HAUNTING MEMORIES: BLACK FRANCOPHONE CARIBBEAN WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS AND THE TRAUMATIC SLAVE PAST

by

MARY ELIZABETH TURNER

(Under the Direction of Freda Scott Giles)

ABSTRACT

The French Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique endured a particularly tumultuous slave past under both British and French regimes, resulting in an uneasy emancipation for both islands finally in 1848. Unlike their sister island, Haiti, these two territories never won their independence from France and opted instead, in 1946, to integrate into the French political system by becoming French departments, administered approximately the same as the departments in mainland France. It is the contention of this dissertation that the brutal imposition of slavery and its vicissitudinous administration across some two hundred years resulted in a population that still suffers from what Joy DeGruy Leary terms Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, which has been transmitted intergenerationally and that the vestiges of this syndrome can still be found in their dramatic literature. This study will focus solely on several Guadeloupean and Martincan women playwrights—Ina Césaire, Maryse Condé, Gerty Dambury, Daniely Francisque, Gilda Gonfier and Michèle Montantin— because the feminine perspective provides an incisive lens into the intimate ravages of slavery and into the ongoing effects of slave trauma on present-day family life, interpersonal relationships, and cultural

practices, and because this vital perspective of the woman writer has been eclipsed by male writers and consequently silenced until recently in the French Caribbean literary world. While amply demonstrating the presence of PTSS in their cultures, these playwrights also exhibit in their plays a determination to resist and quell those effects through their robust embrace of their Creole culture and in their willing acceptance of a mission to rebuild a cultural memory and a collective consciousness for their societies.

INDEX WORDS: Francophone theatre, French Caribbean women playwrights, French Caribbean theatre, Caribbean theatre, Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Caribbean slavery, slave trauma, Post traumatic Slave Syndrome, Maryse Condé, Ina Césaire, Gerty Dambury, Michèle Montantin, Gilda Gonfier, Daniely Francisque, Suzanne Dracius

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Charlotte Belle Brown whose lifelong quest for knowledge and education has inspired me throughout my life's journey. If only she could be here to savor this fruit of her legacy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The imagination must unearth unofficial truths that official history has suppressed.[1]

The islands of Guadeloupe, Martinique and Haiti have a shared history of slavery and colonization under the French. However, in 1804 Haiti fought its way into existence as the first emancipated and politically independent Black nation of the Western hemisphere. By contrast, although a significant slave revolt also occurred in Martinique in 1789 that actually "was of paramount importance as an inspiration for further revolts on other Caribbean islands, in particular in Saint Domingue (Haiti),"[2] and a large rebellion took place in Guadeloupe in 1802,[3] they were both quelled. Consequently, permanent slave emancipation for Guadeloupe and Martinique was not achieved until 1848, and then not militarily but by French decree.

However, with emancipation the slave past was submerged, seemingly erased and replaced by a French master narrative of Enlightenment liberalism and the ideals of liberty, equality and brotherhood. Subsequently, young Martinicans and Guadeloupeans, no matter what the color of their skins or their ethnic backgrounds, all sat in school reciting: "Our ancestors, the Gauls," from textbooks in which there was no mention of the existence of French slavery. As Wendy Goolcharan-Kumeta claims,

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[1] J. Michael Dash, "Introduction," in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* by Edouard Glissant (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), xxxvii–viii.

[2] Catherine Reinhardt, "French Caribbean Slaves Forge Their Own Ideal of Liberty in 1789," in *Slavery in the Caribbean Francophone World: Distant Voices, Forgotten Acts, Forged Identities*, ed. Doris Y. Kadish (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 19.

[3] Doris Y. Kadish, "Introduction," in *Slavery in the Caribbean Francophone World: Distant Voices, Forgotten Acts, Forged Identities* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 7–10.

> [*a]ssimilation* has produced serious psychological effects because it demands that the French West Indian discard his or her identity in favour of a French identity with white, European, metropolitan values. The French West Indian has been taught to abandon her/his culture, neglect her/his native language, *créole*, and above all, to despise the colour of her/his skin be it black or brown.[4]

Despite these efforts, assimilation into the French nation has not succeeded in erasing the imprint of the slave past. Writing about a trip she made to Guadeloupe in 1999 to visit her in-laws, Catherine Reinhardt reports, "I came across unexpected traces of the slave past everywhere I set foot and realized to what extent the memory of slavery constituted a problematic element of Guadeloupean society to this day."[5]

Martinican playwright Ina Césaire further corroborates the pervasive effects of the slave past on the psyche of the people of these Caribbean islands in her preface to *La Nef* (*The Ship*),[6] a play written by her sister Michèle in 1991:

> Most island cultures have an innate tendency to sacralize the sea, and rare is the maritime country whose narratives and legends fail to reflect this mythification. This does not, however, hold true for the Caribbean region: There, the sea is never sacralized….The sea is hostile because it has become the symbol of the violent rupture between man and his land, between man and his former freedom. The vessel is loathed as the moving receptacle of physical suffering and moral humiliation.[7]

Also, the abolition of slavery did not lead to political independence, since Guadeloupe and Martinique, unlike Haiti, have never freed themselves from French rule. Instead, in 1946, both islands opted to become further enmeshed in the economic and

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[4] Wendy Goolcharan-Kumeta, *My Mother, My Country: Reconstructing the Female Self in Guadeloupean Women's Writing*, Modern French Identities (New York: P. Lang, 2003), 19–20. (Italics in the original.)

[5] Catherine A. Reinhardt, *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), xi.

[6] Michèle Césaire, *The Ship*, in *New French Language Plays: Martinique, Quebec, Ivory Coast, Belgium* (New York: Ubu Repertory Theatre Publications, 1993), 55–107. Throughout the dissertation, as mandated by *Chicago Manual*, the English translations of published plays will be capitalized and italicized. Translations of unpublished plays will not be italicized and will be written in sentence-style.

[7] Ina Césaire, "The Sea and the Ship" in *New French Language Plays: Martinique, Quebec, Ivory Coast, Belgium* (New York: Ubu Repertory Theatre Publications, 1993), 57–58.

socio-political network of the French metropole by voting to become incorporated as actual departments of France. Administered approximately in the same manner as the departments of continental France, these islands (as well as the islands of St. Martin and Saint-Barthélemy in the Caribbean, Réunion in the Indian Ocean, and French Guyana in the northeast of South America) are now known collectively as Départements d'Outre-Mer (DOM), or Overseas Departments of France. Thus they partake in an economic stability and a standard of living rarely enjoyed by any other Caribbean island. Martinicans and Guadeloupeans are full-fledged French citizens (yet not quite, as demonstrated by recent unrest on both islands that highlighted economic and social disparities with mainland France), but at what price? [8]

This French policy of assimilation and homogenization of its slave population into the French cultural, social, and economic matrix has resulted in a strange sense of what Martinican Édouard Glissant has termed "non-history" for the formerly enslaved people of these islands. As Glissant's translator J. Michael Dash explains,

> The Caribbean in general suffers from the phenomenon of nonhistory. No collective memory, no sense of a chronology, the history of Martinique in particular is made up from a number of pseudo-events that have happened elsewhere. What is produced is a lack of any historical continuity or consciousness.[9]

Even worse, the denial of the slave past also aggravated the lingering, deleterious effects of trauma ingrained in the population after over two hundred years of slavery. Trauma theorists such as Joy DeGruy Leary, Yael Danieli, Nanette Auerhahn and Dori Laub,

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[8] In February 2009, protesters in both Martinique and Guadeloupe rose up against the social and economic disparities between France and its overseas departments. While unemployment was about 8% in mainland France, it was 23% in Guadeloupe. They also expressed resentment of the economic stranglehold of the békés (the White ruling class) who comprise only 1% of the population but own most industries. One protester was killed. See Bill Mayer, Danica Coto, Jenny Barchfield, and Dheepthi Namasivayam "Unrest in Caribbean Has Roots in Slavery Past," http://www.cleveland.com/world/index.ssf/2009/02/unrest_in_french_caribbean_has.html (accessed 6 May 2011).

[9] Dash, "Introduction," xxxii.

among others, have discovered that, indeed, the traumas incurred as a result of the atrocities of slavery, or the Holocaust, or the Japanese internment in the United States, etc. have wide and enduring impact that can be experienced by descendants who were not even born at the time of the trauma. Leary, in particular, has studied behavior and socialization patterns among the descendents of formerly enslaved African Americans and has postulated a pattern of trauma symptoms that she has named Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS). As Leary explains:

> The slave experience was one of continual violent attacks on the slave's body, mind, and spirit. Slave men, women and children were traumatized throughout their lives and the violent attacks during slavery persisted long after emancipation. In the face of these injuries, those traumatized adapted their attitudes and behaviors to simply survive, and these adaptations continue to manifest today.[10]

However, central to my decision to explore the effects of PTSS in the work of French Caribbean women playwrights is the difference in the nature of the traumatic experiences of slave women from those of their male counterparts, differences that have been transmitted through the generations and have colored Black women's perceptions of their bodies, their sexuality, their child-rearing, their ways of being in the world, and their ways of self-expression. It was the slave woman whose body was not only used for production on the plantation but also for reproduction and nurturance. She not only worked the fields beside the men, she was expected to do the domestic chores for her slave family at the end of the day. She not only worked the fields beside the men, she had to endure repeated rapes as a natural part of her existence. It was she who had to prepare her young daughters for similar violation as they approached adolescence.[11] It was she who could be rented out as a prostitute, bringing in money for her "sexual services [that]

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[10] Joy DeGruy Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Milwaukie, OR: Uptone Press, 2005), 14.

[11] Ibid., 79–80.

frequently exceeded the slave's market value."[12] When pregnant, it was only for her that a hole was dug in the ground so that she could be whipped while protecting the master's unborn property.[13] As a domestic, she was not only called upon to do the master and mistress's biddings in the house but also to nurse their infants. In fact, a recorded account of a gathering for European guests at the home of a colonial family in Barbados underscores the degree to which the Black female slave in the Caribbean had no ownership of her own body. In the midst of a soiree for European guests, the planter's baby needed to be fed and the slave nanny was summoned.

> The planter's guests were most embarrassed by the sight of a white child sucking the black breast. To make matters worse, some "respectable" creole ladies began to assist by "slapping, pressing, shaking about and playing with the long breasts of the slave, with very indelicate familiarity…without seeming to be at all sensible that it was, in any degree, indecent or improper.[14]

For the woman slave no part of her body was ever her own exclusively.

Because of the unique experiences of women during slavery and after, because French Caribbean women writers such as Ina Césaire sought to recover the islands' past through interviewing the elderly, particularly women, in face of the nonhistory of the official records, because women writers like Suzanne Dracius sifted through their history to recuperate women warriors who had been denied recognition as opposed to male French Caribbean writers who sought their heroes among the Haitians, because of the unequal representation of women in the expressive literature in the French Caribbean (and elsewhere), I have passionately devoted this dissertation to the dramatic writing of

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[12] Hilary McD Beckles, *Centering Women: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society* (Princeton, NJ: Marcus Wiener, 1999), 27.

[13] Dorothy E. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 39–40.

[14] George Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies* (London: Longman, 1806), 1: 260; quoted in Beckles, *Centering Women,* 135–36.

French Caribbean women. My choice was also spurred by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido's insistence that "[t]he work of women needs to be a part of the literary account of human experience and the critical response to it simply because the account is incomplete without them and up to now thay have not had a sufficient place….[A] complete account is, after all, what each discipline strives for." [15]

The urgency and importance of inclusion of the female experience is particularly driven home by the understanding that one of the crucial ways of helping slave traumatized populations to heal lies in the hands of the creative artist. Cultural theorists such as Kirby Farrell confirm the importance of creative imagination as one of the most effective means of helping to build a collective memory so essential to restoring a traumatized community. They also particularly endorse the expressive arts as a means of constructing knowledge about trauma, including slave trauma. Though a historian himself, Dominick LaCapra even privileges the role of fiction over historiography in recuperating some aspects of past trauma. He points out:

> One might argue that narratives in fiction may also involve truth claims on a structural or general level by providing insight into phenomena such as slavery or the Holocaust, by offering a reading of a process or period, or by giving at least a plausible 'feel' for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods.[16]

Glissant and Dash agree, recognizing particularly the creative writer as the one who is capable of actively recuperating the Caribbean past and reconstructing Caribbean identity. Says Dash:

> In a situation where the group is ignorant of its past, resentful of its present impotence, yet fearful of future change, the creative

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[15] Carole Boyce Davies, and Elaine Savory, *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990), vii.

[16] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 13.

> imagination has a special role to play. Martinicans [and Guadeloupeans] need writers to tell them who they are or even what they are not. A collective memory is an urgent need for the [French Caribbean] community if oblivion is to be avoided.[17]

Martinican Aimé Césaire's groundbreaking work, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*), marked the beginning of this important act of cultural recuperation by French Antillean writers. When Césaire, Sekou Touré of Guinea and Leon-Gontron Damas of French Guyana formulated the literary and ideological school of thought that became known as Negritude, French Caribbean literature began to break free of the grip of French cultural hegemony. Instead, "[t]he *Négritude* movement of the 1930s sought to exalt pride in blackness, linking all the communities of black African origin by celebrating their 'race' through both lyrical and militant literature."[18]

The springboard provided by Césaire led to a flourishing of vibrant French Caribbean prose, poetry and theatre. Césaire, himself wrote four acclaimed plays—*Et les chiens se taisent* (1956), *La tragédie du roi Christophe* (1963), *Une saison au Congo* (1966), *Une tempête* (1969)[19]—as well as eight books of poetry and several books of critical writings. Other Guadeloupean and Martinican writers followed in his footsteps: Georges Mauvois wrote his first play *Agénor Cacou* in 1966 and went on to write Creole translations of Molière's *Dom Juan* and Sophocles' *Antigone*; Auguste Macouba wrote *Eia Manmaille-la* (1968); Daniel Boukman's *Les Négriers* (1971); Joby Bernabé, *Kimafautièsa* (1973), Sony Rupaire *Samamhil* (1975); Vincent Placoly, *Dessalines ou La*

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[17] Dash, "Introduction," xix.

[18] Sarah Barbour and Gerise Herndon, *Emerging Perspectives on Maryse Condé: A Writer of Her Own* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006), 182.

[19] Stéphanie Bérard, *Théâtre des Antilles*: *Traditions et scènes contemporaines* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009), 24n1.

passion de l'indépendance in 1983; and Édouard Glissant wrote *Monsieur Toussaint* in 1986.[20]

However, this burgeoning indigenous theatre, as well as literary output, was remarkable for its lack of women's voices. As Wendy Goolcharan-Kumeta notes,

> [t]here has…been a considerable bias against Caribbean female-authored fiction by the firmly established West Indian masculine literary [and theatrical] tradition. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido speak of "voicelessness" which …signifies …"the absence of a specifically female position on major issues such as slavery, colonialism, decolonization, women's rights and more direct social and cultural issues.[21]

As the only published woman novelist in Martinique, Suzanne Dracius put it more bluntly in an unpublished 2002 interview with University of Georgia professor Jean-Pierre Piriou when she said,

> Today the Martinican literary movements are very masculinist, very 'phallocentric,' if not phallocratic….[A] woman writer is labeled an eccentric or a homosexual, like Madeleine Carbet, or obscured, overwhelmed by the shadow of a great man like Suzanne Césaire, or stigmatized, or treated like an insane person like Mayotte Capécia.[22]

Whether women's voices were considered insignificant or if barriers were intentionally or unintentionally constructed against women in theatre, women's entry into French Caribbean theatre came belatedly and tenuously. Indeed, although Maryse Condé wrote her first play, *Le Morne de Massabielle* (The hills of Massabielle), in 1972, it wasn't produced until 1979, and then only for an audience of friends in Puteaux, a suburb of Paris. It has never been published in French. Its second production occurred twelve years later in 1991, when an English translation was produced by UBU Repertory in New York City. Ina Césaire wrote the first version of her first play, *Mémoires d'isle* (*Island*

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[20] Ibid., 25, 27.
[21] Wendy Goolcharan-Kumeta, *My Mother, My Country*, 12.
[22] Suzanne Dracius, unpublished interview with Jean-Pierre Piriou, 2002.

Memories),[23] in 1983 and also had it produced in a suburb of Paris. As a result, their voices had not yet made inroads into the theatre scene in Guadeloupe or Martinique respectively until almost the last decade of the twentieth century, and even then their growing renown as published writers of prose and stories may have opened the doors.

The coming to voice of women playwrights is not only vital to a more comprehensive theatre canon but also, importantly, to a more exhaustive understanding of the historical, cultural, socio-political and gender realities of their respective homelands, and ultimately of human existence itself. This silencing of the woman's voice is rendered even more significant in light of the "non-history" of the Caribbean. Certainly in a recuperative project in the French Caribbean, the voice of the Black French Caribbean woman playwright must play a vital role, offsetting not only the inaccuracies of accounts by slave owners and colonial bureaucrats but also the patriarchal distortions of both White and Black men.[24] Moreover, through a different angle of vision, these women playwrights open an entirely different window onto Antillean existence. Says Melissa McKay,

> they are more interested in the individual histories that are found in the interior of the historical event in question, placing the accent on the lives of their women compatriots and on those marginalized and forgotten characters in the history books. In so doing, these playwrights manage to recount some intimate and touching stories while still giving a voice to those who have remained silent in the theatrical domain for too long.[25]

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[23] Ina Césaire, *Island Memories,* in *Plays by French and Francophone Women : A Critical Anthology*, ed. Christiane Makward, Judith G. Miller and Cynthia Running-Johnson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 49–74.

[24] Similar to sociologist Patricia Hill Collins and others, I capitalize the term *Black* and *White* when they are used to describe African-descended or European-descended people and not merely a color. This practice underscores the constructed nature of these terms as they clearly do not usually denote actual skin color.

[25] Melissa L. McKay, *Maryse Condé et le théâtre antillais*, Francophone Cultures and Literatures, (New York: P. Lang, 2002), 27.

It is within the larger project of bringing the voices of women playwrights further into the spotlight that I situate this dissertation with its exploration of the plays of seven Black French Caribbean women playwrights. In analyzing their plays I ask: If the effects of slavery still exist in these French Caribbean societies, do their plays reflect, contextualize or reify the traumatic past, whether slave or patriarchal? Do these playwrights undertake Glissant's sober charge of recuperating the vibrant truths of their Caribbean past out of the ashes of slavery and colonialism to construct a cohesive collective memory? Or do they eschew the evocation of the past and its trauma and perhaps even their own "Caribbeanness" (*Antillanité*) to take on, instead, the project of valorizing and assimilating into the ever-imposing cultural and aesthetic influence of the French metropole? It is my contention in this dissertation that the slave past is still a pervasive and haunting presence in the lives of the populations of Guadeloupe and Martinique, and that their historical experiences vis-à-vis slavery, patriarchy, and colonization have resulted in the development of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, gender trauma, and a distressed collective memory and identity that is reflected from a female perspective in the work of their Black women playwrights. I also argue that whether consciously or unconsciously, the theatre work of these playwrights presents models of resistance to the debilitating effects of PTSS by recuperating and honoring the cultural traces from their suppressed past, thereby helping to build a cultural memory and a collective consciousness for their people**.**

Methodology

Only a small fraction of the plays written by French Caribbean women playwrights has been published. Partially this is a result of a strong belief by the

playwrights themselves that plays are to be performed, not read. Even Maryse Condé, whose prose and drama have been widely published, said in 2002:

> The form of theatre that I make now, is made to be played, to be seen, to be heard, like that, collectively. It is not at all made to be published. Publication…addresses whom? Some people who know how to read…who have the time to read. That's the difference.[26]

Yet even for those who seek publication, it is not easily achieved. Most publishers of French language works are located in France, Belgium, or Canada, which means selection for publication is made by editors who may not fully understand or appreciate the cultural aesthetics of the Caribbean work they are asked to evaluate. One of the authors in my study, Michèle Montantin, said that she has tried to get her play, *Le chemin de petites abymes*, published but did not succeed. Having no choice in the matter, she conceded that "the main thing is to get the play produced."[27] Yet, those of us who are theatre historians know that without meticulous archiving and/or publication, plays have historically disappeared into thin air.

Recognizing the need to archive the theatre work of her playwright colleagues in the face of inadequate publishing opportunities, Montantin developed a program in 2002 called Textes en Paroles (Texts into Words), which organizes an annual juried competition and reading of previously unpublished or unproduced plays by new or well-known playwrights, primarily from the French Caribbean. In 2008, the program entered into a partnership with the Centre de Ressources Théâtrales Caribéen (Center of Caribbean Theatrical Resources), which has provided for the archiving of the selected

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[26] McKay, *Maryse Condé*, 125.

[27] Stéphanie Bérard, "Michèle Montantin, une dramaturge investie dans la vie théâtrale guadeloupéenne." *île en île*, 2004; http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ile.en.ile/paroles/montantin_entretien.html (accessed 22 April 2011).

plays at the library Médiathèque Caraïbe Bettino Lara in Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe. The program, still presided over by Montantin, is under the day-to-day oversight of her daughter Cécilia Collomb, who is the project manager.

Since one of the goals of my study is to flesh out the voice of the French Caribbean woman playwright by exploring the work of published as well as unpublished playwrights, I traveled to Basse Terre, Guadeloupe to access the Textes en Paroles archives at Médiathèque. I made the trip in May 2009 and with the assistance of head librarian, Line Césarus, I was able to discover manuscripts by twelve unpublished women playwrights, and even several manuscripts by published playwrights Ina Césaire and Gerty Dambury. While in Guadeloupe, I was also able to conduct an interview with Michèle Montantin and to meet Cécilia Collomb, who subsequently very generously provided me with PDF emailed copies of the Textes en Paroles manuscripts that interested me, thereby sparing me the cost of reproduction and transport. I selected the eleven plays analyzed in this study from these manuscripts and twenty published plays that I located in libraries in the U.S. and Canada. They are: Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'isle* (*Island Memories*), *Rosanie Soleil* (*Fire's Daughters*),[28] *L'enfant des passages ou la geste de Ti-Jean*, (The child of passageways or the adventure of Ti-Jean), and *La Lettre d'Affranchissement* (The letter of emancipation); Maryse Condé's *An tan revolisyan* (*In the Time of the Revolution*)[29] and *Comme deux frères* (Like two brothers); Gerty Dambury's *Trames* (Fabrications); Suzanne Dracius's *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (Lumina Sophia, also known as Surprise); Gilda Gonfier's *Le cachot* (The cell); Daniely Francisque's *Crevée vive* (Buried alive); and Michèle Montantin's *Vie et mort de Vaval*

[28] Ina Césaire, *Fire's Daughters*, in *New French Language Plays: Martinique, Quebec, Ivory Coast, Belgium*, 1–53 (New York: UBU Repertory Publications, 1993).
[29] Maryse Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution, Callaloo* 25, no. 2 (2002):454–493.

(The life and death of Vaval) and *La Chemin des Petites Abymes* (Recursive Lane). My only regret is that I could not include more of the plays from the treasure trove of Textes en Paroles' collection.

Through the thoughtful assistance of Guadeloupean historian Gérard Lafleur, I was also able to obtain housing as a guest researcher on the grounds of the Departmental Archives in Gourbeyre, Guadeloupe for the entire extent of my visit. This arrangement provided me with easy access to the Departmental Archives library whose collection includes innumerable historical documents about the French Caribbean. It was there that my research on slavery in the French Caribbean became grounded and more sharply focused. With Lafleur's guidance, I was also able to time my trip to Guadeloupe to coincide with the celebration of the emancipation of the slaves that occurs at the end of May. In addition to seeing a reenactment of the events of Louis Delgrés heroic confrontation of Napoleon's troops on the historic site of the battle, I was also able to witness a municipal memorial to Delgrès and to attend several lectures by prominent scholars on the issues of slavery and emancipation in the French Caribbean. Lafleur also introduced me to Maryse Preira, an instructor in English at a local high school in Basse-Terre. She was immensely gracious in escorting me around Basse-Terre, inviting me on a family holiday outing, and introducing me to her friends Inès and Max Théodore, who in turn, generously transported me to two different performance events, one of which was all the way on the other side of the island.

Since my study also included works by playwrights from Martinique, I made a second trip to the Caribbean in June 2010. Through the assistance of some friends and colleagues in Guadeloupe, I was able to meet Martinican playwright Bernard Lagier who

helped me set up an immensely important interview with Ina Césaire, the premiere Martinican playwright. He also generously gave of his time to escort me on a tour of Fort-de-France, the capitol of Martinique. That wonderful afternoon, the delicious lunch and delightful interview with Ina Césaire, the frantic car travel in and around Fort-de-France and Diamant where I was staying, and the visits to some historic sites, all gave me a more substantial concept of Martinique and a better understanding of its landscape and people.

With my primary texts in hand and grounded in a sense of the life and landscape of Guadeloupe and Martinique, I began my analysis of the plays through the lenses of trauma, feminist/womanist, postcolonial, and cultural memory theory. Each of these paradigms provided an angle of vision that helped to elucidate the relationship of this body of work to the history of slavery on the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. However, while each of these theoretical frames informs my work, my main emphasis is on trauma theory, most particularly post-traumatic slave syndrome, and on cultural memory theory, which postulates the manner in which trauma is perpetuated intergenerationally. Referencing the work of scholars of trauma theory such as Joy DeGruy Leary (*Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome),* Yael Danieli (*International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*), and Cathy Caruth (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory*), I investigate what slave trauma is, how it falls within the realm of trauma theory, and how it can be perpetuated across generations. By looking at the work of cultural theorists Dominick LaCapra (*Writing History, Writing Trauma)* and Kirby Farrell (*Post Traumatic Culture*), I broaden the understanding of the impact of trauma on cultural production and vice versa.

My analysis will expand on LaCapra's and Leary's thinking on trauma by also drawing on the work of Maurice Halbwachs and Jeffrey Olick on collective memory. Halbwachs establishes and Olick extends a theory that does not regard memory as being situated exclusively in the mind of the individual. Instead he theorizes that "[g]roup memberships provide the materials for memory and prod the individual into recalling particular events and into forgetting others. Groups can even produce memories in individuals of events they never 'experienced' in any direct sense."[30] The intersection between the theories of trauma and collective memory, particularly at the juncture where collective memory of a past trauma serves as the basis for group identification and collective consciousness is at the heart of my analysis.

Postcolonial theory and feminist theory also play a part in this analysis. Both islands have been European colonies, subjected at different times to the rule of the British as well as the French. The history of the two islands as postcolonial subjects is further complicated, though, by the fact that Guadeloupe and Martinique remain entities within the original colonizing power. Bonnie Thomas, speaking specifically of these two islands, identifies some of the psychological gymnastics this political and cultural construction requires:

> Because they have had their entire existence defined for them by the Other, the culturally dominant France, Caribbean people have long suffered from a lack of "authentic" history and tangible roots. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that France operates both as the Other (the islands are possessions of France) and the Same (the people of Martinique and Guadeloupe have interiorized the language and values of France). This fragmented sense of self has left French

[30] Jeffrey K. Olick, "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures." *Sociological Theory* 17, no. 3 (1999): 335.

> Caribbean people with a powerful desire to belong to their own history and culture.[31]

Manifestations of some of the signature postcolonial struggles appear in the life and the writings of these populations. Most importantly for my study, postcolonial writers often attempt to recuperate the expressive forms of their precolonial cultures. This recuperation is seen in the incorporation and foregrounding of rituals, folklore, and storytelling in the plays. Some postcolonial writers also struggle against using the language of their European colonizer to express their counter-culture, or their Caribbeanness. This concern has led to a movement for the establishment of Creole instead of French as the culturally correct language of Caribbean expression, a movement opposed by those who embrace French and who view creolization as diminishing opportunities for publication and the broader dissemination of their work. Such forces towards adaptation, appropriation and even expropriation are also evident in the body of work of French Caribbean women playwrights. Thus in the course of the dissertation I unpack the postcolonial influences on the playwrights' dramaturgy, subject matter and language as each playwright integrates the demands of a dominant French culture with the emergent Caribbean or Creole movement.

Last but certainly not least, this study analyzes the gender differentials reflected in all aspect of these playwrights' work and career. It is not easy to achieve an understanding of the interplay of gender politics within a society other than one's own (and even sometimes within one's own), especially within a short period of study. Here I rely heavily on the writing and expertise of scholars of French Caribbean society, history and gender, such as Patricia Mohammed, Bonnie Thomas, and Doris Kadish, to help me

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[31] Bonnie Thomas, *Breadfruit or Chestnut?: Gender Construction in the French Caribbean Novel* (New York: Lexington Books, 2006), 2.

cross the cultural divide and to resist applying feminist theory in culturally inappropriate ways. In the Caribbean, as in many regions in the African diaspora, the very term "feminism" is seen as another manifestation of Western theoretical hegemony imposed heavy-handedly upon very different social realities. As Nigerian scholar Oyèrónke Oyewùmí notes:

> From a cross-cultural perspective…feminism, despite its radical local stance, exhibits the same ethnocentric and imperialistic characteristics of the Western discourses it sought to subvert. This has placed serious limitations on its applicability outside of the culture that produced it.[32]

In contrast, Alice Walker's concept of womanism, which has consequently been embraced and theoretically expanded by other African diasporic scholars, recognizes the common fight of Black men and women against racism and discrimination and embraces men in a common struggle against gender injustice. In the Caribbean region—where some writers argue that "mainstream Caribbean nationalism sees the proliferation of feminist identity politics as deeply threatening to its foundational aims and agendas"[33]—the less divisive womanist approach engenders less resistance.

Interestingly, the discussion of gender in the work of these playwrights brings the dissertation full circle. In interviews conducted by Bonnie Thomas, several French Caribbean women writers have linked the source of sexism in the Caribbean to the institution of slavery. She reports that Maryse Condé "attributes the structure of male-female relationships in the French Caribbean to the experience of slavery, which broke all previous family structures and denied slaves the right to autonomy over their own

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[32] Oyèrónke Oyewùmí, *The Invention of Women : Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 13.

[33] Natasha Barnes, "Reluctant Matriarch: Sylvia Wynter and the Problematics of Caribbean Feminism," *Small Axe* 5 (March 1999): 35.

lives."[34] Similarly Guadeloupean novelist Gisèle Pineau also “situates the origin of these inequalities back in that ‘time of slavery.’" According to Pineau, "black men under slavery did not have the same status as other men who could assert their ownership over their family; rather, partners, wives and children remained the property of the master."[35] Thus, the Caribbean slave past stands implicated in the state of present-day gender inequalities through the effects of PTSS and the force of collective memory. This is the very dynamic that is at the center of my study of the works of the Black women playwrights of Martinique and Guadeloupe.

Chapter Outline

Since the entire dissertation is predicated on the existence of an oppressive system of slavery that has had powerful traumatic reverberations throughout these French Caribbean islands, I have devoted chapter 2, "Trauma's Genesis: Slavery in Guadeloupe and Martinique," to a detailed explanation of the history of slavery in Guadeloupe and Martinique. Even while sharing certain characteristics with all slave societies in the Americas, slavery on these two islands was not identical, nor was it a carbon copy of American slavery. I begin by discussing the introduction of slavery and its early administration. Then I demonstrate how the nature of slavery changed drastically as France decided to challenge Spain's dominance in the region by catering to Europe's addiction to sugar through expanded sugar cane production. This plan, however, necessitated the importation of much larger numbers of slaves. This increased slave population required more than the loosely structured, inconsistent management systems of individual plantation owners and soon Louis XIV established a set of regulations

[34] Thomas, *Breadfruit or Chestnut?* 6.
[35] Ibid., 7

called *Le code noir* (The Black Code) that sought to standardize most aspects of slave life, including marriage, punishments, and sales. I will also reveal the effect of the French Revolution on the island's slave population and how one island was emancipated during that period while the other was not. Finally, I will talk about the re-establishment of slavery under Napoleon, and the uneasy continuation of slavery until 1848 when all of the slaves were emancipated by decree.

In chapter 3, "Clinically Distressed Characters," I discuss the trauma caused by over two hundred years of slavery in Guadeloupe and Martinique. I particularly explore Joy DeGruy Leary's theory of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, which asserts that the effects of the trauma of slavery are still impacting present generations. I also look at the generalized trauma theory by Judith Herman and Cathy Caruth, who discuss the symptoms of trauma as well as at Yael Danieli's extensive cross-cultural study, *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, in which a variety of trauma specialists theorize the transgenerational transmission of trauma. In this chapter, I discuss *Le cachot* (The cell) and also introduce Ina Césaire's *L'enfant des passages ou la geste de Ti-Jean* (Child of passages or the adventure of Ti-Jean), plays in which atrocities are referenced and in which some of the characters manifest clinical post traumatic stress.

In chapter 4, "Whiten the Race": Depiction of a Complex Color/Class Hierarchy, I argue that the racial hierarchy of the slave system with Whites at the top and Blacks at the bottom engendered a color and class complex that still manifests in these societies as an intricate hierarchical classification system of skin color and hair type. An analysis of this colorism, classism, and racism in Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'isle* (*Island Memories)* and *La lettre d'affranchissement* (The letter of emancipation) and in Michèle Montantin's

Le Chemin des Petites Abymes (Recursive Lane) helps to advance this argument. The root causes of this color prejudice as theorized by psychiatrists Frantz Fanon, Carl Jung, and Michael Vannoy Adams are also discussed in this chapter.

In chapter 5, "Patriarchal Prerogatives, Reluctant Matrifocality," I consider gender relationships as revealed in the plays of Césaire's *Mémoires d'isles*, Daniely Francisque's *Crevée vive*, (Buried alive) and Maryse Condé's *Comme deux frères* (Like two brothers). I contend that demonstration of unbridled patriarchal privilege by slave masters within their families and within the slave quarters presented a warped model of family life that strongly influenced the male/female relationships of slaves following emancipation, a model that I believe is at the heart of some of the troubled love and family relationships depicted in these plays.

Chapter 6, "Folklore, Carnival, and Creole as Resistance," begins to explore the ways in which the dramaturgy of these women playwrights (by embracing the non-European cultural foundations of their societies) provides resistance to the effects of PTSS. I discuss Creole language, which is used in varying degrees by all of the playwrights in this study as a means of reifying collective consciousness. The variety of ways in which Creole is used highlights a careful negotiation by the playwrights between community connection and the desire for a larger audience. I also look at the use of folklore as resistance in Ina Césaire's *L'enfant des passages*...and reinscribe carnival's subversive powers in Michèle Montantin's *Vie et mort de Vaval* (Life and death of Vaval). Postcolonial theories by Bill Ashcroft as well as the writings by Édouard Glissant, proponent of the concept of Caribbeanness (Antillanité) and of Jean Bernabé,

Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, proponents of Creoleness (Creolité) help to inform this chapter.

In chapter 7, "Fighting Back: Creating Cultural Memory," I reference cultural theorists Laurence Kirmeyer and Dominick LaCapra in discussing the role of the expressive artist in helping to build a cultural memory for a society. The plays in this section intersect with actual historical events, taking different dramatic approaches from the depiction of an intimate domestic scene of Ina Césaire's *Rosanie Soleil (Fire's Daughters),* to the blatant apotheosis of a heroine in Suzanne Dracius's *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (Lumina Sophie aka Surprise), and the deconstruction of heroes and reevaluation of common people and women in Maryse Condé's *An tan revolisyan: Elle court, elle court, la liberté* (In the time of the revolution, liberty gets away)[36]. In each instance, the playwrights historicize the events from the perspective of women and/or of everyday people thereby reaffirming the active participation of both groups in resisting the force of oppression in the past, and thereby providing stepping stones to the building of a collective consciousness for the future.

The final chapter is my conclusion in which I affirm my findings.

Because the women playwrights in my study are still not as well known in the US as their work warrants, I have provided short biographical sketches for them in Appendix A at the end of the dissertation.

[36] Maryse Condé's partially Creole title, *An tan revolisyan: Elle court, elle court la liberté* was translated by Doris Y. Kadish and Jean-Pierre Piriou and titled *In the Time of the Revolution* for a production of the play at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia in October 1997.

Significance of the Study

As recently as 2006, Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, an accomplished scholar and playwright, noted the growing intellectual interest in the writing of women from the African Diaspora. She states:

> Since the early to mid-1980s, interest in women writers of color has become increasingly strong, and the publication of critical texts examining women writers from Africa and the African diaspora has not adequately met the demand from scholars in feminist studies, African studies, African American studies, diaspora studies, American literature, American studies and postcolonial studies.[37]

In my review of the literature I discovered that despite the growing quest for scholarly knowledge about the expressive culture of women writers of the African diaspora, one group of artists, the French-speaking Black Caribbean woman playwright, is triply marginalized—by gender, genre and language— and therefore remains underrepresented in an already meager area of scholarship. In a broad search of literature, I was only able to uncover nine books and seven dissertations that engaged some aspect of my proposed area of scholarship and no published or unpublished work duplicated my proposed dissertation.

Most books about Caribbean writers focus predominantly on the prose and playwriting of men. When the work of women is engaged, it is most often centered on the genres of fiction and poetry and only tangentially on the drama of the Black French Caribbean female playwright.

A key issue of my dissertation is the intersection of trauma theory and theatre. While a number of books investigated trauma theory in relation to fiction, such as Laurie

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[37] Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, *Middle Passages and the Healing Place of History: Migration and Identity in Black Women's Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 1.

Vickroy's *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (2002), many fewer have explored it in relation to theatre. Only one book, Christopher Bigsby's *Remembering and Imagining the Holocaust: The Chain of Memory*, provides important thinking about trauma theory as applied to dramatic work, but the subject population of his study is obviously vastly different from mine.

A review of dissertations also revealed a dearth devoted to French Caribbean women playwrights and slave trauma. Where scholars engage the topic of French Caribbean women playwrights it is either in comparison to French speaking playwrights from other parts of the globe, or if focused on the Caribbean, it involves an intercultural comparison between English-, Spanish- and French-speaking women and/or male playwrights. Those works that explore trauma and the drama of French-speaking women playwrights are even more limited in number and again they are not focused solely on the French Caribbean woman playwright but include the entire Black Atlantic and/or Africa or include the study of film and novels. Again no dissertation discussed the intersection of post traumatic stress syndrome, cultural memory and the plays of French Caribbean women playwrights.

Overall, my dissertation will expand the needed scholarship on Caribbean women playwrights highlighted by Elizabeth Brown-Guillory. Moreover, it will help to counterbalance the scholarship being developed on the English-speaking Caribbean, which has tended to be presented as emblematic of the entire Caribbean; the work and thinking of French and Creole-speaking Caribbean writers cannot be presumed to be fully explicated by analysis of English-speaking Caribbean writers any more than the analysis

of British literature would be expected to illuminate the specificities of France's literary production, even though both countries are located in Europe.

Finally, many of the works I found in the review of literature were written in French. By writing my dissertation in English I hope to bring the work of these playwrights increasingly into the consciousness of theatre academics and theatre producers in the United States, where their work can help also to elucidate some of our own country's issues with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. I am also hoping that my presentation of even this small sampling of work by these French Caribbean Black women playwrights will spur interest in the many other manuscripts held in the Textes en Paroles Collection and lead to more translation and publication of these compelling works.

CHAPTER 2

TRAUMA'S GENESIS: SLAVERY IN GUADELOUPE AND MARTINIQUE

As inhabitants of what Joseph Roach has termed "the circum-Atlantic world,"[1] the people of Guadeloupe and Martinique share the history of the well-known atrocities of the trans-Atlantic slave trade: abduction from West and Central African lands, the tribulations of the Middle Passage, the indignities of the slave auction, the loss of even the most basic personal liberties, and the endurance of lifetimes of forced labor with its attendant physical and mental trauma. Yet, within this vast rubric of Black slavery, the particularities of the slave practices in each "New World" territory had its own unique imprint. The size of territory, the ratio of Black slaves to White settlers, the agricultural and commercial interests of the colony, the European nations possessing the territory, the inter-European conflicts played out on the territory (for instance, Guadeloupe and Martinique changed hands seven times between European nations, primarily Great Britain and France[2]), all influenced the nature of the slave experience. Similarly, the manner of slave emancipation also differed: slaves emancipated following the bitter Civil War in the United States, for instance, entered freedom in a very different social fabric than those in Guadeloupe, who were emancipated, relatively bloodlessly, as a part of the French Revolution, only to be re-enslaved when Napoleon came to power in France. Thus, while the generalities of slavery in the circum-Atlantic world provide an overall

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[1] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 4.

[2] Richard S. Hillman and Thomas J. D'Agostino, *Understanding the Contemporary Caribbean* (Boulder, CO:
L. Rienner, 2003) 35.

matrix, or as Roach states, "a vast behavioral vortex, the forces of which created certain characteristic patterns that continue to influence values and practices still extant today,"[3] the specificities of the configurations of slavery in their own particular history haunt the cultural memory and impact the nature of the Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) of each former slave society. Therefore it is imperative that I ground the analysis of slave trauma in the plays I will be exploring by contemporary Black Francophone women playwrights of Guadeloupe and Martinique in the complex nature of slavery on each of the islands. Once I have established the nature of slavery, I will analyze eleven plays by these playwrights to reveal the enduring impact of slavery on their cultural memory and theatrical expression.

The Establishment and Growth of Slavery

Guadeloupe and Martinique are a part of the Caribbean known as the Lesser Antilles, a long arc of small islands that extend from the Virgin Islands in the north through Trinidad in the south, then westward along the coast of South America to Aruba (fig. 1). Their designation as "lesser" derives from their comparison to the Greater Antilles islands of Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola and Puerto Rico. Even in the aggregate, the Lesser Antilles "barely exceed Jamaica in surface area, and their total population at present is less than Puerto Rico's."[4] Indeed, despite the fact that Columbus landed on the shores of Guadeloupe in 1493 on his second trip to the Western Hemisphere, and on Martinique during his fourth and final voyage in 1502, the Spanish basically ignored the Lesser Antilles as "islas inútiles" [useless islands][5] in favor of the wealth of the

[3] Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 30.

[4] Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman, eds. *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 1.

[5] Ibid., 1. (Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.)

continental lands of the Incas and Maya, from which they could extract precious metals.

However, in the seventeenth century, as other European nations also joined the quest for colonial possessions, "a swarm of eager, fighting colonists poured down to claim [the islands] in the names of England, France, and the United Netherlands, putting an end forever to the Spanish monopoly of the West Indies.[6]

The French first established colonies on Guadeloupe and Martinique in 1635. Initially, the islands served mainly as outposts used for respite and re-stocking of provisions for ships en route to France's other colonies in the New World. However, discovering they had arrived too late in the New World to break Spain's and Portugal's holds on the gold trade, France decided to make its fortune instead in luxury crops—coffee, cocoa, and especially sugar cane—to supply the growing sugar addiction of Europe's elite. For what would become an enterprise almost equally lucrative as the gold trade, France turned first to the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique and then to Saint Domingue (Haiti) on the island of Hispaniola, whose larger tracts of fertile land would soon outshine the other two islands' production and become France's most valuable sugar cane possession.

Although the first slaves arrived in Guadeloupe with the first French colonists in 1635, they were primarily domestic and personal slaves. Agricultural labor on the early plantations was supplied by indentured workers, usually poor Frenchmen who seized the opportunity to work for three years and then purchase some land of their own. Consequently in 1656 on Guadeloupe, there were some 12,000 White women and men (of which about 800 were indentured) as opposed to only 3,000 Black slaves. But as the

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[6] Nellis Maynard Crouse, *French Pioneers in the West Indies, 1624–1664* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 9.

number of sugar plantations grew (from 65 in 1700 to 391 in 1790), and the French witnessed the success of the Portuguese with Black slave labor on their sugar plantations in Brazil and other island colonies, they became avid participants in the burgeoning slave trade. Thus, by 1770, the number of slaves had increased exponentially to a figure between 80,000 and 85,000, while indentured laborer had disappeared altogether.[7] By 1790, during the French Revolutionary period, and close to the time of Guadeloupe's first slave emancipation in 1794, the number of slaves had risen to approximately 92,545,[8] out of a population "estimated at 107,226: 13 percent white; 3 percent free colored; 84 percent slave."[9] In total, Philip Curtin estimates that there were over 3,750,000 slaves brought to the colonies of the various European countries in the Antilles from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries; of these Guadeloupe received 290,800 and Martinique, 365,800 in comparison to Saint Domingue, which imported 864,300 slaves, more than any other Caribbean colony.[10]

When slavery was re-established by Napoleon in 1802, there were 87,156 people re-enslaved in Guadeloupe. This number climbed to its all-time height of 99,464 in 1832, and then declined as the country moved towards final emancipation in 1848.[11] By contrast, the slave population in Martinique, which was under the control of the British at

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[7] Josette Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens: Les noirs à la Guadeloupe aux XIX^e siècle* (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe: Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe, 1992), 38–41; also Anne Pérotin-Dumon. "Free Coloreds and Slaves in Revolutionary Guadeloupe: Politics and Political Consciousness," in Paquette and Engerman, *The Lesser Antilles*, 259.

[8] Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyen*, 80. These figures are probably underestimates for as Fallope notes: "The census of slaves should be used prudently, given the tendency of masters to want to escape the per capita tax on slaves." See ibid., 20.

[9] Pérotin-Dumon, "Free Coloreds and Slaves," 259. Fallope's figure of 92,545 would make the slave population 86% of the total population but again these figures are estimates and approximations.

[10] Philip Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 268. High slave mortality, disability, *marronage* (escape) as well as evasion of head taxes factored into the disproportion between the number of slaves imported vs. the number of slaves living in the colonies at any given time.

[11] Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 80.

the time of the French Revolution and, therefore, never experienced the early emancipation, declined from its height of approximately 90,000 in 1802 to a low of 77,412 in 1821–22, only to surge again in 1831 (86,499) before it began its final descent to 72,859 in 1847.[12] Thus, at the time of emancipation, Whites comprised only slightly less than 8% of Martinique's population.[13]

However, the society on these islands was not so neatly divided between Black slaves and the White slave owners as these figures imply. From the early days of colonization, interracial sexual relations resulted in a third group—people of mixed ethnicity—mostly the progeny of Black slave women and their White masters, who subsequently often freed their slave partners and their children. Known as *sangs-mélés* (mixed bloods) or *gens libres de couleur* (free people of color), they were "a small but youthful and rapidly expanding group" [14] so that by the time of the final emancipation in 1848, there were 31,405 free people of color in Guadeloupe, [15] and 110,876 in Martinique, more than half of the population.[16] While the ranks of free people of color also included former slaves of a variety of hues who had saved enough money to buy their freedom or who had been liberated for good service at the death of their masters, the vast majority were mixed-race people. This group constituted a sociological, economic, and political gray area, and a Babylon of skin colors, features, and hair textures that soon became categorized and hierarchized into racial markers of status. The major racial designations were mulatto, *câpre*, *métis*, quadroon (or *quarteron*), *congre*, and *mameluke*

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[12] Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss, "Table I," *Sweet Liberty: The Final Days of Slavery in Martinique* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), vii.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Pérotin-Dumon, "Free Coloreds and Slaves," 260.
[15] Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 100.
[16] Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 228.

but Moreau de Saint-Méry, a Martinican statesman, historian and a staunch supporter of slavery, identified 128 types of racial mixtures that demarcated the steps on the ladder between the allegedly superior Whites and inferior Blacks.[17]

However, even this labyrinthine social color coding does not fully explicate the complexities of this slave society, as each of the three major groups also had interior hierarchies based on their socioeconomic levels—from field hand to skilled artisan among the slaves; from slave, to artisan, or small property-owner, to plantation slave owner, among gens libres de couleur; and, among the Whites, from poor subsistence farmer, to merchant and bureaucrat, to plantation aristocrat, whose status was only slightly rivaled by the high administrative officials sent from France to govern the colonies. Under the overarching influence and power of France itself, each of these groups lived in tension with, but inextricably bound to each other for their existence. As each emerged from emancipation, their historical experience created distinct social, political and economic paths that still impact these societies.

The Nature of Slavery and Its Traumas

In the French colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe, as in most slaveholding territories, the practice of slavery evolved over time. Similar to the American South, the vast majority of slaves were involved in agriculture, although in the Antilles the crop was primarily sugar cane, instead of cotton. Days began with a wake-up crack of the whip shortly before sunrise. Likewise, the whip announced the end of the day at sunset as well

[17] Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 99, 98. A mulatto was the child of a White and a Black parent. Higher up on the ladder was the métis, the child of a mulatto and a White parent; and still further, a quadroon or quarteron born of a métis and a White parent. A mameluke, the progeny of a quadroon and a White person was nearly indistinguishable from Whites, etc. On the other hand, a câpre was the offspring of a mulatto and a Black parent, and a chabin, congre or grife was the child of a câpre and a Black person, both representing steps down the ladder.

as the rhythm of the work throughout the day. Nineteenth-century abolitionist Victor Schoelcher stated, "The whip is the bell of the plantations….The day of death is the only one where the slave enjoys respite without being awakened by the whip."[18] Of course, it was also used to mete out punishment.

> [T]he great majority of the planter class defended the whip as the only means of compelling labor from the slaves. It was the most common means of punishing laziness, insubordination, or any serious breach of discipline…as it could be used to inflict punishment without necessarily causing permanent injury.[19]

Although, the Code Noir limited the number of lashes permitted to twenty-nine, Schoelcher pointed out: "The force of the executioner depends upon the humanity of the master. If he so wishes, twenty-nine blows of the whip will not produce any effect, but, if it is desired, the most robust man can be disabled for six months with only fifteen."[20]

Not all slaves underwent punishment by the whip. The example of the few served to discipline the vast majority of the slaves, who then usually only required reprimand or loss of privileges for any infraction. Also, corporal punishment was much less used on the smaller plantations where the master often worked in close proximity with the slaves himself, rather than hiring overseers, who tended to be much harsher.

The field slaves were divided into two major groups: the *grand atelier* (the highest ranking slave gang), about one-third of the slave population and consisting of the strongest men and women, was responsible for the heaviest work on the plantation, such as harvesting the cane and feeding the cane into the mill; and the *petit atelier* (lesser slave gang), which consisted of children and adolescents, aged ten to sixteen, the elderly, new

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[18] Victor Schoelcher, *Des colonies françaises : Abolition immédiate de l'esclavage* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1842), 84; quoted in Dale W. Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar : Martinique and the World Economy, 1830–1848.* Johns Hopkins Studies in Atlantic History and Culture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 229.

[19] Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*, 242.

[20] Schoelcher, *Des colonies françaises,* 89–90, quoted in Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*, 242.

and nursing mothers, and those convalescing from illness or disability. This gang was responsible for lighter tasks such as planting seeds, weeding, and transporting cane to the mills. [21]

Since most plantations not only grew the cane but also processed it in on-site mills and refineries, the usual dusk-to-dawn work day (nine to ten hours) was extended and the observance of Sunday as a day of rest was suspended at harvest time when delay of process could result in spoilage and loss.

> During the harvest season, 18–20 hours of intensive effort without a break was not uncommon….The exhausting *veillées,* as the night shifts were known, led to fatigue, and negligence and mistakes that threatened both sugar and men were inevitable. The result was often horrible accidents, as tired and overworked slaves got a hand or arm caught in the cylinders of the mill or fell into the cauldrons of boiling cane juice.[22]

On the plantations, in addition to field slaves, there were also skilled artisans—slaves who served as carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, etc.—and domestic slaves, predominantly mulattoes born on the plantation, who performed a number of tasks within the plantation home. While these positions could offer some additional comforts in terms of quarters, clothing, food and lighter tasks, they also placed the slave in direct contact with the whims and fancies of the masters, mistresses and their children, which could result in sudden, seemingly unprovoked physical or sexual abuse. Yet, while even the improved material conditions did not compensate for the inherent exploitation of the institution of slavery, most slaves looked upon domestic service as an avenue towards freedom.

> Perhaps because of closer personal relations with the master and a greater opportunity to amass savings, domestics were often given their freedom or were able to save enough to purchase it….[M]ore typical were household slaves who

[21] Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar,* 220.
[22] Ibid., 231–32.

> served faithfully without attempting to gain their freedom, knowing that they would be treated as freed upon reaching their sixtieth birthdays.[23]

Initially, between 1635 when the French settled Guadeloupe and Martinique, and 1685, when the slave trade started to explode, the fate of slaves was mainly in the hands of individual plantation owners, with loose oversight by local authorities and the French clergy, who were charged with the spiritual conduct of master and slave alike. In that early time before France's massive involvement in the slave trade, plantation slave populations were small (only 4,625 in Guadeloupe in 1685) and plantation owners and the religious clergy encouraged married procreation among their slaves as the primary means of augmenting their slave labor.[24] Raising rather than importing slaves, which requires more attention to the living conditions and well-being of the slaves, kept some of the more notorious abuses in check. For the most part, the slave-master relationship varied from plantation to plantation and encompassed a range of work and social relationships that ran the gamut from conjugal relationships between master and female slaves with automatic manumission of their joint children when they reached puberty,[25] to severe physical abuse through overwork or extreme disciplinary measures. Indeed, in 1672, the governor-general of Martinique complained in a letter to Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV's zealous and influential minister in charge of every aspect of the French realm except foreign affairs and war, that "[t]he slaves are forced to work twenty out of every twenty-four hours" on rations that no longer included meat. "How is it possible," he

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[23] Ibid., 226–27.

[24] Raymond Boutin, *Vivre ensemble en Guadeloupe: 1848 –1946: Un siècle de construction* (Matoury, Guyane: Ibis Rouge Editions, 2009), 15; Laura Foner and Eugene D. Genovese. *Slavery in the New World; a Reader in Comparative History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 134.

[25] Prior to 1671, mulatto children were routinely freed by governors at the age of twelve, the point where they could begin to work, as a way of punishing their fathers for their sexual sins with slave women. See Léo Elisabeth, "The French Antilles" in *Neither Slave nor Free; the Freedman of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World*, ed. David William Cohen, and Jack P. Greene (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 139.

asked pointedly, "for them to endure so much work by eating only potatoes, yams and cassava bread?...[S]laves are human beings, and human beings should not be reduced to a state which is worse than that of cattle," he argued.[26]

In response to these concerns and the perceived need to regulate a slave system projected to increase exponentially as a part of Louis XIV and Colbert's ambitious plan to make France the richest, and most powerful nation in Europe, Colbert formulated a charter of sixty slave regulations called *Le Code Noir* (The Black Code) that aimed to regulate the conduct of masters and slaves while embedding them both within the jurisdiction of the French state and the state religion, Catholicism.

The dictates of the state religion were addressed first. Slaves "were to be baptized and instructed as Catholics.…They were to observe Sundays, and the holidays of the church, to be married, and if baptized, buried in holy ground."[27] Regulation of social relationships deemed immoral were also immediately addressed. The Code also made efforts to reduce the number of conjugal relationships between masters and slave women, but its ban on sexual relations between masters and their female slaves ran counter to general plantation practice and was never fully enforced.

The Code also attempted to formalize the issue of manumission by allowing any master who reached the age of legal majority to be able to free a slave, and that slave was then entitled to all of the liberties and duties of a freed person. As relatively lenient as this sounds, it was more restrictive than what was in practice as the time, which was the automatic manumission of the children the masters had by their slave mistresses. Instead, the Code stated that "the illegitimate offspring and their mothers could never be free,

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[26] Roberts, Walter Adolphe. *The French in the West Indies* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1942), 151.

[27] Foner and Genovese, *Slavery in the New World*, 129.

except by the marriage of the parents." [28] This provision, like the one addressing master-slave sexual relations, never gained any ground against plantation mores. "Masters continued to engage in irregular sexual unions with their slaves and continued to free their offspring. In the end, the crown itself expressly withdrew from its former position."[29]

The Code also stipulated that slave status was inherited from the mother—free mothers had free children; slave mothers had slave children—no matter the status of the father. The Code also provided for a laundry list of prohibitions and punishments of slaves: they could not bear arms or weapons, they could not mingle in groups, they were prohibited from learning, and from practicing certain trades.

For their part, masters were also obliged to uphold certain conditions, and allegedly non-compliance with these laws could technically result in the forfeiture of their slaves. They could not mutilate, torture, or kill their slaves with impunity, but instead would be tried and prosecuted by the court. They had to care for the disabled and the elderly and provide certain rations of food and clothing for each slave. However these rations were extremely modest: 2 ½ pots of cassava root flour, 2 lbs of salted beef or 3 lbs of fish each week for adults and half of that for the elderly and children. The salted meat and the fresh fish were later often replaced by salted codfish. This diet only amounted to

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[28] While, the *Code* punished married masters who co-habited with slave women by imposing fines and by confiscating their slave mistress and their children, "when a free man who was not married to another person while cohabiting with his slave, marries his slave in the correct manner observed by the Church, his slave will be emancipated by this means and their slave children will be rendered free and legitimate" (Article 9). See Louis Sala-Molins, *Le Code Noir ou le calvaire de Canaan* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987), 108.

Léo Elisabeth offers some insight into the thinking of the framers of *The Code.* "The compilers of the *Code Noir* strove to render West Indian society more moral by favoring intermarriage between free people and slaves, and Article 9 of the *Code* was quite explicit in creating another legal path to manumission." See Elisabeth, "The French Antilles,"142, 142n32.

[29] Foner and Genovese, *Slavery in the New World*, 131.

an intake of between 2,150 to 2,300 calories per day, inadequate for the amount of physical labor performed by the slaves and well below the 3,169 calories of food usually available to slaves in the United States. In addition, masters were only obligated to provide one shirt, a pair of pants, and a hat for men; a shirt, a skirt, a handkerchief, and a hat for women per year. Housing was also on the subsistence level, and consisted of a cramped, dank room with earthen floors with wood planks or mats covered with dry leaves for beds. These poor living conditions—inadequate diet and housing; and soon-tattered clothing often made of fabric too light for slaves working at higher, cooler elevations—rendered the slaves particularly susceptible to illness such as pulmonary diseases, gastro-intestinal troubles, and leprosy as well as epidemics of yellow fever and small pox, all of which resulted in a high rate of mortality.[30]

One provision that stands out for its relative benevolence in contrast to the slave system in the US has to do with the selling of slaves:

> Under the law, families were not to be broken up when slaves were sold; and those slaves between the ages of 14 and 60 who were employed in sugar—or indigo—works and plantations were attached to the soil and could not be sold except with the estate. Slaves not falling within these categories, were, however, regarded as chattel.[31]

While this and the measures mandating food and clothing for slaves seem to indicate a humanitarian concern for the condition of the slave, a look at Colbert's zealous attention to France's bottom line renders that assumption suspect. Indeed, "[i]n his monumental study of French West Indian slavery, [Lucien] Peytraud supports the view that Colbert…was moved to protect the slaves by commercial, rather than humane,

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[30] Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 106–109.
[31] Foner and Genovese, *Slavery in the New World*, 129.

considerations"[32]; in short, better treatment of the slave population would lower the disability and mortality rates, thereby decreasing the expense of replacing acclimated workers with the purchase of new Africans.

Foner also warns against overstating the benevolence of the Code Noir, which while prohibiting

> the private infliction of torture and mutilation…did not prevent their use by judicial authorities….[J]udges were left free to sentence slaves to be burnt alive, to be broken on the wheel (a favorite punishment), to be dismembered, to be branded, or to be crippled by hamstringing….Masters maltreating or killing slaves were liable to prosecution, and there are records of cases having been brought against them, although no master appears to have suffered the death penalty for killing a slave. By contrast, atrocious sentences were usually passed on slaves guilty of killing whites; and even for the crime of raising a hand against one of the children of his mistress, a slave was sentenced to have his hand cut off and to be hanged.[33]

The Code's handling of fugitive slaves was also draconian, involving the cropping of ears, and branding with the fleur-de-lys, emblem of the French crown. Second offenses were punished by further branding and hamstringing (crippling by cutting of the tendons behind the knees). If the slave still managed a third attempt, he was sentenced to death.[34]

Worse still, as the slave sugar plantation system expanded, even some of the safeguards for the welfare of the slave originally insisted upon in the Code were increasingly disregarded. The practice of providing certain clothing and food rations fell into disuse. Instead, planters preferred the *samedi-jardin* (Saturday garden)—small plots of land allotted the slaves and time off on Saturday to tend them—so slaves could raise their own subsistence foodstuffs and sometimes make their own cloth, which relieved the plantation owner from having to provide costly foodstuffs and clothing. Even religious

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[32] Ibid., 131.
[33] Ibid., 132.
[34] Roberts, *The French in the West Indies*, 153.

instruction, so important to the crown and the church at the dawn of the slave plantations, came to be viewed as a potential tool of subversion by the slaves. Peytraud states, "The safety of the Whites, less numerous than the slaves, surrounded by them on their estates, and almost completely at their mercy, demands that the slaves be kept in the most profound ignorance."[35]

Essentially, the Code was designed to maintain order in the colonies, rather than to respond to humanitarian concerns. As the slave population expanded and incidents of rebellion occurred, racial prejudice among the White population hardened. Amendments to the Code shifted in the direction deemed necessary by the French state to mollify the planters and maintain peace in its sugar colonies. For instance, a 1771 edict stated:

> It is only by leaving to the masters a power that is nearly absolute, that it will be possible to keep so large a number if men in that state of submission which is made necessary to their numerical superiority over the whites. If some masters abuse their power, they must be reproved in secret, so that the slaves may always be kept in the belief that the master can do no wrong in his dealing with them.[36]

This edict was in perfect accord with public opinion of the time which "was strongly opposed to punishing a white man for any but a heinous offense against a slave."[37] Thus, the floodgates for a wide range of minor and not so minor abusive practices on the part of the plantation owner were opened.

The Plight of the Gens de Couleur

One of several major aspects of slavery in Martinique and Guadeloupe that was different from slavery in the United States was the steady, almost unmitigated growth of a class of free mixed-race people (*gens de couleur libre)* who eventually became a

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[35] Lucien Peytraud. *L'Esclavage aux Antilles françaises avant 1789* (Paris, 1897), 193–94; quoted in Foner and Genovese, *Slavery in the New World*, 133.

[36] Pierre de Vaissière, *St. Domingue (1629–1789)* (Paris, 1909), 181; quoted in Foner and Genovese, *Slavery in the New World*, 134.

[37] Roberts, *The French in the West Indies*, 155.

distinct intermediary class between White Creole planters and Black African-descended slaves. This group was comprised initially largely of the offspring of White male planters and their female Black slaves but there is evidence that there were also births attributed to White females and mixed-race and Black men. In 1842 activist gens de couleur Cyrille-Charles-Auguste Bissette,[38] wrote an article on abandoned infants in his publication *La Revue des Colonies* that, based on Martinique's civil registers,

> identified different phrases Martinican officials had historically used when registering Creole newborns, phrases that he argued showed not only that elites had long understood 'white' as a fluid, problematic category, but also their ongoing struggles to stabilize it.[39]

The six categories used by royal physicians included '*blanc pur sang,'* or pure White blood for the child of a White man and White woman; *'blanc, sang mêlé,'* or White with mixed blood for the offspring of a male quadroon and a White woman; '*estimés blancs'* or estimated White to identify a child born to a White woman and a mulatto or other mixed-race man; '*mulâtre-blanc,'* or mulatto-white, for the child of a White woman and a Black man; '*paru blanc'* or appearing White, implying the circumstances of the origins were unknown but the infant looked White; and "'*jugé blanc'* or judged White, included a child of indeterminate color and a scenario where 'the royal physician waited a bit of time to see if, through his contacts in the world, he could determine which "beautiful princess" had recently given birth to a child, [with] skin…a little darker than expected.'"[40]

Whether the result of White male or female breaches of the color line, the mixed-race population provided a distinct chink in the armor of racial demarcation requisite for

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[38] Some twenty years earlier, Bissette and seven other Martinicans, in what became known as the Bissette Affair, had been accused of and sentenced for plotting "to overturn Martinique's social hierarchy. " See Schloss, *Sweet Liberty,* 100.

[39] Ibid., 206.

[40] "Enfants trouvés," *Revue des Colonies,* April 1842, 432; quoted in Schloss, *Sweet Liberty,* 207.

a slave system based on skin color. Did the presence of "White" blood demand the status of freedom? Were there other mitigating circumstances that warranted the emancipation of individual slaves or was slavery a status for life? These questions haunted the colonies from their inception and the various policies regarding emancipation had far-reaching political and social consequences in the history of these islands.

As mentioned earlier, initially the individual slave owner had almost unfettered ability to emancipate whomever he wished: his slave mistress and his children by her, a slave mother with many children, elderly domestics, slaves who rendered particular services or distinguished themselves by some extraordinary action. Colonial authorities could also emancipate slaves as rewards for unusual service, including military service. In addition, based on a French nationalistic principle that "*le sol de France affranchit*" (the very soil of France liberates), many slaves who accompanied their masters or traveled to France to learn a trade at their master's behest received what came to be known as liberty through travel. Meanwhile, those who became skilled artisans at home could often hire themselves out and save enough money to buy their own freedom, as well.[41]

In later years, as the free mixed-race population grew rapidly and finally surpassed that of the Whites in 1816, the means of emancipation became more restrictive and more scrutinized and controlled by colonial and metropolitan governmental regulations. For instance, a state tax on the emancipation of slaves was imposed. This fee

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[41] Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens,* 121. Léo Elisabeth also states that "[a]t first, French law permitted slavery only in the islands. The ownership of slaves in metropolitan France was, in theory, impossible, and the mere contact of a slave with French soil was sufficient grounds for manumission." This practice was upheld again in 1696 when some white Martinicans "claimed that a royal decree allowed them to retain possession of the slaves whom they had taken to France as servants….After investigation, the minister, who could find no such decree on record, reaffirmed the principle of liberation on French soil." See, Archives Nationales des Colonies, F 249, October 12, 1696, fol. 818, qtd. in Elisabeth, "The French Antilles," 137.

could be a substantial amount depending on the age and physical state of the slave. Consequently, slaves of masters who did not want to pay this fee or self-emancipated slaves who could not afford to pay the fee themselves became part of a large group of de facto free people, who lived liminally between the legally freed and the enslaved.

While under the Code Noir, there was no distinction between the rights of the freed and the free-born, gradually across the eighteenth century, the rights accorded to free mixed-race people became increasingly restricted. By 1720, they were prohibited from "dressing like White people or wearing luxurious clothing." By 1764, further measures were taken to limit their access to certain professions, such as medicine, surgery, or pharmacy and even in mecanical occupations. The aim was to limit them to agricultural pursuits. They could not purchase arms or gun powder or bullets without permission. They could not be an officer, even in colored militia. They could not use White names and they could not be addressed as Sir or Madam….At night they could not get together for dances and festivals and in the day time they could do so only with permission of the authorities. They could not attend gatherings of Whites or festivals of the slaves. "This rigorous legislation expresses the official policy that tended not only to prevent the social, economic and political progress of free people of color but also to isolate them from Whites as well as from slaves."[42]

Indeed, the mixed-race community did become a caste unto itself, constantly pressing for recognition of the rights it felt to be its due as free people and for the status it felt to be its due as the descendants, for the most part, of the White planter aristocracy. Rebuffed by the White Creoles, free gens de couleur equally rebuffed identification with the slaves. Indeed, some were slave owners themselves. Also, since 1785, those who

[42] Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 133, 134.

purchased their own freedom were required to serve for eight years in the militia before being recognized as legally free. The fact that soon "free coloreds made up a significant proportion of the island's police, which was used for the control and repression of slaves, further complicated their caste identity and became a key source of tension."[43] This divide-and-conquer strategy worked well in helping the White Creoles, who were often only 6 or 7% of the total population, to maintain their position of dominance into the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the gens de couleur gradually aligned themselves with the enslaved population in the fight for the abolition of slavery.

Early Slave Resistance

The great disparity between the number of Whites and Blacks in the colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe leads to conjectures as to why a successful revolt similar to that in Haiti did not occur there as well. It was certainly not for the lack of trying; as early as 1656 in Guadeloupe, a plan was discovered in which the slaves were going to massacre the colonists, take their women and their goods and install two kings on either side of the island. But the plan was foiled by interior conflicts between slaves from Angola and those from Cap-Vert, with the latter informing the planters. In 1699 in Martinique there was a general slave revolt that was discovered only moments before its execution. Again in 1710, a governor reports that there was a conspiracy by twenty slaves to burn down the town of Saint-Pierre.[44]

The outcome of these and other attempts prove that secretly organizing large numbers of men and keeping details of a plot undercover while in a state of captivity was

[43] Pérotin-Dumon, "Free Coloreds and Slaves," 262.

[44] Gabriel Debien, *Les esclaves aux Antilles françaises (XVII^{e} –XVIII^{e} Siècles)* (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe: Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe, 1974), 394.

an enormous challenge; the danger of traitors was always present and a frequent cause of failure. As Eugene Genovese states:

> The magnitude of the task facing slaves who chose insurrection suggests the importance of leaders with considerable knowledge of political events in general; of the divisions among whites; of military prospects and exigencies; of terrain; of the psychology of their people; of ways to get arms and train fighters; of everything….Inadequacy of preparation and execution—of organization—accounted for the failure of some of the most serious slave revolts in the Americas.[45]

Despite the lack of success of a revolt on the scale of Haiti, slaves found many individual ways of protesting their plight, gaining some autonomy, and maintaining some personal integrity even in the absence of collective rebellion. As Tomich points out:

> Resistance to work was a part of the collective experience of the slaves' adaptation to New World conditions….[S]uch modes of action as malingering, feigning illness or pregnancy, tool breaking, arson and the destruction of property, deliberate slowdowns, strikes, running away, and even attacks on persons were endemic to slave production.[46]

Some slaves also resorted to individual acts of violence that did not require a vast network of co-conspirators. These acts could include arson, poisoning, and even murder by hand or weapon and were often in retaliation for some excessive mistreatment. Gabriel Debien even asserts that "it was arson, [and] the assassinations of the plantation overseers or administrators that were the true forms of resistance."[47]

However, of all the forms of active slave resistance, poisoning was the most feared by the planters. Abolitionist Victor Schoelcher stated: "Poison is to the slave what the whip is to the master, a moral force. The black works for fear of the whip. The white

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[45] Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 27, 18.

[46] Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*, 250.

[47] Debien, *Les esclaves aux Antilles françaises*, 393.

is less abusive from the fear of poison."[48] The most frequent targets of poisoning were the costly livestock so necessary for the running of the plantation. Fifty to eighty mules alone were needed by the average sugar plantation for the transporting of cane and for running the mills.[49] Oxen, used for these purposes as well, were also targets as were the plantation horses and cattle. A culture of fear and anger emanating from the poisonings led planters to attribute nearly all deaths of their livestock to foul play when in actuality, there were also diseases and epidemics that attacked and killed these overworked and often ill-treated animals. But without veterinary examination to prove otherwise, poisoning was usually assumed the cause.

Poisoning was not limited, however, to livestock. Occasionally, and more frequently in the nineteenth century, especially in Martinique, it was directed to other slaves and to the master and his family. In exasperation, an envoy to Martinique from Louis XVIII reported back to the Ministry of the Navy in the 1820s: "The *nègres empoisonneurs* [Black poisoners] spare nothing…animals, their comrades, their closest family members, their own children all become victims. They take revenge on their master by attacking his fortune."[50] Even the highest echelons of Martinican society and by extension French society were impacted by the threat of poisoning as revealed by an incident in which a house servant was convicted and boiled to death for trying to poison her mistress, the Martinican mother of Napoleon's wife, Josephine.[51] Indeed, because poisonings upended the work of the plantation, impacted the capital investment of the plantation owners, and unnerved the planter population,

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[48] Victor Schoelcher, quoted in Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar,* 251.

[49] Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar,* 158.

[50] Baron Delamardelle, quoted in John Savage, "'Black Magic' and White Terror: Slave Poisonings and Colonial Society in Early 19th Century Martinique," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 3 (2007): 637.

[51] Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 90.

> planters became obsessed with slave poisoning as a threat to the very "survival of the island"…. The crisis was such that it changed the way white planters lived their lives. Observers noted how long trusted house servants were no longer allowed indoors, nursemaids were watched at all times while with children, and ladies used to being served would only eat food they had prepared themselves.[52]

Another form of resistance was escape or marronage. Fugitive slaves who inhabited islands with mountainous, or otherwise treacherous interiors could often find sufficient refuge to maintain a counter-existence. As early as 1665, there are records of a band of between four to five hundred escaped slaves that raided settlements, stealing arms, ammunition and supplies, and slave women. In 1726, Guadeloupe reported the presence of a band of more than six hundred escaped slaves who moved in detachments of sixty to eighty men strong to pillage residences and take what they needed.[53] Known as *marrons*, these escaped slaves often formed Afrocentric counter-societies that became very astute militarily. Unlike slave revolt participants who had to stake their lives on one major attempt, maroons were able to retreat from combat to their mountainous enclaves, revise their tactics, and live to attack again, often defeating the colonial militias sent to destroy them.

While initially the maroons and the still enslaved maintained a close and permeable relationship—complicated mainly by the maroons' practice of kidnapping slave women and stealing slave provisions—as the years advanced, the distance between the two became greater. In some cases, the maroons worked out treaties with the ruling European occupants that sometimes pitted them against the enslaved population. Eugene Genovese states, "[t]he terms of the various treaties usually granted the maroons freedom and autonomy in return for a pledge of allegiance to the colonial regime, including the

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[52] Savage, "'Black Magic,'" 636, 638.
[53] Debien, *Les Esclaves aux Antilles Françaises*, 414.

duty to return new runaways and to defend the public order—that is, to suppress slave rebellions."[54] Furthermore, A. James Arnold contends that "[t]hese agreements effectively made the maroon leaders feudal vassals of the plantation owners and an extension of the island's police."[55] Thus these treaties, combined with the cultural gaps between the creolized slaves and the more Afrocentric maroon colonies, "generated sharp hostilities and even hatreds. If the maroons sometimes let their treaty obligations to capture runaways slip altogether or met them indifferently, at other times they treated dissident slaves brutally."[56] Still, the example of the maroons' militancy and independence stood as a model of active resistance that simultaneously energized the slave community and enervated the plantation owners and colonial officials.

On the other hand, for the most part, the freed mixed-race population did not identify with the slaves or take active roles in most of the early slave revolts and resistances, striving instead to shore up the rights they believed they deserved as free French citizens, including ownership of property and slaves. However, by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, repeatedly rebuffed in their attempts at equal citizenry and in the face of increasing restrictions on the rights they had enjoyed, they eventually understood that the abolition of slavery itself would be the only way for them to obtain their own liberty as well. With this realization, they became more actively involved in political advocacy of abolition and also became active in various plots and revolts. Indeed, the French and the planters on Martinique and Guadeloupe attributed the success

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[54] Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*, 51.

[55] A. James Arnold, "From the Problematic Maroon to a Woman-Centered Creole Project in the Literature of the French West Indies" in *Slavery in the Caribbean Francophone World : Distant Voices, Forgotten Acts, Forged Identities*, ed. Doris Y. Kadish (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 165.

[56] Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*, 55.

of the slave revolt in Saint Domingue (Haiti) to the active role played by the mixed-race population of that French colony.

Not all slave resistance was violent, however. One of the seemingly more benign forms of resistance was the insistence on having a Saturday garden (le samedi-jardin*)*. First introduced by the planters as a way of abdicating their responsibilities for supplying the mandated basic allotment of food, many slaves embraced this system as a space and place where they could be self-reliant and autonomous. Eventually, the more industrious found they could not only provide for their family but could also raise enough crops to sell at market and thereby squirrel away money to improve their immediate material condition or even eventually to buy their freedom.

The French Revolution and its Effects

Liberté, Égalité! Fraternité! The overthrow of the French monarchy not only upended the political, social, and economic landscape of mainland France, it also reverberated through its colonies in the Caribbean like a shock wave. As Doris Kadish notes in the introduction to her book, *Slavery in the Caribbean Francophone World: Distant Voices, Forgotten Acts, Forged Identities*:

> For whites living in the three main Caribbean colonies, the events of the French Revolution gave rise to hopes for changes in their political, economic, and social status….They proceeded to seek greater control of the island without interference from France.[57]

But the news of the mainland Revolution also raised the hopes and aspirations of the free gens de couleur and the Black slaves. After all, Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1762), one of the major philosophical writings undergirding the French Revolution,

[57] Doris Y. Kadish, *Slavery in the Caribbean Francophone World : Distant Voices, Forgotten Acts, Forged Identities* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 3.

began by stating: "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains."[58] Moreover, the newly formed National Assembly in France, codified this claim in the first article of its Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, passed on August 26, 1789, which stated: "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights" and then spoke of "natural and imprescriptible rights of man" that included "liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression."[59] The problem was that, similar to the United States whose own Declaration of Independence also states "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,"[60] racism and capitalism trumped the purity of the claims: enslaved people of African origin, for whom these words would have the greatest meaning and effect, were essentially considered property and not "men" by the lofty framers of both the French and the American declarations.

However, it was impossible to keep this tempest in the teapot. Mixed-race free people, as well as Black slaves accompanying their masters, had long traveled to France. They were aware that embedded in the Enlightenment's overall contempt for monarchical authority and the overweening power of the Church, there was also a strain of thought, particularly by Montesquieu and Condorcet, that was clearly, if cautiously, anti-slavery. Indeed, as early as 1748, Montesquieu wrote anonymously in *The Spirit of Laws*:

> But as all men are born equal, slavery must be accounted unnatural, though in some countries it be founded on natural reason.…Possibly there is not that climate

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[58] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract, a Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, and a Discourse on Political Economy* (New York, Classic Books International, 2010), 2.

[59] "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen by the National Assembly of France" in Thomas Paine, *Common Sense, Rights of Man, and Other Essential Writings* (New York: New American Library, 2003), 217.

[60] Declaration of Independence, http://www.ushistory.org/Declaration/document/index.htm (accessed 13 June 2010).

> upon earth where the most laborious services might not with proper encouragement be performed by freemen.[61]

In 1780, Marquis de Condorcet, mathematician turned philosopher and political scientist, added more philosophical fuel in his *Reflections on Negro Slavery*, which stated:

> To reduce a man to slavery, to buy him, to sell him, to keep him in servitude are actual crimes and crimes worse than thievery….We are accused of being the enemies of the colonists; we are only enemies of injustice; we do not at all aspire to attack their property; but we say that a man cannot, for any reason, become the property of another man; we do not want to destroy their wealth, we would only want to purify the source of it.[62]

By 1788, politician Jacques Pierre Brissot, inspired by the abolitionist movement in England, returned from a visit there and founded *La Société des Amis des Noirs* (Society of the Friends of Blacks) with orator Count de Mirabeau and several other progressives. Its eventual 141 members would include Lafayette (of American Revolution fame), outspoken human rights activist Abbé Henri Grégoire, Condorcet, who would later become the Society's president,[63] and the then unknown Robespierre. Advocating the cessation of the African slave trade as its first step, the founders had, however, envisioned a gradualist approach: Condorcet suggested phasing out slavery over the course of seventy years.[64] Despite that position, by raising the plight of slaves to the French consciousness through their eloquent writing in pamphlets, they helped to intensify the pressure for change and gave hope to the enslaved populations through public readings and word of mouth.

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[61] Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat, baron de, *The Spirit of Laws*, Book 15, sec. 7 and 8, trans. Thomas Nugent (New York: Hafner Publishing , 1949), 240, 241.

[62] Condorcet, "Reflections on the Negro Slavery" in *Complete Works*, quoted in Liliane Chauleau, "Abolition de l'esclavage et Déclaration des droits de l'homme sous la Révolution française" in *Esclavage, résistances et abolitions*, ed. Marcel Dorigny (Paris: Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques (CTHS), 1999), 152 (my translation).

[63] Daniel P. Resnick, "The Société des Noirs and the Abolition of Slavery," *French Historical Studies* 7, no. 4 (1972): 560, 563.

[64] Catherine A. Reinhardt, *Claims to Memory*, 51.

Indeed, as the stirrings of liberty reached the shores of the colonies (always with a six-to-seven-week delay), each faction of the societies of Martinique and Guadeloupe envisioned some amelioration of their condition:

> For wealthy white planters residing in the colonies (*grands blancs*),…it meant the kind of autonomy vis-à-vis metropolitan France that American colonists fought for and obtained in the Revolutionary War….For shopkeepers, artisans, soldiers-of-fortune, and other members of the white lower and middle classes (*petits blancs),*…it meant freedom from the privileges and abuses of the upper classes.…For persons of color, many of them elitist mulattoes who wanted to extend to themselves the privileges of the *grands blancs,* it meant reconceiving colonial society as a meritocracy in which their talents and education would be recognized….For slaves, it meant freedom from bondage, oppression, and suffering.[65]

Rumors were flying everywhere. In Martinique, the writings of the Amis des Noirs had been read out loud to town slaves in Saint Pierre, then the capital of Martinique. In August 1789, even before word of the French Revolution had reached the Caribbean, impatient Blacks sent now historic letters to the governor of Martinique and to the military commander of Saint Pierre, stating that

> the entire nation of Black slaves, reunited together, produces only one identical vow, one identical desire for independence, and all the slaves with one unanimous voice let out only one cry, only one loud cry to reclaim a liberty they have justly gained through a century of suffering and ignominious servitude.[66]

When emancipation did not come as anticipated, the slaves became convinced that "the King had granted them their freedom and that the masters were keeping them from it. Plots in fifteen parishes [involving three hundred slaves] were organized with the goal of slitting the throats of all Whites."[67] Foiled in this well-organized plan by an unexpected shooting at a nearby plantation, the leaders of the revolt were apprehended

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[65] Kadish, *Slavery in the Caribbean Francophone World,* 3–4.
[66] Chauleau, "Abolition des Esclavages," 158.
[67] Ibid., 157–58.

and quickly executed—one was dismembered alive; while others were hanged in different sites throughout the colony as a sensationalized grim warning.

Similarly, in April and May 1790, slave fomentation was discovered in several parishes in Guadeloupe, particularly a large arson plot in Grand Terre. As preventative measures, the Guadeloupean colonial administrators arrested several hundred slaves, executed their free Black and mulatto leaders, and condemned one hundred to hard labor. Although the colonial officials believed these severe actions had restored calm, additional revolts occurred again on the other side of the island in September of that year and again in May 1791.[68] However, finally realizing that neither the King nor the rising Revolutionary government had abolished slavery, Guadeloupe's slaves fell into an uneasy but undemonstrative period of calm, while gens de couleur were appeased by the passage of a bill in France that extended to them the right to vote and to participate in the colonial assemblies for the first time.

When emancipation was finally declared by the Revolutionary French government on February 4, 1794, Robespierre's cohort, Victor Hugues, was sent to Guadeloupe to deliver the news and to assume administration of the island. Upon his arrival, he discovered that since his departure from France, the British had occupied both Guadeloupe and Martinique as a part of the ongoing hostilities between the two countries. According to C.L.R. James, "Hugues…brought only 1,500 men….There was no black army in the Windward islands as in San Domingo. He had to make one out of raw slaves."[69] Thus, on June 7, 1794, by declaring the slaves free and exhorting them to effect their own liberation, Hugues stirred the slaves into rebellion, enrolled them in his army

[68] Pérotin-Dumon, "Free Coloreds," 263–64.

[69] C.L.R. James, *Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1989), 143.

and successfully defeated the British.[70] Many of the planters had made alliances with the British, whom they viewed as fellow monarchists. Hugues's retaliation against them was unrelenting as he resumed a Reign of Terror on the island that had previously been interrupted by the British take-over. Although scholars have not settled on the exact scope of the killings, one source hazards that "eight hundred and sixty-five Creoles fell into the hands of Hugues, who relentlessly put them to death."[71] Another account, published in an historical dictionary in 1815, confirms the massacre:

> The Republicans erected a guillotine, with which they struck off the heads of fifty of them in the short space of an hour. This mode of proceeding, however, proving too tedious for their impatient revenge, the remainder of these unhappy men were fettered to each other and placed on the brink of one of the trenches which they had so gallantly defended. The Republicans then drew up some of their undisciplined recruits in front, who firing an irregular volley at their miserable victims killed some and wounded others, leaving many; in all probability, untouched. The weight, however, of the former dragged the rest into the ditch, where the living, the wounded and the dead shared the same grave, the soil being instantly thrown in upon them.[72]

Thus, slavery was abolished in Guadeloupe in 1794, but not Martinique, which remained in the hands of the British.

However, after all of the turmoil and death, the life of the emancipated slave in Guadeloupe did not differ substantially from his previously enslaved existence. Hugues quickly realized that the agricultural economy would collapse for lack of labor as the freed slaves, who viewed work in the cane fields as emblematic of their former status, fled from the plantations. He soon ordered all Blacks who were not in the military to return to work in the fields—for pay, he stated—or face being considered "traitors to the homeland and subject to the rigor of the laws." Payment never materialized because the

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[70] Roberts, *The French in the West Indies,* 226.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Thompson, G.A. *The Geographical and Historical Dictionary of America and the West Indies* (London: Carpenter and Sons, 1815) 5:293.

owners who would have been responsible for such payment had either fled the island or had been guillotined. Consequently, Hugues was reduced to offering a ration of codfish and garden and root vegetables, and two days off for every ten days of work in place of a salary.[73] In effect, "only the petits-blancs, the former free people of color, and slaves engaged in the army or in the privateer navy truly benefited from the general freedom."[74] Still, the spirit of freedom carried the day and many Blacks and gens de couleur migrated to the shores of Guadeloupe from Martinique and other Caribbean islands while the Guadeloupean plantation aristocracy emigrated away. Flawed as Guadeloupe's first emancipation may have been, its revocation in 1802 traumatized generations of Guadeloupeans to come.

Under Napoleon, Slavery Redux

Few territories were more buffeted about by the vicissitudes of politics than the French Caribbean of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Serving as pawns in the world-wide battle between the titan imperialistic nations of England and France, the colonies also simultaneously endured the upheavals in France's domestic systems of governance that lurched from a monarchy to a republic, to a consulate, to an empire, back to a conservative and then a more liberal monarchy, and then to a second republic, all within the span of sixty years.

Following the crushing defeat of the monarchy during the French Revolution, Guadeloupe's slave population had been emancipated. Martinique, under the control of the British, had not. In 1799, following a meteoric rise to power, Napoleon staged a coup

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[73] Chauleau, "Abolition des esclavages," 161.

[74] Jacques Adélaide-Merlande, René Bélénus and Frédéric Régent, eds. *La Rébellion de la Guadeloupe, 1801–1802.* (Gourbeyre, Guadeloupe: Archives Départmentales de la Guadeloupe, 2002), 25. (my translation.).

d'état in France and as a part of his dream to consolidate the power of France, he was determined to return the islands to their more lucrative pre-Revolutionary status as slave colonies.

In May 1801, one of his first steps in this direction was to send his commander Captain General Jean-Baptiste de Lacrosse to Guadeloupe to deport suspected Jacobins (followers of Robespierre's radical brand of revolution) and to take control of the Black and mixed-race soldiers in the army. Lacrosse, formerly a Jacobin himself, set out to purge the government and the army of Jacobins whom he personally knew from his previous stint as a provisional Jacobin governor of Guadeloupe in 1793. He deported some twenty people and named the others as anarchists. Simultaneously, he undertook the reorganization of the Guadeloupean army, which at that time was composed 50% of Blacks, 40% of the mixed-race, and 10% of Whites, with two-thirds of the officers being of mixed race. In October 1801, under murky circumstances, White officers and government officials tried to arrest officers of color but instead were completely routed by these officers and their men. Instead of being subdued, brigadier officer Magloire Pélage, a mixed-race Martinican officer, became the commander of the army and of the colony, while Lacrosse found himself deported.[75] Napoleon did not take kindly to this turn of events and once he had ended hostilities with the British with the signing of the Treaty of Amiens in March 1802, he immediately sent out General Antoine Richepance with 3,470 troops to bring Guadeloupe back under his control. While Pélage submitted to Richepance upon his arrival, several other officers, most notably Guadeloupean Joseph Ignace (one of very few Black officers) and Martinican Louis Delgrès (a mulatto officer) decided against capitulation. They fought valiant battles both in Grande-Terre and Basse-

[75] Ibid., 26–27.

Terre respectively from May 10–28, 1802 but after eighteen days of intense pursuit and fighting, their rebellion led to the dramatic deaths of both: "Ignace, seeing himself surrounded by eight soldiers, blew out his brain upon telling them, 'You will not have the honor of taking my life'"; Delgrès and his men, shouting "Live free or die," barricaded themselves inside the Anglemont plantation near Matouba/Saint-Claude, and then, when it became clear that defeat was inevitable, detonated an explosion that destroyed themselves and all within (some three hundred people, including women and children).[76]

> Within several days of Delgrès's defeat, a system of reprisals that lasted for over a year was instituted….In all, thousands of persons of color were killed, deported, or tortured. Black soldiers and officers of color who had served in the army…were considered suspect and brought to trial. Those who fled to the countryside were hunted down and in many cases executed. Women were not spared: notable among them was the woman designated variously in the historical record as Delgrès's mistress or wife, Marthe-Rose (also known as Toto), who is reported to have been executed on October 5, 1802; and the mulatto revolutionary heroine known as Solitude, who was put to death after the birth of her child.[77]
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> [H]owever, the remembrance of the battles that took place at Matouba-Saint-Claude remained present in everyone's memories—those of the slaves who drew pride and hope from it and those of the other social classes for whom it served as a check on the temptation of useless oppressions.[78]

Also, on May 20, in the midst of this bloody rebellion, the French government reconfirmed the institution of slavery in the colonies returned to France by England under the Treaty of Amiens. This included Martinique, but not Guadeloupe, which had remained in French hands. However, two months later, a consular decree also reestablished slavery in Guadeloupe.

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[76] Gérard Lafleur, "Les derniers combats de 1802" in *1802 en Guadeloupe et à Saint-Domingue: Réalités et mémoire.* Actes du Colloque de Saint-Claude, 2–3 mai 2002. (Gourbeyre: Guadeloupe: Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe, 2003), 89–90. (My translation)

[77] Kadish, *Slavery in the Caribbean Francophone World,* 10–11.

[78] Gérard Lafleur. "Introduction." *Sur les pas de Delgrés: Parcours commenté retraçant les derniers jours de Delgrès et de ses compagnons* (Saint-Claude, Guadeloupe: Commune de Saint-Claude, *n.d.*).

Despite the draconian reprisals following Delgrès and Ignace's failed rebellion, there were still a few last violent attempts to protest the return to slavery. Of particular note was an insurgency in Guadeloupe on October 6–7, 1802 by a group of one hundred Black, mixed race and White people who carried flags and shouted "Death to Whites" and "Death to French soldiers." They eventually attacked twenty-two plantations, killing twenty-three Whites. "The repression was dramatic," Fallope remarks. "[M]ore than one hundred condemnations to death, some sixty executions on the Place de la Victoire, where they were hanged, burned alive, torn apart, and strangled."[79]

In the next months, France brutally coerced Guadeloupe's formerly emancipated Blacks and people of color either to prove their free status with pre-1789 documents, buy their freedom, or return to their status as slaves. This requirement fell particularly heavily on the many who were defacto but not legitimately freed, having never paid the exorbitant emancipation tax. Those without the necessary documents were re-enslaved, some after decades of freedom. "Of the 15,000 people of color nearly 10,000 could not prove their emancipation before 1789 and were reduced to the status of slaves. All told, the measure brought more than 85,000 individuals into servitude again."[80]

Noted Martinican author, theorist, and politician Aimé Césaire states that following Napoleon's suppression of liberty, "slavery [was] more vigorous than ever. It [was] a doctrine, a system, a propaganda, a way of thinking, a way of feeling and a belief all at the same time." [81] Indeed, the reinstated slavery was worse, not only because of the psychological trauma suffered by the people being reenslaved after eight years or more of

[79] Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 201–202.
[80] Ibid., 51.
[81] Aimé Césaire, "Victor Schoelcher et L'Abolition de L'Esclavage" in Victor Schoelcher and Emile Tersen, *Esclavage et colonisation* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948), 6–7.

liberty, but also because the new slavery allowed for more abusive practices. In 1804, Napoleon established a new civil and legal code governing affairs on the continent and in the colonies. Replacing the Code Noir in the colonies, the new code neglected to specify any obligations or restrictions on the part of the master towards his slaves and abuses quickly multiplied.

Indeed Victor Schoelcher, one of the leading French abolitionists who was initially in favor of gradual emancipation, became an avid advocate for immediate freedom, after traveling to the colonies and viewing the atrocities imposed upon the slaves. His accounts of abuse included the tales of a woman slave who died after having been chained in a cell only 4 ft. high for twenty-two months, and of the severe beating of a pregnant woman who then had lemon and pepper applied to her wounds and finally died from a miscarriage. Her twelve year old son was similarly beaten and also died of his wounds.[82] In these cases, as in many others, the courts acquitted the offending masters while sometimes even condoning extraordinarily barbarous punishments such as the aforementioned boiling to death of the slave woman who attempted to poison the Martinican mother of Empress Josephine by placing crushed glass in her food.

In their overzealous implementation of what they believed to be their rights as slave owners under Napoleon, the Creoles planted the seeds for their own eventual undoing. The colonies were soon plagued with an increased rash of poisonings. The planters' excessive retaliations toward their slaves in turn ripened support for abolition in metropolitan France. This growing movement was exploited by the increasingly savvy appeals by free gens de couleur (such as Bissette) who experienced increased oppression in Guadeloupe and Martinique by White administrators and planters who were in

[82] Schoelcher and Tersen, *Esclavage et colonisation*, 127, 127n2.

constant fear of homegrown copycat Haitian rebellions by their own gens de couleur or the incursion of revolutionaries from Haiti. In 1806, one colonial administrator, Davrigny, wrote to the French minister that the "return to the pre-Revolution order, has reduced [free gens de couleur] to a situation that is morally worse than the original state." He further stated,

> These people of color and Blacks freed through emancipation or by birth as the descendents of freed slaves, are the part of the population that are the most difficult to govern: they have been and will always be the linchpin of revolutions. They have been too overlooked…; it is urgent to deal with them whatever is decided in their regards.[83]

In this vein, the administrators and planters used every means available to try to neutralize the free mixed-race. The government in Martinique, for instance, used the rumor of a plot between Martinique's and Saint Domingue's free people of color as a pretense to monitor its population closely and to punish any mixed-race person found guilty of murder, arson, or poisoning with deportation to Venezuela. These measures, combined with the contestation of the emancipated status of any person of color who could not produce documents verifying manumission, were so effective that they halved the number of free Martinicans of color in one year—from approximately 12,000 in 1802 to 6,254 in 1803.[84]

Rights previously enjoyed by the gens de couleur were also curtailed, especially in the area of civil liberties and education. Martinique's new captain general Villaret-Joyeuse even closed all schools serving Blacks and people of color, saying that

> education is incompatible with the existence of our colonies, which rests on slavery and the distinction of colors….[I]gnorance is a necessary chain for men enslaved violently or stigmatized by prejudice….[T]heir intelligence, made proud by an imperfect and crude education, will incessantly represent the colonial

[83] Davrigny correspondance, November 1806, quoted in Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 100.
[84] Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 23.

> regime as the canon of tyranny and oppression…a false light which would relight, sooner or later, the fire of revolution.[85]

However, while the planters were re-empowered, the White population was not an economic, political, or social monolith. The elite, comprised of the wealthy Creole planters and the metropolitan French administrators, were frequently at odds over the policies to be implemented in the colonies, especially regarding slavery and the administration of the law. The White merchant, artisan, and working classes operated on still other levels of society that often involved closer contact and social interaction with free mixed-race people and slaves. The White elite so frowned upon any evidence of fraternization that at one point, Martinican officials even used a special extrajudicial council "to deport those whites they saw as a direct threat to the island's social hierarchy by associating with people of African descent. Several such people accused of "drinking and eating with negroes" were deported to the United States.[86]

Then, as if all of this was not sufficient to destabilize a tortured social system, hostilities erupted between Great Britain and France again in 1803, resulting in the British occupation of Martinique in 1809 and Guadeloupe in 1810. The British, who would later abolish slavery in their own colonies in 1833, installed some moderating measures for the gens de couleur: the restoration of full civil rights for the legally free and their descendents, and the re-installation of the permission to practice professions and undertake commercial trade. They also diminished the emancipation taxes, thus making it easier for the defacto free and slaves alike to become officially liberated. These measures, however, were not enough to make the British regime immune to attempted revolts. In

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[85]Antoine Gisler, *L'esclavage aux Antilles françaises (XVII^e–XIX^e siècle).* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1981), 89.

[86] Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 86.

1811, the British discovered a plot by gens de couleur and slaves to establish a second Haitian empire by setting fire to the capital city of Saint Pierre. Also, later that year some prominent Creoles and gens de couleur attempted to overthrow British rule in an attempt to return the island to Napoleon.[87]

With Napoleon's first defeat and exile in 1814, and the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty under Louis XVIII, Great Britain returned Guadeloupe and Martinique to France. While instances of atrocious abuse still occurred (one plantation owner had eighteen of his slaves burned alive on one day in 1819[88]), in the course of the next decades, the tide towards moderation begun under the British continued slowly but unabated. Faced with an increasingly vocal abolitionist movement in France, continuing slave resistance, and an expanding population of gens de couleur that eventually outnumbered Whites by four to one, the White Creole planter families organized into a lobby that played a significant role in French politics. In the early 1830s

> the lobby argued against extending rights to the realm's *gens de couleur* and, after losing that fight, in the late 1830s they increasingly turned their attention to thwarting the abolitionist movement, which they framed as an assault against the property rights of French (colonial) citizens.[89]

As their way of life became more and more threatened by the greater economic and political parity gained by gens de couleur, the White elite became increasingly desperate. In bolder moves, the plantation elite fabricated or insinuated plots by the gens de couleur as a way of setting judicial disapprobation against them. For instance, in 1823,

> an anonymous Creole wrote Saint Pierre's royal prosecutor claiming [that]…recently arrived men had originally left the colony for Paris to "support

[87] Ibid., 56, 59.
[88] Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 187.
[89] Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 13.

> the intrigues and pernicious ways" of …the "deputy" of the *gens de couleur*, and to help him "undermine our colonial system.[90]

These accusations led to the raiding of the homes of freed people of color and, in the case of the Bisette Affair—where such a search turned up allegedly "seditious material" (a pamphlet written in Paris critical of the treatment of free mixed-race Martinicans)—to the arrest and hasty sentencing of seven free mixed-race merchants to life imprisonment or deportation, accompanied by branding, and the confiscation of their property. The colonial authorities also rounded up hundreds of the wealthiest free Martinicans of color, influential merchants in the sugar trade, whom they also accused of participating in the plot, and hastily deported nearly three hundred of them.[91]

However, these efforts, particularly in the case of the Bissette Affair, backfired. This controversial event "provoked a full scale scandal in the French press, and helped revive the anti-colonial movement in Parliament, at this point largely focused on obtaining rights for freedmen."[92] Under the leadership of such eloquent advocates as abolitionist Victor Schoelcher—who argued that "[s]lavery must be destroyed not only for the sake of the slaves, but for that of the masters, because it tortures the first and depraves the second"[93]—movement towards emancipation progressed slowly but definitively. In July 1830, when the conservative monarchy of Charles X was replaced by that of the more liberal Louis-Philippe, known as the Citizen-King, hopes once again rose for immediate emancipation. However, while free gens de couleur were given full civic rights, including the right to vote and hold office, slavery remained in effect.

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[90] Anonymous letter written 30 November 1830; quoted in ibid., 98.
[91] Schloss, *Sweet Liberty*, 100.
[92] John Savage. "'Black Magic,'" 640.
[93] Victor Schoelcher, quoted in Roberts, *The French in the West Indies*, 246.

Nonetheless, the writing was on the wall. Watching their world of privilege slowly crumbling, the White planter elite became increasingly adamant about maintaining physical and social distance from people of color. They became fixated about color and the purity of family bloodlines. Nothing could be more socially damning than to be accused of having *la tache de sang mêlé* (the stain of mixed blood). They depicted Black men as sexual predators and argued that their emancipation placed White womanhood at risk of violation. When France opened public schools on the islands to educate all children, especially Blacks, as a step towards emancipation, Creoles invested their energies in the creation and maintenance of Whites-only private and parochial schools. Segregation became the last bastion of defense.

Disappointment at the delay in emancipation and the reluctance of White planters to accept the civil rights won by gens de couleur in the French legislature contributed to several uprisings, the most notable being the Grand'Anse affair in December 1833 in Martinique. After the colonial government blocked the gens de couleur from voting or acting as electors, nearly two hundred armed people of color attacked and burned the property of wealthy White Creoles who were known as vocal proponents of White superiority. Brought to court, eighty-some participants were convicted and suffered sentences that included death, forced labor, and deportation to Senegal. However, this uprising changed the nature of the debate: while the White planters charged that this attack proved that gens de couleur were not worthy of the freedoms granted them, proponents of abolition used a new tactic. "After 1833 the conversation shifted to whether the free individuals involved in the Grand'Anse affair had engaged in justifiable

violence considering that Creoles had continually denied them their rights as French citizens."[94]

Throughout the 1830s and the beginning of the 1840s, the debate over emancipation continued on the islands and in metropolitan France. When the British passed The Abolition Act in 1833 and successfully began implementing emancipation in their colonies without violence in 1834, the debates and agitations became more intense.[95] Interim measures were taken such as the freeing of all slaves who were traveling to France or were already on French soil, and the freeing of any slave who was either married to a free person, the child of a free person, or the mother, father, sister or brother of a newly freed person. Consequently, by 1847, in Martinique, for instance, there were 38,729 free mixed-race people to 9,542 White Creoles, a ratio of four to one, against an enslaved population of 72,859.[96] White colonists countered every measure with angry protests and bitter ripostes. "One Colonial Council member went so far as to assert that the metropolitan government's recent actions justified Martinique's separation from the French Empire."[97]

With emancipation seeming inevitable, the debates in the colonies and metropolitan France finally turned towards the discussion of the viability of immediate emancipation over a more gradual plan. However, before these debates could be played out, the people of Paris took to the streets in February 1848 and overthrew the monarchy. A few weeks later, a new Second Republic was formed with the advocates of abolition—such as Victor Schoelcher, who was named under-secretary of state—at the helm. On

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[94] Schloss, *Sweet Liberty,* 158.
[95] Demetrius L. Eudell, *The Political Languages of Emancipation in the British Caribbean and the U.S. South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 23–40.
[96] Schloss., *Sweet Liberty,* vii.
[97] Ibid., 185.

April 27, 1848, the new government declared that slavery was "a flagrant violation of the republican dogma of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity," and decreed that "slavery will be entirely abolished in all of the French colonies and possessions, two months after the promulgation of this decree to each of them….[A]ll corporal punishment, all sales of unfree people is absolutely forbidden." [98] Slave owners were to be compensated but at a rate far below market value at the time. Only one modification was entertained: since Emancipation had come in the middle of the cane harvest, release of slaves was to be postponed until July.

However, the state of affairs in Martinique had become so inflamed that on May 22, even before the word of the emancipation had reached its shores, an insurrection broke out. Aimé Césaire recounts:

> [D]emonstrators gathered in Fort-de-France. Riots broke out in the south of the island. In the north, at Trinité, the slaves came down from the hills and spread into the town. Hour after hour, the tide of insurrection mounted. At Prêcheur, there was already a battle. At Saint-Pierre, fire. Some twenty houses in flame, thirty killed, the threat of a general uprising— the decision of the insurgents overcame the resistances of the bourgeoisie. And it was the bourgeoisie themselves who beseeched the governor to issue, even before the arrival of instructions from Paris, a decree of immediate abolition of slavery. On May 23, slavery was abolished in Martinique. Several days later, Guadeloupe followed the action. The clear-sightedness and obstinance of Schœlcher gave impetus to freedom. Black defiance did the rest.[99]

Emancipation was accompanied by universal male suffrage and the Black population went from slaves to voting citizens in one day. With Whites composing less than 10% of the population, political participation and advancement among people of color and Blacks was eagerly sought and gained. Many local offices were soon won, as well as positions as representatives in the French metropolitan government.

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[98] Schoelcher and Tersen, *Esclavage et colonisation*, 152–53.
[99] Césaire, "Victor Schoelcher et l'abolition," 20–21.

But emancipation did not solve the exigencies of daily life. While many of the former slaves eschewed plantation life and opted to cultivate their own land or to find work in the towns, there were those who could not sustain themselves in either fashion. Former White masters were also faced with the flight of workers from their fields just as harvest was about to begin. Many drew up post-emancipation agreements with newly freed people of African descent that allowed for

> use of cabins, a portion of land, Saturdays and Sundays off, and one third of the plantation's sugar before expenses. By 1849, many planters also implemented a system of sharecropping in response to declining sugar harvests and prices. With these new methods, Martinique's *békés*, former white elites, fought, as they had repeatedly in the past, to continue dominating the island's economy. Because they retained possession of the vast majority of capital (lands, tools, and buildings), they succeeded.[100]

But their standard of living was certainly not on the scale enjoyed previously. The sugar economy was fragile with competition from beet sugar in Europe and there were still not enough workers enticed back to the plantations. In 1852, the government finally approved the importation of indentured workers from India and other parts of Asia and Africa to replace the former slaves. The influx of these new immigrants would both enrich and complicate the social and cultural realities of the islands through to the present day.

For their part, the already free gens de couleur now had both political and financial clout, and within a number of years a mixed-race ruling class emerged, strengthened by the emigration of some of the old White elite back to France. But the loss of their first emancipation haunted the consciousness of many Guadeloupeans, who were fearful that their freedom might once again be revoked, a fear that lasted for many years after.[101]

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[100] Schloss, *Sweet Liberty* 227.
[101] Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 18.

Conclusion

After slightly more than two hundred years of slavery, liberty was established in Guadeloupe and Martinique virtually overnight. However, while emancipation freed the bodies, it did not necessarily free the minds and the collective consciousness of the former slaves. Major shifts in culture, values, work patterns, family structures, and religious orientation had been abruptly and forcefully foisted upon their distant and not so-distant ancestors. After all, France had not condemned the slave trade until 1815, and it had still continued as "contraband traffic,"[102] with tacit governmental support, into the 1830s. This means that at the time of emancipation, there were still native-born Africans among the liberated. So, while the population was at various stages of acculturation, in the collective memory of all was the extraordinary upheaval that slavery inflicted.

> The slaves were forced to adopt new work habits, adjust to new work discipline, and learn new values and incentives to work. They had to become accustomed to different motor habits and physiological rhythms, as well as a new range of social conduct. They had to learn to accept the authority of the master and his supervisors, to become proficient at new skills, to work together in large gangs continuously and regularly at repetitive tasks within a developed division of labor for a period of fixed duration, day after day. The burden of this transition lay heavily on the minds and bodies of the enslaved, and it required a painful cultural adaptation on a vast scale—if not as the personal experience of each individual bondman then as the historical experience of the slave population as a whole.[103]

This acculturation or creolization brought into play new values and systems of living and working. It normalized the heirarchical relationship between master and slave, between those of white, light, and dark skin, between Europe, the Caribbean, and Africa. And it set into play a collective memory—sometimes suppressed, sometimes sought out—and a traumatic legacy that still emerges in powerful manifestations in the cultural work of contemporary artists.

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[102] Roberts, *The French in the West Indie*, 244.
[103] Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar*, 215.

In the next chapters, I will explore the repercussions of the trauma of slavery in the work of Black women playwrights of Guadeloupe and Martinique. While much of that work will focus on the more submerged psychological and sociological effects of the trauma of slavery, there are a number of works that directly engage the slave experience, such as Gilda Gonfier's *Le cachot* (The cell) and Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'isle* (*Island Memories)* both of which depict the abuse of slaves. The exploration of these two plays will set the stage for discussion of the symptoms of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome that appear in many of the ensuing plays.

CHAPTER 3

SLAVE TRAUMA AND CLINICALLY STRESSED CHARACTERS

As established in chapter 2, slavery is a foundational experience of French Caribbean existence. In this and ensuing chapters, I will explore some of the manifestations of slavery and its trauma that still exist in the work of Black women playwrights of Guadeloupe and Martinique. For this analysis, I will rely on past and current theories about Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) by theorists such as Sigmund Freud and Judith Herman; and its intergenerational transmission by Yael Danieli and Joy DeGruy Leary, whose theory, Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS), explicates the nature and the attendant physical and mental debilitations of the trauma generated by slavery. Using these theories, I will examine a symbolic representation of a slave rape in Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'isle: Maman N et Maman F* (*Island Memories, Mama N and Mama F*); an innovative metatheatrical depiction of slavery and its post traumatic aftermath in Gilda Gonfier's *Le cachot* (The cell); and folkloric representation of symptoms of PTSS—numbing and hyperarousal (beserking) in two of the characters in Césaire's *L'enfant des passages ou La geste de Ti-Jean* (The child of passageways or the adventure of Ti-Jean). In chapters 4 and 5, I will analyze additional plays for their representations of other by-products of slavery trauma: racist socialization and what sociologist Patricia Hill Collins terms “love and trouble” relationships between Black men and women.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

While Post-traumatic Stress Disorder did not receive official recognition by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) until the late twentieth century, Sigmund Freud had identified and studied its symptoms nearly a century earlier. In the mid-1890s, he became intrigued by the atypical psychological manifestations by people suffering from the trauma of railroad crashes (the major source of civilian traumatic fright of the time) and from war trauma. Both types of trauma elicited specific sets of behavioral abnormalities that lay outside the precepts of some of his groundbreaking psychological theories. In his later work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* Freud notes that even dreams function differently for the traumatized. Rather than serving as a vehicle of wish fulfillment, the dreams of the traumatized "are endeavouring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis." These dreams emerge, he further states "in obedience to the compulsion to repeat" and concedes that for him "[t]his would be the place, then, at which to admit for the first time an exception to the proposition that dreams are fulfillment of wishes."[1] Recognizing the unique psychological force of the traumatic experience, he says, "[t]he function of dreaming, like so much else, is upset in this condition and diverted from its purposes."[2]

The long-term, intergenerational psychological manifestations among survivors of the Holocaust and their descendants, coupled with the multiple mental and neurological disturbances experienced by combat troops returning from Viet Nam gave rise to a number of scientific and clinical studies that resulted in APA's formal establishment in

[1] Sigmund Freud and Peter Gay, *The Freud Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 609.
[2] Ibid., 598.

1980 of a new psychological diagnosis: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).[3] Today, theorists from a multitude of disciplines (cultural studies, feminist studies, humanities, film and literary studies) have joined the discourse on trauma, and though the definition of the disorder is contested among the different disciplines, there is general agreement that PTSD is present when

> there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event….The pathology consists…solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event.[4]

While trauma and its aftermath are characterized by a laundry-list of disturbing and life-altering symptoms from repetitive nightmares, flashbacks, numbness, dissociation, and depression, to hypervigilance, panic attacks, aggression, and impulse control and substance abuse disorders,[5] the most fundamental and damaging wound is "the collapse of symbolizing—arguably the essentially human activity."[6] Indeed, the trauma experience is so "horrifying" that neuroscientists have discovered that of the sectors of the brain that register trauma, at the moment when a person is undergoing such an experience, "only the sensation sector is active….The meaning-making one is shut down because the affect is too much to register cognitively." Thus, a traumatized person

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[3] Michael G. Kenny. "Trauma, Time, Illness, and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Traumatic Memory" in *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory,* ed. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (New York: Routledge, 1996), 159.

[4] Cathy Caruth. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4–5.

[5] Kirby Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture : Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 6.

[6] Ann E. Kaplan, "Fanon, Trauma and Cinema" in *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Anthony C. Alessandrini (New York: Routledge, 1999), 146.

acutely senses the trauma but the assault "has not been assimilated in the usual way to the part of the brain that deals with meaning and thus with memory as knowledge."[7] Consequently, the traumatized person cannot even reliably witness her/his own pained experience, yet the body recalls it and brings back vivid sensory images. Anthropologist and recovered memory scholar Michael G. Kenny states, "The therapeutic goal is to set time moving again by bringing traumatic memories…within the orbit of conscious life by recreating 'the narrative flow of history.' Doing so can be both horrifying and cleansing.[8]

As might be intuitively deduced, persons who undergo prolonged traumatic experience such as those held in captivity as war prisoners, Holocaust victims, or the enslaved suffer even more debilitating effects. Judith Herman, Director of Training at the Victims of Violence Program at Cambridge Hospital, suggests the term Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder for the range of behavioral manifestations emanating from such long-term abuse and states in her landmark work *Trauma and Recovery*:

> People subjected to prolonged, repeated trauma develop an insidious progressive form of post-traumatic stress disorder that invades and erodes the personality. While the victim of a single acute trauma may feel after the event that she is "not herself," the victim of chronic trauma may feel herself to be changed irrevocably, or she may lose the sense that she has any self at all.[9]

Herman goes on to elucidate the techniques used by perpetrators of long-term abuse that slowly but surely divest captives of the basic elements of personhood: their sense of autonomy, worth, agency, community. Reduced to an endless daily battle for survival, "[p]eople in captivity become adept practitioners of the arts of altered

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[7] Ibid., 147.
[8] Kenny, "Trauma, Time, Illness," 160.
[9] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 86.

consciousness. Through the practice of dissociation, voluntary thought suppression, minimization, and sometimes outright denial, they learn to alter an unbearable reality." [10]

Worse still, the symptoms of long-term traumatic stress endure much further into the future than for those who suffer shorter-termed trauma. Herman reports that soldiers who were imprisoned both in World War II and the Korean War still suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder some thirty-five to forty years after their imprisonment. The same was found to be true among survivors of Nazi concentration camps.[11] We can only conjecture from these findings to what extent the psychological damage entire life-times of captivity produced in the lives of Africans enslaved in the Americas.

Even more sobering, recent studies show that trauma alters not only the life of victims and their immediate family but that it also pervades the fabric of their surrounding community. "Because of our capacity for suggestibility," states cultural theorist Kirby Farrell, "post-traumatic stress can be seen as a category of experience that mediates between a specific individual's injury and a group or even a culture."[12] He further explains that trauma can cause "a disturbance in the ground of collective experience: a shock to people's values, trust, and a sense of purpose; an obsessive awareness that nations, leaders, even we ourselves can die.[13] Sociologist Kai Erikson concurs saying, "[T]raumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create a mood, an ethos—a group culture, almost—that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up. Trauma, that is, has a social dimension."[14] Because

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[10] Ibid., 87.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Farrell, *Post-traumatic Culture*, 12.
[13] Ibid., 3.
[14] Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 185.

human beings are susceptible to suggestibility and to vicarious experience, whole families, villages, cities, countries can be infected by trauma that may have initially been experienced by only a small fraction of their population (perhaps most vividly illustrated by the groundswell of trauma the events of 9/11 wreaked across the entire American nation).

Multigenerational Legacies: The Transmission of Trauma

A second significant corollary to the synchronicity of PTSD is the discovery that it can also appear diachronically. "Mainstream trauma theory has begun to recognize that post-traumatic symptoms can be intergenerational, as in the case of children of survivors of the Nazi Holocaust."[15] Indeed, it has been found that "some children and grandchildren of World War II European holocaust survivors have also suffered trauma related to those events even though they were born years after the war ended."[16] In one of their articles on Holocaust survivors and their families, Nanette C. Auerhahn and Dori Laub state:

> [W]e have found that massive trauma has an amorphous presence not defined by place or time and lacking a beginning, middle, or end, and that it shapes the internal representation of reality of several generations, becoming an unconscious organizing principle passed on by parents and internalized by their children."[17]

The discovery that trauma suffered by one generation can cause disruption to the social, emotional, and psychological systems of identity and family formation intergenerationally is highly important to my contention that the reverberations of the slave trauma experienced in Guadeloupe and Martinique for over two centuries are still

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[15] Laura S. Brown, "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 107–108.

[16] "Breaking The Chains." *Essence* 35.10 (2005): 152.

[17] Nanette C.Auerhahn and Dori Laub, "Intergenerational Memory of the Holocaust," in *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, ed. Yael Danieli (New York: Plenum Press, 1998), 22.

present in the lives and culture of the present-day population of these islands and is reflected in the work of their contemporary writers.

However, still another breakthrough in biological sciences opens up an even more intriguing assertion as to the possible transmission of trauma through the generations: the discovery of an actual alteration of genetic expression in succeeding generations as a result of traumatic events experienced by their forebears. These revelations come from the field of epigenetics, which is the study of

> changes in gene activity that do not involve alterations to the genetic code but still get passed down to at least one successive generation. These patterns of gene expression are governed by the cellular material — the epigenome — that sits on top of the genome, just outside it (hence the prefix *epi-*, which means above). It is these epigenetic "marks" that tell your genes to switch on or off, to speak loudly or whisper. It is through epigenetic marks that environmental factors like diet, stress and prenatal nutrition can make an imprint on genes that is passed from one generation to the next.[18]

Studies conducted by preventive health specialist Lars Olov Bygren, epidemiologist Gunnar Kaati, clinical geneticist Marcus Pembrey, and bioscientist and medical doctor Michael Sjöström concluded that feast and famine experienced by a population that included women pregnant with female fetuses and prepubescent boys (the times when eggs and sperm are produced respectively) in a remote village in Sweden had direct effects on the health and length of life of the grandchildren of those women and men. They stated:

> Genomic imprinting establishes the principle of transgenerational epigenetic inheritance with an imprint tag or epigenetic mark placed in one generation influencing gene expression in the next.[19]

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[18] John Cloud, "Why Your DNA Isn't Your Destiny." Health and Science. *Time Magazine*, http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1951968,00.html (accessed 20 November 2010).

[19] Gunnar Kaati, Lars Olov Bygren, Marcus Pembrey, and Michael Sjöström. "Transgenerational Response to Nutrition, Early Life Circumstances and Longevity" in *European Journal of Human Genetics* 15, no. 7 (2007): 789.

Further studies of the effects of smoking by pre-adolescent boys in the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children in the UK produced evidence again that an epigenetic switch had been turned off at the time of sperm development, resulting in statistically significant excessive weight gain by their grandsons (but not granddaughters; a comparable study of pregnant women who were smokers was not conducted). Pembrey says "The sperm have captured information about the ancestral environment, and this is modifying the development and health of subsequent generations."[20] Summarizing the significance of his studies he noted that he had discovered that "[a] simple environmental event could affect the way genes worked and that could be inherited…as if a memory of an event was being passed down through generations."[21] The work of these Swedish scientists has opened a floodgate in a new awareness of the impact of environment on what had previously been thought of as a genome that was relatively impervious to environmental impact. "This work is at the forefront of a paradigm shift in scientific thinking. It will change the way the causes of disease are viewed, as well as the importance of lifestyles and family relationships."[22]

Further studies are being conducted following the Swedish team's lead. For instance, psychologist Rachel Yehuda and her colleagues in the Mount Sinai Traumatic Stress Studies program at Mount School of Medicine and Bronx Veterans Affairs Hospital conducted a study in which they "demonstrate empirically that offspring of Holocaust survivors appear to have a similar neuroendcrine status to that of Holocaust

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[20] Elizabeth Pennisi, "Environmental Epigenomics Meeting: Food, Tobacco, and Future Generations." *Science* 310, no. 5755 (16 December 2005): 1761.

[21] "The Ghost in Your Genes," *Nova* (2006) XviD.avi, http://www.video.google.com/videoplay? docid= 1128045835761675934# (accessed 11 January 2011).

[22] "The Ghost in Our Genes," BBC Science and Nature: TV & Radio Follow-up. http://www.bbc.co.uk/sn/tvradio/programmes/horizon/ghostgenes.shtml (accessed 12 January 201l).

surviviors with PTSD and that they may be more *psychologically* and *biologically* vulnerable to stress and trauma than controls."[23] Yehuda, in conjunction with Edinburgh doctor Jonathan Seckl, has also begun studying the effects of the stress caused to pregnant women who were present at the site of the 9/11 attack in New York City. She has discovered a change in the level of cortisol (a stress reactor) in their children similar to that of the mother. Conclusive studies await the birth of the grandchildren of the women initially studied to see if their levels remain similar. However, a study on the effects of exposure of rats to pesticides and fungicides has shown that biological changes lasted as long as four generations.[24] All of this research into the actual epigenetic changes that can be caused by environmental factors and events in the lives of individuals and inherited by their descendents potentially has wide implications for the descendants of enslaved populations who endured hundreds of years of physical and emotional assault as well as severe deprivation of fundamental human needs for adequate diet and shelter.

However, whether generated biologically, sociologically or psychologically, multi-generational trauma has been documented by Yael Danieli, a clinical psychologist and traumatologist, who assembled articles and studies by nearly seventy national and international social, bio- and neuroscientists, psychiatrists, family therapists, medical doctors, and other clinicians on the intergenerational transmission of trauma in *The International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma,* a book of over seven hundred pages. Her authors offer evidence of multidimensional, multigenerational transmission of trauma across a wide spectrum of traumatized populations including those who survived the Holocaust, Japanese internment camps, Viet Nam, Armenian

[23] Yael Danieli, "Conclusions and Future Directions," in Danieli, *International Handbook*, 670. (Italics in the original text.)

[24] "The Ghost in Our Genes," BBC Science and Nature.

genocide, American colonization (Native Americans), and slavery, among a myriad of other life-altering traumas. Using a variety of methodologies and theories from sociological and psychological concepts to family system theory to genetic and biological frameworks, etc., the authors generally concurred that "intergenerational transmission of trauma indeed exists. It occurs across populations within groups exposed to trauma" and that the evidence "strongly suggests that it is a universal phenomenon."[25] Importantly for my study, Danieli also states, "From a multidimensional approach, in some cases, healing requires restoring the *cultural context*" [26] —the societal and familial mores that have been ruptured by trauma—a project I believe is actively embraced by the Guadeloupean and Martinican playwrights involved in my study, as they consciously or even subconsciously grapple with what Dr. Joy DeGruy Leary has termed Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS).

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome

In her 2005 book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, scholar and lecturer DeGruy Leary applied the findings about PTSD to what she saw as the still free-floating trauma in the African American community generated by four hundred years of slavery and perpetuated by the post-emancipation terrors of lynching, burnings, segregation, and discrimination. According to Leary, "Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome is a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience

[25] Danieli, "Conclusions and Future Directions," 669.
[26] Ibid., 680. (Italics in the original text.)

oppression and institutionalized racism today."[27] She cites the precipitating traumas or stressors that the American Psychiatric Association has identified as precursors of PTSD:

> [A] serious threat or harm to one's life or physical integrity; a serious threat or harm to one's children, spouse or other close relatives and friends; sudden destruction of one's home or community; or seeing another person who has recently been, or is being, seriously injured or killed as the result of an accident or physical violence. In some cases the trauma may be learning about a serious threat or harm to a close friend or relative, e.g., that one's child has been kidnapped, tortured, or killed….The disorder is apparently more severe and longer lasting when the stressor is of human design.[28]

Then Leary points out that "[m]any slaves did not experience just one of the above stressors; rather, many experienced all of them! And the preponderance of slaves were subjected to these traumatic experiences over and over again!"[29]

In populations that have been enslaved for hundreds of years, trauma stressors experienced across several generations and dispersed throughout the community turn survival strategem of the immediate victims into family mores and cultural beliefs as to how to exist in the world. Leary poignantly asks,

> What do you think the result would be if generation after generation of young men were not allowed the power and authority to parent their own children?...What do you think the result would be if the primary skills that mothers teach their children are those associated with adapting to a lifetime of torture?[30]

She adds, "[T]hose traumatized adapted their attitudes and behaviors to simply survive, and these adaptations continue to manifest today."[31] In her study, Leary identified a variety of Black cultural practices, such as strict and sometimes excessively punitive child-rearing, impermanence of relationships, vacant self-esteem (the overridding belief

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[27] Joy DeGruy Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Milwaukie, OR: Uptone Press, 2005), 125.

[28] "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder," in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1987), 247–48.

[29] Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 118.

[30] Ibid., 122.

[31] Ibid., 14.

that you or your people have little worth), ever-present anger (suppressed rage at centuries of abuse, violence, and discrimination that may erupt inappropriately or disproportionately), racist socialization (adoption of the racist belief that White people are superior and Black inferior), and a variety of other behaviors and beliefs that are adaptive practices stemming from the traumas of slavery.

While Leary's work is based on slavery and its after-effects on the African American community in the United States, it is my contention that the syndrome she has identified can be found, with some cultural variations, in the lives and cultural expression of the descendants of the 10 to 15 million African slaves dispersed across the Americas, including the Caribbean. For instance, the third act of *Le cachot* reveals aspects of PTSS reawakened in a group of contemporary Guadeloupeans following their reading of a play in which they reenacted an actual historical incident in the slave history of Guadeloupe. Likewise, my reading of Ina Césaire's *L'enfant des passages ou La geste de Ti-Jean* through the lens of post-traumatic stress theory will unearth clinically diagnosable representations of both the dissociative numbness and the violent aggression, or even beserking that trauma can induce in certain personalities. Similarly, Césaire's *Mémoires d'isle* illustrates the effects, generations later, of the ongoing racist socialization generated by the institution of slavery.

Remembering Trauma

In addition to using Leary's theories on PTSS as tools for recognizing the presence of trauma, I will also reference the work of other trauma theorists, particularly the work of Nanette C. Auerhahn and Dori Laub in their article "Intergenerational Memory of the Holocaust" where they identify eight forms of remembering trauma, each

dependent on the "psychological distance" of the subject from the trauma. The forms, which can be present simultaneously, are: "not knowing" (as discussed above, the mind has not registered the event); "screen[ing] of memories," or "the substitution of true but less traumatizing memories for those that cannot be brought to mind"; "fugue states (in which events are relived in an altered state of consciousness)"; "retention of the experience as compartmentalized, undigested fragments of perceptions that break into consciousness"; "transference phenomena (wherein the traumatic legacy is lived out as one's inevitable fate)"; "partial, hesitant expression as an overpowering narrative"; "the experience of compelling, identity-defining, and pervasive life themes (both conscious and unconscious)"; the organization of the trauma as "a witnessed narrative"; the use of trauma as "a metaphor and vehicle for developmental conflict"; and finally "action knowledge" (knowing the facts of the events and what action must be taken).[32] Looking at trauma transgenerationally and synchronously, they assert that while *survivors* know their trauma

> mostly through retention of fragments of unintegrated memories or by reliving such memories in transference phenomena[,] *children of survivors* tend to know through particular themes that prove central to their lives; and *those not directly affected* know of trauma through experiencing their own conflicts and predicaments in its language and imagery.[33]

While guarding against conflating the experience of the Holocaust with that of slavery, I believe the psychological responses studied in the trauma behavior of survivors of the Holocaust also lend themselves as tools for discussion of slavery's trauma.

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[32] Auerhahn and Laub, "Intergenerational Memory," 23.
[33] Ibid. (My italics.)

The Conspiracy of Silence

Another aspect of post-traumatic stress is what Yael Danieli terms "a conspiracy of silence." Those who have experienced trauma will slip behind a curtain of silence when the larger society shows itself to be unable or unwilling to truly hear their experiences, without judgment or denial. If the ethics or courage of the survivors is questioned implicitly or explicitly in regards to how they survived while others perished; or if society represses, devalues, denies their experiences, or just feels too uncomfortable in hearing the full disclosure of their trauma, the traumatized retreat into silence. Studying the victims of the Holocaust, Danieli concluded that this culture of silence

> has proven detrimental to the survivors' familial and sociocultural reintegration by intensifying their already profound sense of isolation, loneliness, and mistrust of society. This has further impeded the possibility of their intrapsychic integration and healing, and made their task of mourning their massive losses impossible.[34]

Danieli believes that the lacuna in the personal, familial and national record that is the result of such conspiracies of silence lead to what Suzan-Lori Parks's *The America Play* so astutely terms the "Great Hole of History."[35]

Leary's concepts of "vacant esteem," "racist socialization, and "ever-present anger," Danieli's findings about "the conspiracy of silence," coupled with Auerhahn and Laub's forms of remembering trauma, particularly transference, enhanced by Julie Kestenberg's theory of transposition "where the past is simultaneously experienced with the present reality" (a phenomenon also noted among traumatized Native American populations),[36] are particularly helpful concepts in unpacking and understanding the

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[34] Danieli, *International Handbook,* 4.
[35] Ibid., 6.
[36] Eduardo Duran, Bonnie Duran, Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, and Susan Yellow Horse-Davis, "Healing the American Indian Soul Wound" in Danieli, *International Handbook*, 346.

nature of the post traumatic effects displayed by the characters in the plays discussed in this dissertation.

Staging Slave Abuse

The depiction of historical abuses of slavery can be found explicitly in two plays in my study: Ina Césaire's two-character play *Mémoires d'isles: Mama N. and Mama F.*, and Gilda Gonfier's *Le cachot. Mémoires d'isle* was first produced in 1983 at the Campagnol, a state-aided dramatic center in a suburb of Paris, followed later in the year by a production in Martinique, then Paris again, and finally a few performances in Guadeloupe the following summer.[37] It was translated and produced as *Island Memories* by UBU Repertory in New York City in 1991. In this play, two Martinican grandmothers, Aure and Hermance, are reminiscing about their lives when Aure speaks of her great grandmother, ironically named Amante (lover), most likely by a mother who knew all too well the sexual services her daughter would be forced to render. Even years after emancipation, Amante still wore "heavy chains—convict style—around her neck,"[38] manifesting outwardly a state of life that had been branded on her soul. As Aure reveals that Amante had given birth to several children by her White slavemaster, the intimate realist setting of the play showing a Caribbean veranda at night accompanied by tropical sounds and moonlight quickly segues into surrealist semidarkness. "This crucial passage," Valérie Bada notes, "is the only break in the flow of reminiscing narratives. The abrupt darkening of the stage signals a leap from Aure's conscious remembering of

[37] Bridget Jones, "Two Plays by Ina Césaire: *Mémoires d'Isles* and *L'enfant des Passages." Theatre Research International* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 228.

[38] Ina Césaire, "Island Memories: Mama N and Mama F," in *Plays by French and Francophone Women*, ed. and trans. Christiane P. Makward and Judith Miller (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 58. All subsequent references to the play will be in the text in parentheses.

her own past to shadowy reverberations suddenly erupting from repressed areas of her unconscious."[39]

Suddenly, the light shining through an opening door illuminates the darkness and the sound of a body on a bed represents the archetypal slave rape scene. In the penumbra, Aure transposes into Amante's daughter Malvina (Aure's own grandmother) who shares the room with Amante. Malvina rises and leans over the space where her white slavemaster father has once again taken her mother Amante. As Malvina raises her arm, the "past ceases to emerge from language but moves like a camera freezing the picture of Malvina's ambivalent gesture of love/hatred towards her father in arrested motion."[40] It is only as the sounds of dogs barking and screams in the distance are heard that the audience knows that she has attacked her father. Simultaneously, although isolated in her own space and time outside of the action, Hermance rocks in her chair and confirms Malvina/Aure's act of retaliation by humming the Creole ballad, "My Daddy Died, I Didn't Cry" (59).

For her part, Gilda Gonfier has created a very complex image of slavery and its traumatic effect on subsequent generations in her first and only play, *Le cachot.* Gonfier used a metatheatrical device in which the characters recreate a play-within-a-play as a way of presenting the details of an historical 1842 trial of a Guadeloupean slave owner who was accused of premeditated murder of one of his slaves through inhumane confinement. Freddie Rokem reminds us that

> performances about history frequently also draw attention to different metatheatrical dimensions of the performance, frequently showing directly on the

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[39] Valérie Bada, "Slavery and Silence in Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'Isles* and Dennis Scott's *An Echo in the Bone." The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 34, no.1 (Autumn 2000–Winter 2001): 88

[40] Ibid.

> stage how performances about history are constructed….This metatheatrical awareness with regard to the theatre as well as history enables them to communicate directly to the audience that, even if what is presented on the stage is a theatrical performance, it actually presents or refers to events that have really taken place.[41]

By drawing on factual accounts, and presenting them in this format, Gonfier has presented one of the more wrenching descriptions of slave abuse I have ever read, as well as giving herself the platform from which to explore the PTSS that are afflicting the present-day characters.

According to the historical facts presented, accused of poisoning his master's livestock, a slave named Sébastien was incarcerated in a slave cell that is described as:

> A massive brick structure, 3 ft. 10 in. in height by 6 ft in length, completely closed on all sides. After some time, the heat of the sun caused fissures through which rain could leak into the interior. The floor was not finished with wood or tiles and so, the water that came from above reduced it to mud. When the body was removed, it presented a hideous sight. The face was eaten by insects, the limbs were dehydrated, the bones no longer had any flesh, pus came out of the eyes, the skin hung and fell in the hands of those who were involved in the interment.[42]

The play-within-the play also presents details of a medical examination of Sébastien's son, Réville who had been severely whipped. The scars from this whipping were so pronounced that another slave asked if the child had been reduced to walking on all fours following such a beating. The medical opinion was, however, that "only when the whipping damages the child's health is it excessive, for example, when it leads to fever or illness"(36). Yet the most dreaded of all punishments was incarceration. Indeed, Sébastien pleads, "Sir, shoot me with a gun rather than make me die in a slave cell" (37).

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[41] Freddie Rokem, *Performing History* (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2000), 7

[42] Gilda Gonfier, *Le cachot*, unpublished manuscript (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe: Textes en Paroles, 2009), 25. All subsequent references will be in parentheses in the text.

As the play intensifies, the readers slip in and out of their roles, sometimes implicating one another or themselves in real life. For instance, Charles-Henri, who is reluctantly reading the part of the slave master, tries to bring understanding to the plight of his character, both in his own words and in those of the character. In the text, his character Vallentin says:

> You have to put yourself in my shoes. When you see you are being ruined, you are forced, without being cruel, to be unjust sometimes. A master is obliged to actively keep a close eye. He must use severity in the discipline of his work force. He cannot rely on his Blacks. They are too lazy. They don't bother to look for the wrong-doers. They are wary of denouncing them (35).

However, Charles-Henri had already earlier stated that he feels that Vallentin is not guilty. With a bit too much empathy, he says, "He is a business man. He needed to protect his interests. The law gave him the right. I admit that it was a bad law, the Code Noir and others. But this man had to protect his interests." This statement elicits an out-of-character response by Olivier, who is playing the overseer. He shoots back, "Even today you are still protecting your interests, right?" To which Charles-Henri responds, "That's how the world is" (29). This time another reader quells the rising tensions with the suggestion that they return to reading.

In the following scenes, characters read from the recorded testimonies of others who spoke at Vallentin's trial. Small wonder that the slaves, who lived at the mercy of their masters, spoke of Vallentin as a "very good master" and that he only gave punishment that was merited, "no more than ten lashes of the whip," that he cared for them when they were sick. Fellow plantation owners testified that he was "too good to his Blacks….He spoils his Blacks." On the other hand, several slaves testified that Sébastien "had a bad attitude. He had the attitude that he had more than the others. He had the most

beautiful garden" (39–42). Vallentin is also questioned about other of his less than savory practices such as applying metal gags over the mouths of slaves caught eating cane. He claimed it was to prevent them from eating earth, not punishment for eating cane. Interspersed with these testimonies are accounts of Sebastian's deteriorating conditions in the cell, as he proclaims his innocence. Despite the horrific details of the death of Sébastien, the slave owner is still acquitted. Thus, the play-within-the-play ends realistically, and in accordance with historical fact and usual practice of the time. But the reading of the play and its unjust ending reverberates through the small group of readers and elicits, in the third act, manifestations that are resonant of PTSD and PTSS.

Le cachot and Post Traumatic Effects of Slavery

In act 3 of *Le cachot* the action picks up following the reading. Even at this juncture, the audience knows the characters only by the names of the personnages they embodied in the reading. The group relaxes, drinks, dances, and mulls over the evening's events. The playwright Réville (resonant of the word *réveiller*—to awaken, but in pronunciation also close to *revit*—to relive the past) is amazed that they are able to re-enter their own existences as if the play had no effect on their current lives, despite those uneasy moments when several of them accused each other's real personas through the guise of their characters. For instance, the White man Charles-Henri (none of the play characters are actors) who read the part of Vallentin the slave master came out of character at several points in the reading feeling that he was being personally accused of complicity in the slave trade. He stated adamantly, "I am not responsible for this Vallentin or for what he did." Réville had asked impatiently if someone had actually accused him or his character. The man reading the part of Louis, the overseer, answered

that he accuses the fictitious Vallentin and the real Charles-Henri too (19). Réville, anxious to hear the rest of his play, had quelled the rising confrontation and told them they could deal with it after the play. Later, when Vallentin balked again and threatened to stop reading his part, Réveille confronted him saying, "I thought you didn't feel responsible, that slavery has little to do with you….Are you afraid of this text. Are you afraid of what you might discover about yourself in playing the role of a murderous slave owner?" (26). But once again, the rising tension was swept under the rug with Réville's insistence that they return to their texts. Now in the aftermath, no one speaks of these accusations or innuendoes; instead they submerge their feelings beneath the socially accepted guise of acceptance and tolerance, reifying Danieli's "conspiracy of silence" surrounding their history as slaves and slave owners.

For Réville, the writing of his play on slave atrocities has been a deliberate and painful breaking of the conspiracy of silence around slavery and the reader who plays an old slave named Jacob recognizes this. He even interrupts the reading to state that he is proud of Réville for writing his play on slavery; he is also amazed because in the past Réville never even wanted to speak about slavery. Réville responds:

> Before the slaves were…I don't know. Now they have a name, Madeleine, Adeline, Louis. They have a history. They speak to me. I wondered why this history made me ill at ease. I wanted to know more. It's better to no longer have fear. It's a healing. (30)

Yet, Réville, who still has not revealed his real name to the audience or to some of the people gathered to read his play, maintains a strained secrecy about the personal impact this story has upon him. Although the play is based on actual historical court records, he expresses dissatisfaction with the ending of the play, and uses his cigarette to burn page after page of the play. Seeing Réville's reaction, Jacob says adamantly, "You

cannot change the verdict. We cannot change what has happened" (48). Both Réville's insistence on the suppression of his readers' identities and Jacob's impassioned defense of history as an immutable fact resonate with what psychologist Nanette C. Auerhahn and Yale University Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry Dori Laub describe as two aspects of post traumatic remembering. The first is "transference phenomenon (wherein the traumatic legacy is lived out as one's inevitable fate)."[43] They say, "In transference phenomenon, a derivative (not even a memory) is reenacted, rather than remembered, and infuses the rest of the individual's life through symptoms."[44] The second symptom depicted is the reconstitution of trauma as a life theme. They say

> Memory in the form of overpowering narrative is transformed to the level of life themes when a degree of distance from the traumatic event is established, and when there is less immersion in the concrete details of the trauma….[A] life theme tends to be unitary, an organizing principle that becomes the center of an individual's personality….It is like a center of gravity for the direction or course the individual's life takes.[45]

However, an even more pertinent corollary to this form of remembering trauma is a phenomenon that psychoanalyst Judith Kestenberg, a founding member of the Group for the Psychoanalytic Study of the Effect of the Holocaust on the Second Generation, has termed "transposition." Speaking about a specific individual survivor child of the Holocaust, Kestenberg says:

> Adaptation to reality was characterized by the simultaneous living in her present and in the past of her father. It is not sufficient to speak of her identification with the father….The mechanism goes beyond identification. I have called it ‘transposition’ into the world of the past, similar—but not identical—to the spiritualist’s journey into the world of the dead.[46]

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[43] Auerhahn and Laub, "Intergenerational Memory of the Holocaust," 23.
[44] Ibid., 31.
[45] Ibid., 32.
[46] Judith Kestenberg, “A Metaphysical Assessment Based on an Analysis of a Survivor 's Child” in *Generations of the Holocaust*, ed. Martin S. Bergmann and Milton E. Jucovy (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 148–49.

Poignantly, she asserts: “The need to use a special term, *transposition,* becomes apparent when one hears the anguished cries of survivors’ children who want to live in the past, and harbor the dead within themselves."[47] She sees this behavior as being linked to mourning, but without the necessary distancing from the lost love objects that true mourning initiates.

> Transposition has a certain relationship to mourning and is perhaps a substitute for it. ….Mourning leads to an identification with the lost object and to its progressive decathexis….Through this mechanism, the psyche becomes reorganized. In contrast, the transposition into the past and the introjections—unknown to the patient—of many objects of the past do not lead to a decathexis of the objects, and the identification with unknown objects has a shadowy quality.[48]

In *Le cachot*, it is Madeleine, Réville's lover, who calls him to task for his transposition of the past onto his present life. When he is dejected at not achieving the sense of redemption that he thought his dramatic re-creation of an actual historic event would bring, and abruptly asks everyone to leave, Madeleine reviles him for thinking that he could purge the effects of slavery so easily. Upon downing a glass of rum and throwing the glass to the ground, Madeleine proceeds to recite out loud the dimensions of the slave cell as described in the play while using chalk to outline the space on the floor. Having been cast by Réville as her namesake, Madeleine, the sorcerer sister of the incarcerated slave, she now adds voudou symbols to the design of the cell. As the group looks on stupified, she announces that the cell exists in each of them. Accusing Réville of being an imposter, of having merely stolen the text from the official account of the trial, she reveals that he is obsessed with the events of this story from two centuries earlier, that he is fixated in the identity of Sébastien's son, Réville, who as a boy was whipped,

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[47] Ibid., 148n†.
[48] Ibid., 157.

forced to eat excrement,[49] and to wear a metallic muzzle. Crying out to Réville she says: "This past prevents you from living, from creating, from inventing your life, from loving me." Throwing pages of his script in his face she exclaims: "It is your love that I want, not being put in your piece to play sorcerers, poisoners. Is that how you see me? A poison?" (52)

When Réville accuses her of being hysterical, she runs to the door of the apartment, locks it, and then rashly throws his keys over the balcony and into the night. Réville does not have a second set of keys and thus the apartment itself becomes a "cell," thereby rendering Madeleine's chalk outline a cell-within-a-cell.[50] Announcing that the play is not finished and that they must not let Réville believe that he can lock them in their slave identities, she says that they must now truly write the play. In a passionate monologue she cries out:

> We are the descendants of these thousands of slaves held by a handful of Whites. We had machetes to cut the cane. But the cane did not free us. The machete could have. Revolt is in the blood. Sébastien was proud of his garden. The poor victim. I declare this victim guilty. Guilty of having been the best Black in the slave gang, guilty of having the most beautiful garden. He was not a Black maroon. He did not poison the animals. I was the one who killed the animals….Without a doubt, he thought he would be able to buy his freedom by dint of his labor….You cannot buy liberty. You snatch it back if someone imprisons us. (53)

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[49] This particularly repulsive form of slave punishment in the Caribbean is confirmed in a diary entry by Thomas Thistlewood, a slave owner in Jamaica in 1756. See Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750-86* (Kingston, Jamaica: The University of West Indies Press, 1989), 72.

[50] According to Gilda Gonfier in a follow-up email interview on 15 January 2011, "[T]he cell in which the slave is confined also refers symbolically to the cell in which we are all confined. Jean-François Prévand, while staging the play, translated this idea by demarcating three spaces, a little like the Russian [nesting] dolls: the large cell is our society, and its manifestation at the moment of the presentation is the theater, the audience, and the actors. The middle cell, is the delineation of the scenic space where the play is taking place. And finally, the small cell is the one Madeleine draws with chalk and into which she invites everyone to enter one at a time." Gonfier and Prévand had originally hoped to stage the play in public spaces where they would merely delineate the space for the actors and then ask anyone from the general public to enter the cell space to contemplate the cell in their own existence.

She then vows to revolt against her own slavery, describing her daily life as an accommodation to her lack of liberty. She states that she spends her life dashing to work because she must and consuming material goods to console herself for the liberty she does not have. She then bemoans the fate of their country, wondering what they will be in twenty years with "each one working his own garden in the hope of buying a little liberty?" Insisting that salvation lies only in entering the cell, stating their true names, and confessing their faults, she pressures Réville to enter the space and reveal himself. When he refuses and another in the group playfully suggests she is initiating a parlor game, Madeleine retrieves a knife, re-enters the chalked cell, gashes her hand, and says, "I am drawing on my hand the new lines of my destiny" (53–54). Gonfier states: "The ritual with the blood symbolizes for me death and rebirth."[51] Thus she has Madeleine put some blood on her face and don a white *foulard*[52] in the manner of a voudou priestess. Having now designated the cell as a ritualized space for effecting the death of the past and the purging of slave trauma with the hopes of a rebirth into a healthier present, Madeleine once again invites someone to enter the space.

The first to do so is Olivier, a Black small business owner, who played Louis, the cruel Black overseer. Permitting Madeleine to smear his face with blood, and drinking an unknown liquid, he eventually confesses that, although he is a Black man and a former inhabitant of the ghetto, he hates Black people, hates politicians, and does not believe in his country. He claims that his "cell" is made up of police boots (from an abusive incident in his youth), labor strikes (that cripple his business) and the ballot box (in that he has not voted since 1992). But in fact, his "cell" is what Leary terms "racist socialization."

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[51] Gilda Gonfier, email interview, 13 January 2011.

[52] "A classic head tie for French Creole women during the colonial era." See Donald R. Hill, *Caribbean Folklore: A Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 159.

> One of the most insidious and pervasive symptoms of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome is our adoption of the slave master's value system. At this value system's foundation is the belief that white, and all things associated with whiteness, are superior; and that black, and all things associated with blackness, are inferior. Through the centuries of slavery and the decades of institutionalized oppression that followed, many African Americans [and other enslaved Africans in the Americas] have, in essence, been socialized to be something akin to white racists….Many of us look at ourselves and our community through white eyes."[53]

With Olivier's confession, we begin to see how accusatory Réville's casting is. Olivier lives his life very much like the slave overseer he played, a Black who elevated himself out of the ranks of the slave gang to lord over the other slaves with an iron fist. As Leary points out:

> Black overseers who were assigned the duties of monitoring and disciplining the field slaves were often more brutal than their white counterparts. One reason for their brutality was that they did not want to be perceived as being lenient and so lose their position. Another reason was that slave masters rewarded them for their cruelty." [54]

Charles-Henri, the reader who played the White slave owner Vallentin, enters the cell space next, pulling along with him his Black girlfriend Corinne, who played Sébastien's wife in the play. He reveals that he, again true to the character he played, is indeed a béké (the descendant of the original White landowners), and a rich owner of businesses in his own right. But he insists he is not answerable for the social hierarchy. He was born into an already segregated world. He finds fault only in having fallen in love with Corinne while he is already married and a father, and therefore, unable to marry her. He assumes responsibility for having put himself in a cell of lies and renunciation.

For her part, Corinne is repulsed by his confession. Though some of those gathered knew about the illicit nature of their relationship, she feels that he stripped her

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[53] Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 139.
[54] Ibid., 141–42.

of the pleasure of being his legitimate companion that evening. She lambasts Madeleine for initiating this farce simply because her love for Réville is unrequited. In the end, she reveals that she is one of Charles-Henri's employees as well as his mistress. She has five children by five different men and despite her work, she has to take public assistance. She becomes enraged at what she considers the group's disdain for her. Feeling stifled, she beats on the apartment door to try to exit. When unsuccessful, she dramatically straddles the balcony railing, threatening to jump until Charles-Henri helps her down. Réville states sourly, "Perhaps that's the problem. We no longer have the strength to invent ourselves individually or collectively. Too much hate, too much anger." (62)

Henri, the reader who played the old slave Jacob, also enters the cell but refuses to be smeared with blood or to drink from the cup. As his "confession," he recites by heart articles from the Code Noir (the 1615 royal edict regulating the treatment of slaves in the French colonies). Locked in the past, encapsulated by the dictates of a historical status that he sees as pervasive, and unrelenting, Henri seems to have no self to reveal. Instead he recites the edict in the persona of King Louis XIV, insisting that it is in the recognition of their immutable origins as slaves that their quest for freedom must begin. He terms Madeleine's efforts as a masquerade.

Finally, still refusing Madeleine's insistence that he enter the cell, Réville instead goads her to reveal herself. Madeleine picks up a mask used earlier by Réville to make the distinction between his role as Réville, the son and his role as Sébastien, the father. The only character in the play whose name is the same as her fictional character, she asks him which identity he wishes her to reveal. Putting on the mask she becomes the historical Madeleine who was, in fact, the actual poisoner who then let her brother die for

the consequences of her actions. Removing the mask, she asks if he would instead prefer to see the Madeleine who is hopelessly, obstinately in love with him? Having lived so long in a cell built of denial and ignorance, of "assassinated dreams," of an "empty womb," she barely knows who she is. Throwing the mask at Réville, she renounces her project of redemption through self-revelation. Instead she eloquently bemoans the inability to recapture the lived reality of the past:

> We know nothing of slavery; it is too far away. We have forgotten. That era no longer marks our flesh and our spirits. What do we know about slavery? What can we know?...We have heard the slaves though, in their narratives, but I do not get to where I can see them. They are too far in the past. I cannot feel their wound, their sorrow….Have I inherited this sorrow? The sorrow that I feel, the tiny sorrow from love's disappointment? I am ashamed. And I'm afraid too. Sometimes I sense, I hear. The land speaks to me. But I refuse this talk. I am afraid of this talk. It is the talk of those who are crazy…the word of those who have died and walk the earth….I am afraid that in listening to this talk that I feel in my gut, that I will become crazy. (66)

But is she as distant from the past as she believes? With what we now know about the intergenerational transmission of trauma, through fragments of memories, through themes that set up family and cultural mores, even through as yet not fully explored epigenetic changes, she may be, in ways she cannot completely fathom, truly haunted by the ghosts of the past.

It is at this point that Henri blurts out his amazement at the power of the text to touch so deeply. We now learn that he provocatively started Réville on his journey into the past by giving him the historical report of the court proceedings that inspired Réville to write his play. But now he wonders about the wisdom of his actions and he agrees with Madeleine that Réville must reveal his true name. When Réville still refuses, Madeleine beseeches him to say his name and his fault so that his father will stop haunting him. But it is not only Madeleine and Henri who know Réville's identity. Olivier does also and

when he threatens to reveal it, Réville becomes enraged, and attacks him, quickly menacing him with the knife Madeleine had used to cut her hand.

Réville's rage may also be read as symptomatic of what Leary posits as Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome's ever-present anger. Says Joy DeGruy Leary,

> Even when we're producing quality work, laughing with our friends or enjoying time with our family, anger rarely is far away….This seems to be especially true for many black men. This ever-present anger is one of the most pronounced behavior patterns associated with Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.[55]

In the fray, Madeleine grabs the knife and to everyone's alarm, she points it at her own stomach. In despair she realizes she has not been successful in effecting her loftier vision of helping the group members, particularly Réville, to purge themselves of their slave past; nor has she been able to open Réville to her love. She cries out to him that she had hoped "we could avow our fears, our choices, our ignorances, our faults, also, our weaknesses, our hatreds and be capable of being together in an intelligent bond that would transcend the desire of the flesh" (72).

Failing in both of her objectives, and yet still unable to purge herself of her obsession for Réville, she resignedly reveals his true name as Sébastien, an actual descendant of the Sébastien in the play. Then she rebukes him, saying:

> This name, this death, you carry like a cross…like a martyr, a man perpetually condemned to a silent memory. You repeat the words of the slaves on the stage, but you do no better than Henri who can recite the Code Noir to us by heart. Your cell is the incapacity to transcend your grief. The death of your father, the miserable life of your father, the name of your father. You cannot pardon him. You cannot pardon him for what he was. And you do not pardon yourself either for what you are and for having condemned your own father. (71)

Réville/Sébastien is deeply ashamed of his forebear. He believes his namesake was an acquiescent, complacent, "good nigger." He would have preferred that he had been a 'neg marron,' a Black maroon, or at least someone like the son Réville who bore the signs of

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[55] Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* 134.

his rebellion in the scars on his back. But to be named after someone who was the "best slave in the slave gang" and one who had the best garden, is a mark that weighs heavily on the playwright.

Perhaps Réville/Sébastien would benefit from the perspective of some contemporary historians, who take a much broader perspective regarding the nature of slave resistance. Guadeloupean historian Josette Fallope states:

> It seems indispensible to us…to enlarge the concept of resistance to include all actions of opposition as well as the system of defense worked out in front of aggression, from the most natural, or even unconscious, to the most deliberate and active.[56]

What Réville/Sébastien does not recognize is that while the Saturday garden, at which his namesake excelled, was initiated by planters to side-step the regulations regarding their obligations for providing foodstuffs for their slaves, many of the slaves took to this provision as a means of having a day of freedom, of independence, in which they could work for themselves without supervision. When planters wavered in favor of the old system of supplying food to their slaves, the slaves insisted on having the Saturday garden and the free time to work it. Many raised not only enough vegetables to support themselves, but also to sell at market. They also raised livestock, sometimes substantial herds, including cows and horses. Slaves also made income from cutting wood and making charcoal for sale, fishing, and hiring themselves out on their free days. Through these means and other skills**,** "it is certain that slaves…were able to accumulate

[56] Josette Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens: Les noirs à la Guadeloupe aux XIX^e^ Siècle* (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe: Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe, 1992), 12.

substantial sums of cash as well as other property." Some slaves even hired other slaves and freedmen to work their gardens. [57]

The free-time for Saturday gardens was eventually made into law, thereby effectively inhibiting the power of the plantation owner in that the

> amount of labor time at the disposition of the planter was frozen, and the slaves acquired a means of resisting the intensification of work at the very moment that the transformation of the world sugar market demanded higher levels of productivity and greater exploitation of labor from French West Indian planters….[Moreover], acquisition of skills and property and the establishment of economic and social networks enabled the enslaved to realize important material and psychological gains. The slaves thus began to fashion an alternative way of life that played an important role not only in eroding the slave regime but also informing a transition to a new society.[58]

But the working of the Saturday garden seldom resulted in amassing enough money to buy freedom, which in any case Madeleine has already denounced in favor of taking freedom back forcibly. So neither Réville/Sébastien nor Madeleine sees resistance in the historical Sébastien's life as a slave. Madeleine condemns him soundly, seeing in his example only capitulation to a repressive society, similar to her perception of her own existence.

Now dispirited, she reminds Réville that he once said to her that probably the only way to exit a tragedy is through death. She tells him that she had wanted to believe that love would save them from tragedy. As Réville/Sébastien still stands motionless outside the cell, Madeleine loses all hope and plunges the knife into her stomach, It is only as she falls that Réville/Sébastien and the others break free of their inertia and enter the circle to try to save her.

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[57] Dale W. Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World Economy, 1830-1848*. Johns Hopkins Studies in Atlantic History and Culture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 278.

[58] Ibid., 279.

In *Le cachot*, Gilda Gonfier presents us with two complex characters: Réville/Sébastien and Madeleine. Réville/Sébastien, in a state of post-slave trauma, completely transposes the identity of two of his nineteenth-century forebears upon his current existence through a collapsing of time facilitated by Gonfier's astute use of the play-within-a-play convention supported visually by a set that becomes a cell within a cell. Thus, Gonfier presents us with a contemporary character who, in many ways, is suffering from the symptoms displayed by the second generation of the survivors of trauma: depression, mourning, shame, emotional distance, and a need to fill in the 'hole' of history. As did many of the second generation of survivors of the Holocaust, Réville/Sébastien tries to use art to unpack his depression, his mourning, and his sense of shame. However, he does not use the facts of his history as metaphor for a re-creation but merely as a reiteration of the events as reported at the 1842 trial and thus he feels a keen sense of disappointment at his lack of a sense of redemption or even resolution. At the end of the process, he is no more able to connect to Madeleine, or his other friends and acquaintances, than he was at the beginning of the reading of his play. As Maryse Condé points out: "Of course you have to know your past, but you also have to integrate it into your present."[59]

Madeleine, for her part, tries intuitively to break Sébastien and the rest of the participants from the grips of post-traumatic slave syndrome and also to heal her love relationship by improvising a ritual that will break open the conspiracy of silence and start the process of healing. She seems to know what Tamar Soshan and others have discovered about post-traumatic stress among the children of Holocaust survivors:

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[59] Françoise Pfaff, *Conversations with Maryse Condé* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 95.

> Interpersonal support and unconditional acceptance may create the necessary frame for recognition of a self that can differentiate itself from the parents' oppressive past, thus allowing the delayed process of individuation and separation.[60]

However, the characters in *Le cachot* are not ready to bare their souls or even to state their names and their faults. Madeleine's project fails because those who enter the cell choose only to recite lifeless distant text or cast recriminations at one another. They remain mired in and immobilized by the past. No one undertook the processes of recognition and mourning that liberation from post-traumatic syndromes require. As Gilda Gonfier states in an afterword to the play: "Our slave past, sealed by a silent memory, is a cell from which we cannot liberate ourselves except through the work of mourning" (75). Perhaps only Madeleine's final desperate act of despair and self-sacrifice brings everyone into the cell in a state of emotional availability and mourning from which their own liberation may have begun.

Ti-Jean and Post Traumatic Numbing and Beserking

While I will discuss Ina Césaire's folkloric dramatization *L'enfant des passages ou La geste de Ti-Jean* (The child of passageways or the adventure of Ti-Jean) in fuller detail in chapter 5, there are aspects of the play that require at least passing mention in this chapter on the dramatization of clinical aspects of post-traumatic slave syndrome. *L'enfant des passages…* recounts the adventures of Yinyin and his younger brother Ti-Jean (Creole for Little John) who, having lost their mother and their home, set out on a journey that, at least, for Ti-Jean, involves a series of feats of great daring, strength, and cunning, including the outwitting and killing of a seven-headed monster. Although the Ti-Jean stories emanate originally from the folk culture of French medieval peasants—

[60] Tamar Soshan, "Mourning and Longing from Generation to Generation." *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 43:2 (1989), 205.

populations that were no strangers to physical and emotional trauma—they became natural vehicles for the folk expression of the oppressed populations of the French New World. As Évelyne Voldeng points out in her cross-cultural study of the Ti-Jean fable: "Ti-Jean does not accept the existing system of legal force, he does not accept the culture regimented by masters, whether they be the king of France, the lord, or the béké, the white colonist of the Antilles.[61]

If we interpret the death of their mother, the instigating trauma suffered by Ti-Jean and Yinyin, as representing the loss of Mother Africa through slavery,[62] then we can perhaps be allowed the liberty of describing some of the behavior of Ti-Jean and his brother as symptomatic of post-traumatic slave syndrome. Perhaps the existence of two brothers might serve as a metaphor for the dissociated mind, a split in the personality, that can occur in a state of post traumatic stress:

> The idea is that, owing to the emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events, the mind is split or dissociated: it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed. As a result, the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience in normal consiousness; instead, she is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories.[63]

Whether we regard them as two sides of a split personality, or as two actual brothers, each character reacts differently to the initial traumatic stressor. In the character descriptions of her play Césaire describes Yinyin, the eldest brother, as a tearful coward who strictly follows societal rules, but who is still capable of a "sudden burst of revolt

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[61] Évelyne Voldeng, Les Mémoires de Ti-Jean: Espace Intercontinental du héros des contes franco-ontariens. Vanier, Ontario: Les Éditions L'Interligne, 1994.

[62] Speaking about Ina Césaire and Simone Schwarz-Bart, Judith Miller says, "[I]n their particular feminist countering of the negative representation of women in 'the Caribbean master texts', they concentrate on building a communal hero/ine and on connecting the Antillean diaspora with the lost but never forgotten *Mother Africa*" (my italics). See Judith Miller, "Caribbean Women Playwrights: Madness, Memory, but Not Melancolia," *Theatre Research International* 23, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 226.

[63] Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2.

against injustice."[64] He reacts to their misfortune by beginning to manifest the post-traumatic symptoms of numbness and depression. He is indecisive, lets his younger brother take control, even when the latter makes rash decisions such as burning down the house the mother left for them as a way of killing a rat that went in it. He is constantly crying, through mourning or fear, and futilely seeks a glass of rum for solace. While Yinyin accompanies Ti-Jean on the beginning of his journey, he abandons him when he becomes truly alarmed and disgusted by Ti-Jean's unjust, cruel and seemingly irrational behavior.

For his part, Ti-Jean is, according to Césaire in the character descriptions, the revolt-type. He is "courageous, cruel, and insolent," a character who "instinctually refuses all societal constraints" (7). In the course of the story, he experiences a suite of nightmarish and wondrous occurrences, but the vigor, daring, and lowered moral compass of his adventurese evoke the hyperarousal or beserking that has historically been identified as a symptom of post-traumatic stress, resulting in particularly devastating or equally redemptive behavior in combat situations. Kirby Farrell elucidates:

> No one can be certain why combat trauma immobilizes one soldier and launches another into a murderous frenzy….'[G]oing out' of his vulnerable mind, the berserker gains access to extraordinary power through central-nervous-system flooding and its psychic analogue, the intoxicating ideation of rage. The killing frenzy can be related to ancient ideas of restoring order or 'getting even' through revenge, of mystically replenishing life through death…and of annihilating death itself through superhuman fury.[65]

Ti-Jean's ruthless killing of Baby Tiger, left in his and Yinyin's care by a too-trusting father, and his equally ungrateful murdering and eating of Brer Tortoise, who had just brought the two boys back to life (despite Yinyin's fervent plea that he not revive Ti-Jean,

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[64] Ina Césaire, *L'enfant des passages ou La geste de Ti-Jean* (Paris: Éditions Caribéennes, 1987), 8. All subsequent references will be in parentheses in the text.

[65] Farrell, *Post-traumatic Culture*, 289.

again suggestive of a split personality), provide fictional depiction of destructive hyperarousal. However Ti-Jean's killing fury or beserking that destroys the previously unvanquishable Beast with Seven Heads and frees the kingdom and Ti-Jean himself from a life of eternal darkness illustrates that aspect of beserking that has been characterized as "mystically replenishing life through death." And similar to our twenty-first century filmic anti-heroes, in the end, Ti-Jean wins the hand of the princess in marriage, and becomes heir to the kingdom, despite his earlier misdeeds. Soon thereafter Yinyin arrives at the castle. Ti-Jean asks him what happened to him. Having just followed Ti-Jean through his incredible adventures, the audience expects to hear the same for Yinyin. But instead, Yinyin responds: "Nothing happened to me. Nothing ever happens to me. I walked and I arrived here." Processing the trauma in a completely different fashion, the depressed and numb Yinyin finds the trip uneventful—not one bump in the road. For him, happiness consists simply of finally being served a glass of rum, the palliative he has craved throughout the play (115). As Kirby Farrell states:

> The variety of post-traumatic suffering makes clear how capacious a concept trauma can be. Symptoms may range from paralysis to frantic, disorganizing action…. Numbness or depression may constrict feeling, or hyperalertness may produce impulses to aggression, startle responses, panic reactions, and a feeling of losing control….Dissociative and personality disorders may be attributed to the catastrophic event, as may neurotic conditions, atypical psychoses, and many impulse-control and substance-abuse disorders.[66]

Conclusion

While memories of slave trauma may bubble to the surface in quite a few of the plays in my study, these three plays give the most direct depiction of some of the violations connected to slavery and how those traumas still manifest in current society, in

[66] Ibid., 6

family memories, and in folklore. In *Le cachot*, Gilda Gonfier has demonstrated a full-blown example of what Dominick LaCapra has called "acting out":

> [I]n trauma and in post-traumatic acting out…one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes—scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop. In acting out, tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene.[67]

Despite her efforts, Madeleine is never able to guide Réville/Sébastien to the working through of this trauma because as LaCapra continues,

> to the extent one works through trauma…one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or one's people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future.[68]

However, through the silent reminiscences of Aure and Hermance in *Island Memories*, a working through does occur and the characters find connection despite a painful legacy. Even Ti-Jean in Ina Césaire's fable *L'enfant des passages ou La geste de Ti-Jean* overcomes the nightmares of his past trauma.

[67] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 21

[68] Ibid., 22.

CHAPTER 4

"WHITEN THE RACE": THE DEPICTION OF A COMPLEX COLOR/CLASS HIERARCHY

One of the most recognizable means of transmitting the effects of trauma is through the socialization process.[1] The experiences of prior generations are transmitted informally through the family and community as life lessons, mores, values, codes of behavior, and more formally through the larger society's educational institutions. An easily identifiable residue of the slavery era that has been incorporated into the socialization of many descendants of slaves in the Americas, including the Caribbean, is color racism and a class hierarchizing based on skin color.

The impact of color racism or colorism in the Francophone Caribbean was clearly articulated decades ago by Frantz Fanon, Martinican psychiatrist, anti-colonial activist, and the author of two masterpieces: *Peau noire, masques blancs (Black Skin, White Masks*), published in 1952; and *Les damnés de la terre* (*Wretched of the Earth*), published in 1961. *Peau noire, masques blancs,* in particular, is an impassioned exposé of the effect of White racial hegemony on the psyche of the Black Francophone Caribbean, with pertinent wider implications for other formerly enslaved peoples of the African Diaspora. Focusing on formal socialization at the site of educational institutions as well as in the family, Fanon states:

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[1] See Joy DeGruy Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (Milwaukie, OR: Uptone Press, 2005), 138–143; Nanette C.Auerhahn and Dori Laub, "Intergenerational Memory of the Holocaust," in *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma,* ed. Yael Danieli (New York: Plenum Press, 1998), 21 –41.

> In the Antilles, the black schoolboy who is constantly asked to recite "our ancestors the Gauls" identifies himself with the explorer, the civilizing colonizer, the white man who brings truth to the savages, a lily-white truth….[A] way of thinking and seeing that is basically white, forms and crystallizes in the young Antillean….The fact is that the Antillean does not see himself as Negro;…The Negro lives in Africa. Subjectively and intellectually the Antillean behaves like a white man. But in fact he is a black man. He'll realize that once he gets to Europe, and when he hears Europeans mention 'Negroes,' he'll know they're talking about him as well as the Senegalese.[2]

A decade and a half later, co-authors Guadeloupean Simone Schwarz-Bart and her French husband, André Schwarz-Bart in their 1967 novel *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (A Dish of Pork with Green Bananas) described the color hierarchy as a "ladder of contempt that towers over the island like a tower of Babel slowly piled up by centuries of oppression and crime." One of the characters in their novel sarcastically states:

> [T]he White despises the Octoroon, who despises the Quadroon, who despises the Mulatto, who despises the Câpre, who despises the Zambo, who despises the Black man, who despises the Black woman, who despises the East Indian man, who despises the East Indian woman who…slaps her dog.[3]

Echoing and confirming the existence of this hierarchy still some forty years later, Josette Fallope notes in her extensive 1992 historical study, *Esclaves et citoyens* that

> the racist ideology of the Creole white is internalized by the other racial categories in an ideology "of color" which reflects stereotypes and racial myths from top to bottom of the socio-racial ladder. The White discriminates against the mulatto, who discriminates against the black, who discriminates against the Congo, who discriminates against the East Indian, the last two groups having been introduced into the Antillean society after 1848, to replace the former Black slave on the sugar plantation.[4]

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[2] Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox. (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 126–27.

[3] Simone Schwarz-Bart and André Schwarz-Bart, *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 123.

[4] Josette Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens: Les noirs á la Guadeloupe aux xix^{e} siècle* (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe: Socie̲te d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe, 1992), 479.

Writing as recently as 2003, Wendy Goolcharan-Kumeta continues to cite the myriad terms commonly used to categorize French Caribbean women, according to the variations of their skin-tones and hair textures:

> *Négresse*, a black woman; *Mulâtresse*, a woman with light brown skin and usually curly hair whose parents are either a white man and a black woman or vice versa; *Chabine*, woman with light skin and curly, frizzy hair, *Câpresse*: woman with dark skin and long hair whose parents are either a mulatto man and a black woman or vice versa; *Sapotille* is a fruit of a light brown colour; *Acajou* is the color of mahogany. Both terms denote complexions of such descriptions.[5]

With such a strong color awareness ingrained in these French Caribbean societies it is little wonder that the theatre of their women playwrights would reflect this colorism as well. Indeed, in my sampling there are several plays that reference color prejudice. Of these, I will discuss the following in some detail: Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'Isle: Maman N et Maman F* (*Island Memories: Mama N and Mama F)*; Michèle Montantin's *Le Chemin des Petites Abymes ou Sans amour on n'est rien du tout* (Recursive Lane or without love there's nothing at all); Daniely Francisque's *Crevée viv*e (Buried alive); and Suzanne Dracius's *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (Lumina Sophie aka Surprise). While all of these plays identify and often deplore the existence of colorism, only one, *Lumina Sophie Dite Surprise,* forcefully denounces it. On a somewhat lighter noter, the final play I will discuss in this section is Ina Césaire's "La lettre d'affranchissement" (The letter of emancipation), a dramatic fable that perhaps most clearly depicts how the internecine prejudices among people of color provide a squabbling distraction, a diversion of energy that could be better used against the White power structure that actually dominates and oppresses all of them.

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[5] Wendy Goolcharan-Kumeta, *My Mother, My Country : Reconstructing the Female Self in Guadeloupean Women's Writing*, Modern French Identities (New York: P. Lang, 2003), 15n9. Italics in the original.

The Black Shadow

Modern psychology has discovered that the denigration of blackness runs deep and is embedded even on the level of the subconscious. Carl Jung asserts that the White ego subconsciously uses the Black body as a "shadow" upon which the White ego can project all that it deems unacceptable in its own constitution. Frantz Fanon explains:

> In the remotest depth of the European unconscious an inordinately black hollow has been made in which the most immoral impulses, the most shameful desires lie dormant. And as every man climbs up toward whiteness and light, the European has tried to repudiate this uncivilized self, which has attempted to defend itself. When European civilization came into contact with the black world, with those savage peoples, everyone agreed: Those Negroes were the principle of evil...In Europe, the Negro has one function: that of symbolizing the lower emotions, the baser inclinations, the dark side of the soul.[6]

Psychotherapist Michael Vannoy Adams further explains that in a Eurocentric system of oppositional "either/or" thinking bolstered by Judeo-Christian beliefs, the color white is associated with all that is good, clean, civilized, and superior, and consequently all that is black is perceived as the polar opposite: evil, dirty, primitive, and inferior. Adams quotes Emil Gutheil, a Freudian analyst who states that White racists “are talking about their own id drives,” which, Adams concludes, “they unconsciously project onto [Black people]."[7] Therefore, just by dint of their skin pigmentation, people of African descent automatically accrue all the negative attributes the White psyche has associated with the color black.

For the Black Creole who has been socialized as a French person, the problem is exacerbated. Fanon explains: "Since I realize that the black man is the symbol of sin, I

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[6] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 190.

[7] Michael Vannoy Adams, *The Multicultural Imagination: "Race," Color, and the Unconscious* (London: Routledge, 1996), 136.

start hating the black man. But I realize that I am a black man."[8] He further illustrates the extent to which the hatred of blackness and, by extension, Black people, and their association with evil, or the dark side of life permeate popular thinking: "In Martinique, which is a European country in its collective unconscious, when a jet-black person pays you a visit, the reaction is: 'What misfortune brings him?'"[9]

How can the Black psyche deflect such wrenching self-denigration? Kwame Anthony Appiah asserts:

> Black children raised within the racist cultural assumptions of the colonial system, can partially resolve the tension between contempt for blackness and their own dark skins by coming to think of themselves, in some sense, as white.[10]

While this desire for Whiteness often plays out over generations, some more fragile personalities seek to achieve it in their immediate lives. One of the clearest instances of the desire to whiten features in the here and now among the plays I have read occurs in *Crevée vive* (Buried alive), a one-woman play by Daniely Francesque that was read as part of the 2006 Textes en Paroles season. Reminiscent of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, a young girl who yearns for Whiteness, recounts that she

> [w]anted to have blue eyes and free-flowing curls like the girls at school. Wanted to have transparent skin, to become invisible, like the others. So I stuck my tongue to the window, fixed my eyes on the dull sun, without blinking my eyelids, so that it would cook them into sky blue. And then with a leap from the window to my mirror, I went to see if they had transformed into blue. There were bubbles that danced in my eyes. Of all colors. Magic bubbles that transformed the color of my eyes. Then, I closed them under my eyelids, so that they would not escape. Especially the blue ones.[11]

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[8] Fanon, *Black Skin* (2008), 174.
[9] Ibid., 167.
[10] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Foreword," in Fanon, *Black Skin* (2008), ix.
[11] Daniely Francisque, *Crevée vive*, unpublished manuscript (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe: Textes en Paroles Collection, 2006), 10. All subsequent references to the play will be in parentheses in the text.

Privileging Whiteness and internalizing the racist White gaze and discourse, the Black Creole further cripples himself through self-hatred. Gilda Gonfier references this phenomenon in *Le cachot* through the character of Olivier, a Black man who plays the overseer, a role he prefers to that of the victim Sébastien, because, he says, "[i]n the end, perhaps it is the whip that will make us advance." Although he grew up in the ghetto, and worked his way up to owning and running his own security alarm business, when he steps into the truth-telling cell drawn by Madeleine, he confesses: "My fault is to hate the Black man, to hate my own people."[12] Completely alienated from other Black people by his self-hatred and equally estranged from Whites, particularly politicians, bankers, and bureaucrats, he inhabits a space of disengagement and bitterness.

"Scientific" Racism Fuels the Flame

That color racism and self-hatred runs deeply in this society is of little wonder. After two hundred years of a racist slave system where the majority of the dark-skinned masses occupied the lowest ranks of slavery, where the mixed-race often had a position of greater social status and privilege, and the Whites had an undisputed position of dominance, color-informed class prejudice was deeply ingrained by the time of emancipation. To make matters worse, as the pressure to end the slave trade and to emancipate Blacks increased, pro-slavery forces and White people whose position of privilege was being threatened latched onto the perhaps not totally coincidental rise in scientific studies on the races of man. Presumed "scientific" proof of the inherent inferiority of the Black race would become a powerful weapon in the arsenal of those

[12] Gilda Gonfier, *Le cachot*, unpublished manuscript (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe: Textes en Paroles Collection, 2009), 57.

who favored the continuation of slavery or of those who sought to limit the social advancement of people of color following emancipation.

The sparks of scientific racism first began to take hold in 1735 when Carl Linneaus published *The System of Nature* in which he proposed a categorization of humanity into five major categories, each with defining skin color and personality traits: the Americanus, the Asiaticus, the Africanus, the Europeanus, and an ill-defined fifth category for the "wild man." In his work, Africans were described as "black. phlegmatic. relaxed." *Hair* black, frizzled. *Skin* silky. *Nose* flat. *Lips* tumid." Although he does not mention the female of any other of the species, he does mention the African woman whose "breasts give milk abundantly."[13] He went on to further describe Africans as "[*c]rafty,* indolent, negligent." Then, instead of wearing clothing, Linneaus proposed that the African "anoints himself with grease." Finally, he stated that the Black man was "governed by caprice." By contrast, Europeans were "white, sanguine, brawny. *Hair* abundantly flowing. *Eyes* blue. *Gentle,* acute, inventive." He described them as "*[c]overed* with close vestments" [as opposed to loose vestments worn by Asians] and "*[g]overned* by laws [customs]."[14]

The prospect of a "scientific" basis for racism began to fuel European writing and beliefs. Even Enlightenment philosopher Montesquieu grappled with the interplay

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[13] One of the worst examples of this scientific racism was the exploitation of a 19th century South African Khoikhoi woman, Sartje Baartman, whose body was exploited by profiteers and medical scientists as an "object of curiosity" while living and whose genitals and other body parts were preserved and put on display in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris upon her death. Nelson Mandela's post-apartheid South African government petitioned the French government to return her remains in 1994. She was finally returned for proper burial in 2002. See Chris McGreal, "Coming Home," *The Guardian*, 21 February 2002, http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2002/ feb/21/ internationaleducationnews.highereducation (accessed 21 May 2010).

[14] Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812* (New York: Norton, 1968), 221, 220.

between race, evolution, and climate in his 1748 anonymous work *Spirit of Laws*,[15] all while advocating the cessation of the slave trade. During the early nineteenth century, French abolitionist Abbé Henri Grégoire countered the emerging claims of "scientific racism" when he wrote compellingly of "the intelligence and intellectual achievement of Negroes" in his 1808 work, *De la littérature des nègres*.[16] Yet, even some of the main proponents of emancipation, such as Victor Schoelcher, writing in the 1830s and 1840s, still viewed the slaves as Others, and as lesser human beings.

> Lets remember that it is very uncommon for Blacks to marry legally, for the simple reason that marriage would impede the disorders in which they are used to indulging, or rather, because they are deprived of all knowledge of social principles, and incapable of raising their slave thinking to the moral level of this formality, they abandon themselves to cohabitation as the most natural state.[17]

When abolition and emancipation became realities, and the prospect of social equality between Whites and Blacks became a possibility, proponents of "scientific racism" attempted to erect immutable biological barriers. Within five years after the emancipation of slaves in the French colonies, French aristocrat, diplomat and self-made ethnologist Joseph Arthur Gobineau published a four-volume work, *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, between 1853 and 1855 in which he established "a hierarchy of civilization founded on the notion of race where Aryans—the Whites—occupied the summit and Blacks the base." In this highly influential work, he also condemned

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[15] Montesquieu stated, "There are countries where the excess of heat enervates the body, and renders men so slothful and dispirited that nothing but the fear of chastisement can oblige them to perform any laborious duty; slavery there is more reconcilable to reason." See Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat, baron de, *The Spirit of Laws*, Book 15, sec. 7, trans. Thomas Nugent (New York: Hafner Publishing , 1949), 240.

[16] Doris Y. Kadish, "Translation in Context," in *Translating Slavery: Gender and Race in French Women's Writing, 1783 –1823*, ed. Doris Y. Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994), 43.

[17] Victor Schoelcher and Emile Tersen. *Esclavage et colonisation*. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948), 60–61.

miscegenation as a "cause of physical and cultural degeneration."[18] He believed that "[t]he white race originally possessed the monopoly of beauty, intelligence, and strength. By its union with other varieties, hybrids were created, which were beautiful without strength, strong without intelligence, or, if intelligent, both weak and ugly." He concluded that history "shows us that all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help."[19]

Similarly, French criminologist Dr. A. Corre wrote in 1889 that "[t]he Creole Black has improved [from the Black African] but has not at all ceased from belonging to his race and this race is not adaptable to the same social conditions as the Aryan."[20] He went on to accuse Blacks of being mentally underdeveloped "because of incomplete cerebration."[21]

Ultimately, no matter the lens used, the underlying conclusion for most of the thinkers of the mid to late nineteenth century was that the White man and White civilization represented the zenith of human qualities and accomplishments. By contrast, Black Africans were seen as a failed race that had contributed nothing to world civilization. Africans were also termed barbarians who performed ritual deaths and practiced cannibalism. Even as late as 1890, referring to the African migrant workers who came to Martinique and Guadeloupe to replenish the workforce following the emancipation of Creole Blacks, sociologist Charles Mismer warned the authorities that

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[18] Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 472.

[19] Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, Trans. Adrian Collins (New York: Howard Fertig, 1967), 209, 210.

[20] A. Corre, *Nos créoles* (Paris: A. Savine, 1890), 38; quoted in Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 475.

[21] A. Corre, *Le crime en pays créole. Esquisse d'ethnographie criminelle*, (Lyons: A. Storck, 1889), 124; quoted in Fallope, *Esclaves et Citoyens*, 475.

"Africans used to human flesh never lose the taste for it. They prefer it to pork."[22]

Lactification

Faced with the massive denigration of Blackness on psychological, sociological and economic levels, it is little wonder that people descended from African slaves sought to distance themselve from Africa and Blackness. If Whites created two opposite poles— Whiteness and Blackness— the people of color in Guadeloupe and Martinique erected a racial ladder between the two poles, with each rung up from pure Blackness characterized by physical features that more and more closely resembled those of the Whites. The means of climbing the ladder involved a debilitating form of racist socialization known as "lactification" or "whitening the race," that further fractured the Black Creole population.

> In solidifying sexual relations with a White man, the woman of color desires to whiten her descendants, and consequently to climb the steps of the hierarchy of color; it is a matter for the mulatto woman 'of saving the race' by avoiding sexual relations with a Black man or an individual whose skin is darker….The politics of whitening, although revealing a prejudice of racial inferiority on the part of the Black or mixed-race woman proceeds also from a will for social ascension. Sexual relations can be here a channel of vertical social mobility in a society where improvement of the situation depends in part on color. The child born of these relations will enjoy improved conditions in his social position in relation to that of his mother.[23]

While Fanon and even Fallope look at this problem in terms of the Creole woman, scholar Christian Makward remarks that it also involves Creole men. In 1999, she published a monogram, *Mayotte Capécia ou l'Alienation selon Fanon,* in which she analyzes Franz Fanon's particularly virulent and misogynistic critique of Martinican novelist Mayotte Capécia's depiction of female characters enamored of White men. In the course of her research on colorism in the French Antilles for her book, Makward says that

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[22] Charles Mismer, *Souvenirs de la Martinique et du Mezique pendant l'intervention française* (Paris: Hachette, 1890), 52; quoted in Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*,476.

[23] Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 487.

> one of my sources hammered it home in these terms: "The black man compensates by marrying a white woman, it is a real wound! The mulatto never marries a black woman, the black man does not like to see the mulatto, the mulatto despises the black man; the black man prefers the béké [descendants of the white planters] to the mulatto.[24]

Sisters Apart: Colorism in Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'Isle*

The prevalence and severity of color racism becomes evident in the life stories of the two matronly women in Ina Césaire's 1985 two-character play *Island Memories: Mama N and Mama F*. A poignant homage to Césaire's two grandmothers and a composite of their stories and those of other elderly women interviewed by Césaire, the play opens metatheatrically by showing two actresses putting on their make-up. However, they are not dressed as venerable grandmothers but as Carnivalesque she-devils who soon create the world of the Carnival. By having the women dress as Carnivalesque she-devils, Césaire both embraces the folkloric world that has long engaged her interest while simultaneously subverting the misogynistic image of women that is often found there. The She-devils dance the vigorous *vidé* [emptied], a principal dance of the Carnival, followed by some African dance steps, and accompanied by quick spoken repartee about time, the past and memory. This introductory performative frame situates the intimate scene that will soon follow in a swirl of time and culture that extends beyond the three hundred years of the African presence in the Caribbean, back to Africa itself.

In this wonderful overture, the women revel in the Carnival songs and dances known to their audience. Then picking up the thread that will lead to the main body of the play, they proclaim themselves to be "Women outside of time" and "outside of ages." Having danced the *vidé*, they have emptied themselves of time and of age, which they

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[24] Christiane P. Makward, *Mayotte Capécia ou l'Alienation selon Fanon* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1999), 44n23.

liken to a *kenep*, a green fruit that is hard on the outside but whose interior is "tender as memories!" Finally they playfully but meaningfully engage concepts of the past: "The past has passed!" "The past has been trespassed….The past has been surpassed" and then teasingly ask, "But has the past passed away?" Finally they announce in unison, "And tomorrow will be different!" but then ironically burst into "uncontrollable laughter."[25] Carole Edwards notes that " [t]his laugh that is forced and rings falsely relates inevitably to the history of slavery lived individually by these two women. In exclaiming '300 years that we dance Carnival' they allude to the subjugation linked to the state of the slave."[26] With the laugh, the "She-devils" once again return to being actresses in the process of preparing to play two new roles, those of two French West Indian grandmothers, Aure and Hermance, brought together by the wedding between Aure's nephew and Hermance's husband's niece.

That the color of the skin plays an important role in *Island Memories* is immediately signaled in Ina Césaire's preface to the play. One of the women, Aure, is described as "a refined mulatto...[b]lue-eyed and light-skinned…[v]ery cultured…a retired schoolteacher. The other Hermance is "a very tall black woman…urban and working-class" (49). Their lives, like the place of their births, are reflected in the choice of names Ina Césaire has chosen for each. Aure, meaning soft air or breeze, reflects her birth in the countryside of southern Martinique on the Caribbean (the leeward or *sous-le-vent*) side of the island. By contrast, Hermance, whose name derives from the feminine of the German name Herman, meaning soldier, lives in the harsher (windward or *au vent)*

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[25] Ina Césaire, "Island Memories: Mama N. and Mama F," in *Plays by French and Francophone Women*, ed. and trans. Christiane P. Makward and Judith Miller (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 50–52. All subsequent references to this play will be in parentheses.

[26] Carole Edwards, *Les Dramaturges Antillaises : Cruauté, Créolité, Conscience Féminine* (Paris: Harmattan, 2008), 87.

landscape of the northern part of the island "by a frenetic sea and the dark volcanic sand surrounding Mount Pelée and its tragic memories" (49). However, the name Hermance also evokes the Spanish word *hermana,* meaning sister, and indeed, these two vastly contrasting women are step-sisters, the offspring of the same father. However, the same seeds planted in different soil often yield dissimilar harvests; likewise, the paths of each of these women through life have greatly diverged.

Although the biological father of these two women only married Aure's mother when Aure was eighteen years old, he seems to have maintained a steady presence in her life. She describes him adoringly. "He was a gentle man…very affable and a good worker, too; he could do anything! And such a handsome man! A fine mulatto, very straight and slender!" In the same sweep of pride she adds that his "natural father was a white man from France, M. Vrigny." She completes her homage to her father saying, "He was very poor, but he enjoyed giving.…He was well loved…revered, you might say!" (54).

But the man known as Papa Bert to Aure is known only as Monsieur Bernus to Hermance, a man her mother pointed out to her as her "real daddy." Bitterly she states, "I wasn't good enough to be acknowledged. My mother wasn't well enough born—not enough of a mulatto to be taken to the altar!" (53). And when Aure rebukes her, saying, "Oh that was such a long time ago, Hermance. And prejudice is so…regrettable….The past shouldn't run in front of the future" (53), Hermance reaches for her cane and calls out for her grandson to come and take her home. His lack of response and her impaired physical state are the only reasons she remains in Aure's presence and the conversation picks up again.

As opposed to Aure's fond memories of her father building their cabin in the woods, Hermance's childhood recollections include the sporadic presence of a migrant worker, a man who had other women (and children) in addition to her mother, and a drunk step-uncle who threatened Hermance's life when she was only nine. Papa Bert was not there to protect his dark-skinned child. Hermance's mother raised her and her step-siblings, seven children in all, on her own. She worked her own garden and lived by taking in sewing. It was a hard life and once Hermance was old enough to learn to sew, she dropped out of grade school to assist her mother. Whereas Aure, with her father present and a mother that she describes as "tiny but very headstrong…with light eyes" (55)—again reifying her human worth through reference to her more Caucasian physical features as well as her personality—finished school and became a teacher.

As the evening conversation continues, it becomes evident that the scourge of colorism did not end in their parents' generation but continued to inform Aure and Hermance's own love and marital relationships. Aure found an adoring husband and had a fairy tale wedding with a white horse, twenty horsemen, and all—but not before her husband-to-be was forced by her parents to disentangle himself from a mistress by whom he already had a child. Insisting to Aure's parents that he had never promised to marry his mistress, he paid for her and their child to disappear to French Guyana in South America or to Panama, so as not to compromise his forthcoming marriage. While Aure may have possessed many worthy attributes that appealed to him, including her education, her skin color again worked to her advantage. Discarded like a piece of junk, his darker-skinned mistress could only bitterly complain about "those educated young mulatto ladies whom men preferred to marry" (67).

Hermance also found a worthy companion, a man who worked for the tax administration. Hermance's mother was very happy about the union but Hermance says that his mother was not. Described by Hermance as "short, very dark" (57), the mother-in-law claimed that she was an African and that her parents came from Mali. We are left to ponder the reason for Hermance's mother-in-law's disaffection. Although her own features might have been African, had she been infected by the Caribbean desire to "lighten the race?" Or in identifying with her African heritage, did she hold disdain for a daughter-in-law who might have been a few shades lighter than herself? Color prejudice can cut both ways, as Maryse Condé made clear in an interview. She stated that her dark-skinned middle-class parents—her schoolteacher mother and her banker father—"wanted to socialize only with Black people. They were racists in their own way, believing, as I said, that mulattoes were bastards and Whites, the enemy."[27]

However, what Hermance does clearly articulate is an incidence of her husband's infidelity, in which the mulatto woman once again plays the spoiler. He ran away to France with a woman Hermance describes in Creole as a "pale-skinned negress." When Hermance asked why he wasn't taking her instead, he disdainfully repulsed her saying, "Rig up a nutshell and follow me if you can!" (66). He left her for six months to take care of their children alone, finally returning, without apologies, with some cash for her and arrogant tales of his grand adventure. Although Hermance relates another instance of his infidelity, this time with the godmother of one of her daughters, she does not mention the woman's skin color. Perhaps skin color that approximates her own is unremarkable; only the darker and especially the lighter skins are worthy of mention.

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[27] Françoise Pfaff, *Conversations with Maryse Condé* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996), 5.

In Black French Caribbean society issues of class and color, emanating from the time of slavery, have fractured or rendered difficult the bond between women, even biological stepsisters, who stand on opposite sides of the color divide. However, the communicating of shared womanly experiences—reminiscences about growing up, getting married, giving birth, relationships with their husbands, struggling through war-times and other hardships—open the possibilities of bridging that gap and building new bonds, as shown by Hermance and Aure, who end the play referring softly to each other other as "dear sister" (74).

Racism, Classism, and Colorism in *Le Chemin des Petites Abymes*

Whereas Ina Césaire explores the life-altering effects of color racism and its concomitant classism on two stepsisters who lived out separate existences in Martinique, Guadeloupean playwright Michèle Montantin places the poison of racism, classism and colorism squarely within the confines of one family and discloses its malignant effects across four generations. Her play *Le Chemin des Petites Abymes* (The Recursive Path) was read as part of the Textes en Paroles 2002 season and remains unpublished. Once again, in this play there are two grandmothers who are central to the plot: Mathilde is White, a Parisian by birth; Eugénie is mulatto, the child of a Black woman and a White plantation owner, who recognized her as his child, and provided for her upbringing and education. Each grandmother jockeys for status in the family based on the values assigned to the variables of race, skin color, and social position. Unlike Aure and Hermance, these two grandmothers are not joined through a common father but by the marriage of their children—Mathilde's daughter and Eugénie's son—and by their mixed-race granddaughter.

As the curtain opens on a garden scene, Eugénie enters running as if trying to escape someone. Though bi-racial, she does not present as the stereotypic light-skinned "mulatto"; instead Montantin describes her as having dark skin and very long hair, more resembling an East Indian. The audience immediately hears the voice of her pursuer calling out to her from the wings. Mathilde, stylishly dressed and still with an air of Parisian sensuality despite her sixty or seventy years of age, soon enters in belabored pursuit. As Eugénie becomes winded, she sits down along the Chemin de Petites Abymes.[28] Mathilde catches up to her and does the same. Their conversation soon reveals a long-enduring antagonistic relationship. Each knows the others Achilles' heel and doesn't hesitate to strike it. Eugénie criticizes Mathilde for her multiple marriages and divorces. Mathilde throws back in her face Eugénie's one enduring marriage that was marred by multiple instances of her husband's infidelities and illegitimate children. A contentious conversation ensues.

In all its outward trappings, the play seems grounded in realism, a domestic drama. Yet, there is something askance. Both women recount vivid dreams and speak of being awakened from their sleep. But by what? Eugénie keeps singing a refrain that is suddenly heard, out of nowhere, sung by the voice of an unseen young girl. As the first scene ends, the women resume their trip up the road to the top of the hill where they hope to get better clarity.

The second scene, however, opens on a little winding street lined with cafés and restaurants in Paris. Eugénie and Mathilde's granddaughter and her parents are present.

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[28] The literal translation is "The Road of Little Chasms" if "abyme" is read as an old spelling of abîme; however, "abyme" is also the word used to describe infinite repetitions such as a picture within a picture within a picture, which led me to choose "The Recursive Path" as a translation that captures the repeated reflections of this family across multiple generations.

These characters are never given proper names and are only known by their relationship: the father, a handsome, smooth Black man who wears blond leather gloves, lined with silk; the mother, described basically by her post-World War II outfit and hat over dyed blonde hair; and the granddaughter, who has straight black hair cut like Joan of Arc or in a Chinese style, and who Montantin describes as being ethnically undefineable to the European gaze: "Chinese, East Indian, Eurasian, Mulatto, no matter, someone who, in the world of whites, carries the mark of the Other."[29] She recounts how in elementary school her classmates would encircle her during recess and call her "a green Chinese girl" at the top of their voices. When she protested, telling them she came from the Antilles, not Asia, they thought she was talking about Africa where, according to them "the Black cannibals lived." She resigned herself to regaling them with stories of exotic animals and tales of cannibals eating human flesh as a way of being accepted (15–17).

The granddaughter is seated on the edge of the stage, with her legs dangling into the audience, rendering uncertain the ever fragile fourth wall. When the two grandmothers descend in swing seats from the rafters, in the manner of deus ex machina, the veneer of realism is completely shattered. In effect, the grandmothers become another audience for the onstage action, and like a recursive picture, the theatre audience is now able to watch an audience watching the play as they themselves are. Also, through the presence of the grandmothers suspended in space the audience soon understands that it is witnessing a dream or spirit world. Unlike Aure and Hermance, these estranged grandmothers were never able to move through their racial and cultural differences to find reconciliation while they were still alive. Instead, they have been summoned by their

[29] Michèle Montantin, *Le chemin des petits abymes*, unpublished manuscript (Basse-Terre: Textes en Paroles Collection, 2002), 1. All subsequent references to this play will be in the text in parentheses.

granddaughter to assuage her mourning for them, to ease her nostalgia for her island home, to give her strength against the cold grayness of Paris, and to provide her with a path in the world.

The familial dialogue on the stage soon reveals the racial, class, and color barriers that made it impossible for Mathilde and Eugénie to establish bonds of sisterhood despite their shared roles as grandmothers. The granddaughter entices her parents into relating the story of their courtship, during which her mother admits that Mathilde did not react well to the news of her relationship with a Black man. She says that Mathilde "did not like Black people! But I told her he is the one I love and if you do not accept him, he is the one I choose and you will never see me again!" (14). Her mother recanted. Eugénie's reaction to her son's choice for a wife is not mentioned but even if she did accept her White daughter-in-law, her antipathy for Mathilde endured throughout their lives.[30]

Mathilde's daughter blames the lack of compatibility between the two women on the gap in education and the difference in their life experiences. Eugénie had had a classic bourgeois Creole Catholic upbringing and has a "self-righteous" air, while Mathilde is more of a free spirit, a modern woman who divorced twice and married three times. Indeed, while racism is one part of the wedge between them, class distinctions and life style is the other. Considering herself high on the racial/social hierarchy because of her

[30] It is interesting to note that at the time period of the play, the 1940s, and even today, this interracial relationship would not have happened in Martinique or Guadeloupe had the mother been a White Creole. The descendants of the White plantation owners guarded the sanctity of their women from sexual involvement with men of color. Even while White men might have dalliances with women of color, as in the days before emancipation, marriage was frowned upon and could lead to ostracism and banishment from the elite White community. Historian Josette Fallope states starkly**:** "A White Creole who marries a Black woman is immediately banned from white society and must, most often, leave the island in order to minimize damage for his family." See Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens*, 488. This seems to be true for the crossing of any color lines. I personally met an elderly Creole White man who owned a stunning home in Guadeloupe but lived in total social isolation from his community because of his marriage to a lovely, caring East Indian woman.

recognized paternity by her upperclass White father, Eugénie is an elitist. Even now, she still enthuses about her White grandparents, who had been named the king and queen of Abymes, an area outside of Guadeloupe's capital, Pointe-à-Pitre. While she never speaks of her Black mother, she chats on about the acres and acres of sugar cane fields, orange and lemon groves, and garden vegetables on her grandparents' estate. Then she speaks of a fairytale process of selecting a husband among many suitors. Tiring of this self-aggrandizement, Mathilde accuses her of embellishing the truth. She reminds her that the competition for her hand was not all that swift and that she had to wait until she was thirty years old before an appropriate suitor appeared. "[D]espite your education Eugénie, no White man wanted to marry the swarthy bastard of an elite White," she scoffs and adds that Eugénie had to settle for "the one who would be the least Black" (26). Although Eugénie denies that it was simply a matter of color, she begins the list of her husband's attributes with his skin color: "he was a light-skinned Black, almost mulatto, with a touch of Chinese" (26). With the disdain of the outsider, Mathilde announces that she "has had enough of thinking about you on this ridiculous island, with all these people who looked at us as if we were from the moon, those of us who were not White creoles, or Blacks or mulattoes and who didn't belong to the family of so and so" (26).

In the midst of the clash between these two women, each of whom is a product of racist and classist socialization, the issue of institutional racist socialization also emerges. The father recounts how one day the granddaughter, then six years old, returned from school and asked, "So, the Gauls are really our ancestors?" He opened her school book and saw printed there information about the first inhabitants of the island, the Carib Indians, and about the French, whose ancestors were the Gauls. There was no mention of

Africans at all. So her father sat her down and informed her about the African presence and about slavery but he also spoke to her about the revolt of Delgrès, telling her, "We were not only slaves, but also fighters." (22).

As the play unfolds and the granddaughter floats up to the grandmothers' level to speak with them directly, we learn that she is having trouble adjusting to their deaths, to her exodus from Guadeloupe, and to her new life in Paris, which she describes as "gray! dirty! sad!" and which still carries an aura of the war. She also complains about the dark gray, leaveless trees of the winter, and the ephemeral summers, whose short duration leaves her anxious. She is also racked by the plight of "all of the beggars on the bridges, all the people who are hungry and cold," whom her father urges her to disregard, as he, following his classist upbringing, has been taught to do (10).

She had begun to seek refuge from this new life in her sleep but recently even there she is tortured with dreams in which she sees herself in chains, feels the pangs of starvation, and experiences rape. In what is almost a classic description of post-traumatic stress disorder flashbacks, it seems her body remembers a trauma that her mind does not consciously know. Most of all, she is horrified that, facing death squarely in the face in these dreams, she chooses life and submits to the rape. In trying to understand what she is experiencing, she intuits that "perhaps my body remembers the time of slavery and I am removing this weight from my body" (32).

At this moment Eugénie reveals, for the first time, that while her father was a White elite, her mother was a pure-blooded African, "blue black," as she describes her. Eugénie remembers the sadness in her eyes, sadness that "made you doubt any joy, even of living." She says her mother had recounted to her the infamous times of slavery and

how some women, "the most savage and the most sweet-tempered," took their lives rather than to continue to submit to the rapes. But others, like herself, "suffered and kept within thermselves the strength to survive despite everything" (33–34). When they gave birth to the products of their rape, her mother continued, again some women, "the most savage and the most sweet-tempered," strangled their babies without shedding tears, while others "mastering their great hatred, had pity on the little beings. They continued to love them until they were ripped from their arms to be sold" (34).

In this passage, Michèle Montantin has astutely created a strikingly imaginative depiction of the "transgenerational transmission of trauma…the notion that children are affected by their parents' posttrauma sequelae,"[31] even when they themselves never witnessed or experienced it. By having the great granddaughter experience the traumatic flashbacks, Montantin also touches on the theory of Pembrey and others in their studies of epigenetics that show that, indeed, the "body" does know [maybe more than we can yet prove]; and that the alterations of epigenes effected by the environment, can be passed down through as many as four generations, as we see in the above scene.

After hearing Eugénie's confession, the granddaughter soberly insists that these slave women should not be forgotten and that she will tell her children and then ask them to tell their children, on and on through the succeeding generations (resonating with the sense of infinity of the recursive picture, suggested by word "abyme" in the title). Not wanting to be left out, Mathilde points out that White women as well as Black have been raped across history, but her instances are somewhat random and pale in comparison. Then she reveals that her parents were what Eugénie disdainfully calls gypsies, but in fact

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[31] Michelle R. Ancharoff, Jasmes F. Munroe, and Lisa M. Fisher, "The Legacy of Combat Trama: Clinical Implications of Intergenerational Transmission," in *Intergenerational Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, ed. Yael Danieli (New York: Plenum Press, 1998), 257.

were owners of a well-to-do circus. There is legacy on both sides. In the end, as the grandmothers are being drawn towards the light of eternity, Mathilde calls to the granddaughter to remember: "Without love, you are nothing at all," while Eugénie advises her granddaughter: "Return to the living, daughter of my son, you carry us within you. No need to call us again" (40). They rise into the light amidst music that fills the theatre. When she can no longer see them, and the lights have subsided, the granddaughter raises her arms as if about to dive and soars into the darkness above, signalling her return to the darkness of night and sleep. After a few seconds, however, her voice is heard:

> Well, they are gone and I am alone.
> And at the exact moment that they separated from me, they entered into my heart, forever reconciled with themselves and I am reconciled with them.
> And I knew that I was standing solidly in the world of the living. (41)

In her play, Michèle Montantin provides a glimpse of the struggles of interracial couples, like her own Parisian mother and Guadeloupean father, who dare to cross the color line, and of their children, who may feel as though they live in a no man's land between the races. In an epilogue to the play, there is a scene between the White mother and the Black father. Though they are merely talking to one another in their bed, Montantin insists that "theatrical distance" be maintained and that the scene be played either behind a curtain of mosquito netting against back-lighting or as figures reflected behind a screen as in shadow puppets. In either case, no clear sightline is permitted. Is this because even today audiences might find this picture of an interracial couple too disturbing? Clearly, from the dialogue between the two parents, in the world of the play, it is their experience that the larger society would not tolerate the sight of their physical proximity:

THE MOTHER: The Whites of your country, they hated imagining us…in bed…together.
THE FATHER: (*laughing furiously)* That made them jealous…that such a beautiful girl was my wife…
THE MOTHER: That really bothered them…even simply to imagine your hand on me.
THE FATHER: I caressed the whiteness of your breasts.
THE MOTHER: What bothered them? That we are husband and wife, lovers? That we pleasure each other?
THE FATHER: No, it's what you said…that my black hand caresses your white skin. Just that. For them, the indecent contrast of black and white….
THE MOTHER: (*laughing*) I love black. It is a beautiful color! (43–44)

Thus it is little wonder that this couple left Guadeloupe soon after their respective mothers passed away. It was an inhospitable climate for them as an interracial couple. But the beauty of their love was affirmed by a loving smile from their daughter who stumbled into their bedroom while her father was caressing "the white" of her mother's breast. It did not shock her. Instead, she looked at them, filled with wonder and took them in with love in her eyes. Then smiling at them, she closed the door. After all, as grandmother Mathilde had said, "without love, you are nothing at all."

In their depictions of color racism and classism in this chapter, each of the playwrights demonstrate their regret about the existence of these prejudices in their society. They show poignantly the personal and social toll this system of color hierarchy takes. But there is a certain air of resignation about them, as if there is little hope of the situation changing: this is just how it is. Aure and Hermance in Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'isle* don't override their social distance until they are elderly when the impact of such a value system has already informed their entire lives; Eugénie and Mathilde in *Le chemin de petites abymes* never overcome their racial antipathies even in death. It is only within the body of their granddaughter that the essence of each woman commingles and reconciliation occurs. These depictions reinforce Maryse Condé's position on the subject:

> Generally, Antilleans consider color prejudices to be a defect suffered by their society, and they feel a certain uneasiness in speaking about it….What is color prejudice but the tenacious reflection of the relationship between the dominant and the dominated, of the exploiter and the exploited….To approach [the White master's] color was already to appropriate his power. What astonishing qualities would have been necessary for the slaves to valorize their own selves and their color. Is it astonishing, is it shocking if they adopted the value system that had been imposed on them?...It seems absurd to us to be ashamed of that aspect of our personality and dangerous to regard as criminals those who cannot yet cure themselves of it. All colonized societies have passed by there.[32]

Lumina Sophie and a Resounding Rebuttal

There is, however, one play where color prejudice is soundly rejected and denounced for the destructive practice that it is: Suzanne Dracius's historical drama *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, which will be discussed more fully in chapter 5. This historical play was commissioned for the Global March for Women in 2000 and subsequently reprised at the Festival of Marin in 2002 and at the opening ceremony of the American Association of Teachers of French held in Martinique in 2003. As a band of female rebels prepare to participate in the Insurrection of 1870 in southern Martinique, the leader, Lumina Sophie, quells an argument between two of her combatants: Simonise, a young woman of East Indian heritage and Rosalie, whom Dracius describes as either a cafre (descendant of slaves from Malagasy) or a chabine (light skin with frizzy hair). When Rosalie insults Simonise, calling her a coolie who eats dogs, Simonise responds that she'd rather be someone who eats dogs than to be the dog itself. Then adding insult to injury she tells Rosalie that she prefers her own long smooth braids to the steel wool on the back side of Rosalie's head. Lumina Sophie explodes. Then mastering her anger she says:

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[32] Maryse Condé, *Le roman antillais*. Classiques Du Monde. Littérature Antillaise, (Paris: F. Nathan, 1977), 1:47.

> We will never get anywhere if we lose time looking at who is a coolie, who is a negress, whose is a mulâtresse or câpresse. We are all women of this country, humans, that alone counts…. As far as being women, we have some rights, but we also have duties…for one, not to disrespect each other, not to throw dead rats in each other's face over skin color comparisons.[33]

Lumina reminds them that while they are squabbling over whose hair is better they are serving the interests of their enemies who, "by setting them against one another," she cautions, "will get rich off of their heads whether they're frizzy or not."[34] This divisive denigration of peers is an aspect of harmful socialization, known as crabs-in-the-barrel behavior, that has endured since slavery. Ina Césaire's dramatic fable *La lettre d'affranchissment* further illustrates the danger about which Lumina warns her troops.

La lettre d'affranchissement: A Crabs in a Barrel Cautionary Tale

Ina Césaire's unpublished cautionary tale, *La lettre d'affranchissement* (The letter of emancipation) was read as part of the Textes en Paroles 2008 season. This children's play reveals how intra-group rivalries can lead to a symptom of racist socialization known as crabs-in-the-barrel, mentioned by Joy DeGruy Leary as behavior that has consistently undermined progress in African-descended communities. It is common knowledge that crabs placed in a barrel will instinctively try to climb to the top to get free, but in their efforts they constantly claw back those who are ahead of them, so that in the end, none escape. This is an apt metaphor for a phenomenon observed in Black societies, whereby even friends and relatives may work to undermine the success of their best and brightest. Leary says part of this is because "[h]istorically, during slavery the promotion of one black person over another usually meant that they would soon use their

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[33] Suzanne Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (Fort-de-France, Martinique: Éditions Desnel, 2005), 25.

[34] Ibid.

newly acquired position to further tyrannize those blacks occupying lesser positions.[35] If those persons who were frequently elevated and privileged were the mixed-race progeny of White plantation owners, as often happened in the Caribbean and in other slave societies, a color-based system of envy and resentment is established. While this behavior, which Leary terms "overseer mentality," can still be seen today in hierarchical work situations, PTSS issues of low or vacant esteem also trigger this type of behavior even in ordinarily more nurturing environments like family or friendship circles. Joy DeGruy Leary says:

> I have noticed that layered between the resentment and envy are issues of fear or panic, coupled with feelings of abandonment and shame. There is a fear of being left behind by the very people who we have embraced as equals….If I believe that black people are inferior and someone who is black is being promoted over me, then I am lower than the lowest.[36]

Several authors reference this phenomenon in passing, such as Gonfier, in *Le cachot* whose character Olivier has pulled himself out of the ghetto only to discover that instead of standing with him, his friends despise him. Yet, few writers have depicted this behavior more fully than Ina Césaire in *La lettre d'affranchissement*.

Césaire opens the play with a storyteller perched on a raft floating in the midst of mangrove trees, which the storyteller establishes as a metaphor for the human condition, likening the futile stretch of the mangrove roots out of the mud towards the sky to humanity's engulfment in the mire of disagreement, strife, and jealousy. The storyteller then provides the background for the story, reminding the audience of the evolutionary

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[35] Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 166–67.
[36] Ibid., 166.

links between animals and humans, and adding, "If you think about it, you could assert that currently things have not changed so much!"[37]

The storyteller then introduces three comrades from long ago, "from a time we hope has passed" he says, "the era of slavery" (2). While all three characters are house slaves, they have Creole animal names that represent their core character traits: Mizo [here is the bone] is the planter's valet, who is as faithful as a dog; Ziéshat [the cat's eye] is the hunter for the planter, providing the game the planter loves to eat; and Ratiè [rat-trap], is the bookkeeper of the plantation in charge of settling the accounts and overseeing the food supplies (2n1–3). When these characters sink into their baser emotions and actions, however, they metamorphose into the animals whose traits they possess.

The harmony between these three friends is disrupted when Mizo arrives, gleefully announcing that the master has emancipated him as a result of an incident at dinner during which the master would have died from choking had Mizo not reached into his throat and retrieved the bone. Mizo compassionately recognizes that he has done no less than Ziéshat who had saved the entire plantation's population by forewarning them of the century's worst hurricane so everyone was sheltered and safe. For this the master had given Ziéshat a demi-john bottle of aged rum. Likewise, Raziè organized a slave work force to put out a fire that threatened to destroy the plantation storehouse, a large building where everything necessary to sustain life on the plantation was stored from sugar, and flour, to the linen. For his efforts, the master had merely shook his hand and called him "a good Negro." While Zièshat is able to celebrate his friend's good fortune, Raziè is bitter. As a consequence, when Mizo leaves his letter of emancipation in the safe-keeping of

[37] Ina Césaire, *La lettre d'affranchissement*, unpublished manuscript (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe: Textes en Paroles Collection, 2008), 2. Subsequent references to the play will be in parentheses.

Zièshat following a night of drinking and celebrating, Raziè eats it up. When Mizo returns the next day ready to take his letter to the governor for endorsement, the final necessary step for official emancipation, it cannot be found anywhere. Thinking Zièshat has stolen it, the storyteller informs us that "Mizo, forgetting all humanity, rediscovers his animal essence and throws himself, with claws extended and drooling at the mouth on his friend, who, undergoing an identical transformation, feels each hair of his body stand on end" (11). The dog and the cat become the sworn enemies they remain today. Meanwhile, Raziè content with his handiwork, sips some rum and then also transforms into a rat. When Zièshat, now the cat, returns and sees Raziè, now the rat, eating some of their playing cards, he realizes what has happened to the letter and pounces on him, grabbing him by the throat. He angrily warns the rat not to come within his sight from this day forth, or he will make his life a living hell. The rat squiggles free and runs for his life with the cat in hot pursuit. The storyteller then ends the play by saying, "It is since this fateful day that the enmity and hatred have replaced their former friendship….And as long as they [hate one another] those three fellows are still slaves!" (13)

Conclusion

Racist socialization based upon the complex values of color and class emanating from the days of slavery has resulted in a color-coded social hierarchy that still seems to influence social and economic life in Guadeloupe and Martinique. Its presence is referenced in some way in most of the plays in my study. While the authors depict it, and deplore it, it is a subject that is approached gingerly, even wistfully, but, with the exception of Suzanne Dracius's *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, seldom with condemnation. Yet, these dynamic societies have seen some progress in this area. In 1996,

Guadeloupean novelist and playwright Maryse Condé optimistically insisted that "the issue of color has lost much of its significance as Guadeloupean society moves toward racial harmony." But then, recognizing the enduring impact of years of such prejudice, she added, "However, let's not minimize the color question, because Blacks still constitute the majority of the poor."[38] Also, in 1999, scholar Christiane Makward published a monograph, *Mayotte Capécia ou l'Alienation selon Fanon*, in which she analyzes Franz Fanon's particularly virulent and misogynistic critique of Martinican novelist Mayotte Capécia who depicted female characters enamored of White men and in the throes of what Fanon termed 'lactification' or the obsessive desire to whiten the race. She still concluded in that work that miscegenation "has never ceased from being a fundamental reality of the Antilles and the primary basis for social mobility."[39]

[38] Pfaff, *Conversations*, 70.
[39] Makward, *Mayotte Capécia*, 214.

CHAPTER 5

PATRIARCHAL PREROGATIVES, RELUCTANT MATRIFOCALITY

In the previous chapter, I explored the phenomenon of color racism and classism, which emanated from the institution of slavery and was propagated across the generations by means of racist socialization. As difficult as color classism made interpersonal relationships among the African-descended Creoles of the Caribbean, even more debilitating was the slave institution's practice of systematically destroying the sanctity of the slave body and of familial bonds among the slave population. Rape of slave women was a regular practice. It was not only, or even primarily, an act of passion, but, just as in many of our contemporary ethnic conflicts, it was also an act of terrorism.

> The rape of slave women by their masters was primarily a weapon of terror that reinforced whites' domination over their human property. Rape was an act of physical violence designed to stifle black women's will to resist and to remind them of their servile status….Its intended long-term effect…was the maintenance of a submissive workforce. Whites' sexual exploitation of their slaves, therefore, should not be viewed simply as either a method of slave-breeding or the fulfillment of slaveholders sexual urges.[1]

Rape indelibly impressed upon the slave community the futility of their own emotional bonds: a slave woman could be taken by the master, or his sons, or his friends, or prostituted to strangers at will, and her male kin could do nothing to rescue or avenge her, without grave, and potentially lethal consequences for themselves. Thus, with the same stroke, slave women were sexually victimized and slave men were emasculated. Slave

[1] Dorothy E. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body : Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 29–30.

women learned they could only rely on themselves for their survival, while slave men learned to close off their emotional attachment to slave women.

Simultaneously, following the tenets of animal husbandry, some slave owners (fewer than in the US) used the male slaves who had the physical traits desired as studs or breeders to impregnate slave women on the plantation in their quest for a more robust slave stock.

> Black males were valuable to slave owners in a number of ways, the most obvious being their ability to perform arduous manual labor; another, however, was their breeding capability….This role of 'breeder' was a sought-after position on the plantation because it offered special privileges like extra food or special jobs and power among the slave population. Today this role has morphed and reemerged to become the 'street hustler/womanizer'.[2]

Also, Black women had no recourse against Black men, even if they were again taken against their will. Who would they report it to? In a society where "the prevailing belief among Whites [was] that Black women could not be raped because they were naturally lascivious," [3] who would see it as a violation, even if the slave girl were prepubescent.

These practices had profound impact on the behavior of the descendants of slaves in the Americas, through the intergenerational transmission of slave-generated family mores resulting in what sociologist Patricia Hill Collins terms a "tradition of love and trouble"[4] among Black men and women—and their children, I would add. Trying to function in a society still rife with racism, classism, and sexism, Collins explains that "[f]or far too many Black mothers, the demands of providing for children in interlocking

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[2] Joy DeGruy Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (Milwaukie, OR: Uptone Press, 2005), 151.
[3] Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 31.
[4] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought : Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Perspectives on Gender (New York: Routledge, 1991), 184.

systems of oppression are sometimes so demanding that they have neither the time nor the patience for affection."[5]

In this chapter, I will examine Michèle Montantin's *Le Chemin des Petites Abymes* (Recursive Lane), Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'isle* (*Island Memories*), Daniel Francisque's *Crevée vive* (Buried alive), Maryse Condé's *Comme deux frères* (Like two brothers), and Gerty Dambury's *Trames* (Fabrications) for their depiction of the continued troubled love and familial relationships that still plague slave-descended populations in the Americas. The social structures depicted in these plays include life-long friendships, the traditional nuclear family and the matrifocal homestead and explore the complexities of committed love, extra-marital affairs, homosexual seductions, and incestual rape. Together they offer a nuanced picture of the myriad ways women and men have navigated the shoals of French Caribbean sexual politics in their personal relationships in the nearly two centuries since the ending of slavery.

In the Beginning

In the first fifty years after the introduction of African slaves to Guadeloupe, when the slave population was relatively evenly divided between men and women, family groupings and marriages were encouraged by the island clergy who were charged by the Catholic church and the throne with the moral oversight of the colonies and directed to see that "[a]ll the slaves who are on our islands be baptized and instructed in the Catholic, apostolic and Roman religion,"[6] and by the planters who were initially pro-

[5] Ibid., 127.

[6] Louis Sala-Molins, *Le Code noir, ou, le calvaire de Canaan*, Pratiques théoriques. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1987), 94.

birth as a way of augmenting their property.[7] However, after the mass importation of slaves began in 1685, resulting in a much larger male slave population, the clergy's mandate to save and minister to each "infidel" became untenable and their moral influence waned. At the same time, the increased availability of full-bodied slaves—particularly the prized "*pièce d'Inde,* a six-foot man between eighteen and thirty years old"[8]—ready for the field, removed the need to raise slaves from birth (although there were reformist movements aimed at reducing "debauchery" that encouraged familial groupings from time to time across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). Even Article 47 in the Code Noir stated that a slave husband should not be sold separately from his slave wife and prepubescent children if they all belong to the same master.[9] For this and other reasons, most planters saw the legitimate slave family as being "incompatible with slavery" and "a hindrance to their authority,"[10] and thus discouraged its practice.

Despite these obstacles, Guadeloupean historian Raymond Boutin reports that at the time of emancipation, in addition to the large number of slaves who had no known ancestors or descendants, there also existed a small number of slave families that fell into four major categories: "legitmate families based on civil or religious marriages, stable consensual [common-law] relationships, polygamous relationships, and families headed

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[7] "From 1635 to 1685, the number of slaves was limited…and the equilibrium between the sexes was practically assured. The objectives of the master were pro-birth and many favored the marriage of slaves. This frame of mind is revealed in the accounting for the slave crews, where certain documents, like those on the Bisdary plantation, reveal kinship ties and lineage among the slaves." See Raymond Boutin, *Vivre Ensemble en Guadeloupe: 1848–1946: Un siècle de construction* (Matoury, Guyane: Ibis Rouge Editions, 2009), 15.

[8] Albert Valdman, "Creole, the Language of Slavery" in *Slavery in the Caribbean Francophone World: Distant Voices, Forgotten Acts, Forged Identities*, ed. Doris Y. Kadish (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 154.

[9] Sala-Molins, *Le code noir,* 184.

[10] Boutin, *Vivre ensemble*, 15.

by women."[11] Boutin also notes that the legitimate nuclear family comprised only 18% of the families registered, while households headed by women comprised 48%. He says:

> In total, there was a great diversity in the familial groupings, but the maternal families prevailed; however, it would be an error to believe that the men were systematically absent….The mothers knew the fathers and permitted the children to know their identities for reasons common to a great many societies—the taboo against incest.[12]

Emancipation and Familial Challenges

Upon emancipation in 1848, many freed slaves tried to establish family groupings or re-establish families that had been dispersed. Yet, for a vast number, personal experience with the model of the nuclear family was absent. Leary reminds us that

> [m]any of our ancestors had to start from scratch to develop the necessary skills to maintain a family, skills that so many people take for granted….To their credit, many did succeed. Many did not….As with learning any new set of skills, stress impedes their development….So, when times got tough, as they did so often, many black families could not hold up under the strain and fragmented once again.[13]

Also, the maladaptive social behavior that Leary has identified as having emanated from slavery, such as vacant esteem, ever present anger, and racist socialization all spelled difficulty for the establishment of healthy relationships between African-descended men and women as they tried to establish family structures. But even more injurious to the future family life of former slaves was the presence of a perhaps insidious, unspoken distrust that slavery engendered between Black men and women. Leary asks,

> Is it possible that during slavery black men held resentments towards black women for not fighting against the masters' sexual advances despite the fact that it was obviously out of her control? Did the black woman harbor contempt for the

[11] Ibid., 16.
[12] Ibid., 24.
[13] Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 155–56.

> black man that did not protect her, even though she knew that any interference on his part could cost him his life?[14]

Another hindrance to the successful building of families lay in the model the former slaves had for their concept of family. The most powerful and omnipresent model was that of the patriarchal family of the slavemaster, in which the father was undisputed head of the family, with unlimited sexual opportunities within and outside of marriage, while the wife, encased in the myth of "true womanhood," was supposedly a paragon of obedience, femininity, and exalted motherhood. [15] Liberated Black men who sought to dominate their families in the manner of the master would butt up against liberated Black women who had long lived outside of the ideal of submissive feminine identity, and who were certainly not interested in trading their White slavemaster for a Black one. As Eudine Barriteau notes,

> The notion that an individual and citizen is a male household head had no relevance for enslaved black women and men since they were equal in their inequality under slavery. However, European gender ideologies fed by the Enlightenment discourse of Liberalism promoted the notion of the male breadwinner and the dependent housewife.[16]

Also, following emancipation, Black men were faced with new responsibilities under the patriarchal model that they often did not have to shoulder previously, such as being the provider for their families. In the harsh realities of post-emancipation life for

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[14] Ibid., 157.

[15] "According to the cult of true womanhood, "true" women possessed four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity." As part of their exemplary domesticity, "'[g]ood' white mothers [were] expected to deny their female sexuality and devote their attention to the moral development of their offspring." See Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 71, 72. On the other hand, "the patriarchal pro-slavery argument [was] that black females were not 'women' in the sense that [White women] were, and certainly not feminine….For the black woman the scars of centuries of denial went deep; with the onset of free society the raw wounds remained, sending tensions down the spine of all recuperative socio-political strategies." See Hilary Beckles, "Historicizing Slavery in West Indian Feminisms." *Feminist Review* 59 (Summer 1998): 37.

[16] Eudine Barriteau, "Theorizing Gender Systems and the Project of Modernity in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean." *Feminist Review* 59 (Summer 1998), 194.

the newly freed, economic conditions did not favor the patriarchal family, which presupposed a certain economic stability. Indeed, Boutin cites precarious financial conditions among the newly emancipated as, at least, a partial reason for the predominance of unstable relationships and the occurrence of late marriages, which often took place only after many years of cohabitation, and frequently well after the birth of children.

However, improved economic status did not always alleviate the problem. Boutin also reveals that rather than finding an increase in marriages among the more financially stable population, it seems that

> affluence facilitated common-law marriages and families outside of marriage. Those who had substantial revenue, social position, or simply a bit of power or authority had the means to live in polygyny. The shopkeeper, the plantation administrator, the manager, the teacher, the doctor, particularly favored this plan.[17]

Indeed, today, while acknowledging two major family formations: the nuclear (either legitimate or common-law) and the maternal, Boutin quickly adds that neither legitimate or common-law marriages precludes engagement in extra-marital affairs on the part of the male head of household. It seems that the freedom to engage in extra-marital relationships was also an aspect of the slave master's privileged behavior that was deeply and indelibly marked on the Black male psyche, and seemingly is still embraced as a marker of economic, social, and sexual status in the French Caribbean. Collins explains:

> Under patriarchal assumptions, maintaining a family (e.g. a wife and dependent children) and having material wealth (land and/or slaves) were essential to (White) masculinity…..Because enslaved African men were denied the patriarchal power that came with family and property, they claimed other markers of masculinity, namely, sexual prowess and brute strength.[18]

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[17] Boutin, *Vivre Ensemble*, 35.

[18] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 58.

Love and Trouble: Patriarchal and Matrifocal Families

The familial expectations, and desires that have been influenced by patterns established during slavery, and complicated by intergenerational transmission have led to what African American sociologist Patricia Hill Collins calls "a love and trouble tradition" when it comes to relationships between Black men and women in the US, a phenomenon that also holds true for those in other parts of the African diaspora, including the Caribbean.

> Exploring the tensions between African-American men and women has been a long-standing theme in Black feminist thought….Another long-standing theme…is the great love Black women feel for Black men….Both the tensions between African-American women and men and the strong attachment that we feel for one another represent the both/and conceptual stance in Black feminist thought.[19]

In no small part, Collins attributes these problems to Eurocentric gender ideology that was embodied in the patriarchal system of the slave society. Under this ideology, there is a very sharp dichotomy between the roles that each gender is assigned, with the woman's centering around reproduction, childcare, and domestic chores, while the man was involved with production of wealth for the family, maintenance of property and protection of the family.

Speaking specifically of the post-Emancipation manifestations of the heavily patriarchal-influenced gender relations in the Caribbean, feminist scholar Patricia Mohammed points out the sexual prerogatives and privileges the patriarchal system affords Caribbean men:

> In general men are allowed many partners, women are to be monogamous, although serial monogamy is acceptable as women are not expected to remain unmarried after the death of, or separation from, a husband or a partner…. Femininity is still defined in relation to virtue, motherhood and being a wife,

[19] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 183, 184.

> while masculinity is at the same time bounded by expectations, as for instance that of being a provider, but allowed indefinite boundaries and privileges because 'he is a man.'[20]

In stark juxtaposition to the patriarchal nuclear family is the female-headed household in which the mother provides financial support and the primary nurturance for the family. However, whether in a patriarchal nuclear family or a maternal family, the common belief is that the influence of women in French Caribbean family life is pervasive and dominant. To describe this phenomenon, sociologist Boutin uses the term "matrifocality," meaning that even in those families where the man is present, the woman-mother is the focus, the "pole of stability" of the familial interrelationships.[21] Indeed, there is a common saying in the French Caribbean that the woman is the "poto mitan" (Creole for the pillar around which everything revolves)[22] of the family.

However Patricia Mohammed sees the application of the concept of matrifocality across the board as not being truly reflective of the complex reality of women's daily existence. She says that the Caribbean region

> has inherited a generalized stereotype of woman in society as *matrifocal* or mother centered, often confused for matriarchal and matrilineal both of which are not at all applicable. In this stereotyping women are not only assumed to possess extreme strength and resilience, but also to be responsible for the increasing *marginality* of the male.[23]

For further clarity on the term "matrifocality" I turn to Nancie L. Solien de González, who claims to have coined the term in the 1960s. De González says that "matrifocality" should be used

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[20] Patricia Mohammed, "Towards Indigenous Feminist Theorizing in the Caribbean," *Feminist Review* 59 (Summer 1998): 26.

[21] Boutin, *Vivre Ensemble*, 43.

[22] Eleanor J. Bader, "Poto Mitan: Haitian Women, Pillars of the Global Economy." *Feminist Review* (Blog), 13 November 2009; http://feministreview.blogspot.com/2009/11/poto-mitan-haitian-women-pillars-of.html (accessed 8 March 2011).

[23] Mohammed, "Towards Indigenous Feminist Theorizing,", 24–25.

> to designate a type of family or household grouping in which the woman is dominant and plays the leading role psychologically. She is probably the most stable member of the group, especially in societies in which divorce and remarriage are frequent. She may or may not be the economic mainstay of the group, but she probably exercises authority in how the money coming into the domestic establishment will be used. She also is probably the figure who most influences the children in their development,…Obviously, a household in which there is no regularly present male in the role of husband-father, will in most cases also turn out to be matrifocal but this is not always the case.[24]

In the plays in this study, there are multiple depictions of women in a variety of affinal relationships. *Island Memories* we get a view into Aure's and Hermance's relationships with their husbands, as well as a In Ina Césaire's glimpse into Aure's and Hermance's parents' relationships. In Michèle Montantin's *Le Chemin des Petites Abymes*, we are likewise afforded a cross-generational picture of marriage or love relationships: Eugénie's and her son's (not to mention the three marriages of the White grandmother). Rather than concretizing a dichotomy between the patriarchal family and the matrifocal family, the households in these plays create a continuum between the two poles.

The marriage closest to the patriarchal ideal is that of Eugénie, the grandmother in *Chemin des petites abymes*. From the upper crust of the early turn-of-the-twentieth-century Guadeloupean society of color, she married what she thought was the "ideal man"—handsome, erudite, of an acceptable color, charming, cultivated, "more aristocratic than the aristocrats that used to frequent her father's plantation in the old days, more cultivated also, more provocative and arrogant." But the fairy-tale was short-lived. This man, who she first admired because he respected nothing, "neither god nor master," soon revealed that he did not respect the vows of marital fidelity either as he began having extra-marital affairs and fathering illegitimate children. Humiliated but

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[24] Nancie L. Solien de González,"The Consanguineal Household and Matrifocality." *American Anthropologist,* New Series, 67, no.6 (Dec 1965): 1544.

constrained from divorce by her Catholic beliefs, Eugénie was still not devoid of some agency. After bearing a second son, she closed her bedroom door to her husband, thereby maintaining the sanctity of her body against her husband's philandering.[25] However, despite his affairs, he always remained an integral and controlling force in his family. By contrast, we glean little in Eugénie's reminiscences that give evidence of her having much control or central influence in the face of her husband, whose blatant wielding of patriarchal privilege was emblematized by the white colonial helmet he wore when he first came to court her.

Moving away from the patriarchal pole, Ina Césaire presents Aure's parents in *Island Memories*, a couple who also began their life together at the end of the nineteenth century in 1893. Aure says her mother was known as "Ti-piment…'Hot little pepper'—because she was a tiny but very headstrong woman….A half-sized masterful woman," which implies that no one could walk over her. Yet the father's presence and influence are also strong as Aure talks admiringly about how her father built their family home in the hills, and how he "would get up before dawn and tend the farm, the animals, the buildings, without ever losing his smile or his song." Although he didn't marry Aure's mother until Aure was eighteen years old, he was always involved in her life and her upbringing. She recounts how he would not have permitted her to go to a dance that wasn't "a family affair," and how he didn't want her "to mix with young men." [26]

The relationship of Aure and her husband Benoît is also a harmonious partnership that hovers around the center of the continuum, with perhaps a nod towards matrifocality.

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[25] Michèle Montantin, *Le chemin des petites Abymes*, unpublished manuscript (Textes en Paroles Collection, 2002), 28–29. All subsequent refences will appear in parentheses in the text.

[26] Ina Césaire, *Island Memories*, in *Plays by French and Francophone Women.* Ed. and trans. Christiane P. Makward and Judith G. Miller (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 56–57. All subsequent references will be in parentheses in the text.

Aure states to Hermance, "I, for one, have never understood why the woman should be more submissive than the man." Yet, in the marriage this does not manifest as a militant resistance against a patriarchal stance on Benoît's part. Even as young people growing up, Benoît had agreed with her beliefs about the status of women. She describes him as a very "gentle, amenable man, even playful" and she says that they always got along well. Indeed, she could only think of one time that he raised his voice and banged on the table, for which he apologized immediately when she turned around in shock (67). From all she says about him, he was a caring, hard-working, faithful partner, who unfortunately died when Aure was only thirty-nine years old.

Hermance, the other grandmother in *Island Memories,* on the other hand, offers an example of a matrifocal household in which the father is present. She says, "I never was the kind of woman you push around." Then she adds, "But Ferdinand did anyway! A man's a man…, right? But he had to hear me stuff his ears, you better believe it!" (66). Ferdinand seems to have had the upper hand in their relationship, in that she excuses his brutish behavior as a sign of his masculinity. She even stays with him despite blatant extra-marital affairs, such as when he openly took another woman on a trip to France for six months, which, she confides to Aure, "really shamed me." When he came back, he was "rolling his hips, proud as a peacock, to unwind his string of tales," while she had been working to feed their children. "Day after day it's me who works!" she complains in Creole (66). Although he holds a good administrative position, his ability to set aside enough money to live with a mistress in France for six months suggests that a considerable amount of his salary is not devoted to his family. Hermance endures his infidelities but she becomes tough too. When he even has an affair with her own good

friend, their daughter's godmother, and has the audacity to leave his hat out in the open where their daughter can see it and report back, Hermance ran furiously to her friend's house and "trounced her good and clean….I let her have it! Ferdinand got it too!" (66). In later years, Ferdinand becomes paralyzed and retreats to the third floor of their house because he is too vain to be seen in his condition. The household hardly seems to skip a beat as it officially transitions to Hermance's control, even though she still runs up and down three flights of stairs to care for him until his death. In the end though, she nevertheless locates him squarely within what she considers acceptable male behavior by saying, "Féfé was just like all men, neither better nor worse!" (67).

Is this family matrifocal? In its daily operations, it seems to be. But this certainly is not Hermance's choice. With eight children and a man who seemed to make light of his family responsibilities, what can she do but be the poto mitan of her family? She certainly does not take on this role to marginalize her husband. If anything, in excusing his irresponsible behavior and recognizing it as typical male behavior, she has privileged his masculinity rather than marginalized it.

The household that most closely resembles the model of matrifocality is that of Hermance's mother. She was the mother of seven children by her husband who died two years before Hermance was born (Aure and Hermance have the same father). Hermance says, "My mother always raised her children all on her own….She had to nearly kill herself to raise all her other children, plus me….Mama supported the whole family with just her sewing" (55, 56). While Hermance mentions a migrant worker who had an intermittent presence in her life, and who came the closest to the role of father, he was only there sporadically as he also had other women and families along his work circuit.

Hermance emphatically states: "I can't remember seeing his face for any too long!" (55). Her mother was clearly the head of her household, but again mainly due to life's circumstances, rather than because of a deliberate determination of her own.

In Gerty Dambury's *Trames* (Fabrications), however, we do come to an example of a matrifocal household in which the mother has chosen to exclude and marginalize the father. This three-character play was presented at the Musée Dapper in Paris on 7 November 2008. It won the Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques (Society of Playwrights and Musical Composers) Prize for Francophone Playwriting that same year as well. Since then, it has been performed at the Aimé Césaire Theatre in Fort-de-France, Martinique and at the Artchipel Theatre in Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe.

The lead character in the play is Gilette, a collector of women's narratives, whose work is reminiscent of Ina Césaire's early project to tape-record the life stories of elderly Martinican women that then became the source material for *Mémoires d'isle.* Gilette has one child, a twenty-five year old son named Christian who has been a crack addict and a street person for the past four years. The third character in the play is Dabar, a shadowy figure who is primarily Gilette's housekeeper or cook, but who, at other times, transforms into two of the women whose stories Gilette has recorded: a woman on the boulevard and a woman who was attacked with stones. As herself, Dabar speaks primarily in proverbs to comment on what has just transpired. For instance, she listens to the taped story of a young abandoned mother who went to prison for selling beach sand as a way to support herself and to raise the money for her new baby's christening. Her estranged husband showed up at the christening, ate and drank his fill, and then went back to his new lover,

offering no support to the mother or the baby. To this Dabar says, "Not every pair of pants has a man in them."[27]

The play revolves around a bi-weekly ritual whereby Christian comes home on Wednesday and Friday nights of each week, ostensibly to get a good meal, but also usually to petition his mother for money, despite her objections and resistances. There is no father in the home. The absentee father is an African from Mali, whom Gilette had met in Timbouctou and married. After four years living there, she had abandoned him and life in Africa and taken their infant son back with her to Guadeloupe, where she raised him on her own, with the support (or interference) of her mother, who lives nearby. In either case, this family is matrifocal by choice, and the father has been deliberately marginalized.

This arrangement has not gone well, not necessarily because it is household headed by a woman, but because despite her choice of single parenthood, Gilette is a reluctant poto-mitan. She has worked at being a good mother, but from Christian's obvious and futile attempts to get her full attention and love, it is clear she has not succeeded. Growing up, he sought to fill the empty spaces in his life with his grandmother and still finds with her the unconditional love that his mother is incapable of giving him, particularly in his current state as an addict.

By the time he was seven, after seeing a picture of his father, whom he still calls the Man in the Robe (traditional Malian garb), he began pestering Gilette to go visit him. With the insistence of Gilette's mother, the trip was arranged, but it was short-lived and evidently disastrous. He has refused to celebrate his birthday from that day forth and even

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[27] Gerty Dambury, *Trames* (Paris: La Fabrique Insomniaque, 2008), 47. Subsequent references will be in parentheses in the text.

worse he has refused to tell his mother what happened all those years as ago. She too has kept her experiences in Africa shrouded in secrecy. The audience does not gain clarity about these events until the last minutes of the play. Indeed, Gilette does not live to hear Christian's revelation.

The action of the play centers around Gilette and her current relationship to Christian, interspersed with the recordings of the stories of the wrenching interpersonal relationships of the women she has interviewed. Christian has come to regard his mother's preoccupation with the women's narratives as his primary competition for her attention. Everything comes to a head after Christian loses his one long-shot at a job prospect because he pockets some of his potential employer's money. Still, trying to look as if he has turned over a new leaf, he arrives for dinner in new clean clothes, wearing aftershave (Gilette notices neither improvement) and actually cooks the dinner for them both, including a flan. But the evening ends in failure when he tries to hustle his mother to pay for the meal, after she suggests that maybe he could make a living as a cook. Finally in desperation Christian says, "I don't know what to do for you to have a little…a little…." She finishes his sentence: "Pity? Compassion? Patience? Tenderness? Love??? I exhausted all that, Christian. It's all used up. Nothing more to give." He is reduced to saying "I don't need much, you know…like 100 francs [around $15]" (46–47). Gilette just responds by looking at him for a long time, and then gives him a 100 franc bill without speaking. Something in the ritual has been broken this time. He leaves, but several days later he returns and robs her of everything he can find of value, including an African outfit, her treasured book of African art, and her stamp collection. When she discovers the robbery, it is the last straw for Gilette. She makes two decisions: to report

Christian to the police, and to leave the island for Jamaica, where she has obtained a writing contract.

Christian is humiliated, crest-fallen, and angry at having been arrested. He remains in jail two days until his grandmother is able to get him released. He comes over to confront Gilette, who, on the eve of her departure, has nothing left in the apartment except her armchair, some fabric, a statuette, and a calebash. They share a last meal African-style from one bowl, seated on the floor on the cloth. Christian is devastated that she plans to leave but he becomes enraged when he learns that one of the few things she will bring with her is his rival: the cassettes of the women's narratives. He screams, "I'm fed up with your filthy tapes, I'm fed up with lives of others, fed up with history, fed up with the past." Prompted by his rant against the tapes, Gilette spews forth her pent up rage as well, telling him in Creole that she is fed up with him, his father and his whole family. "What do you think," she screams, "that I'm going to let you suck the marrow from my bones?" And then she finally reveals what Christian has intuited throughout his life: this single parenthood, this matrifocal motherhood, is an anathema to her:

> I am a free woman! That's what he [Christian's father] did not understand. That's what you do not understand, right? Neither you nor your grandmother. I will not repeat history. I will not be MY mother. I will not be HIS mother. I tried….I took on that role but it didn't agree with me. All of that was false. I have only one desire: to take to the roads, to take to the air, to take to the sea, and to leave again. Always to leave again. I have not reached my destination….YOU ARE NOT MY FINAL DESTINATION! (74)

She starts to leave but Christian blocks her way. His life is totally invested in hers, in their weekly rituals. He cannot imagine letting her go, even if it means taking her life.

As the final scene opens, we see Gilette's lifeless body in her armchair. It is to her corpse that Christian makes his confession about what happened during his visit to his

father in Mali at the age of seven. Upon his arrival at his father's village, Christian is "celebrated like a prince," with "loads of cousins, and brothers and friends asking to get to know him and to love him" (26). However, on his birthday, his father, who had a drinking problem and was drunk, ordered that no one serve him any food that day. He told Christian, "The day of your birth is not a festive day for me….SON OF A SLAVE!" And he spat at his feet (75).

Christian had been so deeply affected by this public denouncement and rejection that upon his precipitated return to Guadeloupe, he buried his shame even from his mother, but he refused to celebrate his birthday from that day forward. He also fully realized that his world would revolve solely around his mother and his grandmother. But his mother could not embrace that kind of need. Perhaps there was no way to undo his father's immense blow to his self-esteem but Gilette's deep, perhaps unconcious, repugnance of motherhood certainly could not heal him. He knew she lacked engagement with him but he came to accept it as a part of her nature, that is until five years ago, when he discovered how impassioned she became when she undertook her project of recording the stories of abused women. Jealous of the attention she devoted to the women and their tapes, he started on drugs a year after her project began. Now, in front of her cadaver, having revealed his long-held secret, he places the African cloth on her body, and says, "We needed that time between us. I saw in her eyes….I saw that she listened to me" (76). Once he exits, the stage tableau of Gilette in her armchair replicates the opening scene of the play, in which she dozed in her chair while awaiting Christian's late arrival.

Gilette's repugnance at being defined solely by motherhood, to be swallowed up by the stereotype of the mother as poto-mitan, is at the core of her unrest in this play. In

the context of French Caribbean social life she battles against a powerful current. As late as the 1990s Maryse Condé stated:

> In the Antilles, as in Africa or in Europe until recently, women gained stature almost exclusively through their maternal function. An entire literature exalts childbirth, breast-feeding, and magnifies the attachment of the mother to her little one. From childhood, the little girl is prepared for the time when, in her turn, she will bring to the world the "fruits of her womb."[28]

Gilette has always yearned for a life beyond the socially valorized constraints of motherhood. Theatre scholar Sylvie Chalaye applauds Gilette's choice to accept the writing contract as an affirmation of herself and of her desire "no longer to conceive of her accomplishment, her finitude, in maternity and the transmission of blood." Chalaye sees her decision as an act of rebellion (*marronnage*) that extends beyond the feminine condition, and

> touches on an ontological question that issues from colonial history and slavery. To refuse the destination imposed by the order of things, it is to refuse the identity imposed by the master, it is to refuse a definition preconceived about yourself.[29]

But at what cost? Certainly, by the opening of the play, the die has been long cast. Gilette knows, especially from the narratives she has recorded, that her safety as well as her future now lies in escape. Christian will pick her dry at this point. But we can't help but wonder why Gilette, as the free soul she professes to be, opted to become a mother in the first place. Was she lulled into motherhood by the African spirit of village upbringing? By contrast, her single parenthood thwarted her spirit of marronnage and left her bereft of the emotional qualities so needed by her son. Christian essentially had a mother's physical but not emotional presence—a second, and possibly even more

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[28] Maryse Condé, *La Parole des Femmes: Essai sur des romancières des Antilles de langue française* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1993), 40.

[29] Sylvie Chalaye, "Le Théâtre de Gerty Dambury: Un marronnage au féminin." Émergences Caraïbe(s): une création théâtrale archipélique, ed. Sylvie Chalaye et Stéphanie Bérard, *Africultures* 80 (2010): 233.

damaging rejection than his father's. At the end of the play, we are left to mourn the loss of two souls who did not escape their misbegotten history.

Love and Trouble: *Mémoires d'isle* and *Crevée vive*

Another aspect typical of relationships of slave-descended families following emancipation was the prevalence of late marriages. Raymond Boutin notes that not infrequently, especially in rural areas, marriages occur after years of an informal consensual relationship. Noting a study done in the mountains of Martinique among small landowners, he says,

> Major considerations such as the transmission of land rights made the choice of a legitimate nuclear family to be conceived of, not as a point of departure, but as a culmination [of a relationship] after a probationary period marked by the birth of children.[30]

Such was certainly the case with Aure's parents in Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'isle*. Her father and mother lived together throughout her childhood, but it was when they acquired some land and built a house on it, not just "a hut: four walls and a roof" but "a real house, with a veranda all around" (54), that her father married her mother—the culmination of a successful relationship with property to be considered. Aure was already eighteen.

Daniely Francisque also describes a late marriage in her one-woman play, *Crevée vive* (Buried alive). The play, which was read as part of the Textes en Parole project in Guadeloupe in 2008, opens on Leyna Kaéra, a woman in her thirties who has come to the police to report her boyfriend as missing. She is pregnant by him, and in the course of the play, which spans many months, she makes references to the baby's movements and kicking inside of her. After a monologue in which she expresses her deep longing for her boyfriend, and her anxiety that he may have deserted her, the next scene opens with her

[30] Raymond Boutin, *Vivre ensemble*, 36.

trying desperately to escape from a small enclosed cell. The walls trigger childhood memories of having been abruptly brought from the Caribbean to an airport in Paris with its tall, gray, cold walls. She was six. It was the first time she met her real mother, Arlette, who had been abandoned by her boyfriend, Leyna's father, and thrown out of her parents' home when she revealed her pregnancy. She had to await the birth of her baby at a relative's home and then leave Leyna, soon after she was born, in the care of a friend so she could seek work in France. It took Arlette six years to raise enough money working as a nurse's aide to have her daughter brought to her. Leyna, who always thought her caretaker was her mother, felt confused and abandoned in the arms of this stranger. Her relationship with her mother had been contentious ever since, as Arlette resented Leyna's lack of affection and meted out harsh punishments with a belt for her childish infractions at home or at school.

Leyna always dreamt of having a father in her life who she imagined as a big man with a mustache. She asked her mother incessantly about her biological father. On her eighth birthday, Leyna's father showed up. She was ecstatic:

> My starving eyes became populated by a thousand butterflies released in all directions around his grandeur. Butterflies swirling above the waves of his thick black hair….Butterflies from my eyes slide on his warm breath, caress their wings on his face that was gold-colored like wax.[31]

He was a charming man, a musician, a storyteller who lit up both her and her mother's life. When Leyna was twelve, her parents got married. Dressed like a princess, Leyna was the ring-bearer. Everyone was beautiful…the picture of happiness, the formation of the perfect patriarchal family of which they had all dreamed. But the patriarchal family can also be fraught with problems of its own.

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[31] Daniely Francisque, *Crevée vive*, unpublished manuscript (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe: Textes en Parole Collection, 2006), 12. All subsequent references will be in parentheses in the text.

Just as the descendants of slaves emulated the patriarchal family model of the slave master, there is another abusive aspect of the patriarchy that may have influenced their behavior as well. In indiscriminately fathering children by slave women, masters inevitably fell, knowingly or unknowingly, upon their own grown daughters. Lisa Habermann, in an article for the *Hastings Women's Law Journal*, states:

> Antebellum masters had free sexual access to their female slaves and generated large numbers of mulatto children who, while in truth the biological children of the master, were treated as slaves. It was not uncommon that slave owners would have incestuous relationships with their daughter-slaves.[32]

While guarding against attributing all deviant behavior in later generations to the institution of slavery, it is worth noting that Habermann does make a direct connection between the patriarchal institution of slavery and the practice of incest. She asserts that "[a] contemporary heir apparent to antebellum slavery is child abuse, specifically incest in the father-daughter relationship. Just as the slaves were oppressed, children are exploited."[33]

Incest as a problem in the patriarchal family was even identified by Freud in his early interviews of women, findings that he then later suppressed, because

> [i]f his patients' reports were true, incest was not a rare abuse, confined to the poor and the mentally defective, but was endemic to the patriarchal family. Recognizing the implicit challenge to patriarchal values, Freud refused to identify fathers publicly as sexual aggressors.…Scrupulously honest and courageous in other respects, Freud falsified his incest cases.[34]

Incest became the patriarchy's dirty little secret. Shrouded in secrecy by scholars, and silenced within the home, incest was a festering sore that infected the men and hence the

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[32] Lisa Haberman, "The Seduction of Power: An Analogy of Incest and Antebellum Slavery," *Hastings Women's Law Journal* 13 (Summer 2002): 314.

[33] Haberman, "The Seduction of Power," 308.

[34] Anne Cossins, *Masculinities, Sexualities, and Child Sexual Abuse* (Boston: Kluwer Law International, 2000), 35.

families of those who had been socialized under the most virulent forms of the patriarchy: the slave institution. The problem might have been further exacerbated by the Caribbean post-slavery practice of late marriages, particularly when the husbands were introduced into the family at the time the daughters were reaching puberty, as was the case for Leyna and her father.

By the time Leyna was eleven, the dream-come-true of an ideal nuclear family has morphed into a nightmare for her. She wets her bed to the irate befuddlement of her mother, who cannot understand how a girl old enough to have her period could do such a childish thing. Leyna tells her mother about her dream of a wolf who pursues her even into her bedroom and whom she fears so much that she dare not rise at night to go to the bathroom. The mother ignores Leyna's tears, refuses to see her distress, or to try to understand what Leyna is attempting to tell her: her father is the wolf; he is raping Leyna at night. Haberman notes that like the slave owner, the incestuous father has a battery of incentives to enforce the compliance of his victim. Such "types of manipulation include psychological abuse, physical coercion, intimidation, discouragement and threats of isolation, physical harm or even death."[35] For Leyna, her father says he is sick and she is his cure; but in her dreams, the wolf threatens to kill her if she calls for help.

On the night of her parents' wedding, while the wedding guests are partying below, the father, still wearing his wedding trousers, comes to Leyna in her bedroom.

> Don't cry my princess. This is a day of happiness…Give me your mouth….A kiss for the king, a kiss for the princess….I want to love you. You will be the most beautiful of the princesses. Let me do it. (25)

Through her tears and sobs, he proceeds to force himself into her when suddenly the door opens and the mother stands there. She does not come to her daughter's rescue. Instead,

[35] Haberman, "The Seduction of Power," 316.

she takes it all in, then closes the door and leaves. This scene is redolent of the archetypal slavery rape scene: the repeated helpless dread of the young Black girl trapped in her room; the selfish, heartless indulgence of the man in power; the silent acquiesence of the mother, who, in this case, ironically adopts the impotent stance of a slave mother who fears to interfere because of the dire consequences that she herself would incur. And yet, some slave mothers did intervene.

In Leyna's case, however, her mother doesn't utter a word. Arlette is enslaved to her own idea of a stable marriage and the few comforts and status it affords. For her, the prize of marriage is too great, too hard won to lose, especially at the very moment she has achieved it. Nothing is ever said of the discovered incest again and the patriarchal family enters into a life of silent lies. Abused at night, Leyna has to function as if normal during the day in school until she can liberate herself from her home six years later at the age of eighteen.

Understandably, Leyna carries the scars of this incestuous abuse into her new life, scars that manifest initially in a series of failed relationships. Camille W. Cook and Pamela Kirkwood Millsaps observe:

> The victim often…has difficulty in trusting others, especially men; and experiences problems with intimacy evidenced by marital and relationship problems. Furthermore, victims have a tendency toward revictimization. The situations they often find themselves in range from prostitution to a high incidence of rape; substance abuse, including alcoholism and drug addiction; sexual dysfunctioning including frigidity, a fear of sexual contact, and an inability to tolerate sexual arousal; and multiple personality disorders.[36]

These legal scholars argue that incest is a trauma that results in the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms of dissociation and submersion of the memory, among others, and

[36] Camille W. Cook and Pamela Kirkwood Millsaps, "Redressing Wrongs of the Blamelessly Ignorant Survivor of Incest," *University of Richmond Law Review* 26, no. 1 (Fall 1991): 3.

that the victim's actual memory of the event may not surface until well past the legal statute of limitation. While Leyna's recollections are not so deeply buried that she does not remember her father's incestuous attacks, she does not recognize their impact on her subsequent intimate relationships.

She recounts how her life since leaving home has involved a series of men. When she makes love, she cries—for what she characterizes as "no reason." With a lowered self-esteem, and the sense of worthlessness that many victims of incest experience, she performs fellatio for her partners and degrades herself by letting them "ejaculate in her face." Still, despite indulging them in their "preferred game," they always leave her anyhow (28). Sex is not pleasurable for her until at the age of twenty-eight, she meets Ruddy and she feels all of her dreams have finally been answered. Yet, by the time she is thirty, something changes; while she still loves him she begins crying again when he caresses her. She avoids sex with him for five or six months, using one excuse or another. His desire became palpable and she says she felt like "a beast tracked by a predator….When he desired me at that point, he frightened me and disgusted me at the same time" (28). He would cry on his knees before her and beg her to explain what was wrong. Finally, he corners her and rapes her. She falls into silence for six weeks. He begs forgiveness repeatedly and she eventually relents and rejoins him in their bed. However, one night while she is sleeping, he places his hand on her buttocks as he masturbates. It is an action that makes her flashback in her semi-dream state to her abuse by her father. In a dissociative trance, she transposes Ruddy into her father who is about to molest her. Simultaneously, she sees herself as her mother and confronts him as her mother never did on her behalf. With a knife to his heart (it is not clear how she got the knife; did she come

to bed with it?), she demands to know what he is doing. Shocked and paralyzed, her boyfriend doesn't know what to answer. In a steel voice she says:

> Listen well to what I am going to tell you. This is a mother wolf who speaks to you. If you touch my little girl again, I will kill you. What, that astonishes you? She is no longer alone now. She is mine. This time it is done, you will never put your hand on her. Say good-bye to us. (30)

With that she grabs his genitals, cuts them off, stuffs them in his mouth, and watches him die. (The imagery in this scene is multiply laden with the historical horror of castration of Black males as an instrument of punishment and terror.) Then she lets out a blood-curdling scream, which startles her out of her trance state. Now fully awakened, Leyna is horrified to see her dead lover below her, his castrated genitals in her hand, and blood everywhere. Terrified, she closes his bedroom door and throws the key in the rubbish chute. In the morning, in a state of post-traumatic denial, she goes to meet him at the café where she first saw him, hoping their story will begin again anew. When he does not show up for two days, she goes to the authorities to report him missing.

The last scene, which takes place in what we now recognize as an institutional or prison cell in which Leyna is incarcerated, she proudly reaffirms that she is expecting Ruddy's child, a girl. But months have passed in the course of her narrative, as indicated by the increasing roundness of her abdomen. As she nonchalantly announces that she is now in her twelfth month, the audience realizes she is experiencing a false pregnancy. Delusional, Leyna attributes the baby's late arrival to the fact that "[s]he's in no rush to come out….She's waiting for her father" (31). With that, the audience fully understands the depths of Leyna's trauma and mental instability.

In the course of this heart-wrenching story of abuse and violence, Leyna fully experiences several of the behavioral symptoms of PTSD, including depression,

flashback, trance state, and beserking or hyperarousal. Unrecognized and silenced, the trauma from her father's repeated assaults festered in Leyna until Ruddy unwittingly, with an action and a touch, triggers the well of rage that has simmered within Leyna for more than ten years. Leyna clearly illustrates Emory University scholar Cathy Caruth's point: "The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptoms of a history that they cannot entirely process."[37]

Patriarchy and Boys: *Comme deux frères*

While certainly rape and incest depicted in *Crevée vive* are all practices that preceded slavery in the Americas by millennia, it is still within the slave institution that such practices had the most immediate impact on African-descended populations. However, fathers' incestuous abuse of their slave daughters was not the only forced sexual practice that emanated from the patriarchal system of slavery. Slave boys were not exempt from the masters' erotic attention and there are examples in slave narratives of masters abusing slave boys and men and of even passing on the ownership of male slaves they used for their own sexual pleasure to their sons in their wills, rather than to their daughters. Darieck Scott argues forcefully that the historical reality of "the sexual exploitation of enslaved black men by white men, the horror of male rape and of homosexuality" not be subsumed and homogenized within the abstract notion of "lost or stolen manhood."[38] *Comme deux frères* (Like two brothers) by Maryse Condé resonates of this history of homoerotic abuse, with the stories of the initiation of impoverished boys into sexual relations by a patriarchal figure.

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[37] Cathy Caruth, "Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.

[38] Darieck Scott, *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 150.

Comme deux frères was first presented at the 2007 Avignon Theatre Festival in France and later in 2007 at Artchipel in Basse Terre, Guadeloupe. Also published by Lansman in Belgium in 2007, it was later performed in the US at the Chopin Theatre in Chicago by the Alliance Française in February 2008 and by the Caribbean Theater Company at the University of Virginia in 2009.

Centering the action around the male character, as she does in several of her other plays, (*Dieu nous l'a donné, Le morne de Massabielle*, *Mort d'Oluwémi d'Ajumako),* Condé has chosen two men, Grégoire and Jeff, as vehicles for this compelling exploration of human psychology and societal ills. Similar to *Le cachot* and *Crevée vive* this play also takes place in the enclosed space of a cell—the ever-present trope of slave entrapment and confinement that still haunts the imagination of contemporary French Caribbean women's theatre. Imprisoned for an armed robbery that went awry and resulted in the shooting of the victim, the two men will have to make their case to the public defender in the morning. Jeff, the more affable and sensitive of the two, screams in his dreams in the pre-dawn hours and awakens Grégoire, who then shouts for Jeff to wake up. It immediately becomes evident that these two men know each other so well that Grégoire, in trying to forestall Jeff from recounting his dream, is able to recite three or four of Jeff's recurring dreams by heart. Indeed, Jeff and Grégoire have known each other since their births, having been born the same year to prostitute mothers who lived next door to each other in one of the worst neighborhoods in Guadeloupe. Color coding the level of their degradation, Grégoire speaks of the women as "our two mothers, our two négresse mothers,"[39] thereby locating their mothers at the bottom of the social ladder both by

[39] Maryse Condé and José Pliya, *Comme deux frères*, Collection "Beaumarchais" (Carnières-Morlanwelz, Belgium: Lansman, 2007) 13. Subsequent references will be in the text in parentheses.

profession and by color. Grégoire's mother beat him severely, as did the string of "stepfathers" that came in and out of her life, as much as "four in one year" (11). Both boys were thrown out of school: Grégoire for getting into fights and blinding a boy; and Jeff because he was a pathological liar—a dreamer in sleep and out—a child who used his vivid imagination to create more pleasant alternate circumstances for himself. In another social milieu he might have developed into a writer. Recognizing Jeff's gift for fiction, Grégoire insists he presents himself as a writer to the public defender.

One of his imaginative alter-lives consisted of passing himself off at school as the son of the police commissioner—the ultimate powerful, protective figure to have as a father when you are a student in a tough school environment. However, the police commissioner was a pedophile, who actually sexually abused all of the members of their gang except Jeff, Grégoire believes, because he resembled the commissioner's son. In all likelihood, Jeff was also abused, perhaps even more intensively, but as he begins to reveal his similar experiences, he is stopped mid-track by Grégoire's insistence that it did not happen to him. Yet Jeff's later narrative about a casual seduction by a macho man with a mustache who flirted with him like a woman, and with whom Jeff entered into a three-month affair gives credence to an earlier introduction to homosexuality.

Grégoire, for his part, is a blatant, and even brutal heterosexual, who is quick to call a woman a whore. His attitude is encapsulated in his use of woman as a metaphor to describe his desire to live. "Life is like a woman who doesn't do what you want. The more you hit her, the more she resists. And because of that you want her even more.” Life and women are inseparable for Grégoire and for a moment he speaks touchingly about how there is "nothing more beautiful than the stomach of a pregnant woman" and how

the sight of a pregnant woman makes him want "to kneel before her" (18). Jeff quickly calls him on his hypocrisy and bitterly reminds him that, thinking she had been unfaithful to him, he had thrown his unappreciated pregnant girlfriend Lucinda out onto the streets. She was a childhood friend whom Jeff also loved. When he discovered her plight, he had taken her into his home but she had already contracted a lung infection and soon died. More truthfully emblematic of Grégoire's image of his sexuality is his impassioned rant when he directs Jeff, whom he thinks will get out of jail ahead of him, to "go tell the girls of the Pointe to get the parade ready. This goddamned nigger is coming back, with his blade in marching order….King Kong respect!" (23).

It is Grégoire's gusto and bravado over female flesh that Jeff manipulates to his advantage. Although Grégoire is the one who shot the man despite Jeff's insistence that no guns be used in the robbery he intended to be a political statement, Grégoire does not want to take responsibility. He has recently met a new woman, Lisette, to whom he is very attracted. She is a "negropolitaine" born in France and now working as a waitress in Guadeloupe. He pleas to Jeff to take the rap for him, because this is "a young love, brand new, burning," a love that cannot withstand the long years of the prison sentence he expects to receive (28). He sees in her a chance to remake his life, to have a family, to be a father. He also coldly warns Jeff that if push comes to shove, he will lie and blame it all on Jeff anyway and even say it was premeditated. Yet, he would prefer that Jeff falsely confess to the crime. Jeff has always volunteered to shoulder the burden for Grégoire, without having to be asked. Grégoire reminds him, "[Y]ou did my homework, you lied for me, you got punished for me, you fought because of me and you stole with me." But this time Grégoire is actually asking Jeff, like a brother, to do something for him. He begs

him to help him refashion his life, telling him, "You know that I don't know how to dream, to remake my life in my imagination like you do. I need reality. I need Lisette." And beyond the years of imprisonment that Jeff's confession will incur, Grégoire also wants Jeff to unburden him from the guilt as well, because "it blackens my soul and I cannot, no I cannot carry it with me outside of here, with me close to my Lisette, to the sunshine of our love" (30).

Jeff does not believe that Grégoire will change his life, but he still agrees to confess. But this time he is not going to be the fall guy for free. This time there is a quid pro quo. He has a proposition. It is, he tells Grégoire,

> an indecent proposition….like that made between men…between friends since childhood….like two brothers in the bottom of a cell when life, country and the entire system rejects them. Then there is nothing left: no more dreams, no more hope, no more illusion. Nothing except guilt and an obscure desire to negotiate. (32)

Jeff has turned the table. For once, he has something that Grégoire desperately wants and he is not going to give it away. There is a price to be paid…in flesh…in sex. Grégoire protests and struggles as Jeff grabs him and they enter into a choreography of force, resistance, and acquiescence, a masculine dance of seduction, ending as their lips approach one another.

Comme deux frères represented a daring foray on the part of Maryse Condé into one of the most volatile subjects in Caribbean society and culture: homosexuality. Patricia Mohammed reminds us:

> In societies where black masculinity constantly seeks to assert itself, where it is defined as power over other men and in relation to multiple relationships with the other sex, where monogamy and fidelity are perceived as signs of weakness or of being a 'soft man', masculinity is itself a very fragile thing. This fragility is evident in the antagonism and distance which must be maintained from male

> homosexuality and from homosexuality itself, the latter which is in general unacceptable as an alternative sexuality in these parts.[40]

Tellingly, I have not found one review or preview of *Comme deux frères* that references the homosexual under- and overtones of this play. For instance, the publisher's description of the play says:

> Two childhood friends, two longtime brothers, find themselves in prison; their robbery gone wrong. On the eve of their trial, they hardly have any hope of convincing the judges of their innocence. But they hope to put forth extenuating circumstances because they have not been spoiled by life nor valued by society. In their eyes, they have not deliberately decided to fall into lawlessness and violence; it is their childhood that has led them directly on this path. Will their friendship withstand this ordeal?

In a region that so highly privileges male heterosexuality, mum is still the word when the subject is homosexuality.

Conclusion

The selection of plays in this chapter clearly illustrate that these French Caribbean women playwrights are fully aware of a broad spectrum of human sexual relations (although I have not seen any plays yet about lesbian relationships) in their island societies. While they articulate the lived realities of the push and pull of the love and trouble legacy between men and women on a daily basis and they are certainly able to reify those areas of distinct masculine privilege and even abuse, they do not seem to take the strident tone that they often associate with their image of feminism; rather they adopt the more nurturing tone of womanism, which seeks to bring the whole community along rather than pit one sex against the other. Self-identified Caribbean feminist scholar Patricia Mohammed explains the stance:

> The feminist or women's attempt to achieve parity with men in various spheres is viewed, here as elsewhere, as an antagonistic measure to gain control over the

[40] Mohammed, "Towards Indigenous Feminist Theorizing," 27.

> other sex. The fact that women's struggles thus far in the region's political arena have been more than conciliatory, reconciling the need for ethnicity, nation and community and family with that of desire and intimacy, remains a persistently elusive part of the discussions which take place in the societies. None the less, there have always been supportive male colleagues or partners in this struggle for gender equality.[41]

This stance is confirmed by Maryse Condé who brings the same circumspection to the question of gender politics that she brought to the issue of the color complex on the islands. It comes from a place of acceptance and love.

> Just like the woman, the Antillean man is conditioned by a heavy history. During the time of slavery, the white man, seeing in him a potential rival, tried desperately to destroy him. He forbade him the white woman but also he took away from him his natural companion of whom he often made a plaything, a sexual object. Frustrated, dispossessed, the Antillean man took refuge in attitudes of irresponsibility that have outlived the political evolution of the islands. The reproaches with which he is burdened must always be situated in the larger and more enlightened reminder of the socio-economic condition in the Antilles.[42]

What a telling statement about Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome and its enduring presence in contemporary French Caribbean life

[41] Ibid., 26.
[42] Maryse Condé, *La Parole des Femmes*, 36.

CHAPTER 6

FOLKLORE, CARNIVAL, AND CREOLE AS RESISTANCE

In the previous chapters I have demonstrated multiple ways in which slavery and its traumatic aftermath still influence the plays of many French Caribbean women playwrights. In this chapter, I will explore the use of folklore, the carnivalesque, and the dramatization of historic events by several French Caribbean women playwrights to resist or offset the insidious effects of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) and postcolonial alienation. The plays I will discuss are: Ina Césaire's *L'enfant des passages ou La geste de Ti-Jean*, a dramatization of an amalgam of folkloric tales about the multi-talented, irrepressible French-derived folk character Ti-Jean; and Michèle Montantin's *Vie et mort de Vaval*, a drama based on Carnival. I will also demonstrate the manner in which the playwrights in my study use Creole in their plays, and how this usage serves again as a tool of resistance to the French cultural hegemony that has undervalued the cultural production and language of these islands and contributed to the vacant or low-self esteem symptomatic of PTSS. It is my contention that by using Antillean folklore, by representing the spirit of the Carnival, and by embracing the Creole language, these women playwrights have found a way to recuperate their past, counter the effects of transgenerational PTSS and open up their society to a transformative future.

The Nature of Resistance

Resistance to slavery or postcolonial oppression is usually framed in the popular imaginary in terms of organized protest and insurgencies—the taking up of arms, burning

of property, taking of lives. In the Caribbean, the model of the fugitive slaves or the maroons, who created their own counter-societies and cultures in defiance of the slaveholding colonial powers, is also often posited as the ultimate image of resistance during the time of slavery. *Marronnage* is a term still used in contemporary French Caribbean writing to describe acts of defiance to the imposed order of society. For instance, speaking of Gerty Dambury's *Trames,* Sylvie Chalaye proudly described Gilette's act of choosing writing over the societal dictates of prescribed motherhood as "marronnage."[1] The perceived lack of a prevailing marronnage, or of an armed resistance to slavery or colonialism has led to an existential dilemma, particularly for Martinique, vis-à-vis its own history.

However, postcolonial scholars and historians today take a broader approach to what constitutes resistance. For example, Guadeloupean historian Josette Fallope posits:

> It seems indispensible, as a means of most closely apprehending the dimensions of the responses of the slave, to enlarge the concept of resistance to include all the actions of opposition and the systems of defense developed in the face of aggression, from the most natural or even unconscious, to the most deliberate and active.[2]

Fallope sees even the slaves' ability to use the "Saturday garden" for their own profit and to insist on the right to have such a space and the time to tend it in the face of rising opposition by slave owners as an important act of resistance.

Postcolonial theorist Bill Ashcroft goes further and even privileges those acts of resistance that are less visibly oppositional. He states that

> if we think of resistance as any form of defence [*sic*] by which an invader is 'kept out,' the subtle and sometimes even unspoken forms of social and cultural

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[1] Sylvie Chalaye, "Le théâtre de Gerty Dambury: Un marronnage au féminin." Émergences Caraïbe(s): Une création théâtrale archipélique, ed. Sylvie Chalaye et Stéphanie Bérard, *Africultures* 80 (2010): 233.

[2] Josette Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens: Les noirs à la Guadeloupe aux XIX^e^ siècle* (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe: Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe, 1992), 12.

> resistance have been much more common. It is these subtle and more widespread forms of resistance, forms of saying 'no,' that are most interesting because they are most difficult for imperial powers to combat.[3]

According to Ashcroft, imperialist powers understand how to combat forces that are expressed in terms of what he calls "a binary myth" of "colonizer/colonized, civilized/uncivilized, white/black," but are less adept at combating the subtle and the ambivalent resistance that takes

> the array of influences exerted by the dominating power, and [alters] them into tools for expressing a deeply held sense of identity and cultural being….[I]t is the ordinary people—and the artists and writers, through whom a transformative vision of the world has been conceived—who have often done most to 'resist' the cultural pressures upon them. In most cases this has not been a heroic enterprise but a pragmatic and mundane array of living strategies to which imperial culture has no answer.[4]

Negritude, Caribbeanness, and Creoleness as Resistance

In the Caribbean, cultural resistance to French literary hegemony was marked by the emergence of the concept of Negritude developed by Aimé Césaire of Martinique, Léopold Senghor of Senegal, and Léon Damas of French Guyana. Although later criticized for playing into the binary myth of White versus Black by single-mindedly embracing African roots and extolling a Black aesthetic as the basis for cultural expression, the Negritude movement still wrested Caribbean cultural output from the grasps of a stultifying mimcry of French art. It also served as resistance to an overweening French literary criticism that demeaned and denigrated Caribbean writing as exotic and picturesque, and posited it as merely regional, rather than universal, as they considered French art to be. In an interview with fellow Martinican author René Depestre, Aimé Césaire spoke about some of the tenets of Negritude:

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[3] Bill Ashcroft. *Post-Colonial Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 20.
[4] Ibid.

> [W]e affirmed that we were Negroes and that we were proud of it, and that we thought that Africa was not some sort of blank page in the history of humanity; in sum, we asserted that our Negro heritage was worthy of respect, and that this heritage was not relegated to the past, that its values were values that could still make an important contribution to the world….[u]niversalizing, living values that had not been exhausted.[5]

In *Éloge de la créolité* (*In Praise of Creoleness*), a newer generation of Martinican authors Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, even while advocating a different cultural stance, paid homage to Césaire for his groundbreaking vision:

> To a totally racist world, self-mutilated by its own colonial surgeries, Aimé Césaire restored mother Africa, matrix Africa, the black civilization….Césaire's Negritude gave Creole society its African dimension, and put an end to the amputation which generated some of the superficiality of the so-called doudouist [exoticist] writing ….Negritude imposed itself then as a stubborn will of resistance trying quite plainly to embed our identity in a denied, repudiated, and renounced culture….Césairian Negritude is a baptism, the primal act of our restored dignity. We are forever Césaire's sons.[6]

Having been released from the dictates of French literature by Césaire's Negritude movement, Guadeloupean and Martinican writers soon discovered that identification solely with Africa also did not fully express the lived reality of French Caribbean society with its broadly multicultural populations, and the unique Caribbean history of slavery and cultural expressions shared by other Caribbean islands and nations. Thus, Édouard Glissant proposed the concept of Caribbeanness (*Antillanité*): the recognition of the Caribbean as a unique geography. In his *Discours Antillais* (*Caribbean Discourse),* he

> preached "Antillanité," a sense of regional identity in the Caribbean and French Guyana that could lead some day to a political federation of the four French

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[5] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 92.

[6] Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge De La Créolité*, trans. Mohamed Bouya Taleb-Khyar (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 79, 80.

> overseas 'départements' in the area, plus other Caribbean Hispanophone, Anglophone, and Lusophone groups consisting of the descendants of slaves.[7]

While cognizant of the proven difficulties of creating an Antillean political unity that can surmount the particular interests of the discrete islands and their distinct alliances to various European nations, the United States, and/or South America, Glissant still advocated that Caribbean artists embrace those unique qualities of Caribbean culture shared in common and build upon them to help create a Caribbean collective consciousness.

Dissatisfisfaction with Glissant's concept of Caribbean uniqueness led to the emergence of another school of thought. Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant sought to define the process that accounted for the uniqueness that Glissant identified. They looked at the vast range of peoples— Europeans, Africans, Amerindians, East Indians, Asian, and Middle Eastern—all brought together in the Caribbean to form a new syncretic Creole culture. They identified the genesis of Creoleness as arising from

> the brutal interaction, on either insular or landlocked territories…of culturally different populations….Generally resting upon a plantation economy, *these populations are called to invent the new cultural designs allowing for a relative cohabitation between them.* These designs are the result of a nonharmonious (and unfinished therefore nonreductionist) mix of linguistic, religious, cultural, culinary, archtectural, medical, etc. practices of the people in question.[8]

They state that this cauldron, "this historical maelstrom," involved not only adaptation to the foreign landscapes by distinct and often far-traveled populations but also the forced "*cultural confrontation*" of this mixture of people because of their close proximity, often under oppressive conditions, and their non-existent opportunities to return to the places of

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[7] Laurence M. Porter, "Maryse Condé, Historian of the Black Diaspora," in *Emerging Perspectives on Maryse Condé: A Writer of Her Own,* ed. Sarah Barbour and Gerise Herndon (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006), 183.

[8] Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, *Eloge De La Créolité,* 92. (Italics in the original.)

their birth. This process was responsible for the creation of creolized people and syncretic cultures not only in the Caribbean, but also across the globe, from the "Europeans, Africans, and Indians in the Mascarene islands" to the "Europeans and Asians in certain areas of the Philippines or in Hawaii."[9] As Caribbean Creole artists they believe they must plumb the depths of their culture for their unique Creole expressiveness. They particularly urge a return to the traditional orality of their culture, seeing that orality as "a whole system of countervalues, a counterculture." They envision that by recuperating Creole language, dance, the carnival, and the old gestures—in other words what Diana Taylor terms "the repertoire"[10]—of their societies, they could marry those aspects of their culture to their now literary "trained senses" and thereby "inseminate Creole in the new writing."[11]

Reclaiming the Creole Language

A foundational corner of the concept of Creoleness is quite naturally the use of the Creole language. Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant state:

> Creole, our first language…is our original means of expressing our innermost self, our collective unconscious, our folk genius….We dream in it. We resist and accept with it….No matter what the field, no Creole creative artist will ever be accomplished without intuitive knowledge of Creole poetics.[12]

But what is Creole and who uses it? Albert Valdman designates Creole as the "language of slavery," not as a derogatory term but because these languages literally came into being as a part of the social processes connected with the establishment of slave-driven plantocracies in the New World. As such, Creoles are not completely

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[9] Ibid., 93. (Italics are in the original)

[10] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

[11] Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, *Eloge De La Créolité*, 97.

[12] Ibid., 43, 44. (My translation).

mutually understandable. Haitian Creole is not the same as Guadeloupean Creole or Louisiana Creole, for example, although they may share similar components. Each Creole differs because its origins were based upon the dialects of colonists from different regions of France and upon African languages from different parts of that continent. Also the degree of contact between colonist and slave population altered the degree of French that became incorporated.

Originally developed as a means of communicating with their captors and masters, slaves eventually also used their creolized language as a way of resisting and subverting the force of the dominant powers in their lives. Aching notes:

> Given circumstances in which the public utterances of native speaking subjects were circumscribed by imperial laws and their attendant codes of conduct, these subjects were obliged to seek expression through opaque, surreptitious, and resourceful means.[13]

This subversive role of Creole, as well as its deep-rooted expressiveness of the lived realities of Creole life and traditions, is seen by postcolonialist theorists Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffins, and Helen Tiffin as an essential step in resisting European hegemony. They say:

> One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language….The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized space. [14]

Suppression of Creole and the strict imposition of French went hand in hand with the post-emancipation assimilationist project of France. French, as the official language of the country (both islands are, after all, officially a part of France), is the language of

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[13] Gerard Aching, *Masking and Power: Carnival and Popular Culture in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 2.

[14] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 7, 37.

instruction. Thus, one of the predominant markers of education and social status, along with skin color, was the ability to speak fluent metropolitan French. Middle-class and upper-class families insisted that their children speak French, often banning the use of Creole, even in the home. This connection of social status and the use of the French language tended to exacerbate a class division based on language. However, everyone across class lines seems to have a fair familiarity with spoken Creole, though that familiarity does not always translate into written fluency. For instance in an interview with Jean-Pierre Piriou, Suzanne Dracius says,

> I belong, let's say, to an ethnoclass where the children are raised on French, not Creole. Creole is the language of my country, one of the two languages of my country, but in the end French remains my maternal language. I think in French, thus when I write in prose, I am tempted to use this language.[15]

Maryse Condé has expressed the same reluctance to write in Creole, for similar reasons.

Of course the dilemma that the Creolists confronted immediately concerned the reception of their work: literary and dramatic writers have to balance their desire to remain faithful to Creole expression with their need to reach a wider audience for their works. Each playwright in my study chose different means of handling this dilemma. A few playwrights, such as Florelle Benjamin, Guadeloupean author of "La Bous Ouben Lanmou," wrote their plays entirely in Creole, thereby rendering the plays inaccessible to this study. For her part, Ina Césaire also wrote *L'enfant des passages* entirely in Creole but provided a French translation side by side, page by page throughout the play, so that it could be read or performed in either language.

By contrast, in her play *Rosanie Soleil* (*Fire's Daughters*) (discussed below), Césaire includes several lullabies and folk songs, using the language in which they are

[15] Suzanne Dracius, unpublished interview with Jean-Pierre Piriou, 2002.

commonly sung. Most are in Creole, but one is French in origin and is rendered in French. Otherwise Césaire, Maryse Condé in *Comme deux frères* and Michèle Montantin in *Le Chemin des Petites Abymes* use occasional short Creole phrases, and either have the response of another character provide the meaning for the benefit of the non-Creole listener or if the emotional intent is clear, the Creole is left untranslated. Similarly in *Le cachot,* Gilda Gonfier uses a few untranslated phrases or single sentences in Creole, but then uncharacteristically gives one actor the option of reciting a very long mid-play monologue in either French or in Creole, as he wishes. She does not supply the Creole in the text, however.

In some of the plays, the authors provide a more formalized means of translation of the Creole for the published versions of their plays. Montantin in *Vie et mort de Vaval* (discussed below) provides parenthetical translations for her rather frequent use of Creole in her play about Carnival. These translations, of course, are only available to the reader and not to the spectator. For her part, Suzanne Dracius in her *Lumina Sophie, dite Surprise* (discussed below) on occasion gives large passages of Creole poems and songs to the chorus in her play, which like a classical chorus, represents the voice of the people. These she translates in parentheses for her readers. However on two or three occasions, short phrases uttered by other characters go untranslated. In *Trames,* Gerty Dambury carries a short glossary at the end of the play that translates several passages throughout the play that are in Creole. She informs the reader, however, that the translations were supplied at the request of her publisher, implying that she did not originally wish to provide them. Also, once again, such translations would not be available to a live audience, unless they are included in the program.

This embrace of the diglossia of the Antilles and the recognition and privileging of vernacular language in opposition to the fierce imposition of the dominant French language is revolutionary, especially when viewed in contrast to the state of affairs a mere sixty years earlier. Frantz Fanon noted:

> In the French Antilles the bourgeoisie does not use Creole, except when speaking to servants. At school, the young Martinican is taught to treat the dialect with contempt. Avoid Creolisms. Some families forbid speaking Creole at home….In France they say 'to speak like a book.' In Martinique they say 'to speak like a white man.'[16]

Although the writers of the Negritude movement wrote a meticulous French, even garnishing praise from such renowned writers as Jean-Paul Sartre and André Breton, one of the framers of the movement, Léon Damas, still recognized the tyranny of the imposition of French over the use of Creole. In a poem entitled "Hoquet," he writes:

> This child will be the shame of us….
> Shut up I told you you have to speak French
> The French from France
> The Frenchman's French
> French French.[17]

This perspective is again confirmed from the more contemporary perspective of historian Josette Fallope who states that

> the adoption of the French language by the bourgeoisie of color, was already a sign of cultural assimilation of which it was proud….The adoption of French language and the disdain for the Creole language, the mode of expression of the masses, was the symbol for the bourgeosie of its detachment from the masses from whom they absolutely wanted to be distinguished.[18]

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[16] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 4.

[17] Léon-Gontron Damas, "Hoquet" in *Pigments* (Paris: Guy Lévis Mano, 1937); quoted in Fanon, *Black Skin*, 4.

[18] Josette Fallope, *Esclaves et Citoyens: Les noirs à la Guadeloupe aux XIX^e^ Siècle* (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe: Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe, 1992), 456.

Even the writers associated with Glissant's Caribbeanness movement also most often wrote in French, although Bonnie Thomas points out that underneath "there is often a concealed subtext in Creole."[19]

The Francophone Caribbean women in my study have shown a robust willingness to undertake the challenge of using Creole, while still maintaining a level of access to their works for the non-Creole-speaking public. I have no doubt, however, that even their own translations of the texts from Creole to French will fail to recuperate the full meaning that a Creole-speaking audience would glean from the original Creole, especially in performance where the text would be further enriched by familiar Creole gestures, songs and dances. Indeed, Carole Edwards has observed that these works are so distant from the standard fare of the Western theatre canon that Parisian audiences find them nearly incomprehensible.[20]

The Role of Folklore

However, even before Glissant had published *Le Discours Antillais* (*Caribbean Discourse*), his treatise on Caribbeanness, in 1981, or the framers of the concept of Creoleness had published *Éloge de la Créolité* in 1989, Ina Césaire had been actively working to recuperate Caribbean/Creole roots through some twenty years of ethnographic study of the folktales and autobiographical narratives of the elders of Martinique and Guadeloupe. Storytelling is one of the most ancient ways of passing down the customs, beliefs, values, legends, and other folklore of a society to the next generation. It still remains an entertaining yet potent form of cultural resistance for formerly enslaved

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[19] Bonnie Thomas, *Breadfruit or Chestnut?:Gender Construction in the French Caribbean Novel* (New York: Lexington Books, 2006), 25.

[20] Carole Edwards, *Les Dramaturges Antillaises: Cruauté, Créolité, Conscience Féminine* (Paris: Harmattan, 2008), 57.

and/or colonized populations, who see within storytelling "a powerful means of transmission of history and survival."[21] With its ample use of larger-than-life characters, heroes and heroines, tricksters and monsters; its free-wheeling use of allegory and metaphor; its access to a wealth of folk legend and history; and its eschewing of a moral for its ending, the Caribbean folk tale is a perfect vehicle for subtle and not so subtle subversion of the totalizing narrative of the dominating culture.

As an ethnographer, Ina Césaire had long been intrigued by the folktales of Martinique and Guadeloupe. By the time Théâtre de la Soif premiered her play *L'enfant des passages ou La geste de Ti-Jean* at a cultural festival in Fort-de-France in 1987, she had already published a book of folktales in 1976, *Contes de mort et de vie aux Antilles* (Tales of Death and Life in the Antilles) that was compiled from audiotaped recordings of stories told at actual wakes in Martinique and Guadeloupe and from other improvised storytelling sessions. She published a second compilation, *Contes de nuits et de jours aux Antilles* (Tales of Nights and Days in the Antilles), in 1989. However, as with the oral histories she had recorded and collected,

> [f]or some time she had felt dissatisfied with the limitations of scholarly analysis, sad that so many gifted speakers, so much vital testimony, reached only a restricted circle. Recordings in Parisian archives, learned articles, even bilingual collection of tales…did not transmit the unwritten resources of the national literature to its true audience."[22]

Encouraged by the reception of her play *Mémoires d'isle* in 1983, based on oral histories of elderly women, particularly her own two grandmothers, Césaire undertook the dramatization of the adventures of Ti-Jean, the quintessential trickster folk character

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[21] Marie-Chantal Kalisa, "Violence, Memory and Writing in Francophone African and Caribbean Women's Fiction" (Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of Iowa, 1999), 158.

[22] Bridget Jones, "Two Plays by Ina Césaire: *Mémoires d'Isles* and *L'enfant des Passages." Theatre Research International* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 223–33.

whose persona seems to be ubiquitous in the French diaspora. Prototypes of the character can be found in the folklore of medieval France as well as in that of the French colonial territories: the French Caribbean, Canada, Louisiana, and even in the Maghreb of Africa.[23] The origin of this folkloric character among the peasants of medieval France accounts for the frequent presence of a king and a princess in the stories. But the basic scenario of this trickster everyman who outwits the forces of domination and oppression lends itself to an infinite variety of social and political situations where the oppressed seek relief, if only in their imaginary world.

> Ti-Jean is the spokesperson for the peasant, the weak and the oppressed. Being cunning and 'full of devilishness,' he ridicules the holders of power and the wealth and plays tricks on them.[24]

However, even from her encrypted title, rife with meaning on several levels, we know that this play is more than just a re-creation of a fable. *L'enfant des passages* can be translated as "the child of passageways." For Bridget Jones the title means that Ti-Jean not only represents the orphan and the slave but also "a new generation able to negotiate divisions, open the barriers which segment adult society, find the connections for a psychic and social wholeness."[25] The play is about a new world order, one freed of the plague of post traumatic slave syndrome (hence Jones's "psychic and social wholeness"), where the young lead the way, not encumbered by the past or by material possessions. Ti-Jean is the French Antillean Everyman, sometimes configured as the disinherited, and exploited godson of a "béké" (White planter aristocrat), who outwits and outfights every

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[23] See Évelyne Voldeng, *Les Mémoires de Ti-Jean: Espace Intercontinental du héros des contes franco-ontariens* (Vanier, Ontario: Les Éditions L'Interligne, 1994).

[24] Ibid., 51.

[25] Jones, "Two Plays," 230.

obstacle thrown in his path and finally comes into possession of the realm and all its wealth.

The alternate title, *La Geste de Ti-Jean,* alludes to these adventures; it hearkens back to the medieval genre of epic heroic poems about the deeds or exploits (*gesta* in Latin) of legendary men such as Charlemagne, known as *chansons de geste*.[26] So in this sense the title might be read as the "Epic or Adventure of Ti-Jean." At the same time, Césaire has introduced into the traditional telling of the story references to "le geste" of certain characters, employing a masculine form of the noun that is strongly reminiscent of Brecht's concept of *gestus,* according to which the character's gesticulation "makes corporeal and visible the relationships between persons and functions to keep always before the spectator the social implications of epic theatre."[27] Early on in the adventure, Ti-Jean makes a gesture of condescending irritation towards his brother (23); the king makes a gesture of repudiation when Ti-Jean presents himself as the conqueror of the Seven-Headed Beast (105); and at the end of the play, the nouveau riche Ti-Jean makes an aristocratic gesture that sends the servants scurrying to serve his brother a glass of rum (115). In addition to highlighting social issues, the play is also informed by other aspects of the Brechtian epic theatre in its nonlinear, montage-like sweep across events and times. Also, just as in Brecht's work, the main character is flawed, the most moral choices are not always made, and the ending is not always the best for society.

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[26] William W. Kibler, Grover A. Zinn, John Jr. Bell Henneman and Lawrence Earp, eds., *Medieval France: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 195.

[27] Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 384.

The frame for the play is the oral story known as "Enfant terrible" (Dreadful Child) recorded in Césaire's *Contes de mort et de vie*,[28] which, according to Bridget Jones[29] is supplemented by characters and plot pieces from as many as seven or eight other stories, These include stories such as "Dame Kéléman," which is about the sorcerer Ti-Jean encounters, and "Ti-Jean L'Horizon," which explains how Ti-Jean received his surname.

That Ina Cesaire intends to speak of issues much larger than those of a fairy tale becomes immediately evident from her list of characters in the opening pages of her play. In addition to typical fable characters like Mr. and Mrs. Tiger, the Tortoise and Brer Eagle, there is The Upside Down Man who represents alternate realities, or parallel worlds, and symbolizes for Césaire the “heterogeneity of culture.” Also there is Zamba, who not only represents the traditional African ancestor and the figure of wisdom in traditional Guadeloupean oral literature but here also represents “memory, tradition, and forgotten history.” There are also recognizable social figures: the Thief sarcastically described as a "Negropolitan" (a somewhat acerbic portrayal of Antilleans who have lived in France and who usually are "deified," in the words of Fanon, upon their return to Martinique),[30] and the King, who is described as being either an old mulatto or a béké.[31]

Césaire's play opens at the point when the mother of Ti-Jean and his older brother Yinyin is dying. Upon her death Ti-Jean takes control of their affairs, reminding Yinyin that their mother had told them before her death that "the eldest child will obey the youngest child. The youngest will not obey the oldest!" Yinyin accedes to Ti-Jean's will

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[28] Joëlle Laurent and Ina Césaire, *Contes de Mort et de Vie aux Antilles* (Paris: Nubia, 1976), 24–37.
[29] Jones, "Two Plays," 229.
[30] Fanon, *Black Skin*, 3.
[31] Ina Césaire, *L'Enfant des Passages* ou *La Geste de Ti-Jean*, (Paris: Éditions Caribéennes, 1987), 8–11. All subsequent references to the play will be in parentheses in the text.

but sows seeds of doubt by asking: "Mama said that?" (19). We soon see that the reason for Yinyin's doubt is that Ti-Jean is a flawed character who, for instance, impetuously tries to kill a rat in the house their mother left for them by burning down the house. Now homeless, the course of the journey that he and Yinyin embark upon reveals other morally suspect decisions by Ti-Jean. For instance, he demonstrates his lack of gratitude and compassion when out of jealousy he kills the baby Tiger whom Mr. and Mrs. Tiger had entrusted to his and Yinyin's care, despite the fact that the Tigers had just sheltered and fed them in their time of need. Likewise, Ti-Jean turns Tortoise on her back and then eats her although she had just literally reassembled his and Yinyin's bodies, splattered by a fall from the sky, and brought them back to life, even if unceremoniously, by means of a fart. The immense injustice of Tortoise's death combined with Ti-Jean's unrepentant, cavalier attitude induces Yinyin to renounce him as his brother and to part company with him. Ti-Jean's adventures drive the rest of the story.

Through the next section of adventures, Césaire takes us on an allegoric venture. Ti-Jean immediately enters a world where everything is reversed: flowers grow with their roots in the air; people sleep on their heads in the day time and wash their faces with dirt. The implications of this fantastic world for the French Antilles is best described by playwright/librarian Gilda Gonfier in a blog article she posted in her capacity as an archivist for the documentary film *Le Pays à l'envers* by filmmaker Sylvaine Dampierre:

> An inverted country for me is a country that doesn't have its feet on the ground, that before being assured that it is anchored in the ground, before knowing who it is, what it wants and where it is going, constructs a false image of itself, one especially acquired from the colonizer, and today, from the state civil servant or from the tourist. We don't know how to look at ourselves.[32]

[32] Gilda Gonfier, "Guadeloupe, an Upside-Down Country?" Blogspace, http://lepaysalenvers.blogspace.fr/1395601/La-Guadeloupe-un-pays-a-l-envers/ (accessed 18 April 2011).

Subsequently, Ti-Jean encounters the Immortal Man who appears as a giant mahogany tree whose beard is composed of tangled branches that represent the threads of history. He explains to Ti-Jean: "If I cut one of these remembering threads, a large section of human culture will collapse in a bewildering uproar….Zag! Man will look for his forefather. Will he be a monkey or a fish?" (71). Of course, this image has tremendous significance to a culture who feels cut off from its history, not knowing the degree of the damage. How much fell away with the zig-zag cut of the European historian? Also, through the voice of the Immortal Man, Césaire asks incisively,

> Who will speak of the naiveté of the upper class?...Who will speak of…the intense imbecility of their petty-minded hatreds, of their narrow and caustic hatreds, hatreds led astray in the insularity of this miniscule world, rotating like animals seized by madness in their self-made cage, obscure hatreds and brilliant destinies, brilliant hatreds and obscure destinies, the antithesis of life and of the creative laugh. (73)

Ti-Jean insolently interrupts Immortal Man's musings and asks for his help in returning to his own world. The Immortal Man calls in the Fish in Arms to help him identify the wisest person in this realm. This character allows Césaire to address the issue of the military, particularly the Tonton Macoute of Haiti, whom the Fish in Arms closely resembles in his attitude. When the Immortal Man reminds him that he is not needed for repression, only to help a little boy, the Fish in Arms still replies "[A] good little repression from time to time is never useless" (75). This, of course, is a statement that resonated strongly at the time of the writing of the play when the Duvaliers were still in power in Haiti.

The wisest person in the realm is an African called Ancestor or Zamba. He has a phenomenal memory of the past, present, and future and is believed to be a sorcerer. Zamba arrives on his own and places himself immediately in conflict with the fish by

refusing to display any particular reverence to the Immortal Man or to the Armed Fish. Zamba directs Ti-Jean to the country of eternal night, explaining that this land will eventually lead him back to his own world.

In the country of eternal night, Ti-Jean encounters the Beast with Seven Heads, the creature responsible for swallowing the sun and keeping the land in perpetual darkness, a metaphor for the oppression of the European colonizing powers. Only by killing the beast can the daylight be returned to the land. The killer of the beast also wins the right to marry the king's daughter, a solution that caused Bridget Jones to tarnish Ti-Jean's image as a potential revolutionary:

> In her play Ina Césaire presents a rebel, who after only a brief protest accepts marriage into the existing fair-skinned ruling-class (Le Roi and his daughter, portrayed with an element of derision). She stops short of implying any revolutionary change, even though her analysis of oral tradition shows very clearly the moral and spiritual damage wrought by colonialism.[33]

However, I do not see Ti-Jean's actions to be quite as assimilationist as Jones does. First of all, there is no indication that Ti-Jean is aware that the killing of the beast will make him eligible to marry the princess. Upon killing the seven-headed beast, not wanting to weigh himself down dragging seven heads, instead he cuts out their tongues—an action that suggests the culture's emancipation from the hegemony of the French language in favor of the vernacular Creole. When the opportunistic Negropolitan stumbles across the dead beast, he cuts off the heads, and presents himself to the king as the rightful heir to the throne. It is only when Ti-Jean shows up later with the tongues that the King realizes he has been duped and threatens to decapitate the Europeanized usurper.

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[33] Jones, "Two Plays," 230.

At this point Ti-Jean exhibits resistance to the assimilationist impulse to enter into the world of the ruling class. First of all, Césaire has already diminished the stature of both the King and the Princess. Ti-Jean boldly disrespects the King for having been duped by the Negropolitan imposter, saying, "Mr. King, do you know you are the biggest imbecile. If the head of the numbskulls saw you, he would run away!" (105). For her part, the Princess is presented as totally clueless. Even the king says that she is very beautiful but he sometimes wonders if she is all there. By dint of his feats of bravery, his cunning, and his intelligence, Ti-Jean is by far the most qualified to run the kingdom. However, he declines the king's offer to marry his daughter. Only under the threat of being decapitated does he acquiesce to the marriage, but not without first asking for one more gift: half of the realm! The King gladly concedes and gives Ti-Jean even greater news: "[A]s husband to my daughter, the beautiful Bébelle, you are the only heir, my boy" (111). So, indeed, as Jones noted, this is not a revolution, but neither is it a capitulation. Instead, I would characterize it as a fantasy blueprint for a peaceful regime change, a rightful handing over of the country from the White aristocracy to the Martinican native son.

During the marriage banquet, Yinyin walks in, having encountered no adventures at all on his trip. Ti-Jean makes a speech in French (which remains in French even in the side-by-side Creole translation, as does the King's language, indicating French as the language of the ruling class, and showing that Ti-Jean is adept in both worlds). He tells the story of the death of his mother and the burning of his hut. He says, "[T]he old world is dead. Today, I am celebrated and admired but you have doubtlessly recognized me: I am Ti-Jean Lorizon. I am a forgetful Black man and you know without doubt also that nothing is forgotten more quickly than unhappiness. So, it's to you, to all of you, that I

ask, in all of our names, not to forget" (113, 115). The play ends with all of the characters encountered during the play, human and nonhuman, dancing energetically until abruptly stopped in a freeze-frame.

In this highly imaginative rendition of the beloved French Caribbean folklore hero Ti-Jean, Ina Césaire has found a vehicle for social commentary as well as a way to reclaim the important oral cultural form of Caribbean storytelling. The play itself is an answer to Ti-Jean's call "not to forget."

Carnival as Cultural Memory and Resistance

While some scholars insist that the Caribbean carnival is mainly a homegrown cultural practice originating primarily from events in the lives of slaves in the Caribbean such as Trinidad's camboulay (cannes brûles), there are also many aspects of it that resonate of times far preceding colonial incursions into the New World. There are aspects of the Carnival that are clearly derived from very ancient fertility rites and are even reminiscent of the phallic processions of early Greek civilization, from which comedy is thought to have evolved. Brockett and Hildy describe predramatic choruses of early Greeks who danced in processions, masqueraded as animals, appeared in ceremonies on stilts or carried large phallic symbols. As in Carnival, they note that "[t]hese ceremonies provided opportunity for considerable byplay and mockery between participants and spectators."[34]

Indeed, Louis Collomb, former president of the Group for the Development of Carnival and Festivals (later the Guadeloupean Federation of the Carnival), asserts unequivocally that "[i]n the French Antilles and in the Caribbean in general, Carnival was

[34] Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy, *History of Theatre* , 9th ed. (New York: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 18.

introduced by the European colonizers."[35] He even maintains that the Mass a Kon'n (masques à cornes), in which the participant is dressed in dried banana plant leaves and wears large horns on his head, comes from Egyptian antiquity and represents the Apis bull, symbol of virility and reproduction. Women, who sing obscene songs while exhibiting phallus-like objects, accompany him. The Mass a Fwet (masques à fouet) with its whipping of the earth also originates from a fertility rite coming from the Romans, in which the symbolic whipping of women was believed to make them fertile, and thus the whipping of the earth is designed to make it fertile too.[36] These practices eventually passed into medieval and Renaissance Europe.

Other events and characters are more noticeablly stamped with the mark of slavery and the New World. The Mass a Kongo, Neg Gwo Siwo (Blacks in syrup) or Mass a Goudwon (masques of tar) is performed by participants who are dressed either in field work pants, shorts, the old redingotes of the eighteenth century, or simply loin cloths. All parts of their exposed skin are covered with a mixture of molasses and soot. These blackened characters are parodies of the newly arrived African slave. Collomb points out, though, that this masque is also syncretic:

> In the European tradition, the foundational myth of the carnival one remembers is that of the bear or the savage man who leaves his cave on February 2 and blackens with soot all persons that he encounters as a way of making spring arrive sooner….It is interesting to note how this ancient carnivalesque myth (mythical savage man) telescoped into the also mythical savage African man: the Congo, the newly arrived African, from whom the Antilleans, recently emerged from slavery, considered themselves different.[37]

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[35] Louis Collomb, "Transmission et Reappropriation" in *Vie et Mort de Vaval*, ed. Conseil Régional de la Guadeloupe (Pointe-à-Pitre: Guadeloupe, 1991), np.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

A more positive example of the syncretic Carnival displays is the Moko Zombie/Angle Su Beki (the English on Crutches). Introduced atfter the First World War from the English islands, this character, a man dressed as a woman, wearing a medieval cone headdressing and mounted on stilts like West African stilt dancers is "a perfect example of syncretism," according to Collomb.[38]

But whatever the origins of Carnival, what cannot be denied is its subversive nature. Whether in Europe or in the Caribbean, the "fat" days preceding Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent allow a time when everyone shakes themselves free of societal restraints and the more disempowered elements of society get to parody and burlesque even the most austere institutions of their society: the church, the government, the military, the aristocracy. Lisabeth Parvisini-Gébert asserts that "Carnival enables the disenfranchised population to adopt fictitious social roles and to (at least temporarily) break the social boundaries of class and color characteristics of Caribbean societies." It also allows for "the articulation of resistance to the dominant culture's tendency to regard its own principles as eternal truths."[39]

Richard D.E. Burton speculates that the resistance manifested in Carnival has been co-opted by those in power as a way of relieving and diverting possible social unrest "by giving the people's frustrations a licensed imaginary outlet," still, on rare occasions, the inversion of power relationships celebrated in Carnival has engendered real political change. For instance, Burton states: "[I]t was by no means fortuitous that the final

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Lizabeth Paravisini-Gébert, "Writers Playin' Mas': Carnival and the Grotesque in the Contemporary Caribbean Novel" in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean: Cross-cultural Studies*, ed. Albert James Arnold, Julio Rodríguez-Luis, J. Michael Dash (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co. 1997), 216, 217.

collapse of Duvalierism took place in February 1986 against the background of carnival."[40]

Vie et mort de Vaval [41]

In creating a play epitomizing the life cycle of Vaval, the personification of Carnival, Michèle Montantin engages in a recuperative project that is informed by Diana Taylor's concept of the interplay between a culture's textual archive and its performative repertoire as sources of knowledge and preservation of a culture's memory. Taylor says: "Embodied performances have always played a central role in conserving memory and consolidating identities in literate, semiliterate, and digital societies. Not everyone comes to "culture" or modernity through writing."[42] While vigorously affirming the ability of the repertoire to transmit cultural practices and knowledge that Collomb identified as going back as far as Ancient Egypt, Collomb and his wife Michèle Montantin were also aware that the celebration of Carnival was constantly in flux and that there was even a time when interest in celebrating Carnival in Guadeloupe had almost completely waned. Though it has revived today, Collomb noted that there were already elements that had fallen out of the repertory, such as the Mass à l'Ours (the Bear Masque), which is no longer performed. Montantin even expresses her concern about the survival of Carnival in the opening moments of her play, when the master of ceremonies, Master of Drums, announces that he is afraid every year that the story of Vaval will no longer interest anyone. Another character wonders if they are about to announce the birth of Vaval or his definitive death. Thus, it is out of a love of Carnival and a desire to record some of its

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[40] Richard D.E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition* and *Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 218, 219.

[41] "Vaval" is a Creole derivative of Carnival

[42] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, xviii.

elements in the archive as well as in the repertoire that Montantin wrote *Vie et mort de Vaval,* a dramatization of Carnival for the stage. Diana Taylor recognizes the importance of this process when she states:

> The archive and the repertoire have always been important sources of information, both exceeding the limitations of the other, in literate and semi-literate societies. They usually work in tandem and they work alongside other systems of transmission—the digital and the visual, to name two. Innumerable practices in the most literate societies require both an archival and an embodied dimension.[43]

In the play, Montantin recounts the story of the life of Vaval, whose existence, initially unbeknownst to him, will span only the length of time between Epiphany on January 6 and Ash Wednesday. Like the carnivalesque scene opening Ina Césaire's *Mémoires d'isle*, this play opens while the actors are in the process of applying their makeup and costumes. In the mass of confusion and excitement of those who are supposed to be preparing for the birth of Vaval, with the aid of drumming and a birth song, Vaval is finally born through a slit in a large cloth. Having only a short time to live, Vaval grows quickly, and in the next scene, three weeks later, he is already a young man who has impregnated a girl.

Although grown, he is still nude as the day he was born. He covers his nakedness precariously by wrapping around himse;f the sheet through which his stage birth was effected. When he requests clothing, the Master of Drums lets him know that what he needs even more than clothing is to make preparations for his baccanal. Four pillars of the society, grossly parodied and burlesqued as Moko-zombis on stilts, arrive and each eventually agree to suspend different regulations of their society to make the festivities possible.

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[43] Ibid., 21.

The first to arrive is Madame President, a cross-dressed man (men dressed as women is an integral part of the Carnival's parodies based on inversions). She is unnerved by Vaval's talk of her need for love, while the crowd on stage accuses her of mismanagment of funds. Flustered, she gives him permission to reign over the city until the next Wednesday (Ash Wednesday) and his followers can do whatever they wish. The next visitor is a priest from whom Vaval extracts the right for his followers to roam the streets in masks, crowned with horns, and armed with whips (both symbols of fertility) and, like animals in heat, to indulge in wantonness and sexual desire. The next visitor is the police chief, who agrees to suspend all traffic rules, including traffic lights, so Vaval's processions can pass unfettered. He will also not press charges against vagabonds, transvestites, or the obscene.

The last visitor is the Keeper of Business Affairs who informs Vaval that his life is not just one of frivolity, but that he was born to perform a most serious mission: to lead the souls of those who died the previous year away from the earth and to the spiritual world via the Milky Way. Vaval makes light of the Keeper's words, not fully understanding that he will have to die himself to fulfill this mission. Instead, he turns his attention to the pants the Keeper has brought him, the last item he needed to complete his Carnival outfit. She-devils and a transgendered character called He-She arrive, and the dancing and celebration begin. Soon Vaval is swept into the frenzied spirit of Carnival.

Following the exuberant revelry, a drunken Vaval is left only with the masque of the dead, characters in black with the shape of skeletons imprinted on their clothing. At this point a foreshadowed subplot begins to play out in which an assassin kills a young prince. Vaval now understands that he is to play the part of the prince and that he will

have to die at the hands of the assassin in order to lead the dead souls to the Milky Way. When the scene is enacted and Vaval is mortally wounded, he is assisted into a stretcher that is composed of the original sheet through which he had been born, as the entourage chants in Creole, "Vaval pa kité nou!" (Vaval don't leave us).

Upon his death, the stretcher, holding a *bwa-bwa,* or an effigy of Vaval instead of the live actor, is brought out as the entourage mourns him loudly with tears, song and the covering of their faces with ashes, thereby symbolizing the coming of Ash Wednesday and Lent. As the procession carrying the bwa-bwa (which can be an articulated puppet on a pole) moves through the audience, the spectators are invited to join behind and everyone marches out of the theatre to the square in front. Once there, the effigy is burned while spectators join in the final dance of celebration.

By means of the events that transpire onstage as well as the descriptions by the characters in the play of various aspects of Carnival and carnivalesque practices and personages, Michèle Montantin has created a vibrant performed memory of a cultural practice that she loves so well. While celebrating its long history of subversion (for even during slave times, the slaves would parody and burlesque the masters during Carnival), she has doubly inscribed Carnival by placing it into the archives, both through production and publication. *Vie et mort de Vaval* was produced in 1991 at the Centre of Arts and Culture of Pointe-à-Pitre, as a coproduction of the association Chico-Rey and the Centre. Michèle Montantin, a professional director as well as a playwright, directed the work herself. The play was also published by Chico-Rey and the Centre.

With the use of folklore, the Carnival and Creole, several of these French Caribbean women playwrights have worked to recuperate the elements that are special to

their culture both in terms of their Caribbeanness and their Creoleness. By finding the beauty in the unique aspects of their culture, they assert self-esteem and a confidence in who they are as a people, and provide a foundation upon which the next generation can build. By embracing their own vision of the world they also provide resistance to and rebuttal of French cultural hegemony.

CHAPTER 7

FIGHTING BACK: CREATING CULTURAL MEMORY

One of the essential areas of recuperation from the effects of post-traumatic slave syndrome is the building of a cultural memory and collective consciousness. Francophone Caribbean women playwrights are poised to have a major impact on this endeavor with their ability to engage the past in palatable ways that mitigate the trauma for their societies. As Diana Taylor notes,

> Looking at performance as a retainer of social memory engages history without necessarily being a "symptom of history"; that is, the performances enter into dialogue with a history of trauma without themselves being traumatic.[1]

French Caribbeans, like other Caribbean people, have a strained relationship with the past. Some have an overwhelming feeling that they have been exorcised from the history of the islands by the writings of the European colonial powers, and that, in essence, theirs is a "non-history," as Édouard Glissant asserted.[2] Trying to recover a glimpse of the lived life of the Martinican and Guadeloupean person of color is particularly difficult as most of the historical records of the colonies are governmental accounts and procedures or the accounting records of plantations. However, the urgency and importance of remembering the past is evident in Ina Césaire's reflections on the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Martinique:

> If we as Antillians have a responsibility to the coming generations, it is the responsibility of remembrance that constitutes the minimum guarantee against possible reoccurrence [*sic*]. If we demand recognition of the slave trade and

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[1] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 210.

[2] See earlier discussion above, page 3

> slavery as a crime against humanity, we do so to preserve an essential bit of our dignity.[3]

Others feel that an unadulterated recuperation of past historical facts is not what is needed. The past is too painful, too shameful to resurrect; the healing work to be done is too exhaustive, if not impossible. As Hermance says in Césaire's *Mémoires d'isle*: "I can't understand people who want to go far back into their ancestry….[A]s far as I'm concerned, life today's enough of a handful! The past doesn't interest me. It's all too far, too far away, the whole thing."[4] Her thoughts echo those of Frantz Fanon, who said:

> The discovery that a black civilization existed in the fifteenth century does not earn me a certificate of humanity. Whether you like it or not, the past can in no way be my guide in the actual state of things….Haven't I got better things to do on this earth than avenge the Blacks of the seventeenth century?"[5]

Like Hermance and Fanon, some contemporary Antilleans see the project of extricating a collective consciousness from knowledge of their past as a futile and risky endeavor. Like literary critic Christopher Bigsby, they ask: "Is it a legitimate function to sustain the memory of injustice?"[6] However, the writing of the contemporary women playwrights I have discussed here has been animated by the spirit of the proponents of Creoleness who state that in their writing they

> must look for our truths and affirm that one of its missions is to present insignificant heroes, anonymous heroes, those who are forgotten by the colonial chronicle, those who resisted indirectly and patiently and who have nothing in

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[3] Ina Césaire, "To Each His Commemoration," trans. Elisabeth Daverman, in *Facing up to the Past: Perspectives on the Commemoration of Slavery in Africa, the Americas and Europe,* ed. Gert Oostindie (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2001), 57.

[4] Ina Césaire, "Island Memories: Mama N. and Mama F." in *Plays by French and Francophone Women: A Critical Anthology,* ed. Christiane Makward, Judith G. Miller and Cynthia Running-Johnson. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 59.

[5] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 199–200, 203.

[6] C.W.E. Bigsby, *Remembering and Imagining the Holocaust: The Chain of Memory*, Cambridge Studies in Modern Theatre (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 19.

> common with the Western or French heroes….It is a question of descending into ourselves, but without the Other, without the alienating logic of his prism.[7]

In the hands of the women playwrights in my study, who have recuperated aspects of the lived past from the stories of elders, from the old songs, and dances, from the fables and stories, and from the rhythms of their own souls, the denigrating colonialist history is countered and a new future comes in sight. Maryse Condé once saw this rebuilding of a cultural memory as her mission as an Antillean writer:

> If….the brutality of repressions in conjunction with the necessity to prevent all Antillean realization has deprived us of precise memories of our martyrs, and since oral literature does not restore the 'heroic deeds' except for those of the heroes in stories, it is up to the writer to imagine, to recreate. For many, it is the most beautiful role: to furnish models there where they were lacking. To give a memory. On the other hand, past battles can foreshadow those of the future and then it is a question of a double lesson.[8]

She, Ina Césaire and Suzanne Dracius directly immerse themselves into the turbulent waters of actual historical events. Maryse Condé's *An tan revolisyan,* Ina Césaire's *Rosanie Soleil,* and Suzanne Dracius's *Sophie Lumina dite Surprise* reappropriate actual historical events in the Guadeloupean, Martinican, and Haitian past but without the "alienating logic" of the European gaze. They wrest a buried past from the grips of "non-history" and lay it out as an affirmation of their people and their aspirations.

Reclaiming the Past

The tense relationship between French Caribbeans and history is not only a result of their having been subjected to the Western imperialist writing of their history but also of their having been subjugated to an active erasure of slavery from the annals of French history. As Joseph Roach asserts: "[F]orgetting, like miscegenation, is an opportunistic

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[7] Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge De La Créolité,* trans. Mohamed Bouya Taleb-Khyar (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 101, 102.

[8] Maryse Condé, *Le roman antillais,* Classiques Du Monde, Littérature Antillaise (Paris: F. Nathan, 1977), 20–21.

tactic of whiteness. As a Yoruba proverb puts it: 'The white man who made the pencil also made the eraser.'"[9]

According to Catherine Reinhardt, "France…has never integrated her slave past into the nation's history. The absence of slavery and the slave trade from the school curriculum exemplifies this lack"[10] This blot on the national character was replaced by a narrative of French Enlightenment, assimilation and equality. This determined act of enforced forgetting in the name of the illusion of the homogenized, egalitarian nation is why until very recently brown and black-skinned Antillean children recited "Our ancestors, the Gauls" in their classrooms. "French schools," says Marie-Chantal Kalisa, "are the ultimate memory eraser."[11] It was not until the year 2000, after more than 150 years of repressed knowledge, that the French government voted into law recognition of the slave trade and of slavery as crimes against humanity.

By originally creating a narrative celebrating their grand gesture in legislating the liberation of the slaves without giving recognition also to French atrocities under slavery or acknowledgment to the extensive evidence of slave resistance through bloody revolts, poisonings, arsons, letters, and petitions, France valorized itself while painting the slave population as passive and ineffective. Despite many brave acts of defiance, both personal and collective, by the slaves leading up to their final emancipation in 1848, the fact that the abolition of slavery was conferred by decree rather than wrought through immediate revolt in the manner of Haiti seems to still weigh heavily on the collective consciousness

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[9] Joseph R. Roach, *Cities of the Dead : Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 6.

[10] Catherine A. Reinhardt, *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 10.

[11] Marie-Chantal Kalisa, "Violence, Memory and Writing in Francophone African and Caribbean Women's Fiction," Ph.D. diss, (The University of Iowa, 1999), 77.

of Guadeloupe, and particularly of Martinique. While the name of slave heroes were buried and lost, the glory for the final emancipation was conferred upon Victor Schoelcher, who had been a very influential and staunch French advocate of abolition. Consequently, numerous public institutions and edifices bear his name, from a stunning library in the heart of Fort de France to the high school that Aimé Césaire attended. Responding to the observation by a French writer visiting the islands about the statues and monuments to Schoelcher everywhere, Maryse Condé pointedly responded that those memorials were done so that

> the creole not forget for an instant by the constant recall of the name of the Benefactor that he owes his liberation, not to his own effort, but to the will of the master, impenetrable as God who from one day to the next made of a slave a Free Man like himself, in his Image.[12]

Frantz Fanon also once remarked that there were an "impressive number of statues throughout France and the colonies representing the white figure of France caressing the frizzy hair of the docile black man whose chains have just been broken."[13] Condé recognizes the power of the pen to refute this imbalanced representation of the past, and says, "The role of the writer will thus be to recall the revolts, the uprisings, the massive poisonings of the masters, in one word, the resistance and the fugitive slave."[14]

While the Guadeloupeans have resurrected and honored the memory of Louis Delgrès and Joseph Ignace, who gave their lives in the fight against Napoleon's troops that came to re-establish slavery in Guadeloupe, I find it interesting that Martinicans have not chosen also to valorize Delgrès, who was born in Martinique, or those unnamed heroes who undertook slave uprisings on their soil, or even the unknown slaves who

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[12] Condé, *Le roman antillais*, 20.
[13] Fanon, *Black Skin*, 195.
[14] Condé, *Le roman antillais*, 20.

wrote fiery letters in 1789 to the governor of Martinique and the military commander of St. Pierre preceding a revolt, saying:

> Remember that we the Negroes…*we are ready to die for this freedom,* for what we want to and *will obtain it at any price,* even with the help of mortars, canons [*sic*], and rifles….If this prejudice is not entirely eradicated before long, there will be *torrents of blood,* as powerful as our streams flowing in the streets.[15]

The great significance of these letters was that in counterpoint to the efforts of abolitionists in France (Les Amis des Noirs), who painted the slaves as passive recipients of the gifts of the enlightenment and civilization they hoped to bestow upon them, these letters showed the slaves to be sophisticated and capable active agents of their own liberty.

Creating Collective Memory

Collective memory is a touchstone for group survival. By means of cultural practices such as storytelling and dance, shared narratives about a common past, and common beliefs and values, the group defines itself in both the past and in the present. Trauma experienced by even a fraction of the group's population causes a ripple throughout the community and impacts the group culture. Sociologist Kai Erikson says, "[T]raumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create a mood, an ethos—a group culture, almost—that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up. Trauma, that is, has a social dimension."[16] When an already fractured population, such as the slave populations of Guadeloupe and Martinique—divided between newly arrived African slaves, Creole field and domestic slaves, and free

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[15] Archives Nationales de France, "Colonies F3 29," folio 83; quoted in Catherine Reinhardt, "French Caribbean Slaves Forge Their Own Ideal of Liberty in 1789" in *Slavery in the Caribbean Francophone World: Distant Voices, Forgotten Acts, Forged Identities*, ed. Doris Y. Kadish (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 26. (Italics in the original.)

[16] Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community" in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 185.

Creoles of color—is traumatized by more than two hundred years of slavery, the challenges to creating group cohesion and collective memory are enormous, but not insurmountable. As cultural psychiatrist Laurence Kirmayer points out:

> Trauma shared by a whole community creates a potential space for retelling. If a community agrees traumatic events occurred and weaves this fact into its identity, then collective memory survives and individual memory can find a place (albeit transformed) within that landscape.[17]

However, noting that just "[a]s remembering is a social act, so too is forgetting,"[18] Kirmeyer adds: "If a family or a community agrees that a trauma did not happen, then it vanishes from collective memory and the possibility for individual memory is severely strained." [19] This is precisely the type of suppression that occurred when those who were slaves one day became French citizens the next and their previous status, history, and even the uprisings that hastened their emancipation became erased by a narrative of French benevolence, nationhood, liberty, equality, and brotherhood. As implausible as such an erasure may seem, Kirmeyer reminds us that

> [t]he injunction 'never forget' made with regard to the Holocaust points to the ease with which even so extreme a rupture of experience can be forgotten, suppressed or mythologized until unrecognizable. The moral order requires memory, and memory, in turn, demands certain narrative forms."[20]

It is precisely at this juncture that the Antillean creative artist's mission emerges, for as Reinhardt states:

> Unable to identify with colonial history, [Caribbeans] are forced to find ways of recapturing bits and pieces of their past in order to construct their own historical identities. This task is consciously taken up by many Caribbean writers who

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[17] Laurence J. Kirmayer, "Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Narrative, and Dissociation" in *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (New York: Routledge, 1996), 189–90.
[18] Ibid., 191.
[19] Ibid., 190.
[20] Ibid., 192.

> 'search' the historical memory of their people, using latent traces they have come across in the reality of their Caribbean existence.[21]

Imagination as Recuperative Key

Caribbean scholars seem generally to concur with Édouard Glissant that the French Antilles suffers from a sense of "non-history" that suppresses the recognition of any existence on the islands prior to the colonial presence and the erasure of any events that ran counter to the master narrative of colonial and Enlightenment discourse. Now that the importance of a collective memory to the health and strength of a people has been recognized, how can it be obtained at this late date? Cultural theorists, literary critics, and some of the most renowned contemporary expressive voices locate the answer in the imagination of the poet, the novelist, and the playwright. Nobel Prizewinner Derek Walcott, speaking of the Caribbean at large, states:

> [D]egradations…have been endured to the point of irrelevancy. In the Caribbean history is irrelevant, not because it is not being created, or because it was sordid; but because it has never mattered. What has mattered is the loss of history, the amnesia of the traces, what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention.[22]

J. Michael Dash, noted Francophone scholar and translator of Édouard Glissant, concurs, saying, "In a situation where the group is ignorant of its past, resentful of its present impotence, yet fearful of future change, the creative imagination has a special role to play….The imagination must unearth unofficial truths that official history has

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[21] Reinhardt, "French Caribbean Slaves Forge Their Own Ideal," 20.

[22] Derek Walcott, "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?" (1974) in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott.* D. Robert D. Hamner (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1992) 53.

suppressed."[23] Compressing and universalizing this concept into a catchy maxim, Bigsby asserts, “Memory and imagination are kissing cousins.”[24]

The recognition of the inherent link between imagination and memory is seen in the English language where "story" is embedded within the word "hi/story." The link is completely cemented in French, where both meanings are collapsed into one word "histoire." Indeed Freddie Rokem asserts that Michel de Certeau

> has suggested that fiction and historiography are closely related and even in some respects identical….[H]istorians and creative writers not only rely on similar rhetorical strategies, but also hold the same basic assumption concerning the status of their discourses in relation to the 'real' events in the past which they depict.[25]

It is within the duality of this word, within the explicit recognition of the ultimate fictionality of the historical narrative, so easily visible when the same events are interpreted by historians of opposing ideologies, that cultural theorists, poets, novelists and ultimately our French Caribbean playwrights have found the flexible space to extricate from meager traces, the threads to weave an image of the past so needed for the building of a collective memory for their people.

As is evident from the sampling of the plays I have presented in this study, these French Caribbean women playwrights have shouldered this task, creating fictional genealogies and snatches of past lives based on spoken narratives, songs and dances, carnival rituals, and bits and pieces of written texts. Three playwrights have also undertaken the historicization of three actual historical events in the French Caribbean: the 1870 Insurrection in the South of Martinique (Ina Césaire's *Rosanie Soleil*, and

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[23] J. Michael Dash, "Introduction" in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* by Edouard Glissant (Charlottesville: University of Virgina Press, 1989), xxxviii.

[24] C.W.E. Bigsby, *Remembering and Imagining*, 23.

[25] Freddie Rokem, *Performing History* (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2000), 12.

Suzanne Dracius's *Lumina Sophie, dite Surprise*) and the revolt of Delgrès and Ignace in Guadeloupe, the revolution of Toussaint L'Ouverture in Haiti, and the effects of the French Revolution on the Caribbean (Maryse Condé's *An tan revolisyan*).

French Caribbean male playwrights have addressed history through theatre also. Interestingly, though, while several male Martinican playwrights have written about historical Black leaders, they have chosen Haitians as their heroes, as with *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* by Aimé Césaire, *Monsieur Toussaint* by Édouard Glissant, and *Dessalines ou La passion de l'indépendence* de Vincent Placoly. The women playwrights in my study, on the other hand, chose events concerning the lives of Martinicans and Guadeloupeans.

The uprising in the South of Martinique to which Césaire's *Rosanie Soleil* and Dracius's *Lumina Sophie, dite Surprise* refer was instigated in February 1870, but fully erupted in September of that year, just as the Third Republic replaced the government of Emperor Napoleon III in France. The ground was already set for the disturbances by ongoing dissatisfactions by Blacks with the slave-like conditions of the workers in the sugar cane fields twenty-two years after Emancipation. This disgruntlement was further enflamed by the judicial system's mistreatment of a young Black Martinican named Lubin, who had been whipped by a White aristocrat for not ceding the road to him quickly enough. Lubin complained to the governor about this affront but received no redress. Taking things into his own hands the next time he encountered the aristocrat, Lubin whipped him. The aristocrat did, of course, have his complaint heard and Lubin was tried by a tribunal of White planter aristocrats who sentenced him to prison in exile

in French Guyana in South America. The head juror was a man named Codé, who became the symbol of this injustice.

On September 22, energized by the general excitement over the change of government in France, Louis Telgard, a Black man who had been involved in the revolts leading up to emancipation in 1848, organized an attack on the Codé plantation and set it afire. Codé escaped but was found two days later and killed. The hastily assembled band of insurgents included numerous women, among whom were Rosanie Soleil of Césaire's play, and Lumina Sophie of Suzanne Dracius's. Twenty other plantations were attacked and incinerated that first night and more in the ensuing days. Also some thirty people were killed. A bloody and ruthless government repression put an end to the uprising on September 26.

The government framed the uprising as an organized plot to overthrow the government of Martinique and to establish a Black republic in the fashion of Haiti. Using this pretext they were able to bring forth the most punishing of penalties in what was reported to have hardly been a fair trial. The women in particular were targets for the harshest punishments as they were considered "in effect, doubly guilty: guilty of having revolted against their condition as proletarians, guilty of revolting against their condition as women."[26] Fourteen women in all were condemned and severely punished.

According to Odile Krakovitch, Lumina Sophie, whose story resonates of the Jeanne d'Arc legend, was

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[26] Rice-Maximin, Micheline. "Entre Fiction et Realité: Contrôle et résistance dans *Laisser brûler Laventurcia* de Xavier Orville." *Atlantic Cross-Currents: Transatlantiques*, Annual Selected Papers of the African Literature Association Meeting, ed. Susan Z. Andrade, Eileen Julien, Micheline Rice-Maximin and Aliko Songolo (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001), 82. The account of the uprising is drawn from Rice-Maximin, 81–83. She herself references the research of Odile Krakovitch, "Le Rôle des femmes dans l'insurrection du Sud de la Martinique en septembre 1870," *Nouvelle Questions Féministes*, nos. 9/10, Paris, Alternative-Diffusion, septembre 1985 (35–51). [I will try to obtain this journal articles].

> considered the one who instigated the uprising, stimulated the troops, menaced those who hesitated, chose the plantations to occupy and burn….She was punished for her impetuousity, for wanting to make a Black republic of Martinique by means of fire and pillage, but they rejected the possibility of her having been a leader. It was inconceivable that a woman of nineteen years of age, Black and also pregnant could have been at the head of the troops.[27]

Instead of being seen as leaders and warriors, the women were painted as hysterics who did not participate conscientiously but through the excitation of their feminine instincts. However, although the event ended tragically for these insurgents, their actions did result in definitive social improvements. Melissa McKay quotes a letter from Suzanne Dracius in which she states: "After September 1870, things could no longer be the same as before. Some important political reforms intervened: universal suffrage, the right given to Martinique to elect two deputies and a senator, thus, the beginning of democracy."[28]

Rosanie Soleil: An Intimate Hi/story

Written in 1992, Ina Césaire's *Rosanie Soleil* was translated by Judith G. Miller and produced as *Fire's Daughters* by UBU Repertory Theatre in New York City on October 5, 1993. It was directed by the renowned playwright/director Ntozake Shange. To date, it has not yet been performed in metropolitan France. French scholar Christiane Makward contends that this lack of production in the metropole "is perhaps because 'the events' of 1870, which the play reflects without staging them—sugar revolts in the South of Martinique and the burning of sugar cane fields—seem too close to other recent events"[29] (i.e. uprisings in the streets of Paris and unrest in Guadeloupe).

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[27] Krakovitch, Odile, "Le Rôle des femmes," 44; qtd, in Rice-Maximin, "Entre Fiction et Réalité," 82.

[28] Letter from Suzanne Dracius, quoted in Melissa L. McKay, *Maryse Condé Et Le Théâtre Antillais*, Francophone Cultures and Literatures.(New York: P. Lang, 2002), 44.

[29] Christiane P. Makward, "Enraciné profond: le théâtre d'Ina Césaire." Émergences Caraïbe(s): une création théâtrale archipélique, ed. Sylvie Chalaye et Stéphanie Bérard, *Africultures* 80 (2010): 143.

Ina Césaire sets her play in a realistic intimate domestic space in Martinique. As the mother Madame Sun enters the stage and begins her daily morning spiritual preparations, an off-stage voice intones in a legalistic manner the names and descriptions of sixteen actual participants in the historic 1870 uprising. The next to the last name mentioned is Lumina Sophie; the last is Roseanna Sun (Rosanie Soleil), Madame Sun's daughter. However, in her author's notes, Césaire insists the play should not be treated as a historical drama but as a "chamber play." Following her desire to give voice to "those who are silenced; those who act, who have always acted, without ever having their thoughts or their actions extend beyond the familial setting,"[30] what interests her in this play is "to show from the interior and in the intimacy of daily life what could be the spirit of resistance and revolt."[31] Therefore, the narration of the names is merely a non-diegetic reference, belonging to a time period in the future, and unheard by characters in this domestic scene. Undisturbed Madame Sun continues her daily preparations in the well-cared for modest cabin she shares with her two fraternal twin daughters: Roseanna, described as a chabine (light-skinned but with blonde or light kinky hair) and Annarose who is dark-skinned. The only things that connect this totally feminine space to the outside world is the strong trade wind that enters the room through an open window, the haunting playing of a *ti-bwa* drum or guitar nearby and an eccentric neighbor Sister Smoke, who comes to visit and eventually brings to them the story of Augier de Maintenon, Codé and the young Black man, whom Césaire calls Lindoret, rather than Lubin.

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[30] Ina Césaire, "De l'enquête ethnologique à l'expression théâtrale" quoted in Makward, "Enraciné profond," 143.

[31] Makward, "Enraciné profond," 143.

Originally written in French, *Rosanie Soleil* still contains short phrases in Creole that are indicated by italics in *Fire's Daughters,* the English translation. However, even in English the whole rhythm of the conversation, the wordplay, the innuendoes and double entendre all give the play the feel of spoken Creole. As the members of this family greet each other and begin the day it soon becomes clear that the daughters are hiding something from the mother and the mother has her own secret too. Never making direct reference to the blazes that were set to the fields, as if sparing the mother from a knowledge that might incriminate her in the future, each woman still talks in fire imagery. Roseanna's first words to her mother are: "It's been truly hot, Mama, and it's seemed I was about to burn up alive!" To which Annarose adds "(*carefully*) That's true, all right. Towards noon, the cane fields feel like they're on fire…." Mama Sun seemingly does not catch on at first, and answers: "*I guess so*" (italics in the original). But then she adds, "It's dry as Lent. And this wind! You'd almost think it drags fire along with it." [32] Is she aware too?

A few lines later, Roseanna gets a little bolder and says: "I've been told—take no offense—that you used to know something about fire," alluding I would presume to her mother's possible participation in pre-emancipation uprisings twenty-two years earlier that involved the setting of blazes as well.

> THE MOTHER: (*furious*) Fire! What I really remember is the burning in my guts when they opened two times their size to put you into this world…

From this response, although she has not addressed Roseanne's statement directly, the girls deduce that their suspicions are correct.

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[32] Ina Césaire, "Fire's Daughters" in *New French Language Plays*: *Martinique, Quebec, Ivory Coast, Belgium,* trans. Judith G. Miller (New York: Ubu Repertory Theatre Publication, 1993), 9. Subsequent references will be in parentheses in the text.

> ROSEANNA: (*laughing*) So that's why we're called fire's daughters!
> THE MOTHER: (*anguished*) Fire, yes! But not when it burns my children!
> ROSEANNA: (*unmoved)* There's no burned fields without fire.
> ANNAROSE: (*more gently*) And there's no fallow earth without burned fields. (11)

The mother concedes the argument and exits, but shortly thereafter Annarose scolds Roseanna for talking too much and too directly.

The elliptical dialogue picks up again when the neighbor Sister Smoke inquires about the nearby soft beating of the ti-bwa drum. Madame Sun tells her she merely hears the sound of a wild manicou (an opossum-like animal) pacing in its cage. Smoke is hurt that Sun would think her so stupid as not to recognize the sound of the drum. She counters by suggesting that Madame Sun has hidden one of the insurgents in the back room. Sun responds sharply with a proverb: "[T]he sugar cane leaf is keen…and sharp! When the flat-rumped pig roots around the cut cane, it's apt to get its snout slashed!" Sister Smoke quickly understands the offense taken at her probings and assures Madame Sun that she would never betray her confidence. With the atmosphere clearing up as quickly as it had become stormy, Madame Sun reaffirms their friendship by offering her some tea and then they both smile as she asks to be excused to take a cup of tea out to her "wild manicou" (16–17).

It is through this type of indirect dialogue that we discover that not only is Madame Sun hiding an insurgent but that in all likelihood it is the twins' long-absent father. No such statement is ever made, but the twins all of a sudden yearn to have her describe their father again. The pride and love she still holds for this man pours forth.

> I’ve already told you a hundred times: as tall as an hour glass, as black as mahogany, as good a talker as *an old-time Arab trader!* (*Proudly)* And as for his manners...Let’s say that he knew what manners were...He wasn’t just your average black man, he was an educated negro! His father came from Haïti, a free country. A black nation and a free one...(*She laughs.)* Like him.... (38)

And a great part of what she admires about him is connected in her mind to his Haitian heritage, a country whose successful revolution remains the standard-bearer of heroism among the Caribbean populations.

However, when the sisters are alone, they speak to each other very directly. Annarose is worried about Roseanne who participated in the killing of Codé. Communication also becomes more direct as the sisters and the mother realize that they have all been trying to protect each other, while still participating in their own fashions in the insurgency. When Sister Smoke also places herself in danger by coming to warn them that a door-to-door search is being conducted to find the leader of the insurgents, the girls inform their mother that they had made a change to the hurricane shelter and they could hide the insurgent there. While Madame Sun and Annarose shepherd the fugitive to a safe hiding place, Sister Smoke and Roseanna stage a storytelling session as a way of staging a picture of domestic normalcy when the authorities arrive.

In the final scene of the play, upon hearing the distant drumming that lets them know that the "stranger" has arrived safely at the insurgent camp on the horse they provided, the women perform a spiritual ritual around the Assotor, a traditional drum used in Voodoo ceremonies. Calling upon Ogun, the god of War, they joyously shout out the Haitian motto, "Live Free or Die!" and all vow to join the insurgents the following nightfall.

Thus, without moving her play outside the domestic domain, Césaire has successfully modeled the heroism of those who resisted oppression in their own lives and actions, and demonstrated how their individual acts of resistance, when unified with the

actions of other common people, became the grist upon which revolts could be built. She says,

> I think there are so many unknown heroes in our world, especially at the beginning of our tragic history; those who are called the common people, those to whom hardly a word is granted and who, supposedly having nothing to say, on the contrary, have much to say.[33]

***Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, Resurrecting a S/hero.**

For her part, Suzanne Dracius chose to depict the unsung Martinican heroine of her eponymous play *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (Lumina Sophie aka Surprise) outside of her domestic space, where she was a seamstress, and instead inside the battle arena where she played a definitive role in the Insurrection of the South in Martinique. The piece, which Dracius designates as a historic fabulodrama or a heroic fantasy, is a five-act play that is strongly influenced by Greek as well as neo-classic French theatre, as might be expected of someone like Dracius, a scholar and teacher of Latin and Ancient Civilization. But Dracius is also a proclaimed literary writer who is endowed with a magnificent, unfettered imagination. Of all the writers I have encountered who have tackled the issue of slave trauma, self-recuperation, and resistance, none have done so with more abandon, inventiveness, experimentation, and freedom of expression than Suzanne Dracius. James P. Gilroy in a review of the play says:

> Dracius's play captures the attention of the reader/spectator by its thought-provoking discordance of styles. The drama is both epic and burlesque, classical and avant-garde. There is a constant shift from one register to another, and the audience is moved to compassion and laughter almost simultaneously.[34]

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[33] Ina Césaire, "De l'enracinement à l'ouverture du monde: Entretien de Stéphanie Bérard avec Ina Césaire." Émergences Caraïbe(s): une création théâtrale archipélique, ed. Sylvie Chalaye et Stéphanie Bérard, *Africultures* 80 (2010): 148.

[34] James P. Gilroy, "Dracius, Suzanne: *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*," *The French Review* 80, no.2 (Dec. 2006): 486–487.

The eclectic nature of the play extends also to the musical interludes and songs that Dracius suggests, which range from the traditional Carnival vidé song and dance to Beethoven's "Für Elise" and Mozart's "Cosi Fan Tutte."

According to the front matter of her published play, a three-act version of *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (Lumina Sophie aka Surprise) was written in honor of the Global March for Women on October 17, 2000 and directed by José Alpha. Subsequently it was read at the conference for the Association of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars (ACWWS) in April 2002 and then produced for Cultural Nights in Rivière-Pilote, the site of the historic insurrection, on August 2, 2002. Later that month it was also produced at the nearby Festival of Marin. In addition, with the support of TV5, it was presented at the opening ceremony in Martinique of the American Association of Teachers of French, where Dracius was named an Honorary Member, the first Martinican writer to be so honored since Aimé Césaire in 1979. The play was published in its five-act format in 2005 by Éditions Desnel of Martinique.

The play opens in September 1870 in the shelter of a cliff in a clearing in a field of sugar cane in the south of Martinique near Rivière-Pilote. Lumina Sophie dite Surprise, who Dracius unabashedly names as a leader of the Insurrection, is holed up with a band of insurgents, primarily women, most of whom compose the Chorus of Arsonists. She is only a nineteen year old seamstress, but her intelligence, her bravery, her self-taught education, and her vision for a united and liberated people have brought her to a leadership position. She definitively squashes any racial or ethnic squabbles among her troops, building a sense of unity in preparation for their next assault. In the process of the last attack, her troops have become separated from the male leaders, Telgard and

Lacaille, as well as Emile, Lumina's lover, and, unbeknownst to him, the father of the baby she is carrying. In the course of the evening as they search for signs of the rest of their party, the insurgents discuss the oppressive conditions for the workers, and the general restriction of their human rights, which renders their lives virtually those of slaves.

Into this huddle, a magical being appears, La Muse Africa, a divine being who is an androgynous shape-shifter and time-traveler. S/he appears as a bat with broad wings and wearing make-up composed of ritualized symbols. S/he also carries a "combinoscope," an anachronistic modernized gadget combining a mobile cell phone, a mini-computer, a micro-cassette recorder, a pocket camcorder, etc., which in the 1990s when the play was written, prefigured the Ipod. Although s/he has knowledge of the past, present, and future, s/he is not permitted to change of the course of events. Her mission, instead, is to make sure that Lumina Sophie's valorous deeds are recorded in the annals of history. However, her outward appearance as a bat causes the Women Arsonists to try to set her on fire or at the very least to shoo her away from the camp with their torches. Her mission is serious, but, as can be imagined, this African muse also provides moments of humor and the lessening of tension within this potentially and eventually tragic scenario. For instance, just as the Muse arrives, Lumina blasphemes, saying, "Burn! I want to burn everything! And if the good Lord descended from the sky, I would burn him too, because he must be an old béké."[35] As soon as La Muse Africa has escaped from the torches of the women, she takes out her combinoscope and contacts God. While waiting for her connection, she says: "Rumors are so devilishly fast! Oh! [God has picked up and

[35] Suzanne Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* (Fort-de-France, Martinique: Éditions Desnel, 2005), 35. All subsequent references will be in parentheses in the text.

overheard her reference to the Devil.] A thousand pardons. Nothing escapes your surveillance, not my thoughts or Lumina's words. If you were as quick to catch our prayers, I know some who would be glad" (38).

Eventually, Lumina is able to see beyond Muse Africa's exterior appearance and realizes she is a beneficial force. However, when she learns about the muse's mission to record her heroic deeds, she dimisses it. She is more interested in doing what is necessary to bring about real change for the people. Lumina's attitude does not deter Muse Africa any more than it would contemporary journalists embedded with troops and equally determined to get the scoop on their story.

Over the course of the play, the situation becomes more desperate. Lumina learns from a letter from her lover, Emile, that his division is encircled on all sides by the army. Further news reveals that the missing men have been captured and shot to death. The names of some of the men are mentioned but no one has heard any news about Emile. Lumina stays focused. By the time she receives the signal for attack from the leader of another division, she has sewn a new flag. Shouting the Haitian slogan,"Cut off the heads. Burn the cabins," she then adds, "Let's crush all there is to pulverize. Cool head and flame in the fist!" (110), as they run to attack. As she departs the African muse attempts to detain her. Like today's cable news reporters, she begs, "Do me the honor of an interview, even briefly, there, at the very moment….What is a little hour, Lumina, in comparison to the immensity of your destiny" (111). In light of Lumina's immediate goals, the muse's request is absurd. Giving an interview on an as yet unearned glory does not hold a candle to fighting for liberty. Watching her rush off to battle, La Muse Africa says sadly:

> I wanted to preserve their image. To perpetuate their fame. Their woman's word. Their splendor. These women warriors didn't want that.They told me loud and clear, loud as the burst of their torches shattering the night's sky, clear as the fire they used to burn the old world, clear-cut as their determination: they were fighting for their dignity, not for glory. (113)

In the play's epilogue, Dracius reveals that badly outnumbered, and outarmed, many of the insurgents were killed in the assault and the rest were severely penalized and exported to overseas prisons. Lumina gave birth to her son on a prison floor. Later forced to marry a convict who treated her like a slave, she died, toothless, anemic, and suffering from rickets at the age of twenty-eight in French Guyana, South America. The father of her child, Émile Sydney, was never found and was believed to have escaped, as did Louis Telgard.

That Suzanne Dracius had deliberately undertaken the project of erecting a stronger cultural memory for Martinique through this play is evident in her words in a recent interview. She said, "One wants to create a mythology because one has no heroes. I wanted to contribute to placing this figure in the Martinican pantheon where there is hardly anyone, especially women."[36] She deemed theatre to be the best genre for her project of apotheosis because she felt that having Lumina Sophie embodied by an actress, showing her as a woman standing on her own two feet in her full corporality, would best accomplish her goal. She explains:

> I needed a real actress with flesh and bones to incarnate this historical figure since it was necessary to resuscitate her, to exhume this Creole Joan of Arc, seen as pregnant and not as a saint, from the limbo of oblivion and misogynistic denial in order to crown her with a halo. A woman in love, not a virgin. But nonetheless heroic. I wanted to project a true woman with a true life. A true flesh and blood woman. A heroine coming, not from my imagination, but straight from the history

[36] Axel Artheron, "Suzanne Dracius: Le 'carrefour' du théâtre pour se hisser au-dessus du magma de l'humaine marchandise," Émergences Caraïbe(s): une création théâtrale archipélique, ed. Sylvie Chalaye et Stéphanie Bérard, *Africultures* 80 (2010): 226.

> of Martinique. What would be better for that than the theatre, the living spectacle.[37]

Dracius understood intuitively and from experience the important role of theatre in recapturing the past. As Freddie Rokem states: "The theatre 'performing history' seeks to overcome both the separation and the exclusion from the past, striving to create a community where the events from this past will matter again."[38]

***An tan tevolisyan:* History Challenged**

With *An tan revolisyan* (*In the Time of the Revolution*), Maryse Condé takes up the project of bringing a fresh view to three historic events that have actually been commemorated in French Antillean culture: The French and Haitian Revolution, and Delgrès's revolt in Guadeloupe. Aspects of the Haitian Revolution had already been dramatized by Aimé Césaire and Édouard Glissant, among others. Indeed, Glissant noted that in1979 the "separatist intellectuals" of Martinique were accused of encouraging "a complex of Toussaint," which he said meant that they were "trying to compensate with the adoption of the hero of others for the absence in Martinique of a great popular hero."[39] But the writers of Martinique were far from the only ones who had a 'complex of Toussaint.' Indeed, in her essay, “Haiti’s Tragic Overture: (Mis)Representation of the Haitian Revolution in World Drama,” Vèvè Clark notes that no less than sixty-three plays were written about the Haitian Revolution between 1796 and 1975.[40]

Condé wrote her version of the revolutions at the request of the president of the Regional Council of Guadeloupe in honor of the bicentennial of the French Revolution.

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[37] Artheron, "Suzanne Dracius," 224.

[38] Freddie Rokem, *Performing History* (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2000), xii.

[39] Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1981) 135.

[40] Vèvè Clark, “Haiti’s Tragic Overture: (Mis)Represention of the Haitian Revolution in World Drama (1796 – 1975),” in *Representing the French Revolution: Literature, Historiography, and Art*. James A.W. Heffernan, ed. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New Hampshire, 1992), 238.

Directed by Sonia Emmanuel and performed by José Jernidier's troupe of sixty actors, it was presented on November 11, 1989, outdoors at the Fort Fleur d'Épée Gosier in Guadeloupe. There were two performances, with the theatre filled at each.[41]

The play was also produced in 1996 at the University of Georgia as a co-production between the Department of Romance Languages and the Department of Drama and Theatre. Translated by professors Doris Kadish and Jean-Pierre Piriou, it was directed by Freda Scott Giles. Bringing the production to an indoor space, the Seney-Stovall Chapel in Athens, Georgia, and replacing the original cast of sixty with seventeen student actors, provided a daunting challenge for Giles. She found a solution in the use of carnivalesque masks that denoted the constructedness of race and sex and enabled each actor to play at least six roles. She notes: "These multiple roles imposed a heavy responsibility on these young actors, but they acquited their task with great enthusiasm."[42]

With the deft sweep of the renowned novelist that she is, Maryse Condé managed to tell the story of three revolutions in this play: the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, and the Guadeloupean revolt, all of which occurred within a fifteen year span. The narrator/storyteller is Zephyr, a well-known Caribbean mythical character who flies from island to island all night, and, in this play, is the spirit of a man who was killed in an earlier uprising in Guadeloupe. With his aid, Condé is able to transport her story across time and space to the events of the three revolts. In the first act, she depicts the effects of the French Revolution on the people of Guadeloupe in 1789. Despite all the

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[41] McKay, *Maryse Condé*, 56.

[42] Freda Scott Giles, "Traduire et mettre en scène *An tan revolisyon* en Amérique" in *Les théâtres francophones et créolophones de la Caraïbe: Haïti, Guadeloupe, Guyane, Martinique, Sainte-Lucie*, ed. Alvina Roberta Ruprecht and Bridget Jones, Collection Univers Théâtral (Paris: Harmattan, 2003), 177.

lofty precepts of the French Revolution about liberty, equality and fraternity, the slave owners immediately make it clear to the slave population that these newly decreed rights do not include them. Those who rise up in protest are shot. Act 2 opens in 1794, the year of the first emancipation of slaves in Guadeloupe. While granted their freedom, the former slaves soon find themselves forcibly returned to the fields under similar conditions as those they endured during slavery. When they protest and revolt, the order is again given to fire on them. To emphasize again the failure of the revolution to live up to its promise, the scene ends in a mirror image of the scene of mourning shown after the 1789 revolt:

> Shots. The men fall. The lights go down. When they go back on, bodies are stretched on the ground. Women dressed in white arrive from staircases leading to the different corners of the stage. They crowd onto the stage, kneel next to the dead men, place lit candles at their feet and sing a cappella. This scene should be an exact replica of the one from the preceding period of 1789.[43]

When it comes to the Haitian revolution, Condé deconstructs Toussaint L'Ouverture and contests the adulation accorded him by the rest of the French Caribbean. While showing his spectacular ascension from a slave coachman to a skilled revolutionary fighter and the first leader of the first Black republic in the Americas, Condé also shows that as a ruler he too turned an impervious ear to the concerns of the emancipated slaves and the small farmers. While he had a heroic vision, she presents him as a determined pragmatist not easily swayed by the emotions of his subjects. After the Revolution, similar toVictor Hugues, the 1794 White liberator of Guadeloupe, when Toussaint learns that the former slaves do not want to return to work on the plantations,

[43] Maryse Condé, *In the Time of the Revolution*, *Callaloo* 25, no. 2 (2002): 476. All subsequent reference will be in parentheses in the text.

and worse still, that they are rebelling because they want the lands to be distributed among them, Toussaint pronounces:

> What insolence! They deserve the whip!....All overseers, drivers, and farmers who do not scrupulously fulfill the duties that farming imposes on them will be arrested and punished with the same severity as soldiers who fail to meet theirs.

Even the storyteller Zephyr says, "I found Toussaint Louverture a little frightening, in spite of all the respect to which he is entitled" (472–473).

Having desacralized Toussaint, Condé went on to cast doubt upon the glory of revolutions in general. Turning his attention back to the French Revolution, Zephyr says, "Revolution isn't a woman. It's a witch. She feeds on fresh blood. She smears it all over her jowls. She licks it off her fingers. And then, in the colorless hours before dawn, she gives birth to monsters." He then recounts the horrors of the Reign of Terror in France in which 16,600 heads were decapitated, "an average of 200 heads a week" (473). All of that abomination was committed in the name of liberty, only to have the country once again fall under the grips of the dictator Napoleon a mere fifteen years later. It was also Napoleon who nullified the emancipation earned by the brave efforts of Guadeloupean slaves who had fought against the British with Victor Hugues to obtain their freedom in 1794. Despite the valiant efforts of Louis Delgrès and Joseph Ignace in trying to defeat Napoleon's forces, they both lost their lives in the attempt. Slavery was re-established, not to be abolished again until 1848.

A scene in the play shows that some Guadeloupeans escape and manage to get to Haiti, where Toussaint's successor, Dessalines rules. He welcomes them assuring them that "[t]his land is yours!" and vowing to avenge them, saying "We'll fight to our last breath!" One of the men from Guadeloupe says "One day, despite all of this, our country

will be independent. Yes, it will be independent and we will plant it with the fruits of hope and fraternity!" As the crowd finishes dancing to the rallying cry of "Freedom! Independence! the storyteller says:

> That was in 1802! Since we all know the outcome of this story, I'll let you judge whether the promises that were made that year were kept; whether the dreams were realized or whether tomorrow still remains nestled in its mother's womb, waiting to be born. My eyes see nothing; only many, many corpses; many prisoners, many exiles; many, many. (489)

As suggested by the French sub-title for the play, *Elle court, elle court la liberté*, a take-off on a French children's game song, suggesting Liberty runs away, Condé gives a dark picture of the revolutions and their outcome. Despite the valor and bravery, the revolutions brought about untold death and bloodshed only to have the ideals for which they were fought unrealized, compromised, or reversed. In 1989, as she wrote the play, Haiti had just emerged from thirty years of brutal dictatorship at the hands of the Duvalier family; Guadeloupe and Martinique still are not independent. As director Giles says, "It's very clear that Maryse Condé did not see any reason to celebrate the Bicentennial of the Revolution since its principles had not been realized in Haiti, Martinique nor Guadeloupe."[44]

It is small wonder that the play raised a furor. According to Melissa McKay, following the production in Guadeloupe, the official television and radio media boycotted the production and future plans to film the production were cancelled. In an interview with McKay, Condé said:

> There was also a side that shocked the Antillean public a little. I showed them characters…that were considered mythical figures: Toussaint Louverture and Delgrès. Then I showed their negative and even ridiculous sides. Toussaint Louverture who is nearly a dictator; Delgrès who reads…a last letter to people who understand none of it [he spoke in a flowery French to people who spoke

[44] Giles, "Traduire et Mettre en Scene," 175.

> Creole], while in fact, these were sacred texts for the Antilleans. So, people didn't like that, they reacted a little.[45]

In asking her to commemorate the French Revolution, undoubtedly the officials expected an apotheosis of the ideals of the Revolution and a tribute to the liberators. Instead, Maryse Condé ripped off the rose colored glasses of nostalgia and even rejected the concept of a "glorious" revolution, be it the French, the Haitian or the Guadeloupean. As McKay observes:

> Condé had seen that it was necessary to break the myths and the slogans of the Revolution to find a more realistic and perhaps more a propos reading in light of the present French Caribbean…. [T]he purpose of this play...was not to repeat the fixed ideas in the history books but to go much further in the analysis of this historic period, putting the accent on the experiences of the inhabitants of the colonies."[46]

Another important challenge that Condé made to traditional historical accounts was to place more of a spotlight on the role of women in these insurrections. "According to D. Kadish, in addition to demystifying the heroism and exposing the truthful heritage of slavery, the author wanted to bring to light the contribution of women to the fight for liberation."[47] Women are represented throughout the play, especially in scenes of mourning but also as warriors as epitomized by the character Solitude, based on the legendary pregnant mulatto woman, who fought with Delgrès and died with him in the explosion at Matouba, outside of Basse Terre, Guadeloupe in 1802.

Through the opportunity afforded her by the commission to write a play for the Bicentennial of the French Revolution, Maryse Condé lived up to her mission to "furnish models there where they were lacking. To give a memory."[48] Her play talked back to the

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[45] McKay, *Maryse Condé*, 122.
[46] Ibid., 57.
[47] Freda Scott Giles, "Traduire et mettre en scène," 175.
[48] Condé, *Le roman antillais*, 20–21.

French master narrative of the French Revolution as well as contextualized the narratives of the home-based revolutions and revolts. She also confronted the masculinist narrative of revolutions by presenting a compelling female warrior figure, and the elitist narrative by having a constant presence of the common people who were not only acted upon but who themselves were actors in the historical events of the past. The cultural memory that Maryse Condé wants to build for the French Caribbean is one of inclusiveness and empowerment. This might equally be said about all three of these three women writers of history-influenced drama.

Recuperating their stories, their language, their performative culture, their history are all a part of resisting the debilitating tentacles of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome by French Caribbean women writers. By undertaking this important work, these women concur with Joy DeGruy Leary who says, "We have forgotten our greatness. Perhaps many of us have never known!...Whatever the case it is vital that we collectively regain this knowledge so we can take our rightful place in the world community."[49]

[49] Joy DeGruy Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Milwaukie, OR: Uptone Press, 2005), 189.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The Historical Past

The French Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique endured a tumultuous history of slavery, complicated by their transference back and forth between British and French control, by emancipation followed by re-enslavement for Guadeloupe, but not for Martinique, and by the emergence of four contentious classes of people within these slave plantocracies: slaves, free people of color, lower class Whites, and the White landed aristocracy. Despite the regulations of the Black Code, which allegedly mandated a certain level of sustenance, clothing, and work conditions for slaves (but also provided for severe punishments for insubordination or escape), many masters still deprived, overworked, sexually abused, and punished their slaves sadistically. However, even the most benign treatment by a master did not negate the injury to the enslaved individual. As trauma theorist Joy DeGruy Leary reminds us: "Bondage is antithetical to humanity. Therefore, bondage in any form is abusive. When we discuss living enslaved we are discussing only degrees of abuse….Slavery by its very nature is abusive and abhorrent to the human spirit."[1] When slaves were emancipated in 1848, the centuries of violence and abuse and trauma did not disappear though the history of slavery was swept under the rug by the French national narrative of enlightenment, liberty, equality and fraternity. Trauma theorists have been able to identify clusters of behavior that are generated by trauma and

[1] Joy DeGruy Leary, Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing (Milwaukie, OR: Uptone Press, 2005), 77.

have shown how trauma and its attendant behavior can infect an entire community and can be transmitted to descendants who were not even born at the time the atrocity was committed. In undertaking this study, it was my contention that the effects of slavery or Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome still permeated the societies of Guadeloupe and Martinique and that the repercussions of this slave trauma would be exhibited in the plays of their Black women playwrights. I also hoped to discover that the drama of these women playwrights is striving to combat the effects of this trauma by revealing the still-existent wounds and then through their creative imagination inspiring their societies to reconstruct a more self-affirming cultural foundation and collective consciousness, making, as John Kundert-Gibbs so aptly noted, "a proverbial pearl from the sand of their past."[2]

Slave Trauma and the Woman's Perspective

I chose to concentrate on the work of women playwrights for two major reasons: the female experience of slavery and the nature of its trauma was compounded by abuses specifically related to gender and thus, provides a fuller image of slave trauma; and the voice of the Caribbean woman writer has been silenced across the past decades. Despite the crucial female perspective on the traumatic historical past and on its lingering effects in contemporary society, Caribbean scholars Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido note that "The Caribbean woman (writer)…has been historically silenced in the various 'master discourses.'"[3] This is particularly so in the theatre arena where two world-renowned male Caribbean playwrights, Aimé Césaire and Derek Walcott, sucked the air out of the room. As Sandra Adell asserts, "Standing in the shadow of the formidable

[2] John Kundert-Gibbs, notes, 30 May 2011.

[3] Carole Boyce Davies, and Elaine Savory, *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990), 1.

figures of Derek Walcott and Aimé Césaire, women playwrights from the Caribbean remain virtually unrecognized in the canon of Caribbean literature and literary studies."[4]

Therefore one of the aims of this dissertation is to bring greater attention to the often overlooked French Caribbean woman playwright. To this end I examined eleven plays by seven women playwrights, two from Martinique and five from Guadeloupe. Some of the playwrights, such as Maryse Condé and Suzanne Dracius, already have achieved acclaim as writers of prose; others, such as Ina Césaire and Gerty Dambury, because of their success with play production and publication. However, two of the playwrights have never been published and for one, the play considered here is her first.

I examined this selection of plays by published and unpublished Black French Caribbean women playwrights through the lenses of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome as expounded by Joy DeGruy Leary; trauma theory by Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, and Yael Danieli and others; cultural memory theory, particularly the work of Jeffrey K. Olick, Laurence Kirmeyer, and Dominick LaCapra; postcolonial theory by Bill Ashcroft and Diana Taylor. The works of feminist/womanists Carole Boyce Davies and Patricia Mohammed, among others, have further helped me to clarify and articulate the female perspective of these women playwrights.

Joy DeGruy Leary and the work of other trauma theorists enabled me to discern the presence of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome in the drama of the women playwrights in my study. Some of the playwrights depicted scenes of slave atrocities, such as Gilda Gonfier and Ina Césaire in their plays *Le cachot* and *Mémoires d'isle*, respectively. Gonfier's *Le cachot* and Césaire's *L'enfant des passages* also had characters that

[4] Sandra Adell, "Word/Song and Nommo Force in Two Black Francophone Plays: Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Ton Beau Capitaine* and Ina Césaire's *Mémoire d'Isles*," *Journal of Caribbean Studies* 8, no. 1–2 (1990–1991): 61.

displayed the post traumatic symptoms of melancholy, transference, numbing and beserking. In Michèle Montantin's *Le Chemin des Petites Abymes,* Césaire's *Mémoires d'isle* and Suzanne Dracius's *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise* the PTSS symptoms caused by racist socialization were illustrated as the characters in these plays struggled within and against a society strongly predicated on issues of skin color and hair texture. Césaire's *La lettre d'affranchissement* provided an addendum as it illustrated a particularly problematic propensity among populations suffering from PTSS to undermine each other's success through what Leary calls "crabs-in-the-barrel" behavior. Daniely Francisque's *Crevée vive,* Maryse Condé's *Comme deux frères,* and Césaire's *Mémoires d'isle* depict a variety of deleterious effects the patriarchal model of the slave master's family has had on the family and interpersonal relationships of the descendants of former slaves.

Postcolonial Resistance

One of the urgent projects of postcolonial and post-slave populations is to resist the pressures of cultural, social, and political hegemony of the European metropole. Bill Ashcroft points out that

> the most fascinating feature of post-colonial societies is a 'resistance' that manifests itself as a refusal to be absorbed, a resistance which engages that which is resisted in a different way, taking the array of influences exerted by the dominating power, and altering them into tools for expressing a deeply held sense of identity and cultural being.[5]

Postcolonial resistance might even be considered a contested concept for Guadeloupe and Martinique in that they are both still firmly incorporated into the French political state. Yet, even from the early days of slavery, resistance has been part of the fabric of these

[5] Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 2.

island societies. The second half of the twentieth century has seen the writers of these islands take up the mantle of resistance by rupturing the hold of the aesthetics of the French metropole first to find inspiration in African culture and solidarity in Blackness through Césaire, Senghor and Damas's Negritude movement, then in the embrace of their own Caribbeanness through Édouard Glissant's vision, and finally to Creoleness through the thinking of Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant. Searching through the cracks of the French hegemonic cultural imposition, the playwrights in my study have resurrected the folklore, the orality, the Creole language, and the carnivalesque from the vestiges of their past and reaffirmed them in their drama. Ina Césaire revives the Francophone trickster hero Ti-Jean, inherently a figure of resistance and rebellion, in her play *L'enfant des passages ou la geste de Ti-Jean*. Michèle Montantin inscribes the values of the Carnival and its subversive underpinnings in her *Vie et mort de Vaval.* All of the authors embrace the use of Creole in their plays in blatant rejection of the previously uncontested dominance of the French language. Whereas at one time the use of Creole by the educated middle class was a major taboo, today Gilda Gonfier states unequivocally in an email interview: "We are bilingual…and the use of one language or the other is never neutral." Each of the playwrights has paid homage to Creole in one fashion or another in her work. Ina Césaire uses both French and Creole on par in a side-by-side translation of her play *L'enfant des passages.* Others use phrases, poetry, or songs in Creole that they opt to translate or not. Maryse Condé, who states: "People need to hear spoken the language they usually use, which has a literary quality that perhaps they didn't expect,"[6] does not write long passages in Creole herself because

[6] Stéphanie Bérard, "Le théâtre aux Antilles a toujours souffert d'etre un parent pauvre": Entretien de Stéphanie Bérard avec Maryse Condé." Émergences Caraïbe(s): une création théâtrale archipélique, ed.

she does not feel she has the literary grasp of the written language. She has however given her directors from time to time the liberty to let the actors improvise certain passages in Creole.

Constructing Cultural Memory

These playwrights have also directly addressed the issue of building a cultural memory for their societies. From the interior domestic scenes of Césaire's *Rosanie Soleil*, to Suzanne Dracius's direct, if fantastical, engagement with the historical figure of Lumina Sophie, and Maryse Condé's sweeping revolutionary panorama in *An tan revolisyan*, these authors have undertaken the project of creating a cultural memory. It is a complex process and not viewed by all as easily or successfully accomplished by creative artists. While Michèle Montantin said, in an email rejoinder to our face-to-face interview in Guadeloupe in May 2009, that "for a young people [meaning a young country] like ourselves memory must be in some way fabricated," she expressed doubt as to the ability of creative artists to do it. She asserted, "It's a political issue that has little to do with artistic creation…even when artists have largely participated in this construction (*An tan revolisyan* of Maryse Condé for the 1789 commemorations), where the artistic quality is really high, the complexity of the work does not help the construction of this memory."[7]

However theatre scholar Freddie Rokem, while recognizing the complexity of this intersection between theatre and history, still sees theatre's pertinence in issues of resistance. He states:

> [T]heatrical performances of and about history reflect complex ideological issues concerning deeply rooted national identitites and subjectivities and power

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Sylvie Chalaye et Stéphanie Bérard, *Africultures* 80 (2010): 31.

[7] Michèle Montantin, email communication, 14 August 2009.

> structures and can in some cases be seen as a willful resistance to and critique of the established or hegemonic, sometimes even stereotypical, perceptions of the past. They can also provide a direct critique of certain historical figures and their actions.[8]

He and cultural theorists such as Dominique LaCapra and writer/scholar Édouard Glissant put the task squarely in the laps of the creative artist. And many of these playwrights have taken up the challenge, whether unconsciously or consciously. New playwright Gilda Gonfier states unequivocally when asked what about her culture she wants to transmit through her work: "Resistance….We resist in Guadeloupe. We resist to keep our living language, Creole, and to reconquer our History, that of colonization and slavery."[9]

In this dissertation I set out to establish, and I believe that my findings definitively confirm, that the plays by a significant cross-section (seven playwrights out of a field of twelve) of Black women playwrights of the French Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique do reflect the existence of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome in their societies. Not only are actual scenes of slavery depicted on the stage, but also the symptoms of PTSS can be found in their portrayals of their societies' conceptions of beauty and personal worth, family and community life, and male and female relationships. I also showed that the writing of these women playwrights, either consciously or unconsciously, resists French cultural hegemony through the embracing of African and Amerindian orality, Creole language and sensibility, traditional folklore, and carnivalesque traditions, and by helping to restore a sense of collective consciousness and cultural memory to their people by resurrecting and/or re-imagining the repressed stories

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[8] Freddie Rokem, *Performing History.* Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2000, 8.

[9] Gilda Gonfier, "Gilda Gonfier sur Takam-Tikou" an interview on Le Petit Lexique Colonial; http://lepetitlexiquecolonial.blogspace.fr/2103754/Gilda-Gonfier-sur-Takam-Tikou/ (accessed 4/24/11).

of the heroic deeds of everyday people as well as reexamining historical figures from their embattled historical past.

I was drawn to this study by my passion for theatre, the French language, women's writing, and the Caribbean, and by an intellectual curiosity as to whether Joy DeGruy Leary's theory on Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome would apply to slave-descended populations other than African Americans. I have been deeply gratified on all counts. But beyond my satisfaction, my fervent hope is that this dissertation in English may make the invaluable contributions of these Francophone Caribbean women playwrights more widely known and more accessible to the French and non-French-speaking public. My fondest desire is that my dissertation will help to bring about a well-warranted increase in opportunities for publication and production of this drama both within the French Caribbean and in the world beyond, especially in the United States.. However, most importantly, my dissertation reveals that there are new and different perspectives emanating from the body of work of these women playwrights that will enrich and expand the complexity of our knowledge about contemporary women's dramaturgy and about the nature of womanhood itself. And as Carole Boyce Davies has said, "[A] complete account is, after all, what each discipline strives for." [10]

[10] Carole Boyce Davies, and Elaine Savory, *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990), vii.

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APPENDIX A

PLAYWRIGHT BIOGRAPHIES

INA CÉSAIRE

Ina Césaire is an ethnographer, critical essayist, and playwright, who spent several decades studying and recording folktales and the personal narratives of elderly French Caribbeans. She compiled the stories into two books of tales: *Contes de mort et de vie aux Antilles* (Tales of death and life in the Antilles) in 1976 and *Contes de nuits et de jours aux Antilles* (Tales of nights and days in the Antilles) in 1989. She has also written three books of analysis about Caribbean storytelling, the last of which is *La faim, la ruse et la révolte* [Hunger, cunning, and revolt), that she describes as "a semantic analysis of the Antillean tale."[1] In addition, she has produced over thirty articles on Caribbean and African orality.[2]

Just as her ethnographic studies have fed her analytical publications and her story anthologies of Caribbean tales, so too they inform her playwriting. As a playwright she has written seventeen plays,[3] four of which have been published: *Mémoires d'Isle: Maman N et Maman F* (*Island Memories: Mama N and Mama F*) in 1985; *L'enfant des passages ou La geste de Ti-Jean* (The child of the passageways or the adventures of Ti-Jean) in 1987; *Rosanie Soleil* (*Fire's Daughters*) in 1992, and *Molokôy* (Land turtle) in

[1] Stéphanie Bérard, "De l'enracinement à l'ouverture du monde: Entretien de Stéphanie Bérard avec Ina Césaire." Émergences Caraïbe(s): une création théâtrale archipélique, ed. Sylvie Chalaye et Stéphanie Bérard, *Africultures* 80 (2010): 147.

[2] New French Language Plays: Martinique, Quebec, Ivory Coast, Belgium (New York: Ubu Repertory Theater Publications, 1993), 2.

[3] Bérard, "De l'enracinement," 147.

2009. They are all bursting with the vivacity of oral literature and the cultural groundedness of her ethnographic interviews. Some of her unpublished plays, among a suspected treasure trove of others in the playwright's keeping, are held in the Textes en Parole Collection. She has also written a novel, *Zonzon Tête Carrée,* (Square-headed Zonzon), which was published in 1994.

Ina Césaire, the fourth child and first daughter of famed Martinican writer and statesman Aimé Césaire and his wife essayist Suzanne Roussy Césaire, was born in 1941 in Fort-de-France, Martinique. She completed her graduate studies in ethnology at the Sorbonne in 1971 and then taught for twenty-two years on the faculty of the University of Paris before returning to Fort-de-France, where she currently makes her home. Her younger sister, Michèle, is also a playwright and a director, and currently the head of the Municipal Theatre of Fort-de-France in Martinique.

MARYSE CONDÉ

It takes no stretch of the imagination today to characterize Maryse Condé as the "Grand Dame of French Caribbean Literature,"[4] or at very least, "the leading fictive historian of the black diaspora."[5] Condé is the author of eighteen novels, of which the best known in the United States are *Segu* and *The Children of Segu (Ségou, Les Murailles de Ségou),* an intergenerational story and sequel set in Mali, and *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem (Moi Tituba, sorcière…Noire de Salem)* that imagines the life of the West Indian slave woman involved in the Salem witchcraft trials in Massachusetts. Condé has also written collections of short stories, children's books, several books of criticism and

[4] Sarah Barbour and Gerise Herndon, *Emerging Perspectives on Maryse Condé : A Writer of Her Own* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006) 3; Elizabeth Nunez, "Talking To…Maryse Conde: Grand Dame of Caribbean Literature," *UNESCO Courier* 53, no. 11 (Nov 2000), 46.

[5] Laurence M. Porter, "Maryse Condé, Historian of the Black Diaspora" in Barbour and Herndon, *Emerging Perspectives,* 196.

innumerable critical articles. She was awarded the prestigious Grand Prix Littéraire de la Femme (Grand Prize for Women's Literature) in 1986 for this latter work. She has also been the recipient of Le Prix de l'Académie Française, a Fulbright Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Despite her subsequent great success in prose, her first foray into full-length writing was for the theatre. Her first play *Le morne de Massabielle* (The hills of Massabielle) was written in 1972 and first performed in France in 1979. In 1991, it was performed in English in New York City as part of UBU Repertory's season of Francophone plays. Since her debut play, she has written seven others: *Dieu nous l'a donné* (God has given him to us) in 1972, *Mort d'Oluwémi d'Ajumako* (The death of Oluwémi d'Ajumako) in 1973, *Pension les Alizés* (*The Tropical Breeze Hotel*) in 1988, *Comédie d'amour* (Love's comedy) in 1988, *An tan revolisyan* (*In the Time of Revolution)* in 1989, *Comme deux frères* (Like two brothers) in 2007, and *La faute à la vie* (Because of life) in 2009.

Born in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe in 1937, into an upper middleclass family, Maryse Boucoulon broke free from her insular home life at the age of sixteen when she went to Paris to complete her high school and then her college degree. She married actor Mamadou Condé there in 1959 and traveled to Africa soon afterwards, where she lived for most of ten years. Following a divorce, she completed her doctorate in Paris and has since held teaching positions in the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Virginia, and the University of Maryland, all while writing novels at the average rate of about one every two years. In 2002, she retired from Columbia University in New York

City, where she was the Chair of the Center for French and Francophone Studies.[6] She and her second husband, Richard Philcox, frequent translator of her works, make their home in Paris.

GERTY DAMBURY

A poet, playwright, short story author, actress, stage director and teacher, Gerty Dambury is the author of fourteen plays, of which six are published: *Rabordaille* in 1989, *Lettres indiennes* (*Crosscurrents)* in 1993, *Survol* (Flying Over) in 1995, *Camille et Justin* in 1997, *Reflux* (Ebb tide) in 1998, and *Trames* (Fabrications) in 2008. She has been writing plays since 1981. *Lettres indiennes*, which debuted at Théâtre des Halles in Avignon, was also produced in English as *Crosscurrents* by UBU Repertory as part of their 1997 season in New York City. She is the winner of several prestigious writing residencies in France and in Canada. Her play *Trames*, received the Prix SACD (The Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers) for Francophone Playwriting in 2008.

A student of Arab and English at the University of Paris in Vincennes, she has taught English in Guadeloupe between 1980 and 1998. In 2002, she was invited to be a visiting professor at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania. Born in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe in 1957, she currently makes her home in Paris.

SUZANNE DRACIUS

A fictional writer, a poet, a playwright, a critical essayist, and a professor of classical and Antillean literature, Suzanne Dracius is best known for her short stories, "De sueur, de sucre et de sang" (Of sweat, sugar and blood) and "Virago" both of which are published in her 2003 collection of nine short stories titled *Rue Monte au Ciel*

[6] Barbour and Herndon, *Emerging Perspectives,* 7.

(Climb-to-the-Sky Street). Her novel, *L'Auteur qui danse* (The author who dances) was published in 1989. In 2008, Desnel, a Martinican publishing house, published her first collection of poems, *Exquise déréliction métisse* (Exquisite Creole dereliction). Her only play, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, was written in honor of the Global March for Women in 2000 and subsequently produced at Conference of the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) in Martinique in July 2003. It was on that occasion in 1979 that she was named Honorary Member of AATF, the first Martinican writer since Aimé Césaire to be so honored. She has also received a Schoelcher Medal of Honor for *Lumina*, which Desnel published in 2005.

Born in Fort-de-France, Martinique, Dracius left the island with her parents while still an adolescent and ultimately completed her education in the classics at the Sorbonne. She taught in and around Paris before returning to Martinique in 1982.

DANIELY FRANCISQUE

Starting our primarily as a dancer, Daniely Francisque believes that acting chose her. She had to fill in for an actress when she was performing in a play on slavery called *Neg Pa Ka Mo* that was being directed by Luc Saint-Eloy, who afterwards asked her to join his company. Since then she has performed in a wide range of productions under his direction. She has also performed on the screen. She wrote her one-woman play, *Crevée vive*, and read it herself for the 2006 Textes en Paroles competition presentation.

Born in Martinique, Francisque was brought to France at an early age and did all of her schooling there. Unlike many young French Caribbean artists, she came back from France to pursue her career in Martinique in 2006. Since then she has performed in several plays as a part of Lucette Salibur's theatre company, Théâtre du Flamboyant. In

an interview with Stéphanie Bérard, she estimates that there are only about four professional actresses below the age of thirty, like herself, living in Martinique.[7]

GILDA GONFIER

Librarian by profession and the director of the Médiathèque Library in Gosier, Guadeloupe since 1996, Gilda Gonfier was inspired to write her first play, *Le cachot* (the cell), in 2005, by her curiosity about the life of the grandfather of her grandfather's grandfather who was age seventeen at the time of emancipation. Regarding the library as her second home, Gonfier undertook research that uncovered a documented account of an actual 1842 court case in Pointe-à-Pitre, the capitol of Guadeloupe, that serves as the inciting incident for her gripping play. She is hoping to have the play published by L'Harmattan.

Her passion for history has also led her to serve as researcher for Sylvaine Dampierre's full-length documentary, *Le pays à l'envers* (Upside down country) and her forthcoming full-length feature film, *Marie-Galante après la nuit* (Marie-Galante after the night).

This mother of two daughters, ages one and three, also recently wrote a children's book in French and Creole entitled *Zandoli mandè mayé / l'Anoli amoureux* (The lizard asks for marriage/Lizard in love). The book won a competition for the illustrated book of the year and as such it will be distributed to all children born in Guadeloupe in 2011. She is working on a second illustrated book "La Mangouste qui avait peur de son ombre" (The mongoose who was afraid of his shadow)" with the same illustrator, Doumey Durieux. She has also written a novel, "L'escarpin rouge" (The red heels), which is not

[7] Stéphanie Bérard, "Daniely Francisque: Histoire d'un retour reussi." Émergences Caraïbe(s): une création théâtrale archipélique, ed. Sylvie Chalaye et Stéphanie Bérard, *Africultures* 80 (2010): 170.

yet published and she is in the process of re-writing her second novel. She has also had a short story included in an anthology *Guadeloupe Temps Incertain*.

MICHÈLE MONTANTIN

Michèle Montantin is an accomplished stage director, playwright, theatre administrator, and founder and president of Textes en Paroles, a program that has held a juried playwriting competition and reading presentation for known and unknown French Caribbean playwrights since 2002. As a theatre director, she staged the first production of Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Ton Beau Capitaine* (*My Handsome Captain*). She also directed her own first play, *Vie et mort de Vaval* in 1991, which was published and co-produced by Chico-Rey and the Cemtre of Arts and Culture at Pointe-à-Pitre in Guadeloupe and later in Nancy, France. She is the author of three unpublished plays: *Le Chemin des Petites Abymes* (Recursive Lane), which was directed by Michèle Césaire at the Théâtre Municipal of Fort-de-France in Martinique; *La nuit de la comète* (Night of the comet) and "Dibidambam" (the onomatopoeic sound of a drum).

Similar to the granddaughter in her play *Le Chemin des Petites Abymes,* Michèle Montantin was born to a Black Guadeloupean father who was a professor of Classical Letters and to a Parisian mother in Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe in 1943. Like Maryse Condé, her schooling took her to France. It also took her to Africa where she completed her high school baccalaureate in the Congo. She received her Bachelor of Literature from the Sorbonne completed an apprenticeship in theatre in Nancy, France, which ignited her love of theatre.

APPENDIX B

SELECTED TRANSLATIONS

CHAPTER 1, PAGE 6

«Aujourd'hui les mouvement littéraires martiniquais sont très masculinisants, très 'phallo-centrés,' si ce n'est phallocrates….[U]ne femme écrivain est cataloguée comme une originale ou une homosexuelle, comme Madeline Carbet, ou occultée, écrasée par l'ombre d'un grand homme comme Suzanne Césaire, ou stigmatisée, traitée d'aliénée comme Mayotte Capécia.»

"Today the Martinican literary movements are very masculinist, very 'phallocentric,' if not phallocratic….[A] woman writer is labeled an eccentric or a homosexual, like Madeleine Carbet, or obscured, overwhelmed by the shadow of a great man like Suzanne Césaire, or stigmatized, or treated like an insane person like Mayotte Capécia."[1]

CHAPTER 1, PAGE 7–8

«[E]lles s'intéressent plus aux histoires individuelles qui se trouvent à l'intérieur de l'événement historique en question, mettant l'accent sur les vies de leur compatriotes féminins et des personnages marginalisés et oubliés dans les livres d'histoire. En faisant ceci, ces dramaturges arrivent à raconter des histoires intimes et touchantes, et en même temps elles donnent une voix à ceux qui sont restés silencieux dans le domaine théâtral pendant trop longtemps.»

"[T]hey are more interested in the individual histories that are found in the interior of the historical event in question, placing the accent on the lives of their women compatriots and on those marginalized and forgotten characters in the history books. In so doing, these playwrights manage to recount some intimate and touching stories while still giving a voice to those who have remained silent in the theatrical domain for too long."[2]

CHAPTER 2, PAGE 51–52

«Réduire un homme à l'esclavage, l'acheter, le vendre, le retenir dans la servitude, ce sont de véritables crimes et des crimes pires que le vol….On nous accuse d'être les ennemis des colons, nous le sommes seulement de l'injustice; nous ne prétendons point qu'on attaque leur propriété; mais nous disons qu'un homme ne peut, à aucun titre, devenir la

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[1] Suzanne Dracius, unpublished interview with Jean-Pierre Piriou, 2002.

[2] Melissa L. McKay, *Maryse Condé Et Le Théâtre Antillais*, Francophone Cultures and Literatures, (New York: P. Lang, 2002), 27.

propriété d'un autre homme; nous ne voulons pas détruire leurs richesses, nous voudrions seulement en épurer la source.»

"To reduce a man to slavery, to buy him, to sell him, to keep him in servitude are actual crimes and crimes worse than thievery….We are accused of being the enemies of the colonists; we are only enemies of injustice; we do not at all aspire to attack their property; but we say that a man cannot, for any reason, become the property of another man; we do not want to destroy their wealth, we would only want to purify the source of it."[3]

CHAPTER 2 PAGE 58

«[L]a nation entière des esclaves noirs, réunie ensemble, ne forme qu'un même voeu, qu'un même désir pour l'indépendance et tous les esclaves d'une voix unanime ne font qu'un cri, qu'une clameur pour réclamer une liberté qu'ils ont justement gagnée par un siècle de souffrances et de servitudes ignominieuses.»

"[T]he entire nation of Black slaves, reunited together, produces only one identical vow, one identical desire for independence, and all the slaves with one unanimous voice let out only one cry, only one loud cry to reclaim a liberty they have justly gained through a century of suffering and ignominious servitude."[4]

CHAPTER 2, PAGE 58

«[C]ependant le souvenir des combats qui se sont déroulés à Matouba-Saint-Claude, reste présent dans toutes les mémoires; celles des esclaves qui en tirent de la fierté et de l'espoir, celles des autres classes sociales pour retenir les tentations d'oppressions inutiles.»

"[H]owever, the remembrance of the battles that took place at Matouba-Saint-Claude remained present in everyone's memories—those of the slaves who drew pride and hope from it and those of the other social classes for whom it served as a check on the temptation of useless oppressions."[5]

CHAPTER 2, PAGE 67

«[D]es attroupements se forment à Fort-de-France. Des émeutes éclatent dans le Sud de l'île. Dans le Nord, à Trinité, les esclaves descendent des mornes et se portent sur le bourg. D'heure en heure, le flot de l'insurrection monte. Au Prêcheur, c'est déjà la bataille. À Saint-Pierre, l'incendie. Une vingtaine de maisons en flammes, trente tués, la menace d'un soulèvement général, la décision des insurgés eurent raison des résistances de la

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[3] Condorcet, "Reflections on the Negro Slavery" in *Complete Works*, quoted in Liliane Chauleau, "Abolition de l'esclavage et Déclaration des droits de l'homme sous la Révolution française" in *Esclavage, résistances et abolitions*, ed. Marcel Dorigny (Paris: Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques (CTHS), 1999), 152.

[4] Chauleau, "Abolition des Esclavages," 158.

[5] Gérard Lafleur. "Introduction." *Sur les pas de Delgrés: Parcours commenté retraçant les derniers jours de Delgrès et de ses compagnons* (Saint-Claude, Guadeloupe: Commune de Saint-Claude, *n.d.*).

bourgeoisie. Et c'est elle-même qui supplia le gouverneur de prendre, avant même l'arrivée des instructions de Paris, un arrêté d'abolition immédiate de l'esclavage. Le 23 mai, l'esclavage était aboli à la Martinique. Quelques jours après, la Guadeloupe suivait le mouvement. La clairvoyance et l'obstination de Schœlcher avaient donné le branle de la liberté. L'impétuosité nègre fit le reste.»

"[D]emonstrators gathered in Fort-de-France. Riots broke out in the south of the island. In the north, at Trinité, the slaves came down from the hills and spread into the town. Hour after hour, the tide of insurrection mounted. At Prêcheur, there was already a battle. At Saint-Pierre, fire. Some twenty houses in flame, thirty killed, the threat of a general uprising— the decision of the insurgents overcame the resistances of the bourgeoisie. And it was the bourgeoisie themselves who beseeched the governor to issue, even before the arrival of instructions from Paris, a decree of immediate abolition of slavery. On May 23, slavery was abolished in Martinique. Several days later, Guadeloupe followed the action. The clear-sightedness and obstinance of Schœlcher gave impetus to freedom. Black defiance did the rest."[6]

CHAPTER 3, PAGE 86

«Un massif de maçonnerie exactement fermé de tous les côtés et ayant trois pieds dix pouces de hauteur et six pieds de longeur. Au bout de quelque temps, l'ardeur du soleil occasionne des fissures par lesquelles l'eau du ciel s'infiltre dans l'intérieur. Le sol n'est ni planchéié, ni carrelé, l'eau qui découle d'en haut le réduit en boue. Quand on retire le cadavre, il offre aux yeux un hideux spectacle. La face est mangée par les insectes, les membres sont desséchés, les os n'ont plus de chairs, le pus sort des yeux, la peau pend et tombe sous les main de ceux qui s'occupent de l'inhumation.»

"A massive brick structure, 3 ft. 10 in. in height by 6 ft in length, completely closed on all sides. After some time, the heat of the sun caused fissures through which rain could leak into the interior. The floor was not finished with wood or tiles and so, the water that came from above reduced it to mud. When the body was removed, it presented a hideous sight. The face was eaten by insects, the limbs were dehydrated, the bones no longer had any flesh, pus came out of the eyes, the skin hung and fell beneath the hands of those who were involved in the interment."[7]

CHAPTER 3, PAGE 92

«Nous sommes les descendants de ces milliers d'esclaves tenus par une poignée de blancs. On avait les machettes pour couper la canne. Mais elle ne nous a pas rendu libre la canne. La machette aurait pu. Les révoltes c'est dans le sang. Il était fier de son jardin Sébastien. La pauvre victime. Je la déclare coupable cette victime. Coupable d'avoir été le meilleur nègre de l'atelier, coupable d'avoir eu le plus beau jardin. Ce n'était pas un neg

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[6] Aimé Césaire, "Victor Schoelcher et l'abolition de l'esclavage" in Victor Schoelcher and Emile Tersen, *Esclavage et colonisation* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948) 20–21.

[7] Gilda Gonfier, *Le cachot*, unpublished manuscript (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe: Textes en Paroles, 2009), 25.

marron. C'est pas lui qui empoisonnait les animaux. C'est moi qui tuais les bêtes…. Il pensait sans doute pouvoir racheter sa liberté à force de labeur. Obtenir son affranchissement. On n'achète pas la liberté. On l'arrache si quelqu'un nous emprisonne.»

"We are the descendants of these thousands of slaves held by a handful of Whites. We had machetes to cut the cane. But the cane did not free us. The machete could have. Revolt is in the blood. Sébastien was proud of his garden. The poor victim. I declare this victim guilty. Guilty of having been the best Black in the slave gang, guilty of having the most beautiful garden. He was not a Black maroon. He did not poison the animals. I was the one who killed the animals….Without a doubt, he thought he would be able to buy his freedom by dint of his labor….You cannot buy liberty. You snatch it back if someone imprisons us."[8]

CHAPTER 3, PAGE 95–96

«On ne connaît rien à l'esclavage, c'est trop loin. On a oublié. Cette époque elle ne marque plus nos chairs, et nos esprits. Qu'est ce qu'on en sait de l'esclavage, qu'est ce que l'on peut en savoir?...On les a pourtant entendus les esclaves, dans les témoignages, mais je n'arrive pas à les voir. Ils sont trop loins dans le temps. Je ne sens pas leur blessure, leur douleur….Ai je hérité de cette douleur? La douleur que je ressens lat toute petite douleur du dépit amoureux? J'ai honte. Et j'ai peur aussi. Parfois je sens, j'entends. Le pays me parle. Mais je refuse de cette parole. J'ai peur de cette parole. C'est la parole des fous…la parole de ceux qui ont quittés le monde, et qui arpentent la terre…..J'ai peur qu'en écoutant cette parole que je sens dans ma ventre, je ne devienne folle.»

"We know nothing of slavery; it is too far away. We have forgotten. That era no longer marks our flesh and our spirits. What do we know about slavery? What can we know?...We have heard the slaves though, in their narratives, but I do not get to where I can see them. They are too far in the past. I cannot feel their wound, their sorrow….Have I inherited this sorrow? The sorrow that I feel, the tiny sorrow from love's disappointment? I am ashamed. And I'm afraid too. Sometimes I sense, I hear. The land speaks to me. But I refuse this talk. I am afraid of this talk. It is the talk of those who are crazy…the word of those who have died and walk the earth….I am afraid that in listening to this talk that I feel in my gut, that I will become crazy."[9]

CHAPTER 4, PAGE 107–108.

«[L]'idéologie raciste du Blanc-pays est intériorisée par les autres catégories raciales dans une idéologie 'de couleur' qui répercute les stéréotypes et mythes raciaux du haut au bas de l'echelle socio-raciale. Le Blanc discrimine le mulâtre. Qui discrimine le nègre, qui discrimine le Congo, qui discrimine l'Indien, les deux derniers groupes ayant été introduits dans la société antillaise après 1848, pour remplacer l'ancien esclave noir sur l'habitation sucrière.»

[8] Ibid., 53.
[9] Ibid., 66.

“[T]he racist ideology of the Creole white is internalized by the other racial categories in an ideology 'of color' which reflects stereotypes and racial myths from top to bottom of the socio-racial ladder. The White discriminates against the mulatto, who discriminates against the Black, who discriminates against the Congo, who discriminates against the East Indian, the last two groups having been introduced into the Antillean society after 1848, to replace the former Black slave on the sugar plantation.”[10]

CHAPTER 4, PAGE 111

«Voulais avoir les yeux bleus et des boucles libres comme eux, à l'école. Voulais avoir la peau transparente, devenir invisible, comme les autres. Alors, je collais ma langue à la fenêtre, plantais mes yeux dans le soleil mou, sans battre paupières, pour qu'il les cuise en bleu ciel. Et d'un bond de la fenêtre au miroir j'allais voir s'ils se tranformaient en bleu. Y'avait des bulles qui dansaient dans mes yeux. De toutes les couleurs, les bulles. Des bulles magiques qui transformaient la couleur des yeux. Alors, je les enfermais sous mes paupières, pour ne pas qu'elles s'échappent…Surtout les bleues.»

"I wanted to have blue eyes and free-flowing curls like the girls at school. I wanted to have transparent skin, to become invisible, like the others. So I stuck my tongue to the window, fixed my eyes on the dull sun, without blinking my eyelids, so that it would cook them into sky blue. And then with a leap from the window to my mirror, I went to see if they had transformed into blue. There were bubbles that danced in my eyes. Of all colors. Magic bubbles that transformed the color of my eyes. Then, I closed them under my eyelids, so that they would not escape. Especially the blue ones."[11]

CHAPTER 4, PAGE 128–29

LA MÈRE: Les blancs de ton pays, ils détestaient nous imaginer…au lit…ensemble.
LE PÈRE: (*rageur et riant*) Ça les rendait jaloux…qu'une fille aussi belle soit ma femme.
LA MÈRE: Ça les gênait vraiment…simplement d'imaginer ta main sur moi.
LE PÈRE: Je caressais la blancheur de tes seins….
LA MÈRE: Qu'est ce qui les gênait? Que nous soyons mari et femme, amant et amante? Que nous jouissions l'un de l'autre?
LE PÈRE: Non, tu l'as dit…: que ma main noire caresse ta peau blanche, juste cela….Pour eux…le contraste indécent du noir et du blanc.
LA MÉRE: (*riant*) J'aime le noir…c'est une belle couleur!

THE MOTHER: The Whites of your country, they hated imagining us…in bed…together.
THE FATHER: (*laughing furiously)* That made them jealous…that such a beautiful girl was my wife…
THE MOTHER: That really bothered them…even simply to imagine your hand on me.
THE FATHER: I caressed the whiteness of your breasts….

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[10] Josette Fallope, *Esclaves et citoyens: Les noirs à la Guadeloupe aux xix^e^ siècle* (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe: Societe d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe, 1992), 479.

[11] Daniely Francisque, *Crévee vive*, unpublished manuscript (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe, Textes en Paroles Collection, 2006), 10.

THE MOTHER: What bothered them? That we are husband and wife, lovers? That we pleasure each other?
THE FATHER: No, it's what you said…that my black hand caresses your white skin. Just that. For them, the indecent contrast of black and white….
THE MOTHER: (*laughing*) I love black. It is a beautiful color! [12]

CHAPTER 5, PAGE 140

«Au total, on a une grande diversité de regroupements familiaux, les familles maternelles l'emportent mais ce serait une erreur de croire que les hommes en sont systématiquement absents….Les mères connaissent les pères et permettent aux enfants de les identifier et ce pour une raison commune à de très nombreuses sociétés, l'interdit de l'inceste.»

"In total, there was a great diversity in the familial groupings, but the maternal families prevailed; but, it would be an error to believe that the men were systematically absent….The mothers knew the fathers and permitted the children to know their identities for reasons common to a great many societies—the taboo against incest."[13]

CHAPTER 6, PAGE 174

«Le créole, notre langue première…est le véhicule originel de notre moi profond, de notre inconscient collectif, de notre génie populaire…Avec elle nous rêvons. Avec elle nous résistons et nous acceptons….Aucun créateur créole, dans quelque domaine que ce soit, ne se verra jamais accompli sans une connaissance intuitive de la poétique de la langue créole.»

"Creole, our first language…is our original means of expressing our innermost self, our collective unconscious, our folk genius….We dream in it. We resist and accept with it….No matter what the field, no Creole creative artist will ever be accomplished without intuitive knowledge of Creole poetics."[14]

CHAPTER 6, PAGE 175

«J'appartiens à, disons, une ethnoclasse où on élève les enfants en français, pas en créole. Le créole c'est la langue de mon pays, une des deux langues de mon pays, mais enfin le français reste ma langue maternelle. Je pense en français, donc lorsque j'écris en prose, je suis tentée d'utiliser cette langue.»

"I belong, let's say, to an ethnoclass where the children are raised on French, not Creole. Creole is the language of my country, one of the two languages of my country, but in the

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[12] Michèle Montantin, *Le chemin des petits abymes*, unpublished manuscript (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe, Textes en Paroles Collection, 2002), 43–44.
[13] Raymond Boutin, *Vivre Ensemble en Guadeloupe: 1848–1946: Un siècle de construction* (Matoury, Guyane: Ibis Rouge Editions, 2009), 24.
[14] Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge De La Créolité*, trans. Mohamed Bouya Taleb-Khyar (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 43, 44 (My translation).

end French remains my maternal language. I think in French, thus when I write in prose, I am tempted to use this language." [15]

CHAPTER 6, PAGE 185

«Qui dira la naïveté des grands? Qui dira…l'intense imbécilité de leurs haines mesquines, de leurs haines étroites et décapantes, haines égarées dans l'insularité de ce monde minuscule, tournant comme des bêtes prises de folie dans leur cage auto-forgée, haines obscures et destins brillants, haines brillantes et destins obscurs, antithèses de la vie et du rire créatif.»

"Who will speak of the naiveté of the upper class?...Who will speak of…the intense imbecility of their petty-minded hatreds, of their narrow and caustic hatreds, hatreds led astray in the insularity of this miniscule world, rotating like animals seized by madness in their self-made cage, obscure hatreds and brilliant destinies, brilliant hatreds and obscure destinies, the antithesis of life and of the creative laugh."[16]

CHAPTER 7, PAGE 211

«Je pense qu'il y a tant de héros méconnus dans notre monde, surtout à l'origine de notre histoire tragique, ceux qu'on appelle les petites gens, ceux auxquels on n'accorde guère la parole et qui n'ont soi-disant rien à dire, ont au contraire beaucoup à dire.»

"I think there are so many unknown heroes in our world, especially at the beginning of our tragic history; those who are called the common people, those to whom hardly a word is granted and who, supposedly having nothing to say, on the contrary, have much to say."[17]

CHAPTER 7, PAGE 215

«Je voulais garder leur image. En pérenniser le renom. Leur parole de femmes. Leur splendeur. Ces guerrières ne l'ont pas voulu. Elles me l'ont dit haut et clair, haut comme l'éclat de leurs flambeaux déchirant le ciel nocturne, clair comme le feu dont elles incendient le vieux monde, net comme leur détermination: elles se battent pour leur dignité, pas pour la gloire.»

"I wanted to preserve their image. To perpetuate their fame. Their woman's word. Their splendor. These women warriors didn't want that.They told me loud and clear, loud as the burst of their torches shattering the night's sky, clear as the fire they used to burn the old

[15] Suzanne Dracius, unpublished interview with Jean-Pierre Piriou, 2002.

[16] Ina Césaire, *L'Enfant des Passages* ou *La Geste de Ti-Jean*, (Paris: Éditions Caribéennes, 1987), 73.

[17] Ina Césaire, "De l'enracinement à l'ouverture du monde: Entretien de Stéphanie Bérard avec Ina Césaire." Émergences Caraïbe(s): une création théâtrale archipélique, ed. Sylvie Chalaye et Stéphanie Bérard, *Africultures* 80 (2010): 148.

world, clear-cut as their determination: they were fighting for their dignity, not for glory."[18]

CHAPTER 7, PAGE 221

«Il y avait aussi un côté choquer un peu le public antillais. On lui montrait des personnages…qu'on considère comme des personnages mythiques: Toussaint Louverture et Delgrès. Alors, on les montrait avec des côtés négatifs ou ridicules même. Toussaint Louverture qui est presq'un dictateur, Delgrès qui lit…une lettre dernière à ces personnes qui ne comprennent rien. Alors, qu'en fait, ce sont des textes sacreés pour les Antillais. Donc, les gens n'ont pas aimé, ont réagi un peu.»

"There was also a side that shocked the Antillean public a little. I showed them characters…that were considered mythical figures: Toussaint Louverture and Delgrès. Then I showed their negative and even ridiculous sides. Toussaint Louverture who is nearly a dictator; Delgrès who reads…a last letter to people who understand none of it [he spoke in a flowery French to people who spoke Creole], while in fact, these were sacred texts for the Antilleans. So, people didn't like that, they reacted a little."[19]

[18] Dracius, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, 113.
[19] McKay, *Maryse Condé*, 122.

APPENDIX C

GLOSSARY

Békés – present-day descendants of the White planter aristocrats.

Creoles – People of French parentage who were born on the islands. Later the term came to reference all people born on the islands.

Économe – overseer (Tomich 239)

Gens libres de couleur – mixed-race individuals manumitted or born free.

Géreur – plantation administrator (Tomich 239).

Grands Blancs – wealthy White planters

Petits Blancs – middle and lower-class Whites who made up the majority of the White population.