1, 1 Jan. 2007, pp. 29–47, academic.oup.com/hwj/article/64/1/29/600961, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbm035>. (Accessed 23 Feb. 2023)

Merrill, Louis Taylor. "The English Campaign for Abolition of the Slave Trade." *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 30, no. 4, Oct. 1945, pp. 382–399, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2715027>. (Accessed 23 Feb. 2023)

Oldfield, John. "Abolition of the Slave Trade and Slavery in Britain." *The British Library*, 4 Feb. 2021, www.bl.uk/restoration-18th-century-literature/articles/abolition-of-the-slave-trade-and-slavery-in-britain. (Accessed 3 Mar. 2023)

Oldham, James. "Insurance Litigation Involving The Zong and Other British Slave Ships, 1780–1807." *The Journal of Legal History*, vol. 28, no. 3,

Dec. 2007, pp. 299–318, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440360701698437>. (Accessed 7 Nov. 2022)

Phillips, Christopher N. “Epic, Anti-Eloquence, and Abolitionism: Thomas Branagan’s “Avenia” and “the Penitential Tyrant.”” *Early American Literature*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2009, pp. 605–637, www.jstor.org/stable/27750151. (Accessed 11 Nov. 2022)

Rediker, Marcus. *The Slave Ship : A Human History*. New York, Viking, 2007, pp. 290, 340.

Richard de Grijs. “A (NOT SO) BRIEF HISTORY of LUNAR DISTANCES: LUNAR LONGITUDE DETERMINATION at SEA before the CHRONOMETER.” *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1 Dec. 2020, pp. 495–522, <https://doi.org/10.3724/sp.j.1440-2807.2020.03.04>. (Accessed 29 Aug. 2022)

Rodger, N A M. *The Command of the Ocean*. 2004. Penguin Books, 7 Sept. 2006, pp. 484–485.

Walvin, James. *The Zong : A Massacre, the Law and the End of Slavery*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011, pp. 21, 23, 29, 41, 52, 53, 56, 61, 70, 72–76, 78, 79, 82, 86, 88–90, 93–96, 102–106, 109–111, 114–117, 120, 121, 123, 124, 130, 132, 134–138, 151, 152, 155, 160, 166–168.

Webster, Jane. “The Zong in the Context of the Eighteenth-Century Slave Trade.” *The Journal of Legal History*, vol. 28, no. 3, Dec. 2007, pp. 285–298, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440360701698403>. Accessed 15 Feb. 2022.

Figure 5: Walvin, James. *The Zong : A Massacre, the Law and the End of Slavery*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011, p. 21

Figure 6: The Kneeling Slave, 'Am I not a man and a brother?'

<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-kneeling-slave-am-i-not-a-man-and-a-brother-79464> by British (English) School (c. 1800), photo credit: Bridgeman Images, licensed under Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

BIBLIOGRAPHY CHAPTER 3

Walvin, James. *The Zong: A Massacre, the Law and the End of Slavery*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011, pp. 23, 26-8, 172.

Shanes, Eric. *The Life and Masterworks of J.M.W. Turner*. New York, Parkstone Press International, 2008, p. 222.

Postle, Martin. "Eric Shanes Remembered." PAUL MELLON CENTRE, Yale University, 2017, www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/about/news/ericshanesremembered/page/1. (Accessed 10 Nov. 2024)

Ward, Abigail. *Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Fred D'Aguiar Representations of Slavery*. 1st ed., Manchester, UK; New York, USA, Manchester University Press, 2011, pp. 19, 101, 104–6.

Craps, Stef. "Learning to Live with Ghosts: Postcolonial Haunting and Mid-Mourning in David Dabydeen's "Turner" and Fred D'Aguiar's Feeding the Ghosts." *Callaloo*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2010, pp. 467, 469, 471–2, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cal.0.0651>.

Labaune-Demeule, Florence. "'The Sea Is Slavery.'" "the Sea Is History." "Maybe the Sea Is Endless." *1 the Sea as a Confluence of Horror and Memory in Fred D'Aguiar's Feeding the Ghosts.* *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1, 1 Sept. 2017, pp. 147–158, journals.openedition.org/ces/4536, <https://doi.org/10.4000/ces.4536>. (Accessed 10 Aug. 2024)

Fehskens, Erin M. "ACCOUNTS UNPAID, ACCOUNTS UNTOLD: M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* And the Catalogue." *Callaloo*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2012, pp. 408–9, 413, www.jstor.org/stable/23274289. Accessed 21 July 2024.

Howley, Ellen. "The Sea and Memory: Poetic Reconsiderations of the Zong Massacre." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 57, no. 2, 30 Oct. 2019, pp. 2, 4, 5, 9, 14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989419881233>.

Monzon, Japheth. "The Meaning of Zong: Humanising the Abstract." *Black South West Network*, 31 Oct. 2022, www.blacksouthwestnetwork.org/case-studies-and-features/the-meaning-of-zong. (Accessed 11 Sept. 2024)

"Cast Announced for the Meaning of Zong World Premiere - Visit West." *Visitwest.co.uk*, 22 Feb. 2022, www.visitwest.co.uk/news/read/2022/02/cast-announced-for-the-meaning-of-zong-world-premiere-b2225. (Accessed 11 Sept. 2024)

"African Cargo, an" *Blackplaysarchive.org.uk*, www.blackplaysarchive.org.uk/productions/african-cargo-an/. Accessed 11 Sept. 2024.

Cross, Felix. "Felix Cross MBE." *Felix Cross MBE*, www.felixcross.org/african-cargo. Accessed 19 Nov. 2024.

Krikler, Jermy. "The Zong and the Lord Chief Justice." *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 64, no. 1, 1 Jan. 2007, p. 40, academic.oup.com/hwj/article/64/1/29/600961, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbm035>. (Accessed 24 June 2023)

Andrews, Kehinde. "The Psychosis of Whiteness: The Celluloid Hallucinations of "Amazing Grace" and "Belle." *Journal of Black Studies*,

vol. 47, no. 5, 21 Mar. 2016, pp. 444–9, 450–1, www.jstor.org/stable/43926967, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934716638802>. (Accessed 15 Sept. 2024)

“The MJR Exhibition: Colonial Slavery and Its Legacy” Movement for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d. www.mjr-uk.com/exhibition-old.html. (Accessed 12 Sept. 2024)

“The New Voyages of the slaveship Zong” Movement for Justice & Reconciliation, 2019, www.mjr-uk.com/zong.html. (Accessed 12 Sept. 2024)

“The Zong Project” Movement for Justice & Reconciliation, n.d., <http://www.mjr-uk.com/uploads/1/2/2/0/12205473/mjrzonginfo0518.pdf>. (Accessed 12 Sept. 2024)

Moody, Jessica. “Conclusion: Untelling Difficult Pasts.” *The Persistence of Memory: Remembering Slavery in Liverpool, “Slaving Capital of the World”*, Liverpool University Press, 2020, pp. 264. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1675bp5.15>. (Accessed 3 Nov. 2024)

Lancaster City Council. “Lancaster Maritime Museum Launches Virtual Memorial to Zong Exhibition.” Lancaster.gov.uk, Lancaster City Council Website, 2021, www.lancaster.gov.uk/news/2021/mar/lancaster-maritime-museum-launches-virtual-memorial-to-zong-exhibition. (Accessed 3 Nov. 2024)

Lancaster Maritime Museum. *Memorial to Zong: Virtual Tour Exhibition*. By Lubaina Himid, with support from Theasys website, Hollybush Gardens, Institute for Black Atlantic Research and University of Central Lancashire, 2021, <https://www.theasys.io/viewer/SpmtTEZjbGF5Fxi6CGl4aPtCCsmPIZ/>, (Accessed 3 Nov. 2024)

Tate. "Turner Prize 2017: Lubaina Himid." Tate, 2017, www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/lubaina-himid-cbe-ra-2356/turner-prize-2017-biography. (Accessed 3 Nov. 2024)

Tate. "Who Is Lubaina Himid?" Tate Kids, www.tate.org.uk/kids/explore/who-is/who-lubaina-himid. Accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

Greene Naftali Gallery. "Lubaina Himid | Biography." Greene Naftali, greenenaftaligallery.com/artists/lubaina-himid. (Accessed 3 Nov. 2024)

Facing the Past. "Memorial to Zong (2021)." Facing the Past, www.facingthepast.org/map/records/memorial-to-zong-2021. (Accessed 3 Nov. 2024)

Rice, Alan. "Ibo Boy and Swallow Hard." YouTube, uploaded by Lancaster City Council, 24 Feb. 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhK2jpN46B0. (Accessed 3 Nov. 2024)

Sillis, Andrea. "Maritime Museum A Sillis" YouTube, uploaded by Lancaster City Council, 24 Feb. 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=NwmkCr1ec7Y. Accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

Whalen, Lotty. "An Interview with Lubaina Himid." *Decorating Dissidence*, 5 May 2020, <https://decoratingdissidence.com/2020/05/05/an-interview-with-lubaina-himid/>, pp. 1, 2. (Accessed 10 Nov. 2024)

Fulford, Sarah. "David Dabydeen and Turner's Sublime Aesthetic." *Anthurium a Caribbean Studies Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2005, p. 2, anthurium.miami.edu/articles/10.33596/anth.32, <https://doi.org/10.33596/anth.32>. (Accessed 31 July 2024)

Hollybush Gardens. "Lubaina Himid." Hollybush Gardens, hollybushgardens.co.uk/artists/lubaina-himid/. (Accessed 3 Nov. 2024)

Figure 7: Turner, J. M. W. The Slave Ship. 1840. Oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Slave-ship.jpg>. (Accessed 10 Nov. 2024)

Figure 8: Philip, M. NourbeSe. Zong! "Zong! #1." United States of America, Wesleyan University Press, 2008, p. 3.

Figure 9: MRSC. Slave Ship Tower Bridge 2007. Photograph. Transferred from English Wikipedia to Commons by Bonas, Public Domain. Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zong_massacre#/media/File:Slave_ship_tower_bridge_2007.jpg. (Accessed 10 Nov 2024)

Figure 10: Himid, Lubaina. Memorial to Zong. 1991. Acrylic on canvas (Courtesy of the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London) Lancaster Maritime Museum, Memorial to Zong: Virtual Tour Exhibition 2021, <https://www.theasys.io/viewer/SpmtTEZjbGF5Fxi6CGl4aPtCCsmPIZ/>. (Accessed 3 Nov. 2024)

Un ringraziamento speciale a mamma, a papà e a Martina.