

Journal of Haitian Studies

*Pou kat gwo Mapou
Frisner Augustin, Vodou master drummer, 1949-2012
Lénord Fortuné, master rasin musician, 1965-2011
And for Clothaire Bazile, wherever you are...
These artists created splendor out of the oldest traditions of Haiti.
Rasin fon; fwi bon.
If the roots are deep the fruit will be good.*

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DÉTOUR D'HAÏTI: A PROLOGUE

Roberto Strongman

University of California, Santa Barbara

In working on this issue, it became clear to me how much contributors, subscribers, and editors of *Journal of Haitian Studies* rely on the journal as a vehicle for a type of scholarly travel to Haiti, in addition to its academic content. As one of the guest editors for this issue, I often felt the articles whirling about me. I, in the eye of storm, thrown into a spiralist descent in which the /r/ consonance of reading, writing, and revising recomposed into a sort of return. Whether as children of the soil or scholars of the country and its wonders, Haiti has marked our lives and we long to go back to that site of affective and intellectual imprinting. If we are being honest with ourselves, we might confess to the shock and even the disappointments of our recent returns. Everything has changed after the earthquake, the hurricanes, the Aristide administrations, and the Duvaliers. The Haiti of today is not the one we left behind. Our desires are frustrated and circuitous, trapped in the motions of a storm whose counterclockwise motions always bring us back to twelve but which will take us very far from our intended destination. In the tempest of this issue, our travels to Haiti will take us invariably elsewhere.

In our theoretical descent towards Haiti, we look out of the airplane window to see a new Haiti, diffuse, its peninsulas stretching out like arms connecting it to other islands and mainlands. Disorientation as a quality of return permeates Caribbean discourse from Césaire's *Cahier* to Glissant's *Le Discours Antillais*. In both texts, the idea of *retour* is unachievable and, at least in Glissant's case there is a realization of its impossibility and a drive towards an acceptance of *errance* (wandering) as a mode of living. Far from being a fatalistic and depressing condition, this *détour* involves a *prise-de-conscience* on the part of the exiled West Indian that forces him to transform the diasporic locale into a new homeland. Moreover, awareness of the reality of *détour* forces the West Indian scholar to question origins and empowers him to understand the work of nostalgia that propelled him to seek a return in the first place. Césaire finds an island in the Adriatic with a similar sounding name to his native land: Martinique has its counterpart in

Martinska. Glissant also seriously plays with/in language as he elegantly encodes the elliptical nature of this quest for home in the near homonymy of *retour/détour*. In the process, Glissant also ends up seeing his homeland of Martinique all over the Antilles. *Retour* leads to *détour*.

The first section, *Défense et Illustration du Vodou*, reiterates the important role that language has in our conceptualization of reality and presents to us a number of articles that defend Vodou from its detractors and illustrate its complexity. While most of the second half of the section does fulfill our wish to return to Haiti, the first half curiously takes us to Washington D.C. and more precisely, to the US Library of Congress which is housed there. The history of imperialism in the Western Hemisphere forces us to land on the capital of the US to assure proper recognition to the spiritual practices of Haitians. By ensuring proper spelling of the religion, one important battle has been won. Will lobbying for proper representation in US television and media be next in our future travel plans?

After this layover, we resume our flight to Haiti. Flying over the archipelago, we are able to appreciate Haiti's central location within it, its political, literary and broad cultural import for the lands and peoples of the Antilles. We learn about Montero, a Cuban who lives in Puerto Rico and writes of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. A bit further on, blackness creates a dialogue between Haitian, Cuban, and Puerto Rican female poets. As we continue ahead onto the next section, we consider how a genre that has defined the literary production of Spanish speaking Latin America, Magical Realism, has in fact deep Haitian roots, having been developed there by Cuban Alejo Carpentier, in large part through his exposure Vodou communities. This section investigates the resurgence of this genre in Jamaican, Colombian, and Martinican novels and through this *détour* we are able to consider the centrality of Haitian cultural history for the multi-lingual literary expression of the entire continent. This is our return. And we would not have been able to arrive here without having experienced several well worth reroutings.

We return to Haiti through a play by a Haitian playwright: *Le Blue de l'île* by Evelyne Trouillot. But this return is fleeting. He allows our feet to briefly touch Haitian ground before whisking us away in a truck to the Dominican Republic, along with some sugar cane cutters en route to the *bateyes*. As editor of this issue, I would like to present these *détours* and diversions as strategies that can be deployed to understand Haitian identity not by returning directly to Haiti-as-source-and-origin but by navigating through alternative routes. These redirections might surprise and disappoint us but when these feelings subside, we gain new vistas on

our desired destination as well as acceptance and knowledge of our own location, an understanding of our past and a measurement of our growth.

Building on the theories of Glissant and the poetry of Césaire, I propose that we use these *détournements*, as regenerative strategies for establishing new bonds with Haiti and our current locations. It is my hope that this issue of JOHS might help us to consider *détour* as a strategy that can help us regain the sense of newness necessary for us to experience a Haiti that is always in a state of becoming and that constantly forces to move beyond memories. We are ready for take off! Sit back and enjoy these readings of our “Détour au Pays Natal.”

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION: AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT H. McCORMICK, JR.

Roberto Strongman

University of California, Santa Barbara

R.S.: *The idea for this issue of JOHS was conceived at Franklin College in Lugano, Switzerland in 2011, during the last year of your tenure as a professor there. Some of the papers published here are revised versions of presentations at the Caribbean Unbound conference, but many are papers that were conceived anew subsequent to that academic gathering. As such, this issue is not a collection of conference proceedings, but the written record of a loose association of scholars which constellated around the conference. Can you tell us about your own role in the origin and history of the Caribbean Unbound conference so we can understand the history of the community that is represented in these writings?*

R.M.: I'll try to sum that up. I was the founder of the series, the name-giver and the organizer of all five colloquia. I selected the theme, in conjunction with other Caribbean scholars, put out the Call for Papers, invited the keynote speakers, did all the correspondence and arranged all the programs myself. Franklin College provided invaluable technical and logistical assistance. At first, I limited myself to conference organization. In 2009, however, I organized and moderated a panel on Junot Díaz and made a presentation on his work. In 2011, I moderated a panel entitled "Borders Between the Dominican Republic and Haiti." That led to field study in the Dominican Republic and a publication in the bi-lingual journal *A Contracorriente* in the spring of 2012.

Thanks to the generous collaboration of the *Journal of Haitian Studies*, we have been able to publish selected, peer-reviewed papers from 2009 on. I wish to thank LeGrace Benson for recommending our work to the editor, Claudine Michel.

R.S.: *Why did you feel compelled to organize this conference?*

R.M.: I founded "Caribbean Unbound" in 2003 because, at certain conferences I had attended in Europe, I felt the Caribbean and Caribbean

Studies were underrepresented. At that time, I was an avid reader of the work of Maryse Condé. Truth be told, my study of her work motivated me to try to understand the Caribbean in a larger context. There is a secondary reason of a more practical nature. We have an academic travel program at Franklin College Switzerland. I felt the need to amplify that experience because two weeks in Cuba were not enough for the students or for me. I was lucky, for I was able to engage Antonio Benítez-Rojo to be the first keynote speaker. The idea of having a Caribbean banquet to mingle interested students and scholars was part of the original conception. In 2011, students prepared, from scratch, a complete evening meal for over 200 students, administrators and Caribbean scholars. In 2003, we also brought in a Cuban band from Germany. Recently, for logistic reasons primarily, that aspect has been phased out. We have also included student creative writing panels and student academic presentations on Caribbean culture at all conferences. In the early stages, Kathleen Gyssels and Ivette Romero were especially helpful with their suggestions.

R.S.: Who were the previous keynote speakers at the conference?

R.M.: 2003—Antonio Benítez-Rojo

2005—Professor J. Michael Dash

2007—Maryse Condé

2009—Jean-Claude Fignolé - Conference Theme: “Re-Conceiving Hispaniola”

2011—Claudine Michel - Conference Theme: “Vodou and Créolité”

R.S.: I became aware of the herculean effort that this conference required when I helped you with the 2011 conference. Who were your supporters over the years?

R.M.: There were “regular” participants, and they sustained the enterprise. Among them were: Sally Barbour, Victoria Bridges-Moussaron, Marie-Hélène Laforest, Irline François, Sämi Ludwig, Wasîq Khan, Günther Giovannoni, Karina A. Bautista, Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, María de Jesús Cordero, Sarah Mosher, Maria Cristina Fumagalli, Georges Rocourt, Sara Steinert-Borella, and, of course, yourself. I am sure I have forgotten some very helpful collaborators. I apologize for that. Getting to work with and to know that stellar group of people was one of the project’s great rewards.

R.S.: *How did the conference evolve or progress over the years?*

R.M.: One of the key progressions was both the number of the participants and their geographic origin, which became progressively broader. At the 2011 conference, scholars came from Poland, Greece and Turkey—for the first time in all cases—Italy, France, Great Britain as well as from Canada, the United States, Brazil, and Australia.

Another area of progress was the movement toward a more poly-lingual approach. Calls for Papers were sent out in three languages, and we had panels in French and Spanish, but English still remained the majority language. You know that because you helped me with some of the translations. In the 2010 publication, the full keynote address of Jean-Claude Fignolé was published in the original French and translated into English by Kaiama L. Glover.

There has also been a progression in the foregrounding of original Haitian, for the most part, literary texts. Myriam J.A. Chancy has read from her work here. We have published original work by Fabienne Pasquet, Marie-Hélène Laforest and a translation, in this edition of JOHS, of Évelyne Trouillot's recently published play, "Le Bleu de l'île." Incidentally, the inspiration for that translation stemmed, in large part, from Stéphanie Bérard's article on the play in *Re-Conceiving Hispaniola* (2010).

R.S.: *Let us backtrack a little bit. How did you become interested in Caribbean Studies? I am sure that there must be a bit of retour/détour in your own scholarly prise-de-conscience.*

R.M.: I think you are right! I am a literary person; so, my entrance into the Caribbean world was bookish, through the novels of Maryse Condé. From there it was travel to Cuba, Guadeloupe, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, etc. and the work of Carpentier, Romain, Alexis, Díaz, Danticat, etc. If I could add one thing: I was always struck by Caribbean sociability, which I equate with humanity. It should be preserved like the Parthenon. It's one of the Caribbean's cultural gifts to a world woefully in need of it.

R.S.: *What are your plans now that you have retired? We image you will continue to be involved in the Caribbean in some way or another.*

R.M.: As you know, I don't like the word "retirement." I am doing what

I can to promote the diffusion of Caribbean culture. I think some of the money collected for Haitian relief should be earmarked for the preservation and diffusion of its rich culture. I understand, of course, that there are priorities.

***R.S.:** Any words of wisdom for younger scholars of the Caribbean? Perhaps your experience in Switzerland can illuminate the way for Caribbean Studies academics working in locales far from large Caribbean populations.*

R.M.: There is one key similarity between Switzerland and the Caribbean that should be underlined. It is linked to language. There are four national languages in Switzerland. The Caribbean is also a rich, poly-lingual space. My suggestion to younger Caribbean scholars would be to plunge into as many Caribbean languages as you can. One of my former students, with whom I did the border study, recently told me that in her first year of graduate school she selected, amongst her courses, one in Haitian Kreyòl. That seemed to me a fantastic choice! Could I add one more thing?

***R.S.:** Sure, go ahead!*

R.M.: I simply wanted to add that right now I am working, amongst other projects, on a novel, the imaginary re-creation of the life of my grandfather. He was a Greek born in Turkey!

***R.S.:** Aha! Just like Césaire re-discovering Martinska-Martinique on the Adriatic! See, I told you there was a retour/detour somewhere in there! You are still studying the subjectivity of exiled island people. The Caribbean is everywhere and no matter where you go, it will find you!*

DÉFENSE ET ILLUSTRATION DU VODOU

FROM 'VOODOOISM' TO 'VODOU': CHANGING A US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS SUBJECT HEADING

Kate Ramsey
University of Miami

For years, practitioners and scholars of Haitian Vodou have challenged misrepresentations of the religion and advocated against the spelling “voodoo,” a word that is still often used pejoratively. In fall 2011, discussions that began at the Haitian Studies Association meeting in Mona, Jamaica led a group to come together to work jointly towards these ends. Ultimately, twenty-five Haiti- and internationally-based scholars and scholar-practitioners who have published on the religion signed a letter requesting that the US Library of Congress change its primary subject heading for the religion from “Voodooism” to “Vodou.” Contacts at the Library of Congress advised that this petition was well-timed, given that the single heading “voodoo music” had recently been changed to “Vodou music” following a request by Temple University Press and Benjamin Hebblethwaite. In addition to a proposal letter, the group submitted several supporting documents, including a list of all the subject headings recommended for revision; examples of the use of “Vodou” in US-based newspaper, magazine, wire service, and news website articles; excerpts from reference works that use “Vodou;” and excerpts from scholarly writings explaining the problems with using “voodoo” and/or advocating for “Vodou.”

Capitalizing on the collective momentum, the group expanded the effort to request that the Associated Press and *The New York Times* revise their influential stylebook entries to “Vodou,” and called upon other news organizations to do so as well. In support of this broader effort, Leslie Desmangles, Professor of Religion at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, wrote an eloquent further rationale for the change to “Vodou,” spotlighting the history of stigmatization attached to the usage “voodoo” and thus its inappropriateness to name the religion.

Building on years of individual and collective effort, this initiative has already seen historic results. In September 2012, the Policy and Standards Division of the Library of Congress announced that in reviewing the

submitted materials they “found the documentation of the scholars’ and practitioners’ arguments that ‘voodoo’ is pejorative to be compelling” and had decided to revise the subject heading “Voodooism” to “Vodou.” This landmark decision reinforces the group’s contention that English language usage is shifting towards “Vodou,” and it will support ongoing efforts to convince *The New York Times* and the Associated Press, among other news organizations, to change their stylebooks. As a record of this process, some of the materials presented to the Library of Congress are included below, either in their entirety or in excerpted form.

April 15, 2012

Dear Libby Dechman, Paul Frank, and Janis Young:

As a group of scholars who study and publish on Afro-Caribbean and West African religions, we are writing to urge the Library of Congress to change the existing Subject Heading “Voodooism” to “Vodou.”

According to the online Library of Congress Catalog there is only a single published book with a title featuring the word “Voodooism” and it dates from 1934 (*Voodooism in Music and Other Essays*, by Sir Richard R. Terry). Please note that we are decidedly not suggesting that the Subject Heading be changed to the more common usage “Voodoo” as such a shift would only reinforce the current problem. Both of these terms connect to a long history of denigration of West African and Haitian religions and are rejected by almost all practitioners and scholars of Vodou. The word “Voodoo” is still frequently used to signify fraudulence, spuriousness, and charlatanism as the expressions “voodoo economics,” “voodoo politics,” and “voodoo science” exemplify.

While there is discussion among scholars and practitioners about how the name of the Haitian religion should be spelled, “Vodou” is the spelling most widely used in published works and is also the name by which the Haitian government officially recognized the religion in 2003. Another search of the Library of Congress Catalog documents that over the past decade almost all of the scholarly books published on this religion in English use the word “Vodou” in their titles, whereas not a single scholarly work uses the word “Voodoo.” KOSANBA, the scholarly association for the study of Haitian Vodou, adopted this spelling upon its founding in 1997. Reference works such as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* increasingly feature the usage “Vodou” rather than “Voodoo,” and a growing number of high circulation US newspapers and magazines use Vodou as well. Furthermore, Vodou is the name that practitioners themselves use and they resent vehemently the use of the term “Voodoo” to refer to their religion.

For these reasons we strongly urge the Library of Congress to consider changing the Subject Heading to “Vodou.” Please note that as the name of a religion it should be capitalized. We are attaching documentation in support of this request, including examples of the use of Vodou in US-based newspaper, magazine, wire service, and news website articles; excerpts from reference works that use Vodou; excerpts from scholarly writings that explain the problems with using “Voodoo” and/or advocate for Vodou; and a list of all the established Library of Congress Subject Headings

that we recommend be reevaluated and revised, including cases in which the word “Voodoo” or “Voodooism” is embedded in the heading itself, in references, and in scope notes. If we can provide additional materials and/or information, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you very much in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,
(in alphabetical order)

M. Jacqui Alexander

Professor of Women & Gender Studies
University of Toronto

Andrew Apter

Professor of History and Anthropology
University of California-Los Angeles

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LIST OF SUBJECT HEADINGS FOR REVISION

Please find below a list of Subject Headings that we recommend be considered for revision. These include cases in which the word “Voodooism” or “Voodoo” is embedded in the heading itself, in references, and in scope notes. We have excluded usages of these words as proper names.

Based on a close examination of the appended list, we have determined that the necessary revisions will not in all cases entail a simple substitution of “Vodou” for “Voodooism” or “Voodoo.” This is primarily because “Voodooism” and “Voodoo” frequently appear in these headings as a gloss for other African and African diasporic religious practices that have their own accepted names. For example, it is not clear what is meant by “Voodooism—Africa,” “Voodooism—Brazil,” “Voodooism—Jamaica.” Certain cases may be especially tricky: does “Voodooism—Cuba” refer to the practice of Haitian Vodou in Cuba or does it refer to Afro-Cuban religions such as Regla de Ocha or Palo? In each of these cases, the works to which these headings are assigned will need to be examined individually to determine what subject headings actually apply.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS AUTHORITIES

SOURCE OF HEADINGS: Library of Congress Online Catalog

YOU SEARCHED: Subject Authority Headings =

Voodoo banners.

Voodoo dolls--2000-2010.

Voodoo--Fiction.

Voodoo flags.

Voodoo flags--Haiti.

Voodoo Horns.

Voodoo music.

Voodoo music--Bahamas.

Voodoo music--Cuba--Matanzas (Province).

Voodoo music--Dominican Republic--History and criticism.

Voodoo music--Haiti.

Voodoo music--Haiti--History and criticism.

Voodoo priestesses.

Voodoo priests.

Voodoo priests in literature.

Voodoo priests--Portraits.

Voodoo (Religion).

Voodoo women priests.

Voodoobull.

Voodooism.

Voodooism [LC subject headings for children].

Voodooism--1990-2000 [Thesaurus for graphic materials: TGM I, sub. Terms].

Voodooism--Africa.

Voodooism--Africa--Pictorial works.

Voodooism--Africa, West.

Voodooism--Benin.

Voodooism--Benin--Dictionaries--Weme-Gbe.

Voodooism--Benin--Exhibitions.

Voodooism--Benin--Pictorial works.

Voodooism--Brazil.

Voodooism--Brazil--Bahia (State).
Voodooism--Brazil--Cachoeira.
Voodooism--Brazil--São Luís do Maranhão.
Voodooism--Caribbean Area.
Voodooism--Computer games.
Voodooism--Cuba.
Voodooism--Dictionaries.
Voodooism--Dominican Republic.
Voodooism--Drama.
Voodooism--Exhibitions.
Voodooism--Fiction.
Voodooism--Fiction. [LC subject headings for children].
Voodooism--Fiction--Comic books, strips, etc.
Voodooism. [from old catalog].
Voodooism--Georgia.
Voodooism--Georgia--Macon--Case studies.
Voodooism--Haiti--Fiction.
Voodooism--Haiti.
Voodooism--Haiti--Bibliography.
Voodooism--Haiti--Controversial literature.
Voodooism--Haiti--Drama.
Voodooism--Haiti--History.
Voodooism--Haiti--History--Exhibitions.
Voodooism--Haiti--Jacmel.
Voodooism--Haiti--Jacmel--Pictorial works.
Voodooism--Haiti--Music.
Voodooism--Haiti--Pictorial works.
Voodooism--Haiti--Port-au-Prince--Case studies.
Voodooism--Haiti--Psychology.
Voodooism--Haiti--Rituals.
Voodooism--Hispaniola.
Voodooism--Humor.
Voodooism in art.
Voodooism in art--Catalogs.

Voodooism in art--Exhibitions.
Voodooism in literature.
Voodooism in motion pictures.
Voodooism--Jamaica.
Voodooism--Juvenile fiction.
Voodooism--Juvenile literature.
Voodooism--Louisiana.
Voodooism--Louisiana--Drama.
Voodooism--Louisiana--Fiction.
Voodooism--Louisiana--New Orleans.
Voodooism--Louisiana--New Orleans--History--19th century.
Voodooism--Louisiana--New Orleans--History--Juvenile literature.
Voodooism--Louisiana--New Orleans--Juvenile fiction.
Voodooism--Louisiana--New Orleans--Miscellanea.
Voodooism--Martinique.
Voodooism--Martinique--Fiction.
Voodooism--Miscellanea.
Voodooism--Missouri.
Voodooism--New York (State)--Brooklyn.
Voodooism--New York (State)--New York.
Voodooism--Nigeria.
Voodooism--Pictorial works.
Voodooism--Puerto Rico. [from old catalog]
Voodooism--Relations.
Voodooism--Relations--Catholic Church.
Voodooism--Relations--Catholic Church, [etc.]
Voodooism--Relations--Christianity.
Voodooism--Rituals.
Voodooism--Songs and music.
Voodooism--South Carolina.
Voodooism--South Carolina--Saint Helena Island.
Voodooism--Southern States.
Voodooism--Togo.
Voodooism--United States.

Voodooism--United States--Handbooks, manuals, etc.

Voodooism--West Indies.

SOURCE OF HEADINGS: Library of Congress Online Catalog

YOU SEARCHED: Simple Search = voodooism

Catholic Church--Relations--Voodooism.

Christianity and other religions--Voodooism.

Haiti--History--Revolution, 1791-1804--Religious aspects--Voodooism.

Initiation rites--Religious aspects--Voodooism.

Jazz--Religious aspects--Voodooism.

Mambos (Voodooism).

Mambos (Voodooism)--Brazil--Biography.

Mambos (Voodooism)--Brazil--Recife.

Mambos (Voodooism)--Fiction.

Mambos (Voodooism)--Louisiana--New Orleans--Biography.

Mambos (Voodooism)--New York (State)--Brooklyn.

Mambos (Voodooism)--New York (State)--New York.

Mambos (Voodooism)--Portraits.

Music--Religious aspects--Voodooism.

Other Embedded References

Bizango (Cult) [BT Voodooism].

Gagá (Cult) [RT Voodooism].

Hoodoo (Cult) [RT Voodooism].

Obeah (Cult) [RT Voodooism].

Paranormal fiction -- Here are entered collections of fiction on witchcraft, spiritualism, psychic phenomena, voodooism.

Rada (Voodoo rite) [BT Voodooism-Rituals].

Zombiism [BT Voodooism].

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REPLACING THE TERM “VOODOO” WITH “VODOU”: A PROPOSAL

Leslie G. Desmangles

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The anthropologist Richard Barrett noted that ethnographers hold many stereoscopic visions of the societies that they study. Such visions provide them with views of the world through two or more lenses, including what he referred to as *etic* or *emic* perspectives. The etic description of a culture is “an observer’s oriented approach” whose goal is to analyze a society’s customs and symbolic forms “from afar,” that is, objectively as a scientist observes a chemical reaction in his or her laboratory. To describe a culture emically is to understand the customs and categories of thought from a subject’s point of view. It is to look and describe a people’s worldview subjectively, that is, from inside their culture, to learn their languages and use the nomenclatures that they use to designate the categories of things that are part of their universe.

Voodoo is a Western term that derives from the late 19th and early 20th centuries’ views of Haitian culture. It is fraught with racist categories about blacks’ religious practices. Writers like Spenser St. John, a member of the British diplomatic corps in Haiti, the occultist William B. Seabrook, and world traveler and author J. Verschueren among others, described Voodoo as primitive beliefs and practices involving zombies, wax dolls, and exotic spells celebrated clandestinely by Blacks who, inebriated with blood, enter into ecstatic and frenzied states of consciousness in which their bodies are invaded by supernatural malevolent powers. The term *Voodoo* then is associated with the colonial (even latent) views of African and African-derived New World ritual practices perceived as untamed and uncivilized.

The questionable reputation of Vodou derives from a fictional incident purported to have occurred in Haiti in December 1863. The story is told that a young woman had disappeared, was killed and her flesh eaten by religious fanatics in a diabolic Voodoo ceremony. This incident reported by Seabrook and St. John was never documented but it captured the imagination of journalists and novelists who dramatized it and reported it with a flair for the exotic that was designed to quench the thirst of

their readership. Their readers assumed that this fictional event was true and reconfirmed in the minds of many what they already knew; that such atrocities were the results of inherent and uncultivated savagery of Blacks, not only in Haiti but also throughout the world. The intrigue that surrounded this incident passed into oblivion after its publication but left indelible marks on Haitians as an unenlightened people whose “heathen practices” and moral laxity could only be redressed by the saving message of Christianity.

Whatever the reasons may have been to propagate these false notions about Vodou, an examination of it reveals that in practice none of its rituals confirms these popular views. Vodou was brought to Haiti largely from West Africa where it is still practiced today. It survived the ravages of slavery during the Haitian colonial period (1492-1804), and needs to have its place today in the family of thousands of religious traditions throughout the world. The word *Vodou* derives from *Vodu* or *Vodun*, and means *spirit* or *family of spirits*. Like other religions, Vodou is a religion that, through a complex system of beliefs and practices, provides a spiritual dimension to human existence; it uplifts the downtrodden and gives meaning to their lives. It also instills in its devotees a need for solace and self-examination and relates the profane world to incommensurable mythological entities, called *lwas*, who are believed to govern life and indeed the entire cosmos. Vodou provides an explanation for death, which is treated as a spiritual transformation—a portal to a sacred world beyond where the souls of morally upright individuals conceived to be powerful can continue to influence the living. In short, like other religious traditions, Vodou is an expression of a people who yearn for meaning and purpose in their lives.

Voodoo is then an etic term whose history derives from racist denotations and ill-conceived notions about a religion that is practiced by millions of believers in Haiti, in West Africa, in the United States and Canada, as well as other parts of the world. We propose therefore that the Associated Press change its designation of *Voodoo* and adopt the more appropriate nomenclature *Vodou* for two principal reasons:

1. The term *Voodoo* is offensive to its believers because of its racist and inaccurate historical denotations;

2. From an emic view, *Vodou* and not *Voodoo* is the proper term that believers use to call their religion. From an etic view, *Voodoo* is a foreign term whose denotations are not related to the worldview of those who practice *Vodou*.

MEDIA ALERT**KOSANBA**

**The Scholarly Association for the Study of Haitian Vodou
Center for Black Studies
University of California, Santa Barbara**

**US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CHANGES: SUBJECT HEADING FROM
“VOODOOISM” TO “VODOU”**

December 20, 2012 — For years, practitioners and scholars of Haitian Vodou have challenged misrepresentations of the religion and opposed the spelling “voodoo.” A group of Haiti- and internationally-based scholars and scholar-practitioners came together last year to work jointly towards these ends. The Congress of Santa Barbara (KOSANBA), the Scholarly Association for the Study of Haitian Vodou, joined this effort and is very pleased to announce on behalf of the group that the initiative has already seen historic results.

In April 2012 the group petitioned the United States Library of Congress to change its primary subject heading for the religion from “Voodooism” to “Vodou.” Subject headings are the categories assigned to books to indicate their subject matter. Earlier this fall, the Library of Congress notified the group that upon reviewing the submitted materials it had “found the documentation of the scholars’ and practitioners’ arguments that ‘voodoo’ is pejorative to be compelling” and decided to revise the subject heading to “Vodou.”

The Library of Congress announced this revision in October 2012, making the statement: “PSD [Policy and Standards Division] was petitioned by a group of scholars and practitioners of Vodou to change the spelling of the heading Voodooism. They successfully argued that Vodou is the more accurate spelling, and that the spelling ‘voodoo’ has become pejorative. The base heading was revised to Vodou on this list, and all other uses of the word ‘voodoo’ in references and scope notes have also been revised.” (<http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/cpsocd/psd-121015.html>)

This change is now reflected on the Library of Congress Authorities site:

<http://authorities.loc.gov/>. Henceforth, books focusing on the religion and cataloged using Library of Congress Subject Headings will no longer be classified under “Voodooism” but will be assigned the heading “Vodou.”

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NÒT POU LAPRÈS

KOSANBA

Asosyasyon pou Etid Vodou Ayisyen

Sent Etid Nwa

Inivèsite Kalifòni Santa Babara

BIBLIYOTÈK KONGRÈ AMERIKEN AN CHANJE: TIT SIJÈ «VOODOOISM» LA POU FÈ L TOUNEN «VODOU»

20 desanm 2012 — Sa fè anpil lane depi vodouyizan ak inivèsite ki ap fè rechèch sou Vodou ayisyen an ap pwoteste kont jan moun mal prezante relijyon sa a epi jan yo sèvi ak òtograf «voodoo» a. Yon gwoup inivèsite ki fè rechèch sou relijyon Vodou ansanm ak vodouyizan ann Ayiti ak nan peyi etranje te rasanble ane pase pou yo travay ansanm sou kesyon sa a. Kongrè Santa Babara a (KOSANBA) ki se yon Asosyasyon pou Etid Vodou Ayisyen vin antre nan lit sa a tou, epi jodi a yo kontan pou yo kapab anonse nan non komite a ke demach sa a pote bon jan rezilta istorik.

Ann avril 2012, gwoup la te voye yon petisyon bay Bibliyotèk Kongrè Ameriken an (Library of Congress) pou mande li chanje prensipal tit sijè li genyen pou relijyon sa a de «Voodooism » a «Vodou». Tit sijè, se kategori kote yo klase liv yo pou montre ki sijè liv yo trete. Nan mwa ki sot pase la yo, Bibliyotèk Kongrè a voye fè komite a konnen rezilta petisyon an, apre yo fin egzaminen tout dokiman komite a te voye bay Bibliyotèk Kongrè a. Bibliyotèk Kongrè a « jwenn dokiman chèchè yo ak vodouyizan yo montre jan ‘voodoo’ gen yon move sans”, se yon mo ki pa ta dwe sèvi. Ki fè Bibliyotèk Kongrè a deside chanje tit sijè sa a pou ranplase l ak « Vodou ».

Bibliyotèk Kongrè Ozetazini an fè moun konnen desizyon l sou chanjman sa a nan yon deklarasyon ofisyèl ki pibliye ann oktòb 2012. Deklarasyon an di : « Yon gwoup edikatè ki mete ansann avek vodouyizan te voye yon petisyon bay PSD [Policy and Standards Division], branch ki okipe afè prensip ak règleman, pou fè chanje òtograf tit ‘Voodooism’ la. Se avèk siksè yo prezante agiman ki montre se ‘Vodou’ ki pi bon òtograf la; e menm agiman sa yo montre òtograf ‘Voodoo’ a vin tounen yon jouman. Nou chanje tit sijè a pou fè l tounen ‘Vodou’ nan lis sa a, epitou nan tout lòt kote yo sèvi ak mo ‘Voodoo’ nan divès referans ak nòt aplikasyon, nou chanje yo tou. » (<http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/cpsod/psd-121015.html>)

Kounye a chanjman sa a parèt nan sit entènèt Otorite Bibliyotèk Kongrè a: <http://authorities.loc.gov/>. Apati jodi a tout liv ki pibliye sou sijè relijyon ki pou kataloge avek tit sijè Bibliyotèk Kongrè a yo p ap klase sou tit « Voodooism » ankò, men y ap klase yo sou tit « Vodou ».

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ALERTE MEDIA

KOSANBA

**Association pour l'Etude du Vodou Haïtien
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Université de Californie à Santa Barbara**

LA BIBLIOTHÈQUE DU CONGRÈS AMÉRICAIN: REMPLACE SON SUJET DE RÉFÉRENCE 'VOODOOISM' PAR CELUI DE 'VODOU'

Le 20 décembre 2012 — Depuis des années, les pratiquants et chercheurs du Vodou haïtien ont contesté les représentations négatives de cette religion et se sont insurgés contre l'orthographe 'Voodoo'. Un groupe de professeurs et de chercheurs-pratiquants basés en Haïti et à l'étranger s'est regroupé l'année dernière pour travailler à cette fin et mettre un terme à cet usage. L'Association pour l'Etude du Vodou Haïtien, le Congrès de Santa Barbara (KOSANBA), s'est joint à cet effort et est heureux d'annoncer au nom du comité que cette initiative a déjà obtenu des résultats historiques.

En avril 2012, le groupe a adressé une pétition à la Bibliothèque du Congrès Américain pour réclamer le remplacement du sujet de référence 'Voodooism' par le terme 'Vodou' dans les notices et l'indexation en général. Les sujets de références sont les catégories assignées aux livres afin d'indiquer le sujet de l'ouvrage. Au début de cet automne, la Bibliothèque du Congrès a notifié le comité que suite à l'examen des documents soumis, elle a « conclu que les arguments avancés par les universitaires et praticiens selon lesquels le terme 'Voodoo' est péjoratif, sont convaincants » et a décidé de son remplacement par le terme 'Vodou'.

La Bibliothèque du Congrès a annoncé ce changement en octobre 2012 et a émis la déclaration suivante: « Un groupe d'universitaires et de praticiens du vodou a adressé une pétition à la PSD [Policy and Standards Division] afin de faire changer l'orthographe de la rubrique 'Voodooism'. Ils ont présenté avec succès l'argument que l'orthographe vodou est la plus juste et que l'orthographe 'Voodoo' est devenue péjorative. Le sujet de référence a été remplacé par le terme 'Vodou' dans cette liste, et tous les autres emplois du mot 'voodoo' dans les références et notes d'application ont aussi été révisés». (<http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/cpsod/psd-121015.html>)

Ce changement est à présent en vigueur sur le site des Autorités de la Bibliothèque du Congrès : <http://authorities.loc.gov/>. Dorénavant, les ouvrages ayant pour objet cette religion, catalogués suivant les sujets de référence de la Bibliothèque du Congrès, ne seront plus classifiés sous le terme 'Voodooism' mais plutôt sous celui de 'Vodou'.

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MAMA LOLA'S TRIPLETS, HAITI'S SACRED GROUND, AND VODOU'S QUINTESSENTIAL LESSON¹

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Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn has enriched religious studies, feminist studies, anthropology, and research methods across disciplines with new views on the ideal rapport with informants and host cultures. In particular, this field-defining book has reconceptualized the content and form of feminist research and ethnographic work in ways that have also enlarged the study of indigenous religions nationally and transnationally. I personally consider *Mama Lola* one of the most insightful volumes ever written on Haitian Vodou, especially from a markedly feminist perspective and by a scholar trained in both philosophy and anthropology of religion. She is part of a lineage of groundbreaking feminist scholars not born in Haiti that includes Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Dunham, Maya Deren, and Odette Mennesson-Rigaud, Karen McCarthy Brown pushed boundaries and borders bravely and with vision. Following an emerging trend among feminist anthropologists in the late 1980s, she blurred different genres of writing and methodologies to produce *Mama Lola*, analyzing complex interactions between religion, race, culture, diaspora, transnationalism, class, gender, sexuality, and politics. In so doing at a time when reflexive writing was still shocking to some, she exhibited courage, daring to position herself in the text as an active participant and allowing perhaps Gede's tricksterism to play with truths and take charge of Mama Lola's countless renderings of ancestral tales.

Across the religious landscape of the world, three is consistently a sacred number. A belief inherited from the Fon people of West Africa considers twins to be supernaturally and metaphysically powerful; in Haitian Vodou the child born immediately after the twins is regarded as having an equally complex relationship with the invisible world. This child born after the twins, a "third twin," so to speak, is Marasa Twa, a Dosou/Dosa, and the concept applies to the result of all sorts of labor, not just childbirth. This third edition of *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* is the Marasa Twa, the Dosa, the third "twin" of Vodou knowledge, the

culmination of three decades of scholarship. While the original text by Karen McCarthy Brown remains the same in each of the three editions, in my view, each of these editions marks a paradigmatic change and an epistemic shift in our understanding of the religion, a deeper revelation and initiation into the *konesans*/knowledge of Vodou. Each also exhibits a greater openness and disclosure of Vodou, once secretive and persecuted, now increasingly gaining acceptance, respect, and recognition. As readers of *Mama Lola*, we are brought ever closer to the *djèvo*, the initiation chamber where the *manbo* initiates the reader as she instructs us in a sort of scholarly *hounfò*.

THE FIRST EDITION, *LAVE Tèt*

In 1991, the publication of the first edition of *Mama Lola* marked the birth of a new and vigorous current in Vodou scholarship, particularly in the United States. This was a shy firstborn, however, as the identity of Mama Lola, the informant, was kept secret. The otherworldly stare of the Vodou doll on the front cover of that first edition visually suggests the reticence surrounding the topic in those early years of Vodou research. Yet even in its diffidence the book marked the first step in the initiation of an entire generation of scholars into the work of Vodou, spawning a set of workshops and conferences. Most notable among these was the 1997 Congress of Santa Barbara (KOSANBA), which marked the inauguration of the first scholarly association dedicated to the study of Haitian Vodou. Much as the *lave tèt*, the first ritual of induction into Haitian Vodou, figuratively shaves and ceremonially washes the head of the initiate and serves to regenerate, reinvigorate, and offer a fresh view of self, Karen McCarthy Brown's *Mama Lola* razored and rinsed, so to speak, anthropology, religious studies, and women's studies and in so doing prepared them to view the religious knowledge of Haitians as a legitimate field of academic inquiry. Moreover, by emphasizing what Haitian culture had to offer, it provided a contrast to US media's incessant portrayal of the dire needs and conditions of the new wave of Haitian immigrants following the 1991 coup that overthrew the first democratically elected president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Karen McCarthy Brown's formidable accomplishment with the first edition of the book included creating new spaces within and between cultures for a religion re-envisioned and reconstructed through reciprocal reinterpretations. The text also succeeded in demonstrating that the Haitian imaginary differs from that of the West in profound and crucial ways that are nevertheless solid and worthy. Here I aim to also highlight an epiphany of sorts. Recently Karen commented, regarding the impact of her

work in *Mama Lola*, “All I did, really, is explain what Haiti gives to us!”² I could not concur more, for I had always viewed this forward-looking book as an extended commentary on the cultural riches of Haiti and its people and as an in-depth, respectful tribute to a society too long maligned by misrepresentations, distortions, omissions. In particular, Brown countered the fact that the Haitian religion has been depicted at best in superficial ways, without the more profound meanings and layers of interpretations needed to probe our cosmology and do justice to our spiritual heritage. Ultimately, *Mama Lola* stands as a powerful account of the contributions that Haiti can and does make to the larger conversations about religion, about life, and ultimately about being human.

Karen McCarthy Brown took many risks academically and personally: academically, by inserting her voice into the text and by taking liberties to complement the personal narratives of her informants with reconfigured family stories, put together from multiple and sometimes conflicting accounts, that some critics labeled fictional tales; personally, by publicly declaring, “What Vodou has shown me is that there are living traditions... that have long experience with the sort of spirituality that we seek... It can revitalize our world and unmask its claims of being the World, the only one there is... Once our theological and social constructs are robbed of that false power... then we can move to change our poor world, a world gone rigid and destructive in places.”³ She revealed that she had become not only a member of Mama Lola’s extended family but also a Vodou initiate, a process that gave her understandings she might never have gained solely through research conducted from the outside. This initiation, like the experiences of earlier scholars who also became part of the religion they set out to study, offered prime insights regarding the spiritual path. However, Brown did not stop there. She provided unique and perceptive views—some would say that she theorized even—on Vodou rituals and practices as an alternate form of morality, a creolized worldview embracing “a moral vision that is not abstract but interpersonal, with a complexity that does not paralyze and a tolerance that is not abdication of responsibility.”⁴ Of course, she encountered serious academic criticisms for her perceived lack of objectivity. To which I reply: What objectivity? The objectivity that for centuries ostracized indigenous knowledges, modes of being, and ways of thinking that did not fit Western norms? The objectivity that kept women at the periphery? And the pretense of science that continues to view as subaltern in thoughts, ideas, mores, and physical traits those—most often, the brown people of this world—who do not control capital, resources, and canons?

Karen McCarthy Brown intentionally disrupted established standards

of objectivity with the world-shattering view that “more extended, intimate and committed contact between researcher and subject can undercut the colonial mindset of much anthropological writing.”⁵ She countered the notion that Mama Lola was “other” by positioning herself as “the other” and Mama Lola as “belonging” to a perfectly sane world that “enriches life without leading us to pretend that we know things we do not know or that we have truth that rules out the truth of others.”⁶ She never shied away from who she was or pretended to be who she was not: she always remained a white middle-class woman, but one who tried to intervene in ways that were consonant with those we hope so much to see restored. Brown explained that she “felt compelled to do justice to Alourdes and to her world in [her] writings,” contrary to allegations that she might have joined the religion solely for academic gain, and she demonstrated over the years that giving back to her Vodou family and the larger Haitian community was a commitment she made beyond any and all research projects.⁷

Mama Lola is the first work to research the life of a Vodou practitioner, a woman priestess in this case, without making that person the subject of a voyeuristic anthropological study. Though Brown could not have entirely avoided the use of the anthropological gaze, she did shift it, making it more encompassing and textured. Her master ethnography is ultimately a respectful biography of a working-class mother and community member but also the story of a transnational family who struggles to earn an honest living in a foreign land while maintaining traditional African principles and Haitian religious values. This multidimensional narrative offers unique psychological and sociological insights recounted in a distinctive feminist style and with astonishing depth. It is at once a story of rootedness, departure, and new beginnings. In this text, through the voices of “Lola” and the experiences of her extended family, shared memory becomes narratives woven into a tapestry of multilayered stories that reflect real lives, longings, and social and personal struggles. These narratives serve as reflexive tools for researchers, informants, and readers so that all of us may weave together stories, creating new meanings, reconstructing collective consciousness, and strengthening selves and community.

Elsewhere, in an essay titled “The Moral Force Field of Haitian Vodou,” Brown analyzes her own position and role as a scholar studying Haitian culture and reflects on the research she has conducted for the book.⁸ Though she obviously writes about it in a scholarly fashion, it is my sense that Karen in the private world could never quite fully grasp why the book was so important. She often questioned why *Mama Lola* had been labeled a field-defining piece of research, a master ethnography. She

also wondered why so many students would write her year after year, first by mail and more recently by e-mail, sharing how the book had changed their lives or the course of their research, or perhaps both.

I contend that although the book makes obvious methodological and feminist contributions, there is something perhaps even more unique to it: Karen Brown's insights on the moral imperative to reclaim our humanity and our planet, and specifically the need for Western hegemonic powers to realize that they may indeed be able to learn something about being human from non-Western societies, so-called Third World agrarian societies where both the land and the people still matter. Brown's attempt to position indigenous cultures and Haitian religion in discourses of modernity is in the end a call to embrace interculturality that can no longer be avoided. She writes: "In sum, those of us in the United States who are interested in the revival of moral inquiry ought to consider taking Haitian Vodou on as a conversation partner—not to become like it, something we could never do anyway, but to see ourselves from a different angle in relation to it. The challenge of the postmodern age is centrally about hegemonic power or, more precisely, the loss of it."⁹

This may well be the key to it all—that Haiti indeed has something to teach this world, especially in the area of religion and through the unique epistemologies that have been so disparaged and maligned by the Euro-American imaginary. The task Brown undertook was to show the riches in the practices and beliefs of Vodou and to demonstrate that this ancestral mode of thinking and being is ultimately about forces and values that transcend any particular nation-state or culture. She further examined rituals and practices attuned to Haitian and diasporic feminist sensibilities that have larger implications for counterdiscourses of empowerment, solidarity, and liberation. In the following quote may well lie the response to the question that Karen herself had great difficulty answering beyond scholarly musings until our conversation of September 12, 2009, about "what Haiti gives to us": "Haitians would be good conversation partners for North Americans precisely because they have never had the money, the power, or the weapons to be tempted to think that they possess universal truths or that they could speak with authority for the rest of the world... As Haiti has become increasingly under the sway of US popular culture and political economy during the last century, all of the learning tends to flow in one direction—from the United States toward Haiti. The time may be right to test what can flow in the other direction."¹⁰

This is precisely what Karen McCarthy Brown has succeeded in accomplishing in *Mama Lola*. The book opened and reversed the flow of

communication. She placed the nexus of learning in Haiti and succeeded brilliantly. *Mama Lola* is a masterpiece of victorious subalternity.

On the matter of voice. In an earlier essay I suggested that despite the challenges that Brown and Mama Lola faced over the years during their courageous journey to serve Vodou, a distinctive single voice emerged from their long and complex dialogue, between the many voices of Brown as researcher, observer, and participant and the multiple voices of Mama Lola as priestess and informant who also balanced an array of spirits that danced in her head.¹¹ This venture could happen only because of their mutual respect for each other, their firm determination to counter the distorted images of this ancient religion, and their shared belief that common humanity transcends class, race, time, and country of origin. The women's voices fused successfully in a powerful articulation of cultural understanding and feminist intervention, merging the often dissonant voices of Western and diasporic feminism. The lives and work of these two women clearly establish how the Haitian religion empowers women, how the *manbo* subtly manifests Haitian female power both in Haiti and in the diaspora, and how Vodou encompasses the ideals of spiritual democracy and service.

THE SECOND EDITION, *PRAN ASON*

The second edition of *Mama Lola*, first published in 2001, responded to the clamor of a reading public eager to learn more about the culture of the "boat people" making headlines in US television broadcasts and newspapers. It also preceded the 2003 Haitian decree making Vodou equal to other religions in Haiti. The growing acceptance of the field is visually represented on the cover of the second edition, which displays the face of "Mama Lola"; the book also reveals her full name and shows photographs of her family. This speaks to the maturation of the field, which is akin to the *pran ason*, the ceremony that consecrates and installs a Vodou priest or priestess. In this edition we see Mama Lola as a *manbo*-priestess assuming in a more public manner the *ason*, the sacred rattle that symbolizes the authority of a Vodou spiritual leader who may initiate others into the religion. She assumed the *ason* more than literally, for she became in effect a public figure and spokesperson for the religion, appearing in a British documentary and lecturing along with Karen McCarthy Brown at universities, museums, and other public venues. She even became something of a celebrity, particularly after the opening of the large exhibition *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* (UCLA Fowler Museum, October 1995–July 1996; American Museum of Natural History, October 1998–January 1999), for which she served as a consultant and discussant.

In the second edition, I view Karen McCarthy Brown as the first Marasa yielding her place to the second twin, the informant Alourdes, who now is ready to receive the attention she deserves from the book's reading community. With the fuller revelation of Alourdes, this community is inducted into the realities of Haitian Vodou lives in the United States, in a process of demystification that does not in any way diminish the profound spirituality of the religion. As we learn, Alourdes is an amazing individual. She followed in the footsteps of her great-grandfather, Joseph Binbin Mauvant, her grandmother, and her mother, Philo, all gifted interlocutors of the sacred. While in Haiti, she did not feel that she had to embrace the world of the spirits; in fact, upon leaving Haiti, she only reluctantly allowed her mother to do a last ritual so she would be protected. Upon arriving in the United States, her concerns were not spiritual at first. Like every transnational migrant, she needed to find a job that would allow her eventually to bring her young children, whom she had left behind in Haiti. However, in 1965, after Alourdes had suffered from many illnesses and instances of bad luck, consultation determined that she had to return to Haiti to become initiated. She has been a priestess ever since, and she started helping clients and performing healings in the Brooklyn community even when she had to hide the nature of her real occupation from certain neighbors. There were attempts to ostracize her and even attacks on her house. She kept her blinds down—always.

Mama Lola is an extraordinarily skilled technician of the sacred who for the past forty years has orchestrated religious gatherings for the benefit of her immediate community and beyond, negotiating the world of the invisible with a reverence that involves the willingness and humility to reconsider, embrace, and return. She works in Oakland and Los Angeles, where she now has famous Hollywood clients, and has traveled to Europe and Africa while maintaining a practice in New Orleans as well as in her Brooklyn home, where she officiates most of the year. In addition to aiding with physical ailments, her healing work helps many clients to balance psychological and spiritual needs with the demands of modern existence as immigrants in a foreign land. Staying connected with her homeland while trying to reclaim a new one has been a constant struggle for both her and members of her Vodou family.

Alourdes is also quite aware of the oppressive structures that keep women subjugated in the United States and in Haiti and the ways Vodou attempts to counter inequalities that women experience. As a priestess of the religion, Lola has “plenty confidence” in herself and in her work and brings her own form of diasporic feminism to the table. One of her goals, she states, is to open doors for others—as she has done by taking

the formidable risk of allowing this biography to be written. Though women have always been at the center of Vodou, academic writing has barely started to give credit to their leadership, and Mama Lola is grateful to Karen Brown, who also took risks to write the book. She recognizes Brown's instrumental work to encourage her agency in the book and to give her a platform to "talk about her *Lwa* with clarity and pride,"¹² even when she herself talks in stream of consciousness, metaphors, proverbs, and sentences loaded with double and triple entendre. Karen was able to make sense of all that. Mama Lola exclaims, "Karen has done a lot for Vodou."¹³ So have you, I say. Both women's contributions are significant and their voices precious not only as female reflexive views from within but also as windows into an evolving Haitian religion that is now internationalizing.

Recognizing the phantasmagoric reputation that Vodou has had in the West, Mama Lola is aware that Vodou has come a long way since the early days of her work. The book has transformed popular perceptions about Vodou, and her own life has become enriched through the experience. She comments: "People recognize Vodou a different way now, a better way... People give me more respect after the book come out."¹⁴ She believes that the book has had a major impact in that transformation and feels proud of having been a part of that process. However, the publication of *Mama Lola* did not just affect her and Brown professionally. Brown courageously discussed in the afterword of the second edition difficulties that emerged when the two women had to renegotiate their relationship and the matter of authority and responsibility vis-à-vis the book and its impact. I am also aware from conversations with both of them that their relationship continued to evolve, at times facing more challenges but ultimately becoming a bond of unbreakable love and loyalty. It is my view that family crises, financial concerns, deaths, and health difficulties, along with possibilities for renewal, have only contributed over the years to solidify this successful work venture that turned into an amazing family relationship and a commitment for life.

THE THIRD EDITION, *DESOUNEN*

The third edition of the book is Dosa, the child that is born after the sacred twins. She is the culmination of a productive lineage; she speaks to, for, and with the twins; she provides reflection for the twins and stands as their full revelation. She is the end-as-beginning and is ritualized in the ceremony of *desoumen*. Performed after the death of a Vodou initiate, the *desoumen* separates the deity from the head of the initiate, allowing the deity to find another head and the initiate to begin his or her voyage of return to Ginen, the land of the ancestors. Before reaching Ginen,

the soul, free from the cosmic force of the *Lwa*, will reside one year and one day in the water before returning to the land, where it becomes a protective spirit for the living. At that time, a ceremony is sometimes performed, the *wète mò nan dlo*. The publication date of the third edition coincides roughly with the twenty-year anniversary of the first release of *Mama Lola*, a book that contributed immensely—perhaps more than any other, considering its wide readership in mainstream academic religious circles—to the demystification and rehabilitation of Haitian religion, an undertaking meant to bring about the death of “Voodoo” and the rebirth of “Vodou” on the international stage.

The third edition also coincides with the one-year anniversary of the devastating January 2010 earthquake that left the country shattered and the people broken. The quake claimed the lives of more than three hundred thousand Haitians—some say as many as four hundred thousand. The new edition of the book honors their lives, paving the way for their return to Ginen. The book’s cover closes the circle and features the altar of Alourdes’s mother in Port-au-Prince, which was partly destroyed during the earthquake.¹⁵ The third edition reveres and brings respect to the very lives that the televangelist Pat Robertson maligned by saying they had it coming to them for having made a pact with the devil—not knowing that this supernatural creature is nonexistent in the Vodou pantheon.

Karen McCarthy Brown and Alourdes Champagne have verbalized the mysteries of Vodou: the twins have spoken. And now they have requested that the one-born-after-the-twins communicate their words to the world. Hesitant but obedient to the Vodou value of service, Dosa, the smallest of the trio, speaks.

On November 2, 2009, as I began drafting the foreword to *Mama Lola*, I thought what a propitious day it was: the Day of the Dead—Fèt lè Mò, a most venerated holiday in Haiti. Little did I know then what was in store for Haiti. The first words I penned were: “May all the Gede—Bawon Samdi, Gede Nibo, Ti Malis, Ti Pise, Brave, Gede Simityè, Luciani Bawon Lacroix, Britis Jean Simon, Gran Brigit, and Gedelia, the female Gede that Karen summoned at the end of *Mama Lola*—guide my path and meet me at the crossroads as I humbly offer these reflections.” I further implored the Gede—masters of life and death, Eros and Thanatos, the deity that personifies best the contemporary urban struggles of our people—to let the ancestors speak through me, as I would in essence be writing about the book’s impact on us as Haitians, on the ramifications of this work for Haiti, and on the new place *Mama Lola* created for Vodou philosophy and practices in both the scholarly world and the larger international

community. Knowing that this acclaimed text had been both widely used and positively reviewed by scholars throughout the world, I went deep inside my soul to unearth what others—particularly practitioners, elders with more *konesans*—would say about it. I asked if the book was in harmony with the spirits that had guided the work. I asked about balance that the text might offer.

Our national religion is grounded in a system of balance: balance within ourselves, in interpersonal relationships, in our rapport with the divine, in the way we understand and use power, in the task of negotiating life morally, in the harmony we seek with nature. I reflected that for too long our nation has been out of balance; the world has been out of balance. Could Vodou offer healing modalities for an ailing society? For a world no longer in equilibrium?

I felt the strong presence of the *Lwa*, the Gede for sure, as I tried to organize my thoughts and find direction. Though writing down some ideas about a book, especially one so rich, might seem to be a simple task, at that moment it was a daunting challenge. For the task was not about crafting another commentary on yet another important piece of scholarship, detailing the book's methodological contributions to scores of scholarly disciplines, or even recounting its huge impact on perceptions of Haiti's national religion and culture. I felt it was a summons to mull over Vodou's deepest meaning and the role that the ancestral religion can play in sustaining Haiti, its people and its culture, and how it might address larger questions about the country's history and politics. The question became, "How could the spirit world and its figuration of the dead help reshape the decadent political and economic conditions in Haiti and stitch together its social fabric?" Could the *Lwa* help make sense of the current situation in Haiti? In an ultimate act of mirroring and inversion, might they turn chaos into order?

I felt I had been entrusted with a precious gem but also a heavy responsibility. I pondered if it was perhaps my role to try to expound what Karen McCarthy Brown had meant when she exclaimed, during that September 12, 2009 phone conversation, that she had finally figured it out: that the book was really about "what Haiti gives to us!" Did I feel uneasy not because I had to write an introduction to such a well-respected book but because I had to attempt to explicate Karen's truth-seeking insight about both the religion and the nation? Or because I sensed that considering the illness she was battling this might well be Karen McCarthy Brown's last gift to us? Or because I believed that this might be one of her most profound statements about her work of the

past thirty-five years, about her complex understanding of the Vodou religion and the role it might play in rehumanizing a world turned egocentric, materialistic, and ecologically unsound? Note that Karen did not say “what Haiti gave to us.” That phrase would have had a different meaning, referring to Haiti’s unique place as the first black independent nation of the Western Hemisphere, inspiring revolutions in Venezuela and elsewhere in the Americas; referring to the role that Haiti’s history had played in the Louisiana Purchase and the subsequent expansion of the United States; referring to the fact that in the black diaspora Haiti has been a beacon of hope, constantly leading struggles for social justice and creating extraordinary literary and artistic productions within Haiti and beyond. All these things would locate Haiti’s contributions and gifts to the world in the past. Karen spoke in the present—what Haiti has to offer right now. Perhaps I had to leave academia and go into the realm of popular wisdom to seek an answer. Haiti’s prized gift might then be its profound and proverbial *honè/respè*, honor and respect, and its ethos of sharing as *partage*—concepts best conveyed in the simplicity of Toto Bissainthe’s song “*Ti mòso manje fèt pou l separe*” (Every inch, every morsel of food must be shared), in the traditional proverb *Manje kuit pa gen mèt* (A cooked meal belongs to all), or even in Mama Lola’s exclamation “When I eat alone, I have nothing.”

I was also apprehensive about the prospect of trying to explicate Haiti’s nonquantifiable riches, helping perhaps to dispel the media-constructed image of Haiti as eternal taker and recipient of world charities. Though Haiti is a very poor country materially speaking, it is also a giver, rich in all sorts of wisdom, knowledge, and hope as well as beauty, a country that captivates foreigners and impels them to return to its shores, a country that is after all for us, native sons and daughters, our *Haiti chérie*, our beloved Haiti.

Late on November 2, the words didn’t seem to want to come. I stopped. I traveled later that week to a Vodou ceremony at the home of *manbo* Jacqueline Epingle in Montreal. I went to the Haitian Studies Association meeting in Bloomington, Indiana a few days later and then to Washington, D.C., and Urbana-Champaign. Upon my return in December, I worked on the *Journal of Haitian Studies* double anniversary issue. I still could not write this text. The inspiration did not come. It was not there.

On January 1, 2010, I awoke troubled from a strange dream. I told my husband about it; I told others. I resumed writing on January 3, 2010, still confronted by the extraordinary challenge of explicating the richness of Vodou, the richness of Haiti, and Karen Brown’s unique ability to

find beauty and truth in the daily lives of what some may call ordinary people—in their struggles and tribulations, their hope and despair, their love and lovelessness. I was anguished because I had to articulate what Haiti gives the world against the media's master narrative of Haiti as the poorest nation of the Western Hemisphere (how long will this painful descriptor be applied to us?) and against the never-ending stereotypes attached to Haitian religion.

And now I was also haunted by dreams in which I might have pre-sensed the apocalypse that was to come for Haiti—troubling dreams that I had for twelve nights in a row before the quake. During what I now call the “ball of the dead of January 1,” all the dead I had ever known visited me in dreams, their faces clear, even joyous, as if they were having a ball, a strange juxtaposition of family members buried in Haiti, close friends who had died in Santa Barbara, childhood friends who had made their transition thirty years ago, remote acquaintances, writers I might have met. There were more intimate dreams where dear departed ones, James S. and Shirley K., offered comforting words; there was an in-law who died in May 1973, Pierre was his name, who came to pack the belongings of his wife in a car and take her away, as “she needed to leave that house” (this same residence crumbled during the quake, and its sole resident, this elderly lady, his wife, was saved). Dreams have such significance in Vodou, and I know they do for Karen and Mama Lola. These dreams have meaning, I thought, and I felt they were somehow connected to this foreword. Perhaps my invocation early on of the Gede, destabilizers par excellence, had something to do with it. What unearthly forces had I disturbed? I felt ill at ease, burdened, scared. I shared this with Phyllis B., a dear friend, the day before my birthday on January 10, what is now National Vodou Day in Benin. I asked her: Am I dying, or are others?

I was haunted in particular by the dream I had on January 11, in which I saw hundreds of thousands of people at the Toussaint Louverture airport in Port-au-Prince running in all directions and screaming—chaos in Port-au-Prince and in the country at large. Something was out of balance.

I felt like a chosen mourner.

During those early days of January, despite my uneasiness and a troubled soul, I continued to write. On January 12, I was putting finishing touches to this text, perhaps crafting one of the last few paragraphs. The phone rang at 2:01 p.m. Pacific Time—5:01 Eastern Time, Haiti time. With a tremor that sounded like the tremble of the earth, the Haitian voice on the other end said, “Turn on the news. *Tranblemann tè ann Ayiti*. An earthquake has hit Haiti. Seven-point-three, they say, on the Richter

scale. It hit Port-au-Prince. The National Palace is destroyed. *La Cathédrale* gone. The epicenter is in Carrefour.” Did I hear right? Hit Port-au-Prince, the city where I was born. My Haiti. Carrefour, where my parents’ home was. I stopped writing. I was numb, petrified. My people, my Haiti! No, it cannot be. (I am ashamed to admit it, but I almost felt relieved for a short minute. *This* was what I had been carrying.) Why Haiti? Why now? Why?

I felt as if I had been stabbed in the stomach. I had a vision of a razed Port-au-Prince reduced to nothingness. A heap of rubble and bodies everywhere.

Please, pave the way for these souls to Ginen.

I rushed to turn on the television set. My eyes shifted focus between two screens. On the one screen, the words I was writing. On the other, images of a wrecked city, collapsed buildings, rubble everywhere, bodies littering the street, corpses dumped in large heaps in the yard of the Hôpital Général. People covered in dust rushing, running, wailing. Children lost, shrieking. It was as if we had been bombed.

This foreword would now need to be a Vodou eulogy for the earthquake’s victims. This effusion of feeling might lead to healing. This was the catharsis of *desounen*, the knowledge of Vodou imparted by *Mama Lola* and promoted in Haiti, its diaspora, and the world. We needed that knowledge and wisdom now more than ever.

We needed all our *Lwa* and then some!

Details were not forthcoming at first. The hours seemed long; the moments were intense. Each one was trying to get news of family and friends; phones did not work. I got word that my brother and his family were safe; I could not reach my parents until a week later.

The next few days, our attention was riveted to the TV screen.

We cried. We mourned.

The phone rang continuously. We feared for this one or that one we had not heard about; the list of names of those who had died grew longer. A list next to my computer was updated daily. What we saw on television was gruesome. Goudougoudou had hit us hard.¹⁶

Despite the reporting of airplanes loaded with supplies for the postearthquake relief of Haiti, aid was not arriving fast enough. The image of Haiti begging for international aid contrasted so vividly with what I was writing about—Haiti, a plentiful Haiti.

Haitians everywhere contacted other Haitians. Haitians everywhere supported other Haitians, and other friends of Haiti called and tried to assist in what ways they could. The international community joined us

in mourning; the earthquake catastrophe became a global phenomenon overnight. We witnessed moments of despair and hope, heroic rescues, and loved ones reunited in the midst of this apocalypse. The outpouring of support was incredible but not enough to prevent seven thousand people from being dumped in a mass grave the first two days, and more after that.

Every society guards its rituals to bury the dead; we all need to lay our deceased to rest with dignity and respect. But many in Haiti did not have even the time or luxury to identify their loved ones before they were thrown into public trucks and then tossed like garbage. Proper burial might have brought some minimal comfort and a modicum of meaning to their losses. Yet even that was denied to the poor—being able to honor lives that mattered to them, grieve properly, and have the luxury to remember.

During the next two months, like most Haitians, and like those from the international community who wanted to assist, I worked relentlessly on the bit of relief efforts I could help organize with the support of Direct Relief International. I had a supportive talk with the editor at UC Press and a new deadline—March 15. We agreed that I would add “something about the earthquake.” Of course, at the time I had no idea how much the text would be reshifted. I told myself that I would return to writing on March 12. These anniversaries have meanings for Haitians and now for the world. These are archived in our minds and our bodies, marking the date when our country was fractured, when the earth opened up and asked for a rebalancing. In the words of A-lan Holt, “Haiti was broken, then broke open the universe.”¹⁷

This task weighed on me. It was time to finish. Clearly what I had first written as a preamble to the text was now irrelevant—Karen’s retirement party. It no longer fit. However, later I decided to keep the original introduction as an afterword. The personal was something Karen had made her signature in her writings and her talks, something that endeared her to audience and readers: no big words, just the real thing, the lives of real people, descriptions of heartfelt interactions, divisions, resolutions, stitching of communal ties, and almost always communal healing. Still, this was where things stood for me: the text needed to be rethought. It was no longer about praising the contributions of the book. I now had to delve even deeper into the question posed by Karen about what Haiti gives to us so that I could provide some counterbalance to this moment of indescribable physical destruction, utmost devastation, and sheer despondency among those who continued to mourn their dead.

Might I have intuited in my dreams the catastrophe that was to come? Might I have sensed that the Gede would need to be summoned

to carry and soothe those three hundred thousand souls that perished in the January 12, 2010, earthquake? Were those whose faces I had seen in what I now called “the ball of the dead” on the night of January 1 preparing an embrace for the departed souls to be reunited with spirits of other realms?

Brown and Alourdes’s *Mama Lola* gives the wider world in and outside the academy strategies for appreciating the value of life and ways of mourning its loss. In so doing, the book breaks down barriers of scholarship and affect, allowing us the hope of becoming more integrated, more fully human. *Lakay, nou di: tout moun se moun*; in Haiti, we say everyone is a person. To those who would diminish the pain and suffering of the earthquake’s victims, *Mama Lola* proudly proclaims that Haitians are people, people with a culture, a religion, a worldview that allows them to love their departed and mourn their absence while caring for the living.

Haiti is now a sacred ground.

Embrace the living, honor the dead.

Illuminate the triumph of the human spirit.

Wète mò nan dlo

Let us open the passage of these souls to Ginen.

Ginen is the realm of the unborn and the afterlife, where ancestors who have passed from this life to the next reunite with those not yet born, who are instructed with the knowledge of ancestral spirits and come into this world to share with the living what they have brought from the otherworld; where the conjoining of spirits—old and new—creates a seamless tapestry of past, present, and future that is then brought to this earth to shield and strengthen the living.

I hope that this text honors this passage.

Honors this passage, now, a year later, ten years from now, and forever.

Make way for the procession of the saints on their way to Ginen.

Make way for the procession of *Sen yo* on their way to Ginen.

The three sisters complete the circle.

Lave tèt, pran ason, desounen.

Notes

- ¹ A version of this text was presented as the keynote address at the Annual European Caribbean Conference on Vodou and Créolité at Franklin College, Lugano, Switzerland April 6-9, 2011. I dedicated the presentation to my mother, writer and feminist scholar Paulette Poujol-Oriol who passed away on March, 11, 2011. A version of the text appeared as the forward to Karen's McCarthy Brown's *Mama Lola, A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (3rd edition, 2010). This third edition is dedicated to those who passed on during the earthquake of January 12, 2010. It also honors Karen McCarthy Brown, esteemed colleague, who has been severely debilitated by a rapidly advancing case of dementia. I express my appreciation to Roberto Strongman and Kyrah M. Daniels for their insights on this piece.
- ² Conversation with Karen McCarthy Brown, September 12, 2009. Karen phoned from North Carolina, where she was visiting her parents, to tell me that she had finally figured out what the book was about. It was a long, insightful conversation—most certainly her last one on an academic matter—and a rare and precious moment of clarity.
- ³ Brown, “Plenty Confidence in Myself,” 75-76.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.
- ⁵ Brown, “Writing about ‘the Other;’ ” A-56
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, “Plenty Confidence,” 75.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, “Writing about ‘the Other;’ ” A-56.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, “The Moral Force Field of Haitian Vodou,” 181–200.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 200.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ Claudine Michel, “Women’s Moral and Spiritual Leadership in Haitian Vodou: The Voice of Mama Lola and Karen McCarthy Brown,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Fall 2001), 61–87.
- ¹² Conversation with Mama Lola, Milford, New Jersey, May 2, 2009.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ *Mama Lola*, 2nd edition, afterword, 383.
- ¹⁵ Alourdes proudly posed in August 2009 in front of her mother’s altar on Rue Oswald Durand near the Faculté de Médecine, where the family has had its perystil for many decades. After the quake, Mama Lola stated that she will no longer return to Haiti, as the perystil was destroyed. “There is nothing left,” she exclaimed.
- ¹⁶ *Goudougoudou* is the name that Haitians have given to the earthquake of January 12, 2010. This is what the rumble felt like.
- ¹⁷ A-lan Holt, “A Poem for Haiti,” unpublished, January 2010.

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**LA COULEUR DE L'AUBE DE YANICK LAHENS : CETTE HORRIBLE
BÉANCE OBSCURE**

Marie-Agnès Sourieau
Fairfield University

*« L'Apocalypse a déjà eu lieu tant de fois (...) dans cette ville, dans
cette île... ». -Yanick Lahens, La Couleur de l'aube*

Deux mois après le séisme qui a frappé Haïti le 12 janvier 2010, l'UNESCO a tenu à Paris un forum intitulé « Reconstituer le tissu social, culturel et intellectuel d'Haïti » au cours duquel la journaliste indépendante québécoise d'origine haïtienne, Nancy Roc, a prononcé une remarquable allocution. J'en cite les premières phrases:

D'entrée de jeu, nous devons admettre que reconstituer le tissu social, culturel et intellectuel d'Haïti relève d'une gageure. Contrairement à ce qui a été avancé en l'occurrence, que 'c'est le tissu social, culturel et intellectuel d'Haïti qui s'est déchiré le long de la faille sismique' le 12 janvier 2010, ce tissu était en lambeaux bien avant cette date fatidique.¹

Quelques paragraphes plus loin, la journaliste dit entre les lignes que si les organisateurs du forum avaient lu les ouvrages d'écrivains contemporains comme Yanick Lahens, Lyonel Trouillot, Gary Victor, Frankétienne, ou encore Evelyne Trouillot pour ne citer qu'eux, ils auraient remarqué que la trame de leur écriture est composée des déchirures du tissu social, culturel et intellectuel haïtiens, et ce depuis de nombreuses années. Déchirures qui rongent le corps social depuis la fondation de la République; déchirures qu'aggravent les blessures et traumatismes à répétition qui s'acharnent sur ce corps malade. Le séisme de janvier 2010 a été une catastrophe aussi bien naturelle que politique, maillon d'une longue succession de fractures qui ont empêché le pays de se développer en une nation unie, de faire émerger un « monde commun » au sens qu'en donne Hannah Arendt.² En effet, comme nous le rappelle Laënnec Hurbon, il ne peut y avoir de nation véritable que si « le politique pose le principe du partage d'un monde

commun » fait de droits et d'obligations. « Et c'est donc précisément là où saute ce principe que la violence fait rage. »³ C'est aussi ce que Nancy Roc dit dans son allocution à l'UNESCO:

Intellectuellement, Haïti force à poser des questions dérangeantes. Pourquoi, en dix générations, les Haïtiens n'ont-ils pas forgé la moindre valeur commune? Comment cet État sans idée de nation est-il devenu maintenant un pays sans État? Il nous semble que l'individualisme et le 'chacun pour soi' des habitants, doublé d'une méfiance très jalouse à l'égard de son voisin, trouve ses racines dans l'histoire du pays où l'État n'a jamais incarné rien de bon.⁴

C'est précisément ce dont se lamente Joyeuse, l'une des protagonistes du roman de Yanick Lahens, *La couleur de l'aube*:

la méfiance rampe dans (nos) veines comme un liquide qui suinte. [...] La méfiance que les aînés nous ont toujours obligés à entretenir envers ceux qui nous ressemblent comme deux gouttes d'eau. Avec le malheur, la méfiance est le seul héritage que nous, les vaincus, nous ayons vraiment en partage. Et qui figure non point du côté de nos pertes mais bien celui de nos gains. (42)

La méfiance, tel un fluide corporel contaminé et incurable serait une tare héréditaire chez les Haïtiens. Les habitants du quartier, dit Angélique, l'autre protagoniste du roman, se livrent à des « guerres sourdes », s'épiaient, se soupçonnant les uns les autres: « ici chaque sourire a sa mesure, chaque parole son poids » (35). Parlant de l'un des malades de l'hôpital qui semble avoir confiance en elle, elle se ravise rapidement: « je savais qu'au fond de lui il se méfiait. Comme nous tous. Dans cette ville nous sommes ainsi faits » (94). La méfiance – héritage de la colonisation et de la question de couleur – empêche depuis plus de deux siècles le consensus autour de la notion du 'vivre ensemble' dans une société où n'a jamais régné l'égalité de fait.

L'absence de cohésion sociale, la crainte de l'autre, la suspicion imprégnant toute relation et toute initiative reflètent l'histoire tragique du pays. En effet, Haïti se caractérise par son dysfonctionnement politique, économique et social, et ce, depuis l'indépendance du pays en 1804. Comment « la perle des Antilles » est-elle devenue ce « trou d'enfer » ? Pour répondre en partie à cette question complexe, il faut comprendre tant le rôle de la communauté internationale que celui de l'élite haïtienne, toutes

deux mues par l'avidité de l'argent et du pouvoir. Depuis la colonisation française et son pillage des ressources, les ingérences étrangères se sont succédées, contribuant à faire d'Haïti un état néocolonial jusqu'à ce jour. L'embargo international de 1804, l'exigence du paiement de la dette française de 1938, les occupations américaines de 1915-1934 et de 1945, l'arbitrage de la crise de la présidence d'Aristide par les États-Unis dans les années 1995, puis en 2004 l'opération de stabilisation MINUSTAH dirigée par les Nations Unies ont renforcé la servilité du pays sans le sortir de la misère. On pourrait ajouter à cette liste le rôle souvent contestable des organisations étrangères non gouvernementales. En deux siècles, Haïti a connu trente-deux coups d'état et cinquante-six présidents de la République, subi une succession de dictatures violentes et ratifié vingt-deux constitutions (l'actuelle a été adoptée en 1987, après la chute de Jean-Claude Duvalier). Les catastrophes naturelles, l'érosion des sols, l'analphabétisme, et le manque d'infrastructure sociale ajoutent au dénuement de la grande majorité de la population. Par contre, l'élite politique et celle des affaires, tels les importateurs de denrées, les concessionnaires de voitures ou les administrateurs portuaires ont toujours tiré profit de la misère du pays. Comme le dit Dany Laferrière, dans *Un art de vivre par temps de catastrophe*, le sang, le feu, la terreur qui règnent en Haïti se résument en « un terrible face-à-face entre les possédants et les affamés. »⁵ Bien avant le séisme dernier, les conditions de vie à Port-au-Prince sont infâmes. Dans des quartiers bâtis à la hâte sans planification urbaine ni règles de construction, sans aucun service public d'eau potable, d'assainissement et d'électricité, survivent au jour le jour une population largement illettrée et sous-employée, et sans espoir de vie meilleure à moins de tenter l'exil.

C'est de cette réalité dont parle fréquemment Yanick Lahens depuis la parution de ses premières nouvelles. Nombre des personnages qui peuplent ses histoires subissent l'ordre des choses, c'est-à-dire le chaos généralisé; ils sont trop démunis matériellement, psychologiquement et intellectuellement pour tenter de le changer. Il faut d'abord survivre, 'chacun pour soi,' et pour ce faire, employer toutes ses forces et son ingéniosité à cette entreprise laborieuse. Nourrir et abriter sa famille sont les occupations essentielles; c'est pour cela que dans la plupart des textes de Lahens le point de vue des femmes domine. Dans *La couleur de l'aube*, roman sur lequel je me concentre ici, deux voix de femmes distinctes, deux sœurs, racontent leurs dénuement et afflictions dans le contexte de la dévastation de la société dans laquelle elles sont plongées – une situation que Frankétienne définit dans *Héros-chimères* comme le 'black hole' de la réalité haïtienne, une « horrible béance obscure, effroyable étoile éteinte [...] happant violemment et bouffant tous les corps qui, fascinés par la Gueule du Néant, s'approchent d'Elle. »⁶

Le texte de *La couleur de l'aube* pourrait être décrit comme une toile lacérée en tous sens, chaque personnage exposant ses plaies et traumatismes au sein d'une communauté composée d'individus apparaissant atomisés, sans repères, livrés à eux-mêmes dans la férocité de la survie. Les personnages principaux du roman sont confrontés à une telle abjection que la plupart du temps ils ne peuvent l'évoquer à travers un discours cohérent; leurs souffrances résistent à la parole. Ils se servent alors des succédanées, tels que plaintes, gestes, regards, silences, voix étouffées, cris. Plongés dans le gouffre collectif nauséabond de la jungle port-au-princienne, nombre d'entre eux se déshumanisent, se transformant en bêtes sauvages, devenant même invisibles quand l'excès du dire des 'autorités' prend la relève pour anéantir leur volonté de lutter, leur faculté de juger, leur désir de liberté. Tels sont les effets que produisent les harangues politiques des radios, les sermons de frère Jeantilus, le pasteur pentecôtiste, ou le crépitement incessant des armes à feu. Par contre, d'autres individus arrivent à tirer leur épingle du jeu et à profiter du système par la pratique du marronnage économique qu'ils justifient avec éloquence, alors que les autres la subissent dans la résignation silencieuse.

Le roman commence à l'aube port-au-princienne, à « quatre heures trente... Ce moment entre ombre et lumière » qui signale la fin de la nuit asphyxiante avec ses cauchemars, et le commencement d'une autre journée de méfiance et de lutte pour la survie (12). La couleur de l'aube drape progressivement sa lumière blafarde et exsangue sur la misère de la ville laissant pressentir le drame qui a commencé au cours des heures précédentes. Où est passé Figolé, le frère, qui n'est pas rentré de la nuit? Cette absence angoissante – et donc le silence de Figolé – est le point de départ de la narration relatée en alternance par les deux sœurs, Angélique et Joyeuse, en trente courts chapitres. L'histoire, qui a pour toile de fond le chaos sociopolitique des dernières semaines du gouvernement du Prophète-Président,⁷ se déroule en vingt-quatre heures, de l'aube à l'aube suivante. La structure classique de la narration avec son unité de temps permet au lecteur d'entrer dans l'intimité de la vie quotidienne des Méracin, une famille ordinaire avec ses activités, ses souffrances et ses frustrations usuelles qui, ce jour-là va virer à la tragédie. Les aléas de la journée de cette famille entraîneront le lecteur dans une traversée de la ville et de la société.

Dès les premières pages, le lecteur est confronté à la violence domestique. Le logement des Méracin, exigü, insalubre, sans eau courante et qui abrite six personnes, est prolongé d'une petite cour puante de pourriture et d'urine. Ces conditions déplorables engendrent des tensions qui s'extériorisent en actes brutaux et ce, dès le devant-jour. Angélique fouette Ti-Louze, la

restavec, « jusqu'à en avoir mal au bras, jusqu'à en être exténuée » parce qu'elle s'est réveillée trop tard pour les trois allers-retours de sa corvée d'eau. Angélique est consciente du caractère répréhensible de son geste. Comme pour s'excuser, elle confesse: « je n'avais que cette violence pour enfouir ma peur loin » (34). Parce qu'elle est impuissante, qu'elle ne peut maîtriser ses conditions de vie, l'exercice de la brutalité sur un être plus faible qu'elle la libère quelques instants de ses frustrations. Un peu plus tard, elle applique la *rigoise* (fouet) sur les « frêles jambes de Gabriel », son fils de huit ans, parce qu'il n'a pas bien retenu ses leçons récitées la veille (29-30). Ti-Louze et Gabriel sont des victimes sans voix qui n'expriment leur douleur physique et morale que par des sons plaintifs. Angélique, elle-même, souffre; elle est une des nombreuses victimes de l'irresponsabilité des hommes. « Mère sacrifiée », elle s'est laissée engraisser par un « homme rusé et vantard » qui a disparu à jamais; elle est pleine de « rancœurs, haines, privations », « de privations à faire pleurer de rage » (20, 12). Sa sœur Joyeuse confie qu'Angélique a décidé de mener une « vie cafardeuse, en rase-mottes » et de « résister aux joies terrestres » en s'adonnant aux rituels pentecôtistes pour racheter ses fautes (25, 27). Joyeuse, de façon très lucide, explique la présence inextricable de la violence dans leur vie: « nos souffrances ont commencé depuis trop longtemps. Et ceux à qui nous en voulons sont trop loin. Ti Louze et Gabriel sont, eux, à portée de voix, à portée de main. Nous sommes cruelles par défaut. Méchantes par obligation » (30).

La violence domestique découle souvent de la pauvreté qui, en Haïti, est inséparable de la couleur de la peau. Ti-Louze, une paysanne que la misère a conduite dans la capitale dans l'espoir d'y trouver le paradis et non pas « cet enfer à ciel ouvert », est devenue comme des milliers d'autres misérables, une 'restavec' (59). Mais comment Ti-Louze est-elle devenue l'esclave souffre-douleurs des femmes Méracin, elles-mêmes si démunies, elles-mêmes esclaves du système dans lequel elles subsistent si pauvrement? Joyeuse l'explique: « ...dans cette île, la misère n'a pas de fond. Plus tu creuses, plus tu trouves une autre misère plus grande que la tienne » (59). Les pauvres exploitent plus pauvres qu'eux. Ti-Louze, elle, se trouve engloutie dans l'abysse dont elle ne pourra jamais sortir parce qu'elle a « une vraie tête d'Africaine qui ne lui laissera aucune issue dans cette île. Ti-Louze si noire qu'elle en est invisible » (30-31). Sans identité et sans voix, elle disparaîtra telle une bête de somme abandonnée quand elle deviendra inutilisable.

Le mal fait à la 'si noire' Ti-Louze a pour origine, selon Angélique, l'histoire des Haïtiens qui leur fait haïr leur toute première présence au monde, cette « couleur honnie », « le noir-humiliation de notre peau » (181,

36). Joyeuse, elle, définit Haïti comme « un pays de nègres qui ne s'aiment pas » (143). C'est pourquoi la voisine, Madame Descat « s'est visiblement éclairci la peau du visage à coups de crèmes décapantes » ce qui la rend socialement supérieure aux autres (41). L'éclaircissement de la peau se pose socialement et tient lieu de parole. Joyeuse, si belle, si vive et intelligente, et si noire, qui a eu la chance de faire des études payées par Oncle Antoine chez les Sœurs de la Sagesse, se sent elle-même déshumanisée par les invités de sa riche patronne, Mme Herbruch (23). Alors qu'elle aide celle-ci à servir un élégant banquet, elle est consciente que « pour ces bourgeois, mulâtres à la peau claire, [...] (elle est) juste la femelle noire d'une espèce avec un simple appareil distinctif: deux seins et un vagin. Une espèce vouée aux cases, aux services ou au lit » (117). La couleur de sa peau efface son humanité. Elle n'existe que comme objet érotique.

En effet, les femmes, surtout les jeunes, sont très souvent sujettes au harcèlement sexuel. Les hommes sont à l'affût, surtout ceux qui ont un pouvoir économique supérieur au gibier qu'ils pourchassent. En croisant Jean-Baptiste dans la rue, Joyeuse commente: « En passant devant lui [...] j'ai croisé deux yeux ivres à force de se poser sur moi. [...] Jean-Baptiste me déshabille. En son for intérieur Jean-Baptiste pense [...] (q)ue je me couche sous le premier venu qui claque des doigts » (57-58). Un peu plus loin elle poursuit: « Je soupçonne Jean-Baptiste (...) d'avoir servi à Ti-Louze cette chose cachée sous son pantalon comme une menace, après l'avoir coincée un après-midi entre deux portes » (58). Les jeunes gens subissent aussi maints sévices sexuels comme Vanel, jeune guitariste pauvre du groupe de Fignolé, sensible et intelligent. Recueilli par l'instituteur Perrin en vue de l'éduquer pour « un grand avenir », il ne lui a rien appris sinon « l'intimité avec un sexe pareil au sien » (44). Même les hommes comme Jean-Baptiste qui bénéficient de la corruption politique et économique sont aussi victimes de harcèlement en raison de leur dépendance envers le système. En contrepartie ils font eux aussi valoir leur supériorité en exerçant leur pouvoir sexuel sur plus faibles qu'eux et en intimant la peur, voire la terreur, réduisant ainsi leurs victimes au silence. La menace d'être violé(e) est une constante de la réalité haïtienne surtout au moment des crises politiques, comme c'est le cas dans le contexte du roman. Quant aux jeunes femmes qui rêvent d'amour heureux pour adoucir l'âpreté de leur vie, elles sont très souvent la proie de séducteurs irrésistibles et pleins de promesses qui viennent « disperser leur semence » et puis disparaissent rapidement sans laisser trace. Comme le conclut Joyeuse: « ...dans cette île tous les hommes sont de passage. [...] Dans cette île, il n'y a que des mères et des fils » (57).

La plupart des gens tentent de tirer profit de quelque chose ou de quelqu'un, tel maître Fortuné, ce « grand usurier » qui tire les ficelles du pouvoir et « ne s'embarrasse pas d'une âme, » ou Mme Jacques qui vend entre autres le riz offert par 'food for the poor' et fait payer les appels téléphoniques reçus; ou encore Jean-Baptiste, récemment recruté par les hommes du « Prophète-Président, chef du parti des Démunis, » qui s'enorgueillit de son nouvel emploi au bureau des Douanes en contrepartie des basses besognes qu'il devra effectuer pour son chef (43, 35). Pour la majorité des Haïtiens, la survie économique passe par le marronnage, c'est-à-dire par l'emploi de tous les expédients, ruses et escroqueries qui permettent de se sortir de la misère et de l'humiliation. Ainsi Oncle Antoine a toujours pensé que tous ceux qui étaient pauvres ne l'étaient que parce qu'ils s'étaient mal débrouillés soit parce qu'ils n'avaient pas saisi les combines toujours à portée de main soit parce qu'ils s'étaient empêtrés dans des « considérations inutiles et sans fin, sur la justice et l'injustice, le maître et l'esclave, imaginant que ces choses pouvaient faire le poids face à la réalité du monde » (182). Dans cette société, il faut saisir toute occasion qui se présente, sans arrière-pensées. Préservée par l'héritage culturel, la pratique généralisée du marronnage fondée sur une morale de subsistance est tolérée, voire admirée; elle n'est jamais remise en question, jamais discuté ouvertement.

Même les divinités restent muettes. Le Dieu à la longue barbe blanche des Catholiques, le Dieu au compte en banque bien fourni des Pentecôtistes, tout comme les loas du Vodou, est cruel et injuste; le Dieu et les loas s'acharnent sur les pauvres ne soulageant pas leur misère. Il semblerait que ces déités égoïstes se liguent contre eux en union avec les oppresseurs. Mère dont la santé chancelle « attribue ses malaises au fait que *Dambala*, son maître et son dieu, ne soit pas content d'elle parce qu'il se sent négligé. L'année dernière à cause des dépenses pour Figolé, (elle) n'a pas offert à *Dambala* une fête digne de son rang » (140). Même *Ogou* et *Erzulie Fréda* qu'elle vénère restent sourds à sa détresse.⁸ Quant au Dieu de la religion Pentecôtiste, il est d'une exigence cruelle à laquelle Angélique se résigne. « Dieu nous oblige, dit-elle, à nous tenir tous ainsi agglutinés les uns aux autres dans nos humeurs, nos rancœurs et nos odeurs pour nous mettre à l'épreuve et mieux le servir » (23). D'ailleurs elle élève son fils Gabriel « dans la crainte de Dieu. Dans l'horreur du péché » pour qu'il comprenne que Dieu tout-puissant est avant tout une force qui châtie (110). Il faut se soumettre à la volonté de Dieu qui a toutes les caractéristiques d'un dictateur, personnage récurrent du paysage politique des Haïtiens. Le Diable même est une autre incarnation de dictateur. Malgré toutes ses prières et mortifications, malgré sa foi soutenue par les exhortations

du Pasteur Jeantilus qui sait « convoquer de sa voix caverneuse les anges du ciel et les démons de l'enfer, » Angélique est incessamment tourmentée par le Diable qui cherche à la dévoyer (111, 125). Il est d'ailleurs certain que le Diable a établi ses quartiers dans la maison des Méracin où « il a la partie belle et doit se frotter les mains » (11). Par contre, il y a ceux qui sont rusés, ces gens d'affaires qui savent composer même avec la colère de Dieu, comme les Herbruch père et fils: « ...plus ils accumulent et plus ils susurrent, tous les dimanches à l'église, au vu de tous, des prières à l'oreille de Dieu » (143). Dieu serait-il injuste et ne récompenserait-il que les riches? Il le semblerait puisque seuls les riches ont les moyens de fuir « cet empire du mal » où s'enchaînent enlèvements, meurtres et autres crimes (145). Comme si elle présageait la catastrophe qui arrivera deux ans plus tard, Joyeuse décrit Miami comme « le nouveau jardin de l'Éden » où peuvent se réfugier les riches Haïtiens qui « ont échappé à un séisme en laissant derrière eux des morts et des blessés » (146).

La lutte acharnée pour la survie dans un état sans droit ni loi expose les instincts primordiaux des individus. En Haïti, aucune institution ne soutient ou défend les citoyens de façon systématique et équitable contre l'insécurité et les injustices qu'ils subissent de façon presque permanente. Comme l'écrit Laënnec Hurbon: « Tout semble se passer comme si nous étions en présence du fameux 'état de nature' dont parle Hobbes » (« violence et raison » 113). Le plus fort, le plus cruel l'emporte. Ainsi Frankétienne faisait la remarque suivante lors d'un entretien qu'il avait accordé au moment des émeutes de 2004 quelques jours avant la chute du Prophète-Président Aristide:

Je me demande si Haïti ne symbolise pas ce que j'appelle l'essence fondamentale de la vie, si elle ne serait pas, [...], postmoderne. Ce que nous voyons comme modernité chez les autres n'est qu'artifice. Ailleurs on essaie de contourner le chaos par la technologie, par la science. Nous, nous restons au cœur du chaos, comme si nous portions encore les marques premières de la vie. (*Ecrire Haïti* 2004)⁹

Les marques premières de la vie dont parle Frankétienne correspondent aux manifestations de certaines formes d'animalité et de sauvagerie avant la formation des sociétés. Ainsi, Joyeuse, se trouvant dans la rue lors d'une insurrection spontanée, remarque à propos d'un jeune tueur qui vient de blesser à mort un étudiant qu'il était « en guenilles, ensauvagé jusqu'à la moelle. Il avait à peine seize ans: sans passé, sans avenir, sans parenté, une nature à nu » (90).

Les images bestiales hantent le roman de Lahens. Les métaphores et comparaisons animales s'attachent à une caractérisation morale et physique aussi bien d'individus que de la collectivité. Dès les premières pages, le lecteur est confronté à l'image collective de la métamorphose du quartier « qui-se-bat-toutes-griffes-dehors » telle une horde de fauves (34). Les habitants sont des animaux sauvages qui se battent pour survivre. C'est la vision qu'a Angélique en pensant à Ti-Louze partie chercher de l'eau à la fontaine publique:

Espérons qu'elle reviendra entière et indemne de ces inévitables émeutes de l'eau où très tôt nous apprenons à nous faire les dents. À aiguiser nos crocs. Nous sommes dévorés par la rage comme des chiens. Bientôt il nous poussera une queue et nous planterons quatre pattes au sol. Il n'est que d'attendre (13).

Lorsque l'insurrection s'intensifie et que la mitraille crépite de partout, « un rugissement de douleur et de rage » monte des rues (90). Les jeunes gens qui attaquent le *tap tap* dans lequel se trouve Angélique ressemblent à une horde sauvage qui saute, hurle, cogne, frappe pour se repaître de sa faim de quelque argent pour la drogue ou tout simplement pour se nourrir (153). Dans *Poétique de l'Espace*, Bachelard écrit que « toutes les agressions, qu'elles viennent de l'homme ou du monde, sont animales. [...] ... la violence, celle de l'homme comme celle des éléments naturels, ne s'exprime bien que par l'animalisation » (56). Dans *La couleur de l'aube*, la population haïtienne apparaît être mi-humaine, mi-bestiale, tantôt transformée en monstre collectif, meute incontrôlable qui va tout submerger, tantôt ravalée au rang de bêtes errantes et pouilleuses. Angélique définit l'institution judiciaire comme un monstre dévoreur de ses proies: « ...si le malheur frappe un jour à votre porte, ne vous mettez pas en tête d'aller porter plainte. Ceux préposés à la défense des victimes s'arrangent pour poursuivre l'œuvre de dépouillement et les dépècent jusqu'à l'os » (163). Port-au-Prince, « enceinte de la bête immonde, » tel un minotaure, vit au rythme des rafales de mitraille (60). Port-au-Prince dévore ses habitants « à pleine bouche » (87). Quand une émeute surgit, la foule rugit comme des fauves en gage prêts à bondir sur leurs proies (90). Dans les bidonvilles sordides il n'y a plus d'humanité, il n'y a que des animaux domestiques abandonnés. « À côté des chiens et des porcs, surgissent souvent des silhouettes sinistres. Le dos voûté, elles se mélangent aux bêtes. Quand elles ne leur disputent pas des restes, elles fouinent furtivement à leurs côtés dans la puanteur et la pourriture des immondices » (59).

Tout au long du roman, Lahens utilise des références animales pour

décrire les caractéristiques individuelles des personnages. Certaines images évoquent puissamment la violence maléfique environnante. Par exemple, Maître Fortuné (dont le nom même est significatif) s'est installé dans le chaos port-au-princien « comme un poisson dans l'eau et se repaît de toute l'étendue marine pour nager. [...] Vrai caméléon, maître Fortuné sait prendre la couleur du pouvoir du jour et teindre sa langue et son cerveau » (43). Vanel qui a subi des sévices sexuels ressemble dans sa douleur à un animal domestique battu; il « lèche une grande plaie ... comme un chien blessé » (44). Angélique dit que sous sa propre peau « se meuvent les écailles d'une bête étrange » véritable carapace qui la protège des attaques sournoises du monde dangereux qui l'entoure et des tentations qui conduisent au péché (47). Joyeuse décrit son amie Lolo comme 'une renarde' qui sait profiter de toutes les occasions qu'offre « ce quartier de-qui-se-bat-les-dents-dehors-pour-ne-pas-mourir » (53). Toutes deux sont comme « deux tueuses lâchées dans les rues de Babylone. Deux fauves à l'affût dans cette ville dévoreuse » (54). Il faut, en effet, bien aiguiser ses dents et ses griffes dans ce quartier où les mâles, tous âges confondus, les regardent passer « en se léchant les babines » (57). Jean-Baptiste qui est qualifié de 'porc' dans ses relations avec 'les femelles,' a rejoint le parti des Démunis du Prophète-Président et donc se rengorge de son pouvoir, trônant comme « un roitelet qui aime l'odeur du troupeau » (56, 57). Même un blanc blanc comme l'Américain John, l'ami de Fignolé, se transforme en fauve dans ce milieu où le plus vorace et le moins scrupuleux gagne: il « regardait Joyeuse (...) et avait du mal à se retenir pour ne pas planter ses dents dans ce morceau de chair fraîche et la dévorer là sous nos yeux » (82). John est venu se défaire de son ennui de bourgeois chez les pauvres « qu'il admire comme d'étranges animaux debout sur deux pattes » (100). Angélique se décrit marchant à pas feutrés comme « ces bêtes qui habitent le noir » (95). Les blessés qu'elle soigne à l'hôpital ressemblent à des « bêtes en souffrance » (136). Lorsque Fignolé parle du kidnap d'Octave dont il a été témoin, il raconte que les deux miliciens Gwo Louis et Merisié ont « les yeux en feu comme deux bêtes échappées de l'Apocalypse » et que derrière le visage de Gwo Louis on devine « le venin terrifiant d'un reptile et sous l'épaisse couche de graisse la puissance d'un fauve » (98).

À travers les métaphores et comparaisons animales, Lahens brosse un tableau terrifiant de la brutalité qui imprègne toute la ville. La violence quotidienne, souvent mortifère, est une constante naturelle de la vie des Méracin. Or comme le dit Hurbon dans l'article précédemment cité, la violence se développe toujours « dans un contexte où la parole est barrée » (113). Les femmes Méracin sont livrées à elle-mêmes, sans repères, sans institutions étatiques capables de les entendre. Il n'y a pas de

communication non plus entre les différents segments de la population: il y a seulement quelques privilégiés du pouvoir qui oppressent facilement les autres puisqu'ils leur ont confisqué la parole. Autour des Méracin, en cette journée tragique, règne une conspiration du silence. Joyeuse ne révèle pas qu'elle a découvert l'arme de Figolé cachée dans un trou du mur, Figolé disparu reste silencieux, ceux qui savent ce qui s'est passé refusent de parler, et lorsque les combats armés des rues s'aggravent les témoins s'expriment en cris étouffés ou dialoguent par signes. Joyeuse évoque un monde dans lequel « à la fin de chaque crépuscule des pyromanes crucifient la misère de Port-au-Prince pour la faire taire » (195). Après qu'Angélique ait déclaré la disparition de Figolé au commissariat, les deux sœurs ne communiquent entre elles que par balbutiements, « silencieuses dans [leurs] gesticulations » (196). Et quand la nouvelle de la mort de Figolé est connue, la mère ne dit rien mais entame « une étrange mélodie qui prend naissance tout au fond de la gorge. Bouche cousue, » et avec les voisines venues prêter leurs sanglots et leurs plaintes s'ensuit « un remue-ménage de sons et de cris étouffés » (200).

La tragédie des femmes Méracin exemplifie la situation catastrophique, voire apocalyptique dans laquelle se trouve la majorité des Haïtiens confrontés à la violence sans limite dans son intensité et ses modalités. Malgré leur clairvoyance, leur agilité à inventer des stratégies de survie, leur courage admirable face au malheur qui s'acharne sur elles, les trois femmes se trouvent comme l'ensemble de la population au bord de « cette horrible béance obscure. »¹⁰ Certes Joyeuse se vengera de la mort injuste de Figolé mais ce sera sans doute au prix de sa propre vie. Cette traversée de la quotidienneté de la famille Maracin laisse peu d'espoir à la perspective de lendemains meilleurs malgré la capacité de résistance et le ressort remarquables des femmes.

Notes

- ¹ Roc, "Reconstituer le tissu social, culturel et intellectuel d'Haïti." Nancy Roc est journaliste indépendante, productrice et membre de la Fédération Professionnelle des Journalistes du Québec. Haïtienne, elle connaît bien la société de son pays. Elle a collaboré au cours de sa carrière à un grand nombre de radios et chaînes de télévision haïtiennes et internationales.
- ² Arendt, *La Condition de l'homme moderne*, 126 ; voir le commentaire de Françoise Collin dans "Limites de la violence, violence des limites," *L'Homme est-il devenu superflu ? Hannah Arendt*.
- ³ Hurbon, "Violence et raison dans la Caraïbe : le cas d'Haïti," M118.

- ⁴ Roc, “Reconstituer le tissu social.”
- ⁵ Dany Laferrière, *Un art de vivre par temps de catastrophe* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2010), 8.
- ⁶ Frankétienne, *H'éros chimères*, 160.
- ⁷ Le gouvernement du Président-Prophète est celui du Président J-B Aristide qui sera forcé à l'exil en février 2004 sous la pression des Etats-Unis, de la France et du Canada – autres ingérences étrangères.
- ⁸ Dans le panthéon des divinités vaudou, *Dambala*, originaire du Bénin, est le dieu serpent qui correspond à Saint Patrick, vainqueur des serpents d'Irlande dans la hagiographie catholique. *Ogou*, originaire du Nigeria, est le dieu du feu et par extension des travailleurs du fer. Il facilite le travail des artistes et de tous ceux qui font fondre du métal pour fabriquer des outils ou des armes pour la chasse ou la guerre. Son importance vient du fait qu'il porte un sabre lui permettant d'ouvrir la voie, c'est-à-dire de faciliter la rencontre spirituelle des dieux avec les humains. *Ogou* est donc un loa très puissant car son pouvoir s'étend à de nombreuses entreprises humaines utilisant outils, objets, moyens de locomotions et autres faits en métal. Mais si *Ogou* est bienfaisant il a aussi un côté malfaisant. *Erzili* ou *Erzulie* est identifiée à la Vierge Marie catholique, mais elle a différentes identités. *Erzulie Fréda* que vénère Mère dans le roman de Lahens est la divinité de l'amour souffrant qui intercède auprès des dieux en faveur des pauvres humains. Voir Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods*.
- ⁹ Frankétienne, “Écrire Haïti... Frankétienne, Lyonel Trouillot, Gary Victor.”
- ¹⁰ Frankétienne, *H'éros chimères*, 160.

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“CHILDREN” OF THE GODS: FILMING THE PRIVATE RITUALS OF HAITIAN VODOU

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As storytelling media, documentary film and photography have provided a useful and necessary space of affirmation for non-heterosexual family forms in Western culture.¹ In such diffusions, individual and personal voices, alone or stitched together, may come to represent and account for broader group experiences and realities, subsequently altering received perceptions of the group as well as offering possibilities for viewer identification. Communities are thus bound and imagined through the multivocal threads of these localized visual performances.² Expressions of “non-normative” sexuality in the context of the Caribbean, due to histories of colonialism and slavery, are often formulated around a binary: these expressions are considered to be trailing behind more “progressive” Western models of homosexuality or they are branded a foreign imposition.³ However, this binary is a false one. Caribbean gender identities are in fact far closer to Western “egalitarian” models than this binary would have us believe.

This study will focus on the photographic and filmic documentation of the private rituals of the Afro-Caribbean syncretic religion of Vodou in Haiti and how expressions of cross-gender and, in particular, cross-gender dress manifest themselves both privately and publicly in relation to notions of religious collectivity, family and class structure within and through these portrayals. As Wade Davis explains in his definition of Vodou:

Vodoun cannot be abstracted from the day-to-day life of the believers. In Haiti, as in Africa, there is no separation between the sacred and the secular, between the holy and the profane, between the material and the spiritual. Every dance, every song, every action is but a particle of the whole, each gesture a prayer for the survival of the entire community.⁴

Vodou responds to reality, working practically with everyday concerns to

heal when deemed necessary within the community. Vodou’s syncretic and encompassing system enables alternative collaborations and multifaceted challenges to the dualistic relationship of film subject (outside) and filmmaker and viewer (inside).

This essay will focus on contemporary visual documentation of the private rituals of Vodou that challenge the predominance of an interdependent “us” and “them” dialectic, underpinning how Haiti has historically been imaged and represented. Following the earthquake which revealed the “bodies that matter” and the persistent discriminatory regard towards both Vodou and “non-normative” sexualities,⁵ such filmic histories are, more than ever, crucial contestations to an image problem, that Gina Athena Ulysse has referred to as “Haiti’s burden.”⁶ In order to unpick this scopic relationship, the analysis presented here deals primarily with the implicated role of the filmmaker and spectator in relation to the works discussed, while also considering the images from the perspective of the Vodou practitioners themselves. The first part of this essay addresses filmic representation of the more popular expression of cross-dressing found in carnival representation, using the work of British artist Leah Gordon, whose 2008 film, *Bounda pa Bounda: A Drag Zaka*, depicts drag parody performed within the Rara band tradition in Haiti.⁷ With little at stake, due to the ephemeral and sanctioned nature of what can be seen as harmless gender mimicry, the ease with which such temporary crossover is obtained makes the act a particularly intrusive form of impersonation. The man, adopting female dress, carelessly forays into the sphere of the Other (the woman), without any concern for “realness” in order to mock that which he does not successfully emulate what Helen Gilbert terms a “spectacle of not passing.”⁸ As a process of reinscribing and renewing aesthetic standards however, it constitutes an important means of emphasizing prevailing modes of representation. While *Bounda pa Bounda* shows male virility superficially masked in parody of the female body, the second part of this essay focuses on small visual signifiers of cross-gender dress that denote sexual desire and demonstrate more permanence in their embodiment. In so doing, I will turn to the 2002 documentary by members of the Haitian diaspora, Anne Lescot and Laurence Magloire’s *Of Men and Gods (Des Hommes et des dieux)*, in order to analyze their depiction of another ritually sanctioned space for cross-gender expressions and transformations, that of the religious community of Vodou.

FILMING THE LWA

As many Caribbean scholars have examined elsewhere, cross-dressing is a fundamental element of pre-Lenten carnival festivities.⁹ A sanctioned

transgression which surfaces at *l'heure de la fête*, this burlesque practice has been a part of traditional masquerade performances in the region for over one hundred years. As a form of “subversive” gender costuming in the Bakhtinian sense, it is not clear, however, whether such transgendered expressions veritably constitute a convincing critique of categories of gender since it seems impossible for them to realistically undermine existing gender binaries within the sanctioned space and limited time period of the carnival event. While they do to some extent display and draw our attention to the hegemonic gender roles in circulation in the region, it is surely only where such spectacles exceed their ritually prescribed borders that true resistance might be in evidence.

Leah Gordon’s recently published book *Kanaval* acts as a form of documentation of the fifteen years she spent photographing and collecting oral histories of the characters of the Jacmel carnival. The festivities in this south-eastern town of Haiti are particularly relevant in consideration of the aforementioned designation of relatively closed spaces for the performance of inversion. Although the carnival celebrations in Jacmel take place according to the Catholic calendar of Lenten observances, they do not adhere to the structured, parade formation of other, more popular and commercial Caribbean carnivals. Jacmel carnival has been described by Richard Fleming as truly “impromptu theatre... not so much a parade as a collective flowering of street performance.”¹⁰ In Jacmelian celebrations, therefore, there are no boundaries as to where the narratives of Haitian history are played out and walking the streets with her camera, Gordon would often bump into errant characters *en mas* down small side streets.¹¹ The performative disobedience of the carnival mirrors the civil rootlessness of the Haitian popular classes, who without sufficient state protection for over 200 years, have had to ensure their own means of survival and self-determination through collective *lyannaj* and networks of resistance.

More than mere performance documentation to be archived, Gordon’s images and stories seem to be performative in nature, inviting an engagement on the viewer’s part. In his essay “The Performance of Possibilities,” Myron Beasley recalls Walter Benjamin’s concept of the archive. For Beasley, as for Benjamin, the archive is more than a forgotten, ordered set of remnants, but “a living thing concerned with our relationships with objects,” whereby the archivist “is aware of the ‘subversive protests’ of the assembled items and who loves them as the scene, the stage of their fate.”¹² The artist’s preservation of each fragment as its own resistant entity without the imposition of her own authoritative voice is crucial to the interaction of these heterogeneous stories and identities and their reception as a conceptual whole. The manner in which carnival salvages

disparate elements in an unruly harmony, the “mix of personal revelation, remembrance of the slave revolts, political satire, social commentary, and of course, *Vodou*,” is precisely what Gordon seeks to harness in this art form. Given the historical role of Vodou as a catalyst in the Haitian Revolution, operating as a dynamic network of communication and action for the enslaved and maroon communities, the inclusion of its spiritual cast into this carnivalesque performance of resistance seems inevitable. The spirits of Vodou, the *lwa*, inform the characters of Jacmel carnival in which, as Fleming explains, “marching in a *rara* amongst a crush is an almost trance-inducing experience.”¹³

The spiritual possession performances within Vodou culture, like the quasi-trance states of the carnival masquerade described above, allow for a transformation of character or a crossing of gendered rules for a limited, ritually prescribed time period. Although these non-personal acts, however controlled and rehearsed they may be, can never be replicated exactly, their material recreation and translation ensures an affective collective memory amongst both participants and spectators through their repeated reinscription onto the bodies of the individual adherents. As Claude Planson observed, “*le vodou est bien une communauté vivante, une maison de culture et ‘un théâtre’ dans la mesure où le théâtre est une manifestation du sacré.*” (“Vodou is indeed a vibrant community, a cultural center and a ‘theatre’ insofar as theatre is an expression of the sacred.”)¹⁴ The stock characters, images and symbols of these spiritual performances, whether during carnival or a Vodou *sevis* (ceremony), are recurrently drawn upon by social actors, who renew and adapt them to work for contemporary realities. According to Joseph Roach, “repetition is an art of recreation as well as restoration.”¹⁵ The constantly updated gender performances to be discussed here, are therefore the result of a marriage of revolutionary new as well as existing exchanges between the body, the individual and the collective social and political landscape of Haiti. It is the continual respect of the existing aesthetic in the structure of the performances, which confirm this to be an unfinished, incomplete process. If traditions of transgression stem from a desire to become Other, if these traditions of transgression come out of oneself and become a spirit, then the re-staging of these sequences and the material re-dressing of bodies suggests a desire on the part of the player, as well as a collective need, to return again and again to these scenarios. The potentially subversive effect of these *retours* is empathic identification which threatens to dismantle the privilege of binary thinking, generating revolutionary ways of thinking the body through permeation beyond *kanaval* and beyond the Vodou temple.

During her time in Haiti, Gordon produced the short film *Bounda*

pa Bounda (translated by Gordon herself as *Arse by Cheek*, 2008), in which we observe the visual “making up” and “putting on” transformation of Rara band leader, Dieuli Laurent, as he applies female costuming in preparation for a performance honoring the *lwa* Gran Bwa, the spirit of the forest. Although mostly shot in close-up, the film allows us to explore to a certain extent, the space in which he prepares his costume. The room, known as the *bagi* and which is normally adjacent to the *peristil*, the main ceremonial space, is shown as a sacred space with the back wall taken up by a Vodou altar, made up of carefully assembled vessels, flags and chromolithographs. A sanctuary of sorts, the room also stores the appropriate props and costumes the possessed will need in the moment of possession by the *lwa*. Thus, in Gordon’s film we see Kouzen Zaka’s straw satchel and his North American style straw hat hung at the ready.¹⁶

Wilmeth and Wilmeth’s study reveals remnants of the theatrical traditions of *commedia dell’arte* in Vodou, and pays particular attention not only to the incorporated gestures and dramatic personae, but also the costumes, dressing rooms and props.¹⁷ Similarly Alfred Métraux describes a Vodou ceremony in an area of Port-au-Prince as having been exposed to *commedia* dramatic forms in the pre-revolutionary period:

Every possession has a theatrical aspect. This is at once apparent in the general concern for disguise. Sanctuary rooms serve to a certain extent as the wings of a stage where the possessed can find all the accessories they need... Some in the eyes of spectators, succeed better than others in representing such and such a god... And yet what else can it be called except *theatre* when the possessed turn the simultaneous manifestation of several gods in different people into an organized *impromptu*? ... Ritual trances pose a fundamental problem: are they genuine disassociations of the personality comparable to those found in certain cases of hysteria, or are they entirely simulated?¹⁸

Métraux’s allusion to hysteria needs challenging here, as does his distrust of the authenticity of possession, deeming its apprehension only possible through a Western psychoanalytical lens and his resignation that anything else can only amount to simulation, positions such practice in opposition to notions of the “real.” Though apparently unable to consider possession as a form of immersed, embodied performance, Métraux does paradoxically describe cultural traits in theatrical terms as he compares “sanctuary rooms” to “the wings of a stage.”¹⁹ Lorand Matory, by contrast, dispels any notion of theatricality in his discussion of Oyo-Yoruba cross-dressing,

which he firmly maintains to be “actual spirit possession” and the “very antitype of theatre.”²⁰ However it should be noted that my intention here is not merely to reduce possession to a form of fakery nor to assume initiates to be merely “representing such and such a god,”²¹ but rather I am considering such acts through a performative lens in order to understand the *bagi* of masks that are adopted within *and* beyond the *peristil* on a daily basis. The process of doubling or masking, not exclusive to Haitian culture, exists within and reaches beyond theatre, carnival and sacred ritual, in as much as these acts are firmly a part of daily life, enabling a social actor to play more than one role, and wear more than one mask. Laurent, the leader of the Rara group *Bounda*, alludes to how carnival narratives are both everyday theatre and simultaneously mirror these everyday theatrical activities when he states, “We are all Vodou believers and born into it... We are a Mardi Gras but also we are just the women bringing the leaves of the forest from Gran Bwa.”²² A substantiating statement such as this one points to the blurred boundaries between the sacred and the secular; the burlesque and the banal, and demonstrates how serving the spirits is reflexively attended to within everyday life in Haiti.

If the sanctuary room constitutes a private space of ritual transformation from one costume to another in the film, what can be said of the presence of the filmmaker within the space? In his reading of Gordon’s photography, Myron Beasley argues for the critical stance of the photographer in what he calls “performance ethnography,” whereby the ethnographer works alongside what he labels the “co-participants,” or the subjects of the film/ photograph, to create a performance.²³ This approach creates a social, egalitarian space of encounter and facilitates a continual dialogue between the participants, the ethnographer and the audience as they strive to produce meaning collectively. Gordon, as an artist-ethnographer, became increasingly conscious of the unequal systems of representation prevalent in the global image economy and, “[a]fter seven years of photographic documentation, [she] realized that the images were not enough, [she] needed the signified alongside the signifier.”²⁴ In the *Kanaval* publication therefore, the photographic subject, Dieuli Laurent, also provides an oral history that traces the formation of the carnival group from the perspective of the practitioner, working together with Gordon’s visual language.²⁵ We learn of the origins of the *Drag Zaka* character and how it appeared to him in a vision while he was working in the cane fields of the Dominican Republic:

I decided to form a group to follow my revelation. It was then that I realized that the character in the trees was Gran

Bwa, the Vodou spirit of the forest. I started to wear a long red dress, wig, mascara, and carried a basket of leaves and flowers on my head. I brought together musicians and dancers and called the group Bounda Pa Bounda.²⁶

Gordon's assemblage of visual remnants and oral parts ensures a new layer of language, a subjective layer, simultaneously allowing each individual experience to remain attached to its origins. To use *Bounda pa Bounda* as an example is to suggest that Gordon as ethnographer is validated as being part of the performance, and through the additional filmic transposition, the viewers of the film equally become part of this image-making process of social exchange.

It is important, however, to be wary of what Beasley has coined Gordon's "involvement" which could very easily be seen as the artist's (not forgetting the viewer's) "intrusion" into this private quarter adjoining the "stage." As long as Gordon holds the camera (in the power imbalance of photography or film), she will never completely evade the exploitative system of representing the Other. An "us" and "them" opposition of objectified Other and the filmmaker and her audience is sustained but also modified in *Bounda pa Bounda*. While the work remains locked into an observational filmic framework and bound to colonial hierarchies of representing Otherness, it also offers openings and opportunities for revisioning Otherness. As Catherine Russell explains,

Experimental ethnography involves a reconceptualization of the historical nature of Otherness, including not only how the Other was (and is) constructed in colonial discourse but also how cultural difference and "authenticity" are related in the postcolonial present and future.²⁷

Cultural "authenticity" is challenged in *Bounda* through meaning, which evades and transcends the paradigm of documentary "realism." The most explicit example of this in Gordon's film is when the ethnographic subject destabilizes the "reality" being recorded by committing the ethnographic crime of looking at the camera. Within the mechanics of viewing the piece as a whole, there seems to be a difference between the image transaction in the private intimacy of the *bagi* and the open, more public space of the exterior *peristil*. At the end of the dressing sequence, when Laurent looks directly into the camera for the first time and adds the finishing touch of a pair of kitsch flashing plastic sunglasses, he is commenting on the ridiculousness of the spectator's intent observation of his private ritual up till that point. The viewer's voyeuristic role is suddenly highlighted and

briefly exposed as the positions of power are challenged in a moment of reversal. Up until this point Laurent had had no say in how he wished to be represented in a process where Gordon equally gave no direction to the subject and simply set up the tripod in the corner letting the camera roll in this observational exercise. While he apparently always wears outrageous spectacles to match the spectacle of the “Bounda” character, he seems to particularly relish in adding them here, to the surprise of Gordon who had given this particular pair to him as a gift a few days prior.²⁸ The unidirectional gaze crucial to seeing and thus fixing or “knowing” the Other—as described by Fanon—is disrupted by the bandleader’s defiant and unexpected look into the camera lens.²⁹ As if suddenly viewing himself as Other, he returns the spectatorial gaze, demonstrating the performative power of the subject and upsetting the historical divide between subject and object in the process.

The challenge of the returned look in Gordon’s film, within the private space of the *Bagi*, only proves to be momentary as the Rara band members launch into their dance within the relatively open power-dynamic of the *peristil* and the viewer is ignored once again, restored to the comfort of a position screened in, and therefore protected by, online anonymity.³⁰ Other than during that brief camera address, the bandleader seems unperturbed by the filmmaker’s presence, and other figures, noises and objects are seen to pass into the space while he is dressing. If the performance has not consciously been set up in relation to Gordon’s position, then it is unclear how her work ultimately functions as a critique of the conventions of ethnographic objectivity, as Beasley’s perspective of “performance ethnography” implies. The power division inherent in the documentary form remains intact through the opposition of private ritual (concealed “out there”) and public exposure (revealed “in here” and disseminated across the internet). According to Trinh T. Minh-ha, rooted in this model lies “the Cartesian division between subject and object which perpetuates a dualistic inside-versus-outside, mind-against-matter view of the world,” which, it should be noted, is starkly at odds with the non-binaristic thinking of the Vodou belief system.³¹ What is presented as “real” and what is perceived as “real” by the viewer is always through the film-maker’s lens, and regardless of whether the exchange itself is an act of participation, the resultant piece will always obscure the power balances of the event.

DRESS (AS GENDER) REHEARSAL

Partitioned from the *peristil*, the dressing room in Gordon’s film doubles as a rehearsal space where the performer uses mirrors to perfect and rehearse his look, while we can faintly hear in the background the

rest of the band warming up with songs, or lyrical *pwen*,³² created by Laurent such as, “Bounda’m tro piti, ou ap taye’m compa” (“My ass is too small, you are going to put me on the kompa rhythm”).³³ The lyrical content here echoes the parody of the costume of the bandleader with its strap-on, padded-out bottom. The taunting comment of his enlarged buttocks is based on a male claim that associates the female costume of having a large posterior with the social skill of dancing a good kompa. In this instance the application of false curves, wig, perfume and cosmetics, the “almost but not quite” drag as a uniform not so much conceals, but rather knowingly reveals and magnifies, the hypermasculine posturing of the wearer. The designed lack of effort to “pass” in this spectacle, as in the deliberate flaunting of his unshaven moustache, further accentuates dominant visions of the female body in its male authorship and before he emerges to join the band he brandishes the phallic machete wrapped in a red flag mirroring the images of the warrior spirit Ogou behind him. Laurent’s symbolic use of the machete, a “masculine” weapon of revolt amongst the maroon slaves, further emphasizes gender distinction as well as the presence of a penis as further confirmation for the onlooker of the “truth” that lies beneath the costume.

BEYOND CARNIVAL

Beyond the framework of carnival, histories of cross-gender dress and identification in the Caribbean become far more difficult to trace. Anne Lescot and Laurence Magloire’s documentary film, *Des Hommes et des dieux*, discusses the role of homosexuality and trans-culture within Haiti, but more specifically focuses on their place within Haitian Vodou. Lescot and Magloire introduce us to a small cast of men, from both urban and rural communities, who lead us through their everyday experiences as *masisi*, a Kreyòl term which the subjects themselves have reversely appropriated.³⁴ They share their concerns, fears, and desires and importantly the role of Vodou within their lives, as reproduced lithographs of the *lwa* Erzili Dantò are continuously spliced into the film. Some of the interviewees claim that Vodou provides an explanation for their sexual orientation, that the *lwa* Erzili Dantò, a hardworking, mother spirit, has made them who they are. “Erzili Danto chose me when I was very young” argues one of the men. One of these men even says, “*Lwa gate’m*” (“The spirits ruined me”).

PERFORMING IN MARRONAGE

Vodou’s origins in the unifying and rallying practice of marronage, when considered in reference to *Des Hommes*, account for the communal and family-like solidarity of those represented. The underground nature

of marronage and Vodou creates a mask for the same-sex desires of the initiates granting them the power and freedom of the unsurveyable. We might therefore question, under what circumstances do these minoritized subjects become visible? If considered in comparison to the Anglo-American notion of the “closet,” then the expectation is that there will be a moment of “coming out” or a departure from the support system of the Vodou family.³⁵ The moment in the film when the *oungan*, Erol and Fritzner, deny the link between homosexuality and Vodou could be seen as an act of “outing” and exposing the secret. The sudden visibility and acceptance of those recently initiated as *oungan*, such as Innocence, and the ensuing newfound respect they encounter can also be seen as emergence and renewed acknowledgement of the subject in society. However, these expressions still remain enveloped in the subterraneity of Vodou and the Anglo-American rupture of “coming out” has no currency for the men depicted here as it does not necessarily afford them the freedom they desire. The film rather suggests a blurring of private and public spaces and thus a blurring of visibility and invisibility in *masisi* culture, whereby continuing to perform from *within* marronage allows the subjects to construct the necessary armor and strong group network in order to tackle external hegemonic opponents.

A further parallel between the community featured in Lescot and Magloire’s documentary and the clandestine networks of marronage is the maternal figure they both champion. The Vodou adherents in the film consider themselves the “children” of the maternal spirit of Erzili Dantò. The mother and son relationship is thus extended within the realm of Vodou, where Dantò offers maternal protection in the face of the paternal referent of the slave’s master. One interviewee, Denis, describes his father as “a stranger, my mother acted as my father,” in a scene where we see him kneeling and placing offerings to his surrogate mother Erzili. Certainly it was the mother, often referred to as the *Poto-Mitan* in Haiti, who became the principal site of resistance during slavery due to her decisive role in the reproduction of the system of domination and servitude.³⁶ It was she, as Glissant affirms in *Le discours antillais*, who cried, “*Manjé tè, pa fè yich pou lesclavaj*” (“Eat earth, don’t make children for slavery”)³⁷ and therefore her history was inherently intertwined with the revolution and thus the birth of Haiti:

Parce qu’elle *connaît* le maître, parce qu’elle est tout particulièrement sollicitée par lui – y compris dans une relation de séduction – la mère ne peut qu’être en même temps le premier lieu de résistance. C’est elle que l’on trouvera en tête du cortège des émeutiers exigeant l’Abolition.³⁸

(Because she knows the master, because she in particular is solicited by him—within a relationship of seduction—the mother also has to be the first site of resistance. It is she that we find heading the revolutionaries as they demand abolition.)

The spirit Dantò is an incarnation of this history, particularly as she was thought to have fought on the front line of the maroon armies and some believe this is where she gained the facial scars we see depicted in the close-up of her chromolithograph, which appears intermittently throughout the documentary.

In her study of fictive representations of cross-gendered individuals in contemporary Caribbean literature, Rosamond King highlights the recurrence of the depiction of “trans characters” as nurses or midwives, endowed with both metaphorical and emotional healing power, who “deliver” the centrally positioned protagonists, conveniently displaying “normative” gender ideals, “back to reality, nurse them to health and/or understanding, and then deliver their stories to us.”³⁹ Although none of the characters are strictly of the nursing profession in *Des Hommes*, their status as caregivers and herbalists within the Vodou community runs parallel to the device of the “nurse” put forward in King’s argument as someone able to offer treatment for both physical and emotional suffering.

King’s evocation of the “midwifing of selves” and the delivery of stories also points to the idea of bringing certain histories to bear through the intermediary figure of the “nurse” which results in cathartic restoration of balance and agency for the recipient. The *oungan* in the film seem to benefit from the prestige attached to their role of “healer” as it enables them to gain influence and respect within the parameters of Vodou. “People used to mock my way of dressing or my hairstyle,” claims one priest. “This has stopped since I became an *oungan*. People come knocking at my door...” As such his social standing is at once elevated due to the usefulness of his spiritual *konesans*.

(IN)VISIBLE PERFORMANCES

The *vodouisants* of *Des Hommes* are shown to present their stories and lived experiences openly in an exchange with the filmmaker, whose Kreyòl can be heard from time to time, reminding the viewer of her presence in certain scenes. From the perspective of the Vodou practitioner, a documentary such as this, with extracts available on Youtube, brings the intimacy of the community into sudden view, which may have differing effects on the social standing of its members. It is uncertain whether the

vodouisants are “allowing” themselves and certain ritual acts to be filmed or actively “presenting” themselves, which would suggest a performative inflection to the representation. However, their visibility through these images can be seen as an important means of revealing the agency located within the Vodou community, and promoted within the film as provider of both social protection and assurance of wider participation in Haitian society. Capturing and fixing the reclaimed unity of the group, the film thus becomes an important reference point for future identifications.

Through the various ways *Des Hommes* has been diffused, it is imagined that those involved with the project had the intention of promoting a culture persistently misunderstood, particularly by Western observers.⁴⁰ Somewhat conversely, the aesthetic strategies employed in Lescot and Magloire’s documentary avoid claims to authenticity and an all-totalizing “knowledge” of this community, in what constitutes a challenge to dominant discourses of representing Afro-creole spiritual practices. Just as in a Vodou ceremony, where “*Il n’y a pas ce clivage scène/salle, temps fictive et temps vécu, comme dans le théâtre traditionnel*”⁴¹ (“There is not this divide between stage and audience, imaginary time and real time, like in traditional theatre”), the spectator of *Des Hommes* cannot act as simple voyeur, static and uninvolved. The weave of multivocal threads and contestatory positions from the localized perspectives represented diffuses any revelatory mission or authoritative oversight of the filmmaker. This presents a challenge to the viewer, as *Des Hommes* refuses the privilege of facile explanations and conclusions, rendering complex and opaque the minority identities therein represented. Glissant’s demand for “the right to opacity” (“*le droit à l’opacité*”)⁴² seems relevant here as it is surely from within this opacity that the subjects of the film may enjoy the freedom to perform from behind a series of masks and we as viewers of the film are left unable to fix and “know” an “authentic” *masisi* identity despite their visual presentation to us and our observation of the subjects in front of the lens. The pleasure of reading the filmic representation of the Other as text lies in the traditional Western desire to uncover the unknown, to master it and thus in this case to define it in a totalizing binary opposition to a supposedly more egalitarian or progressive Western model. As Gayatri Spivak maintains, “the heterogeneity of one’s own culture is protected, because one sees oneself as outside of the cultural construction of gender and race or as victim of it; whereas the homogeneity of other cultures is implicitly taken for granted.”⁴³

A traditional textual conclusion where answers are neatly unraveled is denied in *Des Hommes* and as spectator we must work to make sense of the gaps left and the fragments offered to us, which suggests the importance

of considering the construction of any (including our own normative) interpretations of gender and sexuality as relational and contextual. Representation of “heteronormative” individuals in *Des Hommes* remains marginal, forcing us to examine more closely the role of the documentary filmmaker and film viewer. This absence encourages nuanced readings of gender identity, less as oppositions of “male” versus “female,” but rather as a culmination of a complex historical and social process.

The filmic style further emphasizes the need for complexity and specificity in representing Haitian tradition. Magloire’s editing is spliced with shots of drumming, close-ups of bare feet dancing, both musical and visual *appels*, that flag changes in direction, loops of repetition and layered poly-rhythms. Again Glissant draws our attention to the ability of repetition not to clarify ideas but to render them more opaque or impossible to scrutinize.⁴⁴ Such strategies are employed by marginalized people to resist a transparent universality (“*l’universel de la transparence*”) imposed by the “project” (“*Ce n’est pas un lieu, c’est un projet,*” he maintains) which is the West. Thus the film both reveals and shields its subjects, as Lescot and Magloire articulate the heterogeneity and multiplicity of gender identities functioning within Haitian society, destabilizing the maintenance of simplified binaries in the collective memory while also preventing the upholders of the normative from using such identities as a weapon against its own people. Furthermore the opacity of those represented enables both subject and spectator to transcend (recognize and move beyond) limited simplifications and incorporate and blend the marginalized enough so they may negotiate and survive the mainstream social order.

What *Des Hommes* demonstrates well, when considered within its historical context is that in Haitian Vodou, created as it was out of an imagined kinship support system, gender has always been considered “performative” and thus transcendental. The syncretism of Vodou as a discursive site for political and aesthetic resistance collapses binaries of masculine versus feminine, sacred versus profane, visible versus invisible, and rather creates an inclusive moral template which continually adapts to the practicalities of Haitian life. As Maya Deren attests, “It must provide the *means* for living [and] serve as a practical methodology, not as an irrational hope.”⁴⁵ Commendably, *Des Hommes* presents *masisi* as central figures rather than peripheral supports as King intimates. Moreover, perhaps it may be suggested that the *masisi* in the film represent the *fanmsaj* (midwives) of rural Haiti, who deliver us, the spectators of the film, through the telling of their individual stories and shared experiences to a place of better understanding and renewed perspective.

Notes

- ¹ See Dyer, *Now You See It*; and Pullen, *Documenting Gay Men Identity and Performance in Reality Television and Documentary Film*, 141-163, for their illumination of the creation of new spaces and new “families of choice” within media representation.
- ² The notion of performance as used in this paper stems from the by now familiar work of Derrida and Butler on the formation of identities through affirmative processes, undertaken by social actors.
- ³ Due to histories of slavery and colonial oppression, gender and sexuality have quite understandably been subsumed by racial or political concerns. Any discussion of gender has been refracted through a racial discursive lens. While Lola Young rightly criticizes white feminists for their failure to take this important historical context into account, in the case of Haiti outlined here I would question the ideological work behind the implication that gender politics have been left behind.
- ⁴ Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, 72.
- ⁵ Interpretations of the earthquake of January 12, 2010 by individuals from Christian factions in and outside of Haiti quickly scapegoated Vodou as causation of the disaster. Such narratives echo attacks on the religion following the success of the Haitian Revolution in 1804 and during the U.S. occupation of 1915-34. While Christian missionaries have played a significant role in providing much-needed support and services since the quake, *vodouisants* and homosexuals are two groups reported to have been denied aid and food, based on their religious beliefs and sexual practices respectively. Elizabeth McAlister looks into this intervening role in the aftermath of the catastrophe in her important essay “From Slave Revolt to a Blood Pact with Satan.”
- ⁶ The inconceivability of the birth of the first black republic in the white imagination, following the revolutionary upheaval of a colonial regime, is here posited by Ulysse as fundamental to ensuing and enduring negative portrayals of Haiti.
- ⁷ Rara bands are self-organized drumming and dance groups that perform processional rituals and tributes in the streets during the period of *karèm* (Lent) in Haiti. See Elizabeth McAlister, “Rara as Popular Army,” 129-143, for a historical contextualization of the military organization of these groups.
- ⁸ The transparent “aesthetic construction” and revelatory nature of “not passing” as a form of impersonation is discussed by Gilbert in relation to whiteface/blackface minstrelsy. See Helen Gilbert, “Black and White and Re(a)d All Over Again,” 679-698.
- ⁹ For further work in this field see King “Dressing Down,” 25-36; Murray “Defiance or Defilement?,” 343-354; and Rochais and Bruneteaux, *Le carnaval* (for a specifically Francophone Caribbean context).
- ¹⁰ Fleming, “Kanaval,” 16.

- ¹¹ The carnival of Martinique for example allows some fusion between the role of spectator and that of carnival performer. The carnival parade is accepting of the spontaneous participation of bystanders, who for the most part are costumed and made up, respecting the different themes of the *jours gras* and may enter and meld into the throng of the *vidé* at various points, unlike in Guadeloupe where a rope barrier separates the *carnavalièrs* from the audience. This remains however the only occasion when men and women of all sexualities and gender expression may cross-dress with ease, under a public gaze, in the streets of these two islands.
- ¹² Beasley, “The Performance of Possibilities,” 108.
- ¹³ Fleming, “Kanaval,” 24.
- ¹⁴ Planson, *Vaudou*, 46.
- ¹⁵ Roach, “Culture and Performance in the Circum-Atlantic World,” 61.
- ¹⁶ Zaka is the spirit of agriculture and is the head of the Djouba *nanchon* (nation) of earth spirits, originally said to be from Martinique. During possession by Zaka (or Kouzen/Cousin Zaka as he is affectionately referred to), mountees adopt a peasant-style dress of straw hat, denim dungarees, and sometimes brandish a traditional pipe (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions*, 112). It is of note that Denis, one of the subjects of *Des hommes et des dieux*, is shown wearing a similar garb in a scene of possession captured by Lescot in the film.
- ¹⁷ See Wilmeth and Wilmeth, “Theatrical Elements in Vodoo: The Case for Diffusion.” *Commedia dell'arte* was imported to the island in 1764.
- ¹⁸ Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, 126-9.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 126
- ²⁰ Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More*, 182.
- ²¹ The transnational industry of Vodou as tourist performance has surely contributed to the wariness expressed by scholars (Matory; Strongman) towards “possession performance.” Although those who *pran poz* and act “as if” possessed are condemned in Vodou, my concern here is with the theatrical nature of its practice rather than its authenticity. For a good definition of “possession performance,” see Brown, *Afro-Caribbean*, 13.
- ²² Gordon, *Kanaval*, 101.
- ²³ Beasley, “Performance of Possibilities,” 107.
- ²⁴ See Gordon, *Kanaval*.
- ²⁵ The oral histories in the “Kanaval” collection are translated from Kreyòl into English by Leah Gordon, Andre Eugene and Chantal Regnault.
- ²⁶ Gordon, *Kanaval*, 101.
- ²⁷ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 11.
- ²⁸ As Gordon explained in an email to the author on April 10, 2012, the filming

- of “Bounda” took place after having known Dieuli Laurent for over six years. Both Dieuli and the *oungan* Fritzner, whose space was used for the filming, were paid for their participation and, along with many others from the temple, attended a screening of the final production in 2009.
- ²⁹ Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*, 88-104.
- ³⁰ The film *Bounda pa Bounda* (2008) can be viewed on Leah Gordon’s website: <http://www.leahgordon.co.uk/films/3.htm>.
- ³¹ Trinh, *When the Moon Waxes Red*, 35.
- ³² The sung *pwèn* are often characterized by opaque derisory or critical references, comparable to other musical genres known for their social and political commentary, such as calypso in the Anglophone Caribbean, in which the criticism is allusively embedded in the lyrical content.
- ³³ Gordon, *Kanaval*, 100.
- ³⁴ The term *masisi* has been traced back to the Fon word *mamisis*, the name given to the ‘feminine’ initiates of the spirit Mami Wata in Benin and Togo (see Drewal, *Performing the Other*, 160-185). In reference to individuals depicted in the film I will employ the local Kreyòl term (as opposed to imposing a Western category such as “gay” or “transgender”) that the subjects themselves use to describe their lived experiences.
- ³⁵ See Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*.
- ³⁶ The *poto-mitan* is the central pillar of the Vodou *peristil* that serves as the gateway for the *lwa* during ceremonial acts.
- ³⁷ Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais*, 97.
- ³⁸ André, *L’Inceste focal dans la famille noire antillaise*, 246.
- ³⁹ King, “Re/Presenting Self & Other: Trans Deliverance in Caribbean Texts,” 593. King’s case study includes the novels: Mayra Santos-Febres’s *Sirena Selena* (2000); Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996); and Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987).
- ⁴⁰ A series of free public screenings were organized following the film’s release, including one in 2002 at Place du Champ de Mars, Port-au-Prince. In the same year of release, the film won the *Prix Chantal Lapaire* for the documentary most ‘developing attitudes in the North’ at the Festival Vues d’Afrique, Montreal, and a year later the *Dwa Fanm* Voices of Women award for ‘activism, courage and achievement in film’, Women’s History Month, March 2003, New York. In November 2007, in Paris, Louis Georges Tin awarded *Des Hommes* the Diplôme Isidore for its role in fighting homophobic attitudes.
- ⁴¹ Fouché, *Vodou et*, 105.
- ⁴² Glissant, *Discours*, 11.
- ⁴³ Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, 123.

⁴⁴ Glissant, *Discours*, 11.

⁴⁵ Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, 73.

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**‘CHEVAUCHÉS DES DIEUX’ : MAMBOS ET HASSIDES DANS L’ŒUVRE
SCHWARZ-BARTIENNE**

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Chaque fois que la dignité et la liberté de l’homme sont en question, nous sommes concernés, Blancs, Noirs ou Jaunes, et chaque fois qu’elles seront menacées en quelque lieu que ce soit, je m’engagerai sans retour.

—*Frantz Fanon*

L’importance du vaudou pour l’identité culturelle haïtienne et l’empreinte multiforme de cet héritage africain dans l’archipel caribéen, voire au Brésil (Bastide) ont été suffisamment illustrées par les travaux d’ethnologues comme Métraux, de sociologues comme Laënnec Hurbon, et plus proche de nous L.P. Dalembert, et Claudine Michel. Des études sur l’impact proprement pictural (Karen McCarthy-Brown, 1995) et des études littéraires (M. Laroche, des phénomènes de possession (p. e. dans l’indigénisme de Roumain et de J.S. Alexis, et actuellement les romans de Danticat (Gyssels, 2010)) ont paru dans d’innombrables articles souvent dans des numéros de revues spéciaux. Vu la proximité d’Haïti et de Guadeloupe, vu l’entremêlement franco-caribéen qui lie la « première république noire » à la petite île départementalisée, et eu égard à l’immigration importante d’ouvriers saisonniers dans l’une des « vitrines de la Caraïbe » (selon l’expression de Glissant), il ne saurait dès lors étonner que l’œuvre romanesque schwarz-bartienne soit traversée de multiples renvois à une des religions synchrétiques du Nouveau Monde qui, incontestablement, a coloré d’une manière spectaculaire l’imaginaire antillais. Mais il s’agit, de manière plus générale, pour les auteurs schwarz-bartiens de tisser un fil rouge d’un roman à l’autre en interrogeant la place du spirituel dans un univers profondément lacéré par le traumatisme de l’esclavage et du *Middle Passage*. Je m’interroge dans cet article sur le « dialogue avec les dieux » dans l’œuvre schwarz-bartienne.

Dans *L’Etoile du matin*, le roman posthume d’André Schwarz-Bart, auteur antillais d’adoption scandaleusement oublié (Kirkup, 2006,

Toumson, 1998), Haïm Schuster, un moderniste qui ne croit plus en Dieu et ne conserve de la judéité que la trace, prétend que nous avons tous deux peaux. La première symbolise notre singularité, la seconde notre appartenance à une espèce unique et indivisible, l'espèce humaine :

Ces deux peaux s'appellent l'unique et l'universel, l'origine naturelle et l'univers. Pour ma part, dit Haïm, j'ai toujours été ballotté entre les deux termes : exercice d'équilibriste hautement périlleux. Malheureusement, pour les juifs, l'universel avait bien souvent coïncidé avec l'assimilation : il y avait eu attraction de ces deux termes et c'était là toute l'ambiguïté des juifs de gauche : leur noblesse d'âme se retournait contre les leurs. (*EM*, 234-235).

L'idée de « deux peaux », d'un côté face et d'un côté pile est centrale dans toute l'œuvre romanesque d'André et de Simone Schwarz-Bart, duo d'intellectuels comme Linda et Michael Hutcheon (Hutcheon, 2001), duo d'écrivains rarement étudié ensemble (voir Lafon et Peeters 2006, Véran, 2008; Achour et Rolland, 2003). A vrai dire, ils défendent ensemble l'idée centrale que l'humanité est une et indivisible, malgré les spécificités ethniques, linguistiques, géographiques, culturelles et autres. Dans leurs romans, il y a une éthique de la Relation (Glissant, 1990), une philosophie humaniste du dialogue avec l'Autre (Levinas, 1978), une écologie avant la lettre qui s'exprime à travers le respect pour la plus petite créature vivante, la faune et la flore, les quatre éléments. Il y a un profond renouveau du magico-religieux aussi et un mysticisme qui alimente chacune des quêtes identitaires de leurs protagonistes. Qui plus est, la dimension spirituelle des romans implique la disparition de la barrière entre vie et mort, personne et personnage, absence et présence. En effet, cette dimension s'étend encore à des personnes dans la vraie vie, car André Schwarz-Bart s'amuse à donner un rôle dans *L'Etoile du matin* à son fils, Jacques Schwarz-Bart. Doué d'un talent musical extraordinaire, celui-ci accompagne dans cet étrange inédit son père en route pour le musée d'Auschwitz. Métis guadeloupéen qui combine deux cultures et plusieurs traditions artistiques, il discute avec son père et le rassure quant à la vraie couleur des juifs : ils sont des Noirs, tant ils se sentent dominés par des générations et des siècles de mépris. Le juif serait un « Black hors pair » :

Les Noirs ne font pas tellement mieux vous savez, dit le jeune homme. Toujours à chausser les lunettes d'autrui pour se regarder, ils excellent dans l'autodénigrement eux aussi et j'ai très vite compris que tous les juifs étaient des blacks, des

blacks hors pair... (*EM*, 235)

Pour le père comme pour le fils, pour l’auteur comme pour sa co-auteure, Simone Schwarz-Bart, il s’agit de considérer l’esclavage des Noirs et la discrimination des juifs (un esclavage pour des raisons de foi, pratiquée ou non) comme deux accidents de l’Histoire « réversibles ». Sans faire dans la mémoire compétitive, André Schwarz-Bart pose le concept de la *réversibilité* au cœur de la fiction et lui donne une dimension religieuse : il s’agit du rapport du moi à l’autre et aux autres, de l’homme au monde et de chercher une solidarité entre communautés de souffrance, de pratiquer une mémoire non pas communautaire, mais qui aille au-delà des « fractures coloniales » (Blanchard, Becel, Lemaire, 2005).

Parti de deux expériences-limites qu’il n’a cessé d’étudier, perplexe quant à leurs origines et perpétuations insidieuses, il repère le *marronnage* (antillais) comme un revers du *marranisme* (ashkénaze). Un certain nombre d’enjeux identitaires majeurs, côté ashkénaze et côté antillais, se font effectivement face, comme les deux faces d’un tissu réversible. Que ce soit la question de la langue dominée et de la littérature mineure, de la nécessité de s’assimiler, ou encore de l’idéologie du retour au pays natal (sionisme et *rastafarisme*), l’auteur d’origine franco-polonaise voit combien ces deux histoires millénaires, ces deux diasporas, se ressemblent. Ajoutons-y le devenir-autre, la métamorphose en bête et l’omniprésence de la figure du persécuteur et de ses instruments de terreur (chien, fouet, ...), et la noble résistance incarnée par des figures tutélaires, et nous avons le canevas directeur de la broderie schwarz-bartienne. Du marronnage antillais au *marranisme*, il n’y aurait alors qu’un pas que les Schwarz-Bart ont pris étant donné que le métissage se manifeste des deux côtés, se reflète dans l’histoire littéraire caribéenne et proprement antillaise comme dans celle de la diaspora juive. Pourtant, les frontières et rifts linguistiques ont bien pris soin de séparer deux plumes et deux esprits, deux univers et deux histoires. Dans la citation ci-dessus qui figure donc dans le « nouveau » roman posthume, les lecteurs de *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* reconnaîtront aisément le fameux passage où Reine Sans Nom conseille à Télumée, la *Dernière* Lougandor, d’être un « tambour à deux peaux », c’est-à-dire un tambour qui laisse cogner sur le dessus, mais garde intact le dessous. Sous la métaphore de la peau double, j’examine la fonction du religieux qui semble assez incompatible avec la littérature postcoloniale, tellement l’imposition du catholicisme ou du protestantisme aux esclaves et à leurs descendants a été instrumentalisé pour les opprimer et les aliéner:¹ la foi y est alors soit absente (Confiant, voir Modenesi, 2009), soit raillée (Condé, voir Gyssels, 2001) et les pratiques magico-religieuses, proprement afro-caribéennes,

rehaussées. Sous la plume schwarz-bartienne, il reste toujours un besoin lancinant d'un contact avec les invisibles et les disparus, avec l'au-delà, tant dans le cycle antillais (Gyssels, 1996) qu'ashkénaze (qui compte deux ouvrages, *Le Dernier des Justes* et *L'Etoile du matin*) du couple schwarz-bartien. En effet, de même que Deux-Ames (dans *La Mulâtresse Solitude*, premier roman antillais d'André, 1972) sait dissimuler la douleur qu'elle porte en elle à tel point que les DuParc pensent que les Noirs ne ressentent pas la douleur, que Marie-Ange ressemble à Erzulie Dantor dans la pièce de Simone, *Ton beau capitaine* (1987), la dualité identitaire semble revenir avec insistance et chacun des protagonistes excelle dans la confrontation avec la « déveine » (le malheur). Ces personnages antillais rappellent étonnamment le juif résistant Ernie Lévy qui endosse les armes pendant un moment, puis rejoint un groupe d'enfants condamnés à la déportation. Le Dernier des Justes du roman éponyme (Prix Goncourt, 1959) est à vrai dire largement autobiographique : dans les plis du récit, c'est André même qui se dissimule derrière le masque de son héros tragique qui trouvera pourtant la mort à Auschwitz dans le Livre VIII. Dans *Le Dernier des Justes*, l'auteur orchestra magistralement l'antisémitisme à travers plusieurs siècles d'histoire d'Europe centrale et orientale, dessinant parallèlement les nombreux flux de diaspora des juifs à travers l'Europe et vers les Amériques (sans doute aussi les Antilles). Dans cette fresque qui se termina avec la mort du *dernier* rejeton d'une lignée de Justes, de nombreux entretiens théologiques se succédaient : la diaspora juive (analogue à la diaspora noire dans les romans antillais on le verra) avait dispersé les fidèles, disséminant les membres d'une même communauté aux quatre coins du globe. Il est évident que dans un roman *sur* la Shoah, la religion serait au centre des débats entre les personnages : André Schwarz-Bart nous montre que, de génération en génération, des juifs de l'Est, victimes de pogroms, « damnés de la terre » (Fanon, 1952) au même titre que les « descendants de ceux qui survécurent » (Glissant, 1981), et qui ont tenté de donner du sens à cette souffrance et de la présence de Dieu dans ces holocaustes. A jamais endeillé, ravagé par « l'Affaire Schwarz-Bart » (accusation de plagiat pour son prix Goncourt, voir Ducas, 1999; Assouline, 2007), Schwarz-Bart continua à interroger ce que peut l'homme face à l'inhumain, s'il peut maintenir la foi, mieux, s'il peut survivre aux atrocités inouïes grâce au maintien de la foi. Son antihéros, Ernie Lévy, initié par Mardochée Lévy, apprend à supporter la souffrance et à dissimuler sa peine devant les enfants qu'il accompagnera jusqu'à la mort, leur promettant un banquet et le paradis à Pitchipoï. Il est un Juste, un *hasside* qui pense d'abord à alléger les souffrances des autres, et qui conjure les malheurs de ses frères et sœurs. Dans *Le Dernier des Justes*, la différence entre juif et non-juif est

dissoute ; le phénomène de conversion ou de *marranisme* court comme un fil rouge entre les différents univers et différentes générations, de sorte que l'enchevêtrement avec le *marronnage* (l'esclave fugitif qui fuit l'Habitation et survit à la répression du maître) engendre un questionnement pénétrant et profond sur la condition humaine, et qui a inspiré les plus grands auteurs martiniquais, notamment Chamoiseau (Tarica, 2010) et Glissant (Gyssels, 2012). La frontière perméable entre morts et vivants, entre chrétiens et non-chrétiens est flottante et le premier roman est déjà un plaidoyer pour en finir avec les définitions identitaires fixes : « j'ai été dans leurs églises, j'ai lu leurs évangiles ; sais-tu qui était le Christ ? Un simple Juif comme ton père, une sorte de Hasside », confesse Ernie à Golda (*DJ*, 298).

La réversibilité se noue dans la fausse dichotomie entre chrétiens et juifs : ayant fréquenté leurs églises, écouté leurs prières, suivi leurs rituels, Ernie n'en sort que persuadé que leur Jésus est un Juste, et que le Juste est un catholique pieux, dévot dévoué à faire le Bien. De même que Ernie pria les « mânes des ancêtres » et qu'il se sent guidé par les « Anciens de Zémyock », poursuivi par des *dibbouks* (spectres, « revenants ») des temps immémoriaux, de même les protagonistes antillais sauront à la fois puiser une résistance morale dans la présence invisible des aïeux, dans l'accompagnement des revenants, et être envoutés et possédés par ces « esprits de morts » qui rôdent autour d'eux. Dans les pays de l'Est, ceux qui sont tour à tour sous la botte des tsars et des Allemands, les fidèles du Baal Chem Tov expriment leur ferveur religieuse par le chant et la danse (Gyssels, 2011). Celle-ci peut prendre des formes extatiques qui se rapprochent de la possession dans le rite vaudou et dans les soirées *raras*.² André et Simone Schwarz-Bart étoffent leurs romans réciproques, soit cosignés (*Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes*, 1967), soit signés séparément, comme des réflexions sur la question de l'injustice et de l'oppression et de la collectivité subalterne qui se cherche par conséquent une manière de conjurer cette douleur. Le *revenant* ou le *dibbouk*, la *zombification* ou la *golémisation*, la *séancière* ou le *rabbin*, autant de couples qui illustrent la réversibilité à l'œuvre de ce couple emblématique du tandem diasporique, juive et noire.

Dans les romans qui suivront, cette même interrogation et ces frontières floues entre morts et vivants, entre croyants et mécréants, entre hérétiques et fidèles sont menées avec virtuosité. Les personnages se trouvent au mitan de quêtes troublées et troublantes d'identités menacées. André Schwarz-Bart met la religion au cœur des romans, qu'ils soient antillais ou ashkénazes, signés de lui seul, ou cosignés avec Simone.

LA DERNIÈRE « HOUNGAN D'OR »

Assurément *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* est le plus mystique et le plus magique de tous les romans, le plus nettement « taillé » dans le coupon du *Dernier des Justes*. A vrai dire, le patronyme Lougandor cache déjà que Télumée est une *hougan d'or*, soit une prêtresse du vaudou exceptionnelle, une Mambo ou encore une *séancière*. De nombreux rituels à caractère religieux, comme au lendemain du décès d'Amboise. Victime anéantie par une malemort, Amboise connaîtra le même sort que ces esclaves éliminés après avoir été « traités aux fourmis, traités par le sac, le tonneau, la poudre au cul, la cire, le boucanage, le lard fondu, les chiens, le garrot, l'échelle, le hamac, la brimbale, la boise, la chaux vive, les lattes, l'enterrement, le crucifiement », inventaire des sévices dans *La Mulâtresse Solitude* (69), et qui ont leur pendant sous le fascisme. L'esprit d'Amboise harcèle Télumée dont il réclame des services funéraires sans lesquels il ne pourrait rejoindre le cortège des « bons morts ». Devenue « cireuse, cadavérique », Télumée se sent possédée par l'esprit de mort de son compagnon. La représentation du monde du Guadeloupéen implique cette permanente confrontation, voire discussion, avec ceux qui furent. Afin d'évacuer le délire de persécution de la mort, il lui faut flageller la tombe :

Il fallait me ressaisir avant qu'il ne soit trop tard, descendre sur la tombe de l'homme avec des branches piquantes d'acacia et la fouetter autant que je pourrais, tant que je pourrais. [...] Une nuit il m'apparut en rêve et me demanda de l'aider à rejoindre les morts, dont il n'était pas tout à fait, à cause de moi, cependant que par lui je n'étais pas tout à fait vivante. Il pleurait, me suppliait, disant que j'avais à tenir ma position de négresse jusqu'au bout. Le lendemain, je coupai trois baguettes d'acacia et descendis au cimetière de La Ramée, et je fouettaï la tombe de l'homme Amboise, la fouettaï... (TM, 223)

Sous un rituel à première vue chrétien, se cache toutefois une coutume plus païenne, l'acacia étant aussi le rameau des Romains et d'autres peuples à religion polythéiste. Par ailleurs, Télumée surmontera grâce à ce rituel exutoire son malheur et remplira auprès des habitants de Fond-Zombi le rôle de *quimboiseuse*, de guérisseuse qui allège les souffrances à la fois physiques et psychiques. Elle reste celle qui, face à la mort, peut l'affronter sereinement, n'étant pas seule devant la mort. Soutenue par les gens de la Ramée, en qui elle survivra, elle peut mourir le sourire aux lèvres:

Sans trop savoir pourquoi, une certaine allégresse me vient et ma propre mort m’apparaît de manière inusitée, sans confusion ni tristesse. (*TM*, 247)

Contrairement à certains critiques qui trouvent que *Pluie et vent* exprime nihilisme et désespoir, une lecture réversible se défend pertinemment. En effet, Télumée donne deux visages différents, selon l’un ou l’autre éclairage : devant le spectre de la mort, elle me semble ne pas abdiquer la foi dans la vie et elle porte un regard indulgent sur son passé, évaluant positivement ses méandres. Enfin, méditant sur sa propre vie, Télumée passe facilement à celle des autres, gens connus et inconnus. Ses pensées vont aux défunts et aux ancêtres morts sans sépulture, « à la vie du nègre et à son mystère » (*TM*, 243), à « la chute du nègre » et à l’« éternelle incertitude » (*TM*, 243). Il n’empêche que le grandiose spectacle du cosmos, l’ordre dans la nature et la beauté de l’île, Télumée s’apitoie sur « le mystère antillais ». « Troublée par la phosphorescence de certaines étoiles », Télumée contemple le ciel « dont la seule existence suffisait à apaiser [les hommes] » (*TM*, 173) s’il n’y avait cette « souffrance intolérable, ce déchirement constant » (*TM*, 217). Sa pensée va alors à tous les disparus et elle semble réciter intérieurement une prière des morts, soit le *Kaddish* des fidèles juifs :

Je pense à ce qu’il en est de l’injustice sur la terre, et de nous autres en train de souffrir, de mourir silencieusement de l’esclavage après qu’il soit fini, oublié. J’essaye, j’essaye toutes les nuits, et je n’arrive pas à comprendre comment cela a pu continuer, comment cela peut durer encore, dans mon âme tourmentée, indécise, en lambeaux et qui sera notre dernière prison. Parfois mon cœur se fêle et je me demande si nous sommes des hommes, parce que, si nous étions des hommes, on ne nous aurait pas traités ainsi, peut-être. (*TM*, 244)³

En philosophe, elle se pose cette question sans réponse du pourquoi de tant de souffrance nègre et de l’irrépressible douleur qu’elle porte en elle, qui la « pique comme un dard » : les deux romans, *Dernier des Justes* comme *Pluie et vent* se terminent sur un travail de deuil, sur l’espoir qu’une repentance allègera, mais ne guérira pas, la blessure invisible qui, tel un tison, brûle toujours dans le cœur des survivants et des descendants d’une grande injustice (Shoah, esclavage). Méditant sur sa propre vie, Télumée passe facilement à celle des autres gens, connus et inconnus. Ses pensées vont aux défunts sans sépulture, pendant qu’elle traîne sa vieille « carcasse » à La Ramée : espérant que sa vie si mouvementée sera commémorée lors d’une veillée mortuaire, elle sait qu’elle est la *dernière* d’une lignée de hautes

négresses, qu'avec elle s'éteint une certaine vision du monde créole.

UN MONDE SANS DIEU : *UN PLAT DE PORC AUX BANANES VERTES*

Huit ans après le Prix Goncourt, André et Simone publient ensemble un roman où le religieux à première vue semble évacué, un récit même blasphème où il est suggéré que le Calvaire du Christ est à relativiser à côté de ce que vivent les internées du Trou, un asile de vieillards à Paris, vu à travers les yeux de la narratrice, la Martiniquaise Mariotte. Ce roman qui voit le jour après un trop long silence reste assez incompris. Sorti en 1967, il rompt totalement avec le début retentissant de l'auteur, le Prix Goncourt 1959. Décevant les attentes après le premier best-seller de la Shoah d'après-guerre, l'étrange coécriture semble à mille lieux du *Dernier des Justes*. Or, le titre même est déjà inspiré d'un rituel juif lors du *Pourim* alsacien, lorsqu'on prépare un plat de bœuf fumé très gras et très gros parmi les pauvres familles juives alsaciennes.⁴ Comme je l'ai montré ailleurs (Gyssels, 2010), *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes* est le récit réversible du *Dernier des Justes* : dissemblant dans la forme (en genre et en longueur, en structure et en personnages), il est toutefois le correctif du premier roman : sous Mariotte, une autre figure fait son apparition, la muette Louise Duployé qui semble être une « crypto-juive », ployée sous le syndrome du rescapé.

Qui plus est, la personne la plus aliénée semble être en même temps la plus religieuse : la grand-mère Man Louise. C'est en vain que la narratrice des Cahiers implore son pardon, qu'elle rembobine la scène de l'agonisante criant encore que son vrai père était Dieu et maudissant sa progéniture métisse, Mariotte n'arrive à se réconcilier, outre-tombe, avec cette figure grand-maternelle. Devant la mort qu'elle affronte (commun à ce que vit Ernie et à ce que vivra Télumée, Marie Ange, Ti Jean...), Mariotte signe dans la précipitation (et l'inachèvement) son testament. Depuis son entrée dans le Trou, Mariotte se confesse dans ses sept Cahiers. Elle avoue qu'elle a perdu la foi dans le Monde du dehors comme dans le Monde du dedans. Echouée, condamnée à disparaître, elle cherche le contact avec la disparue avec qui elle a perdu tout lien, l'exil ayant mis une distance incommensurable entre elle et les siens restés là-bas, mieux, ensevelis là-bas, à la Martinique, sinistrée par l'éruption du Mont Pelée en 1902. Telle une revenante (un *dibbouk*), Man Louise se moque dans une apparition hallucinatoire de sa pauvre petite-fille qui crève à présent seule dans le bocal hostile de Paris. Vieille femme mourante, Mariotte implore vainement « une parole un peu chaude qui ferait fondre la gangue de glace » (*PDP*, 46-7):

Seulement ces mots que j'attendais de toi, grand-mère;
seulement ces mots: Alors Mariotte, *coumen ou yè chère?* *Coumen*

ou yè chère? ... chère? (PDP, 49)

La réponse ne viendra plus ; aucun mot chaleureux ne sera pas prononcé. Toute la haine inflexible (exprimée proverbialement par Man Louise: « toutes les pluies du monde n'enlèvent pas sa force au piment » *PDP*, 44) de cette grand-mère tient au préjugé de couleur antillais qui est renforcé par la foi catholique : Dieu est blanc et la couleur noire est égale à la mort et au péché, à la peau noire... La plus dévote, Man Louise, est en même temps la plus négrophobe, celle qui est le plus aliénée et qui *jure* sur son lit de mort, que son vrai père est le maître blanc et qui renie ses filles de couleur. Dûment christianisée, elle transmet l'idée que la couleur noire est la couleur maudite à sa fille Cydalise, une négresse rouge, c'est-à-dire qui a un teint tirant sur le rouge (Chabine). La tante de Mariotte lui lance crûment :

La Mariotte-enfant Câpresse est possédée; on voit on voit c'est quel sang qui coule dans ses veines de chat-huant [...] cette enfant n'a plus d'âme son âme l'a quittée [...] un de ces quatre matins elle va devenir toute noire noire noire laide comme un chien sans pattes. (*PDP*, 109)

Celle qui condamne sa petite-fille *câpresse* parce que la plus noire et donc la plus laide, hait profondément tout individu « impur », taché de sang noir (*câpresse* ou *chabine*, la mère Hortensia La Lune). La vieille mourante ne peut pardonner que sa fille ait couché probablement avec Raymoninque, lui aussi de peau très noire : un *vonvon* ou diable noir... trop noir pour être vendu esclave à ses yeux ! La narratrice développe de ce fait une haine à son égard et ira cracher sur sa tombe, tandis que la morte, dans ses hallucinations, n'arrête pas de « cracher dans [s]a direction, sans relâche, à gros jets de bave pourrissante, avec la même, ancienne, sempiternelle expression de condescendance méprisante pour la fillette mal sortie » (*PP*, 47). C'est que la « bonne négresse à sa maîtresse⁵ » portait « les chaînes dans son âme tout au long de sa vie - plus profondément inscrites que la marque au fer rouge de son sein droit » (*PP*, 47). Dans ce roman complexe, il semble que la grand-mère de Mariotte, fille de la « légendaire Solitude », la marronne de Guadeloupe, finisse donc en pourfendeuse de la « négritude » à cause de l'évangélisation et du zèle apostolique ! Fuyant cette cage raciste, l'échelle « du mépris » qui emprisonne toute la Martinique, Mariotte se console en vain d'avoir quitté l'île natale de la Martinique, tant elle redoute d'être enterrée à Paris, seule et sans garantie de prière :

Tu vois, si t'étais restée au pays, toi aussi tu déverserais ton plein de contes dans les pupilles des enfants, comme faisait

Man Louise; et chacun déposerait son offrande dans le creux de ta chemise indienne; et l'on te tiendrait au courant de tout ce qui se passe, afin de te retenir à la terre... Et même si t'étais défunte aujourd'hui, à l'heure qu'il est, il se trouverait bien quelqu'un pour venir te voir au cimetière - ne serait-ce que le jour de la Toussaint. (*PDP*, 138)

Si personne ne se souvient de toi, si personne ne se recueille sur ta tombe, tu es véritablement mort. Comme pour les victimes de la shoah, l'oubli constitue un second oubli. Le lien entre la vocation de conteuse et le culte des morts ressort nettement du passage: sans récit/conte à transmettre à la postérité, on risque de ne pas être commémoré, et donc, de ne pas trouver le repos éternel. Dès lors, sans narrataire, Mariotte panique devant le grand trou blanc, la malemort que sera forcément la sienne.

Dans les interstices du récit testamentaire de Mariotte, une autre figure hautement religieuse est mise à examen : une religieuse du nom trompeur de Sœur Marie des Anges⁶ semble expédier le plus vite possible les agonisantes dans la mort. La nonne démerite son nom, tout en confirmant la présence angélique (tour à tour bénéfique et maléfique dans l'imaginaire schwarz-bartien), puisqu'elle est impitoyable avec les internées du Trou. Contrairement à son apparence, elle est une sadique qui fait tout pour expédier plus vite les *Luftmensche* dans l'au-delà. Dans son journal intime, Mariotte relate combien elle se montre impitoyable avec les personnes âgées et comment toutes sont sans assistance spirituelle: elles vont tomber dans la mort comme des homards dans de l'eau bouillante. A vrai dire, leur portrait que peint Mariotte tel un ex-voto,⁷ reste fort incomplet: il y manque des « échantillons de toilettes, de coiffures, de têtes dont les plus sereines et les mieux conservées ont un air de folie, [...] Manquaient telle jambe serrée contre l'os. Tel cou de marionnette à ressort. Tel goitre.⁸ Tel œil dément, grand comme la page, où seraient dessinées chacune des étapes d'un calvaire auprès duquel la modeste aventure de Jésus prête à commentaires attendris » (*PDP*, 57). Le Seigneur « prête à sourire » comparé à ce que vivent ceux qui sont dans ce mouvoir, véritable univers concentrationnaire en miniature, une « antichambre à la mort ».

LA MULÂTRESSE SOLITUDE

Dans l'Univers de Plantation, les Africains traités perdent leur identité clanique, linguistique, religieuse et tribale. Le pouvoir du Blanc, illimité, anéantit jusqu'aux croyances séculaires. Comme dans *DJ*, le premier Livre esquisse la cosmogonie diola qu'il met sur le même niveau que cette « vision de l'au-delà » des Grecs, des « Germaniques » et des juifs :

Mais les habitants de ce lieu n’avaient pas d’Olympe, de Walhalla ou de Jérusalem céleste, ils n’aimaient guère à se perdre dans les nuées, tenaient beaucoup trop à leurs vaches, à leurs prés salés, à leurs rizières surtout qui étaient connues et appréciées dans tout l’Ouest africain. Trois jours après leurs funérailles, ils prenaient simplement le chemin du royaume des Ancêtres, que chacun savait trouver sous le village, à trois pieds de la surface. (*MS*, 11)

L’auteur, à travers son narrateur, plaide la tolérance pour d’autres religions et d’autres convictions quant à la vie après la mort : malgré leur différence, toutes offrent la même réponse à la disparition ici-bas. La foi dans un au-delà qui signifiera la fin des fardeaux sur terre remplit partout le même rôle de « baume » sur les traumatismes dans une structure sociétale coercitive. De plus les ancêtres enterrés dans le pourtour du village sont respectés et qui plus est, consultés exactement comme dans le rite de vaudou et qui est invitation à revenir ici bas et de veiller sur la communauté.⁹ Bayangumay est donc une Diola « pur sang », élevée selon la coutume diola, mariée à l’âge de douze ans à un Diola qui pourrait être son père. Diola, Bayangumay a été violée à bord du bateau négrier, et abandonne son unique enfant, le fruit bâtard de son ventre, dès qu’elle peut. Elle la maudit d’autant plus qu’elle a un œil vert et un œil marron. L’extrême violence cause à jamais des comportements athées. Vendue à Basse-Terre (Capesterre Belle Eau), elle vit une vie pire que la mort (n’ayant pu avaler sa langue lors de la traversée). Accouchant d’une fille qu’elle renie, et qui se trouve être la grand-mère de Mariotte (dans *Plat de porc*), elle marronnera et suivra des fugitifs sous l’égide d’un vieux nègre pilon. Ce dernier semble être un prêtre mi-animiste, mi-musulman qui, pendant leurs conciliabules nocturnes, prêche le retour en Guinée, ce que Wilnor également aspire grandement. Cet envol pour Guinée est bien sûr la mort (*MS*, 55). Il faut « gagner le bateau dans la forêt », même si ce bateau n’est autre que la mort (*MS*, 41) : thème des *negro-spirituals* et des blues, la vie rendue indigne d’être vécue, la séparation des familles, la douleur et la misère vient « piquer et surpiquer » (*EM*, 69) chacun des récits schwarz-bartiens, où qu’il se déroule, quel que soit l’univers dépeint : univers concentrationnaire ou univers de la Plantation.

Alors que Bayangumay s’émerveillait que « tout en elle fût merveilleusement diola », elle se sent une larve écrasée par les « êtres de la nuit » (*MS*, 33) dans le vaisseau où « tout se fondait en une chose qui ne porte pas de nom dans la langue des hommes » (*MS*, 35). Le passé diola recule à une distance incommensurable, « dans les temps et les temps »

(*MS*, 40, 41). Le *Middle Passage* est évoqué dans des termes analogues des rafles et des « transports » vers les camps de la mort. L'analogie est frappante dans l'instant du « gouffre » : « Bayangumay fille de Sifòk et de Guloshò boh », « la troisième épouse de Dyadyu » (*MS*, 39) est jetée dans la cale mais personne ne répond plus à l'appel de la jeune fille, si bien que la Diola se savait une larve (*MS*, 42).

Dans *Ti Jean L'Horizon*, geste homérique, le religieux est encore tissé de manière marronne dans la pérégrination de « l'enfant des passages » : le « Royaume des morts » évoque par de multiples concordances les camps de la mort et l'arrivée même de la Bête est narrée selon le même scénario d'une rafle dans le Marais... Là encore, l'énigme de la coécriture demeure (Wells, 2000). Dans un ouvrage sous presse, l'analyse de l'intertextualité et de l'intratextualité permettent de conclure à la réversibilité : sous la trame antillaise, résonnent les traces traumatiques à la Catastrophe. La Bête est la « Dévoreuse » qui plonge Fond-Zombi, voire le monte entier, dans l'obscurité totale et pose avec acuité la question du pourquoi d'une pareille hécatombe.

CONCLUSION : LE ROMANESQUE RÉVERSIBLE COMME DÉGUISEMENT D'AUTEURS MASQUÉS

L'œuvre complexe schwarz-bartienne manifeste une éclatante cohérence : anticolonialistes et antireligieux, les témoignages que livrent les protagonistes sur leur condition noire ou juive montrent l'absence de charité chrétienne et le non-sens de guerre de religion et de « race ». Il n'empêche que chaque individu endeuillé se cherche à se réconcilier avec un ordre surhumain, quitte à surmonter son deuil. Dans les romans d'André comme dans ceux signés par Simone Schwarz-Bart, même dans la geste de *Ti Jean L'Horizon* (exclue de cette étude), la quête identitaire est irréversiblement une quête de religieux. Devant les injustices et les « malemorts », l'être humain demande des comptes à Dieu et cherche une réponse pour la souffrance. Bien que celle-ci soit inutile, dépourvue de sens selon les protagonistes, il est impératif de rester en contact avec les « disparus » : chacun des personnages schwarz-bartiens entretient un contact permanent avec ceux qui n'ont pas de sanctuaires (Brodzki 2007). Le récit même se hisse au rang de « tombe » ou de « veillée mortuaire », de mausolée pour des communautés éprouvées pour des facteurs identitaires (race, religion) que l'individu le plus souvent n'est pas libre de choisir. A vrai dire, il en est l'otage, cherchant à fuir (marron, marrane) ce « joug » individuel et collectif : telle est la réversibilité schwarz-bartienne, d'enchevêtrer toujours les deux tragédies séculaires que sont la diaspora noire et juive comme les deux faces d'un même tissu réversible. A l'instar

de Fanon, Césaire et de Damas, les Schwarz-Bart ont bien mieux fait sauter les « lignes » qui séparent encore trop souvent les cultures ravagées et les communautés éprouvées par des systèmes totalitaires.

Notes

- ¹ Voir Victoria Carchidi (2001) “‘Heaven is a Green Place’: Varieties of Spiritual Landscape in the Caribbean”, in *Mapping the Sacred. Religion, Geography, and Postcolonial Literatures*, Rodopi, pp. 179-197; Fiona Darroch (2009). *Memory and Myth. Postcolonial Religion in Contemporary Guyanese Fiction and Poetry*, Amsterdam / New York : Rodopi.
- ² Voir Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and its Diaspora*, Berkeley / Los Angeles: UP California, 2002. Voir aussi l'article de Claudine Michel dans *Journal of Haitian Studies*, “Vodou in Haiti, Way of Life and Mode of Survival”, 8.1 (Spring), pp. 98-110.
- ³ Passage réécrit dans *Ti Jean L'Horizon* (Simone Schwarz-Bart, Seuil, 1979, p. 51): « Oui, nous avons été des hommes autrefois, des hommes au complet, comme tous ceux qui vont sous les nuages: et nous avons construit leurs usines à sucre, nous avons cultivé leurs terres et bâti leurs maisons et ils nous ont frappés, assommés... jusqu'à ce que nous ne sachions plus si nous appartenons au monde des hommes ou à celui des vents, du vide et du néant... »
- ⁴ Tout bon croyant est tenu de faire servir à sa table, et tout convive présent, de goûter un plat indispensable est le *haman*. Le *hazan*, les aides-chanteurs, l'instituteur, le *schamess* arrivent à un moment donné, s'attablent, rompent la croûte, choquent le verre, et ensuite se lèvent pour en faire autant dans maintes et maintes maisons.
- ⁵ Echo césairien parmi tant d'autres : « C'était un bon nègre. Les Blancs disent que c'était un bon nègre, un vrai bon nègre, le bon nègre à son bon maître » (*Le Cahier*).
- ⁶ Ce prénom trompeur apparaît aussi dans *La couleur de l'aube* de Yanick Lahens, prénom qui jure avec son caractère mais en plus qui réapparaît dans « Tombeau » capitaine. Dans la pièce, Wilnor à son tour est cloîtré, séquestré dans sa ti-case et maltraité par sa femme, une Haïtienne malpropre, enceinte des œuvres de son messenger et cette confession plongera Wilnor également dans un état de zombification. Désireux lui aussi d'en finir avec sa vie de « coco sec » et « de nègre des nègres ». Il se met à tourner comme un derwich, comme un « loa » dans un rituel vaudou qui lui fait regagner Guinée.
- ⁷ Un ex-voto est un cadre/tableau qu'on suspend pour remercier dieu de guérisons ou faveurs obtenues, de grâce pour l'état reçu. Si j'utilise ce sous-titre, c'est parce que l'auteur André Schwarz-Bart dessina un portrait du personnage Mariotte, en même temps narratrice des sept Cahiers qui suivront, et qui sont

tout sauf un retour au pays natal. Si elle cherchait à obtenir, affrontant la mort imminente, encore la grâce de sa grand-mère négrophobe, tentant en vain d'obtenir encore le pardon pour ses péchés et son acte sacrilège (cracher sur la tombe), son autoportrait est bien l'expression d'un vœu mais qui n'a pas été exaucé.

⁸ Ganglions dans la nuque.

⁹ Dans *Ton beau capitaine*, Wilnor implore les divinités vaudou, invoque les « loas » de Papa Legba, le « maître des carrefours » qui ouvre les barrières et guide les morts-vivants vers l'éternel. Voir Gyssels, 2003.

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HAITI WITHIN THE ARCHIPELAGO

SERVANTS TURNED MASTERS: CARLOS ESTEBAN DEIVE'S *VIENTO NEGRO*, *BOSQUE DEL CAIMÁN*, AND THE FUTURE OF HISPANIOLA

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Carlos Esteban Deive's *Viento Negro, Bosque del Caimán: Novela* (2002) focuses on the 1791 slave revolt and its social, political, racial, and religious repercussions from the perspective of the Spanish side of the island, a point of view largely neglected by fictional and non-fictional accounts of the Haitian Revolution. Being a novela, *Viento Negro* features fictional characters alongside historical figures and while it relies heavily on established chronology and facts, it also alters them in significant ways. An acclaimed historian, anthropologist, and novelist, Deive knows well the role that narrative plays when one tries to map the relationship between past, present, and future and is particularly conscious of the "content of the form," that is, of the effects that genre and formal features can have on the understanding, shaping, and transmission of history.¹

Through his recent investigation of the relationship between genre and the Haitian Revolution, David Scott observes that, due to the anticolonial organization of the relation between past, present and future, the transition from colonialism to postcolonialism tends to be presented predominantly as a romance, that is, as a story of overcoming and vindication, of salvation and redemption.² Using C. L. R. James's *Black Jacobins* (1938) as a springboard, Scott argues that tragedy might be a more useful narrative frame to assess the Haitian Revolution as it is

not driven by the confident hubris of teleologies that extract the future seamlessly from the past, and [is] more attuned at the same time to the intricacies, ambiguities, and paradoxes of the relations between actions and their consequences, and intentions and the chance contingencies that sometimes undo them.³

Deive's *Viento Negro* constitutes a departure from both romance and tragedy. It might instead be categorized as a *sui generis* comedy or even as an *opera buffa*, if one considers that the narrative is constantly underscored, often in

a contrapuntal manner, by the arias of the soprano Angiolina Falconelli who criss-crosses the island of Hispaniola singing for the French, the Spanish, and the Black Jacobins. At the outset of the 1791 rebellion, for example, it is Falconelli's performance of Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona* (*The Maid Turned Mistress*) that provides the ironic soundtrack to historical events in *Le Cap*.⁴ Comedies, it is well known, can be intrinsically conservative and ultimately support the reconstitution and conservation of the order they seem to disrupt. Admittedly, therefore, the comedic genre of *opera buffa* might not be an obvious choice for an historical novel which, as we will see, aims to make important points about Hispaniola's past and present and to foster a much-needed transformation of the ways in which Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the two countries which share this Caribbean island, perceive one another and themselves. Furthermore, references to *The Maid Turned Mistress* might initially suggest that readers will be exposed to a Dominican mockery of the Haitian Revolution and its leaders but I would argue, instead, that Deive adapts the comedic template of the *opera buffa* to serve his purpose of re-imagining the future of Hispaniola disallowing what Reinhardt Koselleck has called "futures pasts."⁵

Unlike tragedies but like romances, comedies and *opere buffe* tend to "end well." Unlike romances, however, comedies and *opere buffe* do not dramatize the victory of good over evil and do not stage the "ultimate transcendence of man over the world in which he was imprisoned by the Fall."⁶ Initially written to work as *intermezzi* given in the long waits between the acts of the *opera seria* and considered to be inferior to it, *opere buffe* treat serious matters with humor. Like Scott's tragedies, they are full of intricacies and ambiguities, thriving on paradoxes and reversals of fortune, but their protagonists lack the stature of tragic heroes and heroines and are instead everymen and women who operate in everyday situations. As for "the confident hubris of teleologies," *opere buffe* tend to follow rather closely the pattern that White identifies for all comedic texts where "hope is held out for the temporary triumph of man over his world by the prospect of occasional reconciliations of the forces at play in the social and natural worlds."⁷ "Temporary" is the key word here. Aptly, in *Viento Negro*, authority, finality and irreversibility are forcefully undermined but, I will argue, the novel's "happy ending," despite its momentariness, functions as a stepping stone towards an effective rejection of a deterministically bleak view of the future. The novel, in fact, does not support the reconstitution of a previous order and does not solicit nor obtain the reader's sympathy for the dominant social interests which upheld that order: ultimately, the emphasis falls on the emancipatory aspects of the (momentary) resolution and revolution and not on their

ephemeral status and inherent contradictions.

Crisscrossing Hispaniola at a crucial time in its past and from the point of view of a problematic and tense present, Deive's narrative insists that a better future for the island depends on a transcolonial and transnational understanding of its history and in the elimination, once and for all, of xenophobic nationalism. A revisitation of dominant discourses related to the magical world of the island and to the representation of Vodou plays an important part in Deive's recasting of the past and in his creative narrative which, in a way like Vodou itself, aims to go beyond differences and previous enmities to highlight and gain strength from connections, mutual influences and shared (but disavowed) empowering experiences.⁸

Viento Negro begins with a comedy sketch that introduces us to the profound religious, cultural, and social changes that the French Revolution brought about in the Spanish colony. On November 27, 1790, we are told, Guy Millon, a self-defined scientist-philosopher just arrived from Le Cap, held a spectacular demonstration in the central square of the capital city of Santo Domingo. He shared his discoveries on "medicinal electricity" with his audience and allowed them to buy "at a very good price" a number of essential products such as "water of light," "vitriolic ether," and "poultice for hysterical paralysis" (19).⁹ At the end of the show, Millon was planning to fly over the capital city in a balloon. Millon's announcement created great excitement and expectations. In particular, we are told that Joaquín García y Moreno, governor of the Spanish colony, planned to attend the show because he hoped to apply the Frenchman's findings to military weaponry, become a successful inventor and leave Santo Domingo once and for all (22). Deive is careful to point out, however, that not everyone in Santo Domingo shared García y Moreno's enthusiasm for Millot's work. Fray Fernando Portillo y Torres, archbishop of Santo Domingo, was extremely anxious about the arrival in the Spanish colony not only of Millot but of all kinds of "fetishists, necromancers, miracle-workers [and] swindlers" (23).

After the French Revolution, in fact, Spanish Santo Domingo as a whole and its border region in particular had radically been transformed by the continuous influx of refugees from Saint Domingue. In *Viento Negro*, the border town of Dajabón, where most of them were housed, becomes a huge market where all manner of things—including a mud replica of a famous vampire—were bought, sold, and exchanged (42). In Montecristi, situated by the border on the Northern coast, a local priest proclaims the Declaration of the Rights of the Man and Citizen to be the only revealed truth and establishes the Culto Teodóxico Universal, a civic-

religious brotherhood which soon becomes extremely popular and spreads to other border areas (Hincha, Banica, Neiba y San Miguel de la Atalaya). Amongst its followers, the Culto counts Sor Transfiguración des Citoyens, formerly Sor Eufrosina de la Perpetua Consolación (113), and the above-mentioned Guy Millon who, tired of Portillo y Torres's persecutions in the capital, decides to move to the border area where he can thrive without being harassed. The reference to the Culto Teodórico Universal is one of many of Deive's deliberate anachronisms; it was actually an esoteric and freemasonic cult founded in 1824 by Antoine Fabre d'Olivet and is conflated here with the activity of a real-life priest called Quiñones (as is Deive's character) who tried to combine Christianity with French Republicanism.¹⁰ Deive's implicit reference to freemasonry is reinforced by the—also anachronistic—appearance, in the *novella*, of Martinez De Pasqually, the controversial historical founder of the order Elus Cohens (a mystical Masonry) who died in 1774, perhaps in Saint Domingue. In *Viento Negro*, Deive's narrator insists that his real name was Eleuterio Martínez Pascual, that he had travelled to France to become better acquainted with esoterism and then moved to the island of Hispaniola where, with Jacques Cazotte (another real-life esoterist who was to become one of his followers and who was beheaded in France 1792), he had settled in Spanish Santo Domingo (56-57). Freemasonry was well established in the New World. Apparently, in French Saint Domingue there was at least one lodge in every major town and due to its generally equalitarian ethos, freemasonry might have played a crucial role in the uprising of the French colony.¹¹ Most white Masons left or were killed in the aftermath of 1791, but it has been suggested that some of those who survived and stayed on the island continued their practice. In *Viento Negro*, De Pasqually joins the rebel army after their abolition of slavery (107). Amongst others, the army clandestinely inducted Toussaint Louverture.¹² The reference to De Pasqually and his esoterism also brings to the fore the fact that, as Colin Dayan has put it, the much vilified Vodou assemblies “were not the only hieratic sites” on the island.¹³ Vodou, in fact, had been described by a commentator of the time as “a sort of religious and dancing masonry.”¹⁴ Intriguingly, in the cosmologic diagrams for Haitian Vodou, interspersed along *vèvè* ground signs, scholars have identified the secret signs of freemasonry (like, for example, the compass-upon-the-square)¹⁵ and, as Susan Buck-Morss insists, “we cannot be blind to the possibility of reciprocal influences, that the secret signs of Freemasonry were themselves affected by the ritual practices of the revolutionary slaves of Saint-Domingue.”¹⁶

Deive's freemason De Pasqually lives in the region of La Vega, “a desolate landscape where only mad people, maroons and the souls of the

dead walked about” (54). The majority of the maroons referred to here were probably from Saint Domingue. As a matter of fact, many of them crossed the border into Santo Domingo in search of a better life because, despite bilateral agreements which compelled them to do so, the Spanish authorities only very rarely returned fugitive slaves to the French and generally granted them freedom when they arrived in their territory.¹⁷ Moreover, labor in Santo Domingo could be more bearable than in the French side because the economy of the Spanish colony was livestock- and not plantation-based and gave rise to a different, less harsh treatment of the cattle-tending slaves.¹⁸ In the 1790s, Deive’s narrator informs us, the area around La Vega was plagued by the presence of one of these maroons from Saint Domingue who was perpetrating “atrocious crimes”: the well-known Voras Carnefice or Negro Incógnito or Comegente (53). Historically, the Spanish authorities first recorded the criminal activities of the Negro Incógnito in March 1790 when they received the news of various murders and the disappearance of two children. Arson, rapes (of both the living and the dead), genital mutilation, and cannibalism accompanied his attacks. A reward of 200 pesos was promised to those who could assist in the criminal’s capture and almost one thousand soldiers and civilians were mobilized to bring him to justice. In the course of this operation, the authorities apprehended twenty-four maroons, thieves, and vagrants but, since the Negro Incógnito proved impossible to locate, he was declared to be a legendary figure conjured up by the people’s fantasy. In 1792, in Cercado Alto, near La Vega, some hunters with the help of their dogs captured a man who was identified as the Negro Incógnito. Despite this, the colonial authorities continued to deny that the Negro Incógnito ever existed and concluded that all the crimes that had been attributed to him had either been committed by French fugitive slaves who lived in the area or were otherwise “inspired” by their presence which provided a very bad example for the blacks of Santo Domingo.¹⁹

In *Viento Negro*, “ocular witnesses” explain the elusiveness of the Negro Incógnito with the fact that he had learnt his witchcraft from a Carabalí slave in a plantation in the Limbé district of Saint Domingue (53). It is well known that the 1791 revolt in Saint Domingue began “unofficially” with the activities of some slaves from Limbé who either misunderstood the final instructions imparted by the leaders or were too impatient to wait for the established date to begin the uprising.²⁰ In other words, Deive here attracts our attention to those discourses that, creating spurious links between disparate events, aimed to criminalize the 1791 revolt, the Haitian Revolution and later, Haiti and the Haitians as a whole. Crucially, the narrator reports that, according to the same “ocular witnesses,” the

pitch-black ferocious killer could rely on the unconditional protection of a “galipote” (53). On the Spanish side of the island, the theatre of the Negro Incógnito’s rampage, the word “galipote” is a Haitianism which describes a magical shape-shifter who makes a pact with the devil and turns into an animal, plant, rock or, more rarely, into a human being and who can therefore become impossible to capture and almost invulnerable.²¹ Galipotes are also foregrounded when the novel returns to the border town of Dajabón in 1793, when Spain and France were at war and the island was in complete turmoil. During a visit to Padre Vázquez, the priest of Dajabón, Commander don Andrés de Heredia comes across “a creature on a leash with a semblance of a human” (143). This creature is in fact a galipote. As Vázquez explains to a puzzled de Heredia, galipotes are “the bodyguards of Baron Samedi, loa of the cemeteries” (143) who wander around villages and fields looking for people to tear apart with their tentacles. Witnesses, he adds, have seen them rape young girls, sodomizing women, and steeping in pickle old females they could not do much more with (143). In other words, they engage in crimes similar to those perpetrated by the Negro Incógnito with whom they share a Haitian provenance. In *Viento Negro*, Deive’s narrator explains that de Heredia considers Padre Vázquez to be a good but superstitious man, inclined to believe in the sortileges of the “black behiques” (144). A “behique” is a Taino shaman or witch doctor. However, de Heredia himself (and, indeed, the narrator) must be under a some kind of spell too because the novel describes the galipote as a real presence (143).

The ambivalent matter-of-factness with which the galipote is introduced also alerts us to the fact that, rather than being a vestige of the past, galipotes still play a role in contemporary Dominican society.²² For example, in 1974, almost two centuries after the 1791 rebellion, the newspaper *El Caribe* reported accounts of black-skinned people who had signed a pact with the Devil. The newspaper also insisted that the black-skinned people who could turn themselves into animals or inanimate objects were Haitian in origin and repeatedly qualified Haitians as galipotes.²³ However, if anti-Haitian ideology is still a powerful reality, real life—what Scott calls “the intricacies, ambiguities, and paradoxes of the relations between actions and their consequences, and intentions and the chance contingencies that sometimes undo them”—does not always support it.²⁴ Sergio Reyes II, in fact, offers a perspective on galipotes inflected more by class than ethnicity or race. In his 1996 account of his childhood in Loma de Cabrera, in the Dominican rural region around Dajabón and next to the border with Haiti, the shape-shifting galipote seems more scary because he watched over the property and life of the

rich landowners and wealthy personalities of the area rather than because of his phenotype, color, or Haitian provenance.²⁵ Haitian influences, moreover, have always been part of the cultural and spiritual syncretism that characterizes the Spanish side of the island (especially the rural and popular segments of society) despite the fact that certain sectors of the Dominican elite have always tried to minimize or even demonize them.²⁶ The dynamics of acceptance and rejection of such influences are complex but their very existence testifies to the fact that, by focusing exclusively on dominant discourses, one can hardly get the full picture. In *Viento Negro*, for example, in order to prevent the *galipote* from spreading the evil eye and to protect himself from the traps prepared by his followers, Padre Vázquez sets fire to some tobacco leaves and spreads a handful of flour on the floor in a circular shape and then blesses it three times. This ritualistic spreading of powders echoes Vodou practices while tobacco firmly signposts Taino agriculture. Dominican Vodú, as Deive himself has argued, is of Haitian origin even if some of its distinctive features have been significantly altered in the Dominican context.²⁷ In *Vodú y Magia en Santo Domingo*, the first attempt at an anthropological study of Dominican Vodou, Deive argues that the Taino influence is stronger on the Spanish side than in Haiti,²⁸ and in *Viento Negro*, de Heredia's reference to "behiques *negros*" (144, emphasis mine), capitalizing on the multiple meanings of the word "negro" in Spanish, seems to gesture towards this transcultural aspect.²⁹ Besides, the complex socio-religious system of Gagá, a Vodou-derived cult practiced in the Dominican Republic, constitutes an important example of Haitian-Dominican syncretism and a local version of the "culture of the poor" which has established itself in situation of marginality throughout the Caribbean. Haitian in origin, when it arrived in the Spanish side of the island, it was reinterpreted and transformed in relation to local folk beliefs and practices.³⁰

Haitian Vodou appears prominently in the chapter of *Viento Negro* entitled "La noche del bosque del caimán" which describes the roles Boukman, Jean François, Biassou, and Toussaint Louverture played on that famous windy night. Toussaint is present at the assembly as a double agent. We are told that he is entrusted by French royalist conspirators with a falsified document that promised the slaves two days of rest per week and the abolition of the use of the whip (65). He had been instructed to foment a rebellion the royalists thought they could easily put an end to once they had defeated the whites of Saint Domingue who followed revolutionary ideas and threatened the status quo. Toussaint, however, had his own emancipatory agenda.³¹ In *Viento Negro*, the assembly of the conspirators is followed by a Vodou ceremony: like the accounts on which it is based,³²

the ceremony described by Deive takes place in the midst of a terrible storm, is officiated by Boukman Dutty and a female priestess,³³ includes the killing of a sacrificial pig and an inspirational oration by Boukman (68). The Vodou ceremony of Bois Caïman still divides contemporary historians who are debating how to separate actual facts from legend.³⁴ Despite his somewhat irreverent approach—at some point, the forcefully evoked Ogun Ferraille arrives, seemingly in person, on his (literal, not ritualistic) horse and accepts three bottles of rum and some money as a tribute (68)—Deive’s inclusion of Bois Caïman in his novel suggests that he considers it to be at least a crucial and inspirational symbol of the insurrection if not an actual, verifiable event.

Ogun Ferraille is not the only figure of authority undermined by Deive’s humor which, as we have seen, is not only directed at the rebels and those in league with them; in line with his decision to recount historical events following the genre of comedy, Deive’s narrator undercuts all his characters, from the French and Spanish colonial authorities to the leaders of the revolution. For example, Joaquín García y Moreno, governor of the Spanish colony, Fray Fernando Portillo y Torres, archbishop of Santo Domingo, Léger-Félicité Sonthonax, the Civil Commissioner in charge of the French troops during part of the Haitian Revolution, are ferociously ridiculed and their weaknesses and pettiness unmercifully revealed. Boukman is impressive and revered by his companions (including Toussaint) but during the assembly at Bois Caïman he drinks *clerén* because, as he explains, “‘*Gren mwe frél*’... ‘My testicles are cold’” (65).³⁵ When they arrive in Ouanaminthe on December 24, 1792, the impossibly vain “Generalísimo” Jean-François and the “Vicerrey” Biassou rush to the tailor to get a new set of extravagant and flamboyant clothes, issue an edict which abolishes, amongst other things, “black magic,” “black shadows,” “black dirt under fingernails,” and “the black behind the ears,”³⁶ because they are “derogatory, fallacious, racist and contrary to the rights of man” (97-98) and declare as public holidays dates which are, “Gregorian, revolutionary... patriotic... Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist, because here we discriminate against nobody” (99). Toussaint is also caricatured. We are told that in order to allocate to the leaders of the rebel army the most comfortable houses of the occupied villages, he requisitioned properties proffering sincere apologies (100). Overall, however, Toussaint is taken very seriously by Deive: from the beginning he is described as an astute, opportunistic, inscrutable, and persuasive strategist and as a statesman-in-the-making (227). He is also depicted as “enigmatic as a sphinx,” that is, exactly like Francisco Sopo (132), the leader of a slave insurrection described in *Viento Negro* and which took place in Boca Nigua, on the

Spanish side of the island, a few years after the 1791 revolt in Saint Domingue. The fact that, in his turn, Sopo is once identified with the Negro Incógnito highlights the continuities and discontinuities that exist between spontaneous reaction and organized rebellion, survival strategies and emancipatory agendas not only within each colony but also across the island's border (196).

Sopo appears for the first time in “Una visita al Francés,” the second chapter of the novel. Here we follow the Boca Nigua slave-holder and plantocrat Ignacio de Oyarzábal crossing the border before 1791 in the attempt to accelerate the arrival, in the Spanish colony, of a new era that “would forever bury as a most remote memory this repetitive time of sacristies and confessionals” (28). This is a rather problematic statement to process because the modernization that de Oyarzábal is welcoming so warmly must coincide with the opening of Santo Domingo to the slave trade in 1786; yet, de Oyarzábal is very ambivalent towards slavery, the practice of which, he believes, creates “the most miserable and despicable world one could possibly imagine” (27). His disquiet notwithstanding, de Oyarzábal crosses into Saint Domingue to visit the Bréda plantation of Haut-du-Cap in order to study the technical innovations which Count Noé, the owner of the Saint Domingue *habitation*, had enumerated to his father in a Parisian café where ironically the revolutionary theses of the *sans-culottes* were being discussed at the same time. De Oyarzábal is hosted in a luxury *grande case* with a Pompeian façade and tapestries from Damascus and during a tour of the *ingenio* with Francisco Sopo, his favorite slave who had accompanied him from Boca Nigua, he meets a certain Toussaint who was working there as an overseer. Toussaint and Sopo do not speak to one another but Deive's narrator points out that they share the same resentment towards slavery, “a dangerous disposition, a craving painfully dragged along for years” (32).

Historically, the Boca Nigua revolt took place in October 1796, when the plantation had about 200 slaves. The plantation was the largest and best run in Santo Domingo, it was fairly new (probably set up after 1786), and was managed by Juan Bautista Oyarzábal (who shares his name with the father of Deive's Ignacio de Oyarzábal), the nephew of the absentee owner, the Marqués de Yranda.³⁷ The four different sources which relate the historical revolt identify its origin as an act of revenge on the part of a black slave driver called Francisco Sopó who had recently lost two godsons at the hand of the plantation's white staff; the distiller had falsely accused one of his godsons of stealing rum (the youth committed suicide as a result) while the other had died in the plantation hospital. However, when the date for the uprising had been set, Sopó changed his mind,

approached the white distiller and informed him of the rebels' plan; later, he also revealed it to Oyarzábal himself. During the rebellion, Sopó allied himself with the whites and protected their escape from the plantation. When the news of the revolt in Boca Nigua reached Santo Domingo, fifty soldiers were dispatched to reestablish order. The uprising was quickly crushed and all but two of the rebelling slaves were recaptured and sent to the capital's hospital or jail. Sopó and the chiefs of the rebellion were sentenced to death and hanged, beheaded and quartered; their arms and legs were cut off and nailed up in public places in the city while their heads were sent back to the plantation for display.³⁸

Contemporary historians disagree on whether Sopó's revolt was an authentic cry for freedom and equality.³⁹ It is undeniable, however, that the Saint Domingue revolt was influential in the Boca Nigua uprising because it provided a precedent the rebels wanted to learn from.⁴⁰ The connection between the 1791 uprising in the French Saint Domingue and the rebellion in Santo Domingo is further strengthened by Deive when he informs us that just before the revolt, one of the Boca Nigua's conspirators had gone to Marmelade "to find out the details of what happened in Bois Caïman from Toussaint Louverture in order to act in the same way" (196).⁴¹ However, despite Toussaint's alleged prompting, Sopó's uprising, unlike the 1791 rebellion but like Sopó's revolt, is crushed by governmental forces and he is sentenced to death. Deive's foregrounding of the rebellion of Boca Nigua is an effective move which demystifies anti-Haitian historiography; the very existence of the conspiracy calls into question the long-rehearsed claim that the slaves from the Spanish Santo Domingo preferred to "remain... slave[s] under the Spaniards than to be free along with the Haitians who, led by Toussaint and Dessalines, attempted to make the island 'one and undivided.'"⁴² In order to make this point as forcefully as possible, Deive also introduces some crucial alterations to historical facts. Sopó (unlike the historical Sopó) never betrays his comrades and is seen leading the blacks in their attack against de Oyarzábal's house. Deive's decision to change Sopó's betrayal into Sopó's determination is also to be regarded as part of his ongoing effort to undermine the representation of Spanish Santo Domingo as a safe haven and a place of freedom for Blacks and to reject what he calls an "idyllic image of slavery" according to which master and slave relations were generally predicated upon humanitarian sentiments. Slavery in Santo Domingo, he insists, "operated exactly as in other countries."⁴³ In order to offer as diversified a picture as possible of the predicament of black people in the colony, the novel begins with the voice of black women selling their produce in the streets of the capital (7). In the city, both free blacks and slaves enjoyed greater freedom than their

companions in the sugar mills,⁴⁴ but in the following chapters of *Viento Negro* Deive foregrounds the predicament of the latter by focusing on the Boca Nigua plantation before the revolt. We are invited to witness the agony of the slave Filemon Congo, who was a “victim of the exhaustion caused by days of hard work” (129), and the deep effect it has on Sopo. Sopo, whom de Oyarzábal describes as the most faithful and trustworthy of his slaves, according to Agripiliano Brizuela, a former Jesuit who administers the Boca Nigua plantation when Oyarzábal travels to the capital, is instead “as enigmatic as a sphinx” (132). Before the revolt, Brizuela warns the excessively trustworthy Oyarzábal with these truly prophetic words: “do not forget the black wind which, not long ago, blew in Bois Caiman. You cannot trust any of them, not even their mothers” (132).

Brizuela’s words are central to the novel because they contain Deive’s title and, most importantly, because they point to the existence of a libertarian impulse which geopolitical borders could not stop. At the outset of their revolt, the insurgents of Boca Nigua hoped that their rebellion was going to bring slavery to a permanent end and believed that it sanctioned the beginning of a new life (195). In *Viento Negro*, moreover, toponyms allow Deive to trace a continuity between eighteenth-century anti-slavery rebellions and sixteenth-century marronage. The city gate by which Sopo is executed is called the “puerta de Lemba” (“Lemba’s gate”) because it was the place where Sebastián Lemba Calembó, a powerful maroon leader who burned and sacked his way from Higuey to the Bahoruco, was (allegedly) executed in 1548 and where his severed head hung as an example to others who would dare rebel against their white masters. A statue of Lemba is now to be found in front of the *Museo del Hombre Dominicano* alongside two others that embody Enriquillo and Bartolomé de las Casas. The three figures are meant to represent the three components of Dominican identity (African, Indio/a, and Spanish) but the inclusion of Lemba did create some opposition because not everyone considered it appropriate to celebrate the African heritage.⁴⁵ Deive here seems to propose not only Lemba but also Sopó as valiant ancestors who fought for the right values and who deserve the utmost respect of contemporary Dominicans. Crucially, while Sopo is in the process of being beheaded, the *viento negro* still blows and García y Moreno is (anachronistically) informed that Toussaint has reached San Rafael de la Angostura and San Miguel de la Atalaya and that Spain has ceded the colony of Santo Domingo to France with the Treaty of Basel (200-201). Deive’s altered historical chronology—in his account the Boca Nigua revolt precedes rather than follows the Treaty of Basel—draws his readers’ attention to the profound political repercussion that the 1791 revolt and the *viento negro* had for the island as a whole.

Deive ends his novel when Toussaint's glory is at its highest point, that is, with his triumphal entrance in Santo Domingo on 26th January 1801 when, against Bonaparte's will, he finally brought Santo Domingo under *de facto* French domination as stipulated by the Treaty of Basel. As soon as the keys of the city are in his hands, Deive's Toussaint decrees that, to their utter delight, all the slaves of Santo Domingo are free men and women (243). This is historically accurate: approximately fifteen thousand slaves were freed on that day. We also know that Toussaint soon abolished all color distinction so the mulattos could gain entry to those higher levels in the power structure which had previously been reserved for the whites, that he encouraged the white men of Santo Domingo to marry their concubines and that he promised security of land tenure to the *hateros* (the owners of pastures and woodland).⁴⁶ The plantocrat Ignacio de Oyarzábal, one of the people who witness Toussaint's arrival in the capital, is astonished when he realizes that the supreme and only authority on the island is in fact the former overseer he met during his visit to the Bréda plantation. In other words, as prophesied in 1791 by Angiolina Falconelli's performance of Pergolesi's *opera buffa*, servants here have literally turned into masters and, crucially, the novel seems to suggest to its readers that this is a positive outcome.

The novel's last words are García y Moreno's, announcing that "never before had Santo Domingo been so festive" (244). This is most appropriate for an *opera buffa*. As White has pointed out, the temporary reconciliations and happy endings, which characterize comedies "are symbolized in the festive occasions that the Comic writer uses to terminate his dramatic accounts of change and transformation."⁴⁷ Historically speaking, however, this festive mood was soon to end. In his position of supreme command, Toussaint called for the formation of electoral assemblies to choose deputies to a central assembly that would write a constitution for the entire island. According to the July 1801 constitution, Toussaint abolished slavery, he became governor-for-life with the power to name his own successor and, despite the fact that Hispaniola remained part of France's colonial empire, no French representative was allowed to play any role in the colony's administrative structure. However, Toussaint also disallowed the political and economic participation in the new social order of the formerly enslaved masses. Controversially, he was determined to maintain the plantation system of large holdings and sanctioned, in his constitution, that all citizens owed their services to the land that fed them.⁴⁸ In other words, those who were no longer slaves were still required to work in the plantations and to surrender their individual freedom to the new state in order to support, paradoxically, what was fundamentally a project of emancipation.⁴⁹

Predictably, Toussaint's agrarian reforms were met with hostility and also his abolition of Vodou did not prove to be a popular decision amongst the former slaves.⁵⁰ In Spanish Santo Domingo, despite the equalitarian measures that gained him the distrust of most of the Spanish Dominican oligarchy, Toussaint did not long enjoy the unconditional support of all freed blacks and *hateros*. In fact, he tried to convert the Dominican economy of *hatos* into a plantation-based economy and, in order to counteract the parcelization of the territory, he proscribed the unauthorized sale of land thus making it very difficult for the emancipated slaves to acquire their own small properties; he also devalued the *peso* and, as we have seen, instituted an unpopular compulsory labor system.⁵¹ In 1802, after the arrival of the French army, which aimed at expelling the black insurgents from the Western part of the island, the Dominican elites reinstated slavery and the latifundist economy of the *hateros*. Toussaint was captured, taken to France and imprisoned in the castle of Joux where he finally died while different armies continued to fight, reducing Spanish Santo Domingo to a devastated war zone.⁵² Deive knows that what happened after Toussaint's triumphal entrance to Santo Domingo is well known to his readers, and especially to his Dominican readers: decades of anti-Haitian propaganda have urged them to think of the Black Jacobin's domination, but also of Boyer's occupation, of the existence of Haiti across the border and of the presence of "needed but unwanted" Haitian migrants on the territory of the Dominican Republic as an unfolding tragedy.⁵³ All this, however, is omitted from the narrative: the emphasis is decisively on the emancipatory potential of Toussaint's arrival and not on the controversial nature of his subsequent reforms or on his tragic demise. Deive's novel leaves its readers with a sense of elation and possibility, as if the entire island were on the brink of a new era predicated upon racial equality and social justice rather than racism, discrimination and privilege.

Deive's decision to conclude his novel with a "happy ending" which coincides with the French domination of the entire island is therefore noteworthy and a sign that he is not afraid to venture into dangerous territory. It is true that French domination is not the same as Haitian domination—in 1801 Haiti did not exist yet and Toussaint was, at least officially, still acting on behalf of Bonaparte—but the "*une et indivisible*" question" in the Dominican Republic is still a very delicate matter as testified by the furore caused by the current Haitian president Michel Martelly's fumbled response to a question on the unification of the island posed to him by a Dominican journalist during his 2011 election campaign.⁵⁴ In 2008, the historian Frank Moya Pons devoted two chapters of his *La Otra Historia Dominicana* to the "one and undivided"

issue where he insists that, contrarily to what anti-Haitian propaganda maintains, the Haitian constitution does not actually sanction that the island is one and indivisible and therefore does not contain an implicit threat to Dominican sovereignty.⁵⁵ The Haitian constitutions that have used such terminology, Moya Pons explains, did deploy it to declare that the Republic of Haiti (not the island) was one and indivisible. The only exception is the 1806 constitution which did not contain the expression *une et indivisible* but defined the entire island as Haitian territory following the 1801 colonial constitution promulgated by Toussaint which mirrored the territorial unification legitimized by the 1795 Treaty of Basel.⁵⁶ That Deive's "happy ending" revolves around the origins of what anti-Haitian discourse has promoted, and still promotes, as the Dominican's tragedy and nightmare *par excellence*—the Haitian invasion—is not only provocative but speaks to Franklin Franco Pichardo's invitation to revisit the relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic by starting from their colonial roots.⁵⁷ Pichardo also pointed out that the Haitian and Dominican people had been made to interiorize conflicts that originated with the dominant classes of both nations. Furthermore, the ruling classes employed all the available media to disseminate these conflicts to all Haitian and Dominican people.⁵⁸ These reflections, published in 2003, were included in a paper that Pichardo delivered in 1986 in Haina, at the *Coloquio dominico-haitiano de educadores*; thirty-six years later there is still a lot of work to be done to counteract this pernicious anti-Haitian influence and to promote rapprochement, solidarity, cooperation, and mutual understanding between the two nations.

To conclude, Deive's resolve to terminate the continuum of his narrative by presenting the arrival of Toussaint in Santo Domingo as a happy moment in Dominican past is not an attempt to simplify these otherwise complex dynamics, or to smooth the rough edges of history, but derives instead from the realization that it is crucial to reject what Raymond Williams, in *Modern Tragedy*, had distressingly called the "slowly settling loss of any acceptable future."⁵⁹ In this context, therefore, Deive's *opera buffa* clearly emerges as a counterhegemonic tool, which attempts to demystify the past in order to recast and confront the present and, hopefully, to reimagine the future of Hispaniola.

Notes

- ¹ I am echoing White's *The Content of the Form*.
- ² Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 7-8.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 210.
- ⁴ Deive, *Viento Negro, Bosque del Caimán*, 71. Subsequent citations to *Viento Negro* are to this edition and will be cited in-text.
- ⁵ See Koselleck, *Futures Past*.
- ⁶ White, *Metahistory*, 8-9.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.
- ⁸ As Susan Buck-Morss writes:

The millions of slaves brought to the New World... were... varied in language, religion, customs and political institutions... While it is true that the massive influx of slaves to Saint-Domingue... [the slaves] were shipped predominantly from the coasts of the Kongo and Benin, they were brought there from multiple locations in the interior as prisoners of war waged against and among each other... It was the shared trauma of defeat, slavery, banishment, and the horrors of the Atlantic crossing and plantation labour that Vodou, in a burst of cultural creation, transformed into a community of trust. (125-126)
- ⁹ All translations from Deive's Spanish are mine.
- ¹⁰ Deive, *Heterodoxia e inquisición en Santo Domingo*, 318-319.
- ¹¹ Combes, "La Franc-Maçonnerie aux Antilles et en Guyane Française de 1789 à 1848," 26-30; 162, qtd. in Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 51-52.
- ¹² Combes, "La Franc-Maçonnerie," 162 qtd in Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 51-52. Fischer, however, suggests that we should take some of Combes's data with a degree of scepticism considering that his institutional affiliation is the *Institut d'études maçonniques* in Paris (*Modernity Disavowed*, 311).
- ¹³ Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods*, 251.
- ¹⁴ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, Appendix B, 265.
- ¹⁵ See Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History*, 70 fig. 1 and 123-124 fig. 2; and Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, 140.
- ¹⁶ Buck-Morss, *Hegel*, 65.
- ¹⁷ Matibag, *Haitian-Dominican Counterpoint*, 46-48.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 50; 58.
- ¹⁹ Deive, *La Mala Vida: Delincuencia y Picaresca en la Colonia Española de Santo Domingo*, 233-235.
- ²⁰ Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 95.

- ²¹ Reyes II, *Cuentos y Leyendas de la Frontera*, 254; 41-42. Like Reyes, Pedro Henríquez Ureña describes the word as a “Haitianismo” and places the “galipote” firmly in the Dominican villages on the border with Haiti. See *Diccionario dominicano*. Deive also defines the term as a Haitianism in his *Diccionario de dominicanismos*. The *galipote*’s zoomorphism reminds one of the powerful rebel maroon and *houngan* Mackandal who, incidentally, worked in the Limbé plantation fifty years or so before the 1791 revolt and who, according to a well-known legend, escaped his execution by flying away from the burning stake as a fly or a mosquito.
- ²² Rodríguez, *Haiti and Trans-Caribbean Literary Identity/Haiti y la transcaribeñidad literaria*, 202. Rodríguez makes an interesting comparison between the “Haitian” galipote and the “indigenous” ciguapa and argues that “in the course of time... the overlapping and mutual influence of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, has modified folkloric figures first attributed to aboriginal or Afro-Haitian culture... submitting them to a process of creolization with the resulting encroachment of geographic, cultural and mental borders.”
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 194.
- ²⁴ Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 210.
- ²⁵ Reyes, *Cuentos y Leyendas*, 41.
- ²⁶ See Deive, “The African Inheritance in Dominican Culture,” 87; and Reyes II, *Sincretismo*, 5.
- ²⁷ Deive, “The African Inheritance,” 110; 26.
- ²⁸ See Deive, *Vodú y Magia en Santo Domingo*.
- ²⁹ “Negro” is used to describe people of African descent and the color black.
- ³⁰ See Deive “The African Heritage” 110; 127; and Rosenberg, *El Gagá*, 199.
- ³¹ For more on Toussaint as a double agent see Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 92.
- ³² Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, Appendix B, 260-266.
- ³³ The woman is erroneously identified as Romaine la Prophétesse who was instead a man who used to dress up as a woman (see Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 127-128) and conflated with the *mambo* Cécile Fatiman who is supposed to have participated in the historical ceremony. See Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 99-100; and Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 93.
- ³⁴ For the controversy on the Bois Caïman ceremony see, for example: Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 81-92; Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 93; and Appendix B; Hoffman, “Un Mythe national,” 434-448.
- ³⁵ *Clerén* is a Haitian alcoholic drink.
- ³⁶ An expression that designates a person who can ‘pass’ for white yet also has Black ancestors.
- ³⁷ Geggus, “Slave Resistance in the Spanish Caribbean in the Mid-1970s,” 141.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 139-140.

- ³⁹ For a positive assessment see, for example, Martin and Yacou eds., *De la Révolution Française aux révolutions créoles et nègres* (Paris: Editions Caraibéennes, 1989) note 5; David Geggus disagrees with these authors in “Slave Resistance” 147-148 and insists on the fact that Sopó’s revolt was not characterized by a libertarian rhetoric. Deive believes that the historical rebellion “aimed to proclaim freedom for all the blacks of the colony and to establish a popular and revolutionary government” –see Deive, *Los guerrilleros negros*, 221 [my translation].
- ⁴⁰ Despite his reservations, Geggus is happy to concede as much. See “Slave Resistance,” 147.
- ⁴¹ In reality, Sopó did approach, for advice, three former soldiers of Jean-François’s auxiliary army who were working nearby and asked them to take him and some of his fellow conspirators to Saint Domingue but the former soldiers refused to get involved in the plot. See Geggus, “Slave Resistance,” 142.
- ⁴² Deive, “The African Inheritance,” 105-106.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 107; 99; 108. Deive also insists on the importance of endoculturation, a mechanism by which an individual is encouraged not only to adopt the culture that is imposed on him or her but to consider it superior to his own (“The African Inheritance,” 91). What he calls “the dual and often contradictory psychological processes that made slaves oscillate between servility and rebellion” (“The African Inheritance,” 107) which can be seen at work in the behavior of the historical Sopó might be explained, at least partly, by the influence of endoculturation.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 95-97.
- ⁴⁵ Howard, *Coloring the Nation*, 8.
- ⁴⁶ Matibag, *Haitian-Dominican Counterpoint*, 73-74.
- ⁴⁷ White, *Metahistory*, 9.
- ⁴⁸ Dubois, *Avengers*, 245; Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 206-207.
- ⁴⁹ Dubois, *Avengers*, 245.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 244.
- ⁵¹ Matibag, *Haitian-Dominican Counterpoint*, 75.
- ⁵² Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 149.
- ⁵³ I am borrowing the title of Moseley-Williams and Wooding’s *Needed but Unwanted*.
- ⁵⁴ Here he seems to be suggesting that the way forward for Hispaniola is the unification of the island (extract from interview on YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvaU-4zZwis>; accessed on January 10, 2012). Martelly decided to do the interview with Nuria Piera for Dominican television without an interpreter but did not appear too sure-footed and it is at least debatable if he really advocated the unification of Hispaniola. For the controversy, see: <http://www.dr1.com/forums/general-stuff/112313-have-you-guys-read-what-lunatic-said.html>; accessed January 10, 2012).

- ⁵⁵ Moya Pons, *La Otra Historia Dominicana*.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 272-276.
- ⁵⁷ Pichardo, *Sobre racismo y antihaitianismo (y otros ensayos)*, 67.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*.
- ⁵⁹ Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, 209.

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GODS, GENDER, AND NATION: BUILDING AN ALTERNATIVE CONCEPT OF NATION IN FOUR NOVELS BY MAYRA MONTERO

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En mis libros... hay una propuesta básica: el Caribe como un todo, como una unidad. No son sólo islas separadas, son un conjunto de sensibilidades, tradiciones y casi una manera de ser.

—*Mayra Montero, 1996*¹

The year after she published her fourth novel, Mayra Montero gave the above appraisal of her work, emphasizing her perception of the Caribbean as a single entity. This essay uses this position as its point of departure, engaging with concepts of nation, creolization and hybridity, and patriarchal notions of historiography in order to outline a framework with which to interrogate four of Montero's novels, *La trenza de la hermosa luna* (1987), *Del rojo de su sombra* (1992), *Tú, la oscuridad* (1995) and *Como un mensajero tuyo* (1998).² From there, the essay continues to analyze how, by means of a gendered framework within the context of African-derived religious traditions in Haiti, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, the narrative that runs through these texts offers a pan-Caribbean idea of nation, the latter made possible by the author's use of these religious practices as a construct which both connects the region and draws it together.

The concepts of nation and nationhood in the Caribbean have been discussed and theorized in depth throughout the lengthy struggles for independence and processes of decolonization in reference to the notions of an independent state and sovereignty. These ideas, inherited from the colonial powers, have been predicated on the idea of a binary: that of the colonizer and the colonized. In order to avoid the appropriation of the European discourse of nation and nation-state as a means of self-empowerment, Frantz Fanon, Benedict Anderson, and Homi Bhabha have all looked to define nation as a concept that moves beyond that of the nation-state, where nation is thus defined as an "imagined community" that shares elements of collective identity, though not reduced to an homogeneous whole.³

This binary framework is intrinsically related to patriarchy, and in spite of the anti-colonial sentiment that led to independence, there was not a break with patriarchal notions of history and historiography. As Paul Gilroy has recognized, by defining nation, racial identity, linguistic preference, and religion in direct reference to the colonizers' mindset and placing a "natural hierarchy" at the center of nation-building, the masculine was both privileged and seen as embodying the nation's integrity.⁴ In light of this, Caribbean historians such as Bridget Brereton and Patricia Mohammed have called for the redefinition and gendering of the processes of historiography, but not in ways that "simply 'add women and stir.'"⁵ Nor is it satisfactory to position a female narrative in opposition to a male narrative, since, as Trinh T. Minh-ha states, "The choice of a direction opposite to the one rejected remains a reaction within the same frame of references."⁶ Many have reiterated the importance of history and historiography to the idea of nation,⁷ and Edouard Glissant, in *Caribbean Discourse*, has squarely placed the responsibility of re-examining historical consciousness and historiography on novelists.⁸

The discussion of *mestizaje*, creolization, and hybridity in the Caribbean has been no less animated, with numerous scholars including Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Kamau Brathwaite, Gilroy and Lourdes Martínez-Echazábal critiquing the problematic nature of each of these interwoven concepts. Hybridity, however, as Shalini Puri has illustrated, moves beyond the binary framework inherent in *mestizaje* and creolization, and recognizes the plurality of the contemporary situation in the Caribbean, in her terms "a vase shattered and reassembled" that recognizes "a unity and equality that has yet to be achieved."⁹ Furthermore, Martínez-Echazábal has sought to go beyond the binaries she perceives as inherent in Gilroy's ideas of "the black Atlantic" and "double consciousness," moving from "hybridity both as synthesis and symbiosis"—as she summarizes them—to a more heterogeneous, or "polygeneous" understanding of hybridity.¹⁰ Considered in this light, Montero's narrative in these four novels is inherently hybrid and recognizes that such a framework is necessarily fluid and personal. This is formulated within a context of various interconnected African-derived religious traditions in the Caribbean, the plurality of which then enables a critique of Bhabha's theory of the "third space" in reference to a Caribbean thus conceptualized.¹¹

Beginning with the processes of historiography, Montero's four novels each interrogate the manner in which historical accounts have been written and question the validity of the interpretation of events those accounts offer. First, at the beginning of each novel the reader is informed of the final event that has precipitated its writing, underlining the fact that it is

not the event itself that is important but the way it is being recounted. The preface of *Del rojo* tells the reader that Zulé has been killed; Victor's wife Martha tells him that he will die "quemado en un avión, en un cuarto de hotel, hasta en un bote, mira, tan cerquita del agua..." on the second page of *Tú, la oscuridad* (14);¹² Enriqueta gives the written testimony of her mother Aída to an unknown messenger in the first chapter of *Como un mensajero*. Second, each of the texts constitutes a reconstruction and re-evaluation of the past from the narrative present. In the first three novels the past and present are juxtaposed, each influencing the interpretation of the other. At times, the movement between these timeframes is marked by chapter breaks, clearly indicating to the reader a shift in focus; at others, it is through narrative tropes such as dreams or mental recollections written directly into the prose. In *Como un mensajero*, the testimonies of Aída and the other sources interviewed are recounted to a younger Enriqueta, who in the narrative present is the old lady giving away the manuscript in exchange for a series of fifty-two photographs pertaining to the life of Enrico Caruso, her father. In the latter case, then, Montero's exploration of the processes of historiography in the first three novels is further reinforced by this double temporal remove.

The interrogation of historiography continues through Montero's deconstruction of previous official accounts, redefining history in Mohammed's sense of including traditionally non-historical terms and oral testimony in historical discourse.¹³ The plurality of voices Montero offers points to the heterogeneous nature of her historical account, and thus the heterogeneity necessary for the hybrid nation she outlines. *Del rojo* constitutes a direct challenge to the state, asserting in the preface that "Esta novela narra los hechos verídicos ocurridos hace pocos años en algún punto de La Romana" and thus refuting the reductive Dominican police report which concluded Zulé's death was "un simple 'crimen pasional'" (10). In *Tú, la oscuridad*, the author reinterprets the decline of certain amphibian populations around the globe through the context of Vodou, inserting news clippings to this regard between every other chapter of the novel. *Como un mensajero* offers an alternative to the contemporary press's account of the temporary disappearance of the Italian tenor Enrico Caruso in Havana in 1920,¹⁴ situating it within a narrative that reinterprets both the account of Radames and Aída in Verdi's opera *Aida* and several Santería *pataki*.¹⁵ In so doing, Montero points to an alternative explanation of these events based on, and situated within, the belief systems of the specific communities affected.

As Montero critiques these processes of historiography, her incorporation of oral testimony into the narratives challenges the

precedence of patriarchal notions of history. The link between women and the transmission of oral history and *oral literature* has been investigated and theorized by numerous scholars from a range of disciplines conducting research on the Caribbean.¹⁶ Carolyn Cooper's *Noises in the Blood* (1993) examines gender in what she terms "oral and oral/scrival texts" that comprise Jamaican popular culture, underlining the manner in which "hierarchical gender relations between (white) men and (black) women are reproduced in the patriarchal discourse of master texts conspiring to exclude secondary female 'minor' forms from the (scrival) literary canon."¹⁷ Susanne Mühleisen recognizes this association between women and orality, highlighting how it points both to "their strong ties in oral culture as preservers and perpetuators of indigenous traditions" and "the traditional exclusion of women from the domains of public power."¹⁸ However, she then underlines that Caribbean women have challenged the "oral-literate divide" this has engendered by writing oral culture into their work (*ibid.*).

Montero's texts present the same challenge, moving away from these patriarchal modes of expression by placing the focus on writing oral culture, especially testimony. *Del rojo* comprises the account of Zulé's life from her perspective, counteracting the reductive manner in which her story was recounted by the police and valorizing her role as a powerful *manbo* whose rapid ascension to the role: "no se había visto en Société alguna" (45).¹⁹ Choucouné's story in *La trenza*, though mediated by Jean Leroy, rewrites the protagonist of Oswald Durand's poem of the same name, giving her the voice she is denied in the poem to recount her story herself. It is important to note, however, that the accounts transcribed are not solely those of women; this would merely offer a counterpoint to these patriarchal notions rather than challenge them. In *Tú, la oscuridad* the narrative provided as an alternative to the news clippings is that of Thierry Adrien—the Haitian guide to Victor Griggs, an American herpetologist searching for the *grenouille du sang*—whose story suggests that it may be Agwé Tarayo calling the frog back to the depths which is responsible for its disappearance. Montero's critique of notions of historiography is most completely exemplified in *Como un mensajero* however, since, in addition to foregrounding the account of Aída as transcribed by her daughter, the latter is intercalated with other oral testimonies from witnesses—both men and women—which concomitantly confirm and complement it. This methodological approach, similar to that of an historical account, emphasizes the importance Montero places on the process of recording history. However, rather than conceptually situating the narrative back inside patriarchal notions of historiography, the content and oral nature of the accounts and the context within which they take place further indicate

that it is a recognition of heterogeneity, rather than gendered binaries and counterpoints, that will inscribe Caribbean women into history.

Furthermore, orality is pivotal in writing African-derived religious traditions and practices into the narrative. Montero's incorporation of *oraliterature* deconstructs the barrier between official national written history and the oral history of these communities that also constitute nations. In addition, her reinterpretation of classic oral texts such as Verdi's *Aida* through Afro-Cuban religious traditions in *Como un mensajero* and her incorporation and rewriting of certain myths or *pataki* from Santería, Vodou, Gagá, and Abakuá both celebrate the heterogeneous nature of the Caribbean and re-emphasize the hybrid nature of her historical discourse.

Turning first to *Como un mensajero*, the novel is divided into twelve chapters whose Italian titles are taken from *Aida*,²⁰ and the tale of Radames and Aida is rewritten in Caruso and Aida's relationship, itself reflecting the relationships between the *orisha* Changó, Yemayá, and Ochún. In certain *pataki*, Yemayá and Ochún—*orisha* of the sea/motherhood and fresh water/love respectively²¹—have both maintained amorous relationships with Changó.²² As *una hija de Yemayá*, Aida's relationship with Caruso—himself designated *hijo de Changó*—is framed by the different accounts of the relationship between the two *orisha*, both as lovers and as mother and son. Ochún is also described as being in love with Changó, though her sentiments are not reciprocated.²³ The two do maintain a sexual relationship however, which results in Ochún pining for Changó in the face of repeated rejection, as does Aida when faced with the impossibility of her relationship with Caruso.

In *Del rojo*, the myths of Ezili are retold through the life of the novel's protagonist, Zulé, whose character reflects those of Ezili Freda and Ezili Dantò, while Similá represents Toro Belecou. However, as the critic Alicia Vadillo underlines, Montero rewrites the myth surrounding Ezili, Toro Belecou, and Belié Belecán, transforming the latter into Carfú (representative of the crossroads and the link between the physical and spiritual planes), who, instead of killing Toro Belecou, kills Ezili.²⁴ Furthermore, Vadillo demonstrates that this rewriting continues in *Tú, la oscuridad*, whereby Montero modifies the myth of Sikán, central to the foundation of the *Sociedad Abakuá*, by replacing the goat (*mbori*) which gives the sacred drum (*Ekué*) its voice with Sikán herself.²⁵ In this way, Montero both reorients the myth and tempers Sikán's negative portrayal as a traitor who broke her vow not to repeat the secret of Tanze.²⁶ The author therefore gives a voice to these religious traditions and their adherents, the *orisha* and *lwa*, in addition to related historical and mythical figures such

as Durand's Choucouné and Sikán. As such, African-derived religious traditions provide both the means and the context for Montero to challenge patriarchal notions of historiography and nation in the Caribbean, shaping the alternative concept of nation she constructs.²⁷

As noted above, Montero does not solely write the accounts of women. However, these accounts do not fall into the characterization of “add women and stir” in which female narratives are counterpointed with male narratives. Montero constructs her texts in a far more nuanced and complex manner. This is not to say such a binary of male and female cannot be delineated: Lucía Anglade de Aguerrevere describes Caruso as an embodiment of “la cultura europea, lo viejo, lo caduco y lo decadente,” as opposed to Aída, who represents “la nueva, la mestiza, la que sobrevivirá el paso del tiempo;”²⁸ or Similá, *bòkò* in *Del rojo*, who represents the Duvalier dictatorship and destruction, in opposition to Zulé, *manbo* who works for the benefit of her Gagá and dies to save it. That said, Montero problematizes this simplistic binary framework. Zulé's servitor and oldest initiate, Jérémié Candé, is integral to her narrative in *Del rojo*, while Galeona, “vieja mambo vengativa” who works *con las dos manos*, is allied with Similá, representative of the oppression of the patriarchal dictatorship (98). Moreover, neither of the narratives of Caruso and Aída as Montero presents them is possible without the other, the *orisha* or the wider religious and secular communities that surround them. Through the heterogeneous and oral nature of the testimonies and of the context within which they take place, Montero indicates that it is the recognition of heterogeneity rather than gendered binaries and counterpoints that will situate Caribbean women in history.

The hybridity, heterogeneity, and rejection of a binary framework are reflected in the increasingly complex racial and cultural matrix evident as the novels progress. As has been mentioned, the Choucouné of *La trenza* has as her namesake the *marabout* of Durand's poem, representative of *mestizaje* as a woman of European and African descent and, in Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo's words, “the perfect mix of African and European beauty.”²⁹ *Del rojo* moves beyond this synthesis inherent in *mestizaje* to illustrate creolization in the Caribbean, focusing to a greater extent on the interaction of different cultural influences in a specific locale. Anacaona, Zulé's aunt/step-mother, represents both the Dominican Republic and the Taíno past of Hispaniola, and María Caracoles, again through her name, is a direct link both with Catholicism and divination through Ifá. Furthermore, Jérémié Candé, the son of the *oungan* Coridón and a Chinese ship's maid, underlines the important presence and influence of the Chinese in the Caribbean. Though these different influences in the hybrid socioreligious practice of Gagá could be interpreted in light of the

notion of *mestizaje*/hybridity as symbiosis, the interactions and tensions that exist between each of these elements within Gagá point to a process of continued cultural creolization exemplified by Montero's rewriting of the myth surrounding Ezili, Toro Belecou, and Belié Belecán. Jérémie Candé becomes Carfú and kills Ezili, liberating the former to serve as the conduit "through which man ascends and gods descend" and save her *société*.³⁰ This cultural creolization is further demonstrated by Ganesha, the Indo-Guadeloupean partner of American herpetologist Jasper Wilbur in *Tú, la oscuridad* (119), whose prayers to the Hindu deity Mariamman are integrated into Thierry's prayers to Agwé Tarayo as the ship sinks, returning the *grenouille du sang* to the depths (239).

These influences come together in Aída and Enriqueta, the narrators of *Como un mensajero*. Aída is a "chinita amulatada" of Lucumí, Spanish, and Chinese descent on the part of her mother (209), a hybrid nuanced further by Enriqueta's Italian father. Together, they personify the hybridity of the Caribbean and Montero's alternative concept of nation, not as a composite of a shattered vase reassembled but as culturally hybrid individuals who interact and negotiate with different communities. Aída interacts with the Chinese community in Havana, regularly visiting her Chinese *padrino* Yuan Pei Fu, devotee of Sanfancón. This deity, though Chinese in origin—called Guan Gong and venerated by an all-male society—has been associated with Changó in Afro-Cuban religious tradition and thus also with Santa Bárbara.³¹ Though Aída and her mother turn to Yuan Pei Fu for help and guidance at times, they are more intimately involved in Santería. Aída has Yemayá as her *orisha de cabeza* and, as has been outlined above, a close interaction exists between the *patakí* regarding Yemayá and Changó and the development of Aída's relationship with Enrico Caruso.³² Furthermore, she regularly visits her *padrino* Calazán, who intervenes and propitiates the *orisha* on her behalf to prevent her death and that of her lover. In the process of collating the interviews that are interspersed within her mother's testimony, Enriqueta also interacts with these different communities, visiting the house where the *paisanos* live many years after her grandfather's death and others who knew Aída around the time of the bomb. Some were close friends who often visited Aída and her mother, like María Vigil and Amable Casanova; others were professionals whom she met on her travels to Matanzas and Santa Clara with Caruso, such as Dr. Benito Terry. Enriqueta also interviews one of the suspects of the bombing, a pharmacist from El Cerro. Drawing together these interrelated religious, ethnic, professional and personal contexts, the novel provides an account that can be classified in Anderson's terms as one of a nation. Yet as Anderson notes, a nation so conceived, though

heterogeneous, does not preclude the existence of tensions and exploitations that may prevail between its constituent communities, examples of which have been outlined above.

The alternative pan-Caribbean concept of nation provided across these four novels is made possible through the situation of the communities Montero portrays within the African-derived religious traditions and practices of the Caribbean. Importantly, the notion of apostasy does not apply in reference to these religious traditions, and as such in Montero's texts, as in the Caribbean, there are individuals who are members of, or have recourse to, different religious systems.³³ Thierry Adrien is both a Vodouisant and an initiated member of the *Sociedad Abakuá*, who, as previously mentioned, incorporates Ganesha's prayer into his own. Equally, in *Como un mensajero*, Calazán is a *babalao*, *ñáñigo* (Abakuá) and *palero*, while additionally recognizing the power of Sanfancón and Yuan Pei Fu. The reach of this construct is furthered by Montero's location of these traditions in different parts of the Caribbean. In *Tú, la oscuridad*, a branch of the Cuban *Sociedad Abakuá* is situated in Port-au-Prince, while Ganesha brings her Indo-Guadeloupian traditions with her when she moves to Haiti. In the other three novels, there are Vodou and Mayombe communities in Frederiksted, Saint Croix, a Vodou presence in Cuba and a reference to Ifá in the Dominican Republic. The resultant web of interacting religious communities forms the basis of the alternative concept of nation, which can be delineated when reading these texts together. The interconnected nature of each of these traditions, while remaining discrete religious practices, can be analyzed using Anderson's framework of connected communities forming a nation. Moreover, the web created both surrounds and connects with each element of the three-point construct.

Having considered this alternative hybrid concept of nation and the resistance of Montero's narrative to binary constructs, this leads to a critique of Bhabha's concept of third space with regards to ideas of hybridity and nation in the Caribbean. These religious traditions occupy both the public and domestic spheres: historically associated with the domestic environment, they continue to be practiced in this arena, while they also occupy a public space, though acceptance is by no means uniform. These constituting the poles of Bhabha's three-point framework, the third space—the site of interaction between the two—would be the body of the initiate; it functions in both spaces and is central to both religious and secular practice. The body is vital to these traditions, and its ritual painting is noted in both *Tú, la oscuridad* (170) and *Como un mensajero* (220) in reference to Abakuá and the cult of Sanfancón respectively.³⁴

More importantly, however, the body functions as the site of interaction between the physical and the spiritual, and it is here that Bhabha's framework is deconstructed. Rather than being circumscribed by the two poles, the body serves as the conduit through which the physical and spiritual planes intersect. Thus, the body exemplifies the symbiotic relationship between the *orisha/lwa* and the initiate. This necessarily creates a fourth space that transcends the public and private spheres as well as the body of the initiate. Zulé's role as this conduit has been noted above, and the marriage of the physical and spiritual is exemplified in the cited rewriting of the myth of Ezili analyzed by Vadillo. The transcendence of the public and private is illustrated by the relationships between Aída, Yemayá, Caruso, and Changó in *Como un mensajero*. Upon reflection on her escape with Caruso, Aída describes herself as, "el caballo de una potencia que me dominaba, un animal que iba corriendo porque su jinete quiso." She says, "Mi jinete siempre fue Yemayá, y ella mandaba sobre mí, mandó en aquella hora como mandó en las que vinieron luego" (183-84). When mounted by Yemayá, Aída's body functions in both the public and the private spheres. During the ceremony Calazán performs for Yemayá at the lagoon to cleanse Caruso, Aída is mounted several times by Yemayá. In the public sphere, her being ridden by the *orisha* serves the community itself, allowing Yemayá's devotees to greet her and permitting this visible relationship between Yemayá and the Santería community. This is necessarily a public action, as Joseph Murphy underlines: such an interaction is only made possible "by the actions of the community and in the actions of the community" (original emphasis).³⁵ However, as the narrative shows, Yemayá also acts in the interests of her love for Changó, mounting Aída and giving her the strength to run into the lagoon and prevent Caruso's death. For Aída, this then functions in her private sphere as it prolongs the amount of time she can maintain her relationship with Caruso.

Furthermore, Aída's physical relationship with Yemayá gives her strength to withstand certain ordeals. Kidnapped, beaten and left in a cave to die, Aída is pregnant with Caruso's daughter and she notes that either Yemayá Asesu or Yemayá Achabá, "mensajera de Olokún y... secretaria de Olofi" respectively, keeps her and her unborn daughter alive: "No sé cual de las dos fue la que se quedó conmigo, batallando con todo lo que había a mi alrededor... Todavía me pregunto cómo no me comieron y cómo no entraron en mi vientre para comerte a ti" (*Como un mensajero* 235). The manifestation of Yemayá through Aída's body here both serves in the private and public spheres, enabling Aída to continue carrying her daughter, thereby also allowing the daughter of Yemayá and Changó to

be born in the physical world. It is this daughter who later transcribes Aída's testimony, thus allowing both Aída and Caruso's and Yemayá and Changó's stories to be inscribed into the discourse of nation.

Writing in 1997, Margarite Fernández Olmos observed that, "Of all her novels *Del rojo de su sombra* most clearly affirms Montero's transnational and trans-Caribbean reputation."³⁶ In conclusion, I propose that it is by reading these four novels together through the lens of African-derived belief systems that the clearest opportunity is offered for a pan-Caribbean interpretation of the concept of nation. The context of African-derived belief systems in the Caribbean allows nation to be conceived in a manner that does not necessarily require it to be circumscribed by the nation-state. This does not mean that such ideas cannot function within this space, as Montero demonstrates to the contrary. However, the hybridity thus established does not result in the "hybrid singularization" against which Puri warns, since the religious traditions that function within the interconnected web remain discrete entities.³⁷ This hybridity is further evidenced and the notion of heterogeneity within a community reinforced by Montero's complex depiction of race and the movement of peoples across the region, both of which additionally serve to draw it together. Concomitantly, Montero's narrative deconstructs patriarchal notions of historiography and presents a heterogeneous historical account that rejects a male-female binary, promoting a female discourse while nuancing a male perspective. Her texts write oral culture (associated with the private) into the scribal tradition, reinforcing the presence of the spiritual (associated with orality and thus the feminine) in the public sphere. Moreover, her narrative enables the delineation of a concept of nation that functions through the web of religious traditions present in the Caribbean, focusing on the body of the initiate as the site of interaction. This is not to say that the female body constitutes a representation of nation itself and as such is inscribed into the patriarchal framework that this connotes. Rather, the body functions as the conduit through which the physical and spiritual planes intersect and as such is not circumscribed by the two poles of the three-point framework. The fourth space thus created transcends both the public and private spheres and the body of the initiate. It is within this space that Montero delineates an alternative concept of nation that establishes links across the Caribbean without replacing each of the constituent elements that comprise the Caribbean.

Notes

- ¹ Cited in Domínguez, “El Caribe que nos une,” 209.
- ² Subsequent references to these novels are cited in-text.
- ³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6-7.
- ⁴ Gilroy, *Between Camps*, 127.
- ⁵ Mohammed, “A Symbiotic Visiting Relationship,” 111.
- ⁶ Trinh, *When the Moon Waxes Red*, 120.
- ⁷ To this end, Fanon declared in 1959, “culture is first the expression of a nation” just as the nation is necessarily “the condition of culture” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 196-7), and Stuart Hall contended more than thirty years later that cultural identity is “produced out of those historical experiences, those cultural traditions... those peoples and histories which remain unwritten” (“Myths of Caribbean Identity” 589). In his discussion of Mintz, Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes, “heterogeneity cannot be grasped without history (as knowledge) because heterogeneity is the product of history (as process)” (“The Caribbean Region” 31). For her part, Blanca Silvestrini highlights that, “In the literature of the ‘postcolonial’ Caribbean, history is ... a terrain for negotiation and transformation of new national spaces” (“New National Spaces in the Spanish Caribbean” 231).
- ⁸ In his essay “On National Culture,” Fanon uses the League of Arab States to exemplify a national culture that is not confined by the borders of nation-states but rather transcends such divisions in its aim “to create a new Arab culture and a new Arab civilization” (*Wretched of the Earth* 172). While there has been an increased globalized trend for such heterogeneous blocks (such as the European Union, to give a further example), it is important to note that the argument outlined here focuses on Montero’s project as an idea of unity based upon the “popular”—that is cultures, traditions and, to a certain extent, the movement of peoples—rather than supra-national political and/or economic bodies. As such, it does not intend to place this alternative concept of nation in the Caribbean alongside such entities or compare it with them, but rather to examine the manner in which African-derived religious traditions and in particular the body therein function as a conceptual space within Montero’s four texts to connect and draw together the Caribbean region.
- ⁹ Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, 69.
- ¹⁰ Martínez-Echazábal, “Hybridity and Diasporization in the ‘Black Atlantic,’” 117-118.
- ¹¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 3-4.
- ¹² Victor dies in a shipwreck, burned by his experience in Haiti and also symbolically by the blood-red *grenouille du sang* that is claimed by Agwé Taroyo.
- ¹³ Mohammed, “Symbiotic Visiting Relationship,” 120.

- ¹⁴ See the *New York Times* article published on June 14, 1920, “Bomb Exploded at Caruso Performance; Six Injured in Havana Opera Panic.”
- ¹⁵ The *pataki* (or *patakiés/patakines*) are the body of myths in Santería that illustrate the characteristics of the *orisha* and the relationships between them. A single myth is referred to as a *pataki*.
- ¹⁶ For further discussion regarding gender and orality, see works and edited volumes by Bridget Brereton, Eudine Barriteau and Patricia Mohammed, and the Havana-based publication, *Oralidad: anuario para el rescate de la tradición oral en América Latina y el Caribe*. Regarding terminology, discussions of orality, oral literature and the scribal tradition have engendered terms such as “orature” and “oraliterature”. For further analysis see: Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 10-16; Wilentz, *Binding Cultures*, 3-37; Arndt, *African Women’s Literature*; and Anim-Addo, *Audacity and Outcome*, 216-222.
- ¹⁷ Cooper, *Noises in the Blood*, 9; 7.
- ¹⁸ Mühleisen, “Encoding the Voice,” 170.
- ¹⁹ The Kreyòl spelling “*manbo*” has been used in all instances except direct quotations. The *societé* (only used here in reference to Gagá in the Dominican Republic) is the community associated with a specific *oufò* or temple.
- ²⁰ Paravisini-Gebert, *Literature of the Caribbean*, 150.
- ²¹ Bolívar Aróstegui, *Los orishas en Cuba*, 91; 116.
- ²² Lachatañeré, *Afro-Cuban Myths*, 60-62; 82-84. In spite of being Changó’s mother, one of the *pataki* recounted by Lachatañeré regarding Yemayá describes them in a sexual relationship (62-64). As such, in different *caminos* Yemayá loves Changó both as his mother and as a lover. The *camino* foregrounded in *Como un mensajero* is that of his lover, though at points Aída portrays the caring and protective motherly side of Yemayá in her relationship with Caruso.
- ²³ Lachatañeré, *Afro-Cuban Myths*, 82-84.
- ²⁴ Vadillo, *Santería y vodú*, 97-98.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 165-168.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.
- ²⁷ Although the majority of this discussion focuses on the manner in which African-derived religious traditions provide a context for an alternative concept of nation that connects and draws together the region of the Caribbean, religious hybridity cannot be separated from other forms such as ethnic and racial hybridity and the movement of peoples around the region. This is evidenced later in this piece when these issues in the novels are examined, most notably in reference to Choucouné in *La trenza*, Aída and Enriqueta in *Como un mensajero*, in addition to other characters in *Tú, la oscuridad* and *Del rojo*.
- ²⁸ Anglade de Aguerrevere, “Dar voz al silencio,” 77.

- ²⁹ N'Zengou-Tayo, "Fanm Se Poto Mitan," 133.
- ³⁰ Fernández Olmos, "Trans-Caribbean Identity and the Fictional World of Mayra Montero," 280.
- ³¹ Pérez Fernández and Rodríguez González, "La corneta china (*suona*) en Cuba," 143; Scherer, "Sanfancón," 9.
- ³² The *orisha de cabeza* is an initiate's principal *orisha* in Santería.
- ³³ For further discussion of the phenomenon of simultaneously belonging to different religious traditions (except Protestantism) in Cuba and Haiti, see, among others: Christine Ayorinde, *Afro-Cuban Religiosity, Revolution and National Identity*; Marguerite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, ed., *Sacred Possessions*; Tomás Fernández Robaina, *Hablen paleros y santeros*; and Claudine Michel, "Of Worlds Seen and Unseen."
- ³⁴ With regard to Santería, recent scholarship focusing on the centrality of the body includes Mary Ann Clark's *Where Men Are Wives and Mothers Rule: Santería Ritual Practices and Their Gender Implications*, Cariad Astles's "African Presence in Cuban Theatre" and Katherine Hagedorn's "To Have and To Hold: Possession Performance in Afro-Cuban Regla de Ocha." In reference to Vodou, Alessandra Benedicty's paper at the Caribbean Unbound V: Vodou & Créolité conference in April 2011, entitled "Poetics of Possession and Desubjectification: Haitian Vodou, André Breton, and Edouard Glissant" and Roberto Strongman's 2008 article "Transcorporeality in Vodou" both drew on the centrality of the body to the practice of Vodou.
- ³⁵ Murphy, *Working the Spirit*, 110.
- ³⁶ Olmos, "Trans-Caribbean Identity," 273.
- ³⁷ Puri, *Caribbean Postcolonial*, 9.

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DE ISLA EN ISLA : DIÁLOGO ENTRE TRES POETAS AFRO-CARIBEÑAS¹

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El escritor y teórico cubano Antonio Benítez-Rojo indica, en su conocido ensayo *La isla que se repite*, determinadas características comunes a la literatura producida en los países del Caribe, específicamente en las islas. El hecho de que el Caribe esté compuesto por un conjunto de islas hace que, según Benítez-Rojo, este tenga unas características que acercan y asemejan la cultura y visión de mundo de los caribeños, sean ellos de Jamaica, Cuba, Martinica o Haití, y eso pese a la pluralidad de idiomas que se hablan en las distintas islas. Además, Benítez-Rojo define el texto caribeño en general como

excesivo, denso, *uncanny*, asimétrico, entrópico, hermético, pues, a la manera de un zoológico o bestiario, abre sus puertas a dos grandes órdenes de lectura: una de orden secundario, epistemológica, profana, diurna y referida a Occidente—al mundo de afuera—, donde el texto se desenrosca y se agita como un animal fabuloso para ser objeto de conocimiento y de deseo; otra de orden principal, teleológica, ritual, nocturna y revertida al propio Caribe [...] Por debajo de la turbulencia árbol / arbre / tree, etc., hay una isla que se repite hasta transformarse en meta-archipiélago y alcanzar las fronteras transhistóricas más apartadas del globo. No hay centro ni bordes, pero hay dinámicas comunes que se expresan de modo más o menos regular dentro del caos y luego, gradualmente, van asimilándose a contextos africanos, europeos, indoamericanos y asiáticos hasta el punto en que se esfuman.²

De acuerdo con su acercamiento, apoyado en el estudio de otros teóricos y escritores—por ejemplo, en Edouard Glissant—, la literatura caribeña se desarrolla por lo general en distintas direcciones estéticas y epistemológicas, sin dejar como supuesto implícito un único eje central, en

torno al cual el cosmos se estructuraría por medio de ecuaciones lógicas y valores normativos. La pluralidad de perspectivas y de posibilidades de decodificación del mundo, pensado como un caos en movimiento, parecen ser denominadores comunes que definen los rasgos de la identidad caribeña, diferenciándola de las culturas hegemónicas europeas que se sirvieron de los dogmas de la Iglesia Católica y de la imposición forzada de una jerarquía de valores racionales durante el largo proceso colonial, para imponerse y dominar física y simbólicamente el territorio americano. En este sentido, el cruce ocurrido en el Caribe a lo largo de los siglos entre distintas poblaciones, culturas, lenguas, símbolos y órdenes de valores, dio origen a un contexto de diálogo y colisión, como bien observaron muchos teóricos que se dedican al estudio de las intersecciones culturales, como Mary L. Pratt, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Néstor García Canclini, entre otros.

Pese a las divergencias que existen en las obras de las tres autoras, me interesa investigar, comparativamente, la manera como Agnant y Vázquez se refieren a su lugar de origen, es decir, Haití y Puerto Rico, y si estas miradas hacia los países de origen es distinta de la que Morejón le dedica a su tierra natal. Por otra parte, también me interesa analizar el papel desempeñado por la memoria para reconstruir o reinventar una identidad cuestionada por desplazamientos geográficos, culturales o políticos, oriundos de la historia colonial pero también de las migraciones contemporáneas. En este sentido, cuando sea el caso, consideraré también la manera en que el cuerpo femenino (muchas veces, un cuerpo negro o mestizo) es empleado por las autoras para establecer o rever las coordenadas que determinan la definición o la negociación de la identidad.

A la luz de las reflexiones teóricas de los últimos decenios, llevadas al cabo por investigadores como Said, Bhabha, Andersen, entre muchos otros, se hace claro hoy que la problemática de la localización es esencial para la definición de la(s) identidad(es) contemporánea(s), una vez que es precisamente en este movimiento de constante salida de su propio lugar —entendido como lugar geográfico, afectivo, pero también simbólico, político, étnico, de género, de clase— que se determina la “danza de la identidad”³ a la que se refiere la poeta Lourdes Vázquez en su *antología* bilingüe *Bestiario / Bestiary* para definir los cimientos culturales sobre los cuales se levanta su poesía.

Otros elementos nombrados en el prefacio de la autora destacan la importancia dada a la naturaleza en el proceso de construcción de este contexto encantado, pero también revelan un elemento que, en principio, es extraño al universo con que la imaginación occidental suele relacionar

el bestiario: este elemento extraño es la mirada crítica, irónica, realista, casi de periodista de crónica negra, lanzada sobre la sociedad abordada a lo largo de la antología, una mirada que nace del alejamiento provocado por el exilio geo-cultural desde el cual escribe la autora, que vivió durante muchos años en Nueva York, ciudad a la que define como “poblada de etnias que rezan en *lingua franca*”,⁴ y que hoy vive en Miami, una ciudad que tal vez la acerque más a su origen caribeño.

Este libro, bestiario-diario, podemos recibirlo como la producción de un discurso por parte de quien siempre fue considerado sólo como un objeto de *voyeurismo*, de culto, de observación: el animal fantástico, ícono de un personaje vacío, sin producción de un *logos* occidental, sobre el cual se solía colgar una identidad postiza, fruto de la imaginación ajena y cristalizada dentro de determinada representación. En este sentido, se vuelve bastante evidente el cuestionamiento de la iconografía tradicional del bestiario y la presencia de voces esencialmente femeninas en la referida antología: ellas, las mujeres, quienes en las sociedades occidentales, a causa de su capacidad de fecundar y, por lo tanto, consideradas más cercanas a la naturaleza que a la civilización—parámetro de referencia para el derecho de voz y de inserción activa de un sujeto en la sociedad moderna—, son, en este libro, los “animales fantásticos” a los cuales se atribuye voz y pensamiento y para los cuales se pide la escucha, en cuanto permiso para revelar las pequeñas tragedias y los mínimos encantos de lo cotidiano.

A este propósito, es válido afirmar que lo novedoso en la obra de Vázquez es justamente el haber escogido este título que la conecta de inmediato con un contexto explícito de referencias tradicionales, según las cuales la mujer por lo general es más cercana a la naturaleza que el hombre, y a partir de las que se construyó a lo largo de los siglos el discurso social, fundamentado en el texto bíblico, de sumisión del género femenino. Es porque su opción parece asumir una doble intención, no sólo narrativa o de recopilación de personajes que habitan su universo literario, sino más bien irónica, corrosiva, que va corrompiendo los intersticios callados, alimentados a lo largo de los siglos por la ideología de la tradición cristiana occidental. En este sentido, la ironía y lo grotesco del Bestiario construyen otra cosmovisión menos lineal, prismática y con más opciones de liberación del cuerpo.

Esto explica la razón por la cual el *Bestiario* de Lourdes Vázquez está poblado de personajes reales que hablan de un cotidiano a veces transformado, reinventado en formato fabular—a través de la palabra poética—, cercano a un reportaje policial o una crónica periodística, cubierto de ironía, pero nunca cristalizado dentro de una única

representación, puesto que la transformación de un hecho aparentemente real gracias al empleo de un lenguaje poético, obscuro, multiplica sus posibles lecturas e interpretaciones.

Es interesante observar que la poesía de Marie-Célie Agnant también dialoga con la tradición occidental de la mitología griega, creando un fabulario o bestiario en el cual la figura de las Euménides—personificaciones femeninas de la venganza, que perseguían a los culpables de ciertos crímenes—se destacan por encarnar la voz de la propia poeta, reproduciendo, por lo tanto, una forma de alter-ego por medio del cual se dicen cosas válidas universalmente—desde la antigüedad griega hasta la realidad cultural haitiana—, pero que llaman la atención comparadas con determinadas afirmaciones de la autora, como la que cito a seguir, extraída de una entrevista presente en el sitio cultural *Gens de la Caraïbe*:

Quando pienso en eso, creo que he titubeado mucho para dar mis primeros pasos en el campo [de la literatura] porque, tradicionalmente, es un mundo reservado a los hombres, particularmente en Haití. La palabra siempre fue de su dominio. Una palabra guardada feroz, consciente y celosamente. Hombres que, muchas veces, miran con mucha aprensión la llegada de una mujer en la literatura y se ponen de cuatro desde entonces para callarla, de cualquier manera. Es la actitud general.⁵

Ahora bien, los versos del poema “Euménides” dicen, metafóricamente, lo mismo:

J'ai dans le corps des manières
de torrents en délire
grondements de terre en soubresauts
rebelle

La révolte dans le corps
ancrée
dès la première aube

Dans la langue des hommes
point de mots
pour peindre mes ramous [...]⁶

En este sentido, las dos poetas se sirven de un trasfondo mítico —

griego o medieval, occidental—para trasplantarlo en el contexto caribeño y con este trasplante cuestionan el papel de la mujer en las respectivas sociedades. Para Agnant, el cuestionamiento se da a través de un “yo afirmativo” que, al afirmarse explícitamente, se vuelve un instrumento que le permite revertir la situación de paternalismo y dominación colocada en su testimonio, y así reconstruirse como sujeto, cuando afirma:

J'ai dans le corps des mots fous
déferlent
centres soufre lavas

et le temps depuis les Érynes
dans mon corps
n'est plus temps

soifs
montagnes
roches chauffées à blanc
éclats. (10)⁷

El sujeto lírico de estos versos revela estar generando casi escondido dentro de sí un proceso de desbordamiento (“palabras locas”) y de resistencia, alimentado por metáforas de fuego (“cenizas, azufre, lavas”, “rocas calentadas a blanco, astillas”), con lo cual podemos entender que el lenguaje lírico quiere mostrar el enfrentamiento con respecto a la cultura dominante, hegemónica, patriarcal haitiana, y “debe ser pensado como un proceso constante de auto-(re)definición”.⁸

Ya para Vázquez, vale citar la reflexión de Ronald Walter, de acuerdo con quien “es una característica de la escritura caribeña pos-colonial [el hecho de que] la deslocalización de la migración constituye un lugar de alienación y re-conexión [...] también en términos de sexualidad y género”.⁹ En este sentido, la definición de la identidad de género ocurre en sus textos a través de elementos desestabilizadores. Si la explotación del tema de la intimidad y de la vida doméstica representa, tradicionalmente, uno de los puntos de confluencia de la llamada “literatura femenina”, podemos observar cómo Vázquez rompe con tal representación tradicional al atribuir la voz lírica a mujeres que, de cierta manera, modifican esta estructura jerárquica de valores. Con eso, no queremos decir que exista, en sus textos, indiferencia o rechazo del papel de género, sino superación, un deseo de ir más allá de lo que se encaja en este molde social. Esta noción de

superación se manifiesta a través de un discurso que revela el sentimiento de extrañamiento de estas mujeres dentro de los papeles sociales que les fueron atribuidos, un extrañamiento que se hace más agudo a medida que se relaciona con la construcción que “el otro” hace de su cuerpo femenino.

Un buen ejemplo es el texto “Clasificado”, donde la ironía es muestra del vacío del papel femenino fijado socialmente, con lo cual ocurre la situación paradójica que leemos a seguir:

Mi marido y yo hemos perdido a su mujer. Rebuscamos la guata de las almohadas y los huecos del colchón de esta nuestra bendita cama. Minuciosamente observamos cada retrato de esta feliz pareja. Hemos auscultado las gavetas de la cómoda, los armarios de ropa y comida, las hendijas de la madera del piso y el bastón de cada sombrilla. Por si eso fuera poco, el café con leche de la mañana se bate *ad infinitum*, no vaya ser que su delicada esencia surja inesperadamente. Inútil. Hemos decidido colocar un anuncio en los clasificados.¹⁰

El estilo de crónica ayuda a conferirle un tono casi neutral si no fuera por la ironía que minimiza el impacto de la paradoja, presente desde la primera frase: “Mi marido y yo hemos perdido a su mujer”. Ella, la mujer casada, habla como si fuera una tercera persona, revelando cierta normalidad al enfrentar la pluralidad de identidades. En la antología *Bestiary / Bestiario*, encontramos muchos poemas que siguen la misma tendencia perturbadora en lo que atañe la configuración de una identidad de género.

El ambiente kafkiano de estos relatos de mutación femenina nos parecen síntomas de una incapacidad de fijarse en una única representación de género: la rareza inscrita en quien está “sin lugar”, como observó Bhabha, aquí es asumido totalmente por el yo lírico (en primera persona) o por la mirada del narrador (en tercera persona). Lo interesante es que la percepción de sí y la dilución en el proceso de autorreconocimiento, dependen menos de la mirada exterior que de la conciencia de sentirse raro a los ojos de uno mismo.

Por otra parte, hay otro fenómeno presente en los textos de las poetisas, que es la tendencia de una autorreferencialidad del “sujeto lírico” femenino, lo que se puede observar tanto en Vázquez, principalmente en los poemas del libro *Samandar: libro de viajes / Book of travels* (2007), como en Agnant, en la casi totalidad de los poemas de *Balafres*, pero también, bajo otra perspectiva, en la obra poética de Morejón, donde el volcarse

sobre una subjetividad autobiográfica alcanza a veces una dimensión mayor, colectiva, que abarca la trayectoria del pueblo de Cuba. Al operar esta yuxtaposición entre el “yo individual” y el “yo colectivo”, la obra de Morejón atenúa los límites claros y definidos de la historia individual y de la historia de un pueblo o una nación, pero la asunción de esta voz no deja de ser, finalmente, el relato de una colectividad filtrado por una subjetividad autobiográfica.

Si en Vázquez ese proceso de autorreferencialidad es bastante evidente y se restringe a lo individual, ya en Agnant y en Morejón la presencia de lo individual yuxtapuesto a lo colectivo se hace más significativa. En los poemas de Agnant está vivo el recuerdo de su tierra natal, que se manifiesta con el movimiento de rescate de la memoria, que lo evoca a veces con amargor, otras veces con un canto de esperanza. De esta alternancia de evocaciones de Haití deriva la sensación que impregna a los poemas, o sea, la de estar fluctuando entre el pasado y el presente: “Dans les couloirs de ma mémoire / trimbale / ce ballot de souvenirs cassés”; (11)¹¹ “[...] je te donne rendez-vous / laisse ici / infortunes narquoises / débris d’incertitudes / je te donne rendez-vous / pour renaître / avec toi / [...] dans la poitrine un cri d’innocence / ta vie / égarée dans la mienne” (20-21).¹² El sujeto lírico habla por sí en estos versos, refleja sus sentimientos desolados delante de algo devastador que ocurrió con el universo directamente relacionado con su vida: “dans les couloirs de ma mémoire / les souvenirs / abrupts / désespérances / inconfortables / vertiges / cortège de momies / symphonie d’angoisses / baignés de sueurs / et de boues” (13).¹³

En otros poemas, la expresión de dolor o de desolación al observar su país se universaliza, y el sujeto lírico pasa a expresar un sentimiento que se vuelve casi un acto de acusación y resistencia contra cualquier injusticia, dominación y violencia: males que acometieron y subyugaron su país. El poema “Balafre” es esencial, pues además de testimoniar este sentimiento, le da el título a todo el poemario:

Sur les rides du monde
pour conjurer l’oubli
je veux écrire

un long poème

Les ongles plantés dans l’écorce de la terre
au creux du mensonge

je veux écrire

des phrases-témoins

Sur tous les silences complices

je veux ma plume

Torrent cavalcade

je veux ma plume

Ciseux

je veux ma plume

Et réinventer ta vérité

Ô Monde (14-15)¹⁴

El poema revela el empleo de una serie de metáforas corporales (cicatriz, arrugas, uñas) que sirven para intensificar el efecto de proximidad entre el dolor ajeno, observado por el sujeto lírico, y la manera como este dolor es sentido y vivido. La observación de una serie de abusos, aquí apenas sugeridos—el olvido, la mentira, la complicidad, la censura— parece dialogar con los abusos y problemas que acontecen en Haití, mencionados a lo largo del poemario. Tanto la opción formal por un poema de versos cortos, a veces compuestos por una única palabra, como la selección de palabras fonética y semánticamente cortantes (*rides, écorce, creux, écrire, phrases, ciseaux*) que intensifican el sonido /r/, le añaden al poema un tono dramático, casi trágico. Y es justamente de esta silenciosa o silenciada tragedia que se levanta la voz, casi coral, de la autora, voz colectiva y que abraza la causa del mundo.

Este no es el único poema en el cual tenemos metáforas corporales de heridas, mutilaciones, gangrenas; lo que me parece resultado de la miseria y degradación evocada por su país. A veces, esta evocación de Haití se expresa, en los poemas, de forma extensiva, incluyendo a todas las heridas del mundo. Pero hay que recordar que este proceso de evocación y universalización de la compasión humana está acompañado por la vivencia del sujeto individual exilado, que vive “una fractura incurable entre un ser humano y el lugar natal, entre el yo y su verdadera casa [...], el dolor mutilador de esta separación”.¹⁵

Este dolor incurable y mutilador debería estar ausente de la poesía de

Nancy Morejón, pues la autora nunca vivió directamente la experiencia del exilio; al contrario, ella vivió una época considerada gloriosa de la historia cubana, su revolución comunista de 1959. De hecho, su poesía es considerada por muchos críticos como un testimonio de la esperanza y utopía que impregnaron la sociedad cubana y su ideología política durante las primeras décadas después de la revolución. En este sentido, su poesía diseña un retrato de cierta época de su país, filtrado por la percepción de determinado sujeto lírico que muchas veces se identifica con la propia Morejón: una mujer negra que escribe. Existe, por lo tanto, una mirada específica de Morejón sobre elementos de la historia de su país y de su gente, que hacen de su poesía una interesante voz humana de la Cuba vista “desde adentro”.

Veamos, por ejemplo, el poema “Un patio en la Habana”, en el cual la manera de hablar de la ciudad de La Habana no refleja la voz oficial de los que en el pasado cantaban determinados aspectos de la misma, sino su propia jerarquía de valores, más cercanos a la gente y a su memoria:

Un patio de La Habana
como pedía Machado,
es caro a la memoria.
Sin altos muros,
sin esa lumbre intrépida
del arco iris,
sin la flor andaluza
que tanto abuela reclamaba
en los búcaros...

Un patio de La Habana
conserva huesos de los muertos
porque ellos son anchos tesoros,
viejas semillas de labrador.¹⁶

El poema deja clara la oposición entre una posible Habana, cantada incluso por poetas españoles (“Machado”) y que encanta por su fantástica apariencia exterior, y una Habana íntima, que conserva registros de su gente, los huesos de los muertos, y que principalmente por esta razón es cara a la memoria, antes de serlo por cualquier otro motivo. La oposición es una señal importante de la nueva perspectiva poética encarnada por la voz de Morejón: La Habana, Cuba y, por extensión, toda su población pasan a significar en la medida en que reenvían a algo íntimo, de la historia

de todos. Existe por lo tanto una fusión entre Cuba y su gente, entre la historia de Cuba y la historia de su gente. Inúmeros son los poemas donde esta fusión se hace explícita, como ejemplifica bien el poema “Abril”:

Esas hojas que vuelan bajo el cielo,
quieren decir la lengua de la patria.

.

Oh pueblo en que nací
así te miro fiero, junto al mar;
este polvo que piso
será el huerto magnífico de todos.
Y si caemos otra vez
se alzarán los huesos en la arena.

Aquí están nuestras almas
en el mes imprevisto, en abril,
donde duerme la isla como un ala.¹⁷

El sujeto autobiográfico se identifica con la biografía reciente del país, y esta fusión se revela por medio de muchas metáforas que llevan un aliento utópico, repleto de esperanzas (“este polvo que piso [yo, Nancy Morejón, ndr] / será el huerto magnífico de todos”). La fuerza de la esperanza y de la colectividad es la que respira en el poema. La isla, que “duerme como un ala”, personifica un animal que está presto a volar, a lanzarse hacia un nuevo futuro.

Más allá de esta tendencia poética de cantar a la nación, o mejor, de cantar a la esperanza por la nación y por el mundo, la poesía de Morejón también tiene desdoblamientos interesantes en lo que atañe a la (re)visión histórica de la población afro-cubana, en particular la mujer negra. Y eso, pese a que su poesía no lleva marcas evidentes de la tensión vivida por los que están en un “entre-lugar” espacio-temporal, causado por el proceso de exilio. La voz atenta de Morejón se dedica a volver sobre determinados aspectos de la cultura e historia cubana que, por lo general, pasan en segundo plano debido al fuerte atractivo que representó para muchos la revolución, tanto como acontecimiento histórico como en el sentido de posicionamiento ideológico. Como comentaba antes, la mirada específica, individual, de Morejón se concentra sobre aspectos poco relevantes para la historia oficial cubana, como la contribución de los negros y de la cultura afro-cubana, siguiendo pues la herencia de su maestro, Nicolás Guillén.

En especial, el largo poema “Mujer negra” constituye un lindo

ejemplo de la voluntad de Morejón de darle voz a las muchas mujeres esclavas que no tuvieron registrada oficialmente su voz, y que ayudaron a hacer del país lo que él es en la actualidad: un país comunista. El poema revela el sentimiento de rescatar y pertenecer a un linaje histórico que data del siglo XVI. Por lo tanto, existe en la voz lírica la conciencia de estar viviendo hoy gracias a un linaje que se sitúa en otro lugar y en otro momento, dislocado, trasladado históricamente, como ilustra también el poema “Mirar adentro”: “Del siglo dieciséis data mi pena / y apenas lo sabía / porque aquel ruseñor / siempre canta en mi pena”:¹⁸

Todavía huelo la espuma del mar que me
hicieron atravesar [...]
Me rebelé.
Su Merced me compró en una plaza.
Bordé la casaca de Su Merced y un hijo
macho le parí.
Mi hijo no tuvo nombre [...]
por casa tuve un barracón.
Yo misma traje piedras para edificarlo [...]
Ya nunca más imaginé el camino a Guinea
¿Era a Guinea? ¿A Benín? ¿Era a
Madagascar? ¿O a Cabo Verde? [...]. (46-37)

El tono afirmativo, directo, de los versos, de ritmo sincopado, con fuerte acentuación al final de las sílabas, confiere un ambiente tenso al poema, que reproduce la trayectoria histórica, en primera persona, de la población afrocubana desde su llegada a la isla. Más allá del canto al comunismo, en “Mujer negra” se evidencia la conciencia del origen diaspórico de la voz lírica, que causó en las mujeres negras al comienzo del proceso colonial el sentimiento de no pertenecer a la tierra cubana; de ahí la fuga, la rebeldía, la insurrección, el palenque, citados a lo largo del poema; y finalmente, con la revolución cubana, la atribución de la ciudadanía y de la identidad. La revisión histórica operada por la poetisa en “Mujer negra” revela, pues, una forma de exilio o migración de signos y campos de referentes que no es el contemporáneo, analizado en los poemas de Marie-Célie Agnant o de Lourdes Vázquez, pero que sí toma conciencia de su propio origen diaspórico y actualiza el sentimiento de extrañamiento y de violación vivido por los esclavos.

Si juntamos estas reflexiones con la lectura del poema “Madre”, veremos que hay una reconfiguración de la historia de las mujeres negras

cubanas, aquí simbolizadas por la vida que tuvo su madre:

Mi madre no tuvo jardín
 sino islas acantiladas
 flotando, bajo el sol [...].
 Ella no tuvo el aposento de marfil,
 ni la sala de mimbre,
 ni el vitral silencioso del trópico.
 Mi madre tuvo el canto y el pañuelo
 para acunar la fe de mis entrañas,
 para alzar su cabeza de reina desoída
 y dejarnos sus manos, como piedras preciosas,
 frente a los restos fríos de enemigo. (85)

La noción de rescate histórico contribuye a edificar una nueva conciencia—en este caso, que abraza el comunismo—y una forma de unión de las que comparten la misma historia, fortaleciendo los lazos humanos (étnicos y de género), pero también alimentando una sutil red de resistencia contra “los enemigos”. La memoria individual se junta, pues, con elementos rescatados de la memoria colectiva, tanto en Morejón como en Agnant, para edificar un canto de la esperanza o para ser testimonio de una resistencia frente a cualquier forma de dominación y violencia.

Si el símbolo de la madre sirvió a Morejón para recuperar la trayectoria de muchas mujeres afrocubanas, la figura de la madre en Agnant evoca la alienación de las que comparten las mismas condiciones de vida, condiciones que, conforme leemos en el poema “Fête des mères”, indican “ausencia, muerte, sueños, hospicio, grito” (16-18). El poema recita, en tono intimista, la figura de una madre que se ausenta de la vida poquito a poco: “T’imaginer / en ce dimanche absent / absente ta vie / [...] tu repousses l’assiette / morte ta faim / et la tentation de changer ce défunt jour / en une mascarade / La pluie tombe et noie tes rêves / mille fois morts sur un paquet de lettres / et de photos jaunies” (ibid.).¹⁹ La figura de la madre también aparece en la obra de Vázquez, en el poema “El tierno amor”, pero en su universo poético comprendemos cómo no resulta tan esencial reconstruir etapas de una historia familiar o colectiva, sino intentar juntar los muchos fragmentos de una identidad fracturada, multiplicada, alejada de sí y de una noción de “yo total”. Como ya pudimos observar, el “yo” que encontramos en la obra de Vázquez es perturbador, por no saberse recomponer en su (ideal) totalidad original:

Madre, te he muerto hasta
 dejarte entre montoncitos de tierra.
 Cada vez que reapareces, Madre te
 conjuro hasta el puño capaz. Te
 exprimo como el zumo de una naranja
 y te bebo sorbo a sorbo. Es Madre,
 cuando más apasionadamente te
 busco. Cualquiera Madre,
 cualquiera que aparezca a nutrir mi
 vagina de tu tierno amor, cualquiera
 Madre, cualquiera que estruje su
 cuerpo con el mío y complete esta
 multitud, este gentío incesante.²⁰

Para terminar, puede decirse que las tres autoras manifiestan en sus obras, cada una a su manera y de acuerdo con opciones estéticas personales, una voluntad de autoconocimiento que, a veces, pasa por la revisión de la historia del país de origen o de la familia vista como una metáfora de la sociedad, otras veces por la necesidad de resistir, a través de la palabra, contra la disgregación originada por migraciones o por la conciencia del origen diaspórico de la población afrocaribeña. Sus poemas expresan, como vimos, un sentimiento de “estar fuera de su lugar”—tanto geográfico como histórico—y de su relativo tiempo, lo que, de acuerdo con algunos teóricos mencionados en el artículo, es marca de la literatura caribeña. En este sentido, la literatura les sirve como forma de resistencia, pues a través de ella se expresan, directa o indirectamente, deshaciendo determinadas cristalizaciones raciales y sexuales, o atribuyéndole voz a otras mujeres que nunca pudieron hablar.

Las cicatrices históricas están presentes, pues, y se vuelven puntos de conexión y de diálogo entre ellas: tres poetisas caribeñas que hablan desde/sobre sus islas, sean ellas Cuba, Puerto Rico o Haití, y que, al hacerlo, configuran una “isla que se repite hasta transformarse en meta-archipiélago”.²¹ Un meta-archipiélago poético.

Notas

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² Benítez-Rojo, *La isla que se repite*, 39-40.

- ³ Vázquez, *Bestiary*, xi.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ceccon, “Marie-Célie Agnant,” *Gens de la Caraïbe*.
- ⁶ Agnant, *Balafres*, 9. En nuestra traducción: “Tengo en el cuerpo maneras / de torrente en delirio / murmullo de tierra en sobresalto / rebelde // La rebelión en el cuerpo / anclada / desde la primera alba // En la lengua de los hombres / ninguna palabra / para colgar mis remolinos”. Las citas futuras de *Balafres* son para esta edición y se citan en el texto.
- ⁷ En nuestra traducción: “Tengo en el cuerpo palabras locas / se derraman / cenizas azufre lavas // y el tiempo desde las Erinas / en mi cuerpo / ya no es tiempo // sed / montañas / rocas calentadas a blanco / astillas”.
- ⁸ Gonçalves, “Conexão Brasil, Uruguai, Haiti.” En el original: “A escrita nesse caso deve ser pensada como um processo constante de auto-(re)definição”.
- ⁹ Walter, “A política de localização em Maryse Condé, Dionne Brand e Edwige Danticat,” 85.
- ¹⁰ Vázquez, *Bestiary*, 13.
- ¹¹ En nuestra traducción: “En los corredores de mi memoria / me llevo / este paquete de recuerdos quebrados”.
- ¹² En nuestra traducción: “[...] Yo fijo una cita contigo / deja aquí / infortunios burlones / sobras de incertidumbres / fijo una cita contigo / para renacer/ contigo // [...] en el pecho un grito de inocencia / tu vida / perdida en la mía”.
- ¹³ En nuestra traducción: “[...] en los corredores de mi memoria / los recuerdos / abruptos / desesperos / inconfortables / vértigos / corteo de momias / sinfonía de angustias / mojadas de sudor / y de lodo”.
- ¹⁴ En nuestra traducción: “Sobre las rugas del mundo / para conjurar el olvido / quiero escribir // un largo poema // Las uñas plantadas en la cáscara de la tierra / en la cavidad de la mentira / quiero escribir // frases que atestigüen // Sobre todos los silencios cómplices / quiero mi pluma // Torrente cabalgada / quiero mi pluma // Tijeras / quiero mi pluma // Y reinventar tu verdad // Oh mundo”.
- ¹⁵ Said, *Reflexões sobre o Exílio e outros ensaios*, 41. En el original: “[...] uma fratura incurável entre um ser humano e um lugar natal, entre o eu e seu verdadeiro lar [...] a dor mutiladora da separação”.
- ¹⁶ Morejón, *Richard trajo su flauta y otros poemas*, 89. Las citas futuras de *Richard trajo su flauta y otros poems* son para esta edición y se citan en el texto.
- ¹⁷ Morejón, *Where the Island sleeps like a Wing* (San Francisco: The Black Scholar Press, 1997), 28.
- ¹⁸ Morejón, *Where the Island sleeps like a Wing*, 64.

¹⁹ En el original: “Imaginate / en este domingo ausente / ausente tu vida / [...] rechazas el plato / muerto tu hambre / y la tentación de cambiar este día difunto / en una mascarada / la lluvia cae y moja tus sueños / mil veces muertos sobre un paquete de cartas / y de fotografías amarillas”.

²⁰ Vázquez, *Bestiary*, 31.

²¹ Benítez-Rojo, *La isla que se repite*, 39.

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(AUTO)BIOGRAPHICAL VICTORIES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CULINARY AND THE LITERARY IN MARYSE CONDÉ'S *VICTOIRE, LES SAVEURS ET LES MOTS*

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In the postcolonial era, female-authored autobiographical narratives from all corners of the Francophone world continue to shape the literary expression of the twenty-first century. For the Guadeloupian writer Maryse Condé, as for many women writers from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Haiti, life writing results in increased knowledge of the Self, Other(s), and the greater Caribbean as a sense of order is restored to a fragmented, complex, and violent colonial past. When speaking of female writers from the Caribbean, Adele Newson and Linda Strong remind us that women from the West Indies “exist in worlds which have, at one time or another, attempted to censure, silence, or ignore the ideals and interests of women.”¹ A recurring theme in Maryse Condé’s multiple texts is her desire to represent, and in most cases, resurrect the lives of Antilleans from all levels of the racially divided, three-tiered class systems of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Haiti. Thus, for Condé, the act of writing and publishing the (auto)biographical novel *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* (2006) is a means of uncovering her maternal lineage, while artistically comparing, and thus linking herself, to Victoire Elodie Quidal, the grandmother she never knew. Since her grandmother was known throughout the islands of Guadeloupe as a gifted culinary artist, Condé draws striking parallels between her own career as a writer, and the culinary arts practiced by her grandmother. Indeed the novel’s eponymous title announces the primary themes of cuisine, literature, life writing, and the maternal grandmother. In addition to these primary themes, Condé’s novel also addresses key Caribbean subjects such as the *restavek* system of child labor, poverty and social class, and the theme of individuals in socio-cultural migration.

Haiti and Haitians form an integral part of Maryse Condé’s writing. While Haitians and Guadeloupians share many cultural similarities, Odile Ferly reminds us that, “anti-Haitian prejudice is found in Guadeloupe as elsewhere in the region.”² Ferly further adds that “despite such cultural

proximity, today many Guadeloupians harbor a strong animosity toward the Haitian community.”³ Two of Condé’s literary works, *Traversée de la mangrove* (1989) and *Hàïti chérie* (1986) focus on the poverty, migration, and marginalization experienced too often by Haitians both at home and in exile. Condé’s literary representations of Haitians in both works seek to reverse these discriminatory trends while simultaneously highlighting the cultural similarities that exist between Guadeloupe and her Haitian neighbors. As Lydie Moudileno explains, this is Condé’s way of “changing Guadeloupians’ perception of the foreigners that they work and live next to.”⁴

In *Traversée de la mangrove*, Condé devotes one chapter to a character referred to as Désinor, l’Haïtien. As the chapter title suggests, Désinor is a Haitian, living in exile, who migrated to the neighboring island of Guadeloupe. An outsider and thus a marginalized member of the community, Désinor’s abject poverty is made known to the reader through a description of his table manners during a town wake: “Il mangeait voracement, y allant de la main, et sentit sur lui le regard de mépris de ses voisins qui eux s’étaient servis avec habileté de leurs cuillers après avoir déposé un rectangle de papier sur leurs genoux.”⁵ The themes of migration and poverty are similarly portrayed in Condé’s novella for children entitled *Hàïti chérie*. This short story focuses on a young Haitian girl named Rose-Aimée who is sent away from her home to work as a *restavek*. According to Marie-José N’Zengou-Tayo, Condé, in *Hàïti chérie*, “uses the child protagonist as a mouthpiece to question injustice in the world economy, social abuse, and economic exploitation.”⁶ As we will see later in this essay, Condé’s Guadeloupien grandmother shares many of the same socio-cultural inequalities and struggles as the Haitian protagonists Rose Aimée and Désinor. By writing about the common hardships of Haitian and Guadeloupien protagonists in her texts, Condé’s writing thus seeks to erase socio-cultural prejudices and divisions in the French Caribbean.

In *Autobiographical Tighotropes* (1990), Leah Hewitt argues that Maryse Condé is “creatively alert to the way elements of her personal history intersect with those of other women.”⁷ Indeed, the theme of cuisine and the culinary arts form an integral part of the Caribbean’s rich cultural history. The Caribbean islands are primarily composed of people from Europe, Africa, and Asia whose ancestors came to the islands as a result of modern capitalism and colonialism. As the European nations began colonizing the islands of the Caribbean as early as the fifteenth century, they introduced the system of slavery in order to cultivate sugar and coffee primarily for European consumption. Thus, agricultural products

were at the center of these early capitalist systems. Much like the cuisine of Guadeloupe and Martinique, Haitian cuisine is a mosaic of several culinary traditions derived from the many ethnic groups that came to the islands after European explorers first arrived in the Caribbean in the late fifteenth century. In the preface to Stéphanie Ovide's cookbook entitled *French Caribbean Cuisine* (2002), Maryse Condé describes Caribbean cuisine in the following manner:

La cuisine antillaise est une mosaïque. C'est une invitation au voyage puisqu'épousant les méandres d'un peuplement-mosaïque, elle se situe au carrefour de trois traditions. Nourris de "racines," de "pois," de bas morceaux de porc (museaux, oreilles, queues), de morue salée et de hareng saur.⁸

Within this complex cultural, linguistic, and racial mosaic that defines the Antilles, culinary traditions that are unique to the Caribbean archipelagos have emerged over several centuries.

Today, Haitian cuisine is composed of natural products from both the land and sea. Among the many herbs, spices, fresh fruits and vegetables, traditional Haitian dishes incorporate an array of chicken, beef, pork, seafood, rice, and beans. In this way, the diversity of Haitian cuisine reflects the complexity of the island's history and its people. While Maryse Condé has often made reference to the artificiality of the Caribbean, there is nothing artificial about Haitian cuisine or *Manje Kreyòl*. For centuries, culinary ideas have been exchanged as recipes traveled, with the culinary artists who created them, throughout the Caribbean islands. In the preface to Ovide's cookbook, Condé states that, "cuisine est un art qui exige autant de créativité et d'audace que celui d'écrire. Comme en littérature, il faut inventer."⁹ A creative and inventive artist, Victoire Elodie Quidal, inspired Maryse Condé's (auto)biographical novel, *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*.

Published in 2006, *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* represents Condé's literary endeavor to reconstruct and preserve the biography of her grandmother, who was famous throughout the various islands of Guadeloupe for her exceptional Caribbean cuisine. It is not uncommon to find discussions of the culinary arts within life writing since, as Priscilla Ferguson notes in *Accounting For Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine* (2004), "Food has so much to do with constructing our identities—individually and collectively."¹⁰ While the biography and the extraordinary culinary skills of Victoire Elodie Quidal are at the heart of the work, *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* is also a text in which the collective history of the Caribbean is intertwined

with Condé's personal and familial history. Condé describes her own relationship between the culinary and the literary arts in the following way: "J'aime à répéter sans fausse modestie: après une quinzaine d'ouvrages, j'ignore encore si je suis une bonne romancière, alors que sans doute possible, je l'affirme, je suis une excellente cuisinière."¹¹ In her comparison between autobiography and the culinary arts, Anne Goldman notes that, "reproducing a recipe, like retelling a story, may be at once cultural practice and autobiographical assertion." She adds, "If it provides an apt metaphor for the reproduction of culture from generation to generation, the act of passing down recipes from mother to daughter works as well to figure a familial space within which self-articulation can begin to take place."¹² Although Condé names the text after her maternal grandmother, the narrative also incorporates the biography of Condé's mother, Jeanne Quidal. In re-creating her grandmother's past within literary space, Condé traces her family heritage through five generations of Guadeloupean women, beginning with a discussion of her great-great-grandmother, Caldonia, born not long after the final abolition of slavery in 1848.

The novel references two additional generations of women on the dedication page, which reads "A mes trois filles et mes deux petites-filles."¹³ This dedication establishes a succession of past, present, and future female lives and voices within the literary space of the text. Thus, as she delineates the striking artistic parallels between the culinary and the literary arts, Condé simultaneously embeds the text with her own heritage and legacy. In so doing, she establishes an authentic Caribbean textual space in which the biographical, the autobiographical, the culinary, and the literary collaborate and coexist. By comparing the interior world of the grandmother's cuisine to the linguistic space of the granddaughter's literary publications, this essay will examine the artistic crossroads of the culinary and the literary in Maryse Condé's (auto)biographical Caribbean novel *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*.

In their *Encyclopedia of Women's Autobiography*, Victoria Boynton and Jo Malin speak to the patriarchal nature of the genre of biography. Boynton and Malin describe the biographical genre as "opposed to (or even instrumental in suppressing) other forms of life writing such as women's autobiography."¹⁴ However, Condé's (auto)biographical novel seems to work against this trend since the novel chooses for its central subject a succession of intricate relationships between, mothers, daughters, and grandmothers over several decades of Caribbean history. As a result, *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* ruptures and even reverses the patriarchal tradition of the biographical genre as delineated by Boynton and Malin. The theme of tracing one's heritage and identity is a common subject found in many texts

from Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Haiti. Thus, in order for Condé to know, understand, and tell her own story, she must inevitably relate the lives of her mother and grandmother. The chain of female lives within *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* reinforces the Antillean cultural tradition of women and storytelling, thus establishing a permanent string of biographies, family heritage, and feminine voices within the text. As a result, an (auto)biographical text that contains the stories of several individuals can be viewed as a polyphonic literary work. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have pointed out, Francophone writers of the post-colonial era often blur the boundaries between the genres of fiction and autobiography in order to illuminate individual and collective struggles.¹⁵ The story of Condé's maternal grandmother thus becomes a hybrid space of both personal and collective Caribbean identities. The textual voice is defined by its dual role, since the perspective of the adoring granddaughter combines or fuses with the discourse of Maryse Condé, the author, biographer, and producer of the text.

The cultural crossroads of the culinary and the literary define the textual space of *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*. Throughout the novel Condé compares the artistic talent of her grandmother to the act of writing. Indeed, several of her grandmother's most successful menus can be found throughout the granddaughter's novel. As both author and narrator, Condé describes the reasons for writing the biography of her grandmother:

Ce que je veux, c'est revendiquer l'héritage de cette femme qui apparemment n'en laissa pas. Etablir le lien qui unit sa créativité à la mienne. Passer des saveurs, des couleurs, des odeurs des chairs ou des légumes à celle des mots. Victoire ne savait nommer ses plats et ne semblait pas s'en soucier. Elle était enfermée le plus clair de ses jours dans le temple de sa cuisine, petite case qui s'élevait à l'arrière de la maison, un peu en retrait de la case à eau. Sans parler, tête baissée, absorbée devant son *potajé* tel l'écrivain devant son ordinateur. (104)

Condé compares her grandmother's art of cuisine to the artistic creation of a writer: "Quand elle inventait des assaisonnements, ou mariait des goûts, sa personnalité se libérait, s'épanouissait. Cuisinier, c'était son rhum Père Labat, sa *ganja*, son crack, son ecstasy. Alors, elle dominait le monde. Pour un temps, elle devenait Dieu. Là aussi, comme un écrivain" (123).

Maryse Condé is not the first French or Francophone author and scholar to compare the culinary arts to writing or to incorporate cuisine into a work of literature. Rabelais's *Gargantua* evokes the themes of

gourmandise and excessive consumption, while Madame de Sévigné's letters to her daughter relate Vatel's suicide as a result of perceived culinary errors that took place during a feast for Louis XIV and his court. In addition to these primary literary works, there exists a growing body of theoretical and critical texts that address the parallels between the culinary arts and literary works. In *Accounting For Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine*, Priscilla Ferguson explains the central role of cuisine in society:

Whether taken as product or practice, chef or consumer, or everyone and everything in between, cuisine acts as a vital agent of socialization. It translates the corporeal, "natural," uncooked, and unprocessed into a social actor. By fixing the individual gestures that would otherwise remain buried among the pots and pans, cuisine pushes culinary practice out of the kitchen into the culture beyond.¹⁶

Many parallels exist between the daily practices of chefs and writers who create masterpieces to be consumed by readers and diners. Both writer and chef transform the raw elements of their trade, that is to say, words and food, into the cultural products known as literary texts and fine cuisine. When speaking of the relationship between the producers and consumers of cuisine, Lynne Gelber states that since "the individual skill of the cook or chef depends on the appreciation of the diner who consumes and ultimately annihilates the creation, the person or group for whom the poetry is created is enormously powerful."¹⁷ As Gelber suggests, a relationship of interdependence exists between producers and consumers in both art forms, for once the final products are made public, the consumers, or the readers and diners, savor and devour the creation of the artist.

The readers of Condé's texts often encounter the theme of the individual's identity quest that so often characterizes her writing, since the search for selfhood manifests within her scholarly research and multiple publications. In the case of *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*, Condé's quest as both granddaughter and writer focuses on the search, revival, and the re-writing of the maternal grandmother's life and legacy. In so doing, Condé reinvents the Caribbean while re-inscribing her grandmother within Caribbean history. Without Condé's artistic intervention and imagination, Victoire Quidal's story would have undoubtedly been forgotten, like those of countless anonymous women from the French-speaking Caribbean. The first line of the novel introduces the reader to Victoire through her death: "Elle est morte bien avant ma naissance, quelques années après le mariage de mes parents" (13). In much the same way, the novel ends with the birth of Condé's sister, which coincided with Victoire's death:

“Quinze jours après le décès de Victoire, au milieu de la liesse populaire d’un 14 Juillet, Jeanne accoucha d’une petite fille, belle et mélancolique dès le berceau, comme si les peines de sa mère étaient passées en elle: ma sœur Éna” (319). The themes of birth and death that open and close the novel emphasize the interwoven strands of the family’s maternal lineage as family members pass away and new generations continue into the future. The juxtaposing themes of birth and death also highlight the role of food in societies across the globe. Raw materials are transformed into cuisine that is consumed and destroyed. Similarly, food, as nourishment, gives life but can also bring about death, as was the case with Victoire’s own grandmother, who reportedly died after eating a banana in the heat of the afternoon: “Caldonia avait lâché la banane qu’elle mangeait et était tombée raide” (49). In the opening pages of the novel, Condé describes her surprise when her mother told her that her maternal grandmother worked as a cook: “C’était la meilleure des blagues. Ma mère, fille d’une cuisinière! Elle qui n’avait pas de palais et était notoirement incapable de faire cuire un œuf. Lors de nos séjours à Paris, la semaine, nous raclions des boîtes de conserve; le dimanche, nous écumions les restaurants” (15). Through this anecdote, Condé relates an episode from her own childhood while also introducing the reader to the socio-cultural divide that, in her opinion, resulted in the strained relationship between her mother and grandmother. Regrettably, Jeanne never taught her mother to read or to speak French, while Victoire failed to teach Jeanne the art of cuisine. By writing an (auto)biographical novel that addresses the culinary and the literary, Condé bridges the divide between her mother and grandmother. As she reconstructs the portrait of her grandmother within literary space, Condé appeals to the reader’s visual senses through a description of a photograph of Victoire: “Je ne connaissais d’elle qu’une photographie couleur sépia signée Cattan, le meilleur artiste de l’époque” (13). Condé’s physical and psychological description of her grandmother reveals the complexity of Victoire’s character: “Son image est malaisée, difficile à cerner. Pour les uns, elle fut belle. Pour les autres, blafarde et laide. Pour certains, ce fut une créature soumise, illettrée, sans intérêt. Pour d’autres, un véritable Machiavel en jupon” (17).

Born on the island of Marie-Galante, Victoire never knew her mother, Eliette, who died at the age of fourteen while giving birth. However, the reader soon learns that, unlike Eliette and her unknown father, Victoire’s nearly-white skin made it easy to identify her as a member of the mulatto class: “Plus que la mort soudaine d’Eliette, ce qui bouleversa la famille, ce fut l’apparence de la nouvelle-née. Une tête garnie d’épais cheveux de soie noire. Des prunelles d’eau claire. Une peau colorée en rose. Tonnerre

de sort! Où Eliette avait-elle croisée le chemin d'un Blanc?" (23). The family never learned the identity of Victoire's white father. Following her daughter's sudden death during childbirth, Eliette's mother, Caldonia, became Victoire's guardian. As she describes the relationship between grandmother and granddaughter, Condé relies on her imagination to give insight into the nature of the emotional bond they may have shared: "La petite-fille envahit le cœur de sa grand-mère qui n'avait jamais réellement éprouvé de sentiments" (24). In caring for her granddaughter, Caldonia nourished Victoire's growing body with the best culinary materials that the island of Marie-Galante had to offer: "Aucun œuf ne fut assez frais pondu, aucun blanc de poulet assez blanc, aucune farine assez légère pour l'estomac du bébé" (24).

In compliance with the system of child labor practiced throughout the Caribbean, Victoire, like Rose-Aimée in *Haïti chérie*, became a *restavek* at the age of ten when she entered the service of Fulgace and Gaëtane Jovial, a wealthy couple from the black bourgeoisie of Grand Bourg on the island of Marie-Galante. Ironically, it is while working as a *restavek*, in the Jovial's kitchen, that Victoire learned to cook by carefully observing the techniques employed by their servant Danila:

En cuisine Danila n'assigna jamais à Victoire que des tâches ingrates: battre les lambis, extraire la chair des crabes, écailler le poisson avec un couteau pointu, plumer la volaille, écumer la soupe, couper, hacher cives et échalotes, presser les citrons, à la rigueur, cuire le riz à la créole. Mais à épier comme les esclaves qui, de peur d'être punis, lisaient en se cachant, elle prit ses premières leçons, se mûrant dans le secret. (45)

When she reached sixteen years of age, Victoire left the Jovial's home when the daughter's fiancé, Dernier Argilius, impregnated her with her first and only child. The circumstances surrounding Victoire's pregnancy are rooted in cuisine, for Condé imagines that Victoire met Dernier when she brought meals to him in his cabin every day at noon: "Chaque midi, Danila empilait de la vaisselle sur un tray qu'elle recouvrait d'une serviette brodée. Ce tray, sur la tête, Victoire trottinait jusqu'aux Basses" (67).

As a result of these romantic encounters with Argilius, Victoire eventually gave birth to her daughter, Jeanne Marie Marthe Quidal, on April 28, 1890. An infection contracted during the delivery left her sterile. The grandmother's biological sterility is described by Condé through a distinct culinary discourse: "Papayer qui ne donne pas de papayes.

Manguier qui ne donne pas de mangues. Concombre sans graines. Ecale vide” (87). Shortly after Jeanne’s birth, Victoire migrated from the island of Marie-Galante to the town of Point-à-Pitre to work as a private cook in the home of Anne-Marie and Boniface Walberg, a family of wealthy white Creoles: “Officiellement, Victoire fut donc engagée comme cuisinière au service des Walberg. Pourtant, aucun papier ne l’atteste. Dès les premiers repas, elle stupéfia son monde. Loin de se contenter d’exécuter avec brio des plats créoles, elle inventa” (104). As she carried out her multiple household roles as cook, mistress to Boniface, best friend to Anne-Marie, and adopted mother to their two children, Victoire simultaneously created culinary masterpieces in the Walberg’s kitchen.

When speaking of the relationship between cuisine and print culture, Priscilla Ferguson has pointed out that just like a literary text, “the social survival of the culinary performance depends on words.”¹⁸ Thus, similar to a published manuscript, cuisine becomes known to others once it is made public for consumption. Several of Victoire’s most exquisite menus, or culinary performances, are embedded within her granddaughter’s literary text. However, this is not the first time that Victoire’s culinary creations appeared in print for a public of readers. Victoire’s exceptional talent for cuisine became known throughout the town of Pointe-à-Pitre on January 15, 1891, the day of Boniface Jr.’s baptism. Condé describes the importance of the feast prepared by Victoire in the following manner: “A l’occasion de ce baptême, les dons de cuisinière de Victoire furent révélés à tous” (121). The complete menu was translated from oral or spoken Creole into written French, by Anne-Marie Walberg who then sent the translated menu to the town newspaper for publication. Victoire’s culinary masterpiece appeared in issue number 51 of the journal, *L’Echo pointois*, and was described by the journalist in the following manner:

Ce furent chez les Walberg des agapes à la romaine, l’œuvre
d’un véritable amphitryon. Jugez-en plutôt:

Boudin de ouassous

Petits burgos aux pousses d’épinards

et aux feuilles de siguine

Langouste aux mangues vertes

Porc caramélisé au vieux rhum Duquesnoy

et au gingembre

Fricassée de lapin aux oranges bourbonnaises

Gratin de christophines

Gratin de pommes de cythères vertes

Gratin de bananes poto

Salade de pourpier

Trois sorbets: coco, fruit de la passion, citron

Gâteau fouetté

Quelle imagination hardie, quelle créativité ont présidé à l'élaboration de ces délices! L'eau ne vous en vient-elle pas à la bouche, cher lecteur? (121)

While the Walberg's guests savored the various items prepared by Victoire, the readers of the newspaper consumed the menu in print the following day. Condé further explains that "A dater de ce jour, Anne-Marie fut assaillie de requêtes sur papier Bristol émanant des familles les plus en vue. Pouvait-elle prêter Victoire pour tel ou tel repas de baptême, d'anniversaire, de noces? Chaque fois, elle répondait avec délectation par la négative" (122). Thus, two christenings took place on this day, since Victoire's status shifted from that of a private, unknown cook, to a published and public master chef known throughout the island. This culinary victory emphasizes that the art of cuisine can function as an agent of social change, since Victoire, an illiterate servant from the mulatto class, transformed an ordinary christening into an exceptional gastronomic event. Although Victoire was illiterate in the traditional sense, she was exceptionally literate within the field of culinary creation. With the aid of imagination, innovation, and creativity, Victoire stored within her memory, enough recipes to fill numerous volumes of Caribbean cookbooks. Condé describes her grandmother's art in the following manner:

C'était sa manière d'exprimer un moi constamment refoulé, prisonnier de son analphabétisme, de sa bâtardise, de son sexe, de toute sa condition asservie. Quand elle inventait des assaisonnements, ou mariait des goûts, sa personnalité se libérait, s'épanouissait. Cuisiner, c'était son rhum Père Labat, sa *ganja*, son crack, son ecstasy. Alors, elle dominait le monde. Pour un temps, elle devenait Dieu. Là aussi, comme un écrivain. (123)

While Anne-Marie refused to let Victoire work beyond the Boniface residence, Victoire's "employer" did entertain guests in her home every Friday night. Victoire's notoriety as a chef drew crowds of wealthy, white Creoles to the Walberg home on a weekly basis. A menu from one of these famous dinners at the Walberg home was published in issue 55 of *L'Écho*

pointois and included more than a century later in Condé's novel:

Chiktaye de morue, hareng saur et tomates fraîches
 Calalou cribiche
 Dorade entière à la marinade de citron vert
 Tortue des Saintes en fricassée
 Riz indien
 Gratin de couscouche
 Salade de chou palmiste
 Chodo
 Gâteau fouetté (124)

The printed word transported Victoire's cooking and cuisine from the kitchen of the Walberg's home into the larger public space. During these weekly *soirées*, Victoire's culinary creations became theatrical performances for the wealthiest members of white Creole society. The theatrical dimension is further reinforced when Victoire is asked by the diners to come out for an applause and recognition at the end of each meal: "Les convives battaient furieusement des mains, réclamant Victoire. Celle-ci, apparaissait, avalée par un tablier écru brodé d'un gril, allusion à saint Laurent, patron des cuisinières, les joues colorées d'être ainsi mise en vedette, puis retournait, vite fait, courant presque dans son refuge" (125). Soon after, a prestigious culinary organization offered Victoire the honorary presidency. Like a writer who employs a pseudonym or refuses to accept a literary award, Victoire declined the offer. Through her own artistic inventiveness, Condé provides the following explanation of her grandmother's actions: "Comme beaucoup d'artistes et d'écrivains, Victoire se souciait peu de la reconnaissance de l'Autre. Au contraire sa timidité lui faisait chérir l'anonymat. En cuisinant, elle ne se souciait que de répondre à son exigence intérieure" (126).

While Condé writes from the perspective of the black bourgeoisie of Guadeloupe, all socio-economic levels of the island are represented within *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*. This is partially due to the fact that Victoire's cuisine crossed all socio-economic barriers, since Guadeloupians from all levels of society consumed and enjoyed her meals for decades. Victoire prepared feasts for white Creoles, members of the black bourgeoisie, mulattoes, servants, *les restavek*, and those in abject poverty like Désinor l'Haïtien in *Traversée de la mangrove*, referred to in Guadeloupe as *les maléré*. In the town of Le Moule, the local priest asked Victoire to cook for his

Porte Ouverte, which provided meals for the homeless and starving. Despite the lack of high quality produce, Victoire transformed the most meager raw materials into exquisite meals for the island's poorest inhabitants, who had never had the occasion to taste fine cuisine:

Le curé du Moule ne disposait que de 'racines', d'oreilles, de groins, de queues de cochon, de morue salé, parfois de tripes. Des fois, des commerçants charitables lui faisaient cadeau de marchandises à demi avariées. Cageots de choux-fleurs, de carottes ou de navets. Victoire métamorphosait tout. Cela tenait de la Transfiguration. Avec elle, les morceaux les 'moins viandés', les plus coriaces et le plus cartilagineux devenaient fondants, savoureux, sous la dent. (208)

On one occasion, Victoire cooked a feast for more than 200 of the town's *maléré*. The curé wrote in his diary on June 22, "Aujourd'hui Mme Victoire Quidal s'est surpassée. C'est L'Éternel lui-même qui s'est manifesté dans ses mains" (210). The curé's diary, much like the town newspaper, preserved and documented, through the written word, Victoire's culinary skills that had the power to reach and bring joy to individuals from all levels of society.

Maryse Condé often speaks of the artificiality of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Haiti, since the people and the languages of the Caribbean were transported to the islands through the systems of European colonization and slavery. However, the grandmother's cuisine is juxtaposed to the theme of artificiality, since all of the products and raw materials used in her recipes were derived locally from the land and the sea. Since Victoire never traveled beyond the French Antilles, all of her culinary creations were authentically Caribbean. The raw essence of all that the Caribbean archipelago had to offer came to life in the private space of her kitchen. Later, her masterpieces are resurrected by the words on the pages of Condé's published novel. It is thus through her traditional, authentic Guadeloupian cuisine that Victoire established her place in society as well as a personal connection with the island of Guadeloupe, its people, and diverse culture. Victoire's culinary performances gave her the opportunity to form meaningful relationships with others, since she expressed herself and her emotions through the practice of the culinary arts. This is due in part to the relationship between cuisine and society. Priscilla Ferguson describes this phenomenon: "Whether taken as product or practice, chef or consumer, or everyone and everything in between, cuisine acts as a vital agent of socialization."¹⁹ Furthermore, Victoire's ability to create and give life to culinary masterpieces counteracts her biological sterility. Despite

her ability to draw crowds and to nourish the people of Guadeloupe, the lifeless, stagnant relationship between Victoire and her daughter could not necessarily be cured through the magic of her fine cuisine.

While Victoire became sterile after giving birth to Jeanne, sterility also defined the relationship with her daughter, Jeanne. As Claire Marrone notes, “The enormous interest in the mother-daughter relationship in the postmodern period and the outpouring of texts on the subject reveal an endeavor on the part of women writers to explore their origins from their own perspective.”²⁰ In the narrative, Condé relates the personal stories of both the mother and the grandmother, while positioning herself as a social mediator between the two. As a result, *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* functions as a eulogy to both women as Condé strives to articulate and justify the nature of their troubled relationship. While Victoire never learned to read or write, Condé describes her mother, Jeanne, as a woman who was illiterate in the kitchen. Throughout her life, Jeanne categorically refused to participate in or share in her mother’s passion for cuisine. When Jeanne left the Walberg home to study at the prestigious Versailles school in Basse-Terre, Victoire responded to the pain of separation by working tirelessly in her kitchen. Thus, while the daughter refused food and cuisine, the mother consoled herself in the world of the culinary arts. Within literary space, Condé positions herself between Victoire and Jeanne as she bridges the culinary and the literary. Condé’s text thus cannibalizes the biographies of both the mother and the grandmother, as she recreates these narratives within the literary space of her novel.

In addition to refusing to learn to cook, Jeanne suffered from anorexia. When Jeanne returned from school to spend the summer at the Walberg’s change-of-air house in Vernou, her disdain for her mother and the Walbergs manifested through a refusal to consume food: “Jeanne lacéra le cœur de Victoire en refusant de goûter à son plat. Elle répéta qu’elle n’avait pas faim” (180). Condé further describes her mother’s eating disorder in the following manner:

Son état d’humeur se traduisait par un refus presque total de se nourrir qu’on appellerait peut-être aujourd’hui ‘anorexie’ ou quelque chose d’approchant. A table, elle repoussait ostensiblement son assiette après une ou deux bouchées et prétendait que les délicieuses odeurs d’épice: basilic, gingembre, safran qui s’échappaient de la cuisine lui donnait la nausée. (182)

Rather, Jeanne declared that the dishes prepared by her mother “lui

donnaient la nausée” (ibid.). Jeanne’s emaciated female body reflected her intense emotional suffering, while her refusal to eat symbolized her rejection of the Walberg family, their social class, and their manipulation of her illiterate mother: “Elle qui avait un bon appétit, se mit à manger comme un moineau. En un mois, elle perdit d’un coup dix kilos. Ainsi, elle entendait signifier que les nourritures terrestres n’étaient pas son affaire afin de punir sa mère” (164). The nausea experienced by Jeanne symbolized her disdain for the social inequalities that existed between the Walbergs and her mother.

While Jeanne’s eating disorder separated her emotionally from Victoire, her pregnancy with her first child brought her closer to her, and simultaneously ended her eating disorder:

Le plus extraordinaire, c’est que Jeanne redécouvrit l’appétit, repossédée de ces fringales qu’elle n’avait plus manifestées depuis l’âge de raison. Avec dévotion, Victoire y répondait, se sentant enfin vengée de tant d’années d’indifférence. Elle préparait amoureuxment des blancs de poulet, des escalopes de veau, des filets de poissons. Elle mijotait purée et migans. Elle s’ingéniait surtout dans les desserts, entremets, puddings, crèmes, flans, car les femmes enceintes ont besoin d’un surcroît de sucre qui nourrit le cerveau. (252)

Condé’s text suggests the social and psychological power of the feminine themes of pregnancy and childbirth. As Victoire strives to feed her daughter as well as her unborn grandchild, cuisine becomes a source of social unity between the two women. Jeanne’s pregnancy suggests the continuation of life, the importance of the shared family heritage, and the development of a new emotional bond between mother and daughter. In addition, this passage is reminiscent of Caldonia’s efforts to fill her granddaughter, Victoire, with the best raw materials of the island.

While she nurtured her daughter and first grandchild, Victoire’s health began to fail due to leukemia. Her declining health thus coincided with a refusal to practice her art. This sudden inability to work her culinary magic in the kitchen foreshadowed Victoire’s death. However, in the face of her own death, Victoire decided to prepare one last meal for those in her inner circle. Condé refers to her grandmother’s final culinary performance for Jeanne and the Walberg family as the Last Supper or the “Ultima Cena” (309). As she prepared this final feast, Victoire “voulait que ce repas demeure impérissable dans le souvenir à la fois des palais et des cœurs” (310). Ironically, Jeanne preserved the menu of this last supper within the autobiographical space of one of her journals. The meal shared by Anne-

Marie, Valérie-Anne, Maximilien, and Boniface Jr., was written down in French by Jeanne in her diary:

Tourte aux lambris et aux pisquettes de rivière
 Chaud-froid d'oursins
 Poularde caramélisée au genièvre
 Riz blanc
 Cochon découenné aux châtaignes pays
 Purée d'ignames
 Salade laitue
 Flan koko
 Sorbets varies (310)

Since Jeanne recorded the menu in her private journal, Condé could include her mother's diary and her grandmother's last supper within her literary text decades later. In this way, the art forms and self-expression of the (grand)daughter, mother, and grandmother merge and become intertwined as they share literary space. The grandmother's culinary recipe is thus passed from generation to generation. Priscilla Ferguson explains that "cuisine is neither food, nor recipes, nor yet cooks and consumers, but the ideal of a self inextricably bound up with pleasure given and received"²¹ (184). Through her religious beliefs, Victoire believed in the validity of the phrase "Mangez et buvez. Ceci est mon corps" (28). Through this last gesture of love, Victoire's art nourished and gave pleasure to those she loved the most.

It is through and around the grandmother's talent for cuisine that Condé represents and reconstructs Victoire's identity within literary space. Cuisine and writing, the mother and the grandmother, and the three-tiered society of Guadeloupe are at the heart of *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*. Although Victoire could not read or write a cookbook, she created a multitude of authentic Caribbean culinary masterpieces throughout her lifetime. Through her cuisine, Victoire contributed to the establishment of a culinary identity for the island of Guadeloupe and for the Caribbean archipelago. Symbolic of her genius, talent, and individuality, Victoire's cuisine secured her a place in Guadeloupian society. Through her granddaughter, her story and her recipes experienced a re-birth two generations later in the pages of a biographical novel bearing her name. Through the writing and publishing of the grandmother's biography, Condé brought Victoire Elodie Quidal's personal story from the forgotten

margins of the past to the literary arena of the twenty-first century. While Maryse Condé never had the occasion to sample her grandmother's exquisite cuisine, *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*, represents a literary and (auto)biographical victory.

Notes

- ¹ Newson and Strong-Leek, Introduction to *Winds of Change*, 6.
- ² Ferly, "The Mirror That We Don't Want," 58.
- ³ Ibid., 59.
- ⁴ Moudileno, "Maryse Condé and the Fight against Prejudice," 245.
- ⁵ Condé, *Traversée de la mangrove*, 198.
- ⁶ N'Zengou-Tayo. "Children in Haitian Popular Migration as Seen by Maryse Condé and Edwidge Danticat," 96.
- ⁷ Hewitt, *Autobiographical Tightropes*, 162.
- ⁸ Condé, preface to *French Caribbean Cuisine*, 9-10.
- ⁹ Ibid., 9.
- ¹⁰ Ferguson, *Accounting For Taste*, 15.
- ¹¹ Condé, preface, 9.
- ¹² Goldman. "I Yam What I Yam," 172.
- ¹³ Condé, *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*, dedication. Future citations to *Victoire* are to this edition and are cited in-text.
- ¹⁴ Boynton and Malin, *Encyclopedia of Women's Autobiography*, 101.
- ¹⁵ Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 10.
- ¹⁶ Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste*, 8.
- ¹⁷ Gelber, "Creation and Annihilation," 161.
- ¹⁸ Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste*, 20.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 8.
- ²⁰ Marrone, *Female Journeys*, 160.
- ²¹ Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste*, 184.

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MAGICAL REALISM

**DANS LE SILLAGE D'ALEJO CARPENTIER ET DE GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ :
LE RÉALISME MAGIQUE DANS *EAU DE CAFÉ* DE RAPHAËL CONFIAINT**

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Alejo Carpentier est l'écrivain qui utilisa pour la première fois le terme de réel merveilleux/real maravilloso. Selon Jason Wilson, à son retour de Paris, Alejo Carpentier aurait voulu se distancier de l'esthétique surréaliste qui avait perdu son aura en France et pour grouper les réminiscences de ce courant en Amérique latine, il l'aurait surnommé « el real maravilloso ».¹ Durant son séjour en France (1928-1939) Carpentier a fréquenté les poètes surréalistes et a subi leur influence. Néanmoins, quand il regagne Cuba il va se détacher de ce courant. « Le Cubisme ne commence à être compris en Amérique que quand il a terminé son trajet en Europe ; le surréalisme est imité en Amérique quand à sa source première, elle a entamé le processus de sa désintégration ».² Le voyage qu'il va réaliser en Haïti en 1943 va provoquer chez Carpentier la naissance de la notion du réel merveilleux. A Haïti, il découvre les ruines du palais Sans-Souci qui appartenait au roi Henri Christophe et la maison de Pauline Bonaparte auxquelles il fera référence dans l'avant-propos de son premier grand roman *El Reino de este mundo*. Il a trouvé le merveilleux à l'état pur à Haïti. Comparés « au sortilège des terres d'Haïti »³ le merveilleux généré par les procédés artificiels des poètes surréalistes devient dérisoire. « L'histoire de l'Amérique n'est autre qu'une chronique du réel merveilleux »⁴ affirme Carpentier après son voyage à Haïti. La fusion du passé surréaliste de Carpentier et de sa découverte d'Haïti va donner naissance au réel merveilleux. La métamorphose finale de Mackandal dans *El Reino de este mundo* est une première manifestation de ce merveilleux. « Le merveilleux réel que je défends, on le rencontre dans son état brut, latent et omniprésent dans toute l'Amérique latine ».⁵ La voie ouverte par Alejo Carpentier est suivie par García Márquez qui consacre l'oxymoron « réalisme magique » et en fait un courant littéraire qui domine l'Amérique latine et qui dépassera les frontières de ce continent.

Raphaël Confiant est à la fois proche et loin de ces prédécesseurs illustres ; proche peut-être du point de vue de son style comme nous allons

le voir, mais beaucoup plus jeune qu'eux puisqu'il est né en Martinique en 1951. Raphaël Confiant s'engage très tôt dans la voie de la créolité. Avant de commencer à écrire en français il publie des journaux et également des romans en créole (*Antilla, Karibel*). Dans *Eau de Café*, roman publié en 1991 qui a raté de près le Prix Goncourt mais qui a reçu le Prix Novembre, Confiant raconte l'histoire d'un village martiniquais : Grand-Anse. A la suite d'une malédiction, le village a tourné le dos à la mer qui est devenue « béhaigne », c'est-à-dire stérile en créole. Antilia, jeune fille mystérieuse qui est venue de la mer et qui est retournée à la mer après avoir vécu à Grand-Anse auprès d'Eau de Café, garde le secret de son identité jusqu'à la fin du roman qui est composé de 7 cercles en guise de parties. Ces cercles sont divisés en plusieurs chapitres dont certains portent des titres et d'autres pas. Chaque cercle, à l'exception des deux derniers, se termine par une lettre d'Antilia adressée à « Très cher ». La première lettre date du 12 janvier 1937, la dernière du 12 janvier 1977. La rédaction du roman se termine en 1989. Les introductions aux cercles et les lettres d'Antilia relatent les changements subis par les Martiniquais lors des dernières décades. Les deux termes sont possibles.

La narration est faite par un petit garçon, le filleul d'Eau de Café qui préfère utiliser le « nous » qui englobe tout le village à un « je » qui serait déplacé dans cette histoire collective où les habitants du village sont en quelque sorte tous protagonistes. Le but de ce présent travail est d'analyser les éléments de réalisme magique rencontrés dans *Eau de Café*.

UN UNIVERS À LA LISIÈRE DE DEUX CIVILISATIONS

Le roman commence avec la mort d'Antilia, la jeune fille mystérieuse venue de la mer. Au milieu de sa toilette mortuaire, elle se lève et prend soin de ses cheveux. Plus tard, quand éclate un orage, presque un cyclone et, quand la « négraille » pille le magasin d'Eau de Café, Antilia commence à grandir puis elle se transforme en un grand oiseau jaune-abricot et s'envole au milieu de la tourmente. Roger Caillois définit le réalisme magique comme « une déchirure, une irruption insolite... dans le monde réel ». ⁶ Le roman débute donc avec cette résurrection et cette métamorphose doublées d'une tempête apocalyptique qui annoncerait la fin du monde. Eau de Café, l'héroïne éponyme du roman, n'est nullement surprise par le retour à vie d'Antilia, elle la supplie d'épargner les nègres comme si Antilia était une créature surnaturelle. D'ailleurs elle la supplie d'épargner les nègres comme si Antilia était une créature surnaturelle. Selon Katherine Roussos, le réalisme magique « se situe entre deux mondes, entre deux civilisations ». ⁷ Le narrateur ne doute pas de la réalité de l'élément surnaturel. « Les écrivains antillais appartiennent à une culture où croyances au surnaturel

sont courantes ».⁸

Pendant l'épisode de la mort de la mère de Julien Thémistocle, Mère Hermancia, les maîtres de la parole chantent l'histoire de la vieille femme et l'auditoire écoute « stupéfait par la belleté du dire ».⁹ La mère Hermancia fait quérir la Mort et se prépare devant elle pour l'enterrement. La Mort s'attendrit et lui propose de la laisser en vie encore un peu.

Julien Thémistocle, le nègre marron éveille l'admiration des travailleurs quand il déclare, « Je suis le maître des savanes, celui qui possède les trois dons : invisibilité, ubiquité et invincibilité » (219). Il raconte comment il a lutté contre les bêtes longues, c'est-à-dire les serpents et comment ces derniers l'ont conduit à leur dieu mythique Bothrops. Ce récit qui est résolument crédible pour le nègre ou l'indien ne produit pas le même effet chez Castignac le Blanc-pays « qui était partagé entre la perplexité et le fou rire » (225). Pourtant pour les autres le mythe fait partie de la réalité.

La croyance à la Madone est très vive et puissante parmi les Grand-Ansois. Ils sont persuadés que la présence de la Madone dans leur village va donner lieu à des miracles. « Féquesnoy vit un paralytique se lever de son fauteuil, un vieux-corps poitrinaire cesser de cracher du sang, une femme avec un éléphantiasis aux deux pieds retrouver son galbe d'antan, un amoureux trahi surmonter son désespoir, ainsi que tout un lot de miracles plus stupéfiants les uns que les autres » (171). La religion chrétienne est également perçue d'une façon mythique et magique par les martiniquais. De même le Général de Gaulle dont la visite à la capitale de l'île provoque autant d'enthousiasme que la Madone. Les habitants de Grand-Anse se rendent à la capitale Fort-de-France. Julien Thémistocle en sa qualité d'ancien combattant de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale a le grand honneur de serrer la main du général. Puis, avec cette main qu'il prend soin d'envelopper dans un morceau de tissu, il va réussir là où la Madone a échoué. Il va parvenir à diminuer la folie de Bogino, le fils de la boulangère Man Léonce, et « à soigner la bandaison de maître Féquesnoy » (306).

Le Général de Gaulle, la Madone du Retour et le dieu serpent Bothrops se rejoignent dans l'imaginaire des Grand-Ansois. Selon Brenda Cooper, « Le réalisme magique se nourrit de la tradition, du processus de changement, des frontières et de l'ambiguïté ».¹⁰ Le mythe, la religion et les grands personnages d'En France forment le monde sacré des Grand-Ansois.

DÉSTABILISATION DE LA NARRATION

Dans le roman, Grand-Anse est un microcosme qui représente la totalité de la Martinique. Sa relation avec la capitale, l'En Ville est celle de tous les autres villages martiniquais. Grand-Anse est entouré de mornes et tout au nord, on fait référence à la Montagne Pelée. A cause de la malédiction de la mer, toutes les façades des maisons au bord de la mer ont leurs volets cloués. Les rues principales, c'est-à-dire la Rue-Devant et la Rue-Derrière, regroupent les boutiques et les bars du village. Sur la place de l'église il y a une statue. La plage et le promontoire nommé la Crabière sont en général déserts. La place municipale accueille les tables des joueurs de dès et les marchands. L'action se déplace une fois à l'En Ville, à l'occasion de la visite du Général de Gaulle. Aller à l'En Ville relève de la grande aventure car les deux taxis-pays, « le Golem » et « le Bourreau du Nord », se font une course endiablée sur les routes coloniales.

Brenda Cooper remarque que « les écrivains réalistes magiques refusent les conventions du réalisme classique et se rapprochent du post-modernisme ». ¹¹ Dans *Eau de Café* le temps subit des va-et-vient qui déconcertent le lecteur. Le roman s'ouvre comme nous l'avons vu, sur la mort d'Antilia. Puis tout au long des deux premiers cercles Antilia vit à Grand-Anse. Au troisième cercle le narrateur retourne à Grand-Anse après 18 ans d'absence dans le but de découvrir la vérité sur Antilia. Le mystère d'Antilia qui est le thème principal du septième et dernier cercle reste irrésolu. A la fin du roman on ne sait ni qui elle est véritablement, ni ce qu'elle est vraiment devenue. Eau de Café dit à son filleul qu'elle est partie d'abord à l'En Ville puis à l'En France. Lors de la visite du Général de Gaulle on la voit à Fort-de-France. Elle pourrait également être la fille d'Eau de Café, une petite fille qu'on lui aurait enlevée dès sa naissance. « Elle (Antilia) avait vécu cent sept ans seule dans un renflement de la plage sans que personne s'en aperçoive. Elle s'était nourrie d'eau salée, d'œufs d'oiseaux-touaou, de raisins de mer et de crabes-zagaya » (355).

Certains événements dans le roman ont plusieurs versions. La rumeur populaire qui s'appelle « Radio-bois-patate » intervient pour corriger le déroulement de l'histoire. « Ici se produisit une manière d'événements dont Radio-bois-patate a conservé maintes facettes, l'une d'entre elles se révélant au descendant du temps plus crédible que les autres » (76). Parfois la version proposée entre dans le domaine du réalisme magique comme la mort d'Émilien Bérard qui ne serait pas dû à la pendaison mais « à une créature féerique qui lui a happé le cœur » (88). Oui, il est possible de faire cette transformation. De même que les deux versions de la rencontre de Man Doris avec Julien Thémistocle. Dans l'une, le corps de Man Doris « s'alluma d'une vive lueur intérieure qui la secoua comme la tête d'un arbre pendant un cyclone et elle partit à la venvole, laissant

Thémistocle médusé » (202). Dans l'autre, Julien Thémistocle force Man Doris à accepter ses faveurs qui sont extraordinaires grâce « à son verge d'une longueur impressionnante, peut-être deux mètres, voire plus, qu'il enroulait avec une infinie précaution autour de sa taille » (203).

Parmi les particularités du réalisme magique Wendy Faris cite la perspective Junguïen face à la perspective Freudienne : « Le magique pourrait être attribué à un sens mystérieux de relation collective plutôt qu'à des souvenirs individuels, à des rêves ou à des visions ». ¹² Radio-bois-patate, qui représente la mémoire populaire, véhicule l'esprit ambiant à Grand-Anse.

LE POSTCOLONIALISME

La société de Grand-Anse est en pleine transformation. Les personnes âgées se souviennent encore des histoires d'esclavage racontées par leurs grands-parents. Autrefois il y avait les plantations et la canne à sucre. Petit à petit, après l'abolition de l'esclavage la vie a changé. De nouveaux migrants sont venus s'ajouter à la population locale. Dans la période contemporaine les habitants de Grand-Anse ne travaillent plus dans les plantations. Ils sont devenus des citoyens. Certains sont des « djobeurs » et vont travailler à l'En Ville. La Martinique fait partie de la France mais l'En France est très loin géographiquement et psychologiquement des habitants de Grand-Anse qui vivent en quelque sorte un processus postcolonial. Des critiques littéraires comme Frederik Jameson et Perry Anderson relient le réalisme magique au développement du capitalisme. Jameson suggère que « le réalisme magique dépend d'une situation qui trahit la superposition de l'existence du précapitalisme avec le capitalisme naissant ». ¹³ Grand-Anse qui tend à rester à l'écart des activités industrielles subit tout de même l'influence du développement capitaliste de la Martinique. La population ne regrette pas l'antan de l'esclavage sans pour autant se sentir très à l'aise dans ce nouveau système.

Les lettres d'Antilia qui mettent fin à chaque cercle expriment le malaise de la collectivité. Chaque lettre commence avec un syntagme dont le sens est négatif : « Ils nous ont cernés » (64), « Ils nous ont dessouchés » (121), « Ils nous ont calottés » (184), « Ils nous ont ligotés » (241), « Ils nous ont démunis de ce que nous avons de plus précieux » (285).

La chose la plus précieuse citée par Antilia c'est la langue créole. Raphaël Confiant a écrit ses premiers romans en créole. Dans *Eau de Café* certains dialogues se font en créole et sont répétés en français. En dehors de la langue créole le narrateur utilise des expressions qui font partie du français des Martiniquais. Les Grand-Ansois en veulent au système

français d'avoir scolarisé leurs enfants et de leur avoir fait mépriser leur propre « parlure ».

La langue créole est le dénominateur commun de toute la population de l'île dont la multiethnicité est détaillée par le narrateur sur un ton ironique : Dieu a créé différentes races, entre autres les noirs :

Bon-bon-bon, parfois il m'arrive de penser qu'il aurait pu bailler à tout un chacun les mêmes cheveux, le même nez, le même teint et on n'aurait pas à se manger, les uns les autres. Le Blanc n'aurait pas pu faire son intéressant sur le nègre. Le mulâtre ne regarderait pas de haut l'Indien. Le Syrien ne serait pas considéré par tous comme une race de sacrés malpropres. Non ! Et encore ici à Grand-Anse, nous avons la chance de ne pas avoir le Chinois mais si vous connaissiez En Ville vous les verriez amasser sou après sou dans leurs boutiques sur le dos des couillons de nègres... (208)

Dans cette société pluriethnique le racisme subsiste. Les privilèges du Blanc-pays ne sont pas contestés : « De plus, la coucoune blanche est réservée aux Blancs depuis que le monde est monde et non pas à la couleur » (98). Cette affirmation qui relève du domaine sexuel le montre d'une façon cocasse. Les mulâtres méprisent les nègres. Maître Féquesnoy réserve ses filles mulâtres pour les Blancs-France. Thimoléon n'a aucune chance : « Le peigne doit pouvoir traverser sans accroc leurs cheveux et ce n'est pas avec un nègre comme toi que j'aurai satisfaction » (210). Dans le microcosme qu'est Grand-Anse, le Syrien, mahométan de religion, qui possède une boutique de vêtements sur la Rue-Devant et René Couli, l'Indien, boucher de profession, sont des figures importantes bien que René Couli soit la risée de tous les enfants. Pourtant, à leur mort, on les enterre dans le coin maudit du cimetière.

Les habitants de Grand-Anse ont conscience de leur créolité. Ils ne voient plus l'Afrique comme le pays mythique de leur origine. Raphaël Confiant, Patrick Chamoiseau et Jean Bernabé, dans leur étude intitulée *Éloge de la créolité*, se sont éloignés des idées d'Aimé Césaire et ils ont assumé leur identité d'antillais et de créole. Le nègre marron de Grand-Anse, Julien Thémistocle reproche à ses concitoyens de négliger l'Afrique :

(...) vous tournez le dos à la Guinée ! Pas un qui veuille y retourner, compères ! Moi, je n'attends que la mort, tuez-moi et vous verrez que mon cadavre ne sera plus dans ma tombe le lendemain matin. J'ai ma place en Guinée.

Le monde se gaussait de lui maintenant qu'il ne faisait plus

peur. Nous n'avions que faire de cette Guinée dont il nous bassinait les oreilles, de ce pays de nègres sauvages et de cannibales et il n'y avait que ce liseur de livres d'Émilien Bérard pour être d'accord avec lui. (101)

SORCELLERIE ET FÉMINISME

Katherine Roussos dans son étude intitulée « Décoloniser l'imaginaire » souligne la présence d'une approche féministe dans le réalisme magique de Maryse Condé, Marie NDiaye et Sylvie Germain. Les femmes qui vivent dans les marges apparaissent dans les œuvres de ces écrivaines réalistes magiques.

Dans *Eau de Café*, parmi les personnages féminins il y a plusieurs « quimboiseuses » ou « fianceuses du diable ». Eau de Café, femme indépendante qui vient s'établir à Grand-Anse malgré le mauvais accueil des habitants, va gagner leur respect parce qu'elle est l'intermédiaire de l'invisible et qu'elle sait lire demain. Elle fait des séances d'hypnose pour guérir les gens. Mais elle se veut différente des autres.

Car marraine était séancière à ses heures et cela exclusivement pour les Blancs créoles parce que ronchonait-elle, les nègres n'ont qu'à aller consulter les quimboiseurs et autres manieurs de philtres maléfiques. (...) La séancière fait des séances, ce qui revient à parler, parler, parler et sa parole est révélation. Ou parfois elle lit dans vos rêves, ou encore elle endort une dormeuse et vous traduit son délire en termes de tous les jours. (40-41)

Eau de Café endort Antilia pour savoir qui a provoqué cet effroi déstabilisant chez la grande fille du Béké. Eau de Café est en somme une quimboiseuse qui s'est établie en ville. La mère adoptive d'Eau de Café était une vraie quimboiseuse, une fiancée du diable « qui connaît les herbes moudongues qu'il faut laisser macérer trois nuits de pleine lune d'affilée avant d'en boire le thé. Après on sent ses boyaux qui se déchirent, on sent son cœur qui chavire et déchavire » (50). Autrefois les négresses qui ne voulaient pas faire d'enfants pour donner un esclave de plus au maître avaient recours aux services de ces sorcières qui par leur pratique de la médecine naturelle et homéopathique et par leur prise de position contre l'autorité représentaient le matriarcat.

Quand Eau de Café est violée par le vieux commandeur mulâtre dans son enfance, Man Doris apporte la fillette à Man Nanette, sa grand-mère. Man Nanette est une quimboiseuse de grand renom. Man Doris elle-

même ne peut pas guérir Eau de Café de la maudition. Man Nanette se couche sur la terre « et une longue plainte déchirante jaillit de sa poitrine. La terre se mit à trembler sous nos pieds, ce qui sembla épouvanter Man Doris » (283). Finalement Man Nanette a parlé avec la mère morte d'Eau de Café et le lendemain elle va préparer une cérémonie pour guérir l'enfant.

Le pouvoir des femmes noires vient de la magie mais aussi de la vie dure qu'elles mènent. Même la plus vulgaire d'entre elles est estimable. Dans un long et beau passage Thimoléon explique au narrateur la vie difficile des jeunes créoles qui survivent « à la déveine ancestrale » (127). Elles ne connaissent pas le bonheur mais « l'heureuseté » (128).

Thimoléon a souligné le courage et la volonté de la négresse ; Julien Thémistocle, quant à lui, va chanter sa beauté : « (...) car la belleté de la négresse n'est pas dans les cheveux en fil de soie, dans le nez pincé et les lèvres en lame de couteau. Décrassez votre tête de toutes ces couillonnades ! La belleté de la négresse ne peut être décrite avec les mots des Blancs » (333).

L'image des femmes dans *Eau de Café* est mitigée. Présentes dans la magie, elles sont louées par certaines voix masculines mais elles n'échappent pas pour autant aux abus des hommes dans un système patriarcal, hérité des temps de l'esclavage. Elles sont toujours entourées d'une marmaille qui leur complique la vie. Il n'est pas clair si le plaisir sexuel exalté à travers les paroles d'Eau de Café leur est bénéfique : « Négresse, ma bonne amie, l'éternité c'est quand tu sens monter dans ta matrice une sorte d'éraflure qui te fend en deux jusqu'au ras du cou et que tu t'agrippes au bras de l'homme en demandant pardon au Bon Dieu d'empiéter si fort sur son territoire » (334).

LA SEXUALITÉ, L'HYPERBOLE, LE CARNAVALESQUE

Selon Wendy Faris, « un esprit carnavalesque est commun aux romans réalistes magiques ». ¹⁴ Brenda Cooper considère le réalisme magique comme une forme de postmodernisme : « La réunion du magique, de l'improbable et du blasphématoire a conduit aux explorations du carnavalesque de Bakhtine ». ¹⁵

La sexualité est omniprésente dans le roman *Eau de Café*. Dans la plupart de ses occurrences elle est violente, cocasse, insolite, hyperbolique et, par conséquent, magique et parfois blasphématoire.

Forcer la petite fille, la jeune fille, est monnaie courante dans l'univers de Grand-Anse. On ne semble pas faire cas de cet acte de violence. Dans l'antan, la mère d'Eau de Café, Franciane, la négresse-aux-grandes-manières, fut violée par Julien Thémistocle au milieu des champs, ce qui

a précipité la naissance d'Eau de Café. Franciane est morte après son accouchement donc on peut penser que ce viol a provoqué sa mort.

Eau de Café est violée par le grand-père Thémistocle dans son jeune âge. Il s'accouple avec l'enfant et demeure dans cette position des heures, peut-être des jours entiers. Quelques années après Eau de Café se fait « déchirer » par le vieux commandeur mulâtre de l'habitation Beauchamp. Cet homme attire dans son jardin les petites filles qui sont sur le point de devenir femmes. « Il ne les goûte ni avant ni après, juste au moment où elles vont éclore en femelles » (279). Le maître de l'habitation ne réagit guère : « Il me les ouvre ces mamzelles (...) je n'aime pas l'odeur de moule des négresses nubiles » (279). Le vieux commandeur meurt pendant qu'il jouit et reste enfoncé dans le corps de la fillette.

Un autre violeur qui apprécie les jeunes filles nubiles fait des ravages à Grand-Anse. C'est le mystérieux incube que personne ne parvient à arrêter.

L'incube opérait entre deux et quatre heures du matin, choisissant de préférence les jeunes filles dans la fleur de leur virginité, sur les corps desquelles il laissait grafignages, morsures, bave et traces de sang. Une messe d'action de grâces ne suffit pas à en venir à bout et le Code pénal français ne prévoyant pas de sanction à l'égard de tels actes, la population dut se rabattre sur les simagrées du quimbois pour se protéger. (90-91)

Le Syrien trouve une solution : si toutes les dames de Grand-Anse mettent des culottes noires elles seront préservées de l'incube. Le système légal français se révèle donc incompatible face aux mythes créoles.

La sexualité n'est pas toujours imposée aux femmes. Man Doris et Eau de Café se partagent à des périodes différentes avec délice les faveurs de Julien Thémistocle. Antilia par contre refuse sa cour insistante et bruyante. Elle dit ne vouloir que l'amour France qu'on voit dans les films. Pourtant la même Antilia s'ébat furieusement et sauvagement avec le garçon livreur dans un dépôt étroit et mal aéré où les amoureux sont épiés par le narrateur enfant.

La sexualité peut être également vécue en commun par toute la population et d'une manière fort cocasse : un jour Antilia « se mit à courir une Calenda d'une obscénité jamais vue sur la place du bourg » (69). J'ai ajouté cette note. Autrement dit, elle commence à faire des gestes extrêmement érotiques autour d'un être imaginaire. Dans ses divagations sexuelles elle présage l'arrivée à Grand-Anse de la Madone du Grand Retour. En entendant le nom de la Madone, l'abbé qui est nouveau au

village vient voir ce qui se passe et il est subjugué par la belleté et la nudité de la négresse : « Donc la verge de Paul Germain le Gloarnec, natif de Bretagne, entreprit d'enfler-enfler-enfler, tant et tellement qu'elle lui fit une bosse monstrueuse sur le devant de sa soutane » (71). Tant et si bien que le pauvre abbé meurt d'une attaque cardiaque ! Après la veillée mortuaire qui se déroule dans une grande hilarité on se demande comment on va mettre le bon abbé en bière car sa protubérance n'a pas diminué. Finalement la déclaration de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale distrait les esprits et entre-temps le corps de l'abbé retrouve « la posture normale de tout honnête cadavre » (78).

La scène finale du roman qui s'avère être un cauchemar du narrateur est un tableau apocalyptique où Fort-de-France est envahi par la mer à l'image de la ville de Saint-Pierre qui a été ensevelie par les laves de la montagne Pelée. Mais même cette vision de fin de monde tourne au carnavalesque. Une femme à l'angle des rues Victor Hugo et République crie d'un ton syncopé « Koké mwen, doudou, woy Annou, koké mwen (Baise- moi, ô mon chéri ! Allons, baise-moi !) » (374). Au pied de la statue de l'Impératrice Joséphine, Bec-en-Or se masturbe en hurlant : « Crevez tous, bandes de couillons ! » (375).

En conclusion, roman à maintes facettes *Eau de Café* est une œuvre qui comporte des traits évidents de réalisme magique. C'est le réalisme magique que Mikics attribue à Alejo Carpentier : « Une symbiose de culture folklorique et citadine avec l'apport d'un mélange d'éléments africains, européens, asiatiques et amérindiens ». ¹⁶ Dans un microcosme qui représente le monde créole de la Martinique, cette histoire collective de Grand-Anse est contée sous la menace de la mer. Allégories du passé colonial ou de la transformation postcoloniale de l'île, la mer et Antilia, au nom évocateur, sont autant d'aspects insolites de ce roman.

Notes

¹ Wilson, "Alejo Carpentier's Re-invention of America Latina as Real & Marvelous," 78.

² Carpentier, *Tientos y Diferencias* in *Obras Completas* 13, 30.

³ Carpentier, *El Reino de este mundo* in *Obras Completas* 2, 13.

⁴ Carpentier, *El Reino de este mundo*, 18.

⁵ Carpentier, "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," 104.

⁶ Callois, *Anthologie du fantastique* vol I, 8.

- ⁷ Roussos, *Décoloniser l'imaginaire*, 36.
- ⁸ Ibid., 35.
- ⁹ Confiand, *Eau de Café*, 198. Les citations successives d'*Eau de Café* seront cités dans ce texte.
- ¹⁰ Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction*, 13.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 23.
- ¹² Faris, "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism & Postmodern Fiction," 183.
- ¹³ Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction*, 16.
- ¹⁴ Faris, "Scheherazade's Children," 184.
- ¹⁵ Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction*, 23.
- ¹⁶ Mikics, "Derek Walcott and Alejo Carpentier," 374.

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A HEART OF KINDNESS: NALO HOPKINSON'S *BROWN GIRL IN THE RING*

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Science fiction is a rough terrain. Writers, critics, and readers fiercely defend the genre, patrolling its boundaries and excluding texts they find unsuitable for the moniker “science fiction.” Nalo Hopkinson’s debut novel, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), is generously celebrated for the Caribbean background and magic realism intertwined in the story, but its scientific references are often treated as less central to the text. In my opinion, such an approach overlooks Hopkinson’s flair in mastering science fiction literary conventions. Furthermore, this approach belittles the role minorities can play in contributing to the genre. Before fully advancing this thread of my argument, I will briefly focus on the figure of Legba, or Legbara in the novel, and the linguistic strategy Hopkinson uses to set her narrative in a Caribbean context, before analyzing in what way religion and traditional knowledge handed down from Haitian and Caribbean culture contributes to the “novelty” that is constitutive of science fiction. This article intends to pinpoint the reasons why *Brown Girl in the Ring* deserves a place inside the speculative fiction territory, and to show how, by deploying the very conventions of genre, Hopkinson casts the Caribbean minority as the predestinated savior of a near-future Canada in disarray, and casts Caribbean religious practices as both generating and regenerating a multi-layered global identity.

DIVINE LINK MAKER

Papa Legba come and open the gate
Papa Legba to the city of camps
Now we’re your children,
come and ride your horse
In the night, in the night,
come and ride your horse.¹

In 1986, Papa Legba found his way into pop culture in at least two occasions. David Byrne evoked him in a song written for the soundtrack of

his movie, *True Stories*, and William Gibson gave him a role in *Count Zero*, the second volume of his Sprawl Trilogy. The entry “Legba” in the *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora* reads “[o]ften referred as ‘keeper of the gates’ and ‘keeper of the crossroads,’ Legba is the Lwa (force over deity/divinity) that sustains communication among all of the Lwas and between the Lwa and devotees in the Haitian and African Diasporan Vodoun tradition.”² As a guardian of the crossroads and a facilitator of communication between the spiritual and the material, Papa Legba is appealing to artists, like Byrne and Gibson, whom have been experimenting with the interaction of different cultures, media, and technologies. In the 1980s, the fusion of electronic sounds with ethnic rhythms in music as well as the rise of cyberpunk, with its mixture of high-tech achievements and dystopian societies, offered an avant-garde touch in outlining the features of the globalization process, by challenging the fixity of traditional identities in favor of the potential of cultural cross-fertilization. No wonder Gibson affirmed in an interview that “[t]he only native culture [he] ever had was science fiction and rock ‘n’ roll.”³ In the same 2007 interview, Gibson was questioned as to how he “first came upon voodoo [sic], and its Afro-Cuban relative, Santeria,” which also has a crucial role in his novel *Spook Country* (2007).⁴ He explained that as a twelve-year-old boy reading a book about Vodou in New Orleans, he was impressed by how much the ritual symbols for the different gods “resembled the circuit diagrams.” As a result, he began “to wonder what would happen if you wired those circuits,” and so a futuristically syncretic Papa Legba, symbolized by the filigreed pattern of an embryonic microchip, became a character in *Count Zero*.

Twelve years later, in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Legbara appears as the Eshu of the main character, Ti-Jeanne. He makes his appearance in chapter five, when the protagonist’s grandmother, Gros-Jeanne, performs a rite according to the traditional dictates. In a basket, she has collected a set of objects to please Legbara: a flask of rum and a margarine tub filled with cornmeal, homemade candies, a pack of matches, and a cigar. She has chosen her sharpest knife to carry out the sacrifice of a hen. Given her ambivalent feelings toward her Caribbean heritage, Ti-Jeanne is reluctant to attend “a complete ritual.”⁵ At the beginning of the ceremony, Gros-Jeanne fetches “a small, clumsily moulded cement head” with “cowrie shells for eyes and mouth.” She puts it at the foot of the *potomitan* and then, using the cornmeal in her basket, she trickles it “in intricate designs around the center pole.” She continues the ceremony by blowing a sip of rum out of her mouth “spraying the effigy she had put at the foot of the pole” and “laid the cigar and the bowl of candies in front of the effigy.” After invoking Eshu and asking him “to open the doors” and to “let down

the gates” so as to allow “the spirits [to] come and talk” to them, she starts playing the drums (*BGR* 89). Ti-Jeanne watches, absorbing the procedure in spite of her initial unwillingness.

The meticulous description of the religious rite works in the book as a template. Even readers who are unfamiliar with Vodou learn about the sequence of actions and the symbolic value of specific objects. Teaching a skeptical Ti-Jeanne, Gros-Jeanne explains what happens during a rite, and prepares her granddaughter to bear the future fights, inscribed in her destiny, against Rudy—who is Gros-Jeanne’s former husband and, at the spiritual level, her evil counterpart. In the end, Ti-Jeanne surrenders, “Yes, Mami. I sorry, Mamy. I ready to learn from you now” (*BGR* 126). Thus, Gros-Jeanne is pleased to pass on her knowledge to her grandchild:

The African powers, child. The spirits. The loa. The orishas. The oldest ancestors. You will hear people from Haiti and Cuba and Brazil and so call them different names. You will even hear some names I ain’t tell you, but we all mean the same thing. Them is the ones who does carry we prayers to God Father, for he too busy to listen to every single one of we on earth talking at he all the time. Each of we have a special one who is we father or mother, and no matter what we call it, whether Shango or Santeria or Vodoun or what, we all doing the same thing. Serving the spirits. (Ibid)

Gros-Jeanne’s words stress the tight link among peoples of the African Diaspora, and also the connection between Vodou deities and Catholic saints in their role of intermediaries with God, as she acknowledges at the start of her rite when she bows down “low to the chapel’s images of Saint Francis and Saint Peter,” the latter being one of the figures which portrays Legbara (*BGR* 90). Much like the “Legba” entry in the *Encyclopedia* edited by Davies, which explains that “[w]ith the forced merging of enslaved Fon, Nago, Bakongo, and other African cultural groupings in what is now contemporary Haiti, these African traditions have survived collectively as the contemporary Vodoun tradition of Haiti and the African Diaspora,” Gros-Jeanne’s words have a didactical quality that makes the unprepared reader confident, and reassures Ti-Jeanne of her own spiritual power.⁶ She is now conscious that Legbara is her spirit father. However, religion is not the only frame of reference in the novel.

WHAT GENRE IS *BROWN GIRL*?

In an interview with TVOntario, Hopkinson described her relationship to science and science fiction with a pinch of humor: "I'm a science fiction writer who failed science, except biology and cooking class." Although, she added that her scientist friends to whom she asks for feedback on her story ideas are generally astounded by how often she comes up with "ideas that are scientifically plausible."⁷ Darko Suvin has formulated a general principle that identified science fiction as a genre dominated by a "fictional 'novum' (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic."⁸ With sophisticated clarity, Suvin bypassed the ongoing debate on content, choosing to tackle a narrative device that becomes the nucleus from which the plot stems. Although it may not seem obvious at first sight, Hopkinson's quest for a "scientifically plausible" idea in her first novel fulfills Suvin's classic concept of fictional novum.

Brown Girl in the Ring recounts the illicit harvest of a donor heart. The novel opens with Douglas Baines asking for "a viable human heart, fast." Rudy, his interlocutor, curses in surprise, "Bloodfire! Is what you a-say?" (*BGR* 1). It soon becomes clear that Baines wants Rudy to find a human organ for Uttley, the Canadian premier, who urgently needs a transplant but considers the use of "porcine organs" to be "immoral" (*BGR* 3). Hopkinson gives a scant description of the two men, but their manner of speech conveys all of the information we need about their personalities. Their voices are charged with social and cultural elements. Baines's Standard English reveals him to be a government official, ready to lie in the name of national interest. Rudy reads easily through his words. "*He talking all official. The way he uses all them ten-dollar words, this one go be big,*" he thinks while listening to Baines, anticipating his predatory disposition and incarnating his voice in a colored body without naming it as such (*BGR* 2). Hopkinson has often expressed her fascination with language. As she explained in an interview, what interests her is that language has been used by the Caribbean community "as a tool of resistance and politicization." She adds, "[A] lot of Caribbean identity is bound up in language."⁹ When her novel was published in 1998, science fiction readers were certainly not used to coming across characters that speak like Rudy. In her writings, hybrid languages and sociolects, as she highlighted in the same interview, aim at reproducing the complexity of urban life by including a variety of speech patterns, also to challenge the commonplace notion that "'good' writing is with a few exceptions written in 'clear' English" (*ST* 601).

Although African-American writers of science fiction like Samuel Delany and Octavia Butler were already established at the time of her

debut, Hopkinson's ability to give her characters an African-Caribbean background by means of language was quite unique to the genre. As Hopkinson herself put it during another TV interview, "Science fiction is still predominantly a white community... It's a community that prides itself for being unracist... I think to them "unracist" means ignoring race... I kind of feel that if you don't see race you can't see racism either..." Still, as she remarks with regard to her first novel, "people responded primarily to the language" by appreciating the authenticity of her voice.¹⁰

Nonetheless, Hopkinson's novel is rich with references to the Caribbean tradition well beyond the use of vernacular. The title evokes a Jamaican children's song (as do most of the epigraphs), while the conventional folk-tale ending "wire bend, story end!" concludes the novel.¹¹ Similarly, the opening epigraph (*Give the Devil a child for dinner, One, two, three little children!*) from Derek Walcott's play *Ti Jean and His Brothers*, requires some attention for its fruitful blend of Caribbean literature, re-interpretation of the canon, and the personal memories of the author. As Hopkinson explained, her father—poet and actor Slade Hopkinson—worked with Walcott at the Trinidad Theater Workshop (*ST* 589, 598). As a child, Nalo spent time at Walcott's house and she often attended rehearsals and performances of his theater troupe. She remembered realizing that *Brown Girl in the Ring* "was a novel about three generations of women battling an evil in their lives, and [she] thought of the parallels with *Ti Jean and His Brothers*," so, with his permission, she resolved to name the three women in her novel Ti-Jeanne, Mi-Jeanne, and Gros-Jeanne "to acknowledge that connection to Derek's work" (*ST* 598).

But, as I said, this is the story about the illicit harvest of a heart. Having concluded a profitable deal with the premier's assistant about providing a compatible organ for Ms. Uttley before election day, Rudy summons Tony, the drug-addicted father of Ti-Jeanne's child, and orders him to find a "viable" heart for the transplant. An appalled Tony discovers that only Gros-Jeanne has a compatible heart and under the pressure of Rudy's chilling threats commits the murder. While the Canadian premier is lying on the operating table, the conflict between Rudy and Ti-Jeanne begins inside the CN Tower, downtown Toronto. The Jab-Jab in a dream-like setting tells her what to do, "*Rudy is Bull Bucker, so you have to be Duppy Conqueror. You must use cunning. Cunning and instinct, that's the trick, my doux-doux darling*" (*BGR* 192). Ti-Jeanne, relying on this mix of traditional religion and Reggae music culture, resolves to follow her instinct and to pay a visit to Rudy.¹² In order to defend herself, however, Ti-Jeanne must also be "cunning," so for the first time Ti-Jeanne needs to call upon Legbara for protection and to perform the rite she has learnt from her grandmother.

With her template of the ceremony in mind, Ti-Jeanne manages to translate the traditional process into a hybrid one, composed of similar actions and objects. Using the blood of a kid just murdered in the fight, she traces the Eshu image on the ground and offers to the deity a “dusty candy and stale cigarette smoke” (*BGR* 194). After a while “[i]t crept up silently, the fog that only she could see, around the edges of the food court at first, then slowly narrowing in. Papa had heard her!” proving effective her adapted version of the rite (*BGR* 196). Hidden in the fog, she enters the CN Tower where Rudy has his office in an abandoned nightclub. When she emerges from the mist in front of him, Rudy seems astounded and says: “Girl-pickney... like your granny teach you some of she antics after all,” acknowledging her as both a potential opponent and his granddaughter. Failing to consider his self-healing capabilities, Ti-Jeanne shoots at him with a gun, but soon understands that in order to defeat him, it is necessary to destroy the calabash in which his duppies are kept as prisoners to feed him blood. “*Not to think, not to think. Instinct alone,*” Ti-Jeanne goes on repeating to herself (*BGR* 209). As Rudy acknowledges, Gros-Jeanne taught her well about family traditions and, therefore, her first effort against the evil Obeah man consists in mastering the Caribbean tools of her heritage. When the calabash explodes, Rudy loses physical strength, becoming an old and sick man. However, he is experienced enough to know that blood from a new duppy would revive him quickly. He then orders his assistants to immobilize Ti-Jeanne and to poison her for zombie transformation. “Is Haiti people first make it, you nah know?” he tells her, showing a phial of poison from a *Bufo* toad (*BGR* 210). As she feels her body getting paralyzed and stares at Rudy “mumbling the words of a ritual in a language she didn’t recognize” (*BGR* 216), Ti-Jeanne concentrates on Gros-Jeanne’s words about a “center pole” being “the bridge between the worlds” and realizes she was talking about the CN Tower (the world’s tallest building at the time and a landmark of the Toronto skyline), which “like the spirit tree... dug roots deep into the ground where the dead lived and pushed high into the heavens where the oldest ancestors lived” (*BGR* 221). With the identification of the CN Tower as the *potomitan* standing at the center of Toronto—which then becomes the sacred ritual space she needs to reach to attain Legbara—the shift from tradition to syncretism is complete. Although Rudy has immobilized Ti-Jeanne, she is in power to call the spirits in her mind:

“Ogun! Osain!” Her flesh body moved its lips slightly, trying through the paralyzing effect of the drug to form the same words. “Shakpana, Emaniah! Oshun, Oya! And Papa Legbara, my Eshu! Come down, come down and help your daughter!” (*BGR* 221)

Interpreting Gros-Jeanne's words, Lee Skallerup writes that Ti-Jeanne "calls to the spirits, calls to the dead and they together defeat Rudy, using a Canadian icon," but in so doing she also moves toward her new multifaceted identity.¹³ Once she has gathered the spirits of heaven through a performative speech act translated from the Caribbean tradition into the urban space, Ti-Jeanne summons up all the people Rudy has killed to feed his duppy bowl. No exit is left for him. Rudy—a violent husband, a criminal, and a wicked spirit—is now doomed. Just before Ti-Jeanne's final encounter with Rudy, Gros-Jeanne proudly smiles and tells her, "You do good, sweetness" (*BGR* 225). Ti-Jeanne has done good, but she did it in her own way, adapting the traditional knowledge of the previous generations to her post-apocalyptic condition of urban settler. Ti-Jeanne has struggled all her life against her hereditary power to have terrifying visions of other people's death. However, with acceptance and syncretism, she finally comes to terms with her Caribbean origin, addressing her uneasiness toward her multiple, overlapping identities by welcoming her hybridized self.

In science fiction, fights between people with superpowers are nothing new, but the enchanting cultural framework Hopkinson offers in *Brown Girl in the Ring* is a "novum" in itself, as Skallerup suggests with regard to the novel's magic realism. Gros-Jeanne's knowledge of traditional herbs and Vodou allows the inner-city derelicts of Toronto to survive amongst the dangers of shootings, drug dealers, and epidemics. Everybody asks her for help and she helps everybody with her wise mix of ancient remedies and Western nurse training. Her double background gives her confidence, and she appears in control of her life; a true facilitator of communication despite the hopeless decadence of the neighborhood she lives in. Nonetheless, the text reaches its full significance when it is balanced against its futuristic setting.

In the cutting-edge ward of Ottawa General, doctors surround the premier trying their best to help her recover from a rejection crisis. In a state of suspended animation, she feels "*invaded in some way, taken over*" by the transplanted organ: "*Bit by bit, she was losing the ability to control her own body. The heart was taking over.*" She is scared, something is transforming her from the inside, and then she only remembers "*blackness,*" a word that foreshadows, with a hint of reverse irony, the impressive change the woman undertakes after her heart surgery (*BGR* 237). Returning to consciousness after two weeks, Ms. Uttley is cheerful, "*Her dream body and brain were hers once more, but with a difference. The heart—her heart—was dancing joyfully between her ribs,*" and she feels eager to adjust her tactics before re-entering the political arena (*ibid.*). As a result, the woman talks about revising the

organ donation bill, offering “interest-free loans to small enterprises” and perks to squatters who fix their buildings. The fully recovered politician seems sympathetic to the lowest classes of citizens. “Excuse my bluntness, premier, but when did you develop a social conscience?” her policy advisor cannot help but ask, as he deals with the unexplainable change of course at the top of his leader’s agenda, which curiously appears less centered on white hegemony (*BGR* 239).

THE REAL *MARAVILLOSO* OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE¹⁴

Skallerup argues that Hopkinson’s magic realism “plays an essential role in the narrative, and provides the force necessary to overcome the dystopian situation” (*R-ES* 67). Yet, she also proposes a re-interpretation of Suvin’s novum, in which “magical dystopias are revealed to provide opportunities for new theoretical applications of his concepts” (*R-ES* 69). Skallerup casts a new light on Hopkinson’s magic realism by interpreting it as a “possible application of the *novum* and cognitive estrangement in broader terms, which would include and not exclude magic” (*R-ES* 82).

Since the account of Alejo Carpentier’s journey to Haiti in 1943, the term magic realism has increased its currency among literary critics, for its capability of incorporating many different aspects of pre-colonial cultures. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin point out, however, the term is at risk of becoming “a catch-all for any narrative device that does not adhere to Western realistic conventions.”¹⁵ Carpentier’s considerations stemmed from his attempt to grasp the awesome beauty of Haiti in particular and Latin America at large by theorizing a new literary category, which he regarded as different from European literary movements. As he wrote in the introduction to his novella *El reino de este mundo* (1949):

Después de sentir el nada mentido sortilegio de las tierras de Haití, de haber hallado advertencias mágicas en los caminos rojos de la Meseta Central, de haber oído los tambores del Petro y del Rada, me vi llevado a acercar la maravillosa realidad recién vívida a la agotante pretensión de suscitar lo maravilloso que caracterizó ciertas literaturas europeas de estos últimos treinta años.¹⁶

In his later essay, “De lo real maravilloso americano” (1967), Carpentier reprinted the same passage with an explicative footnote, which reinforced his idea of the necessity to identify the *real maravilloso* as a genre separated from its European literary siblings:

El surrealismo ha dejado de constituir, para nosotros, por proceso de imitación muy activo hace todavía quince años, una presencia erróneamente manejada. Pero nos queda lo real maravilloso de índole muy distinta, cada vez más palpable y discernible, que empieza a proliferar en la novelística de algunos novelistas jóvenes de nuestro continente.¹⁷

It is the “more palpable and discernible” nature of these narratives that distinguishes them from other forms of writing, a more palpable substance which, according to what Carpentier observed in the concluding paragraph of his essay, emerges from the cultural and morphological features of this specific area of the world:

Y es que, por la virginidad del paisaje, por la formación, por la ontología, por la presencia fáustica del indio y del negro, por la revelación que constituyó su reciente descubrimiento, por los fecundos mestizajes que propició, América está muy lejos de haber agotado su caudal de mitologías. ¿Pero qué es la historia de América toda sino una crónica de lo real maravilloso?¹⁸

Like magic realism, science fiction has its own conventions and to blur the line between these two genres may simply eclipse the ontological implications of magic realism and the epistemological power of science fiction, penalizing the originality of both. Although Skallerup crafts an intriguing thesis with regard to *Brown Girl in the Ring*, I claim that such a perspective overshadows the presence of the “scientifically plausible” idea which gives form, together with magic realism, to Hopkinson’s novel. Medical studies are currently exploring the idea that memories might possibly be stored in our cells and therefore transmitted by organ transplant.¹⁹ Hopkinson intuitively explores this possibility by imagining as a desirable side-effect of Gros-Jeanne’s heart exploitation the end of the dystopian society in which Ti-Jeanne’s hybrid community lives. Still, another issue is at stake when it comes to recognizing scientific authority in a non-Western person. At the present time, Gros-Jeanne’s phytochemical expertise won’t allow her to become the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry (from 1901 to 2011 only one African-born scientist, Ahmed H. Zewail, has won the award).²⁰ Traditional knowledge is generally ignored by official science, except when it has the potential to turn into a business option for the pharmaceutical industry, as has been the case in many recent cases of biopiracy, all of which have been denounced by Greenpeace and

the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).²¹

To shift our attention from magic realism to science fiction in *Brown Girl in the Ring* means to disregard its holistic vision of a possible future, disempowering the subversive and metaphorical strength it derives from its science fiction lore. In an article published in *Extrapolation*, Neal Baker wrote that in Hopkinson's novel,

the heart of a black, Caribbean immigrant revives the health of a white, birthright Canadian. Uttley is not just any Canadian, however, but the embodiment of the Canadian nation-state. Both literally and figuratively, the body of the nation-state is fortified by the transplant of an 'alien organ.'²²

This assertion, I think, reaffirms the centrality of the transplant metaphor in political terms. It is a powerful call to arms, in particular for minorities and women, to participate more actively in public life, getting to the "heart" of politics, a call of particular strength in our current times of change. If from a postcolonial perspective Skallerup's arguments are crucial to understanding the potential of magical realism within dystopian literature, they are also fundamental in recognizing Hopkinson as a full member of the science fiction community for her new approach to science *tout-court*.

Recent epistemological studies have tackled the controversial issue of Western sciences versus traditional knowledge in an attempt to challenge the all-pervasive belief that history and theory, as Sandra Harding puts it, "persist in identifying the sources of the growth of European science and technology as lying entirely within Europe."²³ As a speculative literary genre, contemporary science fiction has the power of representing the many conflicts and trends at work within our global society from a creative standpoint. Authors cast a light on controversial issues from all kinds of perspectives, emphasizing conservative as well as bleeding-edge scenarios. The liberating force of the genre comes from the very opportunity of debating, within the micro-scale of possible worlds, the validity of human choices and their emotional outcome.

Thus, as it is essential to distinguish between European-based literary genres and the *real maravilloso* described by Carpentier in order to fully appreciate many Latin American authors, it is equally vital to acknowledge the talent of writers like Hopkinson and, before her, Octavia Butler—who entwined her science fiction novels with elements drawn from the African American and Yoruba traditions—with regard to their "scientifically plausible" approach.

FROM DARKNESS TO OTHERNESS, FROM BLACKNESS TO KINDNESS

In her seminal book *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (2000), Sheree Thomas underlines how “in the European tradition ‘blackness,’ an extension of Africa, is often thought of as a resistant force, racially charged matter that must be penetrated—thus the descent into darkness.”²⁴ By pairing Africa with darkness, Thomas brings to mind Joseph Conrad and, while evoking his classical novel, Thomas also quotes from science fiction critic John Clute, who wrote that in *Heart of Darkness* the “grueling odyssey into the unknown, and its vision of the Otherness of alien life, has captured the imagination of SF writers ever since.” As Thomas points out, “In this description the ‘unknown’ element alluded to is the African continent... and ‘the Otherness of alien life’ is the Africans themselves” (*DM* xiii). Not surprisingly, Charles S. Saunders, one of the contributors to *Dark Matter*, stresses that for too long black readers have found “little to identify with in the content” of science fiction plots (*DM* 398), while Thomas states that “like ‘dark matter,’ the contributions of black writers to the SF genre have not been directly observed or fully explored... They became dark matter... yet their influence... would become undeniable” (*DM* xiv).

In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Hopkinson delights her science fiction readers with a unique background, made of magic realism and Caribbean cultural elements. Readers share with Ms. Uttley a similar experience of “blackness” that leads many of them toward a new perception of otherness (*BGR* 237), but the Suvin “novum”—cellular memory tangled with heart transplant developments—remains the fundamental narrative device of the book. Extrapolation from the mundane world allows science fiction writers to explore fascinating ways in which our future may change, as Hopkinson puts it, to “imagine—among other things—cultures in which we aren’t alienated.”²⁵ Moreover, speculative literature can enrich knowledge with its epistemological perspective rooted in human imagination. In his quality of keeper of gates and crossroads, Legba is the best metaphor to signify the merging of religious, cultural, and symbolic elements, as Gibson’s novels also show. It does not matter who we are biologically; only knowledge matters, along with our ways of learning, teaching and bequeathing it. Octavia Butler, indeed, described humanity as “a oneness focused on and fertilized by certain knowledge of alien others” (*DM* 416). With the traditional knowledge and empathy stored in her violated heart, Gros-Jeanne transforms her supposed alien otherness into oneness, and succeeds in passing it down to her granddaughter, who is not afraid to turn the darkness of a dystopian inner-city into a possible world of kindness.

Notes

- ¹ The song “Papa Legba” was part of the soundtrack of *True Stories* (1986) directed by David Byrne. The song, performed by African American gospel and R&B musician “Pops” Staples, was included in the re-edition of the *True Stories* album that Talking Heads realized in 2006.
- ² Davies, *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora. Origins, Experiences, and Culture*, 625.
- ³ Blume, “Q&A with William Gibson.”
- ⁴ Although the spelling of “Vodou” as “voodoo” is controversial, I have kept the spelling when it appears in direct quotations.
- ⁵ Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*, 87. Future citations to *Brown Girl in the Ring* are to this edition and are cited in-text as *BGR*.
- ⁶ Davies, *Encyclopedia*, 625.
- ⁷ Hopkinson, “Science Fiction vs. Science Fact.”
- ⁸ On the concept of “novum”, see Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*.
- ⁹ Rutledge, “Speaking in Tongues.” Future citations to “Speaking in Tongues” are to this edition and are cited in-text as *ST*.
- ¹⁰ Quote from *TVO Channel* interview.
- ¹¹ Allsopp and Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, 607.
- ¹² Bull Bucker and Duppy Conqueror come from a Bob Marley song, “Duppy Conqueror.”
- ¹³ Skallerup, “Re-Evaluating Suvin,” 77. Future citations of “Re-Evaluating Suvin” are to this edition and are cited in-text as *R-ES*.
- ¹⁴ The term “real maravilloso” was coined by Alejo Carpentier.
- ¹⁵ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 119.
- ¹⁶ Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo*, 4.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, “De lo real maravilloso americano,” 99.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ On “cellular memory” see Ball, “Cellular memory hints at the origins of intelligence.” See also D’Alberto, “Zangfu Theory & Cellular Memory.”
- ²⁰ See Nobelprize.org.
- ²¹ *The FreeDictionary* defines biopiracy as “the commercial development of naturally occurring biological materials, such as plant substances or genetic cell lines, by a technologically advanced country or organization without fair compensation to the peoples or nations in whose territory the materials were originally discovered.” Its second definition for the term reads as follows, “(Medicine / Pharmacology) the use of wild plants by international companies to develop medicines, without recompensing the countries from which they are taken.” See

- also Brown, "Ethnobotany Blues," 95-143; *Traditional Knowledge Digital Library*, "Home Page"; and Mazzocchi, "Western Science and Traditional Knowledge," 463-466.
- ²² Baker, "Syncretism," 220.
- ²³ Harding, *Is Science Multicultural*, 31. On the cross-fertilization between Science and Technology Studies, Postcolonial studies and Feminist Studies see Harding, *The Postcolonial Science and Technology Studies Reader*.
- ²⁴ Thomas, *Dark Matter*, xiii. Future citations to *Dark Matter* are to this edition and are cited in-text as *DM*.
- ²⁵ Routledge, "Speaking in Tongues," 3.

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HAITIAN THEATRE

LE THÉÂTRE POPULAIRE SELON FRANCK FOUCHÉ : ÉCLATEMENT DRAMATURGIQUE ET RÉSISTANCE HAÏTIENNE

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Dès le début des années 1950, Franck Fouché opère une transposition caribéenne de la dramaturgie de l'Antiquité par la réécriture de la pièce *Œdipe roi* de Sophocle, ce qui lui vaut le surnom d'« Homère de la négritude. »¹ Avec la publication d'œuvres en langue créole, Fouché embrasse l'univers ethnodramatique, le drame mêlé aux cultes et à la mythologie caribéens, notamment avec l'écriture de *Bouki nan paradis* (1964), une adaptation théâtrale d'un conte populaire haïtien. En 1965, Franck Fouché a choisi de s'exiler en compagnie de sa famille à Montréal. Fouché y continue son travail d'écrivain, afin de poursuivre une dénonciation de la situation haïtienne et du régime duvaliériste. Ainsi, lorsqu'il arrive en terres québécoises, Franck Fouché est déjà un auteur dramatique bien établi en Haïti, où il a déjà écrit et mis en scène plusieurs pièces.

Franck Fouché envisage par la suite le théâtre rituel axé sur les mythes d'origines haïtiennes et sur diverses célébrations ayant cours dans les milieux populaires. Pour Fouché, ce théâtre mythologique et contre-idéologique peut devenir un médium résistant à toute tentative de dictature des pensées, qu'elle soit occidentale, impérialiste ou duvaliériste. La publication de *Vodou et théâtre: pour un théâtre populaire* en 1976 (réédité en 2008) vient marquer une forte tendance chez Fouché, celle d'explorer la mythologie et la culture populaire haïtiennes pour leur caractère festif, mais aussi protestataire. L'auteur haïtien souhaite donc tirer avantage de la dialectique mythologique de « l'absence/présence, » afin de faire en sorte que « le vodou, à travers la théâtralisation de ces célébrations rituelles, livre, dévoile l'inaccessibilité de son signifié, avec sa métaphysique, son surnaturel, son surnaturel, ses mystères et ses dieux. C'est ainsi que le mythe prend forme et sens, qu'il organise le monde/identifie le monde. »²

Le mariage entre la scène et le vodou sera d'ailleurs célébré dans le théâtre de Franck Fouché à travers l'écriture de plusieurs pièces, notamment *Un fauteuil dans un crâne* (1968), *Trou de dieu* (1970), et *Général Baron-La-Croix ou Le silence masqué* (1974). Par cette avenue, Fouché semble

rompre avec les dramaturges de l'adaptation culturelle créole pour amorcer une recherche d'un sens métaphysique et bâtir un véritable théâtre sacré, teinté de la réalité haïtienne. Un théâtre de l'éclatement textuel, à saveur carnavalesque, où s'alternent le sacré et le profane dans une dénonciation grotesque de la servitude. Un art où le mythe prend vie afin d'embrasser un éclatement « postdramatique, »³ une remise en question des règles aristotéliennes au profit d'un texte vivant, où les mots du texte frappent tels les gestes des comédiens. Un théâtre universel et mondial, à travers la célébration de l'humain, son passé et sa résistance.

VODOU, MYTHOLOGIE ET LA TRANSMISSION ORALE DU PASSÉ

Dans un contexte de colonisation, la culture de l'État impérialiste rencontre celle du peuple colonisé. Il se produit alors, au niveau des traditions et de la culture populaire, une acculturation, plus précisément « *a cultural change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems.* »⁴ L'acculturation peut donc être vue tel l'établissement d'un rapport de force, où la société colonisée se doit de lutter contre le système culturel dominant. L'institutionnalisation étant désormais dans les mains du colonisateur, qui souhaite étendre les principes actifs de sa civilisation (religion, langue, coutumes, etc.). La pratique du vodou et la culture populaire haïtienne serait à la fois un héritage des religions polythéistes africaines et le résultat d'une créolisation avec les religions du nouveau monde (le christianisme des colonisateurs européens). Il est donc possible d'affirmer que le développement de la culture populaire s'est opéré comme un acte de résistance culturelle du peuple africain suite à sa déportation, à sa colonisation et son acculturation par l'Espagne (dès le 15^e siècle) puis par la France (à partir du 17^e siècle). Même si les esclaves haïtiens vainquirent l'opresseur et prirent possession de leur terre lorsqu'ils proclamèrent l'indépendance d'Haïti en 1804, le pays est demeuré très sensible aux assauts d'une culture impérialiste. La situation particulière de cette nation insulaire, franco-créole dans une mer anglophone et hispanophone, peut expliquer le besoin qu'a eu le peuple haïtien au fil des siècles de se forger une propre culture nationale. L'affirmation et la redéfinition de la mémoire, de l'histoire et de la culture créole fut donc une manière de s'acclimater à l'acculturation et de mieux se créer une identité collective. Une manière de vaincre la « fabrication » de la culture et de la mémoire effectuée par les colonisateurs.

La « fabrication » de l'Histoire se situe donc au sens où l'Histoire du peuple colonisé est influencée par le point de vue et les « victoires » de la société colonisatrice. En réaction à cet affront à la mémoire s'installe un état de survie culturelle, « où l'esprit de résistance entraîne une

polarisation sur la tradition, et des cultes “vivants”, tel que le vodou haïtien. »⁵ Le syncrétisme (amalgame de la religion ancestrale et la religion du colonisateur) et une autre mythologie sont donc formés en conséquence de cette colonisation afin d’assurer la perpétuité de la mémoire culturelle. Les tentatives d’acculturation de la part de la nouvelle culture dominante ne sont donc pas inamovibles. Le peuple conquis, en étant de survie culturelle, peut effectuer un retour à la tradition, basé sur l’exercice d’une culture populaire ancestrale, permettant ainsi une pérennité de la mémoire collective. C’est de cette manière qu’a pu s’opérer la survivance du culte vodou, et de ces rapports de résistance malgré l’idéologie coloniale espagnole et française et les tentatives d’évangélisation, puisque « vodou en tant que mythe n’est pas plus négatif que n’importe quel mythe. [...] Dans ce cas, le vodou peut-il être regardé simplement comme une réponse à l’idéologie dominante dans son refus de l’exploitation coloniale et du catholicisme? »⁶ Le vodou, comme tradition populaire haïtienne, est une marque de résistance culturelle, puisque, comme l’affirme Claudine Michel : « it is well documented that through their traditional religion and its world view, Haitians survived oppression, found modes of expression, and re-created a modified African society and ethos, which have to some extent Africanized the American continent. »⁷ La création d’une mémoire collective et la créolisation des traditions auraient permis, en ce sens, la survie d’une identité africaine dans les Amériques.

La transmission orale du passé et des mythes, apparaissant dans ce contexte et faisant partie de cet état de survie culturelle, deviennent nécessaires en ce sens où le peuple se donne les moyens de transmettre la culture populaire de différentes façons, notamment, par le biais du conte et des rituels artistiques et religieux. Le mythe et la mémoire sont donc communiqués tels des moyens pour la société colonisée de résister, de se rappeler son passé, de préserver le lien avec les origines et un bagage culturel pour les générations futures. L’Histoire nationale quant à elle, comme elle est enseignée dans les institutions, est la panne du vainqueur et non de la culture populaire:

En ce sens, l’Histoire, la mémoire, sont des champs de luttes qui reflètent fidèlement l’état des rapports de force et de domination d’une société donnée. Elles sont l’ultime terrain sur lequel l’injustice historique et l’exclusion sociale, qui devient mémorielle, se perpétue. L’histoire ne reconnaît pas les « perdants », elle consacre la représentation dominante du passé et exclut symboliquement, après les exclusions sociale et économique, les dominés, une sorte de totalisation de la « misère en histoire ».⁸

Le pouvoir symbolique de transmission de la mémoire du peuple perdue contre la mémoire colonisatrice institutionnalisée grâce aux mythes et aux contes, qui maintiennent un rôle de diffusion. Il s'agit, en outre, de l'un des fondements principaux de la culture créole, que tente de saisir le théâtre populaire haïtien à travers la formation d'une oralité.⁹ Ce symbole identitaire est puisé à même l'appartenance historique que maintiennent les sociétés antillaises vis-à-vis de la diaspora africaine et de la tradition de l'oralité. Le théâtre, à l'instar du conte et de toutes autres formes de transmission orale du mythe, est un art qui s'adresse directement au citoyen, qu'il soit éduqué ou analphabète. Il importe donc de communiquer la réalité et les idées au théâtre de la même manière qu'à travers le conte et toutes autres formes de transmissions orales, soit dans la langue populaire accompagnée de référents culturels.

CRÉOLISATION ET AFFIRMATION D'UN THÉÂTRE POPULAIRE HAÏTIEN

La langue créole, en tant que tradition orale, est l'un des symboles identitaires dominants de la culture haïtienne. À partir de la fin des années 1940, certains dramaturges haïtiens commenceront à rompre avec le français pour s'adresser directement au spectateur dans sa véritable langue. Ce théâtre a pour mission de désemparager le théâtre et le décentraliser vers la population et ouvrira la voie à la création d'un théâtre haïtien.

Pour Franck Fouché, à l'instar de Félix Morisseau-Leroy et autres dramaturges créolophones,¹⁰ il est primordial de désaliéner, ou décoloniser, le théâtre afin d'interpeller le spectateur sur une réalité qu'il connaît, dans une langue qu'il connaît. L'adaptation des classiques grecs en langue créole, doublée d'une actualisation et de l'intégration de certains faits politiques s'étant produit sous la dictature des Duvalier, est une manière de pratiquer l'écriture dramatique et prôner un théâtre avec toutes ses « vertus désaliénantes ».¹¹ Cette porte ouverte sociale et linguistique permet de toucher concrètement aux fondements mêmes de la culture haïtienne, ainsi que de traduire dramatiquement des référents mythologiques et politiques importants :

Il convient de rappeler d'abord l'impact qu'obtint *Antigone en créole* (1953), la pièce de Félix Morisseau-Leroy (auteur haïtien). Transposition créole de l'*Antigone* de Sophocle, d'ailleurs suivie par *Roua Kréon*, cette pièce a ouvert la voie à une tradition d'adaptation, un peu dans le style de *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* de Jean Giraudoux. Pour Morisseau-Leroy, il s'agissait de montrer que la langue créole est une

langue capable d'exprimer les sentiments les plus élevés. Dans l'avant-propos (en créole), l'auteur précisait que l'histoire d'Antigone avait été traduite dans toutes les langues, qu'il était temps de la donner en créole aussi, mais tout en y mettant « le soleil d'Haïti », la façon d'être du peuple haïtien face à la vie et à la mort, les saints, les morts, les esprits qui commandent au vent et à la pluie, et qui, précisait-il, valent bien les dieux grecs!¹²

L'établissement d'une dramaturgie créolophone est un pas de plus vers l'affirmation de la culture haïtienne et un moyen pour les créateurs de revaloriser l'héritage d'un peuple qui fut longtemps traité par ses colonisateurs, puis par l'Occident, comme une nation sans histoire propre, ni culture. Le théâtre, en s'affirmant comme un phénomène de la créolité, est donc en mesure de revaloriser non seulement la langue nationale, mais aussi la mémoire collective, celle qui fut détruite, ou incorporée, aux us et mœurs du colonisateur, pour qui le peuple conquis, esclave, n'avait ni passé, ni langue, ni religion. La langue créole n'est donc pas uniquement un moyen de communiquer, elle est aussi un vecteur d'une tradition et d'un caractère propre au peuple haïtien, qui lui permet de se définir en tant que nation et ensemble d'individus reliés par un passé.

Le théâtre créolophone, comme phénomène de cette époque, s'installe et s'intègre donc adéquatement à cette importante culture de l'oralité qui cimenter le peuple depuis des siècles. Cette transmission de la langue et des traditions par la dramaturgie « est donc, beaucoup plus que ne pourra jamais l'être le roman, un genre populaire: largement fondé sur le conte, »¹³ pour répondre à une nécessité de raconter les choses et les événements tels qu'ils pourraient avoir été vécus par la population et non l'élite.

Ainsi, l'adaptation linguistique du théâtre occidental en langue créole ne se fait pas sans considérer les traits propres de la culture créole. Elle tient compte du registre de l'oralité et transporte les mythes fondateurs de la société occidentale pour les transposer à la réalité caribéenne. Avant même la publication d'*Une tempête* (1969) d'Aimé Césaire, Félix Morisseau-Leroy et Franck Fouché avaient déjà opéré une transportation d'œuvres du Théâtre Antique vers les Caraïbes. Ces adaptations visaient notamment la récupération de la langue créole au théâtre, mais aussi l'intégration des mythes caribéens.

C'est de cette manière que Fouché publia l'adaptation créole d'*Œdipe Roi* (1953), ce qui marqua un important tournant dans la création d'un théâtre singulier, forgé selon le véritable visage du peuple haïtien. Passage entre ce que l'Occident considérerait comme le Théâtre et ce que le peuple

d'Haïti et ses créateurs décidèrent d'adopter comme Théâtre national. De ce fait, la réécriture de la tragédie grecque Œdipe Roi par Fouché intègre de nombreux traits culturels et notions propres à la société haïtienne. À travers ce texte dramaturgique, Fouché opère un véritable clin d'œil au syncrétisme haïtien, en adaptant par exemple le personnage Tirésias le devin en Tirésias le hougan :

ŒDIPE: *Dépi qui temps Laius mourì?!*

KREON: Ca gan en pile temps./

ŒDIPE: Tirésias, té hougán lo ça?

KREON: Gros hougán mimme. Moune té soti bien loin vine consulter'l.¹⁴

La réactualisation des grandes tragédies grecques se fait donc de pair avec le contexte social d'Haïti de cette période. Lorsque Fouché écrit les lignes de l'*Œdipe Roi* en créole en 1953, le palais national vogue sous une instabilité politique persistant après une occupation américaine ayant duré de 1914 à 1935.¹⁵ Dans cette optique, il est possible de comprendre pourquoi ce texte fut jugé intéressant par Franck Fouché. Effectivement, l'histoire de Thèbes, ville ravagée par la peste, aurait pu être vue par l'auteur comme une certaine réplique d'Haïti, submergée par l'instabilité, le néo-colonialisme économique et la faim :

ŒDIPE: Tonton Tirésias, métier'm cé pou M'gouvènin, métier pas ous, cé pou ouè tout ça'q caché. Ous avèg, cé vrai, min fait noué'm, cé pou clai ous. Toute pays-a nen noicé nette, M'chet, dévoi chef moin, cé pou m'ouété'l noicé ça.¹⁶

Si Œdipe rencontre Tirésias, c'est donc pour élucider le mystère de la calamité qui afflige le pays depuis si longtemps, puisque selon Œdipe, Tirésias est le seul après Dieu à connaître la réponse à ce grand malheur. Cette vision représente bien le statut du *hougan* l'être le mieux placé sur Terre pour canaliser la relation entre les humains et les *loas*. Ainsi, selon Alfred Métraux, le *hougan* et la *mambo* (prêtresse) sont des personnalités aux rôles multiples, omniprésents dans la société haïtienne : « un bon *hougan* est en même temps prêtre, guérisseur, devin, exorciseur, organisateur de divertissements publics, chef de chœur. Ses fonctions dépassent largement le domaine du sacré. »¹⁷

Les adaptations tel qu'opérées par Fouché ont donc pour mission d'être vues et entendues par la population haïtienne et d'être amalgamées au vodou afin d'actualiser le propos des œuvres de l'Antiquité: « Autant de mythes provenant d'une civilisation rurale, comme la nôtre, et qui, dans le cadre haïtien, seront appelés à une heureuse fortune, décuplant leur vigueur allégorique surtout quand la mythologie haïtienne s'agglutinera

avec la mythologie grecque pour faire descendre sur la scène Ezulie et Legba. »¹⁸

THÉÂTRE DE LA DÉPOSSESSION DU CORPS ET DE L'ÉCLATEMENT

Si le mythe permet à l'être humain des sociétés axées sur la tradition de prendre conscience de la mémoire ancestrale et d'expliquer le Monde, le rituel et l'exercice du culte sont des moyens de vivre collectivement et spirituellement. Choisir le rituel comme médium de théâtralité était d'ailleurs l'un des espoirs d'Antonin Artaud afin de redonner à l'art de la scène son caractère sacré : « Pour lui [Artaud], le véritable problème de l'Occident est de priver la vie de sa magie. Et le théâtre tel qu'il l'imagine aurait pour but de pallier à ce manque de magie : "Je crois le théâtre comme une opération ou une cérémonie religieuse, et je tendrai tous mes efforts à lui rendre son caractère rituel, primitif." »¹⁹

L'utilisation pour fins théâtrales du rituel est donc chose possible, tout comme le rituel peut s'exercer parfois à travers les crises de possession et des processus spectaculaires, pouvant être considérés comme faisant partie d'un « pré-théâtre ». ²⁰ Rituel vodou et théâtre partagent ainsi plusieurs affinités dans la manière pour le comédien (théâtre) et le pratiquant (rituel) de se mettre en scène, de s'adonner à la dépossession de soi, au profit du personnage, comme du *loa* chevauchant son adepte lors de crises de possession. Aussi, permettent-ils tous deux se de perdre au profit du cérémonial, car « *as in acting where the actor must follow the convention of the play, in Vodou, the theatricality of possession may first be attributed the conventions imposed by the ritual* ». ²¹ Le rituel, tout comme le théâtre, vise donc à donner vie, à matérialiser le mythe. L'acteur et l'adepte prennent inconsciemment possession des codes pour exercer une action concrète dans le présent, c'est-à-dire une action rituelle qui est en elle-même performative, instantanée et éphémère et se développe indépendamment de l'action dramatique.

Le corps dépossédé de lui-même et envahi par une force sacrée est l'une des principales caractéristiques qui relierait entre eux le Vodou et le théâtre. D'après Fouché le rituel vodou peut se qualifier de « pré-théâtre » par ses chorégraphies et les figures corporelles qui en résultent : « On peut dire même qu'elle [la danse] constitue un élément aussi fondamental que la crise de possession. Les évolutions chorégraphiques sont d'une beauté fascinante. La somptuosité des costumes représente un élément scénographique extraordinaire. »²²

La caractéristique spectaculaire de la religion vodou est certes présente dans les œuvres dramatiques de Fouché, où le caractère rituel du théâtre est exploité dans une communion avec le sacré, le profane et leurs mystères.

Il contribue à faire du théâtre un théâtre sacré, au sens où l'entend Peter Brook, c'est-à-dire un événement/performance, un « happening » : « Un “happening” peut être spontané, il peut être cérémonieux, anarchique, il peut provoquer en nous une énergie enivrante. Derrière le “happening”, il y a un cri : “Réveillez-vous!” »²³ Le théâtre sacré souhaite donc déstabiliser le spectateur et contrairement au théâtre traditionnel, il souhaite que celui-ci participe activement et émotionnellement à l'action théâtrale qui se déroule, à l'instar d'une participation à un rituel.

Fouché se reconnaît dans un théâtre de l'évènement. Il souhaite réhabiliter le théâtre et son caractère poignant pour ébranler la tradition d'un théâtre calme, embourgeoisé et élitiste (le théâtre qui ne crie pas). Par le fait même, il s'inspire des grands créateurs qui ont eux aussi souhaité redonner au théâtre son caractère sacré, rituel :

On semble oublier certaines fois les conquêtes scénographiques d'un Meyerhold et ses constructions scéniques, sa géométrisation des mouvements; d'un Piscator, d'un Grotowski, d'un Stanislavski, des démarches créatrices du Berliner Ensemble, du Théâtre-Laboratoire de Wrocław, du Living Théâtre, du théâtre panique de Jodorowsky, de Topor et d'Arrabal; également les prophéties avancées d'Antonin Artaud, à partir du théâtre de Bali, ou encore les expériences de Bertold Brecht avec les éléments esthétiques et scéniques puisés dans la riche mine du théâtre de l'Extrême-Orient, avec les pièces bien connues comme *Le cercle de craie caucasien* ou la Bonne âme de *Se-Tchouan*.²⁴

En ce sens, les pièces de Fouché utilisent un nombre de didascalies afin d'amener la mise en scène à expérimenter et tester les aléas du corps rituel. Plusieurs de ces didascalies décrivent l'exercice d'une véritable performance, d'un évènement théâtral, où « l'euphorie de l'éphémère conduit à la totalité, à la libération des forces supérieures, à l'état de grâce »:²⁵

Éclairs zébrant l'obscurité. Bruits assourdissants entre le tonnerre et une explosion de bombe. Ces bruits doivent durer assez longtemps jusqu'à exacerbation. Peu à peu s'allument des lumières mauves aux divers paliers, puis une lumière aveuglante, sur le décor dépouillé. Un chœur, vêtu de costumes appropriés, descend une scène au rythme d'une danse nago que ponctuent des tambours en feu. On ne verra que les mains des tambourinaires, des derniers étant dans le noir. On peut utiliser des masques pour les danseurs. Ces masques typeront les catégories de danseurs; ils pourront avoir aussi de la peinture sur le visage, toutes choses qui symboliseront l'antagonisme et l'idéologie qui étaient dans

*les paroles du début. La danse est très plastique : une sorte de ballet moderne d'ombre et de lumière. Elle représentera un conflit qui substitue à la psychologie des paroles celle des corps. La chorégraphie est faite pour alerter le jugement critique du spectateur. Durée en conséquence. Les danseurs dont les couleurs expriment les forces du progrès demeurent jusqu'à la fin en scène en pleine évolution, tandis que les autres sont figés comme des statues.*²⁶

En faisant appel aux indications scéniques dans le but d'inciter la performance-rituelle, le mouvement des corps et le rythme théâtral, Fouché amorce un renouveau de l'art dramaturgique. Ainsi, il contribue à donner au corps de l'acteur la place qu'il lui revient dans l'avènement d'un rituel théâtral en faisant en sorte que cette corporalité s'exprime dans ce qu'elle a de plus universel. Le dramaturge contribue à faire du théâtre un art postdramatique, un théâtre où le corps va au-delà du texte, pour se servir de la dramaturgie comme matériel exploratoire.

Dans cette optique, le corps et l'acteur se retrouvent désaliénés du texte et peuvent amorcer un travail créateur indépendamment de celui-ci. Les diverses didascalies présentent au sein des pièces de Fouché nous permettent de constater que, le rituel comme « le frayage théâtral n'a d'autre objectif que d'opérer une série de déplacements qui vont du déroulement des pulsions élémentaires du corps, en passant par le rythme, par la dislocation de l'anatomie jusqu'à l'éclatement des forces premières occultées pour mettre à nue la vie dans sa transparence. »²⁷

UNIVERSALITÉ COMMUNICATIONNELLE D'UN THÉÂTRE SACRÉ

Le théâtre, amalgamé aux autres arts de la culture populaire haïtienne (chants, danses, symboliques, percussions, peintures, *vêvês*, etc.), contribue à renforcer l'image de feste et de rituel présente dans le théâtre postdramatique de Franck Fouché. Ainsi, dans *Le Carrousel des voyelles* (1975), Fouché alterne dénonciation et parole politique avec les rites populaires, tel le carnaval, afin d'enivrer le spectateur dans une allégorie de la situation politique d'Haïti:

O: Le carnaval, mes amis, le carnaval!... (Pas de danse carnavalesque, Déhanchements. Les autres, moins Y, l'imitent. Chœur de danse.)

[...]

E: Il est beau mon peuple quand il s'amuse!

Y: C'est plutôt tragique, la faim masquée qui s'amuse pour s'oublier...

E: Assez de philosophie, mes amis. L'heure est à la joie. Profitons-en. Sans plus ni moins.

O: Fichtre! La belle idée que j'ai. Si on prenait la rue comme des fous...

[...]

*Manifestation croissante du carnaval au dehors au même rythme que la progression de la lumière sur la scène. Théâtre dans le théâtre, les personnages vont créer leur propre drame à leur insu. Le comique de leurs gestes, de leur attitude amènera le tragique de la situation.*²⁸

Le caractère rituel et festif du théâtre n'est pas la seule quête de Fouché. Il cherche aussi, par l'avènement de situations grotesques et l'extrapolation, à cerner de toutes parts les sens du spectateur pour lui communiquer une réalité terrible. Ainsi, dans l'exemple précédent, le carnaval haïtien est montré comme moyen d'oublier la faim et autres maux sociaux du pays. L'auteur opère ainsi une dénonciation de la résilience qui s'opère à travers la fête et l'oubli de la misère sociale.

Fouché explore par ailleurs les caractéristiques spectaculaires des célébrations de la religion vodou dans leur universalité, ce qui se rapproche d'autres rituels non-occidentaux. Les rituels se ressemblent au sens où ils sont centrés sur un exercice vivant de la religion au travers d'une tradition de costumes, de chants et une théâtralisation du corps:

On pourrait multiplier les exemples et établir des parallèles avec le rituel d'Obatala, Egungun yorouba et tant d'autres de l'Orient et de l'Extrême-Orient dans leur organisation esthétique, pour montrer que le vodou, avec ses spécificités et son ensemble spectaculaire, représente, à n'en pas douter, un pré-théâtre caractérisé.²⁹

Ce « pré-théâtre » tend pour Fouché à retrouver la nature d'exaltation à la base même de l'art théâtral. Puisque, avant l'instauration de la logique tragique dite aristotélicienne de l'Antiquité, le théâtre n'était pas un exercice exclusivement réservé à la scène mais une célébration populaire unissant les participants. Les membres du public n'étaient pas des spectateurs vis-à-vis des rites théâtralisés mais bien acteurs, une partie prenante de l'événement. C'est cet enivrement entourant le mythe et l'exercice de la liberté qui ont servi de bases au théâtre grec: « Peut-on oublier les dionysies qui soulevaient le peuple grec? On venait de partout

pour assister à ces spectacles qui dureraient trois jours de l'aube à la nuit, rehaussés de débordements, la frénésie des cortèges carnavalesques et des costumes éclatants.»³⁰

Pour Fouché, l'institution d'un théâtre de la purification, à l'instar de l'instauration d'une logique aristotélicienne dans la composition dramaturgique et la mise en scène, tend à faire perdre le caractère de célébration et d'enivrement « populaire » à la base même de l'art théâtral. Puisque « quand le théâtre, aussi bien occidental qu'oriental, à sa naissance se détache du culte pour s'offrir comme lieu de jouissance purificatrice – dans la tragédie grecque comme dans le nô ou le kabuki –, il se dégage en fait d'une croyance: la foi dans l'efficacité pratique et immédiate du rituel.»³¹ L'art de la scène ritualisé se doit donc d'être vu comme canal de la communication théâtrale, mais aussi comme lien invisible reliant les êtres humains à leur existence et à leur historicité. Les défenseurs du théâtre rituel remettent donc en cause le théâtre classique et ses composantes dramatiques pour re-permettre un échange empreint de mythes, pour permettre au théâtre de retrouver sa vivacité :

On pourrait encore s'interroger sur le signe théâtral, sur ce qu'il a perdu dans ses rapports entre le corps et la pensée, entre le symbolique et le réel, entre le connu et l'inconnaissable. N'est-ce pas le théâtre, comme il se fait, qu'il faut vider de sa logique aristotélicienne, de tout ce dualisme cartésien qui l'aliène et le désacralise pour le remplir de toute cette intuition corporelle, dont le sens du rythme peut aller jusqu'à la frénésie, à la sublimation de l'Être dans l'UN primordial : le dieu caché dans l'homme.³²

Le but d'un tel théâtre n'est donc pas de purger la passion du spectateur par l'entremise de la réalisation de l'action scénique, mais bien de l'intégrer entièrement comme membre d'un rituel théâtral visant à réaliser lui-même l'exercice de la conscience et non d'une *catharsis*. En référence à l'œuvre *Général Baron-la-Croix ou Le silence masqué* (1974) de Fouché, Carrol F. Coates indique : « with multiple allusions to real terror and violence, the drama is repeatedly punctuated by violent song, dance, and shifts in lighting. »³³ C'est donc un sentiment d'exaltation et une communication active entre la scène et le public que Fouché tente de mettre en scène par ses indications didascaliques dans le texte:

Dans le noir, on entend des coups frénétiques de tambours, de cymbales, accompagnés de jeu de batterie, de musique électronique. Un pot-pourri de musique bruyante, tonitruante, qui monte crescendo, ponctuée de

*cris hystériques. On bat des mains, on doit avoir l'impression qu'une danse de possédés ou de fous se développe en puissance à l'arrière-scène. Cette atmosphère durera un assez long temps pour plonger le spectateur dans un vrai bain de psychodrame. Il importe que le choc produise à la fin provocation et contestation, exacerbe la sensibilité du spectateur jusqu'au degré zéro de la perception, réveillant chez lui nerfs et cœur comme sous l'action d'une morsure.*³⁴

Par la création de cette action Fouché opère une invitation à entrer émotionnellement dans le rituel scénique au spectateur. Il l'invite donc incessamment à vivre l'action théâtrale, mais aussi par le propos de la pièce et les métaphores politiques, et ensuite à prendre en main son destin réel au sein de la société. Par le fait même, le personnage principal de cette pièce, le Général Baron-la-Croix, tyran sanguinaire et sans pitié est une forte référence au tyran qui sévissait à ce moment en Haïti, Duvalier. Par la représentation métaphorique d'un personnage monstrueux, d'un loa des cimetières et des morts, cette pièce tend à montrer le visage que l'auteur souhaite révéler du célèbre dictateur haïtien. Cette création dramaturgique est en fait un appel à la prise de conscience du spectateur grâce au rituel, mais aussi un appel à la liberté et à la résistance du peuple haïtien.

CONCLUSION: DE LA NÉCESSITÉ D'INVESTIR L'ESPACE CULTUREL

En conclusion, contrairement à la littérature qui ne peut espérer que toucher certains membres de la communauté plus privilégiés, le théâtre est le médium parfait pour approcher et sensibiliser dans son milieu le spectateur : « les écrivains de tous les temps ont toujours rêvé de s'adresser au peuple. Cette idée est encore plus mythique dans les pays colonisés comme les Antilles que dans des pays comme la France ou l'Angleterre. Un écrivain, à mon avis, n'a jamais encore parlé au peuple antillais puisque notre peuple ne lit pas. »³⁵

L'analphabétisme et le manque de ressources de diffusion de la littérature en Haïti font du théâtre le meilleur moyen d'investir l'espace public, cet espace dont sont absentes les œuvres écrites. Le théâtre populaire haïtien, en prenant d'assaut la culture orale, peut aussi tirer profit des autres arts définissant l'identité populaire, notamment les arts rituels comme le vodou, les processions musicales (*rara*) ou le carnaval. Cette tentative de réappropriation artistique doit alors se faire de manière anti-stéréotypée du folklore, pour retrouver ce qu'il y a de vivant et de fondamental, à même l'identité populaire: « L'on aura compris que le folklore est au centre de la problématique caribéenne. Si nous rejetons leur folklore, cette représentation stéréotypée de notre réalité, c'est pour

mieux retrouver la réalité vraie. Passer de leur folklore au nôtre, aller de ce qu'ils prétendent savoir de nous à ce que nous savons nous-mêmes. »³⁶ C'est dans cette perspective qu'est transmise la langue créole à travers le théâtre populaire, en tant que possibilité de communiquer au peuple directement dans sa langue maternelle, mais aussi en tant que résistance au colonialisme culturel.

De cette manière, Franck Fouché a souhaité faire en sorte que le théâtre haïtien obtienne une véritable reconnaissance au niveau national et international. Après avoir participé à la Renaissance du théâtre haïtien et la matérialisation de la culture haïtienne sur les planches en un mythe vivant, il a publié *Vodou et théâtre pour un théâtre populaire* (1976). Fouché a permis ainsi la diffusion d'une pensée manifeste de ce que doit être l'art de la scène (haïtien ou non) afin de s'élever au niveau d'une cérémonie théâtrale. L'auteur a donc amorcé la créolisation du théâtre pour finalement souhaiter révolutionner la dramaturgie et redonner au corps-rituel la place qu'il lui revient à travers le théâtre comme procédé collectif. Cet accomplissement théâtral s'est établi dans le but certes de désemparager la scène et de permettre au théâtre de raconter l'Histoire d'un peuple colonisé puis confiné à une réalité politique douloureuse, pour qu'il puisse enfin fabriquer et continuer son Histoire.

Franck Fouché a marqué le paysage théâtral d'Haïti autant que celui du Québec, par son incursion dans une écriture de l'exil éclaté et postdramatique où il « s'habitua à écrire des deux mains, c'est-à-dire tantôt en langue française tantôt en langue haïtienne, des pièces qu'il publiait dans leur version française au Québec alors qu'on en donnait à Port-au-Prince une représentation scénique en langue haïtienne. »³⁷ Après son décès en 1981, les pièces de Franck Fouché furent jouées en Haïti, en France (Festival Avignon 1981) et au Québec jusque dans les années 1990. En 2008, la maison d'éditions haïtiano-québécoise Mémoire d'encrier effectue la réédition de son manifeste *Vodou et théâtre: pour un théâtre populaire*. Cela permet à une nouvelle génération de découvrir ce dramaturge et poète révolutionnaire, dont le propos universel trouve ses échos dans l'art scénique actuel.

Notes

¹ Chalais, « Général Baron-Lacroix ».

² Fouché, *Vodou et théâtre*, 35-36.

³ « Le théâtre post-dramatique, toujours multiple et disparate dans ses formes,

- serait un théâtre de l'impulsion, du passage, dont les pratiques se joueraient des principes de la fiction. Ce serait enfin un théâtre soucieux de tisser des liens entre les arts sur scène, un théâtre de la rencontre. » Le Pors, "Le postdramatique à l'épreuve des pratiques plastiques contemporaines," 53.
- ⁴ Smith-Castro, *Acculturation and Psychological Adaptation*, 8.
- ⁵ Delisle, *Acculturation*, 75.
- ⁶ Fouché, *Vodou et théâtre*, 40.
- ⁷ Michel, "Vodou in Haiti," 32.
- ⁸ Hajat, *Immigration postcoloniale et mémoire*, 54.
- ⁹ Contrairement à l'oralité, qui est l'expression de la tradition orale, l'oralité représente les caractéristiques de la langue orale, la langue parlée à travers l'écrit. Marty, *Haïti en littérature*.
- ¹⁰ « À côté de Morisseau-Leroy, dont les adaptations créoles constituent une œuvre de pionnier, il faut signaler Franck Fouché, actuellement à Montréal, créateur d'un Œdipe Roi en créole, auteur d'une quinzaine de pièces parmi lesquelles *L'école des mères*, *L'école des maris*, *L'école des politiciens*, *Prométhée* qui sont bilingues, *Yerma* adapté de Federico García-Lorca, *Ethesin* et *Bouqui nan Paradis* en créole, *Le silence masqué et un fauteur dans un crâne* (en français). » Cornevin, *Le théâtre haïtien*, 212.
- ¹¹ Wainwright, *La culture créole à travers des textes choisis*, 171.
- ¹² Hassael-Massieux, "Le théâtre créolophone dans les départements d'outre-mer," 25.
- ¹³ Ibid., 23.
- ¹⁴ Fouché, *Œdipe roi*.
- ¹⁵ Dans son livre *Haïti: paysage et société* André-Marcel d'Ans trace un portrait sociologique et historique d'Haïti. Il aborde notamment les mouvements sociaux et intellectuels ayant précédé et suivi l'occupation américaine, dont le mouvement indigéniste se reconnaît Franck Fouché.
- ¹⁶ Fouché, *Œdipe roi*, 9.
- ¹⁷ Métraux, *Vaudou haïtien*, 55.
- ¹⁸ Cornevin, *Le théâtre haïtien*, 213.
- ¹⁹ Wright-Laflamme, *Antonin Artaud*, 66.
- ²⁰ Chez Franck Fouché, la notion de « pré-théâtre » ne renvoie pas à ce qui précède le théâtre, mais « renvoi à une réalité, non pas antérieure au théâtre, mais parallèle au théâtre. [...] Le pré-théâtre est un spectacle global, où le fidèle participe corps et âme, sans restriction, même passagère, à des croyances qui mobilisent toute son énergie jusqu'à l'exacerbation de ses sens pour une communion avec le divin, le cosmos. » Fouché, *Vodou et théâtre*, 50.
- ²¹ Alcide St-Lot, *Vodou a Sacred Theatre*, 52.

- ²² Fouché, *Vodou et théâtre*, 57.
- ²³ Brook. *L'espace vide*, 78.
- ²⁴ Fouché, *Vodou et théâtre*, 76.
- ²⁵ Arrabal, *Le panique*, 85.
- ²⁶ Fouché, *Un toit de soleil pour Charlemagne Péralte – théâtre*.
- ²⁷ Fouché., *Vodou et théâtre*, 51.
- ²⁸ Fouché., *Carrousel des voyelles*.
- ²⁹ Fouché., *Vodou et théâtre*, 56.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 56.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid., 51.
- ³³ Coates, “Folklore in the theatre of Frank Fouché,” 259.
- ³⁴ Fouché, *Général Baron-la-croix ou Le silence masqué*, 13.
- ³⁵ Condé, dans Dominique Chancé (éd.). *L'auteur en souffrance : essai sur la position de l'auteur dans le roman antillais contemporain (1981-1992)*, 196.
- ³⁶ Desdouts et Turgeon, *Ethnologies francophones de l'Amérique et d'ailleurs*, 226.
- ³⁷ Laroche, Préface à *Vodou: pour un théâtre populaire*, 17-18.

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**AN INTRODUCTION TO *THE BLUE OF THE ISLAND* BY EVELYNE
TROUILLOT**

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HISTORICAL SETTING

Over the course of the last fifty years, the deteriorating economic situation in Haiti has pushed thousands of Haitian men and women to look for a better life beyond the borders of their country, be it in Miami, the French Antilles, Barbados, or the Dominican Republic.

One of the consequences of French and Spanish colonization was the separation of the island of Hispaniola into two states: the Dominican Republic to the east, and the Republic of Haiti to the west. The problems of migration have been a constant source of conflict between the two countries. On the one hand, the Dominican Republic says it must protect itself against the massive invasion of Haitians. On the other hand, the Haitian community living in the Dominican Republic complains that it does not have any rights while it contributes to the development of the country. Even Haitian children born on Dominican soil do not have the right to Dominican citizenship and are often sent back to Haiti. Haitian manual labor has been used for decades in construction, in the service sector, and especially in the *bateyes* where the Haitian sugarcane cutters work. Haitian migrants live in horrible conditions, which many compare to hell. The Haitian state generally manifests a grand indifference with regard to the destiny and the treatment reserved for its nationals in the Dominican Republic. This sad fact seems to stem from the Haitian state’s elitism; Haitian immigrants across the border are poor peasants that serve as unorganized and unskilled laborers.

From time to time, after a particular tragedy occurs in the Dominican Republic, like the rape and murder of a Haitian female student or the assassination of Haitian citizens, a chorus of protests will raise up on both sides of the island. Then, everything calms down again. Several

associations, both Haitian and Dominican, are however working relentlessly to protest this state of affairs and to have the rights of migrant Haitians respected.

THE TRAGEDY

In June 2000, a group of Haitians from the small town of Piment, in the North of Haiti, furtively left for the neighboring republic. The Dominican guards are sometimes paid to let groups of “clandestines” into the country, but it would seem that on this particular Sunday, apparently after a shift change, the new guards were not informed of the operation. They intercepted the vehicle, fired shots, and killed several of the passengers.

This play was inspired by the tragedy that took place that Sunday in the month of June in the year 2000.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

The passengers meet up in Piment at dawn to take to the road. They are all from the village; all have one or more reasons to leave the country; all are desperate and ready to risk their lives. One after the other, they climb up into the truck driven by a Dominican driver.

THE CHARACTERS: THE PASSENGERS

THE WOMEN:

FIFI: Ronald's sister, a seamstress, Évariste's wife, is pregnant and the mother of a young daughter

ROMAINE: a young woman, independent and dynamic, had a one-night stand with Ronald during his stay in the capital

MADELEINE: leaving to find her husband on the eastern side of the island, their young son died in Piment

MARIE-JEANNE: a charcoal merchant, a mother of three children, a wife beaten by her husband

VIOLETTA: a bit licentious, feels that all methods for survival are good

LAURETTE: a pastry maker by profession, allergic to flour

THE MEN:

RONALD: a mechanic, brother of Fifi, father of a young son and of Amandine-to-be

EDGAR: Fifi's husband, a mason

JEAN-MARIE: Edgar's brother, hoodlum, ready for anything to succeed

ÉVARISTE: son of the village barber, obsessed with the Dominican Republic. He decides to abandon the commercial establishment of his deceased father and settle in Santo Domingo

JOSAPHAT: an old peasant pursued by the Haitian authorities for having avenged his wife

ENZO GABRIEL: had been deported after years in the Dominican Republic where he has a Dominican wife and Dominican-born children, wants to rejoin them at all costs

MAURICIO RAFAËL PEREZ: the Dominican driver called also La Volenta

THE CHARACTERS THAT VISIT THE MEMORY OF THE PASSENGERS:

FRANCINE: Ronald's wife, pregnant with Amandine-to-be and mother of a young son

MAN ÉTIENNE: the mother of Ronald and Fifi, dead

JOSAPHAT'S WIFE: dead

LAURETTE'S SISTER: paid for Laurette's schooling to become a pastry maker.

THE PLOT

All the scenes take place under the blue tarp of the pick-up truck. The passengers all know each other, since they all come from the same village but some, like Ronald, Fifi, Edgar, Romaine have strong family bonds or bonds of friendship. It is a matter of eluding the vigilance of the Dominican guards if necessary and crossing the border. Their goal is to find work there, and, for most of the passengers, to be able to help those who remain in Haiti or to return and set up a small business there.

Evoking the difficult life that explains their departure, initial conversations deal with the reasons for their leaving.

During the entire trip, the imprudent driving of La Volenta, the bad state of the roads, the constant menace of being discovered by the guards, provoke feelings of anguish in the passengers who are already overcome by feelings of anxiety, guilt, and regret. Hope is a cord that unites them as well, with various degrees of skepticism.

Throughout the trip, relationships either become stronger or explode. Some secrets are revealed; others remain exchanged confidences. Facing the menace of the Dominican guards and all the dangers that ensue, the passengers go to the depths of their memory and their emotions.

LE BLEU DE L'ÎLE (THE BLUE OF THE ISLAND)

Evelyne Trouillot

Translated by Robert H. McCormick, Jr.¹

ACT I, SCENE I

Ronald's house

The twelve passengers are reclining, on their knees or bent over under a blue tarpaulin. The background is composed of various sets, but, according to the dialogue, only one is illuminated at a time. The sets: Ronald's house, the streets of the village, the market, the streets of Port-au-Prince, a slum of Port-au-Prince, the interior of a bourgeois home, a corn field. From time to time, one hears a sigh, a passenger complaining, or a passenger pushing another, uttering a name, bursting out laughing. In the background there is the noise of a vehicle that is being driven wildly on a dirt road. From time to time, dust clouds rise. Dawn is breaking.

FRANCINE

(doing various household tasks)

I don't have any power. Some say women have all the power over their husbands, but I will always be weaker than misery... She can take you and lead you far away from me, and I won't be able to do anything about it.

RONALD

(approaches her, but cannot touch her. It is as if she were transparent.)

Let me inhale the scent of your skin! Don't say anything because the silence is allowing me to stock up on you.

FRANCINE

Don't forget our first "Good mornings," with my warm posterior against your loins and the odor of coffee between our lips. Don't forget my skin!

RONALD

Its radiance struck me from the very first.

FRANCINE

The first time, in the church courtyard, a few meters from the market behind the elementary school. On wet grass. My bundles of cloth made a rainbow-colored blanket for us.

RONALD

(an emotional smile)

We ruined a couple of them.

FRANCINE

(dreamily)

At home, I told them I had sold them. I think that Carlo is the only one that suspected anything...

RONALD

Why do you have to mention his name?

FRANCINE

I'm sorry. My brother will always be between us, stickier than poverty, more resistant than rust.

RONALD

Francine, don't ruin my attempt to keep you in the deepest confines of my memory! Tell me about Roberto.

FRANCINE

Listen to the beat of his feet on the dirt road. He is running toward you, with open arms, his smile already at the corner of his eyes before it reaches his lips. He's throwing all the tenderness of his five years against your chest.

(The child seems to throw himself against Ronald, but, with Francine, there is no contact.)

RONALD

His smile tickles my heart. It really makes you feel good! ... I promised him protection and security, too. Bread on the table, mornings without the anguish of hunger, and a future with a well-delineated path. I know, a parent can't foresee everything and a child will find, in spite of everything, potholes along his way, puddles of water, and red lights from time to time. But I want him to have some idea about a possible path, not a series of traps so he won't even know where to put his feet.

(In the background, the sound of a child laughing and of the pitter-patter of a child running.)

FRANCINE

My father has been living in Miami for such a long time that I don't even remember his face. He's a human being without a form. If I look too closely, I don't recognize him any more. He sent us greenbacks that we converted into stacks of gourdes, into food, into shoes, into little extras that made us the envy of others, but the absence of one's father weighs heavily.

RONALD

I know that better than you. My father left us before I had even turned four. But, for my part, I don't plan on spending an eternity in Santo Domingo. You'll see, honey, I'll be back in five years, at the most, perhaps even sooner, if only to see the baby.

FRANCINE

She'll be born while you're gone.

RONALD

She'll be born thinking of me because my love is already with her, in you. When she's born, remember the name I chose because she'll have almond-shaped eyes like my mother. My daughter, my Amandine-to-be...

(Gestures as if putting his hands around the stomach of Francine.)

FRANCINE

(appearing to detach herself from Ronald, she shrugs her shoulders and turns

away)

In September. While you're away.

RONALD

Francine, don't criticize me, especially when I'm clinging to you in order to forget this truck that's taking me away from everyone I love. To forget the dusty dirty people I have been bouncing around with since dawn, under this blue material as artificial as our breathing, controlled, measured, so we don't make any noise. It's as if all our life, we were condemned to not making any noise.

(Ronald lies back down. He is sandwiched in between two women. He wriggles about trying to find a more comfortable position. The movements of the vehicle jostle the clandestine passengers. One hears protests, sobs, and then the voice of a woman.)

LORETTE

Stop crying, Marie-Jeanne!

(Another voice, the voice of a strong, ironic woman, responds.)

ROMAINE

Leave her alone, Lorette. Not everyone can plunge themselves, like you, into silent depression. It's the privilege of the rich, the unhinged.

EVARISTE

Shut up! You are going to get us caught, you idiots.

JOSAPHAT

And you! The barber that didn't make it. You were so anxious to get in that truck this morning. Don't tell me you're already afraid.

MANY VOICES

Shut up! Be quiet!

(Ronald speaks without getting up. He is plastered against Lorette. Little by little the set representing the streets of the village of Piment lights up.)

RONALD

Oh, my dear Francine, how can I feel attracted to Lorette when your memory fills me with softness? Does what men have between their legs obey its own laws? And yet, Lorette is not my type. The coldness of her stare reminds me of the icy calm of a river after the rain, but the movement of her buttocks against my loins reaches deep inside me.

(Lorette frees herself from Ronald and gets up. She starts to speak monotonously as if she were recording her own voice.)

LORETTE

My dear sister, I am sending you this cassette from Port-au-Prince. I don't know when I will be able to return. I couldn't scrounge up enough money to pay for courses this semester. I lost the part-time job I had as a cook in a restaurant on the Grand-Rue. Under normal conditions, I would finish this year, but with all these delays, if I finish next year, I'll consider myself lucky. Send what you can. I didn't want to ask you, but I didn't have any choice. Say "Hi" to my friends in Piment. Kisses, your little sister, Lorette.

(Lorette's sister is energetically doing the wash. The scene takes place inside a dilapidated house.)

LORETTE'S SISTER

(in a tone that becomes more and more emotional as she speaks)

You finally returned after taking classes sporadically for three years. Three years for a program that usually takes eighteen months. If you knew what they cost me, your famous courses at the School of Home Economics, "A Woman Who Has Her Ten Fingers." But I had promised Mom to take care of you. Everyone made sacrifices for you.

LORETTE

You've repeated that so often, I could never forget it. I should give you back one hundred times over what you have given me. By the way, your sacrifice was not without ulterior motives.

LORETTE'S SISTER

We were so proud, so happy when you opened your bakery, "The Happy

Mouth.” You made all sorts of pastries: the Mickey Mouses for kids’ birthdays, elaborate constructions for baptisms and communions. On top of the wedding cakes, a married couple, all pink, was holding hands. You even made cakes for burials on which you’d write “May Your Soul Rest in Peace” in purple letters.

(Lorette gestures mechanically as if she were kneading dough and putting cakes in the oven.)

LORETTE

How much pastry can one sell in a small village like Piment? If one’s relative in Miami doesn’t promise to send off the money for the dress and new shoes, the first communion is postponed until next year and the order for the cake is cancelled. I did try. I borrowed money to start my business, bought the molds, the beaters and, of course, a special oven to perfect my cakes.

(In the background one hears the sounds of Happy Birthday—with a strong Kreyòl accent—and then Sak pa chante pap manje.)²

RONALD

(sits up to speak)

For Mothers’ Day, Fifi and I ordered an amazing cake from “The Happy Mouth” bakery. With flowers all over and on top, Lorette had written in beautiful, rounded letters: “Happy Birthday, dear Mother, from your two children.” Man Etienne trembled when she read the inscription, and she thanked us from the depths of her endless grief. As Fifi says, Mom put a veil over her joy after the death of the twins, and she has never taken it off. We haven’t purchased a cake for her since.

LORETTE

Anyway, no one buys pastry for anyone anymore. I can’t make any more. I developed an aversion to the smell of melted butter and eggs, to everything that reminds me of the long years of study and solitude in the capital. I’m allergic to flour and to vanilla extract. My hands are covered with boils. At the crucial moment, they shake like the hands of an old woman. I break eggs in the wrong bowl, I mix, without wanting to, the egg whites with the yokes, mess up the cream, and frost the cake with my failures.

LORETTE'S SISTER

(wringing her wash angrily)

And now, you'd like me to pity you. I neglected my kids to support you in that rotten Port-au-Prince. I worried about you so much that I couldn't sleep. I sent you everything I possibly could. And then today, Mademoiselle decides that she can no longer stand the smell of flour. After all that schooling, you embarrass me by opening under an arbor, between two trees, a wretched fried-fish joint. You can't even make a go of that. And you are surprised that I am kicking you out of the house.

LORETTE

(while lying back down)

From all my years at school, the only thing that lingers is the persistent smell of vanilla that I can't get rid of. Why stay here? I'd prefer to take my chances across the border. Nothing is holding me in this town where you all think I'm a strange beast.

LORETTE'S SISTER

You intimidate people and you irritate them with your fits of depression. Do you think unfortunate people, the real unfortunate ones, have the luxury of feeling depressed? Hunger doesn't care about equivocation.

LORETTE

(moves away from Ronald and the others and lies back down curling into a fetal position)

In the name of misery, you even deny my moods.

RONALD

Your vanilla smell reminds me of Mom and the twins. Fifi and our youth. I don't want to think about it, though. My big little sister, she, too, is buried in this truck driven at breakneck speed. My sister pregnant with her second child. Oh, God! Please make sure that nothing happens to them! I couldn't bear it.

(Back to Ronald's house.)

(Fifi and Ronald, as children, are running around a tree singing: Yon ti pye lorye.)

They're playing hopscotch. One sees two smaller girls dressed identically. Ronald's mother appears as well. All the children are surrounding her, and she is smiling as she gathers them around her.)

RONALD

Mom! You are so beautiful when you smile. I had forgotten the sound of your laugh. You have changed so much since the death of the twins. The epidemic of dysentery that ravaged the town almost got Fifi and me, too.

(Man Etienne stops playing with the kids and turns toward Ronald.)

MAN ETIENNE

But you survived. Please forgive me, and the Everlasting Lord knows I love you, but each time I see you, I think of my two babies. Scarcely six years old. I did everything to save them. First, the school's dispensary run by the Sisters. Then, old Rosa, famous for her herbal remedies and then the vodou priest, Zachary. Dear Lord, please forgive me if I have offended You, but, at that moment, I would have sold my soul to the devil to keep them. I have since repented. At the Church of God, I gave an account of my aberrations to the faithful.

(Man Etienne lowers her head in repentance; then, she sits down in front of an old sewing machine.)

RONALD

Mona died during the night. Monique, who we thought was healed, passed from life to death in the early morning. Her *marassa* lays claim to her. It's normal.

MAN ETIENNE

I sewed their last dresses. I wouldn't have let anyone else do it. I took out the material that I was saving for their seventh birthday, netting of pink cotton with soft green daisies. I put green lace on the collar and the cuffs.

RONALD

Yes, we heard you all night on your old sewing machine. Until dawn.

MAN ETIENNE

All night long, I cut, pinned, and sewed. I didn't need to take their measurements. I knew each centimeter of their bodies, the length and thickness of each tiny limb, rigid forever.

RONALD

In the morning, the dresses were waiting properly on a chair in the living room. You broke down after the funeral. And your grief has cut you off from us ever since.

(In an outburst of anger, Man Etienne throws a frame, with the picture of the father of her children, to the ground.)

MAN ETIENNE

Your father, who disappeared two weeks after their birth, didn't show up to bid them adieu. I could have forgiven all those women who started swaying their hips when they saw me as if to let me know that he had placed his snoopy hands on them, the stench of *clairin* that accompanied his return in the middle of the night. But he would not, until their death, acknowledge their existence. That was what hurt me the most. I know that my brother, Ferdinand, had informed him... Your uncle thought he was doing the right thing.

(While Ronald is speaking, the children mime a spanking. They try to avoid the blows of Uncle Ferdinand. A silhouette behind the tarpaulin.)

RONALD

My Uncle Ferdinand has always wanted to do the right thing. He hit us, Fifi and me, on the back with his bull's skin riding crop. On the most sensitive part of the shoulder, where the hollow of the flesh reserves its softest, and most painful sensations, as well. In Dad's absence, he took it upon himself to punish us, and, each time he visited Cap-Haïtien, he inquired about our misdeeds. Only the twins escaped his correctives. Without wanting to admit it, the big man was afraid of the supernatural powers of the *marassa*. He always invented a reason for not punishing them. Magnanimous and malicious, my two little sisters took the blame for our wrongdoings, and, even when Uncle Ferdinand suspected subterfuge, he didn't dare deal with them severely.

(The four children are playing in the background. There is a joyful and happy atmosphere around a tree.)

MAN ETIENNE

I was never afraid of my little angels. So soft and cuddly, they snuggled up together against me, giving me a double dose of tenderness.

RONALD

You know, Mom, I loved them, too. The day of the funeral, you didn't realize that Uncle Ferdinand was carrying one of the caskets, or that he made me carry, with cousin Antoine's help, the other one. How could two small caskets made of planks of light-colored wood weigh so much? From the church all the way to the cemetery, I was waiting for Monique to ask me to let her out. For two nights, I thought I heard their tiny fists beating against the planks demanding light.

MAN ETIENNE

(makes a gesture as if to touch the cheek of her son before she disappears)

I heard you crying the whole night, you and Fifi, but I couldn't break the shell of my own sorrow. It benumbed me until my death.

(Ronald lies back down. The passengers are becoming agitated. The truck is moving faster and faster. Grunts are heard. And kicks. The sun has risen.)

LORETTE

(off-stage)

"Move over, Ronald!"

(Marie-Jeanne is crying softly)

LORETTE

(off-stage)

"Stop crying, Marie-Jeanne."

MADELEINE

We have plenty of reasons to cry; otherwise, we wouldn't be here.

EVARISTE

In any case, that Dominican drives like an idiot. He will kill us before we even get to Dajabón.

JOSAPHAT

Ah. Now the coward begins to moan: "*We're all going to die. We're all going to die.*" So, Evariste, death is not made for dogs.

VIOLETTA

It's not for nothing that they call the driver La Volanta.

ENZO GABRIEL

Shut-up, shithead! You'll bring our little truck bad luck.

ROMAINE

Bad luck! It hasn't waited for our words to show up. She's the one that led us under this blue shit where we can all kick the bucket.

(Abruptly, a voice in Spanish demands silence.)

ACT I, SCENE II

Moans and whispers. Suddenly the crazy escapade of the truck stops with a screech of its tires, sending up clouds of dust. A formidable explosion arouses the benumbed passengers and gives them the right to yell. Immediately, prayers, cries, shouts, litanies and oaths come from all directions, criss-crossing and inundating the blue tarp with a grief-filled cacophony.

Jesus Mary Joseph

*Anmwe*³

We are all going to die

I want to return to my country

This driver wants to kill us
 Help
 God damn it

MAURICIO RAFAËL PEREZ

(shaking the tarp. The noise of a chassis being hit.)

Calm down! A tire burst. That's all. *Silencio*. You're crazy! *Silencio!*

ENZO GABRIEL

(gets up, throws himself to the ground, and pounds the earth.)

Mierda. Mierda. Ma Carmencita is waiting for me. When are we going to arrive in Dajabón? The border guards brought me back here six months ago, and I have been trying to get back to my family for six months. What has happened to my wife and my three *hijos* without me.

JOSAPHAT

(ironically)

That Haitian is crazy. He thinks he's Dominican because he speaks Spanish.

ROMAINE

He did live there for ten years.

MADELEINE

Leave him alone, Josaphat. I know what it is to have a love on the other side of the border. I know the pain of waiting.

(Madeleine gets up and relives the farewell scene with her husband, Charlot.)

MADELEINE

(with a serious voice)

My husband, my man, my Charlot, you are madly in love with me; yet, you are leaving. Your little hardware business is dying out. You can't stand dragging it behind you anymore like a piece of rotten flesh. Begging people to buy: five gourdes for the rusty lock, twenty gourdes for the screwdriver,

but I will give it to you for fifteen. When you left, you didn't know that I was pregnant with your generous love.

(Madeleine addresses the other passengers, all the inhabitants of Piment.)

My man will come back, I'm telling you. He's not like those fathers who leave forever. Charlot will return and my two loves will meet without saying anything. I'll see them dancing under the blue of the sky for love scoffs at borders.

(Madeleine is wandering about with her son, who is holding her hand. Knocking from door to door, they march up and down the streets of the town. The set of the streets of Piment.)

THE CHILD

Have you seen my father?

MADELEINE

Have you bumped into my man, the handsome Charlot, in Gurabo?

THE CHILD

In Santiago?

MADELEINE

In Santo Domingo?

THE CHILD

In Dajabón?

MADELEINE

(talking to the buscones that are recognizable by their ridiculous guard apparel: boots, helmets, rifles, and big mustaches, swarthy complexion)

Are you the ones who have come to harass my Charlot, to take him to Santo Domingo? Tell me where he is! What have you done with him?

(With little Leo, Madeleine circles the village twice.)

MADELEINE

I'm afraid. If he were OK, Charlot would have written. So many disappearances in the *bateyes*, the hills, and the countryside. From the agricultural farms of Navarette, from Villa Gonzales to the intersection at Botancillo. Who has the courage to begin counting the dead that are still standing?

(The child is looking in the direction of the border.)

MADELEINE

No, we won't go there. I didn't have a child in order to give him, like mincemeat, to the Dominican guards. Come here, my son! I am going to tell you a story. When you see your father, you'll have so many things to tell him that the time will become longer so as to allow you to get to know each other well.

(Suddenly, Madeleine lets out a horrible cry. Little Leo moves away from her slowly and then disappears.)

MADELEINE

Charlot, our son is gone. After a week's vigil, fever, then meningitis, took him away. I rushed him to Cap-Haïtien where the doctors, in spite of their efforts, couldn't save him. He is dead, that's it, and the sun doesn't rise any more. The others tell me life is unjust: if it is beautiful, they are suspicious of it, if it is cruel, they curse it, for it never relents except when you break its neck. I wasn't expecting that blow. Madness is contacting me. Only you can keep it away.

(Madeleine turns straight towards the east.)

MADELEINE

I'm coming toward you, Charlot. With tears in my eyes, I'm leaving behind my son's corpse, the son you never knew. In Piment's cemetery, in this village where you and I grew up, I have decided to leave him, and nevertheless, to come and find you, Charlot my man, and bring you back to us. I left one dead in the West. Will I find another one in the East?

RONALD

(Leaning on his elbows, Ronald distances himself from Lorette.)

Madeleine is so strong! A bleeding scratch with the harsh smell of wounds too fresh, a green vine, suddenly bent over, but standing up to misfortune. I feel so weak in her presence and so cowardly.

MADELEINE

(lies back down after having spoken)

It's not courage that makes me act. I have no other choice than the truth. With what's left of my good angel, I charge straight at my grief. I am ready to welcome madness because it's the only thing that can save me.

THE VOICE OF ENZO GABRIEL

Nada importa ahora. Nada.

JEAN-MARIE

(with a cold, incisive voice)

If you don't shut that idiot up, I'm going to punch him in the face.

ROMAINE

You think you can scare people, you well-dressed *zenglendo*.⁴

RONALD

That Romaine! Nothing, nobody frightens her. A slip of hot-tempered energy difficult to keep in one place. I wonder how she manages to stay immobile and quiet for so long in this truck of grief.

(While Ronald stands up and speaks, the set of the streets of Port-au-Prince is slowly illuminated.)

RONALD

I remember the first time we met. My first trip to the capital. I was still full of illusions when I got on the bus. After having completed my studies to become a mechanic, I was going to return to the village to set Man Etienne up in a decent house. Finished with rents and farms. Done with those

end-of-the-month anxieties, that feeling of powerlessness when confronted with an arrogant, vulgar proprietor.

(The background noise of a bus station with the voices of the passengers and the driver: "Move to the back! There's space for everyone. Hurry up if you want to get to Port-au-Prince before nightfall!")

(Romaine gets up and hails Ronald.)

ROMAINE

(mocking smile)

First time in the capital, little guy? Be careful! You're wearing your story on your face. You aren't, by chance, Man Etienne's boy, are you? She's the one who sewed my first communion dress. A good woman, your mother.

(Romaine sits down authoritatively near Ronald on a bench and nestles up to him in a teasing, yet very sensual way.)

ROMAINE

Are you timid, little guy? Stick with me and I will show you how to conduct yourself in this city full of traps. Port-au-Prince is a monstrous book with pages ripped out, missing parts, and gaping holes. Even if you know how to read, you can lose your bearings. The Rue des Fronts-Forts is a den of gangsters. On Grand-Rue, a car can cut you down in front of the police station, a thief can take your gourdes, and another your shoes and your pants, before a policeman arrives. Lalue, Avenue John Brown, for chauffeurs, guides and foreigners, if you are in a hurry, don't go there on school days. In a procession of air-conditioned automobiles, the parents come to drop off their spoiled daughters at the Sisters' academy. Their long braids swing from left to right, and from right to left. The chauffeurs wait. The girls who are escorted on foot weave their way in and out quickly, proud to have been admitted to such an important school. Too bad if they are despised by the other children! Be careful in Jardine alley! It's the authorized place where, for decades, governments cut down rebellious young men with impunity.

RONALD

I fell in love with her before we got to the capital. She put me up in

her two-room apartment on the Rue des Casernes during the first three months and taught me how to satisfy a woman. I would have eaten at her feet, covered her with kisses, or written her long passionate letters on white paper without squares. But she didn't believe in it...

ROMAINE

Love is good for young girls. I was a woman well before the arrival of my first period. At fifteen, life had already given me my identity card. I wasn't about to let myself be mistreated anymore. The talk-to-me-of-loves, the love-mes, the be-faithful-to-me-till-deaths, I arrange them nicely on a shelf and look at them from a distance. Ronald is not nasty. I could have become attached to him, but he would have held it against me later. He used to say that he liked my cheeky airs, but he paired up with the gentle and docile Francine. Just the opposite of me.

RONALD

I still dream of her sassy legs, of their stranglehold around my loins. Oh, I love Francine. She's the mother of my son, Roberto, and of my Amandine-to-be, but Romaine, she's the complete woman, the woman who could have calmed all my extravagances and attacked my weaknesses, could have given me the desire to take life by the horns when she's too nasty and put my hands around her neck when she is cuddly. She didn't want me.

(Romaine and Ronald act out the gestures of love while they are speaking; then, Romaine separates herself from the young man.)

ROMAINE

If you only knew, my man, how much I would have wanted to be able to love you, how my body will always remember your tenderness, how my head, on its own, sometimes turns toward a shoulder that resembles yours.

RONALD

After making love, your voice was always clothed with depression in a destabilizing dispute between anger and pleasure. You would immediately jump out of bed to reestablish the distance, reaffirming your role as cynical, detached initiator. My gestures of tenderness, incomplete and unnoticed, were thrown back at me, at my loins and my heart.

(Romaine disengages herself despondently from Ronald.)

RONALD

We had continued to see each other even after I moved to Delmas with the other mechanics. I would go to see you at least twice a week, sometimes more. Then, one day, you weren't at your apartment. No one knew where you went. I looked for you everywhere, like crazy, for months.

ROMAINE

If you only knew how it hurt me to leave you. I would have loved, still today, to snuggle up against you and absorb your tenderness in large gulps, but I cannot be happy for too long. Bitterness always gets me right in the gut and reminds me that life and I have some scores to settle.

(Romaine casts a last sad glance in Ronald's direction.)

ROMAINE

(with her eyes misty and a subtle gesture toward her abdomen)

You'll never know what I almost kept of yours.

ACT I, SCENE III

In the distance, a rooster crows. Under the blue tarpaulin, gradually there is more light. The passengers slowly begin to move about. Some stretch; others yawn. His straw hat on his head, Josaphat gets up. He makes exaggerated movements with the machete he took from his sack. His gestures and his facial expression reveal his rage. The others seem to move away from him and look at him in alarm. He spits his disgust and his disdain.

JOSAPHAT

We let ourselves be disarmed without saying anything, and now we can only escape, leave our land and run towards the unknown. We know well that in the East they will treat us like dogs, but we all go there. As for me, I assure you that I won't let them push me around.

JOSAPHAT'S WIFE

(strong and dressed in white, grabs the stick⁵ with him, a miming revealing pride, pain, and grace. A cornfield in the background suggests work in the fields. Images of peasants, both male and female.)

Then, why are you going, my man? I am already dead and buried. You avenged me quite nicely. You killed our neighbor's wife. You demonstrated your strength, but I am dead, and you can't do anything about that.

JOSAPHAT

Yes, you are dead. You, my wife with whom I wooed the earth from dawn until dusk. They killed you for a patch of land and some stolen plantains. Our son, the only one of our children to survive, to escape the thousands of diseases that kill the kids of poor people, they turned him into a zombi. You and I saw him, grey and spiritless, incapable of thinking, laughing, or loving. Like a plant that's going to rot soon. One only has to look at it to understand that no treatment will save it. And you want me to keep my machete cold and useless under the mattress.

JOSAPHAT'S WIFE

(with an angry movement of the stick)

But now, today, you have to leave the country to escape the police.

JOSAPHAT

(dodges the stick deftly but almost excusing himself for it)

I'll return when things have calmed down. Watch over your tomb and that of our son. I will return. Man can't hide behind the trees of his neighbor; their shadow won't recognize his silhouette and will denounce him sooner or later. I will return.

JOSAPHAT'S WIFE

(disappearing)

I'm going back to my tomb, Josaphat.

JOSAPHAT

I hope to see you some day, but not too soon. Don't come and disturb my sleep if you don't know how to get home.

(The noise outside intensifies just like the bouncing of the vehicle. Several voices are heard.)

ROMAINE

He's going to crush our guts, that Volanta.

MADELEINE

He should let me get off if he's intending to have an accident!

EVARISTE

Your mouths are full of bad luck, ladies. Shut up!

(The voice of Edgar is heard for the first time.)

EDGAR

Fifi, snuggle up closer against me. Put your stomach next to my loins to protect the child.

(He gets up holding his wife's hand who, until then, had remained in the shadow. One sees the couple advancing, but, as they get closer to the front of the stage, the distance between them becomes greater. The set of the streets of the village is illuminated.)

FIFI

(her voice starts as a murmur, then get progressively stronger like a torrent)

It's hard to bear the love you're overwhelming me with, Edgar. I decided to live my life with you like one chooses the straightest road, wearily, while one's heart turns toward mysterious paths and the fragrant underbrush. I carry my affection for you like a burden inside me since I can only show you the part of me that is smooth like a stone and clear like river water.

EDGAR

(his look directed away from the young woman)

I always knew, even on the day of Christelle's birth, that your presence at my side was nothing but a reprieve from your real life, that you often escaped into thought and that I would never be able to rejoin you. Sometimes, you

leave me your tenderness as security, in order to distance yourself from me even more. Behind that gaze, serene and calm, you hide reservoirs of seething and tumult. I would have given my life to dive in there with you, but your smile, so full of affection, became a wall to keep me at a distance.

(A musical fanfare fills the stage. The hymn to the flag. The narrow streets of Cap-Haïtien appear in the background. Fifi effectuates grandiose gestures with her arms and pretends to blow into a trumpet [the sounds of the fanfare are heard], and she marches in step. In the meantime, Edgar goes and sits down on a corner in the shade, and Ronald approaches his sister.)

FIFI

Cap-Haïtien has always fascinated me. Do you remember, Ronald, when we saw it for the first time on Flag Day? I had never seen houses so high or streets so narrow. It seemed to me that it was a magical place where the sea slid in to rock the city to the rhythm of the water. Each house hid its mystery and whispered to passersby stories both gentle and ancient. After you left for the capital, I frequently returned to Cap-Haïtien. Just because, for no specific reason. I didn't tell Mom, for she wouldn't have understood. It seemed to me that I was going adrift and that nothing made sense. As soon as the sewing orders gave me a bit of pocket money, I would take the bus and spend hours at the port. I avoided Uncle Ferdinand's street; otherwise, he would have told Mom. I took my notebook of fashion designs, but, after a while, I wasn't able to design clothes anyone would ever wear. In the end, I only knew how to sew, to complete the prototypes conceived by others. I learned, like Mom, to faithfully follow the patterns of the dog-eared catalogues clients brought me. At that time, I still had orders that were regular enough, but clients gradually became more and more scarce. What dressmaker can compete with the clothes coming from the United States? Even if they're used, they give off the smell of money, of societies overwhelmed with things to buy. They're much cheaper and always much better than the tailored clothes with their foul smell of the poor. One day, while watching the boats, I ripped up that notebook. It no longer served any purpose. Yes, I lied when I told you I had misplaced it.

RONALD

We all need a space to hide our deepest sorrows. It's as if expressing them fully exposes them and makes them more real. I lied to you about

something much worse, little sister.

(Fifi places a soft kiss on her brother's forehead.)

FIFI

Oh, little brother, the guilt that grows in us is so inhibiting. I have never spoken to you about Gérard even though you have always been, besides being my brother, my best friend, the friend I chose around the family table, before the mischievous faces of the twins, over the sad silences of Mom and Dad's desertion. But how could I explain to you what I didn't dare contemplate deep inside myself? At that time, I even arranged it so that our paths never crossed. It's true that you have always known how to read me and to figure things out. But most of the time we all control that part of ourselves we present to others. Except when misfortune makes us different, and we become moans and wounds. That's what happened to Mom. The death of the twins shattered her world as a pious woman, a woman superbly impassive when confronting life's misfortunes. Generally, she would filter what got to us by only allowing to experience what she deemed capable of making us better and happier: moments of joy, satisfaction with work accomplished, her faith in God. She protected our emotions from all pain that was too raw. Until the death of the twins when her suffering, stubborn and brutal, reached us without any buoys for our infant hearts.

RONALD

I can't be angry with her, sis. Now that I am a father and that Francine is expecting little Amandine-to-be in September, I wonder how Mom was able to survive the death of the twins.

FIFI

I'm not mad at anybody. Somewhere inside the circle in which you are born, you choose your life. I wanted to choose mine, but I lied to myself so many times. I am so afraid of hurting others that I bruise myself. I thank Mom for having given us a happy childhood... until the death of the twins.

RONALD

I would like to provide that same happy childhood for Roberto, for Amandine-to-be, for my goddaughter, your daughter, Christelle, and for

the baby you are carrying inside you.

(One hears the voices of children playing, the clickety-clack of Man Etienne's machine. Then, Edgar gets up and takes Fifi's hand. They mimic a marriage procession.)

RONALD

Mom was so happy to see you married. Me, too. Edgar is a good guy and he loves you madly. The only problem is his brother, Jean-Marie, with his desire to be the big black man, ready to sell his entire family for something with four-wheel drive and a gold watch.

FIFI

You forgot the light-skinned wife with long hair who is supposed to symbolize his social success. We aren't very lucky with our brothers-in-law. Me with Jean-Marie and you with Carlo...

RONALD

Don't talk to me about him! I know I'll have to mention his name one day before this lousy truck drives us to our death, but give me another reprieve. Tell me about Cap-Haïtien, about its mysteries and about your adventures. I get the feeling that that city is at the heart of the secrets living in your eyes.

FIFI

Have you ever discovered someone else, besides yourself, in your thoughts and in your gestures? It's as if a stranger had taken possession of you and that, from a distance, you were following a film, the lead actor of which you'd recognized, without questioning the climax of the plot. When Gérard touched my arm that morning at the port, I sensed a stranger under my skin. I didn't know she was living there. I heard her wake up with her movements, both languorous and quivering. I felt the chills even in my toes. He was staring at me as if he were waiting for me at the peak of my desire. Without rushing. *(While talking, Fifi mimes the encounter with the man she's talking about. In the background, the sounds of a religious service can be heard. The thundering voice of the pastor and the enthusiastic responses of the believers, punctuated with curses.)* "Repent, the end of the world is near. You will be punished if you don't follow in the path of the Lord." We would meet near the cathedral. Sometimes, waiting for the appointed time, I would kneel

to pray inside. It's true we're not Catholics, but, at that time, it didn't seem especially important to me. Sin had never seemed to me so inevitable and so easy to bear. On Sundays, I would accompany Mom to mass. Without fail, the pastor would return to adultery, fornication, all the filth the human body, inhabited by the devil, is capable of. Sometimes, men and women would come to bear witness to their depravation. I would bow my head to hide the pleasure that moistened my memories. I would close my eyes to escape into those sensations that defied any sort of absolution. The fervor of the hymns intoxicated me immoderately. That lasted three months and four days. Then, he left. A week later, I realized I was pregnant.

(Ronald goes closer to his sister. Together, they dance around in a circle. Then, they stop abruptly, and, putting his hand delicately on her abdomen, Ronald embraces the young woman.)

RONALD

I never even suspected it. You could have talked to me about it, little sister.

FIFI

At that time, you and Francine were trying to have your second child. How could I tell you that I was aborting a baby that you would have loved as your own? But I would never have been able to lie to Edgar and have him raise the child of another. The truth would have caused him too much pain.

(In the silence that follows, the voice of Edgar, still in the shadows, is heard.)

EDGAR

I suspected as much, but I would have never, at any price, broached the topic. And take the risk of losing you. Ask you to choose between that man that put sparks in your eyes and our love, too comfortable and placid to be a substitute for the attraction of fire.

FIFI

(turned deliberately toward Ronald)

At six weeks, it was easy to get rid of the flesh, but more than two years afterward, my abdomen still deplores its emptiness. Every hug that I give

Christelle bears the nostalgia for that unknown baby. The one inside me now is Edgar's. It's also my way of giving my body the chance to heal its wound.

RONALD

(in an aside)

I feel even more guilty of the mistake I still can't talk to you about because the shame fills my mouth like wet sand. You took off with your child in your womb, your husband at your side. You left little Christelle with your mother-in-law, and perhaps I could have spared you all that. When you know the truth, little sister, will you be able to pardon me?

FIFI

(aside)

Ronald will never understand that nothing would have stopped me from leaving with Edgar. Not because, as the pastor of the Church of God says, a wife should accompany her husband.

(She turns toward Ronald.)

I wonder what would have become of us if Mom had followed Dad when he abandoned us. I saw our father again, you know. Something else that I haven't told you. One fine day in Port-au-Prince, without advance notice, he showed up while I was working in that swimming suit factory in the Industrial Park. God knows how he found me. I recognized his voice when he articulated my name. "Michelle," he said. He had never called me Fifi. He always had to distinguish himself from everyone else. For a second, I thought he had returned for good after all that time. The first thing that came to my mind was that Mom was wrong; *he* hadn't forgotten us. Then, seeing his eyes, I understood that he was only passing through. He was going to leave for the Northwest illegally, on a small wooden boat, with Miami as his final destination. Immediately the big act. The misty eyes and the hoarse voice. To bid me farewell. To ask me to pass along his greetings to you, his only son. To tell me how much he cried when he'd heard about the twins. *It's not necessary to say anything to Solange. She won't understand.* It took me a while to realize that he was referring to Mom. As if I were going to acknowledge to our mother that her husband had given a sign of life, after more than fifteen years, only to announce his definitive departure for Miami. I would have liked so much to not think of that long absence any more. It's crazy how, sometimes, I want him to hold me in his arms and throw me up in the air like when I was a kid. I would tighten

my lips and close my eyes, but I felt my heart expand so that I could take in the whole world, everything shaking behind the clouds. I would never cry, even when he tossed me way up and my head would turn, because I didn't want Mom to come and snatch me out of his arms.

RONALD

Poor Mom. She mistrusted Dad's bursts of laughter. No doubt she saw them as bombs ready to hurt her children.

(A loud noise is heard that makes all the passengers tremble. The screams start up again. The truck stops with an abrupt jerk that throws the passengers into one another.)

ACT II, SCENE I

After that noise, a deep silence sets in. The stage takes on a grey tint. Little by little, voices, like scarcely audible murmurs, are heard. "He hit a goat." "Are you sure? It made such a racket!" "What a nightmare!" The stage becomes progressively more and more grey. A fine powder seems to cover everything. A young woman bent over, dressed in grey with a scarf on her head, slowly comes forward. She is shaking her head from left and to right with an air of desperation. She's beating her chest and counting out loud. The set of the village is illuminated during the whole scene.

MARIE-JEANNE

One, two, three. I left my three small ones at home. One, two, three, Johnny, Charlemagne, and Gabriel. At this hour, each of them must have received three thrashings from their father. My mother-in-law will not be able to protect them. My man shows more tenderness for the shoes he makes than for our sons.

(Suddenly she screams and rushes forward.)

Let me off so I can find them!

(Romaine jumps up and encircles her with both arms.)

ROMAINE

Calm down, Ma-Jeanne, calm down!

MARIE-JEANNE

Leave me alone, Romaine, with your female scent that goes to men's heads, young and old, well-behaved young men and registered criminals. Without prejudice. They all want to breathe it in. As for me, I have been a charcoal vendor for too long. Even if I wash myself with peach-scented Camay, the foul smell of grey smoke remains on my skin and in my hair. It gives my fingers the color of crushed ashes. My poor kids have inherited, how I don't know, the same smell and the same dust. Don't tell me that you didn't notice that their hair is always full of ashes, that their skin is always pale and their eyes grey. Their father whips them as soon as he sees them, by habit or by principle.

ROMAINE

Their father beats them because it's easier to direct his anger towards the weakest. It's not your fault if used shoes coming from America the Beautiful have invaded the sidewalks.

MARIE-JEANNE

Almost no one orders shoes from him any more. Formerly, at home, the smells of the leather and glue of a shoemaker dominated; they even surpassed that of charcoal. The kids played with the small bits of leather strips. Johnny, the oldest, had even acquired the habit of going to bed with a small piece of leather in his tiny hand. In his sleep, he brought it close to his cheeks and his nostrils quivered with happiness.

(Marie-Jeanne gives a start as if someone were hitting her. She stumbles and protects her face with her hand and her arms. She gestures as if to position her children behind her back.)

ROMAINE

I know, we all know that he beats you, too, sometimes when he returns, irritable and execrable, from his workplace next to the old chapel with his pockets empty and his fists clenched.

(The sounds of children crying, of moans, and of a loud voice, full of anger, their father is giving them a talking-to: "Band of imps, I am going to maim you. Your mother's the one that can put up with you." "Stop whining! It will be good for you to get used to beatings. Life won't be giving you any presents.")

MARIE-JEANNE

(lowering her head)

I am ashamed of leaving my kids at his mercy, but I had to do something. I can't stay until Francis gets his clients back. The streets are filling with more and more used shoes everyday. There are shoes in every color, size and style: leather pumps, plastic sandals shining like Christmas tree ornaments, lace-up combat boots for soldiers, shoes for sports, Adidas basketball shoes, and I don't know what else. When school started around September, there were no more orders for a good, solid pair of black shoes with laces. No, parents buy used shoes with strange names that come straight from the garbage dumps of Miami or New York.

ROMAINE

Does that give him the right to beat you or your kids, Marie-Jeanne? You don't have to justify what you're doing.

MARIE-JEANNE

When I left my kids, I told them to be as quiet as possible. Not to contradict their father, not to cough, not to smile too often, or for too long a time. Everything exasperates him. He would have wanted me to stay and take care of the kids, but he didn't want to leave. He wanted his life as it was before, when the whole village got their shoes from him, when the orders were piling up in his shop, when he employed apprentices to help him. He didn't want me to leave just like he hadn't wanted me to become a charcoal merchant. As if I had had a choice!

ROMAINE

Don't blame yourself. He doesn't have the right to transform you and your kids into punching bags to compensate for his frustrations as a permanently unemployed shoemaker.

MARIE-JEANNE

(as if to convince herself, but tears were streaming from her eyes)

I'll come back as soon as I have come up with a bit of money, enough to change my place of residence. There are five of us in only one room. The dirty walls are falling in on top of me. I'll come back with enough money to open a small grocery store. I'll send money to the kids and to Francis's mother, so she can take care of them in the meantime.

ROMAINE

If ever your man doesn't spend it on rum or on *petit trempé*.⁶ We know he comes home drunk, that the little money he earns repairing tired soles is spent at the *tafia* shop and that he returns to your place with foul breath, fists clenched ready to strike and a mouth full of insults. We know that.

(Marie-Jeanne suddenly straightens up)

MARIE-JEANNE

(shouting, insultingly, at Romaine)

Yes, I know that you are all aware of the blows I take, the lickings my three sons and I get during the course of Francis's angry outbursts. One, two, three, a slap for the repair work that hasn't been picked up for three weeks, a blow for the new woman who has set up shop selling secondhand shoes just two blocks away, a clout for the feeling of powerlessness that reddens my eyes, three blows for my inability to awaken his desire. Yes, did you know that, for five years, he hasn't touched me except to hit me with his fists, with insults and with humiliations? We don't make love any more because the word doesn't have any meaning any more. You all know that my lowered eyes hide my scars, that my slow-moving steps conceal my desire to flee, but you don't say anything. You have never said anything.

(One hears the passengers' voices, like murmurs, like whispered discussions: "A husband who beats his wife, that's a private matter." "Child scapegoats. Really, that's not normal!" "A blow, or a clout, never killed anyone." "Beating a woman is okay, but beating the mother of one's children is intolerable!" In the meantime, Marie-Jeanne sinks down and regains her place huddled up on the floor. The voice of Evariste is heard as he moves forward.)

EVARISTE

My father never raised his little finger against anyone. He spent his whole life respecting people, and what did he get for it? His only son, me, is forced to go to the neighboring republic. His barbershop didn't last.

RONALD

(remains sitting, cross-legged)

Oh! Stop your lamentations, Evariste! You continued in your father's footsteps because of your sense of duty or rather because of the simple

reflex of ownership, but you have never understood anything about Mario's talent.

EVARISTE

I should have let you pile up debts, cut your hair for love without demanding my due? Play you the records of Tino Rossi while I cut your hair? I didn't inherit my father's naivety.

RONALD

Don't ruin my memories for me. I remember my first visit to *Chez Mario*. If I returned so frequently, it was because your father was more than a barber. All the men of the village appreciated the power of his steady hand. Their shoulders and necks would recount to Mario the disappointments of the day. The fights with the wife over those minute things that, on payday, make fingers move up the length of legs in a gesture full of sensuality, but that are transformed into get-out-of-heres when one's pockets are empty. The failure of the oldest son at school was so similar to yours that you pummel him and feel spiteful and alone at night. The humiliations swallowed because the children have to eat and go to school, the injustices in the face of which one feels powerless and that weigh on one's shoulders a bit more each day. Mario would move his hand and the cut hair would tell him the story and the struggle, each day more difficult than the last. Since the death of the old barber, *Chez Mario* is nothing but a cold salon where scissors, deft and disdainful, glide right over the depressions of others.

EVARISTE

My father taught me technique. I know how to cut hair as well as him. Moreover, I'm sure that they'll recognize my talent in Santo Domingo. Don't forget that three years ago I did a seminar there on *hair design*. (*"Hair design" is pronounced with ostentation in English as opposed to the French of the original text of the rest of the play.*)

RONALD

How could I forget it! You shape, you cut, and you arrange thinking about Santo Domingo. In a loud voice or a low voice, it doesn't matter. La *ciudad* oozes from all your pores and extends itself in monotonous melodies all around you.

EVARISTE

Yes, my burning desire is to return. My two-month stay remains like a painful red rocket in my memory. I must have it plunge into my flesh one more time to be liberated from it.

RONALD

You have chosen to forget the billy clubs, the raids, and the *bateyes*. You only think of la *cuidad*, the asphalt and the hotels, the public spaces and the avenues, the streetlights and the sidewalks. That scent of shaving cream, calming and purifying, that Mario carried with him is gone along with the old barber. You have not been able to create your own. Your stares, tormented and bitter, have been oriented toward the east for so long that you have forgotten where the sun sets.

EVARISTE

You are all criticizing me. But who is with me in this truck of misfortune? Who, like me, met the *buscones* to negotiate the clandestine crossing? Who was tempted to go look for a better life on the eastern part of the island? I am not alone in this vehicle.

RONALD

You are right. You are not alone. But do you know that with every kilometer covered, I feel my heart contract like a painful lump, an abscess condemned to cause pain because it can never burst?

EVARISTE

As for me, I'm leaving this country like one closes a wound that reeks.

RONALD

God damn it. Shut up, Evariste! I am going to tell you something without hoping you understand anything at all from it because I still don't understand it myself. In Port-au-Prince, I worked at the international airport for two months scouring the urinals and stalls, mopping the floors, and cleaning the sinks in the lounge for departing passengers. I envied those travelers, in a subdued way, without any ill-will, persuading myself that one day I would leave, too. *Don't worry be happy. Life is beautiful.* I had gleaned enough English words to give me the impression that I belonged to America the Beautiful.

(While Ronald is speaking, all the other passengers, their legs tucked under them, congregate around him in the form of a circle to listen to him.)

RONALD

Being so close to the planes, to the runway that took them so far away, reassured me about my destiny. One morning, while I was carefully picking up the scraps of paper left on the floor, I surprised a man furtively drying his eyes in front of the sink. I had heard stories: of false papers, of falsified passports, of pregnant women anxious to give birth, in the United States, to a little American. I had seen many passengers, but I had never seen a man cry. He was probably someone leaving behind his wife and children, an old mother or a beloved father. The eyes of the man met mine above the handle of the mop.

(Ronald assumes the voice of the man. He speaks like a recording.)

“I have been waiting to leave for five years. I spent so much money for this visa; I invested everything in this departure. It’s finally happening, today! In four hours’ time, I will be in New York City. I have been dreaming about this for five years... No, don’t congratulate me. I feel bad. I should be happy today, but I feel bad. You are a young man. One day perhaps you will understand. It’s like a woman you’re seeing, you aren’t getting along with her, she makes all kinds of trouble for you. *(The song of Ti Corn is heard in the background.)* So, you decide to break things off, you tell her, “It’s finished between you and me.” And you find yourself miserable, so miserable that you would like nothing else but to see her one more time, to run your hand through her hair, to caress her lips and to make love to her while crying. That’s how I feel today! I know that I won’t be able to come back. I have a simple tourist visa good for only three months. Unless the Americans force me back, I know that I will not return that fast. Maybe I will even die away from home with the whites, and that hurts. It hurts to have to leave under those conditions. Oh, deep down, I am happy. I will be able to help my Mom and my family. Besides, I know that there are thousands of people who would love to be in my shoes, but... Do you know the song, *Ma prale?*⁷

(The song gets louder and louder.)

RONALD

(continues simulating the man’s voice full of repressed tears)

I forgot the name of the singer. Listen to that song! It’s sad and beautiful:

distress without a solution, a wound without a cure. Listen to it if you have the time!

(The song continues in the background.)

RONALD

(continues with his own voice, shaking himself as if he were coming back from a dream)

I used to consider the man a bit strange. Then, one day on Grand-Rue, a traveling music vendor found me that singer's, Ti Corn's, song. *Ma prale*. In the midst of the cacophonous chaos on Jean-Jacques Dessalines Boulevard, next to the garbage overflowing from sewers, face to face with men and women rushing toward an already overcrowded minibus, I made up my mind to leave this country at all costs, felt my eyes sting nonetheless. At that moment, I thought I understood the bittersweet nostalgia of the song. Today, reclining under this blue tarp, getting hotter and hotter beneath the rising sun, I know I have only grazed misfortune. I'm leaving without knowing if I can really return. The mornings of fleeting dawn vanish under the demented tires of the truck, *Ma prale*, the stars of December, the stardust of dreams, are scattered over the black sky.

(The others continue, like a long, sad suite, without completely drowning out the singer's voice.)

ROMAINE

The rustling of leaves decomposes in the humidity of a rainy morning.

FIFI

Ma prale the feet that leap from rock to rock without being able to avoid the chilliness of the evening mist don't leave any traces.

LAURETTE

The gentleness of the wind that rises at dawn to say "Good morning" to me before everyone else, I am leaving it forever.

JOSAPHAT

The generous smile of a stranger at the foot of the hill and his white teeth

in the yellow flesh of a recently picked mango fade. *Ma prale*.

MADELEINE

I am staring, one last time, at the flowering *flamboyants*.

RONALD

Ma prale. I salute you, my country. My love for you is too impossible to live. It always gets me in the gut.

ACT II, SCENE II

The scene changes abruptly. The song stops. The quiet, nostalgic atmosphere is suddenly replaced by chaos, noise, and screams. The passengers return to their places. Curses in Spanish and Kreyol are heard. The truck speeds up and suddenly the countryside is flying by at an infernal rhythm resulting in dust flying every which way. The voice of Enzo Gabriel rings out.

ENZO GABRIEL

Madre. Mis hijos y Carmencita. I don't want to die without seeing them again. I left my wife and children there six months ago. After fifteen years on the eastern part of the island, I couldn't expect to be deported like that since I have my house there, livestock, fields where the ears of corn take on, in spite of everything, the color of modest bliss. That's where my Carmencita and our three sons, Pedro, Felipe and José Gonzalez are waiting for my return. Barely one year old, little José Gonzalez says "Papa" when I come back from the fields. Felipe is three years old and speaks Spanish like I never will, and Pedro, who just turned six, must start the *escuela* in September. I have to go there now to prepare for the beginning of the new school year. My Carmencita is probably worried about that, she, who, at any price, wants to have a daughter, a *muñeca* as beautiful as she is. We have already chosen the first name: Rose Isabela. If I can't see them again, may I die right now. *No importa. Nada importa ahora*.

ROMAINE

As they say: "No news is good news." Those are words from the French dictionary for those who believe in the stories of alphabets and proverbs. Go tell that to Enzo, who has had no news from his wife or from his children. All those sent back home, they know that the absence of news

often signifies disappearance in a refuge camp, an unexpected departure, and a separation without the formality of saying "Farewell." "No news is good news." For us, all news has a tendency of being bad. Those new means of communication, rapid and instantaneous, the Internet on the corner of the street, those cyber cafes with their cheap calls, serve only to communicate emergencies. From the funeral of the elderly grandmother to the first communion of the little sister, the news begging for some kind of financial support runs rampant across the waves, without worrying about good manners, and one hangs up either relieved or disappointed. (*Romaine takes on a weak, high-pitched voice.*) Yes, dear aunt. Yes, I learned about September 11th. It's horrible. On television, they showed the towers falling. That's not good. Nothing happened to you, right? Thank God! We were afraid when we learned that those buildings were in Manhattan. For, what would become of us without you? Who else would send us that small money order for the ends of the month? We were afraid, you know! Luckily you were *off* that day! Those damned terrorists wanted to cause problems for us.

(Romaine shrugs her shoulders in order to say, for the last time, "No news is good news." She addresses the public.)

Some of those sent home are incapable of taking back up the slice of life that had been attributed to them. Too many loose ends left unresolved. Information doesn't reach the frontier.

MADELEINE

Enzo, you would like to send information there, and I would like to receive some. We are at the opposite ends of a silence that kills.

(Suddenly Jean-Marie emits a derisive laugh and separates himself from the others with violent gestures.)

JEAN-MARIE

You're pissing me off with your whining. You wanted to leave, and now you are acting like children who change their minds for no real reason.

(Edgar runs over to his younger brother and tries to pull him toward him, but Jean-Marie pushes Edgar away.)

EDGAR

Before we left, Mom asked me to keep a watchful eye on you.

JEAN-MARIE

(laughs sarcastically and stares at his brother with contempt)

You watch over me. You, who can't even control your own wife. You, who follow her like a well-trained dog.

EDGAR

(suddenly furious and resolved to make his brother be quiet)

Don't talk about my wife! I forbid you. You hoodlum! Yes, Mom asked me to keep an eye on you. Oh, she knows full well that you have no need of me to settle the business of your gang. She knows how you'll get along without me organizing thefts, rapes, and burglaries of all sorts. Mom has tears in her eyes when she thinks about it.

JEAN-MARIE

(imitates mockingly the voice of his brother)

"Mom has tears in her eyes when she thinks about it." Then tell me how she feels when she sees you, her eldest son, become more faded every day. Only traces of you remain, like one of those texts that the French professor in 6th grade would put on the blackboard for us and that the math professor would erase with an air of mockery as soon as he arrived. You are erased, my brother, in Port-au-Prince where you try to play the mason and where you can only get wretched jobs, eliminated from the blackboard in the eyes of your wife who tolerates you and whom you can't satisfy, even in this pick-up truck where you crouch down playing the protective husband.

EDGAR

Shut up! You will never understand anything of love, of the need to inhale the same air as another, of the need to be the air that the other breathes. To become a simple leaf, a tiny speck of dust in order to cling to her flesh, so as to never be separated from her. You will never know that.

JEAN-MARIE

No, I will never know it, and I am completely indifferent. I reject your timid lives, that dignity and honesty that stick to your skin and lead you, very soon, and poor like Job, to the grave. I tried to make Mom happy, to take courses in classrooms packed with students as disillusioned as me, and I only reaped failure after failure. Then, she insisted that I sign up for a computer course in Cap-Haïtien.

EDGAR

You abandoned it three months before the course ended. You came back with a gold ring and a wristwatch of dubious origins. Is that where you met your new friends with sinister-looking faces?

JEAN-MARIE

My stay in Cap-Haïtien was good for quite a few good deals. But how would you know, you with that bad luck that weighs you down? Do you think that I was going to fight against life with the same weak arms that you and Mom chose, honest hard work that doesn't bring in anything. Collect diplomas from mediocre schools, slave away for a boss who's unfair, when so little suffices to obtain a big stack of green bills.

EDGAR

So little, you say, even though you scare Mom, my wife, and all our family. Everyone in the village knows about your dirty dealings and is afraid of you. They are ashamed of you and afraid.

JEAN-MARIE

In any case, before reaching the age of twenty-five, in less than three years, I will have a motorized vehicle, a cell phone, and a beautiful wife. The vehicle will be a Jeep with four-wheel drive! With the rocky rundown roads in this country, a small car wouldn't do the trick. A cell phone, because only pathetic people don't have them now. How can anyone communicate otherwise? And a beautiful light-skinned woman with hair as long as possible. Not that artificial hair that is sold by the piece, but real hair. With money, you can pay for anything. I swore to myself that I'd own a house by my thirties. A big house with a swimming pool, a terrace, a garden and air-conditioning in every room. In Port-au-Prince, of course. Holing up in this forsaken place is out of the question!

EDGAR

I don't know why Mom wanted so much for you to come with us. As if Dominican earth had redemptive power or the power of expiation.

JEAN-MARIE

Oh, I am not complaining. It's an opportunity for me to make some contacts on the other side of the island. As a result, I'll be able to organize

my own dealings and not be dependent on others anymore.

RONALD

(Ronald gets up and pushes Jean-Marie forcefully)

Tell him to shut up or I'll break his neck. He disgusts me, this guy. Remember your poor mother, you thug. She's going to die of grief.

JEAN-MARIE

Like yours!

(Ronald rushes over towards Jean-Marie and is restrained by Fifi, who grabs him around the waist. Edgar and Jean-Marie return into the shadow.)

FIFI

Let him talk, little brother. He's a good-for-nothing. Twice, he brought drug dealers to the house. I told him straightaway never to do that again.

RONALD

You should have told me about that. How can I protect you if you hide things from me?

FIFI

It's clear you were born in January. Capricorns think they can control everything.

RONALD

Oh, I know that hunger often imposes its choices and that we have to suppress our predilections and stifle our desires. I hate masonry; yet, I had to accept working at a construction site with Edgar at Cap-Haïtien. That's where I received the news of Man Etienne's death. You had sent a neighbor to tell us that Mom was getting worse. I understood immediately. "Getting worse" in our language had always meant death. "I'm kind of okay," Mom used to say as if she didn't dare stick her neck out by boldly declaring she was doing fine. Confronted with calamities, you have to be prudent so as to not overtly defy them, but cope with them, and pass alongside them until the end: "getting worse" in place of "dying." Three years after her death, I still can't think about her without the impression

of jumping into the abyss without any wall where I could hang my appeal without response. Sometimes, the surprising wish still comes to me, so much more so in that it comes spontaneously and naturally, to run toward Man Etienne and tell her those sweet, stupid little anecdotes that make no sense except for the links they create between people. Midway, the idea freezes, and my acknowledgment of the absence destroys the flight. Mom is no longer there to listen. How does one get used to nothingness?

(Fifi becomes all playful speaking to Ronald. One senses that she wants to raise his morale.)

FIFI

Think rather about the body shop you want to open upon your return from the neighboring Republic. Tell me once more what you plan to call it.

(Ronald looks at his sister, then smiles indulgently and begins with a mocking tone as if he were telling a fable. Gradually, his tone becomes more serious.)

RONALD

I will open it near the square, and I will call it *Garage Etienne and Company*. Francine advised me to add *It's in God's Hands* to attract divine benediction. Since one should have all the forms of chance on one's side, I'm not saying "No." It will be painted a beautiful green, and I'll write the letters in white in remembrance of the twins, like the dresses they wore the day of their funeral. Yes, I'll add *It's in God's Hands* to please Francine and our Good Lord.

(He stops, pensive.)

However, boss Wilfrid's hardware store was called *Hardware Store God is Great*, and every client who entered had to listen to boss Wilfrid preach the words of the Lord: "Repent before the Last Judgment. Listen to the Word of the Gospel before it is too late, my brothers." When the hardware store caught on fire one night last July, we all helped Wilfrid put out the blaze, but not much, except the crude masonry, remained. All the merchandise was reduced to twisted fragments of rubber and red-hot metal, a sinister entwinement of cables and charred electric wires. "God is great," muttered boss Wilfrid, but we saw clearly that he said it by habit, with a new tinge of gloom in his eyes.

FIFI

(Garage Etienne and Company)

It's in God's Hands since Francine wants it that way. It sounds good in any case. Like something important and serious. You'll bring it off, you'll see.

RONALD

My dream was just within my reach, and that Carlo ruined everything. I have to resign myself to mentioning his name, sis. He did me a lot of harm. I suffer from not being able to trust like I could before. I see his smile again when we were playing dominos. I see the emotion in his eyes upon hearing Roberto's first words. I feel the crude warmth of his hand against mine holding the crank for an exceedingly difficult repair job. And then, he renounced everything. He took everything, my trust and our business, sold our tools, the spare parts, to leave for Miami. He left me with the debts and the shame of a person that has been duped.

(Ronald dries his eyes furtively before continuing.)

I had always known that Carlo wanted to leave for Miami, but I can't figure out exactly when the scale turned against me, against my family, and my friendship.

(In an aside, he adds):

I, too, fell. I betrayed my family, my mother's dead body, and the trust of my sister who had grown up with me. I also betrayed my Francine whom I had sworn to protect. Do I have the right to judge?

(He continues for Fifi.)

Francine doesn't mention the name of her brother any more, but it surges up between us like an acidic belch. Like a leak in the heart, the drop-by-drop dripping, terrible and throbbing, of a disintegrating friendship.

FIFI

You'll rebuild your garage. I'm sure.

RONALD

I have to. The important thing is getting started. That's worth the sacrifices. Like the one of staring, for hours on end, at that dirty blue tarp that makes you want to punch holes in it in order to rediscover the true blue of the sky. The people seem different, for sure, the language is unknown, but it's the same blue, the same sky. The blue of the island.

FIFI

(continues along the same lines as her brother and with the same tone, both sad and full of light at the same time)

Not that dirty, anemic indigo blue soaked too long in water and bleached in an irregular manner, but the real blue, the one that makes my heart skip. In the morning. Without reason. In a few short hours, it will be over. We will be able to see it. Rub our eyes in the light of day. See the blue of the island again.

ACT II, SCENE III

(Violetta's voice rises like a whip.)

VIOLETTA

I knew this Daihatsu was going to bring us misfortune, with its pooh-yellow color, definitely not a color one can trust, a color of treachery, raw and hard. Don't pretend that you don't see me, Ronald! You know I'm here. Don't ignore me!

(Violetta is still not visible. One only hears her voice. Ronald doesn't turn in her direction.)

RONALD

Memory is like a balloon that soars: one cannot always control its trajectory. Sometimes, it makes three-dimensional rainbows re-emerge, but when you would like to linger there, it gets stuck between two tree branches, and you find yourself a prisoner of your fears. Take pity on me, Violetta. Don't clog my memory. Your imitation *Opium* perfume is already irritating my nostrils.

(Violetta gets up slowly. She moves forward with a sensuality filled with aggression, both vulgar and pathetic at the same time. Ronald turns towards her and addresses her.)

RONALD

How could I have slept with you even if it was only that one single time? So many things sparkle on you like false glimmers and then disintegrate as soon as one touches them. Your long reddish hair, your eyelashes outrageously curved, even your name transformed from Viergéla to Violetta.

VIOLETTA

You think I was going to find a good position as a governess in the city carrying on my back all the debris of this dying village? The name of a coarse peasant woman, a dubious primary school diploma from the national school of the village. One has to distance oneself as much as possible from everything that resembles too much the misery you left behind; otherwise, it clings to your steps. I learned how to please ladies of high society in order to adroitly worm out of them old shoes, used handbags, clothes put aside. It's true that the patrons come sometimes to pull up my skirt, panting like pigs being skinned, but one needs to know when to push them away and when it's profitable to consent. The supplementary dollars are worth a few tedious moments to guarantee that Madame will not be informed of Monsieur's proclivities.

RONALD

And yet, accused of theft and taken to court by your former patroness, you had to take refuge here in this village you detest so much. In the end, your friendship with a police officer wasn't that useful to you. Your patron forgot everything and supported the accusations of his wife. The couple banded together against you and so did the judiciary system. You spent five long months in prison. Upon your liberation, the village, accustomed to the desertion of its children, welcomed you accommodatingly back and allowed you to set up your little business of low-priced beauty products even though your facial expression and your gestures indicated coolly, to the whole community, that you didn't give a shit about them.

VIOLETTA

So? I wasn't going to play the role of the repentant, full of remorse for a life of sin. Yes, I have slept with many men who have given me something to eat, something to keep me from kicking the bucket, a roof over my head. I wasn't going to wait, whining, until life passed me by. I made the first move so that I wouldn't find myself out on a limb.

RONALD

But ultimately, you lost because now you are a prisoner, trapped in this truck with us.

VIOLETTA

I'll try my luck elsewhere. Without a bad conscience. I couldn't give a damn about the blue of your island. It has never helped me out, never adorned my dreams with light. I am not like you, full of remorse, regret and hope. That's the reason I followed you that day. You seemed so desperate that I immediately wanted you. That's my sadistic side.

RONALD

Shut up, if you don't mind. Do you have to make me relive that moment of weakness? That was the infamous day of Carlo's treason. I fled my house, unable to sustain Francine's gaze, full of consternation and shame. I had been walking haphazardly for a long time, pacing up and down muddy paths without paying much attention, mechanically acknowledging the locations of the stumps of trees uprooted by cyclones or by men's arms.

VIOLETTA

(retrospectively)

Actually, I had felt that desire since that distant day when, for the first time, I saw you approach Francine.

RONALD

You caught up with me near the old cemetery. And you spewed your spite over me in grandiose, vindictive deeds. Telling me your story without worrying about how it might affect me.

VIOLETTA

Finally, having had enough, you threw me on the grass, and you entered me sobbing like a baby.

RONALD

Everything is coming back to me now. The wild image of our two bodies. Our feet intertwined and our cries. My God! Never would I have thought that I could, in that way, have lost myself three times in a row on the half-scorched grass of that old cemetery.

VIOLETTA

(with a mocking smile while rolling her hips in front of Ronald)

You wanted to flee afterwards without even zipping up your pants. You were mumbling awkward excuses. Uttering the name of Francine, of Fifi, and of your mother. Your feelings of guilt were pouring out all over.

RONALD

Don't make fun of me, Violetta.

VIOLETTA

I made you discover all the violence inside of you. Through me, you were hammering Francine, Carlo's sister, as guilty as her brother in your eyes. You were hitting her by sleeping with me because you hadn't dared to tell her that, the sight of her reminded you incessantly of Carlo.

RONALD

Francine figured it out. Since Carlo's betrayal, I often surprise her staring at me. She knows that if I am leaving today for Santo Domingo, the shadow of Carlo weighs heavily on my decision.

VIOLETTA

(an aside and with the weary voice of an old woman that contrasts with the movements and the clothes of a young woman of an active, vulgar sexuality)

Poor Ronald! You also want me to pity you although, all my life, I have never stopped fighting against bad luck so that she forgets me. My twenty-five years seem so arduous to me today. The only thing I have left to keep me from crying is the strength to be hard and spiteful.

(Violetta sinks down and regains her place. Caressing his stomach, Fifi rejoins her brother.)

FIFI

The baby moved for the first time. He chose his moment well. Was it to ask me which wasp's nest I led us into? Little brother, I'm afraid.

(Ronald takes his sister's hand and both turn toward the set representing the village. Fifi continues in a tone marked by gentleness and nostalgia.)

FIFI

Fear of dying without having spoken to you as I often do deep inside myself. It's as if we were on the same side of the mirror, staring into one another's eyes and at the mirror. Unique yet together. Like the twins. Do you remember how one would defend the other in every situation? Little brother, I know what happened when Mom died, I know that you feel guilty, but Mom wouldn't have been mad at you. We all have our secrets mixed up with our feelings of guilt cutting us off from the rest of the world, keeping us in solitude. I am afraid to leave without saying "Farewell." Put simply, I am afraid to die.

(Both speak without looking at each other. They hold each other's hand and look elsewhere. It's as if the presence of the other served solely as a pretext to speech.)

RONALD

I would like to have the courage to confess my mistake to you. I am so ashamed of what I did that day while you were waiting for me next to Mom's corpse at the funeral parlor.

(All of a sudden, the shots of firearms are heard. The voice of Mauricio Rafaël Perez orders the driver to slow down. La Volanta is indifferent to the injunctions of the organizer and to the ricocheting bullets around the truck. Nothing seems capable of stopping the Daihatsu. Its swerves becoming more and more dangerous, throwing passengers from one end of the small truck to the other. The tarp becomes taut, then loose, like a blue monster breathing spasmodically. Throughout this scene, the different sets follow one another, illuminating each other in a disorderly manner, as if the thoughts of the passengers were intermingled.)

ROMAINE

(shouts)

Are we going to accept dying like dogs?

(A second-long silence demonstrates the impact of her words on both men and women. Then the babble of the unleashed fears picks up all the more and the insults, the prayers and the litanies clash.)

JEAN-MARIE

(The voice of Jean-Marie grates.)

Shut-up, bitch!

JOSAPHAT

(Brandishing his machete energetically)

As for me, they won't take me alive. If I have to, I'll kill some of them before I die.

(Ronald notices, with fear, the ferocious movements of the man who with a machete, suddenly surging out of his tool bag, seems to defy death. As much as possible, the passengers nearest him move away. Jostled together and moaning, men and women become entangled with one other. Ronald's attention is attracted by the person sobbing right next to him. Evariste howls and beats his chest with his clenched fists.)

EDGAR

(The body of Edgar is bent over as if he were stumbling, and Ronald approaches him. With a firm, hard grip, Edgar pulls Ronald toward him.)

If I don't get out of here alive, take care of your sister and your goddaughter.

(His voice makes Ronald tremble, and he would like to tell Edgar to shut up, God damn it, to stop saying stupid things. But around them, the blue inferno doesn't allow for any more tricks. He responds in the same broken voice.)

RONALD

For Roberto and Francine, I am counting on you.

(One hears Fifi's voice, which gradually fades. Around her, the commotion continues, but in silence. People are moving, hanging around, trying to escape. Arms and legs are convulsing, but only Fifi's voice can be heard. When she finishes speaking, her inanimate body will be seen near Edgar's.)

FIFI

Mom often said that one shouldn't be afraid of dying, that a Christian is always prepared to encounter his God! I believe I am a good Christian, but I don't feel ready. I would like to stay on Earth a little bit longer. Up

till now, it seems I have been playing hopscotch with life and that I have never reached Paradise. I've encountered so many obstacles along the way. The devastating sadness of Mom, who forbade all laughing and outbursts of joy, and the poverty that encloses our ardent impulses in a grey, rectangular space. The village, too, where all eyes confine you to the life that they think is right for you, as if they were keeping themselves ready to take it back from you if you ever decided to change directions and to not appear before them. Life. I haven't known it. I caught sight of it once in Cap-Haïtien, between two episodes that I haven't shared with anyone. Like an appetizer of the happiness that I could never have! Christian or not, I could have lived a little longer.

(The terrible, deafening noise suddenly returns. Vehicles brake violently. The blue tarpaulin twitches and contorts, then caves in and disappears. The violent noises of doors and the echo of shoes on the ground precede detonations of firearms nearby. Fearful screams are heard. Arms and legs are shaking violently. Ronald gets halfway up and looks around panic-stricken. Like the others, he attempts to protect himself from the gunshots. He doesn't know yet who is shooting, but the necessity of protecting himself and finding Fifi render him suddenly calm and lucid.)

ROMAINE

(snuggles up against Ronald and whispers)

Those Dominican military pigs want to kill us. We have to escape. Come with me.

(The young woman's expression takes on a newly acquired emotion. Ronald looks around, searching for his sister he has yet see. His eyes stop at the corpse of Evariste, whose head is strangely contorted. Ronald pushes Romaine, who is staring at him regretfully, gently out of the way before venturing forth. Without worrying about the ricocheting bullets, the noise, or the screams, Ronald advances haphazardly.)

RONALD

Fifi, where are you?

(Ronald steps over Marie-Jeanne, who is moaning and examining her injured leg. Josaphat's big hand knocks him off balance. Traces of blood stain the old peasant's pea coat. He is staggering a bit, but his machete remains vibrating against him. Bent

over to avoid the bullets, Josaphat dodges in and out without worrying about the men and women kneeling, sprawled on the ground or, like him, trying to escape.)

JOSAPHAT

Let me pass, I'm telling you.

(His machete in hand, Josaphat runs off into the distance. Ronald hesitates an instant and reels before the cadaver of Madeleine. He bends over and closes her eyes, which had remained open. Dominican soldiers seize Jean-Marie and Lorette, who defend themselves with their hands and feet, but in vain. They are pushed off unceremoniously.)

(Ronald stops abruptly, for he has just spotted the bodies of his sister and his brother-in-law. The two bodies are stretched out on the ground. Edgar has his arm placed on his wife's hip. Ronald kneels down next to Fifi's corpse and takes her hand. He runs his fingers over her skin as if he wants to wake her up, but she doesn't move. Her palm is still moist and tender. He places his forehead on top of her rounded belly.)

RONALD

(raising his eyes toward the sky)

Oh, mercy! Oh! Mom, mother, m...

(After having cried, Ronald is silent for an instant. Then, with great tenderness, he places Fifi's head on his knees. His voice becomes like a murmur, like someone confiding a secret.)

I had planned on returning the money to you. Without fail. The first few pesos earned in the East, I would have sent them to you and explained what happened. You would have understood. For sure. When Man Etienne died, I had found 10,509 new gourdes in her box. You know the one in which Mom kept the family papers wrapped in rubber bands. Ten thousand five hundred and nine new gourdes,

(Ronald enunciates distinctly the numbers in a tone of amazement)

a windfall, a miracle, as if upon dying, Mom had made known her wish to see me accomplish my dream, the body shop project with Carlo that had been dragging on lamentably for such a long time for lack of money. I wasn't expecting it, I can assure you. I was numb with grief. I opened the box for no reason, as if to bid farewell to Mom by touching the most secret part of her life, a life with almost invisible perforations. A piece of material with a floral pattern from the twins' last dress, a black and white photo of her father and mother, our school report cards. Then, between

the certificates of birth and death, I came across an envelope full of wads of bills. My only excuse remains that I hadn't planned on doing what I did. I couldn't get over seeing all that neatly arranged money. I counted it several times before taking it.

(Around Ronald, the movements continue. The soldiers conduct the prisoners [Enzo Gabriel, Marie-Jeanne, Lorette, Jean-Marie, and the organizer, Rafaël], who bend down over the cadavers: the driver La Volanta, Evariste, Fifi, Edgar, Madeleine. Isolated, the young man remains alone with his sister's lifeless body.)

RONALD

I didn't tell you anything. I let you take charge of the funeral. No one was surprised at that. After all, you were the oldest and you inherited Mom's sewing machine. At the last minute, as if in spite of myself, I gave you two thousand gourdes. You took care of everything: the funeral, the wake, your clothes for mourning. After a long while, I found out that you had hocked all of your few possessions at the pawn shop in the neighboring village: the dishes still in boxes, and the new sheets, a bedspread, that Violetta had sold to you a few weeks before, still in its plastic cover. An immense bedspread, shiny and pink, with large red flowers that we had all admired without daring to touch.

FIFI

(Fifi's voice is heard, monotonous and dead)

The same with the beautiful white tablecloth embroidered by Man Etienne herself that always adorned the table on festive occasions before being wrapped back up in its covering of transparent plastic and relegated to the back of the closet. I got the tablecloth back, but I have never been able to get back the bedspread. Too many emergencies, one after the other!

RONALD

I had promised myself that I would buy you a bigger and more beautiful one in Santo Domingo. A blue one with large white flowers. Blue, that's your favorite color.

FIFI

(still lying down)

It's only a piece of material like any other. I knew you had taken the money

because Man Etienne had spoken to me about it months before her death. She had made me promise to use it for her funeral; in no way, did she want her burial to be a burden for us. I didn't say anything because you needed it to get on your feet. That's what dreams are for, that burning sensation that gives us wings, that makes us forget we are mortal. We all had our dreams, and I would have wanted so much that at least one of us could see a part of theirs realized.

(From then on, the echoes of the voices of children are heard in the background. One sees the silhouettes of children playing, jumping rope and laughing. Gradually, the voices become louder and the silhouettes more distinct.)

RONALD

I was well punished. I don't have anything any more. That bastard Carlo sullied my dream with his stain. I feel even more guilty. I would have wanted to give you so many things. The blue bedspread...

FIFI

It doesn't matter if it's blue or pink! It will never be anything other than a makeshift substitute for real happiness.

RONALD

I didn't have the right to deny you those things to satisfy my own needs. I would have given anything to keep you with us a bit longer.

FIFI

On which side of the island?

RONALD

A part of me will stay here with you. With you, with Edgar and your baby who moved today for the first and only time. A part of me will stay here with you forever.

(At this point, the song hummed by the children can be distinguished. It is a popular Haitian song, "Haïti chérie Mwen konnen yon bèl ti peyi..."⁸)

FIFI

Promise me you won't forget the blue of the island. Promise me to come back from the other side of the island and take care of my daughter and your son. And of your Amandine-to-be...

RONALD

So many things to do. It seems to me that we wanted to find a solution and we forgot that the blue sky doesn't change crossing the border.

FIFI

Take everything with you that might help: Madeleine's dignity, Romaine's zest, Edgar's quiet determination, and my baby's innocence.

RONALD

I am taking with me that part of our childhood that makes me invincible. Your tenderness and your drive toward happiness. I will need them on the other side of the island

FIFI

Take care of Amandine-to-be...

RONALD

In September, on our side of the island.

FIFI

So many children to be born under the blue of the island.

RONALD

So many things to do.

(One last time, in spite of the pokes pounding his ribs, Ronald stares at the corpses of his brother-in-law and his sister. One sees him stand up and salute the dead. Then, he heads off towards the West. Gradually, as he advances, the stage becomes blue, more and more blue, an almost unbearable blue. The dead rise and accompany him. Finally, the silhouettes of the children become enormous and invade the back of the stage. They, too, head off towards the West.)

Notes

- ¹ I wish to thank the following people for their insights and helpful suggestions. First and foremost, thanks to the author for repeated readings and invaluable suggestions. I would also like to thank Charles Ridouré, Professor Patrick Saveau and the translator's former Research Assistant at Franklin College Switzerland, Lindsay Hodgman, for their various helpful contributions.
- ² "Whoever doesn't sing doesn't eat."
- ³ "Help!"
- ⁴ *Zenglendo* is Kreyòl for murderer, robber, rapist or any other violent criminal. It was coined during the first waves of political terror and violent crime that followed the dissolution of the Tonton Macoutes. The word is derived from *les zenglens*, the secret police of the Haitian emperor Faustin Soulouque (1847-1858). The term connotes more than a criminal, but rather a thug with a political dimension. Many *zenglendos* are former Tonton Macoutes.
- ⁵ "Tirer le bâton" is a ritual of martial arts practiced in certain regions of Haiti. Peasants, for the most part, use the stick to play amongst themselves, to defend themselves and to attack when necessary. [The author].
- ⁶ A Kreyòl term for rum or *clairin* in which extracts of plants, bark, roots or flowers are steeped for a long time.
- ⁷ *Je m'en vais*. The words and the music are by Jean-Claude Martineau, also known as Coralen. [The author].
- ⁸ "Dear Haiti I know a beautiful small country..."

RESEARCH NOTES

**CREOLIST MICHEL DEGRAFF: A PROFILE OF COMMITMENT,
ADVOCACY, EXCELLENCE, AND HOPE**

Flore Zéphir

University of Missouri-Columbia

Creolist Michel DeGraff needs no introduction to the readership of the *Journal of Haitian Studies* as he serves on its editorial board. Every reader knows that he is one of the handful of Haitian professors who has the distinct honor of being tenured at one of the most prestigious universities in the United States or in the world for that matter: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). While Michel is known for his university affiliation, he is equally known for his field of scholarship, which is primarily Creole Linguistics, as well as for his advocacy for Haitian Creole, which he has argued time and time again is a language just as sophisticated as any other. In fact, Michel's entire academic life has been devoted to bringing Haitian Creole to the ranks of respected languages, and to bringing it to the fore of the Haitian educational system. His tireless efforts of the past twenty years culminated in the Fall of 2012 with the award of a \$1 million grant from the National Science Foundation to introduce on-line Creole materials in the teaching of STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). Michel's project titled "Kreyòl-based Cyberlearning for a New Perspective on the Teaching of STEM in Local Languages" is also intended to expand and deepen teachers' expertise in what he refers to as "technology-enabled-active learning pedagogies." It is expected that recently trained teachers will subsequently pass along their knowledge to increasing numbers of students, as well as to a new generation of teachers. Michel's ultimate objective is that those efforts will lead to "an expanding library of locally grown Open Education Resources in Kreyòl," as Haitian educators and students "have had too little access to advanced content in science, technology, engineering and mathematics." He strongly believes that efforts undertaken from inside Haiti will give the project a much better chance at sustainability than if they were developed from the outside the country alone.

In Fall 2012, Michel DeGraff added the most outstanding distinction to an already impressive academic record: He is a one-of-a-kind scholar



who has the unsurpassed recognition of having received \$1 million to make Haitian Creole a million-dollar language; thus silencing forever the views that only the languages of the previous colonial powers are “real” languages, worthy of study, worthy of support, and worthy of access to the educational domain. In his proposal submitted to the National Science Foundation, Michel forcefully argues “Better science, technology, engineering, and math education in under-developed countries will lead to better economic development.” Moreover, there is absolutely no doubt in his mind that education in the native language of the population “will qualitatively and transformationally improve learning.”

When one looks at Michel’s academic career, it cannot be entirely surprising that he would tirelessly endeavor to find the means, a million dollars in this instance, necessary to formalize Creole teaching in Haiti’s schools, and to transform higher education. Michel’s academic life began in the late 1980s, when he enrolled in the doctoral program in computational linguistics at the prestigious University of Pennsylvania. Michel tells me that he owes it to Mitch Marcus that he first seriously thought about getting a PhD. Mitch Marcus is a computational linguist whom Michel first met when they worked together at Bell Labs in Murray Hill, New Jersey. Subsequently, Mitch Marcus became his thesis advisor at the University of Pennsylvania. At Penn, Michel also had the privilege to work

with authoritative syntacticians and sociolinguists such as Tony Kroch, well known for his work on the history of English; Gillian Sankoff, well known for her work on Pidgins and Creoles and on language variation; and William Labov, considered the father of the field of “variationist sociolinguistics,” and perhaps the leading expert on African-American Vernacular English. Michel also had, as thesis advisor, Pieter Muysken, a Dutch linguist, who, unlike many linguists of his generation, has made a forceful case that the structures of Creole languages are on a par with those of any other language. In addition, Muysken has vehemently contended that theories according to which Creoles are deficient languages are driven by sheer racism, going back to colonial times. Michel’s work focused on the structures of Haitian Creole; little by little he came to the realization that Creole was a language like any other, and that there was no “linguistic structural reason” why it should be considered an “inferior” or “primitive” language.

Since then, Michel has devoted all his energies to debunking those myths and to proving scientifically that Creole is not an ill formed or “abnormal” language. A good number of the readers of the *Journal of Haitian Studies* may have read his countless articles, or heard him speak on these “dangerous myths,” on the fallacy of “Creole Exceptionalism,” on “linguistics and ideology,” on “language acquisition and Creolization,” on “language mismanagement in Haiti,” or on the “mis-education of the Creole speaker,” among so many relevant issues. I, for one, know Michel and his work very well, and can speak with a certain degree of authority about his profile of advocacy, commitment, excellence, and hope.

I first met Michel some twenty-two years ago in January of 1991 at the meeting of the Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics in Chicago, where Michel presented a technical syntax-related paper titled “Is Haitian Creole *pro-drop*?” At the time, Michel was still a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania; and I was starting my professional career, having earned my doctorate in 1990. I was from the very beginning impressed by the convictions of his statements about Haitian Creole, and the way he argued that the language was “normal.” As I recall, Michel and I were the two Haitians presenting at that meeting, so obviously we talked a great deal and became acquainted, reminiscing a bit about our education (or mis-education) in Haiti when it came to issues of Creole. Suffice it to say that Michel went to St. Louis de Gonzague; and I, to Sacré Coeur. Moreover, it was at that 1991 meeting that we both met for the first time renowned Creolist Salikoko Mufwene from the University of Chicago, who has done outstanding work on Creole languages and African-American English, and with whom Michel has developed a deep friendship, as well as collaborated



on many projects.

The following year, in January 1992, I met Michel again at the same meeting, which was held in Philadelphia. His presentation on “Predication in Haitian Creole” confirmed my earlier impression: I was indeed in the presence of one of the most promising young scholars of all times. I also noticed that Michel did not hesitate to challenge well-established linguists, such as Canadian Claire Lefebvre from the University of Quebec at Montreal. Over the course of the years, others who would be challenged by Michel’s publications and presentations would include Derek Bickerton, one of the most famous Creolists, known for his claims that Creole languages provide insight in the development of language, and Albert Valdman from Indiana University-Bloomington, the 2009 recipient of the Haitian Studies Association’s Lifetime Achievement Award, known for his work on issues of “standardization” and “codification” of Haitian Creole, and for the development of Haitian Creole dictionaries.

Since then, Michel and I have continued to cross paths in a variety of venues, which are worth mentioning as they hint at Michel’s sustained engagement with his life-long scholarly passion and activism. For several years in a row in the mid- to late-1990s, Michel and I would meet at Florida International University, where both of us were invited to be speakers at the Creole Language Workshops then organized by fellow Creolist Tometro Hopkins. Linguist Yves Dejean, or Papa Yves as Michel affectionately calls him and to whom he attributes some of his views on the



use of Creole in education, would also come from Haiti to present at those workshops. In April 1999, Michel, Yves, and I found ourselves together again on a panel on Haitian Creole and Bilingual Education at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. In October 2000, Michel and I attended the Haitian Studies Association's meeting in West Palm Beach, where Michel tackled the question: Is Haitian Creole fit for Education? In July 2002, while I was doing fieldwork in Boston, Michel and I spent some time together, and he introduced me to several Haitian educators. In April 2004, I had the pleasure of seeing Michel in New York at York College at a meeting organized by the Fondation Mémoire. In November of 2004, I invited Michel to come to my own university, the University of Missouri-Columbia, as colleagues and I had organized a conference on the theme of "Transnational Utopias & the Haitian Revolution in Caribbean and Latin American Culture." Michel, who was the only linguist among literary critics and writers, mesmerized the audience with his presentation, "Three centuries of transnational (anti-) utopias in Creole Studies."

More recently in March 2011, Michel and I were invited by the Center for the Humanities and the Public Sphere at the University of Florida at Gainesville to talk about the role of Haitian Creole in the school system of post-earthquake Haiti. The morning after the event, Michel and I were dropped off at six o'clock at Gainesville airport to catch the same flight to Miami. From there, Michel was going to board a flight to Port-au-Prince to continue his work with schoolchildren in La Gônave, and myself to catch

a flight to St. Louis. In this discussion about Michel, it is important to mention that his work in La Gônave has also been funded by a \$200,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to develop, evaluate, and refine Kreyòl-based and technology-enabled learning environments for elementary schools in post-earthquake Haiti. Michel and I were so engaged in a discussion about this particular project, as he was showing me on his laptop the many pictures of children actively learning in Creole and with the use of technology, that we did not hear the boarding announcements made. We ended up missing our flights at a virtually empty airport at six-thirty in the morning, and had to make other arrangements with the American Airline agents who listened incredulously to our story of not having heard the announcement because we were “talking” and looking at “pictures.” Therefore, I know firsthand of Michel’s passion for the cause of education in Haitian Creole and the contagious power of his commitment, which can make one lose track of such mundane, “*terre à terre*” matters as paying attention to flight announcements at airports. When it comes to Haitian Creole and its use in education, nothing matters more to Michel.

Michel is not only known to the readership of the *Journal of Haitian Studies*, but to the readership of the most prestigious presses and journals in the field of linguistics. Among them can be mentioned MIT Press, Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, John Benjamins Publishing Company, *Language and Society*, *Anthropological Linguistics*, *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, *Languages*, among others. His resounding voice in defense of Creole languages has been heard not only in Haiti and the United States, but around the world: in Spain, Brazil, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Greece, France, England, Ireland, Portugal, Mexico, Barbados, Mauritius, Jamaica, St. Lucia, and Guyana. There is absolutely no doubt that Michel has become a giant in his field; indeed, a “\$1 million scholar.”

Over the course of my academic career, which spans close to thirty years, I have had the privilege of knowing many great Creolists. The first one is Dr. Albert Valdman, Rudy Professor of French and Linguistics at Indiana University-Bloomington—under whom I studied—who can be considered a pioneer in the field of French-based Creoles, and is one of the first scholars (if not the first scholar) to make Haitian Creole a legitimate field of inquiry within Linguistics. Others include William Labov, Gillian Sankoff, Yves Dejean, and Salikoko Mufwene, all of whom Michel calls his mentors. All of those great scholars have one thing in common. They are our elders and for that they are revered for the path they shaped for the newer generation of scholars. Michel, however, is part of this new generation of scholars, one who will probably say that the best is yet to

come, and that his grant from NSF is just a point of departure, not a point of arrival.

In post-earthquake Haiti, what better way to transform the educational system than to have the resources and expertise of Haitian scholar Michel DeGraff at the schools' disposal? Michel's \$1 million grant is an award of hope and new beginnings. It is an award from which new models of development are created, where the so-called margins move to the center, where the so-called periphery moves to the core, and where the so-called impoverished language becomes the centerpiece of nation building, and the richest reservoir of opportunities. It is truly an award to inspire.

REVIEWS

***Trading Places: Colonization and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century French Culture.* By Madeleine Dobie.** Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8014-7609-9. 336 pp. \$27.50 paperback.

Review by Alessandra Benedicty, The City College of New York, CUNY

“Slavery hovering in the air” (188) may be considered the undergirding image that puts into relation the diverse and rich panoply of texts, eras, and locations, which constitute the scope of Madeleine Dobie’s tour-de-force analysis of how French culture was (and was not) shaped by the trope of slavery both in “the Orient” and the in the Americas, and was (and was not) transformed economically, socially, and culturally by the fact of slavery in the Western Atlantic. Dobie’s expression, “slavery hovering in the air,” refers directly to her analysis of Chateaubriand’s limited, yet telling allusions to slavery in *Voyage to America*, written in the early 1800s. Yet, the ethereal grotesqueness of the image also emblemizes what might be considered a paradigmatic shift in thinking about representations of slavery and race in texts of the eighteenth century and the scholarship devoted to the study of the French Enlightenment. (“Enlightenment” is a term that Dobie does not find particularly useful in discussing eighteenth-century France (27).) If most previous studies of how French texts deal with slavery speak more of silences (9), Dobie’s work shows how slavery is “latent[ly]” ubiquitous (11). It “hover[s],” lurking disturbingly close by, with repercussions for scholars of eighteenth-century France, but also for academic constituencies as varied as specialists of colonial America or pundits of contemporary European thought.

Dobie anchors her study of colonization and slavery in eighteenth-century French culture; however, its scope surpasses the eighteenth century to include considerations of French outlooks on slavery from the early 1600s to its consequences on cultural and social politics in France and the French Caribbean in the contemporary era. In a sense, Dobie’s work is an all-encompassing survey of how French culture was radically transformed by slavery. At the same time, it looks at how French culture has learned to “displace” (11) any possible overt (and even conscientious) recognition of the monumental role that slavery played in the transformation of French society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. On the subject of textiles, and particularly of the cotton “*indiennes*,” Dobie speaks

of a veritable “revolution” in French clothing (99) that would lead to an increased dependency on the colonies to provide the “raw materials” for France’s new tastes—in dress, in home furnishings, and in culinary needs (124). Yet, the recognition of the Americas—and slavery—as a “point of origin for new textiles, techniques, and styles... long remained largely invisible” (124), even to the point of creating a complex web of “mechanisms of disavowal carried over into the postabolition era” (293).

The corpus that Dobie covers in her book is itself a magnum opus. She considers slavery in seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and early-nineteenth-century French texts, as well as the repercussions that such “patterns” of a sort of “nonrepresentation” of slavery and colonization “occurring on a broader cultural level” have had on contemporary discussions of race in contemporary France and the DOM (11). In other words, she uses texts in which slavery is present, yet repressed. Her primary texts are extremely varied, from the written to the material: philosophical and economic treatises, short stories and epistolary novels, travel logs and narratives, and furniture and textiles. From Montesquieu to de Tocqueville; from Olympe de Gouges to Germaine de Staël; from Jean-Baptiste Labat; Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz and Cornelius De Pauw to Chateaubriand and Delacroix; from mahogany and indigo to cotton, Dobie exhaustively, yet concisely, examines how slavery and colonization were quietly dealt with throughout a French century that sought both in thought and in material life to democratize itself in an unprecedented way. For her secondary texts, Dobie draws on disciplines as varied as art history, cultural studies, economics, history, leisure studies, literary analysis and criticism, and political philosophy, putting an emphasis on a “commodity-centered approach to the cultural impact of colonization” (16). Dobie engages directly with the work of twenty-first century scholars, thus weaving an intricate interdisciplinarity that enables a fundamental and well-documented re-reading of important undercurrents in French thought.

To commence Dobie’s book and read about Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is refreshingly unexpected, creating a sort of provocative suspense: how will she use Said to study Montesquieu, Rousseau, Voltaire? To finish even one part of Dobie’s book is to understand how three main tendencies come to dominate eighteenth-century French mores, and how these three trends are ambiguously, yet inextricably linked to colonization and slavery. In most cases, Dobie does not use the word “trophe” because her work is less conclusive than the identification of the repetition of an image; instead, she is offering a sort of intellectual history of what is in fact a non-history. Dobie writes, “Representing the colonies entailed representing slavery,

and slavery could be contemplated directly only within the discursive framework of a call for its elimination" (7). Dobie's book is divided into three parts, each of which explores one of what I am calling the three tropes of the "nonrepresentation" (11) of colonization, and especially of slavery in the Caribbean and in Louisiana. The first part of her book, titled "East Meet West," looks at the "orientalization" of slavery, whereby patterns and motifs associated with places as varied as "Turkey, Persia, Japan and China" (63) or even Egypt (84) continued to be in vogue despite the fact that the provenance of the materials used to produce the furniture and textiles in question was overwhelmingly American. The second part of Dobie's study, "Savages and Slaves" looks at the "trope of the colonial encounter" and the dual role that the indigenous American, regardless of his/her birthplace in the Americas, played in philosophical discourse and in representations of the Americas. Dobie traces the monumental importance that "Rousseau's ethnographic references to real 'savages'" (who were for the most part "native North Americans") (171) had in shaping polemics surrounding "the state of nature of man" (170) and related contemplations regarding the freedom of man as it related to perceived ways-of-being of Asian, Arab, European, and American indigenous cultures (175). Dobie masterfully explains how French metropolitan thought of the 1700s was quintessentially defined by Europe's "fascination with 'Oriental' culture, and the array of discourses devoted to the relationship between 'civilized' Europeans and 'primitive' societies exemplified by the indigenous peoples of the Americas" (xii). But what of actual slavery, of the slavery that drove the ever-mercantile economies that fed Europe's ever-democratizing taste for luxury-turned-quotidian? Using philosophical texts, popular literature, and the visual arts, Dobie argues convincingly that the "the American savage" was such a compelling image that it was able to eclipse most impulses to represent the African or Creole slave. The final part of Dobie's book looks at how the "the transition from silence to discourse" (200) in regards to colonization and especially slavery took place after 1763 and during and after the Haitian Revolution. Dobie argues that the only way for there to be discourse in regards to slavery in late eighteenth-century France was that it be encased in a discourse of moral uprightness, thus sheathed within a dialogue surrounding abolitionism: "I propose that there was no sustained representation of the colonies without abolitionism, and no abolitionism (at least in the French context) without the appeal to economic interests that these new theories entailed" (200-201). In other words, only within a context of the reconsideration of commercial practices could the abolition of slavery be reflected. The third part of Dobie's work looks at economic practice and theory as they relate to an emerging

epistemology, which builds towards “the ‘Human Rights’ perspective” (247). As intoned by the subtitle “Bourgeois Liberal Feminism” (269), Dobie is careful to show that “the invention of this powerful idea,” that is “the moral ‘lesson’ of the Enlightenment with regard to human rights,” is nonetheless embedded within the more treacherous context of “economic discourses” (286).

For scholars of Haiti, Dobie’s research exemplifies, through meticulous analysis, the difficulty that French writers had in dealing with the Haitian Revolution. In her analysis of Chateaubriand and de Tocqueville’s writing, Dobie offers a reading of the “blame the victim” narrative that came to infiltrate discourse on the Haitian Revolution (190, 192). A final note, in addition to paradigmatic changes in ways of reading the genealogy of French thought, from a practical standpoint, Dobie’s work is extremely well organized. It contains an introduction that serves as a sort of annotated bibliography of scholarship dealing with all of her topics and disciplines; a conclusion that reflects upon contemporary French society; and an appendix that “surveys the representation and nonrepresentation of the colonial world in eighteenth-century French literature” (295). A tour de force that will inevitably serve as a resource for scholars studying French thought, the colonial Americas, the Caribbean, or the Western Atlantic for years to come.

***The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti*, by Kate Ramsey.** Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. ISBN-13: 978-0226703794-4. 425 pp. \$45.00 hardcover.

Review by Celucien L. Joseph, Tarrant County College

The relationship between religion and law has been a source of growing interest and continuous debate among scholars, professionals, and the general public. Arguably, religion has played a significant role in the establishment of postcolonial Haiti and in the formation of Haitian cultural identity; its impact on the public life and Haitian politics is of paramount importance. In the same line of thought, Haitian laws have substantially influenced the religious life and practices of the Haitian people. This fascinating and intelligent study, *The Spirits and the Law*, focuses on the intersection of these two dynamic aspects in Haiti’s cultural and intellectual tradition and history. The book seeks to show precisely how these important factors have defined and transformed Haiti’s civil society and the legal system. Kate Ramsey investigates the role the Haitian

Penal Code played in the production of false representations of Vodou and the ways that these misrepresentations further influenced Haitian elites to criminalize popular ritual practices in Haiti.

Both Haitians and foreigners have often wrongly depicted Haiti's popular religion, Vodou, as the source of Haiti's troubles—from political disturbances to natural disasters. *The Spirits and the Law* is an inquiry into the institutional and social histories of the legal prohibition of certain popular ritual practices (i.e., spells, superstitious practices) in Haiti. It studies “the long history of Euro-American denigration of African and African diasporic spiritual and healing practices” (1) and “the extent to which different Haitian governments relied upon the penal prohibition of *le vaudoux* to repudiate foreign charges that ‘civilization’ was regressing in independent Haiti” (2). Ramsey pays particular attention to the power of the French-dominated Roman Catholic Church hierarchy in Haiti after its 1860 Concordat. This focus makes perfect sense since the Church has been one of the most active forces and institutions in fostering religious violence and in suppressing these popular religious performances and beliefs in the country. This ambitious book is divided into four chapters followed by an epilogue; its detailed conclusion delineates the genealogy of the word “Vodou” and the cultural understanding of the term *lwa* (spirit/spirits).

Chapter one examines the official criminalization of African-based rituals and the magico-religious practices in colonial Saint-Domingue four decades prior (roughly 1685) to the period surrounding the Haitian Revolution. It also discusses the scholarship surrounding the role Vodou played in overthrowing slavery and French colonialism. Additionally, Ramsey examines the post-colonial Haitian state's legal policies toward the popular religious practice and organization during the administration of Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and Henry Christophe. The importance of this chapter is that it traces the legislative history of those laws, the connection within their larger social, cultural, and political contexts, their evolution within the cultural milieu in which they emerged, and finally their effects on the Haitian experience.

Chapter two moves the conversation forward by studying exactly “the legal categorization and prohibition of Vodou as a form of *sortilège* (spell) in the 1835 and 1864 Haitian penal codes” (14). Ramsey argues that the legal discourse or the juridical sense of the concept of “civilization” in modernity—conveying the idea of a progressive historical process and equally the end result of that process—had shaped considerably the judicial repression of Vodou or *vaudoux*, a constituted term in the period that encompassed “the whole of Haitian sorcery” (56). Furthermore, she

articulates that “the disparity between how this word was constructed through penal and ecclesiastical laws and how it was popularly understood thus became... the key point on which both the state’s and the church’s campaigns against popular ritual invariably foundered” (ibid). She also observes that the relentless efforts of Haitian governments and Haitian intellectuals to prove to the “defamers of the black race” that Haiti is a civilized nation and a symbol of black progress, self-government, and black civilization. This may account for their reliance upon the penal codes to reform popular religious “backwardness” and repudiate racist charges from foreigners. These penal laws served “as a sign of a [civilized] condition already achieved among the republic’s governing class, and as a process of reform to which its peasantry would be subjected” (55).

Chapter three focuses on the opportunistic American military occupation in Haiti, which lasted fourteen years (1915-1934). In particular, it comments on how the American government had pervasively reworked and consolidated Haiti’s existing laws and enacted new ones under the guise of establishing so-called “law and order” and “moral decency” in the Caribbean island (120). Ramsey remarks that the US military regime prioritized and enforced articles 405-407 of the Penal Code that forbade *les sortilèges* which the military occupants mistakenly understood as central to the popular practice of *le vaudoux* or “voodoo,” the newly adopted term by Anglophone foreigners (ibid). In her investigation into why the US military regime has emphasized these particular laws, Ramsey concludes that the testimony of military officials in the 1921-1922 US Senate investigation into reports of atrocities committed by US soldiers reveals two important facts: (1) the intimate association US military personnel in Haiti deduce from popular agitation and “native sorcery”; and (2) the impact of that ideology on marines’ assumptions concerning the close link between “voodoo” and the widespread opposition to the American controlling power (120-147).

Next, Ramsey documents the reactions by *Vodouizan* (adherents of the Vodou religion) in response to these laws. She notes that they fostered strategies of resistance, challenging the subjugation of their various forms of spirituality and religious practices while simultaneously countering the military occupation (147-176). The minority Haitian elite group that supported the occupation, on the other hand, expressed its deep discontent and accused the United States of upholding these penal policies for the purpose of damaging Haiti’s reputation abroad (120). It is from this perspective that the author infers that marines’ penalization of Haitian Vodou played a decisive role “in the international construction, proliferation, and commoditization of images of ‘voodoo’ during the 1920s and thereafter” (15). She writes, “United States military officials made

the strict application of Haitian laws against ‘voodoo’ both a hallmark of official policy and a sometime justification for the continued occupation of Haiti” (246).

Chapter four, the most exhaustive part of the book, explores the cultural and historical milieu in which official cultural nationalist policy in the late 1930s and the early 1940s contributed to the institution of the new penal category *décret-loi*, a category that prohibited *les pratiques superstitieuses* (superstitious beliefs). The administration of Sténio Vincent oversaw the implementation of these laws, which resulted in the *campagne anti-superstitieuse* (antisuperstition campaign) supported and enforced both by the country’s national military forces and the Catholic Church hierarchy. This chapter also discusses the implications of those laws on cultural production and identity-formation as well as in the rise of national institutions and sociocultural and political movements in the post-occupation period such as Bureau d’Ethnologie, the *mouvement folklorique*, the *noirisme*, the *Griots*, etc. Ramsey asserts that “folkloricization as a mode of cultural production... became itself the occasion for popular political challenges to the law’s repressive regime” (247). She then outlines the contributions of Haiti’s most important intellectual in the twentieth century and the father of Haitian *indigénisme*, Jean Price-Mars, on the significance of the Vodou religion in Haitian life, his intensive anthropological research, and his brilliant arguments for the reevaluation of popular culture as folklore in the formation of Haitian cultural identity, which the Haitian bourgeois class had substituted and rejected for Western values and cosmology. In this chapter, she also engages critically the works of a number of scholars and anthropologists on the Vodou faith and Haitian culture including Laënnec Hurbon, Jacques Roumain, Alfred Métraux, Melville J. Herskovits, and George Eaton Simpson as well as the famous African-American dancer Katherine Dunham.

The ambiguous and paradoxical nature of these ordinances that banned both the so-called superstitious beliefs and the theatrical performance and aesthetic expression of them—through popular dances, songs, and music—is “their own impossibility in attempting to legislate an absolute distinction between prohibited ritual and popular dance” (246). In particular, “the 1943 ordinance against the staging of prohibited rituals aspired another impossible detachment in restricting folklore performance to the presentation of popular dance and songs” (*ibid.*). The significance of this chapter is Ramsey’s close attention to the ideological goal of these laws. She argues that these legal codes were established in order to counter the argument against “Haiti’s premodernity.” They were an attempt to rehabilitate the negative image of Haiti as characteristically

and sensationally a Vodou nation as advanced in the Euro-American imagination (245).

The Spirits and the Law will stand for many years to come as the most thorough piece of scholarship on the reciprocal relationship between Haiti's popular religion and Haitian laws and their multifaceted impacts on the Haitian experience and Haitian politics. The book effectively underlines the social construction of the Vodou religion and Haitian legal codes. More specifically, it chronicles the different roles Vodou has assumed in the Haitian society, and the various ways it has been interpreted, misinterpreted, represented, and misrepresented both by Haitians and foreigners. The book is nothing less than a well-executed masterpiece and the most sophisticated spiritual biography of Haiti documenting its particular religious tradition, Vodou.

Cric? Crac!: Fables de La Fontaine racontées par un montagnard haïtien et transcrites en vers créoles, by George Sylvain, preface by Kathleen Gyssels and Roger Little. Paris : l'Harmattan, 2011. ISBN 978-2296544857. 256 pp. € 28.00 paperback.

Reviewed by Fatoumata Seck, Stanford University

Dans sa préface datant de 1899, George Sylvain, présentait *Cric ? Crac !* comme suit : « Une adaptation des Fables de La Fontaine au tour d'esprits et au parler de nos campagnards » (5). À cette époque, la production littéraire en créole était beaucoup plus importante dans les îles créolophones—telles que la Martinique, la Guadeloupe et la Réunion—qu'elle ne l'était en Haïti. Et Sylvain comptait combler ce manque en proposant une adaptation des fables en créole haïtien. Il se positionne ainsi parmi les pionniers d'une littérature haïtienne en langue vernaculaire. En utilisant une figure de référence telle que La Fontaine, l'auteur capte indubitablement l'attention de l'élite intellectuelle haïtienne dont les écrits en langue française étaient loin d'abandonner « la défroque classique, romantique, parnassienne ou décadente dont ils s'étaient imprudemment affublés » (Sylvain 5). *Cric ? Crac !* est donc une entreprise politique et culturelle visant à valoriser et développer la langue créole, longtemps méprisée et incomprise; Sylvain en fait sa priorité et son œuvre en est l'illustration.

Tout comme les écrivains de la Renaissance française adaptaient et traduisaient les écrits des grands noms de la Renaissance italienne (Boccace, Pétrarque et Dante) dans le but de transformer la langue française jadis langue vulgaire, en langue raffinée et savante, Sylvain emprunte ses Fables à La Fontaine dans l'espoir d'introduire l'idiome populaire dans la

cour des grands. N'oublions pas que La Fontaine doit aussi sa notoriété à Ésope, fabuliste de l'antiquité Gréco-latine. Dans son étude détaillée de *Cric ? Crac !* Arthur Perry Williams compare George Sylvain à une version moderne de Du Bellay, expliquant que Sylvain cherchait à faire pour le créole, ce que Du Bellay fit pour la langue française. Le préfacier, Louis Borno, juriste, poète et futur président de la République d'Haïti chante les mérites de Sylvain: « Notre créole national méritait une place dans l'Art, dans l'universelle République des Lettres. Oswald l'y avait conduit, Sylvain lui délivre ses lettres de grande naturalisation » (13).

Pour Sylvain, le lecteur haïtien sera plus réceptif à une littérature en langue créole : « Nous n'écrivons pas assez en créole. Nous ne réfléchissons pas que pour élever le peuple à la conception de l'idéal artistique, pour affiner son esprit, pour le moraliser en l'éveillant au sentiment du beau, il faut commencer par lui parler sa langue ». Il encourageait une plus grande production littéraire en vernaculaire, espérant que ceci favoriserait la communication entre écrivains et lecteurs. Près d'un siècle plus tard le Martiniquais Edouard Glissant soulignait la différence entre l'usage d'une langue imposée ou suggérée et celui d'une langue vécue, expliquant que le choix de la langue d'écriture, pouvait aussi poser problème pour l'écrivain: « Il n'est pas sûr que les jeunes Antillais ne balancent pas devant l'œuvre à produire, tout simplement parce que l'utilisation du Français leur laisse à la gorge un goût de nécessité non accomplie. Ici, comme là, une seule et impérieuse vérité : pour qu'une langue devienne langage, il importe qu'elle soit ressentie, vécue par la collectivité comme *sa* langue, non plus celle d'un autre, si fraternel puisse-t-il être » (553).

Ainsi, face à ce dilemme, l'écrivain antillais développe une contre-poétique ou poétique forcée où le contenu de son discours est souvent en contradiction avec la langue d'expression : « Il y a une poétique forcée là où une nécessité d'expression confronte un impossible à s'exprimer. Il arrive que cette confrontation se noue dans une opposition entre le contenu exprimable et la langue suggérée ou imposée » (402). Utiliser un des classiques de la littérature française pour valoriser le créole haïtien est un exemple du type de discours contradictoires que peuvent engendrer une contre-poétique.

Ceci n'empêche pas *Cric ? Crac !* d'être un travail de qualité, autant dans le fond que dans la forme : Sylvain propose une orthographe fixe et une syntaxe du créole, imposant rigueur et constance à la langue tout en adaptant les Fables aux réalités haïtiennes tant et si bien que leur moralité—discutable en bien des points—diffère de celle de La Fontaine. Le lecteur, familier des animaux des fables françaises, sera introduit au

monde rural haïtien où chèvre, âne et laie sont remplacés par *cabritt*, *bourriq* et *malfini*. Ainsi, nous voyons la fourmi suggérer à la cigale d'aller « danser la calinda » et les enfants du très connu laboureur, planter des « bananes, malangas, ignames couche-couche, riz manioc, pois rouges, pois souche, pois d'Angole... » (209).

Bon outil d'apprentissage de la langue, *Cric ? Crac !* présente chaque fable en créole accompagnée de sa traduction en français. Dans les notes qui accompagnent l'œuvre, l'auteur ne manque pas d'expliquer ses choix dans sa codification du créole haïtien, restant fidèle à son projet de hisser sa langue au rang des idiomes pourvus de « qualités de force, de finesse ou d'élégance qui permettraient de prétendre à l'honneur des créations littéraires... » (5). Ainsi, il reprend le vers libre de La Fontaine, avec des rimes pauvres, rappelant à tout lecteur que le créole est doté d'une forte musicalité et que ces fables sont faites pour être lues, répétées et pourquoi pas transmises oralement. Chose qu'accomplit avec talent la comédienne et metteur en scène Mylène Wagram. Dans cette édition de la collection *Autrement Même* de Roger Little (L'Harmattan, Paris), le texte est accompagné d'un CD contenant vingt et une fables lues et interprétées par Wagram, véritable conteuse des temps modernes.

L'introduction de Kathleen Gyssels présente l'auteur, son travail et son engagement politique tout en contextualisant l'ouvrage dans l'histoire singulière du peuple d'Haïti. Le mérite de Gyssels est d'avoir vu en *Cric ? Crac !* un « matériau pédagogique et patrimonial indiscutable » (xxxii) invitant le système éducatif haïtien ainsi que les lecteurs de tout horizon à en profiter, espérant : « que ce recueil bénéficiera d'un engouement renouvelé, partout dans le monde » (xxxii). L'introduction est suivie d'une notice de l'auteur et de la préface de Borno. En couverture se trouve un portrait de Sylvain extrait de l'ouvrage *Figures Contemporaines* (1913) réalisé par Angelo Mariani. Tous ces éléments paratextuels n'empêcheront pas le lecteur d'apprécier les fables de Sylvain remplies d'onomatopées, de proverbes haïtiens et d'expressions idiomatiques typiquement haïtiennes qui rappellent l'ambiance des veillées où ces récits étaient « tirés » par le conteur. Ce dernier proposait ses services à travers la formule d'usage *Cric ?* à laquelle l'audience répondait *Crac !* Ainsi, La Fontaine s'efface tout doucement pour laisser place au conteur créole que Sylvain identifie dans le titre de l'ouvrage comme étant un montagnard haïtien.

Dans sa *captatio benevolentiae* présentée sous forme de prologue, le conteur que Sylvain met en scène chante les louanges de La Fontaine, assurant à son auditoire qu'il n'était pas un « vulgaire rustaud, ni un gratte chaudière » (19). Il prétend l'avoir lu et avoir retenu de ce grand homme

des enseignements qui permettraient à son auditoire de devenir « de bons chrétiens » (19). Borno décrit le conteur comme une sorte *d'alter ego* de Sylvain qui se déplace avec aisance du monde rural au monde urbain maniant « à la perfection, le patois maternel » et bien entendu « le langage des blancs » (16). Dans l'introduction de l'œuvre intitulée « préface courte » Borno pousse l'analogie jusqu'à décrire le conteur comme un vieillard d'environ quatre-vingt ans racontant ses histoires le soir venu, vêtu comme un paysan de Kenscoff; région d'où Sylvain est originaire.

Sylvain n'est cependant pas le premier à avoir traduit et réadapté les fables de La Fontaine ; François Marbot, Commissaire de la Marine et ordonnateur de La Réunion publie en 1846—deux ans avant l'abolition de l'esclavage aux Antilles françaises— un ouvrage intitulé *Bambous, Fables de La Fontaine travesties en patois créole par un vieux commandeur*. La version du Béké Marbot, dont les messages antiabolitionnistes et discriminatoires envers le noir et le mulâtre, appelle les esclaves à accepter leur sort et à servir leurs maîtres : « Vous, les esclaves qui êtes la main et le pied, n'oubliez jamais votre devoir envers le ventre qui n'est autre que le Béké » (Marbot 290).

Malgré sa valorisation de la langue créole, Marbot reste bien clair sur le sort des noirs et des mulâtres que la moralité des fables invite à la soumission plutôt qu'à l'émancipation. Cette version diffère en bien des points de celle de Sylvain dont la moralité fort religieuse ne manque pas de suggérer le dur labeur et la résignation face au triste sort de la race humaine sur terre. « Les contes de cet homme [La Fontaine] vous feront voir que partout il y a misère. Dieu la donne, il faut l'accepter. En Guinée, au pays des blancs, partout, c'est une souffrance, comme si cette race était maudite ! » (Sylvain 19). Alors que la version de Marbot reflète le contexte historique de l'esclavage aux Antilles françaises, la version de Sylvain s'éloigne de la traite et du colonialisme pour s'adapter aux réalités de son temps ; il mentionne la présence de bateaux américains dans la fable « Le Berger et la mer » (129) rappelant l'occupation d'Haïti par les Américains, et l'action dans « L'Ours et les deux compagnons » se déroule sous le règne du président Florvil Hyppolite.

Il faut souligner que Sylvain est une des figures emblématique de la résistance contre l'occupation américaine en Haïti et que son aversion pour l'impérialisme Yankee le poussait à se tourner vers les racines françaises de la culture haïtienne. De plus, en tant que poète de La Ronde qui voyait le créole comme un dérivé de la langue française, son effort de s'appropriier les Fables de La Fontaine fut critiqué par Jean Price-Mars dans son essai ethnographique sur la culture haïtienne *Ainsi parla l'oncle* (1928). Ce dernier déplore l'emprunt fait à un classique français au lieu de contes

traditionnels haïtiens auxquels le peuple haïtien aurait pu mieux s'identifier: « Voyez-vous à quelle magnifique création originale eut abouti George Sylvain s'il avait oublié La Fontaine pour ne puiser ses sujets entièrement que dans les légendes et les contes d'Haïti. N'est-il pas regrettable que nous ayons perdu la plus belle occasion d'avoir un chef-d'œuvre de littérature folklorique » (45). Il faut souligner que contrairement aux membres de La Ronde, Price-Mars penchait plutôt pour une séparation plus claire d'avec la France ; il appartenait à la génération suivante qui s'intéressait aux racines africaines de la langue créole et de la culture haïtienne.

Cric ? Crac ! se place dans le débat entre discours dominant et discours dominé, devenant ainsi, un ouvrage de référence sur lequel les générations suivantes pourront s'appuyer pour articuler des contre poétiques nouvelles. Sous la plume de Sylvain, La Fontaine reprenait soudain une dimension politique. En adaptant La Fontaine pour les Haïtiens, Sylvain se place inconsciemment parmi les précurseurs d'une littérature où l'empire s'adresse à la métropole. Ainsi, l'adaptation littéraire de textes classiques deviendra pour les auteurs de la Caraïbe, une pratique thérapeutique qui vise à articuler un contre-discours en utilisant des œuvres dont la réputation n'est plus à faire. Le Martiniquais Aimé Césaire publie *Une Tempête* (1968) qui se veut une réécriture de la pièce de Shakespeare *The Tempest* (1610-1611). *La Migration des Cœurs* (1995) de la Guadeloupéenne Maryse Condé est une adaptation du célèbre roman d'Emily Brontë *Les Hauts de Hurlevent*. Comme le dirait Salman Rushdie « The Empire writes back to the center ». D'Ésope à La Fontaine en passant par Marbot, Sylvain, Borno et Mariani, sans oublier Little, Gyssels et Wagram, artistes et intellectuels d'hier et d'aujourd'hui créent ce cocktail artistique et littéraire à la fois traditionnel et avant-gardiste; une combinaison intrigante et originale. *Cric ? Crac !* est sans aucun doute un ouvrage qui mérite sa place dans toutes les bibliothèques aux cotés des grands écrits qui font la fierté de la Caraïbe.

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***Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean*. Edited by Faith Smith. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011. ISBN 978-0-8139-3112-8 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-3113-5 (paperback). 292 pp. \$69.00 cloth, \$35.00 paperback.**

Review by Kersuze Simeon-Jones, University of South Florida

Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean is an innovative academic work both in approach and content. The collection of essays examines the intersection between Caribbean social and sexual dynamics and the region's economic politics. With contributions by numerous writers—eighteen in total—the diverse essays in this collection undertake a series of complex inquiries into the beliefs and behaviors governing the sexual practices of Caribbean citizens. While each essay provides a number of unique and provocative ideas, two themes dominate the collection. The essays collected here examine the relationship between global tourism and the image of the Caribbean as sexually liberated and sexually available. At the same time, the collection also treats the epistemology of citizenship, which becomes a means to dissect the most intimate social and political positions of marginalized inhabitants of the Caribbean: women, underprivileged heterosexual males, and homosexual men.

Indeed, consuming the Caribbean in all its facets—coffee and cacao, cash crops, free or cheap labor, and sexuality—is not a novel practice. It dates back to the time of slavery. The significance of *Sex and the Citizen* lies in providing four new ways to look at this exploitation. Thus, the collection provides an analysis of the evolution of consumption from the slavery/colonial era to the current age of globalization; a depiction of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries' varying modes of commodification and trade, which sometimes lead to the exchange of sexuality for citizenship abroad; a comparison of Caribbean homosexuality, both as it is perceived and as it is practiced, to homosexuality worldwide; and lastly, an examination of the diversity of sexual consumers, which now include economically self-sufficient foreign women on Caribbean soil. Thus, the Caribbean is no longer *solely* a “location where the mercantile elite could both increase their wealth and flaunt it, at the same time acquiring a tremendous amount of cultural capital” (Saunders 23); it is also a location where travelers seek to experience leisure and fulfill sexual desires, and where Caribbean citizens

seek to escape or improve their distressed economic condition.

This situation naturally raises ethical questions. Is the exchange between tourist and citizen based on “fair trade” or the manifestation of power and exploitation? As Patricia Saunders concisely explains, we ought to consider the following points in framing our perspectives:

If what we ingest—food, spirits, pharmaceuticals, and so on—is one point of entry for ethical debates about power, mobility, and consumption, then sex should be examined as another point of ethical critique for visitors and “natives” alike. We would do well to ask what “inside information” sexual intimacy provides and how it is decoded, disseminated, and valued as cultural capital in the marketplace. Do sexualized bodies signify, or perform, a kind of strategic withholding during these intimate exchanges? And if so, how might this withholding function as a kind of labor taxation occasionally exercised by those being exploited? (25)

Certainly, the answers to these questions will vary depending on the age and economic situation of the person providing, or rather, at times, strategically coerced into providing these services. In attempting to answer these questions, this collection of essays illustrates three distinct models of sexual service: coercion, fair trade, and manipulation of power.

Essays throughout the collection locate these models in a number of different fictional texts. Saunders discusses coercion through an examination of the film *Heading South* (2005), adapted from Dany Laferrière’s short stories. The film recounts the story of a middle-aged white woman vacationer who sexually assaults a poor Haitian boy. Also taking up the issue of coercion is Odile Cazenave’s “Francophone Caribbean Women Writers.” Cazenave reads Maryse Condé’s novel *Histoire de la femme cannibale* (2005) in order to link sexual violence against women to the problem of domination and abuse of young males. The novel depicts an older, white English professor who strategically grooms and coerces young males to perform sexual acts. Saunders describes “fair trade” through a reading of Terry McMillan’s novel and its filmed adaptation *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (1996/1998). This case is more complex because it is a transaction between two adults, one looking for sexual pleasure and validation, and the other seeking mobility through migration, marriage, and American citizenship. Donette Francis’s essay discusses the manipulation of power through an examination of Angie Cruz’s novel *Soledad* (2001). In the novel, Olivia, a young Dominican woman, escapes familial patriarchal oppression to find herself in sex tourism work. When she becomes pregnant, Olivia finally

gives herself to an American citizen of Dominican origin. Though they are never legally married, he manages to get her a visa to the United States, and once there, he confines her to a life of mental, physical, and sexual abuse. Such stories call the reader to question whether “the exchange for a first-world visa or currency is best understood as modern-day extension of slavery and bondage... or whether sex work is a space where laborers can sell their service for meaningful financial gain and thereby exercise empowerment in the global market” (Francis 56).

Unfortunately, as Saunders points out, in communities and countries where it is difficult to survive, some sort of hustle becomes necessary, whether it be selling pirated goods, illegal drugs, or one’s body (34). What is more unfortunate is the fundamental reality that it is almost impossible, if not entirely impossible, to sell one’s body without selling one’s spirit. While selling sex is sometimes viewed as an act of power, Francis cautions against this simplistic commodity exchange reading. Instances of sexual exchange, she writes, “become at once scenes of subjection and subject formation.” Even as a material trade, she explains, “sex is not a completed service or performance but rather a continuous one; and the workers ‘selves,’ by which I mean body *and* soul, are held as collateral...” (65). Hence, *Soledad*’s Olivia manifests an acute physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual illness, an illness that has negative consequences for her daughter. Francis’s and Saunders’s essays intersect at the analytical juncture of a multilayered/complex system of commodification and its impact on the total self.

If citizenship is bargained/privileged through economic and social standing, then gender and sexual orientation also play determining roles in the general definition of Caribbean citizenship. Such distinctly marginalized perceptions and expressions of citizenship are scrutinized and questioned in the complementary essays “Nobody Ent Billing Me,” “Against the Rules of Blackness,” “Threatening Sexual (Mis)Behavior,” “Sexual Awakenings and the Malignant Fictions of Masculinity,” “Living and Loving,” “Le Jeu de Qui?” “New Citizens, New Sexualities,” “Macocotte,” and “What is a *Uma*?”. While, for the purpose of tourism, the region is sold as sexually liberated and thus available, it is simultaneously a location where one finds the sexually restrained, controlled, and abused in quotidian life. If citizenship implies protection under the law, then countless women, children, and men fall short of full-citizenship. In “Caribbean Migrations: Negotiating Borders,” Evelyn O’ Callaghan probes the extent to which “Domestic violence, incest, and rape continue to spoil the lives of many women and children” (130). Gauging the predicament of numerous women, Tracy Robinson re-states her belief that “citizenship is a valuable

theoretical tool for analyzing women's subordination and a potentially powerful political device for transforming women's lives" (202).

From the collection of essays, it is clear that citizenship is "a potentially powerful device" to not only transform women's lives, but also the lives of abused men and children. In their epistemological scrutiny of *citizenship*, the essays collectively interrogate the role of power (money, status) in the definition and lived experiences of citizenship. Whose abuses are normalized and left unmentioned? Who rapes and sodomizes with impunity? Who remains a pariah?

Journal of Haitian Studies

CFP - Special Issue on Michel-Rolph Trouillot

The editors of the *Journal of Haitian Studies* seek essays that reflect on or build upon the work of Haitian scholar Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1949-2012). In analyses that combined anthropology, economics, and history, Trouillot's work addressed the relationship between historicity and power, the epistemology of social sciences, and the historical evolution of Caribbean peoples. Contributors may want to consider the following topics:

- ♥ Assessing Trouillot's legacy to the field of anthropology vis-à-vis Haitian Studies.
- ♥ Trouillot as a public intellectual and the politics of scholarship in Kreyòl.
- ♥ Tracing the connections and convergences between Trouillot and other Francophone and Caribbean thinkers, particularly in regard to the project of colonization and post-colonization.
- ♥ Capitalizing on Trouillot's work in order to explain post-earthquake conditions in Haiti.
- ♥ Extending Trouillot's comparative approach to Haitian history, not just to the Holocaust and the Alamo as Trouillot does in *Silencing the Past*, but to other historical contexts as well.

However, contributors are free to take up any aspect of Trouillot's work as they see fit.

Essays should be 5,000-10,000 words and should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition. Please submit your essay, cover sheet, and 150-word abstract to johns@cbs.ucsb.edu. Queries should be directed to Patrick Bellegarde-Smith (pbs@uwm.edu) and Nadève Ménard (nm19281975@yahoo.com).

Submit articles by August 1, 2013.

Revue d'études haïtienne

un numéro spécial sur Michel-Rolph Trouillot

Les éditeurs de la *Revue d'études haïtienne* sollicitent des essais s'inspirant du ou se basant sur le travail du chercheur haïtien Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1949-2012). Dans des analyses combinant anthropologie, sciences économiques et histoire, le travail de Trouillot interpelle la relation qui existe entre l'historicité et le pouvoir, l'épistémologie des sciences sociales et l'évolution historique des peuples caribéens. Les contributeurs peuvent intervenir sur les sujets suivants:

- ♥ Une évaluation du legs de Trouillot à la discipline de l'anthropologie par rapport aux études haïtiennes.
- ♥ Trouillot en tant qu'intellectuel publique et les enjeux des travaux de recherche en créole.
- ♥ Tracer les liens et les convergences entre Trouillot et d'autres penseurs francophones et caribéens, surtout par rapport aux projets de colonisation et de post-colonisation.
- ♥ Utiliser le travail de Trouillot pour expliquer les conditions du post-séisme en Haïti.
- ♥ Étendre l'approche comparative à l'histoire haïtienne de Trouillot, pas seulement à la Shoa et à l'Alamo comme le fait Trouillot dans *Silencing the Past*, mais à d'autres contextes historiques aussi.

Cependant, les contributeurs restent libres d'interpeller n'importe quel aspect du travail de Trouillot.

Les articles devraient être entre 5,000 et 10,000 mots de longueur et doivent suivre le Chicago Manual of Style, 16ème édition. Nous sommes aussi intéressés par des textes méditatifs plus courts. Vous êtes priés de soumettre votre article, page de couverture, et un résumé de 150 mots à johs@cbs.ucsb.edu. Adressez d'éventuelles questions à Patrick Bellegarde-Smith (pbs@uwm.edu) ou Nadève Ménard (nm1997@jhu.edu).

Le délai de soumission est le 1 août 2013.



Asosyasyon Etid Ayisyen (HSA)
25yèm Konferans Anyèl
Pòtoprens, Ayiti
7 - 9 novanm, 2013
Karibe Hotel

**Reprezantasyon, Revizyon, Reskonsablite: Nan Direksyon
Nouvo Direksyon pou Ayiti nan 2013 ak pi Devan**

Etranje toujou konn pale sou Ayiti tankou yon nasyon mistè ki ekzotik, ki pa sivilize, epi ki natirèlman vyolan. Reprezantasyon sa-yo pa gen anyen pou wè ak listwa peyi-a; men pito, yo reprezante yon seri fason nètale ki ka aspè pozitif osnon negatif pou yo dekri oswa denigre Ayiti. Kit yo rekonèt Ayiti tankou "premye repiblik nwa endepandan" oswa senpatize ak li kòm "nasyon pi pòv", atitid pòtrè sa yo reprezante, fòse nou evalye efè kijan bann vye lide sa yo toujou rete tennfas nan imajinasyon moun pou ègzamine oswa evalye istwa nou kontinye tande sou Ayiti, epi analize wòl Etid Ayisyen apre goudou-goudou a, pandan nou ap vanse pi devan 25 lane rechèch depi apre fondasyon asosyasyon an. Pandan medya mondyal konsidere Ayisyen souvan kòm yon pèp"ewoyik" oswa "rezistan" devan opresyon ak lenjistis, bon jan rechèch mande pou nou fè yon evalyasyon kritik sou fason kalifikasyon sa yo ka kreye epitou ranfòse chapant ak mekanis kontwòl yo pi plis, ansanm ak yon rekonesans modere sou fason diskou akademik yo ka rive konplis tou nan pwojè sa yo k'ap toufe pwogrè ann Ayiti.

Pou 25yèm konferans ane sa-a, Asosyasyon Etid Ayisyen envite pwopozisyon ki panche sou pwoblèm reprezantasyon ak reskonsablite nan jan yo fè rechèch ak ekri dokiman sou Ayiti ak diaspora a. Asosyasyon an gen pou objektif pou bay yon nouvo souf respirasyon pou lavi nan domèn Etid Ayisyen, epitou bay jèvrenn nan kreyasyon nouvo modèl rechèch Ayisyen epi remanbre kèk nan deba ki te anime rankont inogirasyon nou nan lane 1989.

Apre yon ka-syèk nan fè rechèch, òganize deba- konferans ak piblikasyon jounal, kisa Etid Ayisyen vin vle di? Epi petèt pi enpòtan, ki vizyon nou genyen pou avansman disiplin-lan? Kesyon sa yo vin menm pi enpòtan ak konferans ane sa k'ap fèt ann Ayiti epi avèk plis patisipasyon chèchè ak fouyapòt nan disiplin lan, sitou sila yo k ap viv oswa ki abite ann Ayiti.

Nou enterese nan prezantasyon ki angaje kesyon sa yo:

♥ Ki kalite diskou ki kreye pèsepsyon sou Ayiti, epi nan ki fason moun chèche kontrekare oswa petèt entèprete ankò nosyon nan diferans Ayisyen ak "eksepsyonalis"?

♥ Kijan entèlektyèl ta ka apwoche reyalyte ak vye mit nan fason pwodiktif pandan nou ap chèche klere sila yo ki depann sou "konesans" nou pwodwi?

♥ Kijan nou ta ka kite dèyè konvèsasyon pase yo sou estereyotip ak jeneralizasyon pou konstwi yon istwa angaje ki fè jistis nan konpleksite ak dinamis pou Ayiti ak pèp li?

♥ Ki fòs sosyopolitik ak kiltirèl ki anpeche nou swa pwoblematize oswa reyafime nosyon eksepsyonalis Ayisyen?

♥ Kijan nou kenbe jounalis ak entèlektyèl reskonsab ki gen pwojè ki chita sou itilizasyon Ayiti kòm senbòl lamizè, twoub politik, ak abi dwa moun?

♥ Kisa pou nou fè sou zafè apwopriasyon Ayiti kòm chan eksperyans pou jounalis, rechèch ak pwojè aplike?

♥ Finalman, kijan disiplin Etid Ayisyen te sèvi kòm fondasyon, pou ede chanjman nan vye reprezantasyon epitou pou table lòt nouvo kouran lide, ak nouvo aksyon nan pwojè pou rekonstriksyon Ayiti a?

Nou envite tout diskisyon sou Ayiti nan relasyon li genyen ak Karayib la epi nan yon kontèks mondyal pi laj, kote "diferans" ak "lezòt" toujou la kinalaganach. Prezantasyon yo pral chita sou diferan aspè, men yo pa we limite sèlman sou, listwa, antwopoloji, edikasyon, sikoloji, politik, sosyoloji, kondisyon fanm ak etid sèks, relijyon, ekoloji, devlopman, 'devlopman kominote', etid literè, kominikasyon, etnomizikoloji, kilti, literati ak lòt pwoblèm tankou migrasyon, patrimwàn anviwonman, ak sante.

Pwogram konferans sa pral gen diferan kalite sesyon sou fòm deba, panèl, papyè endividyèl, postè, videyo, egzibisyon, lekti, ti gwoup diskisyon. Papyè maniskri k ap soti nan konferans lan, e ki rive sèksyon pral bibliye nan revni akademik abitre Asosyasyon an ki se Journal of Haitian Studies (JOHS), nan nimewo k ap parèt yon lane konsa apre konferans lan.

Dat limit pou soumèt pwopozal se 1 me 2013.



Haitian Studies Association (HSA)
The 25th Annual Conference
Port-au-Prince, Haiti
November 7-9, 2013
Karibe Hotel

**Representations, Revisions, Responsibilities:
Toward New Narratives for Haiti in 2013 and Beyond**

Haiti is often cast by outsiders as a mysterious nation that is exotic, uncivilized, and inherently dangerous. Such misrepresentations are by no means a vestige of the past; rather, they resonate with ongoing depictions of Haiti as either positively or negatively "unique." Whether Haiti is celebrated as the Western Hemisphere's "first black sovereign republic" or pitied as its "poorest nation," the allure of such portrayals compels us to evaluate the impact of persistent stereotypes, to reexamine the stories we continue to tell about Haiti, and to analyze the role of Haitian Studies post-earthquake, as we move beyond the silver anniversary of the association's founding. While global media often construct Haitians as "heroic" or "resilient" in the face of oppression and injustice, responsible scholarship demands a critical assessment of how such characterizations may fuel structural hegemonies, along with a sober acknowledgment of the ways in which academic discourses may also become complicit in projects that stifle Haiti's progress.

For its 25th annual conference, the Haitian Studies Association invites proposals that explore issues of representation and responsibility as they pertain to research and writing on Haiti and its diaspora. The Association aims to breathe new life into the field of Haitian Studies by proffering new models of Haitianist scholarship and reinvigorating some of the debates that enlivened our inaugural meeting in 1989. After a quarter-century of research, debate, publications, and conferences, what has Haitian Studies come to mean? And perhaps more importantly, how do we envision the field evolving? These questions become even more pertinent with the annual conference taking place in Haiti and with the increased involvement of Haiti-based scholars.

We are interested in presentations that engage the following questions:

- ♥ What kinds of discourses shape perceptions of Haiti, and in what ways do individuals seek to challenge or perhaps reinscribe notions of Haitian difference and exceptionalism?
- ♥ How might scholars grapple productively with myths and realities as

we seek to enlighten those who rely on the "knowledge" we produce?

♥ How might we move past perennial conversations about stereotypes and generalizations to construct more liberating narratives that do justice to the complexity and dynamism of Haiti and its people?

♥ What sociopolitical and cultural forces impinge on our ability to either problematize or reassert notions of Haitian exceptionalism?

♥ How do we hold accountable journalists and scholars whose projects rely on uses of Haiti as icon of misery, political unrest and human rights abuses?

♥ What should we make of the appropriation of Haiti as experimental field and stepping stone in journalism, scholarship and applied projects?

♥ Ultimately, how has the discipline of Haitian Studies served as both foundation to help change misrepresentations and chart the implementation of new paradigms and related courses of action in the project of rebuilding Haiti?

We also welcome discussions of Haiti in relation to its Caribbean and broader global context, where “difference” and “otherness” are enduring tropes. Presentations will include, but not be limited to, history, anthropology, education, psychology, politics, sociology, feminism and gender studies, religion, ecology, development, community building, literary studies, communication, ethnomusicology, culture, literature and art as well as issues such as migration, patrimony, environment and health.

The program will consist of panels, papers, posters, videos, exhibits, readings, discussion groups, and listening sessions. Selected papers from the conference will appear in the *Journal of Haitian Studies (JOHS)*, a refereed academic publication of the Haitian Studies Association, to be issued approximately one year following the conference. Guidelines for general participation in the conference can be found on the HSA website. The deadline for proposals is May 1, 2013



Association d'Études Haïtiennes (HSA)
25e Conférence Annuelle
Port-au-Prince, Haïti
7 au 9 novembre 2013
Karibe Hotel

**Représentations, révisions, responsabilités:
vers de nouveaux récits pour Haïti en 2013 et au-delà**

Haïti est souvent imaginé par des étrangers en tant que nation mystérieuse, exotique, sauvage et dangereuse en soi. De telles représentations erronées ne sont en aucun cas des vestiges du passé car elles continuent de résonner avec les conceptions persistantes d'Haïti comme entité positivement ou négativement « unique ». Qu'Haïti soit célébré comme « première république noire souveraine » de l'hémisphère occidental ou pris en pitié en tant que « la nation la plus pauvre » de celui-ci, l'attrait de telles représentations nous oblige à évaluer l'impact des stéréotypes perpétuels, à réexaminer les histoires que nous ne cessons de raconter à propos d'Haïti et à analyser le rôle du domaine des « études haïtiennes » depuis le séisme, en même temps que nous préparons l'avenir de l'Association d'Études Haïtiennes au-delà du vingt-cinquième anniversaire de sa création. De même, tandis que les médias du monde façonnent souvent les Haïtiens comme « héroïques » ou « tenaces » face à l'oppression et l'injustice, les travaux responsables de recherche exigent a) une évaluation critique de la manière dont ces qualificatifs peuvent alimenter les hégémonies structurelles et b) une reconnaissance sérieuse de la façon dont les discours provenant des chercheurs et d'autres spécialistes peuvent également devenir complices dans des projets qui étouffent le progrès d'Haïti.

Pour sa 25e conférence annuelle, l'Association d'Études Haïtiennes sollicite des propositions qui examineront des questions de représentation et de responsabilité ayant trait à la recherche et à l'écriture sur Haïti et sa diaspora. L'Association a pour but d'insuffler un nouveau dynamisme au domaine des études haïtiennes en proférant de nouveaux modèles de savoir et en revigorant certains débats qui animaient déjà notre conférence inaugurale de 1989. Après un quart de siècle de recherches, de débats, de publications, de conférences, que signifie aujourd'hui « études

haïtiennes » ? Et d'autant plus importante est la question suivante : comment envisageons-nous la suite de ce domaine d'études ? Ces questions sont encore plus pertinentes puisque la conférence annuelle se déroulera en Haïti et comprendra une participation importante de spécialistes basés

en Haïti. Nous nous intéressons particulièrement à des présentations qui soulèvent les questions suivantes:

- ♥ Quels types de discours façonnent les perceptions d'Haïti, et de quelle manière les individus cherchent à réfuter ou peut-être réintroduire les notions de différence haïtienne et d'exceptionnalisme?
- ♥ Comment les spécialistes peuvent-ils venir à bout de manière productive des mythes et des réalités pendant que nous cherchons à éclairer ceux qui comptent sur le «savoir» que nous produisons?
- ♥ Comment pourrions-nous dépasser des conversations sans fin sur les stéréotypes et les généralisations afin de construire des récits plus libérateurs qui rendent justice à la complexité et au dynamisme d'Haïti et de ses habitants?
- ♥ Quelles sont les forces sociopolitiques et culturelles qui empiètent sur notre capacité à problématiser ou à réaffirmer les notions d'exceptionnalisme haïtien?
- ♥ Comment pouvons-nous tenir responsables des journalistes et des chercheurs dont les projets reposent sur le maniement d'Haïti comme l'icône de la misère, de l'instabilité politique et des violations des droits de l'homme?
- ♥ Que devons-nous faire de l'appropriation d'Haïti comme terrain d'expérimentation et de tremplin dans le journalisme, la recherche et les projets appliqués?
- ♥ Finalement, comment le domaine des études haïtiennes a-t-il servi de socle pour aider à faire évoluer les représentations erronées et pour constater la mise en oeuvre de nouveaux paradigmes et des plans d'action liés à ces paradigmes dans le projet de reconstruction d'Haïti

Par ailleurs, nous invitons également des communications sur Haïti dans son contexte caribéen et mondial, où « la différence» et « l'altérité» sont des tropes durables. Les présentations comprendront (sans être limitatives) l'histoire, l'anthropologie, l'éducation, la psychologie, la politique, la sociologie, le féminisme et les études de genre, la religion, l'écologie, le développement, le développement communautaire, les études littéraires, la communication, l'ethnomusicologie, la culture, la littérature et l'art, ainsi que des sujets tels que la migration, le patrimoine, l'environnement et la santé.

Le programme sera constitué de sessions pluridisciplinaires, de communications, d'affiches, de vidéos, d'expositions, de lectures, de discussions de groupes, et de séances d'écoute. Suite à la conférence une série

d'articles sera sélectionnée pour paraître dans le Journal of Haitian Studies (JOHS), la revue académique de l'Association d'Études Haïtiennes, dont tous les articles sont examinés par un comité de lecture. Cette publication aura lieu au cours de l'année suivant la conférence. La date limite pour la soumission des propositions est fixée au: 1er mai 2013.

The Haiti Illumination Project Book Prize

The Haitian Studies Association announces its first biennial Haiti Illumination Book Project Prize for the year 2013. The HSA invites nominations by its membership, and submissions by authors and publishers by July 1, 2013. The Prize will be awarded to the best single-authored or multi-authored book in Haitian studies in the social sciences, with broad applications beyond the academy, published in the years 2010-2013 inclusive. Anthologies do not qualify. Authors or publishers are asked to provide three copies of their book to the Book Prize Committee whose members are listed below. The first Award will be given at HSA's 25th annual Conference, in Petion-Ville, on November 7th-9th, 2013.

The Haiti Illumination Book Project Prize will carry a cash award of US \$1,000.00.

For more information contact Patrick Bellegarde-Smith (pbs@uwm.edu), Nadève Ménard (nm19281975@yahoo.com), LeGrace Benson (legrace.benson@gmail.com).



KOSANBA, A Scholarly Association for the Study of Haitian Vodou

**When Earth Meets Sky: Healing Rites & Sacred Knowledge in
Haiti & Beyond**

**CFP - International Colloquium X Harvard University, Friday,
October 18th – Sunday, October 20th, 2013**

Conference Highlights:

Opening Remarks: Jacob K. Olupona (Harvard). Keynote:
Professor Donald J. Cosentino (UC Los Angeles).
Performance: Professor Gina Athena Ulysse (Wesleyan
University)

On January 12th, 2010, the Haitian earthquake known as “Goudougoudou” claimed 300,000 souls, and left at least ten million people mourning in Haiti as well as beyond its national borders. Though this catastrophe would deeply scar the island of Hispaniola, it also brought to the fore the country's collective capacity for healing and renewal in the invocation of its vibrant Neo-African religious traditions. This type of holistic healing revealed once again the importance of divine knowledge that is skillfully guarded by priests and adept healers.

In Vodou, as in other African derived religions, intuitive knowledge coupled with wisdom from the ancestors—what we call *konesans*—is regarded as sacred and worthy of much protection. Metaphysical eyes so-to-speak allow participants in these traditions to become more alert, and to recognize the presence of the divine in the everyday as well as in otherworldly planes they might enter. When humans attempt to make contact with the divine realm, when spirits and ancestors arrive to meet the requests of living souls, we recognize this as the moment when spiritual integration takes place, when healing—individual and collective—happens. These occurrences suggest a humble moment when mortals witness divinity and a flash of the spirit, an instance when earth meets sky.

The Congress of Santa Barbara's 10th International Colloquium highlights the healing mission inherent in Haitian Vodou and in other African-derived religious systems in the Americas, in indigenous African religions, and within the scope of recent studies in alternative

and complementary medicine in the West. These religious and secular communities have continued their healing practices refined over centuries of experience. We wish to underscore how this substantial and significant compendium of traditional methods and recent innovations have proven largely effective in spiritual and corporeal healing over time, for individuals as well as the collective.

In its 10th colloquium, KOSANBA aims to inspire conversations and discussion on healing practices and divine knowledge across the Atlantic. This forum hopes to include the contributions of researchers, scholars, and practitioners in Vodou and other African- derived systems, as well as secular modes of healing. We meet this year in Boston, a center for religious, philosophical, and anthropological scholarly studies. KOSANBA welcomes papers/presentations on issues such as, though not limited to:

- ♥ Worldviews and "world sense" in the context of healing
- ♥ Shifting religious practices and ideology over time
- ♥ New and old literary/theoretical lenses and frameworks for discussing sacred knowledge
- ♥ "Spirit injury," mental illness and similar "invisible" ailments
- ♥ Arts and other curative practices used for healing and restoring universal balance
- ♥ Environmental concerns and secular healing practices
- ♥ Religious healing in the face of natural disasters (i.e. Haitian Vodou post- earthquake and New Orleans Vodou post-Katrina)
- ♥ Importance of mortuary rites and burial practices in maintaining cosmic order
- ♥ Dynamics of religious communities in new nations and *peyi blan*, the transformation of lives for new converts and initiates

Please submit a whole panel of no more than four presenters (a fifth person may chair or moderate a panel), or an individual paper by 31 May 2013 to the Program Committee. Each presentation should be no more than fifteen minutes (2,000 words or 7-8 pages in length), allowing time for discussion. An abstract of approximately 300-500 words with the title of the paper should be submitted on one page; on a separate cover page, the name(s) of the presenter(s), together with institutional affiliation(s) if applicable and the title of the presentation(s) should also be included. Full panel submissions should submit one file with all of the applicants' abstracts and required information. Additionally, applicants must provide current contact information such as mailing address, telephone numbers and e-mail address, also to be submitted by 31 May 2013. Completed papers are due

by September 1, 2013 to allow panel members time to read those papers before the conference. All proposals will be peer-reviewed, and you shall be informed of a final decision on participation by 30 June, 2013.

Papers should be submitted online to the Program Committee Co-Chairs Gina Athena Ulysse and Roberto Strongman at kosanba@cbs.ucsb.edu

One must be a member of KOSANBA to present a paper at the conference. Registration is also required for all presenters. Registration fees are required for non-members to attend the conference. All those who are scholars and/or practitioners are invited to submit an application in order to join the association.

Membership Fees are as follows: General membership \$60.00 US, Students \$35.00 US; Conference Registration: \$75.00 US, Students \$25.00 US (Before August 1, 2013); On-site Conference Registration (after 8/1/13) \$100.00 US, Students \$45.00 US.

KOSANBA—A Scholarly Association for the Study of Haitian Vodou, is headquartered at the Center for Black Studies Research at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

All Fees should be made payable to UC Regents. In the Memo Section write: KOSANBA Membership and/or Registration. Mail to:

KOSANBA C/o Center for Black Studies Research University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA 93106

Please refer any questions to or transmit all relevant documents to the Program Committee Co-Chairs, Gina Athena Ulysse (Wesleyan University) and Roberto Strongman (University of California Santa Barbara) at kosanba@cbs.ucsb.edu Or visit the <http://www.research.ucsb.edu/cbs/> or phone 805 893-3914.

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