

Growing Old with Dignity:
Women in Francophone Literature of the Caribbean

by

CHARLOTTE GERTZ

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Date

Lucienne J. Serrano
Chair of Examining Committee

Date

Francesca Canidé Sautman
Executive Officer

Professor Edouard Glissant
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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This dissertation proposes to study the role of older women in the literature emanating from Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique during the latter half of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century. The focus is on how the older woman attains the status of Dignity as a result of the strength and fortitude she displays in resisting the assaults inflicted upon her mental and physical persona. She is able to rise above her contemporaries in spite of the struggles which she had to endure before attaining that esteemed goal. Few literary accounts disclose the continuing recital of humiliation and degradation suffered by older women in the era of slavery and the periods of colonization and postcolonialism. Authorship was male-dominated among the few who had literary skills. The women's voices were muffled; they could neither read nor write in the language of the Other. They depended on oral history and collective memory to tell their

descendents the stories of pain and subjugation they suffered. The Emancipation Proclamation, described by Professor Glissant as *une cérémonie vide*¹, resulted in spite of its short-comings, to encourage some women to take the initiative and loosen the fetters of silence. They became the voice for their less vocal sisters.

The literature included in this thesis, compounded of fact and imagination, reflects the beliefs and aspirations of a vital segment of society waiting to be heard. The tales told begin with part myth, part fact and then gradually evolve into the story of a people. The methodology employed is an examination of novels, essays, and critical works to assess the basic ideology of a whole segment of bruised humanity. The novels discussed act as messages from the women who wished to give credence to their silent history. They are written in French, the prescribed language of the Francophone communities, even though many references are made to Creole, the language dear to the heart of the people.

Although this dissertation is seamlessly integrated, it is divided into separate chapters using the literary works as fruitful sources: “Oral History,” deals with the probable past as interpreted by the teller. When based on “Collective Memory”, the story is often fused with personal adaptation. The

¹ Edouard Glissant, La Case du Commandeur, (Paris:Gallimard, 1997), 123.

illness and triumph of the ageing process accent the respect one earns after reaching *un certain âge*, but it also deals with the debilitating affects of sickness which often accompany old age. “Language and Religion” are two factors which are inextricably woven into basic structures of human society. The secret language of the African slaves and their inherited religion sustained them during their tempestuous mode of survival. “Color-Coded Determinism” deals with a woman who is thwarted in her life’s activities because of the color of her skin. She relieves her frustrations and captures her self-identity in the act of writing her intimate thoughts in a journal. “Sexual Abuse” is a major factor in causing women to lose their self-esteem, dignity and family values. Gender is introduced as a social concern rather than a biological phenomenon. “Postcolonialism” is the chapter that demonstrates the after-effects of slave rule. Poverty, hunger, and inadequate living conditions still prevail, but there is hope for the future generation, sustained by the mothers and the grandmothers who sacrifice their own well-being to further the education and social ascension of their offspring.

My thesis concludes with the crowning event in the hope and dream of all the women embodied in the heart-wrenching stories of pain and suffering. Barack Obama, a black man, was elected the 44th president of the United States of America in November 2008. He was raised by his

grandmother, whose aspirations equaled those of the Reine Sans Nom, the M'man Tine, and the Lamerchie of the novels included in this work. The impossible dream came true! It is wished that all of the authors who wrote the texts included here could reap the joy and happiness of this amazing event. How great would be their reward!

The foregoing history will have a determining influence on all that is transpiring in the world today. Society and culture will have positive reactions as a result of the startling election of the first black president of the United States. The far-reaching effects will extend to all geographical and temporal boundaries. And it is very possible that all the women in the inspiring novels of this thesis may have contributed in some way to the amelioration of the human condition.

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Introduction
Growing Old with Dignity:
Women in Francophone Literature of the Caribbean

To grow old with dignity requires a lifetime of creating inner stability and deep-seated moral fortitude. One who achieves dignity in old age displays largesse of spirit and is most worthy of respect. The ageing woman who deserves the title of dignity is the subject of this paper. She is the guiding force for the freedom of her family, her race, and her society. To be old with dignity is heroic.

Intellectual inquiry into the postcolonial societies of Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique has revealed the importance of the ageing woman, a fact reflected in life situations and in the literature of the period. The role of the young woman in Caribbean literature has elicited much critical commentary, but the representation of the older woman has not been given sufficient attention. She has contributed a strong voice and a compelling function in Caribbean life as well as in contemporary literature. The ageing woman has been the survivor of historical disaster and family upheaval. She has been the harbinger of tradition, perpetuating oral accounts of the silent history of her forebears, and maintaining religious beliefs and practices. The older woman has uncovered the hidden trauma of her ancestors and the cries

of resistance by those who could no longer suffer the indignities of subjugation.

The novels which I have chosen were written primarily by authors emanating from these Caribbean countries during the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. These fictional works demonstrate that some ageing women can overcome the overwhelming impediments and restrictions which govern their lives. The older, stronger woman becomes the *poteau mitan* (the central pillar of a voodoo temple) of a family group. She is able to obtain and retain her dignity despite the atrocities she has had to endure. She is represented as "the culture carrier and the morality bearer of a disenfranchised people seeking cohesion and upliftment."²

My thesis seeks to define the words in the title in order to better understand the complex nature of the literature to be analyzed. Each word is significant and refers to a specific interpretation. The meaning turns on the verb, which means to say that "growing" is not a static situation, but an ongoing series of future possibilities. Growing old or the process of ageing is influenced by historical and geographical determinations. Under certain

² Kamau Brathwaite, "Caribbean Women during the Period of Slavery", Engendering History, Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective, ed. Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton, and Barbara Bailey (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 129.

conditions one could not grow old. Slaves died young! The exigencies of slave life and the hardships that ensued inhibited a natural development into old age. And to grow old would be a major triumph physically as well as morally. The memory of past injustices was only partially obliterated by the liberating decree of 1848. The suffering persisted. For the displaced woman, Africa became synonymous with a Paradise Lost. To her, Africa was Mother Earth, the home of her ancestors, her religion, her language, and her customs. In being uprooted to the land of the "Other", she had to forge a link of survival for herself and for her descendents. She would perpetuate her role as mother, teacher, and standard-bearer. She would inculcate her offspring as well as those left in her care, with the religion, language, and customs of their African heritage. The youth were to be made aware of the silent history of their past. The mother-figure would become the interpreter of oral history and collective memory. History would be Herstory! The distinctive peasant culture would survive through the strength and wisdom of the woman, and as she grew older, she would try to transcend the misery of life into the richness of loving. She would indeed grow old with dignity.

Unfortunately, there were some women who could not cope with the indignities of slave life and the loss of Africa, their motherland, and they preferred suicide. They did not want their offspring (particularly females) to

suffer either, so they committed acts of infanticide. The works of the authors of the Francophone Caribbean literature which are analyzed in my thesis make reference to these tragic acts. In some cases they are considered acts of self-respect, a way of refusing a life of degradation and upholding the principles of dignity. The protagonists in the novels become the agonists (the ones who triumph in battle). They are the warriors who gain the title of dignity in the practice of defiance.

The books which I have chosen to include in my work were, for the most part, written by women whose stories are about the plight of ageing women. The inscription of female voices in literary pieces is an effective way of articulating the problems that confront them. In this way, writers empower their characters to express their concerns. The written work enters the realm of *vérité / fiction*. The fiction would reveal hidden truths and could be characterized as a *récit de vie*, where one could enter the life of another without fear of misinterpretation. The authors could expose the problems which beset the ageing woman, to delve into her thoughts, to become part of her daily life, to sympathize with her, and finally to rejoice in her victory.

The power of the woman as she ascends the difficult route to dignity in maturity and in old age is reflected in the literature. The woman has the power of life and death. She is a true daughter of Mother Earth and as such

she is the recipient of all her glories and disasters. She must have the strength of her convictions to reach the almost untenable goal of dignity. When she can finally stand tall in her garden she is likened to Télumée, the protagonist in *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle* (1972), by Simone Schwarz-Bart.

In the novels analyzed, there are several women who grow old with the wisdom of old age due to their lifetime experiences. Tituba, the leading character in, *Moi Tituba, Sorcière ... Noire de Salem*, by Maryse Condé (1986), suffers a life of slavery and humiliation, maintaining her dignity in the face of disaster. Claire Clamont, the protagonist in *Amour*, which is the first book in the trilogy *Amour, Colère et Folie* by Marie Chauvet (1968), considers herself old for having been emotionally paralyzed for thirty-nine years by her self-imposed marginalization in the mulatto/bourgeois society of a small Haitian town. The military atmosphere which pervades plays an important role in this novel as it does in *Fils de Misère*, by Marie-Thérèse Colimon (1973). Here, Lamercie Mercurieu, the quintessential mother, struggles through hard labor and self-sacrifice to educate her son, only to be thwarted by military oppression.

Growing old with dignity is personified by Télumée, the beloved granddaughter of Reine Sans Nom in the novel by Simone Schwarz-Bart,

Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle. In the rural setting of post-slavery Guadeloupe, Télumée is influenced by the memory of the three preceding generations of courageous Lougandor women. In another text, where memory is the important factor, recalling and recognizing previous experiences, becomes the basic element in the story of Emma, in *Le Livre d'Emma*, by Marie-Célie Agnant (2001). The tragic heroine in this novel is completely inhabited by the memory of her female ancestors who survived or resisted slavery. The desperate tales told to her by the older women of her family influence Emma's life and finally in emulating their tragic deaths.

In the following novels, memory is also the basic theme, but in these two novels, it is traumatic memory which obsesses the lives of Eliette, in *L'Espérance Macadam* by Gisèle Pineau (1995), and Sophie Caco in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, by Edwidge Danticat (1994). Both books deal with brutal assault. In the case of Eliette, it is unconscious memory of catastrophe; as for Sophie, the traumatic memory of her mother's assault is transferred to her as well as to her elderly grandmother.

Un Plat de Porc aux Bananes Vertes, by Simone Schwarz-Bart and André Schwarz-Bart (1967) is a novel in which an old woman overcomes sickness and poverty to write her memories of slavery and subjugation. She is

likened to *La Mulâtresse Solitude*³, which is the subtitle of this book. In Caribbean lore, this woman incarnates resistance and invincibility.

There are other works which pertain to the topic of ageing women in the post colonial atmosphere of the Francophone islands of the Caribbean. As survivors of domestic and family violence, these women were able to maintain their secret traditions and to become keepers of memory and the oral history of their communities. In their role of authority, they were the guardians and enactors of popular religion as well as the religion of their ancestors. The tales of resistance, suppressed memory, and trauma served to strengthen their natural inclination to grow old with dignity. Extreme cases of *marronage* and revolt were also part of their heritage and are pertinent to my subject.

In *Femmes des Antilles Trace et Voix*, Gisèle Pineau and Marie Abraham present a narrative of past events with several personal confessions of misery and trauma suffered by the women of the Antilles. Gisèle Pineau wrote the section devoted to slavery and recorded personal histories of individual recipients of punishment and self-abasement, including sexual abuse and incest. Marie Abraham gave the historical background and researched the existing documents to give authenticity to their combined project. As the title

³ Andre Schwarz-Bart, *La Mulâtresse Solitude*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983). “*La Mulâtresse Solitude* (1972) is a historical novel without comparison in Antillean literary history: Schwarz-Bart relies on the rare historiographical traces to reinvent the life of the legendary Solitude.

implies, this text deals with women of all ages who release their suppressed voices, particularly the older women, to reveal their achievements and to finally rejoice in fulfillment.

Engendering History—Caribbean History in Historical Perspective, edited by Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton, and Barbara Bailey is a collection that aims to credit the women who rose from the ranks of submission to unlock the chains of slavery and assume their proper place in society. Their voices would at last be heard and no longer ignored. Hilary Beckles, Bernard Moitt, Lucille Mathurin Mair, and Mary Chamberlain were among the contributors to this volume.

Maryse Condé's *La Parole des Femmes* includes specific accounts of women's contribution to family life in the form of education, religion, and nature. According to Condé, certain works of literature should be studied to discover the inner thoughts of women, what they think of themselves, their country, and the difficulties that face them. It is her attempt to clarify the complex problems existing in the Antilles and to give recognition to the women whose accomplishments have thus far been neglected.

Renée Larrier explores the various ways in which women's voices are inscribed to transmit knowledge, culture, and wisdom in *Francophone Women Writers of Africa and the Caribbean*. Their voices transmit memories of the

pain suffered by ancestors and the opportunity for muffled voices to break free. The older woman gains authority because of her experience and her stature in the community. In *Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean*, Renée Larrier analyzes the works of various authors who present their work from a subjective viewpoint, interpreting her title *Autofiction and Advocacy*. Caribbean literature is rife with first-person narrators, as the scarcity of visual and aural evidence challenging the *grand Récit* (the master narrative) creates the need for a Caribbean first-person perspective. At the same time, Larrier emphasizes the native dance known as *danmyé* (also known as *laghia* in some communities), a combat dance tradition in Martinique which offers a framework for reading Francophone Caribbean texts. She applies the combat dance principles of initiation, challenge and performance to texts from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Haiti, each of which, along with other Caribbean societies, has its own combat tradition.

An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel, Beverly Ormerod's assessment of the literary scene in the French Caribbean, is valuable in that each novel discussed is presented within its social and historical context. The poetry of Aimé Césaire acts as an introduction to important works by Edouard Glissant and Jacques Romain. Ageing women play a vital role in the texts analyzed.

Mama Lola—A Voudou Priestess in Brooklyn by Karen McCarthy Brown is a first-hand study in vodouism, taught by Mama Lola, the Mambo in her community. This religion is still practiced in contemporary Haiti and in Haitian immigrant communities. The voodoo spirits have a great influence on women's everyday lives by giving them voice and empowering them to gain social and economic independence.

L'Esclavage aux Antilles avant 1789, by Lucien Petraud, speaks of the religion practiced in Guadeloupe and Martinique as a form of Animism, which he describes as follows: "...c'est à dire qu'à leurs yeux tout est dieu, tout est animé d'une vie et d'une volonté...; là c'est un animal, un léopard, un crocodile, un serpent: ici, c'est un arbre, une pierre, un rocher; ailleurs, c'est un lac, une rivière, la mer, la lune."⁴ According to Maryse Condé, it is the women of the Antilles who are mostly influenced by Animism and by their leaders, the *quimboiseurs*.

In *Nouveau Voyage aux Iles d'Amerique*, by the Père Labat, voices of resistance are expressed in the form of *marronage*. The Père Labat tells of the capture of *négresses* by the escaped slaves to fill their need for women. Older women objecting to continued oppression were more likely to join a band of

⁴ Lucien Petraud, *L'Esclavage aux Antilles avant 1789*, (Pointe-à-Pitre: Emile Désormeaux, 1973), 155.

marrons than younger women in spite of the harsh life they would surely encounter.

Le Marronage aux Antilles Françaises aux XVIII Siècle: Articles, by G. Debien, gives accounts of life in self-imposed exile, consisting of scarcity of food, constant danger of capture, and threat of severe punishment. These hardships did not prevent the enslaved women from trying to resist the torture of enslavement and run to a free life in the hills, preferring the negation of the maroon to the acquiescence of the plantation slave. The shrill voice of freedom echoed from the hills of the marrons. Marronage provided the space necessary for the articulation of their expression of freedom.

Bernard Moitt, in *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848*, investigates gender and the ugly past of the Antillean slave colonies. His book is a dedicated exposé of the lives of enslaved women, with the object of bringing them “out of the shadows of the slave plantation world and into full view, where they belong.”⁵

In taking an interdisciplinary approach to my thesis, I studied the women in the Francophone African diaspora through a methodology which stresses the ageing process in their common experiences of gender, slavery, and colonization. I connect the irreversible phenomenon of growing old with

⁵ Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001), 173.

the drama of sickness and sexual abuse, as well as the influence of dual religious affiliations. I stress these factors and their effect on the literature to be analyzed. There are several authors whose theories have been vital to the philosophical import of my study.

Edouard Glissant, in *Le Discours Antillais*, states that oral history and collective memory play a vital role in the history and literature of the French Antilles. The absence of the written word allows only a silent history. The remedy for this omission was Orality, a synthesis of memory and rhythm of the spoken word. Glissant says that the literal form that provides insight into the collective experience is the folktale. It has the meandering elusiveness and the opaque unpredictability of the *conteur*. It is neither clear nor straightforward but subject to a fitful recollection of past events.⁶

Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernabé, and Raphael Confiant place great emphasis on the role of oral history in French Caribbean literature in *Lettres Créoles*. They claim that the narrator is not "an artist in isolation but rather the representation of a collective imagination."⁷ They were firm advocates of the recognition of Creole as an official language.

⁶ J. Michael Dash, Edouard Glissant, (Boston : Cambridge University Press, 1995), 64-65.

⁷ Dash, 80.

Julia Kristeva, in *Time and Sense*, discusses her theories of time and memory. Although this work is focused on Proust and his obsession with time and memory, these themes can be applied to my study of oral history and memory, both subjective and collective. She contests that memory is a "kaleidoscope of impressions" and not to be relied on for truth. The "I" carries differences, fragments, and suspension points. Kristeva also talks of time elapsing in the life of a woman, her perception of life, and changes in her body as she reaches the "afternoon" of her life.⁸ The woman of the Antilles perceives her body as an instrument for child bearing; the "afternoon" of her life has a different connotation.

Michel Foucault, in *Les Mots et les Choses*, stresses the interpretation of memory as the way to arrive at knowledge. "Le propre du savoir n'est ni de voir ni de démontrer, mais d'interpréter... L'Histoire—c'est bien la plage la plus érudite...mais la plus encombrée peut-être de notre mémoire et l'incontournable de notre pensée."⁹ In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Foucault touched on African women's behavior as the root of enslaved women's militancy. He also posits that sex, sexuality, and sexual

⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Time and Sense*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 329.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les Choses*, (Paris: French and European Publications, 1990). 55, 231.

relations must be examined with historical specificity. New sexualities are constantly produced and vary according to ethnic and racial groups.

I have included a chapter based on sickness and old age, which bears the title of “Illness and Triumph,” as sickness often accompanies old age. Simone de Beauvoir, in *La Vieillesse*, succinctly states “la vieillesse se traduit par ses difficultés physiques, ses maladies, leurs ralentissement de toutes les fonctions.”¹⁰ This general determination is qualified by “elle n’est pas seulement un fait biologique mais un fait culturel”. In most cultures, women age differently from men. The woman of the Antilles had to cope with her unfortunate history and cultural impediments to grow old with dignity. Simone de Beauvoir provides clinical insights into factors that contribute to the ageing process of women in various cultures.

Sigmund Freud’s *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, contains a chapter on “The Taboo on Virginity.”¹¹ The contrary attitude towards virginity practiced in tribal nations is pertinent to my subject, as it was practiced in Equatorial Africa and was probably included secretly in the traditions of other tribes, as well as in the Caribbean islands of the Antilles. Young women, horrified at the idea of losing their virginity, were forced to accept violation

¹⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *La Vieillesse*, (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1970), 304.

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, (New York: Touchstone Publishing, 1997), 60.

despite their objections. Sexual practices and marital arrangements often caused pain and humiliation due to the dictates of the Other during slavery and colonization. At that time, a woman's body was considered an object, a fertile garden to be ravaged by rape. A postcolonial account of rape was given in *L'Espérance-Macadam* by Gisèle Pineau. In her book, she equates the violence of Hurricane Hugo (1908) with the violence of human beings. Guadeloupe was raped, as were the characters. The result of its force caused the trauma and the devastation of body and soul. The main theme of *L'Espérance* is incest, a practice silenced by shame, fear, and repressed memories. The silence effectuated by the victims of this heinous crime prevents the cessation of future molestation, not only for the individuals who have been brutalized, but also for others at risk.

Harry Goulbourne, in *Community, Work and Family*¹², speaks of the structure of Caribbean families as matrifocal, in which the woman is responsible, economically and otherwise, for the day-to-day living arrangements of family and household. This type of vigorous feminism exerts its pressure on education, religion, and creation of identities. In spite of difficult circumstances and the absence of the male figure, it was and continues

¹² Harry Goulbourne, "Families, Communities and Social Capital," Work, Family and Community Aug. 2006: 235-250.

to be the woman who maintains the family structure. She thus gains dignity in her matrifocal role.

In my thesis, the books analyzed reflect the objective in the title. The interpretation gives the role of growing old with dignity greater validity and comprehension. The events leading up to the postcolonial period serve as a background for my thesis and the books included in the later period give further validation to my premise. The role of the older woman continues to be a source of necessary stability. The role of the older woman as it has not yet been addressed is pertinent to the major theme of this work and in the six chapters which give the literary interpretation.

Ageing women are the harbingers of oral history and the recipients of collective memory. They become the messengers and story tellers to their children who repeat the tales to succeeding generations. The older women become the repository of events of trauma and courage which serve to stimulate an intergenerational influence. The principle work to be analyzed in the first chapter is *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle*, by Simone Schwarz-Bart. The four generations of Lougandor women are inspirational figures in the annals of Caribbean literature.

Each society assigns the older woman her particular role in the community. She is often held in high esteem because of her knowledge and

experience. She can rejoice in her exalted role. But old age can bring a series of ailments both physical and mental. The protagonists in the novels I have chosen to discuss survive poverty as well as sickness in their advancing age. The novels highlighted in the second chapter, *Un Plat de Porc aux Bananes Vertes*, by Simone and André Schwarz-Bart, and *La Case du Commandeur* by Edouard Glissant, illustrate the valor of women who overcome the impediments of ill health, mental and physical, and who lack family support in their struggle to achieve a sense of dignity.

The duality of language and religion is an important factor in the literature of the Caribbean, and is discussed at length in the third chapter. This duality ascribes a particular aspect to the psyche of the older woman who is prey to the effects of mystification and mythification. The novel I have chosen to analyze in this area is *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière...Noire de Salem*, by Maryse Condé. Another book included in this chapter is *Léonora: L'histoire enfouie de la Guadeloupe*, by Dany Bébel-Gisler. This book is a testimony of the cultural and socioeconomic conditions of the country. The religious and linguistic aspects which permeate the *recit* are indigenous to the culture and are necessary for an accurate documentation of the history of Guadeloupe.

An important source for accounts of personal experiences of sexual abuse is found in *Femmes des Antilles: Traces et Voix*, by Gisèle Pineau and

Marie Abraham. Abuse of this kind leaves lingering evidence in the minds and onbodies of the victims. The atrocities suffered present a litany of personal humiliations, outrage, and fear. *L'Espérance Macadam*, by Gisèle Pineau, is a novel that painfully attests to the lasting effects of incest and sexual incursions. Eliette overcomes her pain in silence and achieves a sense of dignity as she rescues another victim of incest and sexual abuse inflicted by a monster who suffers patriarchal madness as did his father.

All of the protagonists of the novels which I have chosen have earned the title of dignity. Through painful endeavors, they grew old and finally achieved a state of grace and majesty. In the fifth chapter, I analyze *Amour*, the first of a trilogy, written by Marie Chauvet. The protagonist, Claire Clamont, is the only black-skinned member of her mulatto family and as a result suffers deep psychological problems. She struggles through life, hiding her deep-seated frustrations and sacrificing her own desires until, through violence and brutal assault, she is finally able to identify her true self and find dignity in her persona.

Slavery left its marks of suffering, resistance and suppressed voices. Abolition could not immediately erase the sins of the past. A brighter future was anticipated, but it was a difficult path to pursue. In the final chapter of my thesis, postcolonial accounts are included in the narrations by Joseph Zobel in

Rue Cases Nègres, (1974) and in *Fils de Misère* (1974) by Marie-Thérèse Colimon. These books illustrate the hardships of a mother and a grandmother who struggle to rear their children in the new era of freedom. They are both determined to instill the benefits of education in their offspring. Social ascension is also connected to their hope of helping their children rise above the common mass. In spite of the political upheaval and the military intervention of that time, José's mother and grandmother as well as Ti Tonton's mother, all override the extreme poverty they suffer, to gain the merited goal of dignity.

The novels analyzed in my thesis attest to the fact that it is the woman who has carried the burden of child-rearing, including earning enough money to provide food, to oversee education, to teach religious values and most of all, to inculcate standards of moral behavior. In the texts analyzed, the women grew old in their pursuits. As they grew older, they acquired dignity. They did not strive for this admirable title but they personified an "earned dignity". In so doing they became the guiding force for the freedom of family, for race, and for society.

This work has provided a unique experience for me. I have been involved in this fascinating literature—truly beautiful stories—for several years. I admire the authors for their talent and honesty. I love their portrayal of

the characters. I empathize with their problems and join them in looking for a bright star, shining for liberty and equal rights. As an older woman, I respect their trials and tribulations and rejoice in their success.

Chapter I: Oral History and Collective Memory

The ageing women in my study are the harbingers of oral history and the recipients of collective memory. They become the messengers and storytellers who rely on memory to transfer their tales to offspring who repeat the stories to succeeding generations. The older woman, respected for her age, experience, and dignity, acts as a repository of events of the past. She stresses the history of trauma and courage in her orality. She attempts to satisfy the quest for identity, a pressing problem, with increasing urgency for generations descending from the Diaspora. History becomes Herstory as she endeavors to fill a void in a blank history which could imbue her with a sense of identity and create a sense of identity in her descendants. History is traditionally recounted, reporting supposedly indisputable facts, dates, and events, etc. Herstory is narrated, accompanied by proverbial wisdom which transcends time. The older woman interprets the proverbs which often make moral and philosophical judgments concerning human nature and society. Proverbial wisdom is the core of folk wisdom and the lessons that these Caribbean proverbs impart become vital elements in Herstory. The nature of orality is presented in the text according to the culture and memory of the characters included in the narrative.

Oral history, when it replaces an unrecorded, silent history, is important in the study of literature of the French-speaking countries of the Caribbean: “For the Caribbean woman writer, the reality of absence, of voicelessness, of marginalization, is linked to the necessity to find a form, a mode of expression.”¹³ Oral history has thus become a vehicle for the inscription of the woman’s story in the literature of the Caribbean countries of Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. Literature based on oral history and the different genres of oraliture: proverbs, songs, and Creole stories provide the material for the study of women and their place in the Antillean arena and its literature.

Oral history is a useful mode of expression and is used as the impetus for many literary works emanating from the islands of the Antilles, but it does not always constitute truth. Collective memory is unreliable, as it is subject to the emotions and sensations of the story-tellers. Julia Kristeva speaks of memory as “a kaleidoscope of impressions and not to be relied on for truth.”¹⁴ Memory is multi-layered and multi-faceted. It is subjective and can offer shifting interpretations. The autonomy of oraliture interprets the perception of the problematic past. Kristeva doubts the veracity of tales that

¹³ Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, Out of the Kumbla, (New Jersey: African World Press, 1990), 4.

¹⁴ Julie Kristeva, Time and Sense, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 332.

are repeated. In her book, *Time and Sense*, she says that memory is suggestive and collective as well as voluntary and involuntary. The "I" wields an involuntary power over time; it is a subject with an unsuspecting memory. The "I" carries differences and fragments of suspension points.¹⁵

Michel Foucault, in *Les Mots et les Choses*, speaks of the importance of interpretation to arrive at a truthful conclusion. "Le propre du savoir n'est ni de voir ni de démontrer, mais d'interpréter."¹⁶ He says that history is the most encumbered part of our memory and the most untraceable of our thoughts.¹⁷ History is not always reproduced through memory and tends to become vague with the passage of time. The narrative in the oral history of the Caribbean countries attempts to unravel the chaos produced by slavery and its devastating results.

The difference between oral history and collective memory is significant. Oral History, although it relies on memory, is "autonome, libre, indépendant; régis par ses propre lois, indépendant de celle de la collectivité publique qui l'a crée et qui l'a contrôlé."¹⁸ Collective Memory is "hétéronome, qui reçoit de l'extérieur les lois régissant sa conduite."¹⁹ The "Je" of the autonome and the "Nous" of the heteronome is given greater

¹⁵ Kristeva, 171.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1966), 55.

¹⁷ Foucault, 231.

¹⁸ Le Petit Larousse

¹⁹ Le Petit Larousse

depth by Edouard Glissant in *Le Discours Antillais*, in his endeavor to create a “Nous” from the disjointed “Je”. His primary aim is to consolidate the disparate “I’s” into collective “We’s”. The “Je” stands for self and the “Nous” stands for community. “The authoritarian or magisterial self is abandoned for a collective identity. ‘Je me groupe au je qui est le nous d’un peuple.’”²⁰ Oral History thus becomes Collective Memory.

When an individual voice is representative of a collective voice, it reflects the voice of others. Although the voice may be individual and differs from other voices, the form that memory assumes, the way in which it is collated and expressed, is collective and is culturally and socially determined. Collective Memory cannot be autonomous, as it is the voice of a heterogeneous society. Collective memory will emerge from the embryo of a particular society. It constitutes and represents the memory of the group and serves to encode the history of the collectivity.

Language gives shape to memory and is derived from social structures. Language contains what Alessandro Portelli, in his seminal article, "The Peculiarities of Oral History,"²¹ labels 'orality' as that which contains linguistic features as well as para-linguistic features such as timbre,

²⁰ Edouard Glissant, *L'Intention Poétique*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 38.

²¹ Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History" *History Workshop Journal*. (Autumn 1981).

volume, rhythm, and velocity. Aural symbols can convey obvious clues to social class or emotions. The subject can be lost, but the aural symbols can contribute to the interpretation. As Mary Chamberlain, in her *Essay on Gender and Memory*, says, "Memory is malleable and susceptible to confusion and conflation, to lapses and lying, and always to the role of the imagination. If we recognize that memory manifests elements of a shared consciousness and is part of social production, then oral sources offer the potential for entering a wider cultural milieu".²² Portelli tells us that oral history is an important secondary source in writing the official history of a society precisely because it offers us many narratives that reveal what that particular society values and attempts to pass on to the future generations.

Through 300 years of transatlantic slave trade, newly arrived Africans nurtured the tenets of the old culture and values through collective memory and oral history. One can imagine the power of imagination and the possible lack of veracity woven into these tales. Edouard Glissant refers to the "opaque" history of the slaves who were transported in the cales of the merchant ships to be sold at auction to the highest bidders among the land-

²² Mary Chamberlain. "Gender and Memory: Oral History and Women's History" *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective*. Eds. Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton, Barbara Bailey. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, 94-109.

owning colonists.²³ These indentured commodities could not have a history. They were sold as chattel, families were separated, and new names were assigned by Masters. Stories of hardship and brutality were transmitted to descendants. Oral History became, by necessity, the principal form of documenting past events, and according to Melville Herskovits in *The Myth of the Negro Past*, “it was through oral history that the African women and their female descendents inherited the culture which enabled them to survive into the twentieth century. The literature reflects this premise—women looked to female kin for support and for the most part were nurtured in female households by mothers and grandmothers.”²⁴ * The female characters who survived physically and psychologically did so because they formed strong and supporting bonds with other women in their families and communities. As a result of the absence of father figures, these women survived without male support. They became the providers and the nurturers of succeeding generations. The older women of the communities attempted to inculcate their offspring with pride by recalling tales of the struggle and the valor of their ancestors. These women inherited the dignity attributed to

²³Edouard Glissant, *Le Quatrieme Siecle*, (Paris: Seuil, 1964)

²⁴ Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958, rep. 1990), 146, 166, 176.

* Melville Herskovits helped forge the concept of cultural relativism in his book, *Man and his Works*. After World War II, he publicly advocated African independence and attacked American politicians for viewing Africa as an object of Cold War strategy.

their foremothers. Oral history and collective memory became the means by which one could incorporate disparate accounts to establish a much desired identity, an identity which separates “Us” from the “Other.”

Women writers of the Caribbean struggled to find a new language or a new literature that could express a Caribbean sense of reality. Women sometimes wrote with great anxiety and created characters who were self-supporting, often single parents, who manifested great strength and endurance. They struggled and survived because of their basic respect for life and they depended on no man for success in their fight for survival. A woman had to develop a sense of dignity in the eyes of the world and have confidence in herself to shape her own destiny. The authors inscribed female voices in the form of *marqueuses de paroles* (translators) in their novels to serve as legacies for future generations. Women-produced orature gives privilege to the female voice as narrator and serves to disseminate intergenerational transmission of knowledge: “Storytelling by older women is sanctioned as a private familial form of creativity and genealogical connection.”²⁵

Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle, a novel by Guadeloupean Simone Schwarz-Bart (1972), is based on oral tradition. It is an autobiographical first

²⁵ Davies and Fido, 4.

person narrative recounted by a woman and serves as an introspective recit as well as a disclosure of the culture ruling her society. The novel exemplifies the importance of oraliture and of the place of women in the Caribbean arena. "Simone Schwarz-Bart a évolué vers une littérature plus proprement féminine où elle récupère avec succès les différents genres de l'oraliture (proverbes, chants, contes créoles)...ou le personnage féminin, trop longtemps mis aux oubliettes par les écrivains, est le 'poteau mitan' de l'oeuvre."²⁶

The novel, *Pluie et Vent*, is dense in character and invites several readings to capture the Creole voice, the proverbs, the metaphors, and above all, the relationship of mankind to nature. One notices that water, trees, plants, and flowers play an interesting role as they are compared to humans. "L'histoire de la nature est... inséparable de celle de l'homme pour composer le chant général de la terre...L'homme est une plante puisqu'il est un 'morceau de pays' au milieu des autres et comme tel, soumis aux mêmes lois que l'ensemble."²⁷

The text becomes a network of images and symbols resplendent with proverbial wisdom. Proverbs retain their importance and must be taken

²⁶ L'Harmattan, Elles Ecrivent des Antilles, Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, (Montreal, 1997), 133.

²⁷ Maryse Conde, La Parole des Femmes, (1979), 66.

seriously in that they are reference points of ancestral culture in various human situations. According to the proverbs used, the author invites the reader to recognize the culture of the persons involved in the narration. The proverbs used in Schwarz-Bart's work have multiple origins but reflect in particular the cultural world of Guadeloupe. Some seem to have their roots in African society, while others are profoundly marked by the influence of the white colonists and the religion that they brought with them. The proverbs of African origin usually approximate the reality of everyday life. Télumée's response to Amboise, when he declared his love for her, is "J'ai vu les cocos secs rester accrochés à l'arbre, pendant que tous les cocos verts tombaient."²⁸ This proverb used by Télumée is an adaptation of an African proverb: "les feuilles sèches restent, les feuilles vertes tombent". She is aware of the maturity of Amboise, who is likened to a "coco sec." He will remain constant and not forsake her. "C'est en sachant tout cela, Amboise, mon nègre, que j'accepte ta proposition."²⁹

A proverb is used to define a situation in a few words. Sometimes the proverbs have metaphorical connotations as well as proverbial intent: "...si lourds que soient ses seins, tu seras toujours assez forte pour les

²⁸ Simone Schwarz-Bart, Pluie et Vent Sur Telumée Miracle, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), 211.

²⁹ Schwarz-Bart, 211.

supporter”.³⁰ This proverb is particularly appropriate for the Caribbean woman. She must be strong enough to carry life’s burdens as she is strong enough to carry her own breasts. The proverbs energize the lessons taught in a subtle manner.

Although Simone Schwarz-Bart extols the beauty of Guadeloupe and the colors of the countryside in her novel, she gives a more realistic description at the outset of her story, “mes ancêtres furent esclaves en cette île à volcans, à cyclones et moustiques, à mauvaises mentalité.”³¹ This observation is comparable to the words of Aimé Césaire as he refers to the sinister side of Antillean nature, “les Antilles qui ont faim, les Antilles grêlées de petit véroles, les Antilles dynamite d’alcool, échouées dans la boue de cette baie, dans la poussière de cette ville sinistrement échouées.”³²

In keeping with the rural setting and peasant characterization, one is aware of the four elements of nature: earth, water, air, and fire. The fiery sun bakes the earth which produces flowers and food in the garden. The earth is important for peasant farmers who inhabit this land and hope that the new growth, in response to their endeavors, will generate relief from the pain of those so recently enslaved. Simone Schwarz-Bart, in her novel, *Pluie et Vent*

³⁰ Simone Schwarz-Bart, 69-70.

³¹ Schwarz-Bart, 11.

³² Aimé Césaire, Le retour au pays natal, (Nigeria: New Horn Press, 2005), 4.

sur Télumée Miracle, places water metaphorically as life flows through time. “Toutes les rivières...descendent dans la mer et se noient. Et la vie attend l’homme (mankind) comme la mer attend la rivière...la vie est là, patiente, sans commencement et sans fin, à vous attendre, pareille à l’océan.”³³ Télumée reminisces about her grandmother who would say philosophically and metaphorically, “la vie est une mer sans escale, sans phare aucun ...les hommes sont des navires sans destination.”³⁴

Télumée, the tragic heroine of *Pluie et Vent*, learns from her grandmother that the four generations of Lougandor women who preceded her were valiant women and worthy of earned dignity. “The Lougandor women journey not to France or to Guinea, but deep within themselves...whatever hand life deals, one must play it.”³⁵ She is inspired to accept life with courage based on the examples of resistance and perseverance demonstrated by her ancestors. Internal strength is developed through suffering. Life goes on in spite of hardship and the various difficulties that one encounters. The lessons of her grandmother taught her hope and endurance. These lessons related orally by her grandmother in the form of tales, served Télumée well in her extensive narration about herself

³³ Schwarz-Bart, 83.

³⁴ Schwarz-Bart, 254.

³⁵ Davies and Fido, 54.

and her people. (Toussine was called Reine Sans Nom by her neighbors as a sign of respect when she survived an extremely difficult period in her life.)

“Simone Schwarz-Bart’s novel is a celebration of life, manifest through a story told...it is the essential feature of *Télumée*’s story as she tells it. In doing so she integrates the entire fabric of her life, by naming herself and each person in her life, and situating them all in time and place, on her island home of Guadeloupe”.³⁶ Throughout the narrative, the guiding principle remains the same: to find the balance between alienation and annihilation. The pains and joys of life must be weathered, and this is the underlying message in the narrative.

Renée Larrier, in *Francophone Writers of Africa and the Caribbean*, says that *Pluie et Vent* has much in common with the structure of a *conte*, in which the narrator begins by placing the protagonist within his or her family context. It has also been called a quest story: “...because of the novel’s Caribbean context with African roots, I prefer to see it more specifically as a woman’s initiation tale that involves a journey and many trials.”³⁷ In structuring her novel in the form of a *conte*, Schwarz-Bart subtly reveals the hardships of peasant life on the island of Guadeloupe in the years following the Abolition. Schwarz-Bart also hints at the sexual practices of her

³⁶ Abena P.A. Bustia, *Out of the Kumbia*, 289.

³⁷ Larrier, 56.

characters and the consequences of their infidelity. The protagonist Télumée narrates her story within the family context. She is led by her mother to the warm embrace of her grandmother to protect her from the possible sexual advances of her lover. It is here that Télumée's journey begins and has thus become a quest story. A quest story involves a search for self or a sense of identity. Each of the female characters in the novel embarks upon a private quest for self or a female sense of identity. In this tale Télumée's quest for happiness and plenitude leads to a vision of daily life and also an affirmation of the land between herself and her community. By telling this tale of women, Schwarz-Bart reflects upon their communities, their families, their men, and ultimately reveals each woman's inner self.

“Télumée is initiated into her grandmother's world...in her grandmother's tiny room, isolation from the ordinary world becomes a positive, enriching experience. Télumée feels safe and protected.”³⁸ Here Télumée starts her new adventures. Her further peregrinations are traced through the novel from place to place as she leaves girlhood, approaches womanhood and finally after much distress and struggle reaches old age. Each move brings trials and challenges to Télumée and is connected in some way with an older woman who serves as a guide and an influence upon her

³⁸ Davies and Fido, 55.

actions. At first, it is her grandmother whose influence leads her through life with sterling guidelines. And then, the treasured friend of her grandmother, Man Cia, through her knowledge of herbs and healing, gives Télumée an added dimension to her life, so that she could help others. When meeting Télumée for the first time, she glanced into her eyes and said, “tu seras sur terre comme une cathédrale.”³⁹ This prediction is consistent with the title *Télumée Miracle*. A cathedral is larger than a church, more magnificent than a simple house of prayer. It is a place of worship for bruised souls, for those suffering with a myriad of ailments both physical and mental. Télumée will become the *cathédrale sur terre*. Her work was destined to be grand, magnificent and healing. The prescient words of Man Cia will come to pass.

The genealogy of the Lougandor women is significant in that each name represents a superior woman either in her role of royalty or as a goddess of mythology. Minerve is the first of the dynasty. Her name is synonymous with the Roman goddess of wisdom. Her daughter, Toussine, represents royalty, and was later called Reine Sans Nom, because of her courage in facing life’s adversity. Tragedy struck Toussine as she lost one of her daughters in a fire that ravaged her home as well as her heart. For three years Toussine lived as a body without a soul until she finally declared that

³⁹ Schwarz-Bart, 60.

she did not want to make a habit out of sorrow. Her belly swelled and a child named “Victoire” was born, a name signifying triumph over disaster. Victoire, whose name also signified Toussine’s survival and whose birth also represents her mother’s rebirth, is Télumée’s mother. The last of the Lougandor chain, Télumée gained the epithet of Télumée Miracle because of the courage and healing power that she displayed in later life.

The novel is more than a mere testimony to one woman and her three ancestors. Its more compelling message is found in the praise it offers to an entire generation of black Caribbean woman, to their fortitude, their resilience, their dignity. Minerve, the first of the Lougandour clan, suffered the indignities of slave life until she was freed during the Abolition of 1948. She displayed an independent spirit and amazing strength of character which epitomized the persona of her descendants",...possédait une foi inébranable en la vie. Devant l'adversité, elle aimait dire que rien ni personne userait l'âme que Dieu avait choisie pour elle."⁴⁰ Minerve grew old bearing the dignity of her convictions. Each woman bearing the Lougandour name grew old with dignity.

Orality becomes written narrative as Simone Schwarz-Bart continues her tale of the strength and dignity of the Antillean women. Toussine,

⁴⁰ Schwarz-Bart, 13.

Minerve's daughter, married Jérémie with the approval and delight of her mother. "Pour ces négresses à l'abandon, le mariage était la plus grande et peut-être la seule dignité."⁴¹ To acquire 'dignity' was a much sought after goal after the indignities of slavery. It was a good marriage. Jérémie, the adoring husband, often murmured endearing words of love to his wife, "Femme, je ne sais encore ce que je préfère en toi, un jour ce sont tes yeux, et le lendemain, c'est ton rire..., un jour ce sont tes cheveux, et le lendemain, c'est la légèreté de ta démarche..."⁴² The happy bride thought that she "mourrait de contentement."⁴³ Toussine and Jérémie prospered greatly until the evil predictions of the jealous women of the village were realized in the tragic fire that engulfed her home and life.

Télumée's mother Victoire also personified the Lougandor heritage of dignity. She kept her head high, singing as she worked. She kept life's difficulties to herself: "...les Lougandor ont toujours aimé à survoler, ils s'accrochaient des ailes et ils se hissaient."⁴⁴ Victoire was naturally included when the locals gossiped about the family, "... chacun se tient à une certaine hauteur sur la terre et ça vient du sang."⁴⁵ This trait was perhaps a biological factor that enabled these women to rise above the other women in their

⁴¹ Schwarz-Bart, 19.

⁴² Schwarz-Bart, 22.

⁴³ Schwarz-Bart, 22.

⁴⁴ Schwarz-Bart, 32.

⁴⁵ Schwarz-Bart, 32.

society. The Lougandor women were known to survive, adapt and resist. They all grew old with dignity. “Dignity” is the earned title for the women of this clan.

Victoire was a good mother, until one day, she fell madly in love with a stranger. She realized that he was a lover of women and would be attracted to her two daughters. To protect them, she sent Télumée to live with her grandmother, and Régine to live with her true father. She and her lover fled to a distant land. Toussine blessed her daughter's decision and happily welcomed Télumée into her home and embraced her with loving care.

Recent ventures into the field of orality in Caribbean literature were inscribed by Édouard Glissant in *Le Quatrième Siècle*, where he interprets the story-teller as a vehicle for collective memory. The vision of the past is not a doctrinaire one, or one that can neatly fit into any theory or ideology. Irreducibly opaque and unpredictable at times, it is a chronicle of rupture, metamorphosis, impermanence, and inconclusiveness. Edouard Glissant claims that memory of the past is stirred through sensations in the present. Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant in *Lettres Créoles*, on the other hand, place great emphasis on the role of oral history in French Caribbean

literature. They claim that the narrator is not “un créateur en suspension, mais bien le délégué d’un imaginaire collectif.”⁴⁶

Simone Schwarz-Bart's novel is an oral tale in which Télumée, the narrator, tells the story of her life. Her reminiscences constitute the entire novel. Beverly Ormerod, in her analysis of *Pluie et Vent*, says that "...the narrator's life, like that of her female ancestors, fall into a recurrent pattern of ascent, ruin and subsequent renaissance, in seeming obedience to a cyclical view of man's progression through time."⁴⁷ Oraliture is the basis on which the novel is conceived. Throughout the text, one finds references of oral history: “Dans mon enfance, ma mère, Victoire, me parlait de mon aieule, la négresse, Toussine.”⁴⁸ "... qu'ils avaient décidé de raconter plus tard, à leurs descendants, la noce de Toussine et de Jérémie.”⁴⁹ "Selon ce qu'on m'a dit, plus de vingt ans après l'évènement...”⁵⁰ "Grandma m'avait déjà parlé de cette femme, son amie, qui côtoyait les morts plus que les vivants.”⁵¹

The stories told by Toussine were aimed as a method of training one to understand one's self and to be aware of the prevailing conditions of the

⁴⁶ Michael Dash, Edouard Glissant, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 78.

⁴⁷ Ormerod, 110

⁴⁸ Schwarz-Bart, 11.

⁴⁹ Schwarz-Bart, 21.

⁵⁰ Schwarz-Bart, 36.

⁵¹ Schwarz-Bart, 57.

community. She wished to teach her granddaughter to survive life's difficulties and to unite her to the history of the suffering of her people. Reine Sans Nom recounted many tales which were based on her own memory of slavery as well as the collective memory of her neighbors. The references to slavery are subtly introduced into the text to remind readers of the enduring effects of slavery even after the abolition. Man Cia answers Télumée's question about slavery: "Si tu veux voir un esclave, tu n'as qu'à descendre au marché de la Pointe et regarder les volailles ficelées dans leur cages, avec leurs yeux d'épouvante."⁵² As Télumée grows older she thinks about the injustice in the world where all her people are still suffering and dying silently of slavery after it is supposed to be finished and forgotten. Reine San Nom sings many songs of the old days for Télumée, including old slave songs, which she sings with such sadness that her lamenting voice reaches the heavens. She is able to reconstruct the history of her ancestors and their legacy of humiliation. Part myth, part truth, the stories are interwoven with fantastic tales. But as Télumée, the recipient of this oraliture, grows older, she realizes that slavery actually existed in these hills and valleys and not in some foreign country. She relegates these stories to the past and captures the posture and resolve of dignity which serves to

⁵² Schwarz-Bart, 63.

strengthen and fortify her as she follows the path of life. "Nous les Lougandor, nous ne sommes pas des coqs de race, nous sommes des coqs *guinmes*, des coqs de combats. Nous connaissons les arènes, la lutte, la foule, la mort. Nous connaissons la victoire et les yeux crevés. Tout cela ne nous a jamais empêché de vivre, ne comptant ni sur le bonheur, ni sur le malheur pour exister."⁵³ This became the creed of Télumée, as she stands with her head held high, telling her history of triumph over disaster. As she grows older, she upholds the dignity inherent in the women who preceded her. Afro-Caribbean womens' passage into maturity is positive, in that for the most part, they gain the stature required for their passage into old age. Télumée survives desertion because the Lougandor women teach each other the endurance and the self-reliance needed for survival. Télumée says that she is a woman who stands on her own two feet. "Je sais que le nègre n'est pas une statue de sel que dissolvent les pluies."⁵⁴

Simone Schwarz-Bart succeeded in giving voice to mothers and grandmothers who had previously been inhibited by poverty and illiteracy. The text presents a contemporary social aspect which reflects the economic insecurities of the black woman in post-slavery society. The strength of these women is shown as they conduct their daily business in the market

⁵³ Schwarz-Bart, 124.

⁵⁴ Schwarz-Bart, 172.

place, perform domestic duties, cook, do fine laundering or even cultivate the land. Télumée realizes that she has need of a liberating economic independence, separate from the man with whom she is living. She hated the demeaning work in the cane fields and as a result, always became involved with another pecuniary project to support herself.

Pluie et Vent brought to life the experiences of an old peasant woman whose life in a small village insulated by mountains and an ever-changing sea was to create a narrative that presented Creole life in the Caribbean. The novel is infused with love, of nature, the sea, and the stars; love of flowers and trees. The union between women and nature is noted as Schwarz-Bart compares them to elements of nature: Télumée, adolescent, is a “libellule”. Télumée, as a young girl, is a “flamboyant”, a “fruit à pain”. As a woman, she is an “acomat tombé” or a “terre fertile”. Laetitia, the evil intruder, is a “couleuvre”.

The love of a grandmother for her granddaughter pervades the first half of the novel as it drifts through the soft breeze of comfort and peace. One is enchanted as Reine Sans Nom sits on her rocking chair and braids Télumée’s hair calling her, "mon petit verre de cristal". The crystal glass is a poetic metaphor which evokes visions of delicacy, fragility, luxury and beauty. The grandmother's rocking chair is a symbol of tranquility and the

throne from which Reine Sans Nom, the "Queen," could weave her stories. She would sit straight in her chair, "ses yeux usés par les soleils et pluies et larmes."⁵⁵ Télumée and Elie, the neighbor's son, were fascinated as Toussine regaled them with songs, proverbs and the folk-tales which she told to reinforce her lessons on independence of spirit and character. She repeated the story regularly of the "Man Who Tried to Live on Air" hoping that this legendary example of human folly and disaster would illustrate for them the serious consequences of losing control of one's life. "... le cheval ne doit pas te conduire, ma fille, c'est toi qui dois conduire le cheval."⁵⁶ Télumée benefited from this advice and when she felt herself being carried away by the winds of perversity, she took hold of the reins and said, "Je conduisais mon cheval". "The essential message of this story is the mastery of internal enslavement. Queen transmits, Télumée learns the necessity for control; it is essential to learn to ride your horse, rather than be ridden by it."⁵⁷ The man in the story lost the ability to control his actions, until too late. He lost control of his destiny. Télumée benefited from this moral tale, but Elie lost control of the reins, his destiny. His prophetic warning concerning the men

⁵⁵ Schwarz-Bart, 85.

⁵⁶ Schwarz-Bart, 95.

⁵⁷ Davies and Fido, 294.

of Fond-Zombi “la métamorphose d’ un homme en diable”⁵⁸ came to pass. After driving Télumée from the home he had built for her, replacing her with another woman whom he subsequently left, Elie became like Wvgabor, surrendered his personal will and roamed the island as a lost man.

Another character-building lesson was taught by grandmother's friend Man Cia. Télumée was advised as a survival strategy to be like a drum and allow one side to suffer the inequities of life and the other side to remain calm. She was taught to let life bang and thump, but to keep the underside always intact. The drum is a symbol of revolt against the white world and a reminder that personal integrity must not be violated. The soul is to remain intact. Beverly Ormerod says that the use of the drum evolved from African ancestry. It signifies “slave resistance, racial solidarity and rhythmic energy.”⁵⁹ In dealing with her employers who maintained the dehumanizing influence of the plantation system in their treatment of hired help, Télumée silently accepted their abuse and their condescending attitude on one side of the drum. She kept her integrity intact on the other, but when the Master invaded her privacy, she reacted with the fire of her ancestors.

⁵⁸ Schwarz-Bart, 123.

⁵⁹ Ormerod, 120.

The use of the drum, the flute, and the voice in song, are symbols of resistance and are significant forms of communication in non-literate societies. Oral tales frequently mention the sound of the drum which signaled slave resistance or racial solidarity, most commonly used among bands of maroons who fled to the hills becoming the antithesis in Caribbean history to the servitude of the plains. The drum is mentioned frequently in the text. Télumée wrestled with the demands of her employers, "je battais en mon coeur un tambour d'exception."⁶⁰ Amboise beat his drum as he approached Télumée, the beat signifying the beginning of his relationship with her. "Puis sa main se rabattit avec force, cependant que sa gorge s'ouvrait sur l'appel traditionnel aux esprits vivants et aux morts, aux absents, les invitant à descendre dans le cercle creusé par la voix du tambour."⁶¹

Speech can exist in other forms such as in the sounds of musical instruments other than the drum. Old Tac-Tac would not speak to anyone. He played his bamboo flute every morning and his playing became a universal language, a symbol of joy.⁶² Tac-Tac's flute, like the sounds that Amboise produced on the drum, had the capacity to convey his life's experiences. The lambi is another instrument used to rally the striking cane

⁶⁰ Schwarz-Bart, 100.

⁶¹ Schwarz-Bart, 215.

⁶² Schwarz-Bart, 215.

workers in their struggle against oppressive working conditions."⁶³ The voice in song is another form of communication and sends signals according to dynamics, timbre and content. The cathartic effect of song and singing is evidenced as the novel weaves through the lives of the Lougandor family. "Quelquefois...une tristesse soudaine m'envahissait...Et ces jours-là je me mettais à chanter, tout en faisant mon travail, et mon coeur se desserrait car derrière une peine, il y a une autre peine, c'étaient là les paroles de grand-mère...Le cheval ne doit pas te conduire ma fille, c'est toi que dois conduire le cheval...Et je faisais mon ouvrage en chantant et lorsque je chantais je coupais ma peine je hachais ma peine, et ma peine tombait dans la chanson, et je conduisais mon cheval."⁶⁴ These were the words of my grandmother. The horse must not ride you my girl, you must ride it – and I would sing as I worked and when I sang I diluted my pain, I chopped up my pain into little pieces and it flowed into song. The content and the literary form of the story artistically overlap in the words of Télumée.

In spite of the doubts concerning the veracity of oral history, it is still a link to the past. In the system of slavery there is ignorance of one's ancestry. No records exist except those of the sea captain who counted heads to realize his ultimate gain. The search for personal identity has become an

⁶³ Renee Larrier. *Francophone Women Writers of Africa and the Caribbean*, p. 64.

⁶⁴ Schwarz-Bart, 95.

underlying theme in many of the folktales and literature of the French Caribbean.

Lack of work due to economic insufficiency often produced a lack of self-esteem among the working class and in turn caused serious cases of male alienation with no remedial consequences. Elie, in his treatment of Télumée after the beautiful years of their union, probably became alienated, as did many of the men who were unemployed and languished in Père Abel's bar. After her initial realization that Elie, her “première étoile venait de naître à l’orient,”⁶⁵ she had misgivings about his ambivalent personality. “Il me semble voir une fumée perpétuelle qui se formait toute seule au fond de lui, et monterait un jour pour le perdre, et moi avec.”⁶⁶ As a result, Télumée experienced a gnawing sense of menace within her happiness. Elie’s predicted downfall began as his sugary words became salty curses and he beat her mercilessly. Alcoholism became for him a symptom of inconsolable despondency and an uncontrollable desire to annihilate. His fall from grace may be attributed to the economic injustices of a colonial society. When Elie, disregarding the profound and spiritual beauty of Télumée, left her for the physical beauty of Laetitia and chased her from her home, she suffered the untold damages of mental derangement. She suffered uncontrollable

⁶⁵ Schwarz-Bart, 72.

⁶⁶ Schwarz-Bart, 74.

grief both physically and morally. Her first emotional upheaval resulted in disaster and as her grandmother went crying into the street, "... pour la première fois lancer son chagrin en pleine rue...mon enfant, mon enfant, sa tête est partie, partie."⁶⁷

With the help of Reine Sans Nom who "fabriquait le vent pour gonfler mes voiles, me permettre de reprendre mon voyage sur l'eau,"⁶⁸ Télumée returned to life. Her grandmother advised her to put on her dress of life again: "un jour viendra où tu remettras ta robe de vie."⁶⁹ Neighbors called her, "la vaillante bougresse, le négresse aux sept fiels, quatre seins, deux nombrils...garde la position."⁷⁰ Télumée laughed as these marks of attention helped put her back in the saddle "à me faire tenir en main les brides de mon cheval."⁷¹ Télumée returned to her garden, a symbol of reproduction and new growth, a signal that she regained her health. Throughout the novel, a return to the garden indicated a determination to reject the past and start life anew. Télumée was able to overcome disaster and as in the case of her grandmother before her, Télumée was given a name by her community as a testament to the dignity of her survival-"Télumée Miracle."

⁶⁷ Schwarz-Bart, 171.

⁶⁸ Schwarz-Bart, 174.

⁶⁹ Schwarz-Bart, 161.

⁷⁰ Schwarz-Bart, 173.

⁷¹ Schwarz-Bart, 173.

Télumée also gained the epithet of "Miracle" by the seemingly miraculous cures that she performed on animals and humans. "Mais lorsqu'on m'amena des vaches écumentes, le garrot gonflé de croutes noires, je fis les gestes que m'avait enseignés Man Cia, et l'une d'abord, puis, l'autre les bêtes repirent goût à la vie. Le bruit courut que je savais faire et défaire, que je détentais les secrets...on me hissa malgré moi, au rang de dormeuse, de sorcière de première."⁷² Peasants accept the concept of the supernatural in their daily lives and turn to a supernatural explanations of disaster to make their problems seem more acceptable. As Télumée grew older, she became a popular healer of medical and mental problems. People came to her overwhelmed with grief and confusion, battered bodies and bruised souls. She gave solace and renewed hope as she soothed their wounds and lit candles in religious ritual. "Elle fait brûlée l'encens, du benjoin, de racines de vétiver et des feuilles magiques pour créer un halo protecteur qui éloigne le malheur."⁷³

Télumée became "la cathédrale sur terre". She cured a five-year-old little girl named Sonore who was left with her by her mother. The little girl was covered with abscesses and infections. Télumée treated her with various

⁷² Schwarz-Bart, 173.

⁷³ Frances J. Santiago Torres, Tanbou lwen tini bon son: L'oral comme reconstitution historique dans l'œuvre de Simone Schwarz-Bart, Ph.D. dissertation, The City University of New York, 177.

herbs and rubbed her joints with garlic. She finally expelled the worms, which were devouring her and was able to wash away the scabs with warm water and sunshine. Sonore then became her adopted daughter, whom she lovingly raised for several years until she was spirited away by an evil intruder named Angel Médard. This same man was labeled a "soukouounyan," a person with special powers to harm. After depriving Télumée of Sonore he tried, in a drunken rage, to harm Télumée, who planned to protect herself with a pair of scissors. In attempting to reach her, he tripped on a table and fatally opened an old wound in his head. Télumée, in spite of his evil intent, comforted Médard in his final hours. This act of compassion added to her talents of healing, physical solace and spiritual wisdom. From then on she became known as Télumée Miracle and here the symbol of the strong tree reappears "maman Miracle, tu es l'arbre contre lequel s'appuie notre hameau et que deviendra le morne sans toi?"⁷⁴ The tree whose stable roots permit it to grow upwards toward the heavens is consistent with the description of the posture of Télumée and her awe-inspiring grandmother. The Lougandor women depict dignity both physically and morally, and are likened to strong trees as they defy the strong winds and rains. Télumée stands straight in her garden at the outset

⁷⁴ Schwarz-Bart, 249.

of her adventures and at the very end when she courageously awaits death. Amboise too, was compared to a tree: "Amboise se tenait au sol, les jambes écartées...Amboise, grand arbre sec et noueux qui avait déjà jeté ses fruits..."⁷⁵ The Lougandor women, "although unique in their capacity for survival, are no more than human in the way they initially meet disaster. Reine Sans Nom withdraws from the world for three years after the loss of her daughter; Victory goes through a long period of drunkenness...and Télumée, repudiated by Elie, is so numbed with pain that she falls into a state of profound depression."⁷⁶ They are different from other women in that they strive to accept their losses as part of the universal pattern of life. Télumée laments Sonore's departure, but she painfully accepts her loss. "Je ne pleurais pas, ne touchais pas à ma bouteille de rhum, songeant seulement que l'enclos du malheur, sa porte n'est jamais fermée."⁷⁷ Télumée's real miracle is not just that she remains faithful to herself in the face of overwhelming adversity, it is also through her courage, her sense of connections to others, and her desire for happiness, that she has reversed the "métamorphose d'un homme en diable." She transcends her own condition, composing her life through a narrative of powerful, meaningful images, and

⁷⁵ Schwarz-Bart, 119.

⁷⁶ Ormerod, 117.

⁷⁷ Schwarz-Bart, 242.

an understanding of life, to accommodate the sick, the needy, and the ones who are overwhelmed by destiny.

Beverley Ormerod says that *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle* is based on "an almost mystical faith in the resilience of human nature and the ability of the black race to endure and survive, to make the humblest of gardens, its own paradise."⁷⁸ Télumée's happiness with Amboise is described as the warm currents which ran through all their days—our waters had mingled and after he was killed, she cried that life flowed out of her body in a continuous stream. "Schwarz-Bart's heroines struggle resolutely to resist the negative attitudes of the people around them and assert their power to remain afloat and upright, in the waters of life."⁷⁹

The Caribbean landscape is surrounded by the sea and the symbolism of the "boat" is ever present. The life of a slave is carried on a boat through the treacherous waters the sea of existence. The boat is seen as the recurrent image of fighting to remain afloat amidst the waves of life. The boat is also seen metaphorically as the ship of life. When Reine Sans Nom advises Télumée to leave Fond-Zombi after her disastrous experience with Elie, she poses a rhetorical question: "Il faut donc abandonner mon navire et le laisser sombrer tout seul...?"

⁷⁸ Ormerod, 15.

⁷⁹ Davies and Fido, 56.

Pluie et Vent was written in the oral tradition and contains all the elements of an oral performance. It includes beautiful means of expression in language, song, and proverbs. No specific dates are mentioned even though 100 years, beginning with the abolition of slavery in 1848, encompass the five generations of the Lougandor family. The oral tradition unfolds irregularly. Women writers inscribe female voices to tell their tales to disseminate the legacy afforded them. At the end of *Pluie et Vent*, as in the beginning, Télumée stands alone in her garden. To the young girl and to the old woman, the garden represents a place of beauty, a place of ownership, a place of privacy. It is a privileged space in which she blossoms and flourishes, safe from intruders: “Télumée in her garden is a figure of hope and quiet strength, a tribute to that part of Caribbean womanhood which continues to resist and endure no matter what restrictions and burdens are placed upon her.”⁸⁰ Télumée stands as a sign of strength, of independence, of endurance against the rains and the winds of life. She has grown old with dignity.

It is interesting to note that Simone Schwarz-Bart had structured *Pluie et Vent* in the form of orality, combining a traditional *conte* and a novel. This choice permitted the author to remain as close as possible to the structures of

⁸⁰ Bustia, 56.

orality, becoming history by the written word—a symbiosis of the phenomenon of orality and of writing. The work attempts to initiate the reader from oral tradition through written literature.

Simone Schwarz-Bart captured the voice of “Fanotte”, the woman whose life’s story was incarnated by Télumée. The author felt the need to reach the young generation of Antilleans who no longer listened to tales of old. She transferred orality into written text to preserve its memory. From Minerve to Toussine to Télumée and Sonore, the author transmits through oral transmission the memory of Guadeloupe and the Lougandour women. The novel expresses the wealth of oral culture while inscribing the permanence of the written word.

Chapter II: Illness and Triumph

In the novel, *Un Plat de Porc aux Bananes Vertes*, (1967) by Simone and André Schwarz-Bart, one notices immediately that the world of Mariotte is very different from the world of Télumée. Mariotte lives in a hospice in Paris, far away from her home in Martinique. It is a refuge for old bodies and the tortured minds of those about to die. Mariotte is the only woman of color in this home of forgotten souls. She learns to ignore the racial prejudice exhibited, and with strength and fortitude she is able to withstand the disdain of the inmates and maintain her dignity. Télumée too, suffers periods of extreme pain, but with her familial legacy of resilience, she turns her sorrow into contentment. In old age, Télumée stands in joy and peace in her garden.

For the two years of her stay in the “Trou,” as she calls the hospice, Mariotte has been sad and incommunicative. Her suffering is evidenced by the gurgling sounds that escape from her throat as she sleeps. Sometimes she is awakened by a rumbling noise emanating from within her, likened to the howling of a dog about to die. She chokes and cannot utter a word. Perhaps it is a nightmare, she thinks, but then realizes that it is a manifestation of

suffering, an expression of hidden misery, of glimpses of the past that she is trying to obliterate from her consciousness. This repressed memory inhabits her soul and continues to “grouiller sous ma peau, comme de la vermine dans une maison abandonnée; que ni la grande âge, ni la résignation ne la désarmaient...”⁸¹ Unwanted images float around her in half-dreams, like suffering ghosts, and as the people of her country believe, these apparitions relive the sins of the past and the agitation of former lives. Mariotte wonders why she has these dreams that plague her. She has lost all memory:

mon cerveau taquin ne veut pas me restituer mes rêves autrement que sous forme de cris—je tiens dans mon crâne les fils de ma vie enroulés comme une pelote.⁸²

She attributes her loss of memory to fear, fear of renewing the painful events that still gnaw at her soul. Even a slight recollection is “un souvenir qui me tue.”⁸³ She cannot vanquish the terror that causes her mind to blot out the past: “Seules demeurent les blessures.”⁸⁴

What happened in Mariotte’s life to produce these subconscious manifestations of trauma? What produced the all-consuming fear that causes her to be bottled-up, ‘baillonnée?’ She does not try to recall any reasons for her inner turmoil other than that she grieved for a granddaughter who died,

⁸¹ Simone and André Schwarz-Bart, *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), 14-15.

⁸² Schwarz-Bart, 18-19.

⁸³ Schwarz-Bart, 19.

⁸⁴ Schwarz-Bart, 19.

la Unetelle, and then the dear Moritz Levy: both tragedies “qui m’ont tuée...entraînée dans leur mort...”⁸⁵ One knows that Mariotte traveled a great deal, to Bogotá (“Ô souvenir lancinant de Bogotá qui me crève encore le cœur après quarante années,”⁸⁶) to Africa, and, of course, to Paris. We are not aware of her activities until she joins the desolate world of the Blancs in the Trou, except that she suffered a great deal. Télumée too, suffered emotional trauma, but it was sprinkled with the love that she received and the spiritual guidance that she bestowed and that allowed her to resist and survive. Mariotte suffers physical and mental disorders, but by her faith and the courage inherited from the women of her race, she manages to exist within the confining walls of this God-forsaken space.

During the two years of Mariotte’s stay in the hospice, she seems to be living in a vacuum, a dream world, just performing the daily necessities for staying alive. She is seventy-two years old, small in stature, bent over, suffering cardiac problems, hip displacement, and near blindness, but does not complain, although she admits, “Je suis la plus misérable de toutes.”⁸⁷ Only God knows the extent of her suffering: “Car vous me connaissez, beau

⁸⁵ Schwarz-Bart, 187.

⁸⁶ Schwarz-Bart, 205.

⁸⁷ Schwarz-Bart, 21.

Prince de Ciel...”⁸⁸ She feels a kinship with Sœur Marie des Anges, her partner in worship of God and church, and as she observes her performing her saintly duties without a sign of repugnance, she is filled with admiration. Sœur Marie des Anges cheerfully dispenses her chamber pots in the early morning hours, her coiffe reaching towards heaven. One sees this angel of mercy: “cette silhouette glissante dont les pieds ne jamais toucher terre...un vase de nuit dans chaque main, en offrande silencieuse aux Dieux.”⁸⁹ Mariotte never ceases to respect this holy daughter of God, who scrupulously guards the virginity of her vows, “au prix de quelles souffrances cachées?”⁹⁰

The atmosphere in the hospice is rife with signs of senile decay, “gâtisme, a gaga a gaga.”⁹¹ Mariotte notices the gradual decadence of the other inmates and then realizes that “c’est seulement dans le corps des autres qu’on perçoit la déchéance du sien.”⁹² She notices the facial tics and the mechanical movements of the old people, their mean and hurtful characteristics—the eccentricities of youth become more pronounced in the ageing process. Mariotte is keenly aware of the decline in her bodily functions and primary language skills “Qui prétend que je ne sais plus parler

⁸⁸ Schwarz-Bart, 21.

⁸⁹ Schwarz-Bart, 18.

⁹⁰ Schwarz-Bart, 27.

⁹¹ Schwarz-Bart, 79.

⁹² Schwarz-Bart, 17.

le créole.”⁹³ She notices too, with much chagrin, that the eyeglasses that she wore entering the hospice are no longer of any use to her. Her sight has degenerated to near blindness. Her right leg has become useless, a sort of parasite, cruel and overwhelming. Her very entrails growl like a subterranean river. A gaga, a gaga.

Death is a frequent topic of conversation among the crumbling men and women who gather around the “poêle.” They fear it and mask their inner misgivings with hopeless defiance. With sardonic humor, they relate accounts of heroic passages into the unknown. Tales are told of lovers who are resigned to their fate and go out into the sea hand in hand, into the *néant*. Other similar solutions are discussed as depressing alternatives such as lethal injections for attaining instant demise, but there is always the added possibility of sudden death caused by the good sisters of the facility, who are compelled to relieve the overcrowded conditions in these halls of mercy. Old people become useless baggage and, as is the custom in several countries of the world, they are put out into the cold to die.

As a relief from the morbidity of her fellow sufferers in this ‘Mouroir,’ Mariotte chats with Monsieur Moreau, the hall porter. He exhibits human compassion as he reminisces with her about his Caribbean

⁹³ Schwarz-Bart, 44.

experiences. “Je lui crois une certaine sympathie humaine à mon égard.”⁹⁴ Mariotte finds his stories diverting and from time to time, she is eager to purchase the wine that he offers, ‘*en cachette.*’ The taste of the wine tends to relax her tight-clenched mind. One day she politely requests another glass, and then another (*un deuxième verre et un troisième verre*), the heady liquor resulting in an immediate path to bed. There:

...avec ce caillot de vin aigre dans mon ventre et la folie des corbeaux qui déchiraient à nouveau ma gorge de leurs croassements; là, tout simplement, sans désirs, sans souvenirs, sans pensées d’aucune sorte, à jamais perdue au milieu du monde obscur et froid des Blancs. -Oui, ce sont les mots.⁹⁵

Mariotte will find the words. She will cease producing the inhuman sounds that issue from her throat and express her anguish in written words.

She will search in her conscience for the words to release her subverted agony! “...l’angoisse coulant sur le papier.”⁹⁶ With borrowed glasses, she starts out by drawing a picture of herself in an old notebook. This sketch is used as a frontpiece in *Un Plat de Porc*.

Even though the wine relaxes her brain, Mariotte’s memories are still blocked. It is difficult to recapture lost memories, especially those hindered by fear. Memory that is not spontaneous requires conscious effort to recall. Memory revives past impressions and can reproduce hidden impressions.

⁹⁴ Schwarz-Bart, 33.

⁹⁵ Schwarz-Bart, 36.

⁹⁶ Schwarz-Bart, 31.

Freud uses the term “repressed memory” to describe: “a significant memory, usually of a traumatic nature, that has become unavailable for recall due to some conscious or unconscious mechanism...repressed memories may sometimes be recovered years or decades after the event...triggered by a particular smell, taste or other identifier related to lost memory.”⁹⁷ For Mariotte, the leaf of the *siguine* placed on her cheek brought back a rush of memory. Memories can be intimate or personal and are buried in the recesses of the mind.

Julia Kristeva analyzes memory in terms of voluntary memory and involuntary memory. She says that memory is both the agent that restores sensation to us and the veil that separates it from us. When Kristeva speaks of the “shifting and confused gusts of memory,” she refers to the I, “a subject with an unsuspecting memory—who brings out the convulsive truth,” or the exploration of memory which brings out ideas and images, flavors, smells or tactile impressions...”⁹⁸ Mariotte drew her recollection as a result of the tactile impression of the *siguine* leaf.

Sometimes memory is selective, the painful ones blocked by fear or inhibition. Then objectivity must take precedence, personal emotions must

⁹⁷ “Amnesia,” *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 2001 ed.

⁹⁸ Julie Kristeva, *Time and Sense*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 280, 170-171.

yield to facts. Selective memory is a ploy used in orality. An African proverb reveals this method: “Lorsque la mémoire va ramasser du bois mort, elle rapporte le fagot qui lui plaît.”⁹⁹ (This bit of wisdom reflects the cultural memory of a people and not the one recorded in history) It is agreed also that time can cloud memory, but a writer is impelled to be a forager of memory, bringing the past to the present.

Mariotte experiences renewed courage and decides to overcome her inhibitions. With surprising resolution, she searches for her suitcase, which had been hidden under her bed for the entire two years of her stay—the hidden suitcase of memories. She had wanted to forget, but now, with her brain soothed by the effect of the wine, she peers into her forbidding past. Among the dust of time and the moth-eaten bits of former glory, Mariotte finds a carefully protected leaf, the leaf of a *siguine* plant,* a token of her beloved country. She looks at it with wonder and nostalgia, and then hides it from the prying eyes of her neighbors in the privacy of the “water.” She gazes at this beautiful leaf and recalls that it grew on the shores of the river Z’icaques. Far from its origin, hidden in a strange land, this leaf and Mariotte became “sœurs oubliées d’un même exil.”¹⁰⁰ Memories are brought

⁹⁹ Ralph Ludwig, *Écrire la « parole de nuit »*, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994), 16.

* Nom commun: philodredon, *siguine* couleuvre. Nom latin: *monstera deliciosa*

¹⁰⁰ Schwarz-Bart, 41.

back by this ancient souvenir, “les cris ont cessé, faisant place à une douleur plus humaine.”¹⁰¹ She holds the leaf of the *siguine* close to her cheek and lets the old images come to life.

“Sur la plage désolée de mon esprit,”¹⁰² the ghost of Mariotte’s grandmother, Man Louise, appears, sitting in the traditional Creole rocking chair, spewing her usual hateful remarks and recriminations. Mariotte seems to remember her grandmother more vividly than her mother. Her grandmother was domineering and controlled the household; her mother was gentle and loving. Man Louise is a stern, stubborn grandmother who probably loved her family secretly, fiercely. She was proud of the power of her advanced years. Man Louise epitomizes the advantages of old age, as emphasized in contrast to its disadvantages. She is respected and feared; her slightest wish is granted. Her daughters hasten to sell all their worldly goods to satisfy her desire for a proper burial dress. Old age is also portrayed in the character of Reine Sans Nom, but in a softer, more restrained sense. She was greatly respected, loved, and revered, a fine example of earned dignity and the gratification of maturity. Man Cia, her friend, was another woman of the same age. Her knowledge of sorcery was not refuted. She became a seer, teaching her ways with the supernatural and with the magic that healed the

¹⁰¹ Schwarz-Bart, 40.

¹⁰² Schwarz-Bart, 42.

sick of body and mind. She attained old age with dignity and respect. One recalls other grandmothers whose lives graced the annals of Francophone literary history, such as M'man Tine in *La Rue Case Nègre*.¹⁰³ The narrator tells about his grandmother:

The floggings ...stem not from the cruelty of a wicked grandmother, but rather from the loving guardian who in this way assures herself of success in the task of raising a well-behaved child. José's drive to succeed must be seen as his desire to make M'man Tine happy.¹⁰⁴

The grandmother of Sophie, Grandmé Ifé, in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, by Edwidge Danticat also plays a significant role in assisting her granddaughter to survive the severe trials of her life.¹⁰⁵ She is portrayed as the immutable image of stability and the one to provide the anchor for the lost souls who flounder in the murky waters of life. The women who encouraged their grandchildren to achieve admirable positions in society and ease their pain in the process are worthy of praise and honor. Old age, however, has many disheartening and disabling factors. They can include the gradual deterioration of mind and body, sickness, and senility. The Golden years should bring peace and contentment, the satisfaction of successfully completing a difficult journey, but sickness, incapacity, and poverty can hamper the glow of the September years. Simone de Beauvoir, in *La*

¹⁰³ Joseph Zobel, *La Rue Casse Nègre*, (Distribooks, 2002)

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Zobel, *Black Shack Alley*, (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), xviii. (English translation of *La Rue Casse Nègre*)

¹⁰⁵ Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, (New York: Random House, 1994)

Vieillesse, compares the ageing process among the various countries of the world, according to historical and sociological determinations. The final result is always the same, “Vivre et Mourir.”

Growing old can bring the happiness of imparting the knowledge and experience gained in younger years. It is also a form of psychological growth, a blossoming of individual development. The older woman in this study of Caribbean literature is perceived as the driving force who preserves family life, who inspires religion, and insists upon education for her offspring. Her actions furthered the role of women in society. She became the “rebel woman,” as conceived by Lucille Mair, or the “natural rebel” as referred to by Hilary Beckles.¹⁰⁶ Both terms represent a cultural icon whose position is derived from the ascribed matrifocality of the African social legacy. It represents a culture of refusal and resistance that is part of a basic self-protective and survival response.

In studying the novels written by the Francophone authors of the Caribbean, one finds outstanding women protagonists, who in spite of their heritage of servitude, physical deterioration, and poverty, still maintain respect for themselves and earn the status of dignity. Mariotte exemplifies the woman who displays courage and defiance in the face of all the

¹⁰⁶ Verne Shepard, Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995). 136.

difficulties presented to women of her race. She maintains respect for herself even in old age.

The leaf of the *siguine* opened the doors of memory for Mariotte, “...les cris muets...comme des passions aveugles, qui se forent lentement leur chemin dans l’être...”¹⁰⁷ and Mariotte feels that she is once again in Martinique. Grandmother is scolding her for speaking *le français* de France instead of her mother tongue. She is accused of wearing the clothes of the *Blancs* instead of the traditional madras. Man Louise never forgot that Mariotte left her family and joined the ranks of the enemy, the enemy that she had despised ever since the days of her slavery. Man Louise wore the chains of incarceration all her life “plus profondément inscrites que la marque au fer rouge de son sein droit.”¹⁰⁸ In her delirious state on her deathbed, she still expels her hatred for the *Blancs* and most of all, for their taking her adored son and selling him to a cruel master. Man Louise did not trust the Abolition. She thought the celebration of Abolition was a “cérémonie vide” as did Edouard Glissant in *La Case du Commandeur*.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Schwarz-Bart, 61.

¹⁰⁸ Schwarz-Bart, 47.

¹⁰⁹ Edouard Glissant, *La Case du Commandeur* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 144.

Man Louise said, “Tu ne le vois-t-y pas qu’en dehors du fouet, rien n’a changé?”¹¹⁰

With jets of tobacco-stained saliva, she launched her diatribe at “la fillette ‘mal sortie.’” She continued her insults with “la proportion de sang *humain* était généralement plus élevée que celui coulant dans ses veines de Capresse.”^{111*} She never ceased to “m’écramer sous le poids de ses prophéties.”¹¹² Mariotte begged her grandmother for forgiveness; she wanted to hear only “*Alors, Mariotte, coumen ou yé chère? Coumen ou yé chère?...chère?*”¹¹³

The tears roll down Mariotte’s cheeks as Man Louise also “pleurait depuis que ses yeux n’avaient plus de larmes”¹¹⁴ and in her memory, Mariotte confesses her love for this dying woman, the one who accused her of being “plus noire que noire.” This accusation does not have a pejorative, racial connotation. Man Louise means to say that her heart is blacker than her skin. Black in this case means “devoid of moral light or goodness, foully, or outrageously wicked; disgraceful, dishonorable or culpable.”¹¹⁵ In

¹¹⁰ Schwarz-Bart, 49.

¹¹¹ Schwarz-Bart, 47.

* Caprese: the offspring resulting from a mulatto woman and a very dark back man.

¹¹² Schwarz-Bart, 46.

¹¹³ Schwarz-Bart, 49.

¹¹⁴ Schwarz-Bart, 62.

¹¹⁵ Webster’s New International Dictionary, Second Edition, 1953.

spite of the insults, Mariotte agonized, "...ô petite bonne maman que j'aime à la folie d'Espagne."¹¹⁶

Mariotte inherited the stubborn, unyielding traits of her grandmother. Both women were strong and defiant, but the rebellious spirit of Man Louise was smothered by the chains of slavery. As a slave, she could not experience the freedom enjoyed by her granddaughter. It is true that she scolded Mariotte, but she was jealous of her own missed opportunities, and harbored ambivalent feelings—admiration for the young woman's determination and misgivings for the plight of this loving child who left the security of her family home to join the world of the Blancs.

In her youth, Mariotte was headstrong, willful, and had a strong sense of justice. Did she not bite the hand of the marine who tried to molest Aunt Cydalize? Man Louise secretly took pride in this brave feat, and then boasted that she herself had inherited some of the blood of la Mulâtresse Solitude* which she passed on to her granddaughter. "...la femme Solitude de Guadeloupe, laquelle était sa maman et par là même, me disais-je, non sans une délicieuse angoisse, m'avait peut-être légué une goutte minuscule

¹¹⁶ Schwarz-Bart, 63.

* The mixed-race slave woman Solitude, though pregnant, battled her way into history by participating in all the fighting for freedom and liberation. The statue of the pregnant Solitude was erected in Guadeloupe in 1999 to bring slave women out of the shadows of oppression into full view, where the entire world could observe their resistance to tyranny.

de son sang.”¹¹⁷ Mariotte was grateful for even a drop of the blood of la Mulâtresse Solitude, the shining example of bravery and courage. Simone and Andre Schwarz-Bart personified Mariotte and her grandmother with La Mulâtresse Solitude, the subtitle of their book. Man Louise and Mariotte subscribe to the same audacious spirit in their actions as did the renowned heroine who struggled for freedom. Her credo was “Vivre libre ou mourir.” Mariotte and her grandmother, in their own way, sought freedom and equality. Solitude maintained her goal to her death, even telling her unborn child: “Prends force et courage et continue à rêver de liberté jusqu’à ce que tu la voies devant toi debout, solide et vivante.”¹¹⁸

Raymonique, the man who was perhaps her father, respected Mariotte for her act of defiance and in the same context, spoke admiringly of Solitude as the “Nèg Brave...une négresse définitive, un grand morceau de Monde, ouaye!”¹¹⁹ He developed a companionable friendship with Mariotte and in realizing her strong sense of justice, compared her to the tree named Résolu “...nous avons nommé Résolu le plus bel arbre de nos forêts, aussi le plus fier: celui qu’on abat le plus!”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Schwarz-Bart, 114.

¹¹⁸ Gisèle Pineau and Marie Abraham, Femmes des Antilles: Traces et voix, (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1998), 226.

¹¹⁹ Schwarz-Bart, 117.

¹²⁰ Schwarz-Bart, 118.

Mariotte, in her vigorous youth, was determined to leave Martinique and seek her fortune in the white world, but as she later recollected, she murmured to Man Louise, “combien je regrettais d’avoir quitté la Martinique...j’aurais pas dû, j’aurais pas dû m’en aller.”¹²¹ She apparently left just before the eruption of the volcano of Mount Pelée (May 8,1902), the volcano whose lava buried all of her village and her family: “mon village enfoui sous la cendre du volcan.”¹²² If only the disaster would have been delayed, so that she would have been able to whisper sweet words to her mother, words claiming her innocence and her love, so that her mother could have taken this agonizing plea to the ashes that enveloped her on that day in May, “Aye Moman... la tristesse de toi est une bête qui dévore mon cœur.”¹²³ Mariotte realizes that the ashes that covered her mother were also the ashes that covered her soul and her very existence for the rest of her life. These are the telling words that seem to reveal the source of the pain and the shame that Mariotte carried in her guilt-stricken memory for sixty years. Words, speech, and memory seem inextricably woven into the hidden trauma affecting the life of Mariotte. Her salvation lies in the power of

¹²¹ Schwarz-Bart, 52, 47.

¹²² Schwarz-Bart, 139.

¹²³ Schwarz-Bart, 85.

producing the written words that remain in her soul. As she writes, her inner misery pours out in words which slowly “coulant sur le papier.”

Simone and André Schwarz-Bart use proverbs, typical of Caribbean literature, to preserve the cultural aspects of *Plat de Porc*. Simone Schwarz-Bart also employed this technique to preserve the authenticity of Caribbean life in *Pluie et Vent*. The proverbs are part of the language of the people: *Soleil couché, malheur pas couché,*¹²⁴ *celui qui tue le porc meurt aussi!*,¹²⁵ *tu récoltes ce que tu as semé,*¹²⁶ *le Dieu qui châtie jamais n'est loin; et vous le trouverez jusque dans la racine de vos cheveux.*¹²⁷ These words of Caribbean wisdom dwell within the heart of Mariotte along with the painful nostalgia she experiences for her beloved Martinique.

The story of Mariotte is the story of yearning, longing for the country that she had abandoned, longing for her loved ones, yearning for the life that she could have had—and yearning for *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes*. The pungent fragrance of this typical Antilles dish is diffused in her memory with the colors of the Martinique landscape. She vividly recalls the terrine of porc, smothered in banana leaves, seasoned with pimentos, that she dutifully carried to Raymonique, her mother's ancient lover, who was languishing in

¹²⁴ Schwarz-Bart, 45.

¹²⁵ Schwarz-Bart, 102.

¹²⁶ Schwarz-Bart, 108.

¹²⁷ Schwarz-Bart, 108.

prison for killing a white man. Raymonique was not a violent man, but one who, when irked, displayed a sense of justice. He was a handsome man: “Il n’était pas noir- noir, plus noir que noir...sa belle peau avait des reflets insolites, des sortes de lueurs marines...”¹²⁸ His greatest talent was that he could play the big N’goka* drum as well as his ancestors in Africa. (The drum, so important to the culture and richness of the Caribbean experience is included in the literature to lend added dimension and texture.) Amboise, the admirable hero of *Pluie et Vent*, also played the drum in recognition of his love for Télumée. Raymonique played “avec la fougue d’un amant; la délicatesse douloureuse, d’un Vray-homme pour sa fille...”¹²⁹ A similar sound in the hospice brought a rush of memories to Mariotte who, as a young girl, sang to the music and cadence of the tambour.

Raymonique devoured the celestial dish served to him with dutiful reverence, not leaving a trace for the onlooking children. The children are accustomed to yielding to the preferential treatment of the male figure. His importance in Caribbean society is unquestionable, even if he is imprisoned. The lingering feeling of hunger for this special dish, the pungent fragrance it evoked and the superb array of savory ingredients, were indeed tantalizing

¹²⁸ Schwarz-Bart, 126.

* The N’goka is the drum of the French Antilles, inherited from the old drums of central Africa.

¹²⁹ Schwarz-Bart, 126.

for the juvenile spectators. They could not partake, only watch. Total abstinence was required and was as a result, understandably painful and unforgettable.

The title *Un Plat de Porc aux Bananes Vertes*, is symbolic of *desire*—the intense desire of the children to partake in the forbidden repast—*poverty*—the lack of money to provide the food to satisfy the pervading hunger—and *submission*—one had to submit to the rules established by civil authorities or familial authorities. Mariotte remembers digging in the ground for forgotten roots to satisfy the hunger gnawing in her entrails after watching the condemned man devour the forbidden “plat de porc.”

One taste, like the madeleine, would invoke memories and sensations relating to the past. The act of eating is tied to memory in the work of Simone Schwarz-Bart and one finds many references to her symbolic use of food to provoke gustatory recollections: “Une avalanche de souvenirs est déclenchée dans les romans de Simone Schwarz-Bart au goût de certains plats.”¹³⁰ The foods indigenous to the islands of the Caribbean evoke hidden memories related to the social and cultural aspects of the new lands as well as to Africa. Mariotte, as an old woman, reaffirms her roots and her identity with Martinique by the memory of the aroma and the sight of the “plat de

¹³⁰ Torres, 78.

porc aux bananes vertes:” “...un souvenir trop lourd et qui s’enfonce inexorablement dans le poussier de la mémoire.”¹³¹

The haunting memory of Creole delicacies becomes obsessive for Mariotte during the Christmas season, bringing thoughts of the Christmas celebrations of former years: “émerveillée qu’il soit une fois de plus Noël.”¹³² Mariotte’s dreams take her into the snow-covered streets of Paris to the restaurant of Rosina Bigolo, her ancient neighbor, who brought Creole cooking to Paris. She imagines her welcome at Rosina’s and to the Antilles food that she would be served, particularly the pork with green bananas, not forgetting the pimentos. She could almost smell the savory food as she bravely ventures into the snowy evening, searching for the ‘Impossible.’ “Non, non, je ne veux pas mourir avant d’avoir goûté, une dernière fois, un petit quelque chose de chez nous...un brin de nourriture folklorique.”¹³³ While enjoying the taste of her imaginary delight, and her last earthly desire, she trips and falls into the snow, not realizing her plight. Amid the lights of the Christmas world, she slowly succumbs, “comme ça dans ces lumières, moi qui ai toujours vécu dans la nuit.”¹³⁴

¹³¹ Schwarz-Bart, 143.

¹³² Schwarz-Bart, 189.

¹³³ Schwarz-Bart, 139, 218.

¹³⁴ Schwarz-Bart, 219.

The story of *Le plat de Porc aux Bananes Vertes* is simple; a black woman is sheltered in a hospital in Paris. She has no family, no friends, and no money. Her loss of memory is due to trauma. The authors attribute her recovery to her defiance and secret combat, representative of practices engaged in by the stalwart women of her race. The realistic aspects of this novel are honest, frank and astounding, the beauty of the language is emotionally moving, and the message of dignity in old age is firmly implanted. This novel is so harsh and desperate that it can be seen as the secret combat of the black woman of today.

The second novel examined in this chapter, *La Case du Commandeur* (1981) by Edouard Glissant, also deals with sickness, a difficult hurdle to surmount in the quest for growing old with dignity. This is not a simple story. The protagonist, Mycéa, seems to wander through the story as the river La Lézarde meanders from its source in the hills to the city below. She is obsessed with idea of finding her roots, her origin, her identity. Mycéa cries out “Odonno”, the mythical, omnipresent ancestor descending from ancient Africa.* Although the authors of both books extol the beauty of Martinique, Glissant presents a more realistic approach. In keeping with the

* Odonno refers to the first slave who marooned and conquered a piece of land. It also refers to two ancestors who bore the same name and are indistinguishable from one another.

story line, he skillfully challenges the destruction and the industrialization of his beloved country. His passion intensifies as he alludes to selfish interests, modernization, and foreign government control. The disarray is wrapped in beautiful prose, consistent with the talent of the author.

La Case du Commandeur is a novel that treats the theme of mental illness and disequilibrium. “In 1981, madness and eccentricity, in various forms of behavior, are interpreted as possibly deviant, a kind of escape into the irrational.”¹³⁵ The protagonist is Marie Celat, or as she is called, Mycéa (she was called mi Célat, which in time evolved into Mycéa). The characters of Glissant’s works, including Mycéa, are woven into his Martinican saga. Events do not appear in chronological order. Throughout his work, Glissant displays more interest in the emotional development of his characters, rather than the mundane details of their everyday existence. Many seem condemned to physical and emotional instability.

Mycéa is a lost woman trying to find herself spiritually and mentally in a society resistant to unusual behavior. She was born in post-abolition Martinique in 1928, and in this book she is representative of the four major families which constitute the genealogy in Glissant’s vast literary oeuvre: the Longoué, Béluse, Targin, and Célat families. Names are significant in

¹³⁵ Michael Dash, Edouard Glissant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 127.

Glissant genealogy. The maroon chooses his own name; the plantation slave is named by his master.

Mycéa inherits the legacy of mystery and inner stoicism from her mother, Cinna Chimène. Both mother and daughter are characterized as having “la tête en feu,” inheriting this trait from a grandmother who displayed the heroic suffering of a maroon or “une femme outragée.” Mycéa had to perform an act of marronage, an ancestral trait, to escape from the mental hospital. Her vigil in the overseer’s cabin reflects the independent spirit of her foremothers. This is the basis for the heritage of strength and dignity that Mycéa develops in spite of her inner torments.

The misery and peculiar behavior suffered by Mycéa are understandable results of misfortune. Her two sons were lost forever, one by motor accident and the other by drowning. She is further haunted by Mathieu’s betrayal and his hurtful emotional defection, when he became attracted to another beautiful woman. (He became attracted to Valerie in *La Lézarde*, the first of the Martinican saga.) Mycéa’s world fell apart. She resorted to peculiar behavior. She became “déréglée” in her display of abnormal actions in public: “L’unanimité se fit contre elle, pour conclure qu’avec de telles idées la folie n’est pas loin.”¹³⁶ The word for mental

¹³⁶ Glissant, 71.

disarray is often challenged. “La maladie mentale (nos lecteurs savent que les spécialistes répugnent désormais à parler de folie) frappe partout, de la même façon.”¹³⁷ The complaints about this deranged woman accumulated in the public office and resulted in a call for an ambulance to be sent to collect her. In *La Case du Commandeur*, Glissant presented a newspaper report of the irrational conduct of Mycéa in the introduction of his novel and in another newspaper article at the end of the same book. The quality of mental hospitals of Martinique is extolled and envied by other nations of the Caribbean as well as by certain psychiatric services in Paris:

...que notre hôpital psychiatrique nous est envié dans toute la Caraïbe et que certains des gouvernements indépendants du voisinage ont entrepris des démarches auprès de nos services, ainsi qu’au ministère à Paris, en vue d’obtenir ici l’hospitalisation de grands psychotiques qu’ils ne peuvent faire soigner chez eux, étant donné les moyens dont ils disposent.¹³⁸

It is interesting to note how the author weaves his message into the story line. He carefully exposes his main themes in conjunction with the emotional intensity of his characters. Glissant finds:

...the need to recapture, but also to transcend, a vanished, unrecorded history; and the struggle to preserve a cultural identity in the face of metropolitan French policies that discourage and inhibit the onward flow of a specifically Caribbean tradition in Martinique and Guadeloupe.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Glissant, 243.

¹³⁸ Glissant, 206. (Quotidien des Antilles, 13 septembre 1978)

¹³⁹ Beverly Omerod, *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1985), 36.

In *La Case du Commandeur*, Mycéa, the person, represents Martinique, the country. She is seeking the impossible truth, the solution to resolve her inner torments. Her irrational behavior, her periods of intense depression, and her love of the natural landscapes of Martinique seem to reverberate in the unsettling arena of the community. Mycéa is conceived to be “symbolic of the tortured collective consciousness.”¹⁴⁰ Although she embodies the physical attributes of beautiful Martinique—the charm of the sea and the winding paths through the forest—her mental condition obliterates rational thought. She is lost for a while, deploring the destruction of her country and its surrender of autonomy, but in the end, she will be forced to adjust to a new existence. The disturbed Mycéa must find herself.

Mycéa’s brief stay in the mental institution and her escape to the abandoned cabin in the hills, which belonged to her distant ancestor, Euloge Alfonsine, are all peculiarly related to the history and non-history of Martinique. Euloge was the severe commander who after the abolition of 1848 took refuge in the world of the maroons to escape the wrath of the newly freed slaves, “Euloge is a figure of disturbing ambivalence in his shrewd self-seeking nature.”¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Dash, 137.

¹⁴¹ Dash, 133.

Mycéa's sickness is symbolic of the bewilderment suffered by Martinique in its struggle to maintain integrity in the face of foreign domination. In her spiritual resistance, she is likened to those in Martinique who try to resist the pressure of the conformists, those who like Euloge defy collective values and reach for self-improvement. "Euloge's fierce individualism and defiant self-advancement point to Glissant's hypothesis that Martinique's history is one of missed opportunities."¹⁴² The decision to choose French citizenship and Departmental status in 1946 was engineered by those who preferred self-aggrandizement to the betterment of the collective whole. The instability and divisive atmosphere in the political arena of the country seem to be similar to the disequilibrium suffered by Mycéa.

Martinique's beautiful landscape and its abundant resources camouflage the turbulence stirring within. Mycéa loves the sea as she wanders along the shore, although it arouses troubling memories of the Middle Passage and the suffering of the slaves in the *cales*. The canefields, with their stalks blowing in the wind, are a pretty picture, but are abhorrent to Mycéa, as they bear witness to the memory of the exploiter and the exploited. As a result, she displays distaste for sugary food, as did her

¹⁴² Dash, 133.

grandmother Ephraïse, who “n’offrait jamais de sucreries ni aucune sorte de douceurs, et nul n’attendait d’elle”.¹⁴³ Mycéa learned from her grandmother to disdain any product of the hated sugarcane. “Elle n’offrait jamais de sucreries ni aucune sorte de douceurs, et nul n’en attendait d’elle.”¹⁴⁴ This aversion to the canefields is forever present in the work of Edouard Glissant. He is haunted by the thought of the death-dealing sugarcane stalks, which tear at the lips of the starving children who suck them.¹⁴⁵

Edouard Glissant’s poetic language describes the plight of a lost, sick woman and of a lost, sick country, “Quand reviendrez-vous au jardin d’espoir...?”¹⁴⁶ He speaks of the necessity to find “le trou par où passer...Cherchant la trace...”¹⁴⁷ Papa Longoué, the “Quimboiseur” who maintains the African tradition of healing and prophecy, predicts that, “la fille perdue allait se trouver dans sa nuit.”¹⁴⁸ Glissant’s novel delves into the possibility of the girl finding herself as well as the country finding itself. It is difficult to establish the present and to find one’s self when one searches for an ideal past which history cannot provide. The “trou du temps passé” haunts and weakens each generation, “The legacy of contemporary

¹⁴³ Glissant, 71.

¹⁴⁴ Glissant, 62.

¹⁴⁵ Edouard Glissant, *La Lézarde* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1995), 51.

¹⁴⁶ Glissant, 132.

¹⁴⁷ Glissant, 138.

¹⁴⁸ Glissant, 191-192.

Martinique is this void in the past and the myths, illusions, or ‘rocks’ that have been used to fill it.”¹⁴⁹ The rock as is described by the author in his chapter “Roche de l’opacité,” pertains to his theory of opacity. It deals with memory, negation, and an obstacle too difficult to destroy. According to Glissant, the rock is a symbolic manifestation of the mythical view of the past. The rock is opaque, and conceals the history of the past, blocking the fugitive maroon’s path to freedom. It is difficult to advance when one does not know one’s own history.

The negative effect of industrialization in Martinique is one of Glissant’s main themes. In *Parabole d’un Moulin de Martinique*, the future is pessimistically described by Glissant as the transformation of a windmill into a factory and then into a chain store. Mycéa recalls reproaching a woman who buys orange soda, leaving perfect oranges to rot under a tree: “d’acheter pour ses enfants on ne savait avec quoi des caisses d’une insipide boisson gazeuse vaguement orangée arrivée de Bordeaux.”¹⁵⁰ The orange trees symbolize the inherent beauty of Martinique. This beauty is tainted by industrialization, and one must remember that *loto épi pa bon zanmi*.^{*} Marie

¹⁴⁹ Dash, 135.

¹⁵⁰ Glissant, 183.

* Creole for: “Voitures et motos ne font pas bon ménage.”

Celat “...criait contre tous les anathèmes de reniement, qui étaient des cris d’amour.”¹⁵¹

Progress, for better or worse, is inevitable. In the final chapter of *La Case du Commandeur*, Glissant skillfully portrays Pythagore as he is engaged in watching color television every afternoon.

Ainsi allèrent les choses, pendant que le pays descendait le morne. Les grands transatlantiques lents...furent remplacés par...les avions à réaction de plus en plus rapides et bondés: nous nous satisfaisons de nous enfourner, pour la seule destination édénique: de la métropole.¹⁵²

Sickness may be a deterrent to dignity in old age, but Mariotte and Mycéa both elegantly manifest this quality, even in the face of pain, suffering, and disillusionment. Mariotte retains her dignity in writing passionately about her past. Years ago, Mariotte wanted to write the story of her life:

...dans les temps anciens, dans les années vingt et trente, quand j’essayais affreusement, désespérément d’écrire le récit de ma vie, je savais toujours, selon l’époque, où je voulais somme toute en venir: soit parler aux miens, à cette femme comme moi que je cherchais sur la terre et dans les livres, à ce nègre comme moi...¹⁵³

Mariotte did finally write, but who would see the words she painstakingly inscribed in her fine hand, who would find the manuscript after her death? In Mariotte’s dreams, her experiences have made her

¹⁵¹ Glissant, 186.

¹⁵² Glissant, 187.

¹⁵³ Schwarz-Bart, 186.

somewhat of a celebrity among Paris's Antillean community. Rosina would introduce Mariotte to her patrons, and brag about the old woman's accomplishments:

...cette vieille madame a dans sa tête des colonnes pout toutes choses, comme les Blancs tout pareil! ...Elle sait lire, écrire, compter tout comme ces gens-là et elle connaît tant de pays...¹⁵⁴

Mycéa recovers her mental faculties to participate in the New World. She adapts to the new mode of life, and overcomes her intense suffering. She keeps a letter-writing correspondence with Mathieu, Le Grand Absent, and comes to terms with their daughter, Ida. She tries to adjust to her lonely world. Edouard Glissant reveals in his writing, "le chaos-monde—L'être chaotique dans un monde chaotique..."¹⁵⁵ This is what *La case du commandeur* subtly illustrates. Papa Longoué left for unknown horizons, Pythagore, her father, and Mathieu, her husband, left her at one time, causing Mycéa to say "Ou bien je quitte mes hommes, ou bien ils me quittent."¹⁵⁶ She continues in her pessimistic mood: "Marie Celat pleurait sans raison connue. Y avait-il une malédiction de solitude sur sa tête? Quelque chose venu de si loin (non pas dans le temps mais dans l'impression qu'on en a et dans la faiblesse qu'elle procure) qu'il n'y avait aucun moyen

¹⁵⁴ Schwarz-Bart, 213.

¹⁵⁵ Glissant, Edouard, *Écrire la <<parole de nuit>>: La nouvelle littérature antillaise* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994), 111.

¹⁵⁶ Glissant, 197.

de le connaître ni de le repousser? Marie Celat riait alors.”¹⁵⁷ She learns to live again and regains her dignity in her declining years. Chérubin calls her “une femme adroessante.”¹⁵⁸ She reiterates, “Je suis presque une vieille femme, même si je suis adroessante.”¹⁵⁹

The two protagonists in this study suffer from Trauma in Memory. Mycéa experiences trauma as a result of the memories hidden in the recesses of her mind. These repressed memories lead to her abnormal behavior. Mariotte suffers as a result of searching for a past without memory; she writes the words which she cannot speak. She unconsciously suppresses her memory of slavery, family and hunger.

Probable causes of trauma in memory as revealed in Mycéa’s behavior stem from the memory of her mother, Cinna Chimène, her grandmother, her ancestors, the death of her two sons and the memory of Mathieu’s infidelity.

Cinna Chimène deserted her family when Mycéa was a child. She left her husband, Pythagore, and her children to work in town and then to join the group of marrones. “Puis un jour, Cinna Chimène s’en alla. Tout simplement prit ses hardes et son bagage, descendit le morne” (43). “Elle

¹⁵⁷ Glissant, 199.

¹⁵⁸ Glissant, 236.

¹⁵⁹ Glissant, 237.

plongea...au ventre inviolé de la forêt...” (72). Mycéa, a child, “maigre statufée de porter son regard par-delà les choses connues. Elle avait refusé de quitter la case” (44).

It is interesting to note that after Cinna Chimène’s departure, Mycéa remained in the cabin with her father. They declared separate space and Mycéa kept house and prepared meals for Pythagore. There was a lack of communication between the father and the daughter. Nevertheless, the ghost of incest haunted the house. “Mais Pythagore ne connaissait pas Marie Celat.”¹⁶⁰ (the verb thus taking on a double entendre, that of the intellectual and corporal definitions) The absence of sexual relationship, to the credit of Pythagore, resulted finally in the daughter taking control of the life of her father. She painstakingly teaches him to read and through their lessons, they resume a normal parental association.

Mycéa was traumatized by the history of slavery suffered by her ancestors. “La foule des mémoires et des oublis...témoignages de temps anciens demeurés là inatteignables...” Memories unforgotten...“où s’est passé quelque chose que nous rejetons avec fureur loin de nos têtes, mais qui retombe dans nos poitrines, nous ravage de son cri”. This is the description of the search for a silent history, a way of finding an identity. Mycéa

¹⁶⁰ Glissant, 21.

wanders along the shores of her beloved country in her search. The beauty of her surroundings produces a healing and restorative effect but in her memory she thinks of those who came before her. She sees the bottom of the sea where the bodies descend, attached by chains. She closes her eyes and descends with them, into the blue, from which there is no way to escape.

Mycéa suffers irremediable trauma due to the death of her two sons. Patrice Celat was the older boy whose passion was the motorcycle. “Marie Celat sut, bien avant d’avoir remarqué la moto en pieces tordues rangée à l’écart...Patrice l’avait ravagé de son corps” (182). Odonno Celat, called Donou by his friends, loved the sea “ pour baigner dans le bleu où on danse et où on oublie...il s’attardait de plus en plus sous la mer...un midi Donou Celat ne remonta pas. Ses amis le retrouvèrent flottant à deux mètres sous la surface” (185,188).

Mycéa suffers additional trauma due to the infidelities of Mathieu. Mycéa remembers Mathieu’s infatuation with Valérie as described in *La Lézarde*. She suffers and finally comes to terms with this painful deception: “elle criait contre tous la procession de ces anathèmes de reniement, qui étaient des cris d’amour...elle s’arrêtait au bord de quoi ce fut menaçait de ressembler à une mesure ou à une démesure d’amour où de ce qu’elle

estimait être tel, reculant alors dans des parages désolés où pas un, hormis Mathieu peut-être, n'était en mesure de la suivre (186).

Mariotte suffers from a past without memory rooted in trauma. Her advanced years were ruined because of suppressed memory. There are multiple reasons why Mariotte is traumatized. The narrative in the text discloses the hidden sources of Mariotte's illness. First, there are the memories of her childhood. Rebellious and recalcitrant, Mariotte did not always conform to the wishes of her elders. There were many disputes with her grandmother who objected to her deserting her native language and culture.

Mariotte disregarded the memories of slavery much to the chagrin of her grandmother. Although she lived in a post-slavery world, the vestiges of slavery were constantly before her, either in the vituperate words of her grandmother, or in the voices of her ancestors. In later years, she suffered remorse.

Childhood hunger is difficult to forget. Mariotte remembers eating *terre blanche* (white clay) to satisfy her hunger. She longed for the terrine of pork with green bananas served to Raymonique while the deprived children looked on with envy. The title of the book reflects the everlasting memory of her hunger for *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes*.

Mariotte left her village the day before the volcanic eruption of 1902. It decimated her village, and most important, her beloved mother. Everything was destroyed. She could never recover from the memory of her abandonment. Mariotte came to realize that she had abandoned Martinique, but Martinique did not abandon her.

“Memory can sometimes open towards light while remaining in constant danger of disappearing. However the road towards the past is subtle and difficult. Memory is often opaque, resembling ruins. The most flamboyant of these ruins is Mariotte’s childhood memory of the pork and bananas dish. Although she didn’t taste any of it, it reveals in her an appetite and tenderness for food, life and happiness. Such a memory is a milestone, a clue to everything that precedes and follows it.” (Lucienne Serrano, *A Memory Inhibited by Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes*, p.5)

Mycéa and Mariotte deal with the trauma of their memories in very different ways. They both block their memories at first. Mariotte eventually unleashes her memories through her writing, while Mycéa retains her trauma within her soul, until she escapes into the forest of the marroons. Both protagonists gain their equilibrium at the conclusion of their stories. Mycéa reenters the modern world and greets her parents and daughter, Ida. Mariotte ventures into the cold world of Christmas and she imagines that she is

warmed by her native cooking. She looks at the bright lights of Paris while attempting to capture the fragrance of her favorite food. She slowly sinks into the snow.

Loss of memory is a method of escape—Mycéa escapes to unreality, a form of folly. Mariotte refuses to release the painful trauma of her existence. Both women have native intelligence, and succeed in the skills of a modern world. The trauma which affected their memories needs inner resourcefulness and great courage to bring them back to cognizant reality. Both *La case du commandeur* and *Un plat de porc* are interesting studies on mental disturbances, offering further insights into the Caribbean diaspora.

The two books in this chapter are based on the theme of growing old with dignity, but they differ in form and structure. The underlying theme of post-colonial family dysfunction is inherent in both works. Simone and André Schwarz-Bart, in their account of the plight of an ageing woman in a Paris hospice wish to recreate the identity of the Antillean woman who has been deprived of her historical and/or mythical origin: “l’exil, le racisme et le sexisme qui font de la femme noire une victime dans un univers pyramidal et ‘coloriste’ où elle et le dernier échelon de l’oppression sociale.”¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Suzanne Rinne and Joëlle Vitiello, *Elles Écrivent des Antilles*. (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997), 133.

Edouard Glissant, in his vast contribution to Antillean literature, includes one of his major themes in *La Case*, that of the need to recapture a lost history and to preserve the integrity of a beloved country. The structure of both novels differ in style and purpose. The plot is achieved according to the technique of each author.

Edouard Glissant presents his characters, describes the scenic background and then allows the reader to uncover the plot and motive. He says without saying that which he wishes to impart. He presents an open-ended fiction in which the reader becomes part of the author's strategy and by his own intuition, realizes the intentions and the movements of the characters. The reader must decipher what is left unsaid. Glissant's novels proceed Faulkner-style, with a comprehensive character definition and a mysterious sequence of events. Although Glissant respects traditional style, his approach adds heightened interest to his wandering characters. At the same time, his style rejects a definitive view of movement and action. His work includes "la mesure " and "démésure" simultaneously, a classic base with a modern literary approach.

One finds difficulty in understanding family relationship in the novels of Edouard Glissant. He is aware of this dilemma and presents a geneology (Essai de Classification sur les familles Béluze, Targin, Longoué, Celat) at

the end of *La Case*. This source includes family ties as originally designated in *La Lézarde* and *Le Quatrième Siècle*. The family tree must be consulted periodically by the reader, to gain satisfactory comprehension of the progression of events.

There is a marked difference in the approach of the authors as they weave their thoughts and words. The Schwarz-Barts delve into the emotional fluctuations of their characters. The story-line follows in planned sequence. Even though the ultimate rationalization is not realized until the dénouement, the reader is immersed in the progression of events. Glissant, on the other hand, retains a mute textual approach. “What is important in a work is what it does not say.”¹⁶² Glissant’s respectful use of silence is akin to his theory of opacity, of being blocked by the absence of history and genealogy.* The silence acts as a moral defense to the victimization of women, and continues in the fictional text “as the only residual of the unspeakable, the only legacy of this dead genealogy.”¹⁶³ Glissant’s literature is difficult to follow because of the gaping absence of speech. The beauty of the prose releases only fragments and snatches of the major events, and like

¹⁶² Valérie Loichot, *Orphan Narratives*, (Virginia: University of Virginia, 2007), 52.

* “Opacity, the primordial quality of the rock, is seen as the first obstacle that the fugitive maroon opposes... It is the maroon’s strategy of negation.” Michael Dash, *Edouard Glissant*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 137.

¹⁶³ Loichot, 52.

Faulkner, he relies on the absences in his texts to subvert the unspoken, the hidden, and the forbidden. Glissant's writing has been compared to the feminine writing of Hélène Cixous in that it is "unpredictable, wandering, layered with multiple voices, close to the flesh, overflowing with laughter and pain...Most important, it reaches no closure, encounters no end, no beginning..."¹⁶⁴ But the beauty in the *œuvre* of Glissant is in the beauty of his language, of his prose, of the landscape, the forests, the sea, and the falling of the waters. His characters wander from book to book, entangled in the cane fields, in the forests of the maroons, suffering pain, anger, and bitterness. In *L'Intention Poétique*, Glissant decries the deprivation and emotional impoverishment of his people. The theme which echoes through his major works is precise and heartrending:

You deport me to a new land (which is an island), you steal from my mind, indeed, from the innermost depths of my being, the knowledge of my former country, you further insist that the new country belongs only to you, so I must go down the ages, countryless.¹⁶⁵

Glissant's message is sent in the fusion of images, the search for *la trace** and the exhilarating hope of future redemption.

¹⁶⁴ Loichot, 76.

¹⁶⁵ Edouard Glissant, *L'intention poétique*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 196.

* La trace—seeking the way through lost paths and “vanished watercourse. Glissant writes of the track silted up not of red clay but by grey stony expanses destined for arcades or bungalows or helicopter pads.” Ormerod, 38.

Chapter III: Language and Religion

“Thou art a Galian, and thy speech agreeth thereto” (Mark xiv,70)

Spoken language reflects the origin, culture, and history of a people. To speak a specific language is to embed oneself in a particular culture. Language was central to the colonial and postcolonial experience in the French-speaking countries of the Antilles. The colonizing nations imposed their languages on their subjects, but hardly ever achieved total uniformity; colonial societies became mixed-language communities. In the transportation of slaves from Africa to the colonies many slaves lost their mother tongue, reducing them to the silence which Edouard Glissant calls the “psychological shock of transportation.” He refers to this as the *mutisme* of slavery and links their muteness to the alienation of their tongues from their bodies. After “La Traite”, one’s own body belonged to the buyer; it no longer belonged to the captive. In *Caribbean Discourse*, he explains, “the alienated body of the slave, in the time of slavery, is in fact deprived...of speech.”¹⁶⁶ This restriction caused the slave to develop a form of communication incomprehensible to the master yet understandable to the other slaves. The masters exerted further control by separating the slaves

¹⁶⁶ Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, (Virginia: University of Virginia, 1999), 22

who spoke the same language. Language thus became a key element in the conflict between the colonists and their captives. The solution for this language deficit was Creole. Creole is a creation of colonialism: “it arose out of the contact between European and African languages, but since [African languages] were lost with the first generation of slaves, Creole was forced to position itself solely in relation to the dominant European language, which it opposes while being continuously influenced by it.”¹⁶⁷ The slaves had to find their own method of expression, including strategies within the common language, to communicate secretly among themselves. They found an urgent need to form a collective consciousness related to past and present and to find a language that could satisfy the desire for cohesion and unity. Creole served the purpose and could conceal as well as reveal hidden meanings. “La langue d’un peuple donne son vocabulaire, et son vocabulaire est une bible assez fidèle de toutes les connaissances de ce peuple; sur la seule comparaison de vocabulaire d’une nation en différents temps, on se formerait une idée de ses progrès.”¹⁶⁸ Language develops as a result of historical and cultural movements and expands with time and progress. The

¹⁶⁷ Celia M. Britton, Edouard Glissant and Post Colonial Theory, (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 2.

¹⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, Les mots et les choses, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1966), 102. (quoting Diderot, Article <<Encyclopédie>> *de l’Encyclopédie*, t. V. p.637)

basic vocabulary in Creole increased with need and became suffused into the developing language.

It is interesting to note the genesis of this language. “Creole is both a proper name and a generic linguistic term...this form of spoken expression is no one’s first language and is usually only sophisticated enough to deal with the trade issues at hand.”¹⁶⁹ Creole evolved from the combination of two languages being used for communication in trading situations and became used by succeeding generations as a first language. Subsequently, Creole became a recognized language rather than a dialect. There are Creole adaptations stemming from the initial origins. British and Spanish settlers, as well as slaves arriving from western Africa, brought their form of communication with them. Various forms of Creole language emerged, notably Guadeloupean and Martinican (called *kréyòl*). It is a French-based lexicon, although some African expressions and euphemisms have been included, making it even more difficult to be understood by the Other. “Attitudes towards Creole and theories about its origins, beginning with a fierce condescending view treating Creole as a deformation of French, have evolved into a more respectful perspective from which Creole was deemed an interesting language phenomenon of great social and cultural

¹⁶⁹ Dany Bébel-Gisler, *Leonora: The Buried Story of Guadeloupe*, (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 264.

significance.”¹⁷⁰ Some philologists and linguists come to regard it “as a quaint dialect and worthy of study but hardly any initiatives were taken to recognize the legitimacy of Creole as a complex and sophisticated language, let alone to institute Creole as the official language of the French Antilles.”^{171*}

Language became an instrument of control and was resisted by the oppressed who sought to use their own method of expression. Only an elite group of the colonized could seek to adopt the new language as an avenue for social promotion. Franz Fanon, in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, speaks of the close links between language and the cultural milieu. As the title of his book connotes, the black man wishes to be white. He will be whiter if he gains a greater mastery of the language. If the ultimate goal is to be accepted into the French world, black people must learn to speak and understand standard French. Edouard Glissant agrees with Franz Fanon, in that speaking the French language is a much desired attribute and serves as a method of identification. It was the language of the white *békés* and came to embody their socioeconomic ascension, freedom, and recognition, the

¹⁷⁰ Bébel-Gliser, 264.

⁶ Bébel-Gliser, 266.

*On December 17, 2007, the Executive Committee of the Ph.D program at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York voted unanimously that “Creole should be included since it is undoubtedly a useful language for students working on Francophone literature.”

antithesis of the slave experience. Consequently, the colonized subject, in his wish to identify with the white language, loses his identity and autonomy. This theory validates the power of language.

For those who were not in a privileged position or did not have access to learning facilities, assimilation was impossible, thus causing language to remain a key element of conflict. The transported Africans had their own languages, but they did not survive for long: “the fact that the African languages were gradually lost as a functional form of communication meant that they simultaneously acquired a quasi-ritual significance, becoming symbols of an original identity and also a symbolic refusal of colonial reality.”¹⁷² African language remained important as a symbolic mother tongue, but remained incomprehensible and could not provide any real solution to communication problems. In some Caribbean countries, where there was no indigenous language, Creole became the common language incomprehensible to the Masters. The indentured could include hidden meanings in Creole and communicate secretly, thereby creating a private space where the white colonialists could not enter.

According to Edouard Glissant’s colonial theory, the colonized subject suffered from, as he termed it, a lack of language. This phenomenon,

¹⁷² Britton, 37.

as well as the aforementioned *mutisme*, was the result of the systematic separation of slaves who spoke the same language. Already traumatized by the Middle Passage, this separation served to further silence the slave. Glissant identifies the main causes for the lack of language as a community's history and its particular socioeconomic situation, in this case with a history of slavery and language needed for daily trading, buying, or selling. There are those who wish to maintain Creole as a language, but for Creole to survive, it must be the language that people use every day. In *Le discours antillais*, Glissant says "Creole is impoverished because terms relating to professions disappear,... because a whole series of expressions that were linked to forms of collective responsibility in the country are disappearing as this responsibility diminishes."¹⁷³

The duality of language and religion is an important factor in daily life, a fact reflected in the literature of the Antilles. In *Plat de porc aux bananes vertes*, Man Louise berates Mariotte for speaking "le français de France", because it implied her rejection of her native culture and origin. Her speech lacked the color, music and rhythm of Creole, the language of her youth. Contrary to her grandmother's teaching, Mariotte's religion was Catholic, although she respected her native religion and reverted to it in

¹⁷³ Britton, 36-37.

times of stress. As language and religion are mutually interrelated, adopting a new language distanced Mariotte from her heritage and religious training, influencing her to indulge in the practices of the Other. In later years, she suffered guilt and unhappiness as a result of this transgression. In *La Case de Commandeur*, Mycéa spoke French fluently, but she also spoke to the street urchins in Creole, who immediately recognized her mastery of the colloquial tongue. Language has been inextricably associated with religion and the inherited religious practices of the ancestors. The Creole spoken by Mycéa was closely allied to the religion practiced among her people. As she traveled through life searching for her roots, she also found her religion. It was of a Godly nature called Animism, and relied on the endowment of life to inanimate creatures.

There are also other women protagonists in the study of Francophone literature who emphasize Creole in their discourse, such as Marie-Sophie Laborieux of *Texaco* by Patrick Chamoiseau, who in telling her story of the one hundred years of Martinican history “mélangeait le Créole et le français, le mot vulgaire, le mot précieux, le mot oublié, le mot nouveau...” Emma, in *Le Livre d’Emma* by Marie Célie Agnant, would confess to Flore only in Créole rather than to her doctor in French, although she was fluent in French. She reverted to the language and customs of her

ancestors and refused the French language and its connotations, which alienated her from her own people. Gisèle Pineau was grateful to her grandmother, who indoctrinated her, the granddaughter—who was born and raised in France—with the importance of the Creole language and the culture of Guadeloupe: “Le Créole de ma grand-mère poussait comme de la mauvaise herbe, rebelle, entre les murs gris, les trottoirs de l’exil, les fissures de la sacro-sainte langue française, sucotée par mes parents ...”¹⁷⁴ Creole became Pineau’s second language, a language of choice and an eventual necessity in assuming the culture of her heritage. “Paraphrasing Frantz Fanon, assuming a language assumes a culture, and Pineau embraces and cherishes her ‘langue maternelle’.”¹⁷⁵

Language is a reflection of social class. Spoken language reflects the culture, the geographical origin, and the educational propensity of the speaker. Social strata is revealed in language by intonation, choice of words, and pronunciation. (Confirming the Biblical reference in the title of this chapter, Peter denied the fact that he was with Jesus but his speech betrayed him. It was discovered by the very nature of his voice, his accent, and his choice of words that he was, indeed, from Galilee.) Body language often

¹⁷⁴ Renée Larrier, Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean, (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2006), 83.

¹⁷⁵ Larrier, 83.

accompanies the spoken word, giving further interpretation of meaning. Not only is language conveyed by voice, but by graphic symbols that are traced, sculpted, painted, tattooed, or woven. Voices are also inscribed on various sites: pot lids, madras, pagnes and finally on page.

There are various nuances in Creole as a language understood by those who use it day-by-day. The proverbs, devinettes, and metaphors capture the meanings in short and often poetic verbiage. The expression “*la bèl pawòl*” differs in intrinsic value from the French “*Quel beau parleur*”. In the Creole version, it is the word that is beautiful, while in the French expression it is the speaker who speaks beautifully. The “*belle parole*” includes expressions “*natif-natal*”, coming from “*la campagne profonde*”. The story-teller in his rural setting accompanies his “*contes*” with gestures, dynamics of voice and other vocal gymnastics to pose his “*Krik*” (*Vous m’écoutez*), waiting for his “*Krak*” (*Nous sommes prêts*). Another expression used which introduces a devinette is “*tim-tim*”. These are often humorous riddles which arouse the interest of the listener and are used before more serious import. The value of the proverb is that it imparts wisdom in “*tipawòl*” (*petites paroles*). These short phrases are worth more than long discourses. “*Pour qu’un proverbe ait toute sa force, il faut le*

prononcer au bon moment, avec le ton sentencieux l'énergie continue des consonnes et la musicalité des voyelles.”¹⁷⁶

Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernabé, and Raphael Confiant “view Creole as the ‘primordial’ language to which Caribbean writers return in order to enrich their enunciation, to integrate it, and to go beyond it.”¹⁷⁷

Chamoiseau, in his prize-winning novel *Anton d'enfance*, writes in French, but his language is heavily seasoned with Creologisms, both linguistic and cultural. He speaks of his mother, Man Ninotte, who speaks Creole to her beloved animal, “Ti-anmay soti en z`eb mwen (petite marmaille sortez de mes pieds)”. When enraged, her tone and language reflect her mood:

C'était un temps où la langue créole avait de la ressource dans l'affaire d'injurier...Il y avait un marronage dans la langue. C'est pourquoi...la langue créole est un bel espace pour les frustrations enfantines, et possède un impact souterrain de structuration psychique inaccessible aux élévations établies de la langue français.¹⁷⁸

Patrick Chamoiseau mentions the body movements and facial expressions which accompany the verbiage (la langue créole dans ses oraisons muettes).

The colonized subject suffered as a result of the dichotomy between her native language and religion, and the imposed language and religion of

¹⁷⁶ Ralph Ludwig, *Écrire la <<parole de nuit>> : la nouvelle littérature antillaise*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 187.

¹⁷⁷ Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernabé, and Raphael Confiant, *Eloge de la Creolité* (Paris: Gallimard /Presses Universitaire Creoles, 1989), 14.

¹⁷⁸ Chamoiseau, *Anton d'enfance*. Paris: Hatier, 1990; Gallimard, 1993. Re-publié comme *Une Enfance créole I, Antan d'enfance* avec une nouvelle préface, Gallimard, 1996, 155-156.

the Other. Her African roots remain hidden in her soul and are revealed in the bosom of her family. Her secret language and religion are entwined, mutually dependent upon each other. The language inherited from Africa, the home of her ancestors, gradually blended with the proscribed language of the country of her captivity, becoming, in effect, the Creole language which is spoken today in the privacy of one's home. The religion practiced in public is the ordained religion of the Catholic Church, while the native religion, nurtured privately, hails back to Africa with all its ritual and symbolism. Confusion of language and religion inhibited the colonized subject in her search for identity.

The rulings concerning languages and religion were originally authorized by Louis XIII in 1633, as it was piously argued that slavery would rescue the blacks of Africa from idolatry and gain souls for Christ. The trade was, at first, just a slight trial, but by 1664, "La Traite" began sending slaves to all of the French West Indies. Père Labat, the historian who wrote *Le Nouveau Voyage aux Iles d'Amérique* in 1772, reported the conditions of slavery in the New World. He deplored the religious practice by the indentured "noirs" who commingled African idolatry with Christian liturgy, thus accommodating the new gods while retaining the old. Louis XIV, foreseeing this possibility, had already issued his famous *Code Noir* to

regularize slavery and religion in his island possessions. This document was intended to codify the rules for Master and Slave. Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1616-1683) prepared the edict and it was promulgated by the King in 1643.

Religious rule was well pronounced in this famous order: slaves were to be baptized, given religious instruction, and sent to mass on Sundays. Articles 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 dealt with Catholicism, indicating the importance of practicing this religion to the exclusion of any other. The expulsion of any other faith was ordered. Rules were also issued concerning language barriers. The *Code Noir* prohibited African slaves of the same language origin from working together on the same plantation, making it difficult for the Africans to maintain their own language and form cohesive groups. The *Code Noir* would have provided a relatively enduring situation for the slaves if it had not been administered by greedy, insensitive planters. They manipulated the rules to further demonize the slaves, compelling them to secretly hold fast to their beliefs, ideologies, and secret language.

Further derogatory results of the Code Noir alienated the people of color, and forced them into an historical void and a subsequent loss of identity. They suffered personal humiliation, individual isolation, and an enforced obedience to the Other. Interdependence was a necessary solution for cohesion and an act of survival for the women in the slave community.

They depended on each other to create the home and hold their society together. According to Ann Armstrong Scarborough, who wrote the Afterword to *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*:

Teaching the children and transmitting the culture that evolved on the plantation, these women also often dominated the white master's entire household: his bedroom, his nursery, and his kitchen. Women thus became the mainstay of Caribbean culture...¹⁷⁹

These women secretly indoctrinated their own children with the religious beliefs that were inherent to their culture and spoke in the language that could not be understood by the Other.

The influence of religion and language is embedded in the literature of the Caribbean, and is included in the context of the two books which I have chosen for this chapter: *Moi, Tituba Sorcière...Noire de Salem*, written by Maryse Condé, and *Léonora: L'histoire enfouie de la Guadeloupe*, by Dany Bébel-Gisler. Women's voices are heard through the language they speak and conveyed in the literature they create. History, memory, myth and ritual are included in the novels that I have chosen to demonstrate the influence of language and religion in the lives of the protagonists and in their contemporary venue. In the former novel, Maryse Condé exposes the evils wrought by slavery and religious fanaticism. The story of Tituba is based on historical evidence—the official history of the witches of Salem—but Condé

¹⁷⁹ Maryse Condé, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 188.

did not permit the emotional trials of the protagonist to be confined to the social issues of that era. Her voice transcends the Salem witch trials and becomes universal in its appeal for black feminist recognition. In order to be historically correct, the novel had to be placed in the appropriate venue. The historical Tituba was actually Barbadian, and Condé uses Barbados instead of the French-speaking Guadeloupe as the Caribbean locale. It was here that Tituba was accused of practicing the art of healing and ancestor reverence, making her a target for the Salem witch hunt. She was unjustly condemned, but as a Caribbean woman of African descent, Tituba demonstrates the influence of spiritual and religious values, which prevent her from seeking revenge against those who condemn her. Maryse Condé undertook the task of re-writing “l’histoire vraie”, founded on the official history of the witches of Salem. At the end of this historically-based tale, the author rejects history for myth. The literary art takes precedence; Tituba dies and returns after death. The novel is structured to portray the early settlers of Salem against a background of ice and snow, practicing their contorted religious beliefs, and brutally treating women who did not conform to their strict standard of moral values. Maryse Condé, in her attempt to explore the basic motive for this tale, gives her readers a taste of the combination of the language mixture of French and Creole which conveys the subtle distinctions of color, class,

and society. The English version, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, was translated by Richard Philcox in 1992.

The other novel that I have chosen has been classified by some scholars as a socioethnological case study that documents the economic, social and cultural history of Guadeloupe. Dany Bébel-Gisler analyzes the development of the Creole culture. Her book is characterized as “hyperintellectual” and is compared to such texts as Edouard Glissant’s *Le discours antillais* (1981) and Mayse Condé’s *L’Héritage de Caliban* (1992).¹⁸⁰ Bébel-Gisler attributes the inception of her book to the impact of slavery on the life and culture of her community. She says that slavery “est le premier trait spécifique de la colonisation du nouveau monde et qui marquera profondément la société guadeloupéenne et toutes ses productions culturelles...”¹⁸¹ The forces which influenced the growth of the Antilles came from the people who created this “marginal” Creole. Those who opposed the new, budding culture were the colonial powers. These two opposing elements served to create the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Caribbean. *Leonora, The Buried Story of Guadeloupe* is the real-life testimony of Leonora, who witnessed the passage of Guadeloupe from colony to department of France. Although she is aware of the cultural

¹⁸⁰ Bébel-Gisler, *Leonora*, 279. (notes to Afterword)

¹⁸¹ Dany Bébel-Gisler, *Langue Créole Force Jugulée* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1976), 56.

changes in her country, Leonora clings to her religion and her preferred Creole dialect. She represents the rural, poor segment of Guadeloupean society and her story discloses the buried history of Guadeloupe. The original French version was *Léonora: L'histoire enfouie de la Guadeloupe*, in which Leonora tells her story, in Creole, to Dany Bébel-Gisler. This book, neither fiction nor biography, attests to the author's "passionate interest in Creole, both as a language and as a cultural practice."¹⁸² The influence of French domination gives rise to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Caribbean.

The Creole language is not accepted in all societies. It is considered beneath the dignity of many to revert to a language of the lower class. Leonora quotes their diatribe at a local meeting, "Look at them, listen to them, I don't like that kind of a person. Teachers speaking in Creole! What do they take us for? Animals? I don't even talk Creole to my goats!"¹⁸³ Creole disturbs some people; they dismiss ideas presented in Creole. "Words must flow in French to be considered important." Historically the majority of Antillean authors have opted to write in French, but in recent years some have written in Creole. Across race and class lines, most of the people are bilingual in French and Creole; Creole at home, French learned at school and

¹⁸² Dany Bébel-Gliser *L'histoire enfouie de la Guadeloupe* (Paris: Seghers, 1985), 262.

¹⁸³ Bébel-Gliser, *Lenoroa*, 140.

used in public discourse. The book characterizes the uneven blend of Antillean French and Guadeloupean Creole within the framework of francophone Caribbean literature.

In this conflict of language and religion, growing old with dignity is a difficult goal to achieve. The protagonists, Tituba and Leonora, as preservationists of different aspects of their culture, both grow old with dignity. In her spirituality, Tituba maintains her religion; Leonora maintains her propensity for Creole. Tituba was not chronologically old when she died, but she became old in the sense of having survived a life of untold misery and humiliation, only to die bravely with grace and dignity. Leonora gained the epithet of dignity in telling the true but undisclosed story of Guadeloupean society. As she grew older, she was able to voice the political, social, and personal struggle of the women of her community. Leonora succeeded in giving cultural authenticity, a valued ideological commodity, to those searching for historical-cultural truth. She gained dignity in her review of the language, politics, sex, and religion of her country.

The two heroines lived in different eras and different countries, and are influenced by the religion of their ancestors. They are both influenced by mythical-mystical powers that interpret their actions and their reactions to life's experiences. Both Tituba and Leonora practice witchcraft, although

they do not use that term in their own minds or in the texts. Tituba's religious/spiritual accomplishments delve into the nature of Animism,* practiced in Guadeloupe. Lucien Peytraud, in *L'Esclavage aux Antilles avant 1789*, speaks of Animism, which is a religion where everything is animated, and has a life and a will:

la c'est un animal, un léopard, un crocodile, un serpent; ici c'est un arbre, une pierre, un rocher; ailleurs, c'est un lac, une rivière, la mer, la lune."¹⁸⁴

Maryse Condé says that it is the women of the Antilles who are mostly influenced by Animism and by their leaders, the “quimboiseurs.”

Tituba communicates with the dead; Leonora does as well. Consistent with her belief in Animism, taught to her by Mama Yaya, Tituba is familiar with the forces of the invisible world. She speaks often to her departed mother, who gives her motherly advice. Leonora also has spirits who visit her during the night. A dear friend who had recently died instructed Leonora about the preparation of a bath, which would cure her sickness. She followed her advice, using the prescribed ingredients of witchcraft medicine, which she gathered in the woods. Leonora was temporarily relieved of her pain and suffering. She also consulted a *gadèdzafé* (a person involved with magical powers, a sorcerer, a clairvoyant, a magician or one who works with God or

* On page 9, Mama Yaya teaches Tituba “everything lives, has a soul, and breathes. That everything must be respected.”

¹⁸⁴ Lucien Pierre Peytraud *L'Esclavage aux Antilles avant 1789*, (Paris: Hachette, 1897), 155.

the Devil) to cure her of her prolonged illness. “When a gadèdzafé sets out to find the answer for you, he always discovers something new. You must visit him often and spend lots of money.”¹⁸⁵

Tituba was accused of causing the sickness and subsequent demise of her mistress, Susanna Endicott. In retaliation, the dying woman sent this free young girl into slavery, knowing that she would not object, as it was her only recourse for remaining with her lover, John Indian. Even in death, Susanna Endicott threatened Tituba in a dream: “Alive or dead, I shall haunt you.”¹⁸⁶ Leonora was also falsely blamed. A suspicious neighbor believed that Leonora had caused a rupture between her and her husband, and in her jealousy cursed her in retaliation. Leonora was innocent, but the woman blamed Leonora for witchcraft.

There is a thread of magic and mysticism that is woven into Caribbean narratives, both colonial and post-colonial. This phenomenon is based upon the religious beliefs that transcend and persist in the inner consciousness of those claiming African roots. Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Haiti delve into the mysticism of religion. Man Cia taught Télumée as Man Yaya taught Tituba the magic of herb medicine. Both students of magical women became accustomed to use their knowledge of herbs and other plants for healing,

¹⁸⁵ Bébel-Gisler, *Leonora*, 127.

¹⁸⁶ Condé, 78.

and not for committing evil. The same magic in Haiti's primitive religion existed in a belief, both feared and revered. It exists today in its own country and in the hearts and practices of its migrants.

Haiti is the third country studied in my work concerning language and religion. It has its own Creole dialect and its own religious cult, despite the fact that French is the official language and Catholicism is the prescribed religion. These regulations concerning the culture of the country have not changed, even though Haiti gained its independence in 1804. Through political unrest and military intrusions, the people have maintained their practice of Voodooism. Haitian Vodou is not a religion of the privileged or for those in power. It is the religion of the people and is the repository for wisdom accumulated by a people who have lived through slavery, disease, repression, and violence. The African slaves brought their religion and their language with them. These were necessary ingredients for survival: "The Vodou spirits represent the powers at work in and on human life. The wholeness of the spirits—their ability to contain conflicting emotions and to model opposing ways of being in the world—gives Vodou its integrity as a

religion.”¹⁸⁷ This religion is still practiced in contemporary Haiti and in Haitian immigrant communities.

According to Karen McCarthy Brown, in *Mama Lola, A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, in Haitian Vodou, there are three dominant female spirits who belong to a group called Ezili. The first is Lasyrenn, the mermaid who links ancient African senses of womanpower to waterpower. The second spirit in this group is Ezili Dantò, the hardworking mother figure who is present in times of trouble but has an affliction due to her participation in a previous battle. She was wounded, left with a scar on her cheek and unable to speak. She utters only "dey-dey-dey." This is a symbolic message; women do not have a voice in this culture. There are heard only as “babil.” The structure of silence in women of this culture is the imposed silence of subjugation in speech, the written word, and cries of inner frustrations. Sometimes, there is violence in Dantò, and she is known as Ezili Je Wou (Ezili of the Red Eyes). She can rage and destroy. She is black in color, in marked contrast to the third Ezili spirit, who is pure white. Known as Ezili Freda, she is elegant, flirtatious, and takes her identity and worth from her relationships with men. Freda is sexy and pretentious, and

¹⁸⁷ Helen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 98.

drapes herself in romance, wealth, and social stature. As a model, Freda is hard to follow, but women old and young try to please this fastidious spirit by emulating her appearance and demeanor. The three Ezili spirits have a great influence on women's everyday lives by giving them a voice and empowering them to gain social and economic independence. Helen McCarthy Brown was fascinated by the breath and scope of the Voudou religion and studied it firsthand under the tutelage of Mama Lola. She was able to write her book with great authenticity, with the material she garnered from her attendance at the ritual performances. Helen found that God was included in several of the Voudou powers. Mama Lola told her one day that even though God would help her with difficult problems, sometimes He was very busy and she had to solve them by herself. Thus practicality and religion go hand in hand. The religion of Voudou has not discontinued its influence on many Hatians today and is often referred to in modern literary recits.

Edwidge Danticat wrote *Breath, Eyes, Memory* in 1994 in which she recalls the Voudou of her youth in Haiti and in Brooklyn. The actant, Sophie, puts pins in the Voudou doll to ward off evil spirits and at the end of the book, at her mother's funeral, she beats the ground with a huge cane stalk to crush the vodou devil that haunted her mother and herself. Her

grandmother, Grandme Ifé, rushes to console her. She portrays the same kind of grandmother as Reine Sans Nom and M’ManTine. She had been the teacher of the language and religion that never left the soul of Sophie. In Creole, Grand Ifé asks “Parol gin pié zel?” (“The words can give wings to your feet”) The words for Sophie were sad words, but they echoed the words of her ancestors: “There is a place where women are buried in clothes the color of flame, where we drop coffee on the ground for those who went ahead, where the daughter is never fully a woman until her mother passes on before her.”¹⁸⁸

Another modern heroine who remembers the language and history of her ancestral past is Emma in *Le Livre D’Emma* (2001), by Marie-Célie Agnant. Emma originally comes from Port-au-Prince and is found by the reader in a psychiatric hospital in Montreal. It is in this confined space that Emma narrates her tragic story to Flore, with whom she speaks only Creole, the language of her ancestors. This modern woman who speaks French fluently and completed her studies in Bordeaux is obsessed by the cultural aspects of her ancestral lineage. Emma is captivated by the history of her ancestors and is driven to emulate their desperate dreams and legends. She committed the act of infanticide, killing her baby daughter as many of her

¹⁸⁸ Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1994), 234.

ancestors had, to prevent a life of misery. Before her suicide, Emma wants to tell the story of her ancestors to the world : “C’est dans leurs cales que tout s’est écrit, dans les plis de la mer, dans le vent gorgé de sel et dans cette odeur de sang. Trop de sang, tant de sang”.¹⁸⁹

Returning to the title of this chapter, Language and Religion, and its analysis of the books involved, one realizes that there are some unanswered questions: Was Tituba falsely accused of witchcraft in the Salem trials? Maryse Condé admits that she had no prior knowledge of witchcraft:

The recipes that I give in the novel are merely recipes that I found in seventeenth-century books: how to cure people with certain plants, what prayers to say in certain circumstances... I found that in books printed and published in America or in England.¹⁹⁰

Condé firmly believes that Tituba was falsely accused because she was using her craft for the good of her community. One could argue that she was in love with her protagonist, and like Arthur Miller in *The Crucible*, defended her witchcraft affiliations:

Isn’t the ability to communicate with the invisible world, to keep constant links with the dead, to care for others and heal: a gift of nature that inspires respect, admiration, and gratitude? Consequently, shouldn’t the witch be cherished and revered rather than feared?¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Marie-Célie Agnant, Le Livre d’Emma, (Haiti: Editions Mémoire, 2001), 14.

¹⁹⁰ Condé, 206. (Afterword, An Interview with Maryse Condé, Ann Armstrong Scarborough)

¹⁹¹ Maryse Condé, I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 17.

Miller and Condé both examine moral right and wrong in the New England Puritan society, and they condemn the narrow-minded, hypocritical Puritan attitude of those who are not of their persuasion. Condé and Miller also use the Salem witch trials of the seventeenth century (1692) to attack the social circumstances of their respective decades in history.

There is another unanswered question—is it true that Tituba used her gift of magic to heal? Healing is at the heart of the religions that African slaves bequeathed to their descendents. The healers, which one finds throughout the Caribbean, combine the skills of a medical doctor, a psychotherapist, a social worker, and a priest. Elizabeth Parris, for example, was sick and about to die. Tituba said, “Up until then I had not called on the supernatural to care for Elizabeth Parris. I had merely kept her warm and had her swallow scalding hot drinks...That night I decided to use my powers.”¹⁹² When Tituba realized that she did not have the required herbs for practicing her art, she substituted, odorless flowers for *salapertuis**, the panacea for all body ills, which grew only in the foothills of Barbados. The next day, Goodwife Parris had color in her cheeks. “Thank you, Tituba! You saved my life.”¹⁹³

¹⁹² Condé, 45.

* This herb is a literary invention by the author.

¹⁹³ Condé, 45.

Herb wisdom and lore have persisted in magical power as the most ancient and most practical form of magic. Plants could heal and plants could kill. Plants harbor magical powers, forces that could be harnessed and directed to fill a need. Herb magic provides practical solutions to problems. To practice herb magic one must know the particular power of each plant. Man Yaya taught Tituba the basics of her magical powers, including the importance of herbs for “healing wounds and ulcers...for loosening the tongues of thieves...those that calm epileptics. Those that put words of hope on the lips of the angry, the desperate, and the suicidal.”¹⁹⁴ Scott Cunningham’s *Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs* does not refer to negative magic: “The power behind herb magic is formless, shapeless, eternal...To fulfill a need, just manipulate the herbs to give their powers direction.”¹⁹⁵ He believes that when negative magic is practiced, the suffering caused to others spills into the Magician’s life until he or she is destroyed.

Tituba learns more about the magical properties of herbs, when applied correctly, from Judah White, a spiritual friend sent by Mama Yaya. Goody Judah remains in the village as a constant reminder that Tituba is not alone. When Tituba holds the fearful Betsy in her arms, she soothes her,

¹⁹⁴ Condé, 9.

¹⁹⁵ Scott Cunningham, *Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs* (Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2006), 4-5.

“Tituba knows the words that cure every sickness, that heal every wound, and untie every knot. Don’t you know that?”¹⁹⁶

These words became the death-knoll for Tituba. It provoked the feigned hysteria displayed by the children of the village, causing her to be labeled a “witch.” *Le Petit Robert* defines witchcraft as:

Sorcellerie—magie de caractère populaire ou rudimentaire, qui accorde une grande place aux pratiques secrètes, illicites ou effrayantes (invocation des morts, appel aux esprits malfaisants...) Lors de son procès, Jeanne d’ Arc fut accusée de sorcellerie.

The New Oxford Dictionary classifies a witch as a “woman supposed to have dealings with the devil or evil spirits; witchcraft use of magic or sorcery—sorcerer of primitive people.”

Tituba does indeed exemplify the definitions of a witch and is construed as such in the Massachusetts Puritan community. Even her Jewish lover and master, Benjamin d’Azevedo, affectionately tells her “tu es ma sorcière bien-aimée”.¹⁹⁷ This of course, is a term of endearment which he used in thanks for using her witchcraft for producing the mysterious appearance of his beloved dead wife.

Witchcraft, in its various forms, is still practiced today and many volumes on it are visible in libraries and bookstores. In her *Wicca: The Complete Craft*, D. J. Conway explains: “The primary reason that Wicca and

¹⁹⁶ Condé, 61.

¹⁹⁷ Condé, 133.

Paganism have survived and continue to be the chosen path of so many people is that these religions are adaptable to our individual needs, as well as open to change to fit the changing times.”¹⁹⁸ To the women who practice it, Wicca is not magic, but a religion. Dissatisfied with orthodox religion, they feel that there must be a better way. In fact, Wicca and Paganism are now considered legitimate religions, recognized by the United States government, and are even listed in the books of military chaplains. Such recognition, however, is not universal; witches still face persecution by members of Orthodox churches. Such religions fail to recognize that healing, not malice, is central to their faith. The Burning Times could happen once more if those who believe in religious freedom are not vigilant.

The lives of the two protagonists remain influenced by their culture; the religion of Tituba, and the language of Leonora. The Epilogue in the English version of *Tituba* tends to mitigate the passion of her death. Her return to life as a working spirit is quite satisfying. She finally finds a child of her own, Samantha, and has the joy of teaching her the spiritual secrets that she is allowed to share; the hidden power of herbs, and the language of animals. In the Postface of Leonora, which begins with a quote from Jeanne Hayward’s *Mother Death*: “Let us recover the speech that they tore from

¹⁹⁸ D.J. Conway, Wicca: The Complete Craft (Berkeley and Toronto: Crossing Press, 2001), 32.

us....” Dany Bébel-Gisler translates the creole of Leonora, “Creole is our natural spur. In our mother’s bellies we’re already bathed in it...French is a borrowed garment. They brought it to us...We found ourselves trapped.”¹⁹⁹

Leonora conveys the story of her life to her narrator, who translates it from Creole to French. Leonora persists in saying “we must not see ourselves in the eye of the Other...how can we vanquish the colonial night and allow the sun to shine for us Guadeloupeans?”²⁰⁰

Vera M. Kutzinski and Cynthia Mesh-Ferguson claim that *Leonora* is placed within the rich and diverse popular cultures of Caribbean women.

Leonora makes us realize that this history [...]is polyvocal and polyphonous, and that it includes black women as cultural producers. Leonora may be an old, uneducated woman, but her language, her perceptions, and her imagination are [...] eminently literate [...]²⁰¹

Despite all the training in school, church, and army authorized by the Metropole, the majority of Guadeloupan peasants and workers “think and speak in Creole, eat yams and breadfruit, dance and bury their dead to the sound of the *gwoka*.”²⁰²

It is interesting to note the formation of Creole as it is known today. The synthesis of the French language and some of the African languages such as Swahili, Woloff and Peulh resulted in present day Creole:

¹⁹⁹ Bébel-Gisler, *Leonora*, 194.

²⁰⁰ Bébel-Gisler, *Leonora*, 234.

²⁰¹ Bébel-Gisler, *Leonora*, 278.

²⁰² Bébel-Gisler, *Leonora*, 235.

je prends (présent)—man pran I take—man ka pran—I am taking

je prenais (imperfect)—man te ka pran – I was taking

j'ai pris (passé composé)—man pran – I took

je prendrai (futur)—man te pran – I will take

j'aurais pris (conditionnel passé) I would have taken—man te kai pran

j'eusse pris (Conditionnel passé deuxième forme) —man se te pran

j'aurais été pris—yo te kai man pran moin – I would have been taken

For the superlative, the adjective is repeated—a big man = an gro
gro nom

The Creole language is in fact an act of revolution, a refusal to conform to the powers that be. It has modern voices that shout to have it recognized. The identity of a race conforms to its language and religion. The words of Glissant, Chamoiseau, Confiant, and Bernabé (not forgetting Dany Bébel-Gisler) have finally been heard: Mayor Bloomberg signed an executive order which established a uniform language policy for all city agencies that directly interact with New Yorkers. It stated that in addition to English they will be required to communicate in the six foreign languages most commonly spoken in the city: Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean, Italian, and French Creole. The interpretation services would provide oral

and written translation of essential public documents in the designated languages.²⁰³

French Creole is finally considered a language in its own right. As usual, there are objectors to the bill, purporting that it is against the city's policies to provide languages other than English. The arriving immigrants have come to participate in "the American Dream" and should learn to communicate in English. It is still noteworthy that in this study, French Creole was added to the list of modern languages, demonstrating the result of firm application to a cause.

Language continues to be a vital part of the culture of a community and a country. Words are added to common usage and to dictionary documentary. Diderot in the 18th century already thought that language was an accurate measure of people's thoughts and intellectual progress. His solution to the constant mutability of language was to develop a system of references connecting words to each other and showing their etymological roots in Greek which he considered to be the universal language of scholars. Maryse Condé and Bébel-Gisler along with many other Antillean writers have recourse to Creole to capture the true feeling of what they are trying to communicate when standard French is lacking. In this way their novels

²⁰³ New York Sun, April 2008.

written primarily in French but are sprinkled with Creole phrases to add another dimension to their narratives. Language is arbitrary and requires a common set of reference. The use of Creole goes beyond the simple choice to use one word over another; it evokes a whole culture. According to Bébel-Gisler, using Creole allows the Guadeloupeans to stop seeing themselves through the eyes of the colonizers and would lead to a rediscovery of their own history. She asks, “If the term Nèg mawon no longer struck terror into the hearts of children and threatened the virginity of young girls, but referred to a heroic resistance fighter, more alive than Joan of Arc, Schoelcher, or de Gaulle...?”²⁰⁴ That is not to say that she completely rejects French but that when using language it is important to be vigilant and to ask “Who is thinking? Who is speaking? Is it really me?” Diderot was optimistic in thinking that language would allow him to write down all that humans knew and, therefore, never have to rediscover that which was already known. Similarly, Bébel-Gisler is optimistic in thinking that Creole will allow her people to know who they are.

Language continues to be an important tool in modern thought. Cultural differences are reflected in language. Technological advances and changes in thinking are often reflected in our daily lexicon. Each country

²⁰⁴ Bébel-Gisler, Leonora, 234.

has hidden nuances in language. An article published by *The New York Sun* in April 2008, reports: “The Bush administration has launched a new front in the war on terrorism, this time targeting language.... Federal Agencies are telling their people not to describe Islamic extremists as “jihadists” or “mujahedeen” according to documents obtained by the Associated Press. Lingo such as “Islamofascism” is out too. The reason: such words may actually boost support for radicals among Arab and Muslim leaders by giving them a veneer of religious credibility or by causing offense to “moderates....Language is critical in the war on terror, another document says...”²⁰⁵

Language and religion are not static; they continue to grow and reflect the changes and progress in society. Vocabulary never ceases to grow; one can fathom the progress or the contemporary status of a nation by the changes in its vocabulary. One needs look no further than the American lexicon for evidence of this phenomenon; the rejection of derogatory words to describe minorities is concomitant with the advent of political correctness. One can tell by the language, spoken or written, the historical and sociological changes that affect a society. Michel Foucault was accurate in

²⁰⁵ New York Sun, *Words that Work and Words that Don't: A Guide for Counterterrorism Communication*, April 2008

his analysis of language with regard to the history of a nation and he was prescient in the formation of the vocabulary for its future.

Growing old with dignity, the title of this thesis is reflected in the lives of the two protagonists in the foregoing chapter. Tituba and Lenora both earned dignity in recognition of their valiant lives. Tituba died on the gallows, bravely, innocent of false accusation. Perhaps she was a witch because of her magical powers, but her power was to heal and not to harm. One can imagine her stature as she went unflinchingly to her death. Dignity was in her persona.

Leonora wanted to preserve a culture, the culture of her people and her country – Guadeloupe. She unearthed the hidden story of Guadeloupe while raising her thirteen children. The world was to be made aware of the richness of the culture and the beauty of their language. She was able to resist violence and act on behalf of her beloved people. “A people thirsting after a human future, after justice, independence and dignity.”²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Bébel-Gisler, 235.

Chapter IV: Sexual Abuse and Survival

“Come lie with me sister.” (II Samuel 13.11) Those were the words of Amnon as he sought to defile his sister, Tamar. She complied, but suffered her sin in silence. Her other brother, Absalom, avenged his sister’s shame by killing Amnon, his brother. William Faulkner, adapting this biblical tale of passion and incest in his novel *Absalom, Absalom*²⁰⁷ repeats the story of a brother, who in his attempt to prevent his sister from an incestuous marriage, kills the prospective husband, even though the two young men had been long-standing friends.²⁰⁸ The sin of incest is manifest in many countries of the world. Although it carries the stigma of evil, it persists in spite of religious and secular negation. The sexual drive in man knows no boundaries.

Gisèle Pineau, author and psychiatric nurse, includes in her literary pursuits countless tales of incest and sexual assault visited upon the women of the Francophone countries of the Caribbean. She tells of the silent submission of the black women who were forced to suffer degradation and loss of dignity.

As a young woman, Gisèle Pineau left Paris, the home of her birthplace, and

²⁰⁷ William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom*, (New York: Random House, 1986).

²⁰⁸ Henry killed Bon for would-be incest if he were to marry his sister, Judith. She did not know that Bon was her half brother, and also that he was of mixed race. The novel imitates the biblical story and includes the issue of mixed race: “So it’s the miscegenation, not the incest, which you can’t bear” and then the shot was fired. (Faulkner, 285)

influenced in part by her grandmother, she gravitated to Guadeloupe, the Antillean home of her ancestors. It is here that her practice in psychiatric care gave her greater depth in the analysis of sexual perversion and the survival of the women of her race.*

In her novels and literary treatises, she expresses the plea for the recognition of the black women who had been denied identity by the French colonizers. In her two books included in this chapter, *L'Espérance-macadam* and *Femmes des Antilles Traces et Voix*, Gisèle Pineau seeks to combat the personal and cultural exile suffered by these women during the period of slavery, the post-colonial era, and to the the present day. The unforgotten but untold histories of physical and sexual abuse are revealed in the form of a novel and in a collection of testimonies by contemporary women. Pineau attests that the yoke of silence has been broken and the stories can now be told. The trauma of sexual abuse has not been forgotten and the silence of submission has been transformed into tales of suffering and shame. The black women of the Antilles have been abused by the colonizers and by men of their own race. The scars remain. Pineau vividly paints the disastrous effects of incest and other forms of sexual assault in her work, notwithstanding the violation of woman's most intimate and precious possession—her body. The

* De 1975 à 1979, elle fait des études de lettres à l'université de Nanterre puis des études d'infirmière en psychiatrie au Centre hospitalier spécialisé de Villejuif.

study of Francophone literature in my thesis reveals the link between the Caribbean geography, its unpredictable and often violent temperament, and the same violence as exhibited in its inhabitants.

Countless tales of incest and sexual abuse are attributable to the nature of slavery and the violent sexuality at work in the plantation world and in the atmosphere of newly-found freedom. Gisèle Pineau unravels a violent tale of incest and sexual abuse in *L'Espérance-macadam*. This book deals with the repressed memories of sexual violence suffered by Eliette, a peasant woman whose trauma is unleashed in the fury of two cyclones. The life of Rosette, another woman in the same novel, is jolted by incest within her own family. She refuses to believe that her husband has abused their daughter and hides her pain in song and escape.

The locus for this novel is Savane Mulet, an ill-fated village situated in a remote area of Guadeloupe. It is not a tropical paradise but a land of cyclones and earthquakes, tidal waves and eruptions. It was founded by Joab, Eliette's stepfather, who had hoped to find a new home in an untraveled, secluded area in a forest-like setting. Instead it became the chosen territory for souls in transition, supposedly inhabited by the devil. People who suffered life's inequalities and an inability to cope with inner depression descended upon this land, including those who smoked "Zeb" (marijuana) to escape

everyday violence. “Combien de fois ma manman a maudit mon beau-père Joab de l’avoir enterée vive à Savane Mulet. Si loin du regard du Dieu, disait-elle.” Surely this was the spot where God deposed “des anges rebelles.”²⁰⁹ At first, the newly arrived who searched for refuge planted their *huttes* with care, but as Savane Mulet became known as a shelter for all kinds of dispossessed souls, the original forest became a treeless, barren, ungodly piece of earth where, “La nature n’avait rien à planter, ni récolter”.²¹⁰ Originally built as a site of marronage and resistance, Savane Mulet became a site of evil and violence. “C’était plus derrière le dos du Bon Dieu mais dans la chambre même du diable... C’était devenu Ti-Ghetto”.²¹¹ Joab died before he could see the changes wrought upon the face of his paradise. “Y avait plus que la désolation au paradis de Joab.”²¹²

Savane Mulet was the scene of multiple crimes. Sexual offense was rampant and incest loomed as its most devastating sin. Incest is defined by Webster as “the crime of cohabitation or sexual commerce between persons related within the degree wherein marriage is prohibited by law.” It is an unspeakable crime that society keeps hidden under the wraps of secrecy and shame. Its repercussions cause irreparable loss of dignity and genealogical

²⁰⁹ Gisèle Pineau, *L’Espérance-macadam*, (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1995), 23.

²¹⁰ Pineau, 24.

²¹¹ Pineau, 25.

²¹² Pineau, 28.

complications. “Rien vu rien entendu...is the oft-repeated refrain as witnesses decline to assume responsibility.”²¹³ One pretends to be oblivious to this societal taboo.

Edouard Glissant speaks of incest complicating the genealogical family tree, obliterating relationships and causing a loss of identity within the plantation colonies. As he says in *La Case du Commandeur*, “N’importe quel colon engrosse une esclave, attend treize ans que la mulâtresse produite soit à même d’enfanter à son tour; alors il l’engrosse pour son plaisir.”²¹⁴

This cold observation summarizes the violent sexuality at work in the plantation world. The terms, *engrossir* and *produite* come from the vernacular in relation to the animal world. The raped girl is reduced to animal status, a profit-earning commodity. The term *plaisir* gives the master exclusive bedding rights, resulting in rape and incest. The genealogical tree is doomed: the master makes a slave big with child, thirteen years later, he rapes the daughter, becoming the father and the grandfather of the new offspring.²¹⁵ The plantation families destroyed the hope for battered women to achieve an identity. The warped history becomes impossible to chart.

Glissant expresses his abhorrence of rape, incest, and particularly the horror

²¹³ Renee Larrier, *Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean*, (Florida: University of Florida Press, 2006), 96.

²¹⁴ Edouard Glissant, *La case du commandeur*, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1997), 122-123.

²¹⁵ Valérie Loichot, 48-49.

of sexual abuse of children. Controversial behavior such as abortion or infanticide—both punishable by the slave owner seeking maximum returns on his investment—often followed violent assault. Self and filial destruction become methods of escape from untenable situations. Although infanticide has a heart-wrenching effect on the slave community, it is understandable “and is presented as the logical corollary to motherly tenderness. As in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, killing a child in the oppressive context of slavery is a motherly act of love and protection.”²¹⁶

Incest is the pervading undercurrent in *L’Espérance Macadam*. Gisèle Pineau weaves her painful account of the trauma caused by incest within the framework of two tropical hurricanes. She demonstrates how natural disasters such as hurricanes and cyclones destabilize both physical weather patterns and human emotions. The disastrous hurricane known as the Cyclone of ‘28 has since become a part of Caribbean historical and cultural myths. In keeping with the parallel of the strength of nature and the violence of human nature, Pineau represents the story of women intertwined with natural catastrophe. She emphasizes the pain that women must endure due to the legacy of patriarchal rape. This novel adds an interesting dimension to the correlation

²¹⁶ Valerie Loichot, Orphan Narratives : The Postplantation Literature of Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison, and Saint-John Perse, (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 50.

between physical and human geography.* Natural disasters can create tragic human geographies.

The imagery that Pineau paints throughout the text evokes the violence of nature as compared to the violence of humans. This theme is woven into the text from its opening pages describing the cyclone of 1928 to the closing pages which describe the devastating effects of cyclone Hugo in 1989. “Dehors, la ville craquait de toutes parts sous les assauts du vent et les fléaux que lançait la pluie poussée par le Cyclone ivre....Et puis, il y eut un terrible chuintement, déchirure de chair et fracas d’os, comme si la terre s’ouvrait en deux pour laisser entrer le fer du Cyclone...”²¹⁷ The description of the cyclone is symbolic of an incestuous rape of Mother Earth, which is inflicted upon her by wild winds. The drunken Cyclone is anthropomorphized, becoming a drunken man; both are natural elements that cause chaos and destruction. The violence is evoked throughout this quote to describe the assault on nature, particularly in the deafening noise, *le fracas* or fracas. *Le chuintement* or violence symbolizes the tearing of Mother Earth’s flesh, her being cleaved into two, breaking her bones to be penetrated by the phallic symbol of iron that forces his entry. It is interesting to note that the Cyclone is drunk; the

* Biological geography: has to do with the relation of living things to their physical environment, as evidenced in their distribution, habits, etc. (Webster’s New International Dictionary, Second Edition, Unabridged)

²¹⁷ Pineau, 215.

drunkenness is symbolic of the excessive, irrational force behind the cyclone that inflicts a myriad of visible and invisible scars upon Mother Earth. It is a cataclysmic, catastrophic event that wreaks havoc on people's lives. The monstrous act of incest is compared to the most ferocious winds, provoking emotional upheaval, lasting pain, and suffering. Gisèle Pineau describes the cyclone as whirling winds which rape the landscape through a circular construction that grows more and more dense; one sees a father committing an act of violence upon the daughter.

Another cyclone which ravaged Savane Mulet in 1981 also led to rape and incest. After many trees were destroyed in front of Rosan's home, he had enough space to build the room of infamy. Here, in the privacy of a large room, furnished with a large bed and walled off from the rest of the house, he repeatedly raped his daughter. He built it quickly, "comme s'il ressentait brutalement l'étroitesse des lieux et l'urgence d'agrandir".²¹⁸ His haste reflected his brutal need to violate his child. Thus the parallel between two incestuous rapes is established as the novel unfolds.

Eliette was raped by her father during the hurricane of 1928. Using the cyclone to symbolize Eliette's father and his monstrous act, her mother called him (as well as the cyclone) Ti-Cyclone or La Bête, to hide his true identity.

²¹⁸ Pineau, 152.

The father and the cyclone are super-imposed, sharing an identity and even a name. Pineau refers to him as a snake: “Véçu soixante ans avec un cyclone niché en dedans d’elle comme un serpent qui étouffait tous les bébés qu’elle aurait pu porter, tous les poupons à qui elle aurait aimé donner ses tétés à sucer. Un cyclone qui avait terrassé l’amour en elle. Une bête longue comme un vers solitaire et sournois qui lui avait mangé les entrailles et la cervelle.”²¹⁹

This quote can have a biblical interpretation—the serpent signifies evil. It is also a phallic symbol that penetrates the womb and causes life-long misery. The storm flattened (*terrassé*) the earth and caused it to be destroyed and barren. Eliette is affected in the same manner. She suffers physically and mentally from the incestuous rape. Her womb was ripped apart, causing sterility in later life, and her brain was damaged, causing aphasia—loss of memory. In later life, a strange feeling—an intuition, not a memory—told her that the cyclone of ’28 was and would always be the most horrendous event which she had ever experienced. As a result, when Hugo, the hurricane of 1989, was whirling through her village many years later, she was not fearful; she was prepared to suffer any of life’s intrangencies: “À la volonté de Dieu! Advienne que pourra”!²²⁰ Old age can exhibit signs of resignation. Eliette even remains passive when sitting on her porch and she hears Rosette beating

²¹⁹ Pineau, 205.

²²⁰ Pineau, 205.

Angela. Confronted with the trauma consuming Rosan's house and family, Eliette cannot react. She forces herself not to listen and turns her head to avoid any involvement in the misery of others. "Elle se redressa dans sa berceuse, testant ces forces".²²¹ Indeed, she is in her sixties and has lived a lonely, unhappy life, but the real impetus behind her inaction is that she subconsciously tries to avoid facing her own trauma, her dissatisfaction in not being able to bear a child, and in not knowing the cause of her early aphasia and her social phobia. She remains passive and the paragraph concludes, "Vieille, elle était vieille".²²²

Eliette has trained herself to ignore the atrocities of which she is only vaguely aware. The harrowing experiences that affect women and children in her community may have been brought on by the natural elements causing havoc between physical and human geographies. Eliette appears to lead a quiet life, safely ensconced in her cabin, but in fact, her body resembles the earth that can be affected at any moment by the earthquake of her dormant memories rising up and destroying her fragile peace. "Comme la terre pouvait être secouée de tremblements, les cyclones chavirer les montagnes, la mer emporter la vie, il savait qu'en deça des façades, belles figures et douces

²²¹ Pineau, 76.

²²² Pineau, 76.

paroles, il y avait des éléments enragés, endormis, prêts à se soulever”.²²³

Historical and natural violence combine with individual experience of abuse and collective trauma to focus on the tension between the person and the community. Natural and unnatural forms of domestic violence constitute a major theme in the work of Gisèle Pineau. “Natural and historical disasters converge to create tragic human geographies.”²²⁴ The novel is wildly rooted in stories of horror and devastation.

The structure of the novel is influenced by Eliette’s infirmity; just as her memory surfaces in fragments, the novel is written in fragmented style. “Memory fragments are stored in “associative networks” in which related thoughts, memories, images, emotions and sensations are linked together.”²²⁵ Being confronted with a similar traumatic event often resuscitates the suppressed memories. Thus the novel begins with Eliette describing the destruction of the landscape that Hurricane Hugo had left, but travels back through time through the snatches of her memory. The shifting winds reflect the volatile story-line as well as the passions of the protagonists. The fragmented narrative is felt through the sudden transitions of time and place, through the unpredictability of action, through the sometimes

²²³ Pineau, 110.

²²⁴ See Chantal Kalis’s article, “Space, Violence and Knowledge in *L’Espérance-macadam*” in *Discursive Geographies*. 2005, 108-109.

²²⁵ Shapiro, F. *Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing: Basic Principles, Protocols and Procedures*. New York: Guilford Press, 1995.

incomprehensible language uttered by the inhabitants of Savane Mulet. The reader is forced to accept the lack of a normal progression of events and is often forced to reread the novel to capture the passion and trauma evidenced by the protagonists. One notices also that the subject varies. When Eliette speaks, the “Je” is predominant, while at other times, it becomes the “Je” of Rosette. The narrative is interspersed with different voices, different pronouns. But it is the third person narrative that dominates. Eliette’s memory is limited, therefore, the “Je” in her case is sublimated. The sequence of events is often difficult to follow, and there is a noticeable repetition of incidents, but eventually the various pieces fit together.

Pineau’s fragmented style allows selected parts of the story to surface and build in small sections, until the end, when the reader and Eliette finally understand the fragments as a whole. The role of the reader is ultimately necessary to capture the sequence of fragmented recits and in putting together the action and movements of the protagonists. The reader works to make sense of the seemingly disjointed story. Similarly, the traumatized woman suffers to make a coherent whole from her disparate memories.

Eliette becomes aware in her scattered memory of the sinful happenings of her village: Glawdys, a single mother, resorts to infanticide by throwing her baby over Néfles bridge. Regis stabs Hortense in a jealous rage. Even

Renélien, the loving husband of Eliette, kicks his first wife because of a burned dinner. The most horrendous crime deals with Hermancia, the dim-witted, singing girl who blamed her pregnancy on the seven men who violated her one by one. Her father killed them all in a rage of retribution as Hermancia continued to sing her song of love. Not wanting the baby, she placed the newborn in a basket and put her on the road to be adopted by anyone. At a later date, Eliette learns how treachery invaded her own life. The abbreviated, fabricated story was told to her piecemeal by her mother, Séraphine, who became aware of her husband's sinful act when he raped Eliette, their daughter, during the hurricane of 1928. In retaliation, she cut off his ear and sent him off into the raging winds. Séraphine cared for her stricken daughter and brought her to the village dressmaker to sew her wounded body, but then spent the rest of her life in madness.

When a traumatized person represses the event that was inflicted upon her, it will remain so until there is something that liberates the suppression of memories. Eliette did not know that she was sexually assaulted by her father. Her trauma was hidden in repressed memory. She had lost her power of speech for three years and when she grew much older, her belly yearned for a child. Her two husbands hoped with her in vain, but her physical damage was too great, although she knew not why. Up until the day of the cyclone of 1989,

the only thing on earth that Eliette wished for, after her disappointments, was the peace of her cabin. She remembers the same feelings of isolation that she felt as a young girl, “Peur des hommes et des cyclones, de leurs yeux mauvais. Marchait avec un chapeau panama pour pas qu’on la remarque.”²²⁶ Eliette now shields her eyes and covers her ears to the violence of Savane-Mulet: “Pas mêler son existence au désordre de Savane. Pas laisser son esprit...bâtir des cathédrales de douleur en son cœur. Yeux et oreilles bouchés, elle luttait pour repousser au loin la peine des autres.”²²⁷ It is interesting to note that one could mentally build cathedrals of misery, the largest architecture of a house of worship, to signify the immensity of the pain. Marraine Anoncia also speaks of a cathedral, “une cathédrale d’oubli”²²⁸ signifying the intensity of her will to forget her hidden pain. Her far-flung relatives desecrated her cathedral by reminding her of that which she chose to forget. Eliette and Anoncia are overwhelmed in dealing with their trauma and their suppressed memories.²²⁹

Reconstituting memory from repressed memory is more complicated when trauma is involved, and the one person who knows of this horrendous indiscretion will not testify. Trauma can occur in natural and man-made

²²⁶ Pineau, 160.

²²⁷ Pineau, 8.

²²⁸ Pineau, 211.

²²⁹ There is an interesting parallel with *Télumée*: Télumée was told by Man Cia that she would be like “a cathédrale sur terre” when she performed her miracles.

disasters, catastrophic mishaps, and medical emergencies. It is common in situations of domestic violence, pedophilia, and incest. It also occurs in victims of child abuse. Trauma is often defined as a coping response and as a consequence of overwhelming situations. The resulting silence surrounding this heinous crime and the repressed memories of its victims perpetuate the anguish and prevent its cessation.

At the outset of the novel, Eliette sees her neighbor Rosan being led away in a police car. She suddenly becomes aware of the familiar look in his eyes, and is disquieted by a flash of unpleasant recollection. At the same time she wonders what crime might have been committed in her neighbor's house. She learns that he was being arrested for sexually abusing his older daughter. The parallel is drawn; Eliette's father sexually abused his daughter, and Rosan sexually abuses Angela, his daughter. (The reader later learns that Rosan is the son of Eliette's own father who, minus one ear, sought refuge in a neighboring town and had a child with a woman half his age.) Angela finally tells her mother of this horrendous act of incest. Rosette, the mother, who had concealed this treachery through denial, had always covered her anguish by singing and dancing to the music of the revolutionary Bob Marley, "*No Woman, No Cry*." (This song is the leitmotif of this novel. It is sung by several women to hide their sorrow and suppress their pain—*No woman, No cry*.)

Rosette refuses to believe that which she secretly suspected and beats her daughter mercilessly until the two come to blows. One could hear the cries and groans of the mother and daughter as “corps à corps, s’arrachant les cheveux, mordant, suant, grignant, griffant.”²³⁰ In vibrant Creole, Rosette told her daughter to leave “Foukan a kaz an mwen.”* A similar story concerning another woman is told by Edouard Glissant in *La Case du Commandeur*. There was a man: “Il a deux filles, il vit ...avec l’aînée, c’est son droit. La femme déjà ridée fait semblant de ne pas voir. Elle ne sait pas si elle déracine l’homme d’un coup de coutelas ou si elle rencogne dans un coin de nuit sans trembler. L’homme entreprend de connaître sa seconde fille; de la garantir contre tous les colons possibles”.^{231*} The father, already guilty of ruining his older daughter, uses the excuse to impregnate his second daughter, for this is a way of preventing intrusion by the master. This monstrous behavior is likened to the father and the son, who in their predilection for incestual sexual satisfaction, claim to protect their daughters with their incestuous behavior. Rosan rationalizes that what he does to her sexually is “ni une faute ni un péché. Il lui disait qu’il avait le droit de la chevaucher comme une jeune

²³⁰ Pineau, 76, 77.

* “Leave my house.”

²³¹ Edouard Glissant, *La case du commandeur*, (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1997), 123.

* There are fathers who resist incestual incursions, as did Pythagore, who, although living alone with Mycéa, did not violate her.

monture, parce qu'elle était sa création".²³² He coerced her into silence and said that the time for his younger daughter would come too: "...qu'il avait le droit, tous les droits..."²³³ According to Pineau and all civilized societies, child abuse and incest are evil. The circular winds of the cyclone symbolize a circle of evil; Rosan and his father committed the same evil act. Rosan was completely unaware that he and his father had committed the same crime, but it is shown that Rosan inherits his aberrant behavior from his father. The vicious circle of evil is completed.

At times, Eliette tries to remember her mother's voice as she told her of the Cyclone of 1928, which pulled *la poutre** from the roof and tore apart the stomach of the little eight-year-old girl. That pain-filled night pushed the mother into madness and the child into muteness and memory-loss. Séraphine told Eliette "c'était à cause du Cyclone 28 qui avait laissé un grand tourbillon dans ma tête".²³⁴ The resulting trauma lasted most of her life. Eliette stood resolutely in the midst of her loneliness, not remembering the cause of her pain until that Sunday and the sight of Rosan sitting in the police car and the

²³² Pineau, 166.

²³³ Pineau, 166.

* *La poutre*: Sustaining beam in the center of a cabin. (used extensively for the central beam in *voudou* ceremonies)

²³⁴ Pineau, 18.

look she recognized in the depth of his eyes. The wheels of memory started to turn.

The concept of repressed memory was originated by Sigmund Freud in his 1896 essay *Zur Aetiologie der Hysterie*.²³⁵ It is used to describe a significant memory, usually of a traumatic nature, that has become unavailable for recall due to some conscious or unconscious mechanism. Amnesia occurs in survivors of trauma. Repressed memories may sometimes be recovered years or decades after the event, triggered off by a particular smell, taste (like the madeleine cookie), or other identifier to the lost memory. For Eliette, the vision of Rosan sitting in the squad car was still nagging her, a disconcerting image of traumatic memory. Other memories of painful events begin to resurface as Eliette hears the screams of Angela and Rosette during that fateful night. In an effort to save her younger sister from similar violence, Angela reports to her mother that Rosan is molesting her. Rosette, does not believe her and is not willing to have her secret fears realized. Violence ensues. Eliette puts her hands over her ears to escape the urgency of injecting herself into the family violence of others, but in the end, by chasing after the child, she rescues her from further pain. Eliette follows her through the wind-

²³⁵ Sigmund Freud, "On the Etiology of Hysteria."

swept country side, and keeps this newly found niece as her own. The prediction of the Haitian fortune-teller finally comes to pass.

Eliette's own tragic story begins to unfold. Her memory of the rape by her father resurfaces when she hears Angela's tale of the same misery. She tries to silence Angela. The story is confirmed, in partial confession, by an aunt who, even when dying, was ashamed to reveal the truth about her wicked brother. For Eliette, the true story becomes liberating. She now knows the story of that fateful night and must no longer live in doubt and seclusion. Knowledge can bring back memory and erase pain and ignorance. And what is more—Eliette survives! She grows old with dignity as did the protagonists in the previous chapters—Télumée, Mariotte, Mycea, Tituba, and Léonora. These characters were able to override the obstacles of life, to survive the oppression of outside influences, and to gain the much sought-after title of dignity. *No woman, No cry.*

Gisèle Pineau chose the title *L'Espérance Macadam* based on her culinary interest in the diaspora. "The title word, *macadam*, a spicy cod and rice dish, a staple of Guadeloupean cuisine among the poor because it is filling, suggests resilience. The hard surface of macadam contrasts with the flimsy, make-shift houses that are vulnerable and carried away by high

winds.”²³⁶ At the center of this novel are women who are vulnerable to the violence of men and are carried away as are the flimsy, make-shift houses. Others interpret the word *macadam* as the hard surface where one’s hopes are dashed to despair. Despite living in a place where dreams are often lost and smashed to bitter pieces, much as hope is smashed on the sidewalk, macadam, the women continue to live while tenaciously holding onto their dreams, their *espérance*. They survive. *No woman, No cry*.

Gisèle Pineau wrote *Femmes des Antilles Traces et Voix* (1998) in collaboration with Marie Abraham, in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery. Their objective was to reconstruct lost memory using historical and imaginative tools. Little documentation remains from this period, except for the scattered accounts of white slave owners. The goal of this literary endeavor was to form a link between the years of slavery and the present day. One finds in this work the individual narratives of women who suffered many types of physical and mental abuse before and after the Abolition in 1848. According to these narratives, one can assess the results of the freedom supposedly enjoyed by the previously enslaved women. Their stories give witness to their being battered and humiliated. Rebellious women performed their tasks with pretended submission, while others performed their

²³⁶ Larrier, *Autofiction and Advocacy in the Franco Caribbean*. 98.

servile duties with tacit resignation. As they worked in the cane fields or in menial jobs, they continued to suffer degrading sexual demands by the masters or by former slaves. They were indeed “objets de tous les désirs et porteuses de toutes les hontes.”²³⁷ Sometimes a woman would lift her skirt to satisfy the ferocious pleasure of a master in exchange for promises of worldly goods or for the hope of producing a mulatto child who could possibly offer her better living conditions and social mobility. The black man would rape her in an attempt to release his inexpressed rage at life’s inequalities or the bitterness of empty freedom, his passion comparable to the rage of the cyclone.

In *Femmes Des Antilles: Traces et Voix*, Pineau memorializes the passionate cries of women who have been abused and violated. In this book, the women express their pain in confessions for public acknowledgement, as opposed to the women in *Macadam*, who keep their pain hidden and suppressed. *Femmes des Antilles* is composed of part historical and part fictional tales of domestic and sexual violence. In the slavery and post-colonial context, natural violence evidences the mixture of individual experiences of violence with collective trauma.

²³⁷ Gisèle Pineau and Marie Abraham, *Femmes des Antilles: Traces et Voix*, (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1998), 10.

Gisèle Pineau and Marie Abraham emphasize the narratives of sexual abuse as well as incest: “Des hommes les prenaient, de la même façon qu’ils avalaient le rhum, grignant dans le plaisir brûlant. Et puis les jetaient, pleines.”²³⁸ Pineau uses words which deeply describe the sexual desire of men as compared to the burning pleasure of alcohol. She then uses three words in this quote to assess the plight of women, “les jetaient pleines”, or he throws them away, pregnant. A preponderance of fatherless homes crowds the landscape. Female figures become the nurturers and culture bearers.

The voices of the battered women were silenced by fear and lack of authentic verification. The accounts of pain and misery arise out of the shadows. Gisèle Pineau, in her study, releases memories of torture including the violence of the whip cast upon nude breasts, the iron collars used as punishment and the heavy rope used to secure the captured bounty. Sexual assault was frequently administered by the Masters, and inhumane treatment was visited upon the female slaves by jealous wives who would put hot pepper on open wounds and “dans tous les trous de mon corps.”* Their tales can now be told. *Leurs voix s’élèvent de l’abîme, et croisent et rencontrent celles des Antillaises d’aujourd’hui. Elles nouent les fils qui les lient à ces femmes du présent.*

²³⁸ Pineau, 14.

* Pineau and Abraham, *Emeline*, 243.

Pineau and Abraham give witness to the fact that sexual abuse was rampant in colonial days, as it is in the post-colonial era. Women often gave their bodies as a means for collecting money to pay their debts. “Donner son corps c’était souvent le dernier recours pour se libérer d’une dette pressante. Donnant donnant, on se servait des hommes qui venaient nous voir comme ils se servaient de nous”.²³⁹ It was a common practice for the man to leave after sowing his seed, and the pregnant woman was left alone to care for the child and provide for his future.

The crime of incest is repeated in *Femmes des Antilles* as Gisèle Pineau tells the story of Sergine. This ten-year-old girl admits to being violated by her father the same day that her mother left for the hospital to give birth to another child. Sergine never knew if her mother was aware of the treachery performed in her home. Her father repeated this evil act at every opportunity. Finally Sergine says: “J’ai été enceinte de lui. C’est horrible, hein! d’être enceinte de son père. Tu as le sentiment d’être un démon et de porter l’enfant du diable.”²⁴⁰

Olga speaks of the blows she received from her husband, turning her love to hate. “J’ai pris ses coups. Tout l’amour...transformé en haine. Elle

²³⁹ Pineau and Abraham, 72.

²⁴⁰ Pineau, 211.

étouffe. Elle empoisonne tout ce qui fait de toi une femme et une mère.”²⁴¹

Bétani, who suffered slavery and its aftermath, also speaks of suffocating hate: “Si je parle aujourd’hui, c’est juste pour joindre ma voix à celle de mes sœurs. J’ai trouvé le courage de ces quelque mots qui m’affranchissent de la peur et me libèrent de la haine que je portais dans le cœur”.²⁴²

The plaintiff cry of abused women emits its sorrowful note through the pages of *Femmes des Antilles*. Almost every confession discloses the pain and sorrow caused by male aggression, male domination, or male desertion. Tales are told dating from the miserable sea voyage to the present day. One cringes to learn Zanina’s story, of the white sailors raping her one by one, after she danced on the decks of that ill-fated ship. She wished for the rain “pour me laver de ceux qui me prenaient debout sur le pont du bateau devant les autres qui riaient en attendant leur tour”.²⁴³ Zanina said that these men were animals, ferocious lions. The only way to escape them was by throwing oneself into the sea—another ferocious lion.

Desertion was common in the post-colonial community. Perhaps men became accustomed to being despairingly separated from their wives at the auction block or at the discretion of their masters, so that they more easily

²⁴¹ Pineau and Abraham, 42.

²⁴² Pineau and Abraham, 49.

²⁴³ Pineau and Abraham, 90.

deserted the woman whom they impregnated. Many confessions in *Femmes des Antilles* speak of the absence of a father figure. Firmine Richard, a modern woman who claims fame as a noted actress, speaks of her father, "Mon père, je le connaissais... On se voyait une fois de temps à autre. Il était avec une autre femme qui avait déjà d'autres enfants." Honorine says "Je peux dire que j'ai eu un papa. Je l'ai peut-être vu cinq fois dans toute ma vie."²⁴⁴ Celia recalls her father leaving her mother to live with another woman: "ma manman a commencé à plus l'appeler de son nom". She rebaptized him "Démon" and called him by that name for all the world to hear.²⁴⁵ The reader recalls that "Ti-Cylone" and "La Bête" were similar names used in the same note of derision by Séraphine. Angela referred to her father as *Démon*, a fitting expression of disgust. It is difficult to smother one's pain with a mere blasphemous title.

Although the history of the slave population was a silent history, only remembered through oral history and collective memory, Gisèle Pineau and Marie Abraham gathered enough facts to give their book credence and a way for these battered women to establish an identity and a means to regain their lost dignity. They included chapters in their work, devoted to the known and documented history of the black women of the Antilles, so that they could

²⁴⁴ Pineau and Abraham, 163.

²⁴⁵ Pineau and Abraham, 46.

better realize their primary goal of bringing these forgotten women into the world arena. Chapters on slave auctions, The Code Noir, La Mulâtresse Solitude and Sévices et Chatiments (torture and punishment) are included in this vast testimonial.

In *Femmes des Antilles*, Pineau reconstructs stories told by women whose lives were tainted by male subjugation from the time they were captured, dragged from their homes, marched to the coast, made to suffer the horrors of the Middle Passage, raped by the sailors, sold at the auction block, and then subjected to a life of humiliation at the plantation. The worth of a woman slave was further enhanced by her ability to reproduce. Each child counted as a capital output. If she did not reproduce within the slave community, the slave owner considered himself entitled to sexual access to reap return on his capital. Any type of sexual activity was condoned. Incest was not frowned upon in spite of its taboo in most communities.

A chapter based on the preferential slaves who worked in “La Grande-Case” instead of the fields or the rum factories is included in *Les Femmes des Antilles*. They were chosen by the planters who measured the competence of those selected with their sexual attributes. “Le pouvoir de séduction et le commerce des charmes constituent des alliés décisifs pour accéder à sa

demeure...la virginité et la beauté présentent des atouts incomparables.”²⁴⁶

Little gifts, better food, the used clothing of the mistress, and the hope of freedom made the chosen ones compliant. The house slaves rejoiced in not being subject to the ever-accusing eye of the Commandeur and caused the slaves to covet this “travail d’exception.” (One recalls however, that Télumée rejected the advances of M. Desarange and threatened him with her concealed knife as he approached her. Household positions were not always enviable.) Punishment and torture were administered for the slightest infraction of the household rules—the female slaves were subject to the discontent of the masters and to the jealousy of the wives. “C’est toujours le Blanc qui décide, qu’il s’agisse de mettre une servante dans un lit, de l’affranchir ou de préserver l’avenir d’une vieille nourrisse.”²⁴⁷

There are many stories in literary history which deal with incest and sexual abuse but there is one in particular which, although repugnant, emphasizes the fact that incest is practiced the world over. The French author, Colette, wrote an unforgettable story, *The Patriarch*. It is a true tale of blatant incest, in which the father impregnates his daughters and becomes the childrens’ father and grandfather, all at once. It is a tale of human travesty. Colette recalls going on rounds with her brother, a country doctor. He was

²⁴⁶ Pineau and Abraham, 162.

²⁴⁷ Pineau and Abraham, 163.

called to assist Monsieur Binard in the birth of his daughter's baby, of whom he acknowledged to be the father (and grandfather). All of the offspring in the house of this widower, Monsieur Binard, were offspring of the father and his daughters. Julia Kristeva made mention of this story in her book entitled, *Colette*. She was particularly interested in the reaction of Sido, Colette's mother, who often made rash judgements about morality. Even though she called old Binard the "impure widower," and a prolific and incestuous father, she says: "Their house is very well kept... The little one's child [resulting from father-daughter incest] has lashes this long... I saw her the other day, she was nursing her baby on the doorstep, it was delightful...What am I saying? It was abominable when you know what's what, naturally..."²⁴⁸ The ellipses suggest the truth without formulating it. In Sido's eyes, might natural beauty, aesthetics prevail over social laws?

Gisele Pineau, in her conclusion of *Femmes des Antilles*, speaks of the resistance and survival of battered women. She quotes Télumée's words, which tell of the women who were plunged into the water of despair, cruelty, and scorn. But they survived. "Nous avons lutté pour naître et nous avons lutté pour renaître".²⁴⁹ Pineau adds, "C'est qu'il y a souvent une Télumée nichée au

²⁴⁸ Colette, 143.

²⁴⁹ Pineau and Abraham, 259.

coeur des femmes créoles”.²⁵⁰ The Antillian woman, “qu’on a trop longtemps considérée comme une éternelle danseuse, doudou créole de la France, ou cette femme poteau-mitan sur laquelle chacun s’adosse en toute bonne conscience depuis les temps de l’esclavage”.²⁵¹

Rina, in *La captiverie*, speaks of “l’horreur d’être bannis du genre humain.”²⁵² Death is her only liberation. The advice of an older woman freed her, told her not to let herself go but to stand straight, and attach herself to a straw of hope. As a result, she withstood the degradation of having the white planters touch her breasts and her private parts. “I was not considered a person, just a commodity for sale.” In the same confession, she speaks about women stifling their newborns and throwing them into the river so that they would not give “d’autres bras aux champs de cannes.” Rina remembers the advice of the wise woman, “Je me suis tenue debout sur cette terre même devant le fouet et le mépris.”²⁵³ She stood tall. Her tenacity inspired other women. Hope for survival is thus generated among the courageous women who search for dignity in the morass of degradation.

In the aforementioned works, the writings of Gisèle Pineau serve as her mission for bringing voice to the black women who have been silenced by

²⁵⁰ Pineau and Abraham, 259.

²⁵¹ Pineau and Abraham, 262-3.

²⁵² Pineau and Abraham, 67.

²⁵³ Pineau and Abraham, 69.

slavery and gender inequality. She says that it is time for women to free their hearts of the horror and shame they have withstood and of the wanton aggression against their human dignity. “Ecrire en tant que femme créole, c’est ma voix aux autres voix des femmes d’ici et ailleurs qui témoignent pour demain”.²⁵⁴ Hope is generated for a true freedom. The former women slaves and their daughters look for a new life and have a fervent desire to plant their own gardens, to regain their lost dignity. Mothers look to the earth to instill in their daughters the pride of ownership and freedom. “Alors, elles se sont mises à rêver en plantant le manger de leur jardin créole, en retournant la terre de leurs mains, elles se sont prises d’amour pour ce pays de honte. Et, petit à petit, de mère en fille, elles ont trouvé les gestes de leur dignité”.²⁵⁵ The garden in this quote is metaphorical, representing not only the connection that these women have with the earth, but also emphasizing the natural, primordial ownership they have of their own bodies. Their bodies, which were previously a source of shame, become a source of pride. Garden and bodies become their own possession.

Marraine Anoncia grew old with dignity keeping her secret for fear of causing pain to others. She counsels Eliette on the path to follow to maintain her strength in spite of the winds of the metaphorical cyclones or crisis in life

²⁵⁴ Maryse Conde, *Ecrire*, 295.

²⁵⁵ Pineau, 12.

that are bound to occur. The only recourse against despair is to stand up tall, rebuild, soothe your wounds and keep hoping while looking forward towards tomorrow. Above all else, Anoncia advises her to continue to replant what has been uprooted. Life does not stop, one must go on.

Laisse aller ce cyclone et comprends que la vie n'est pas une rumination éternelle. Il y aura d'autres cyclones, quantités. Et personne ne peut rien contre ça. [...] Personne pourra les barrer. Seulement les annoncer. Et il faudra bien rester par en bas et puis se relever, rebâtir, panser les plaies regarder pour demain l'espérance et replanter toujours. (217)

The question of self-identity persists. Incest and miscegenation upset the geneological family tree, questions of origins and historical data remain unverified. But the cries of the women are heard. Their poetic denunciation announces victory over degradation. They no longer fear and tell their daughters and the world that it is time to break the silence, forget the past and start anew. They are true women of dignity.

Chapter V: Color-Coded Determinism

*Noire dehors—Blanche dedans*²⁵⁶

This pretense is psychologically examined in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) by Frantz Fanon, who seeks to clarify the position of black men and women in their search for identity. In his book, Fanon opens with the question, “What does the black man want?”²⁵⁷ He wants to be white. For some people, this answer reflects the view of the colonial world, in which everything black is inferior and everything white is superior. “After having been the slave of the white man, he enslaves himself...a victim of white civilization.”²⁵⁸ Although his work was published over half a century ago, Fanon’s message still resonates in the post-colonial world. He quotes from Professor D. Westermann’s article in *The African Today*, which says that the Negro’s inferiority complex is particularly intensified among the most educated...who wear European clothes, who use European furniture...who adorn the Native language with European expressions: “all these contribute to a feeling of equality with the European and his achievements.”²⁵⁹ Fanon includes many other concepts dealing with the black psychosis which are

²⁵⁶ Gisèle Pineau and Marie Abraham, *Femmes des Antilles*, (Paris : Editions Stock, 1998), 44.

²⁵⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 12-13.

²⁵⁸ Fanon, 192.

²⁵⁹ Fanon, 25.

also pertinent to the novel to be analyzed in this chapter. “It is because the Nègress feels inferior that she aspires to win admittance into the white world.”²⁶⁰ This same “Nègress” wants to live in Didier, the preserve of the richest people in Martinique. “One is white above a certain financial level... a house in Didier means acceptance into high society... the fashionable part of Fort-de-France, the leading city of Martinique. These “Whiteys,” are mostly of government people or military officers.”²⁶¹ In this society, the mask of refinement includes lightness of skin color and mastery of the French language. It is not simple to find one’s identity in a world where skin pigment and the mastery of languages are the criteria for social acceptance. It is hoped that time will obliterate color differences and class lines in future generations. After examining the dilemma of the black community and its quest for equality, Frantz Fanon expresses his own philosophy: “I was committed to myself and to my neighbors to fight all my life and work all my strength so that never again would a people on earth be subjugated.”²⁶²

Edouard Glissant, in *Le Discours Antillais*, interprets his own version of the “white mask” philosophy as the *Pulsion mimétique* (mimetic drive) in his theoretical works and in his fiction. He argues that this “obsession with

²⁶⁰ Fanon, 60.

²⁶¹ Fanon, 43.

²⁶² Fanon, 227.

imitation” is impossible to live with, not only because the imitation can never succeed but because the obsession itself is unbearable.”²⁶³ Glissant’s mimetic drive is comparable to Fanon’s thesis: the black man wants to be like the white man. “For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white.”²⁶⁴ According to Glissant, the unpredictable solution to this conflict is chaos. Glissant further states that, “The coming together of the various cultures is an encounter that he refers to as *choc*, a term that also acknowledges the violence accompanying the meeting as well as the ever-changing dynamic that produces a *chaos-monde*.”²⁶⁵ Glissant further explains his collision of cultures: “J’appelle Chaos-Monde le choc actuel de tant de cultures qui s’embrassent, se repoussant, disparaissent, subsistent pourtant, s’endorment ou se transforment, lentement ou à une vitesse foudroyante”.²⁶⁶ The psychological impact of this alienation is further discussed and analyzed in this paper, focusing on the ever-disturbing question of skin color and identity.

The text to be analyzed in this chapter is *Amour*, part of the trilogy, *Amour, Colère et Folie* (1968) by Marie Chauvet. The novel deals with the

²⁶³ Celia M Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory*, (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 83.

²⁶⁴ Britton, 85.

²⁶⁵ Renée Larrier, *Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean*, (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2006), 10, 11.

²⁶⁶ *Traité*, 22.

problems of skin color, race, class, and gender, which are crucial to determining one's identity and place in society. Fanon examines the plight of the black person from a psychoanalytical point of view, while Glissant analyzes the sociological aspect of the same problem. Marie Chauvet confronts the influence of "color" as a novelist. She develops her narration in this book against a background of social and political conflict. She was ostracized because of her flagrant denunciation of the powers that ruled Haiti during the period of 1968. Claire Clamont, her *porte-parole*, is the protagonist in *Amour*. She searches for her identity and her *raison d'être* in a story seething with intrigue, violence, and subterfuge. Like Chauvet, she becomes the witness and observer of the events that surround her world. Both Claire and the author constantly remind the reader of the evil and turbulence caused by the militant factions in command. In denouncing the political regime, Chauvet was harrassed and ridiculed because of the novel's political implications. Her father and husband, embarassed by her protests against the tyranny of the oppressive regime under which they were forced to live, had the novel removed from circulation. Her husband bought the entire publication and had it hidden in a warehouse for 12 years. The book was then banished in Haiti and Marie Chauvet was sent into exile. She divorced her husband and settled in New York, where she died in 1973. Her

last novel, which denounced the abuse suffered under the regime of Jean-Claude, was *Les Rapaces*, a book written under her maiden name, Marie Vieux. Her literal portrayal of the political ills and tyrannical oppression visited upon her people was rewarded posthumously. *Amour, Colère et Folie* received the Prix Deschamps posthumously in 1986 and has been recently re-edited by those who believe in the substance of this work: “C’est pour refuser l’oubli que *Voix de Femmes* entreprend cette édition réservée aux bibliophiles.”²⁶⁷

The pervasive theme in this novel is skin color. Claire Clamont is black, although her name signifies “light,” just as the etymological connotation of the name Jean Luze, her sister’s husband, also bears the allusion of “lightness.” The story revolves around Claire’s suffering, particularly because of the *mulâtres-blancs* who constitute her family and the aristocratic society they frequent. “[...]je commençai dès mon jeune âge à souffrir à cause de la couleur foncée de ma peau, cette couleur acajou héritée d’une lointaine aïeule et qui détonnait le cercle des blancs et des mulâtres-blancs que mes parents fréquentaient.”²⁶⁸ If this deep-seated complex did not influence her existence, Claire would not be writing her story. She decided to disclose her most intimate thoughts in the form of a

²⁶⁷ Marie Chauvet, *Amour, Colère et Folie*, (Édition Voix de Femmes), back cover.

²⁶⁸ Chauvet, 10.

diary. She experienced “une pulsion d’écrire”...“je crois pouvoir écrire...Réduire ma vie intérieure...voilà mon but”.²⁶⁹ Claire’s inner torments are withheld from public scrutiny but her muffled voice finds release in writing her internal monologue. Her writing serves as an outlet for her hatred and envy. The structure of *Amour* thus becomes narrative in form and the words inscribed in her journal describe Claire’s descent from misery to rage, and then violence. Her suffering becomes unbearable. She must relieve her yearning for love and the fulfillment of desire. She feels the necessity to propel her thoughts onto paper, in a private journal, to expiate the heaviness of her soul.

Because of her color, Claire lives on the margin of the elitist society which exists in a provincial city of Haiti. She has interjected the personification of a black woman since she is the only one who has “black skin” among her almost-white circle of family and friends. She is marginalized within her own family, and in society, where race, color, and gender are determinant of status. Growing up, Claire does not understand why she is more black than those around her.

The agreed explanation was simply that she was “mal sortie,” a discretion blamed on an ancestral grandmother, or “brûlée par le soleil,” as

²⁶⁹ Chauvet, 10.

her mother explained to her light-colored sisters. Black skin had a psychological dimension in their community, causing Claire to suffer feelings of inferiority. She felt frustrated and constrained. Even at a party, when she is complimented by an officer of the navy, she does not believe him and flees to her room in tears, where she looks at herself in the mirror, “J’avais eu l’impression de ressembler dans ma robe blanche à une mouche tombée dans un bol de lait.”²⁷⁰ Claire cannot accept her black skin among her mulatto family and aristocratic peers. In his famous sentence, Freud says “La femme est un continent noir.” He was, of course, talking about his lack of knowledge about women in general, not particularly a woman of black skin color. The epithet seems to fit, however: “Le continent noir de la femme noire apparaît comme une mise en abyme enfouie au plus profond de la psyché representative.”²⁷¹ The black woman is most commonly represented in Claire’s world as an impoverished peasant, not a member of the elite society frequented by her family. When another French officer compliments her, saying that her black skin makes her resemble a goddess, she cannot accept this compliment and escapes to her room to hide herself from view. The mythologized black woman is a representation that she can no more

²⁷⁰ Chauvet, 128.

²⁷¹ Françoise Naudillon, Le continent noir des corps : Représentation du corps féminin chez Marie-Célie Agnant et Gisèle Pineau, 76.

relate to than that of the former tortured slave. None of the existing roles or labels seem to apply to Claire. She has no woman with whom she can relate.

It is said that the entire literary production of Caribbean women authors from Marie Chauvet to Simone Schwartz-Bart to Maryse Condé to Edwidge Danticat, including Gisèle Pineau and Marie-Célie Agnant depicts a black woman that goes beyond the pre-existing labels. Their work endeavors to characterize real Caribbean women in a post-colonial world and give them a psychological dimension. They want to correct the misconception of the “femme noire” which casts her in the role of “sexe et soumission.”²⁷² Marie Chauvet produces the “thinking” woman, one who tries to reconcile class, color, femininity, and her inner-most thoughts. She joins the other authors in hoping to forge a new identity for her characters and for the future of women in the literature of the French Antilles. “Enfin dans ces œuvres, la question du rôle des femmes et de leur corps dans l’histoire est au cœur de la réflexion”.²⁷³ Claire questions her roots, particularly her color “Qu’est-ce qu’une négresse, qu’est-ce qu’un corps-objet et un corps sujet de négresse?”²⁷⁴ She rejects a likely suitor, a possible alliance, when she compares the light color of the skin of his hand to the skin of her hand. To

²⁷² Naudillon, 75,

²⁷³ Naudillon, 74.

²⁷⁴ Naudillon, 74.

her chagrin, she notices that his hand is considerably lighter than her own. It is said that “corps torturé, corps esclave, corps exotique, corps maternel ou corps sensuel, le corps de la femme noire apparaît comme une grande machine à fantasmes”.²⁷⁵ Part of Claire’s identity crisis resides in the fact that she cannot easily insert herself into any of these pre-existing roles for black women.*

Henri Clamont resents his daughter Claire, because of her black skin. She is often punished by her father because she is a living reminder of the black skin that he would have preferred to ignore—she reincarnates his mother, a dark-skinned *négresse*. “The return to blackness, the return of blackness, represents the father’s most primitive fears.”²⁷⁶ In spite of the fact that she is a woman, and not the son he had hoped for, he reluctantly tries to train her, his oldest child, to take command of his vast estate. He painfully introduces Claire, his black-skinned daughter, to his field hands as his heir. She rebels. He also attempts to use his vast fortune in securing a husband for her, but Claire refuses any offer. Henri Clamont’s efforts in other areas are also fruitless. He pursued a political career for himself, and almost ruined

²⁷⁵ Naudillion, 73.

* Forty years later, society continues to impose identities upon black women. As much as Michelle Obama’s accomplishments transcend racial boundaries, she must still deal with her blackness. She “must project herself as black in one community but she must also act white to another, whatever either adjective means nowadays.”(*New York Magazine* “Black and Blacker” August 18, 2008, 24.)

²⁷⁶ Ronnie Shaufman, *Theorizing Terror: The Discourse of Violence in Marie Chauvet’s Amour Colère Folie*, 236.

the family financially by purchasing votes in the presidential elections. He did not succeed in that attempt either. When Claire discovers that her father still practices voodoo with the peasants who work for him, there is an irreversible fissure in their relationship, but she keeps the knowledge of his private rituals a secret. In this society replete with contradictions, it is necessary to keep up appearances and hide any unseemly elements of a hidden life. In keeping this undisclosed ambiguity from the eye of the public, one can build a wall of indifference and become anesthetized towards the suffering of others. Henri Clamont was immune to the suffering he caused his oldest daughter and treated her as brutally as he treated his hired hands. He did not seem to notice that his workers and their children were starving. Claire is shocked to see a woman, not much older than herself, who has no food to appease the hunger of her youngest child, gives the child her thumb instead, saying, "Suce, suce." This provides yet another reason to be ashamed of her sadistic father. He fails in his role of being a supporting father and causes his daughter additional disappointment as she becomes aware of his treatment of others. She sublimates her own suffering until it is transformed into an irrepressible rage. It is no wonder that she becomes a perverted and perverse woman.

It is interesting to note the manner in which Marie Chauvet describes the costumes worn by the members of the elite society who constitute the leaders of the community. They are symbolic of the disconnect between artificiality and reality and reflect the false facade of the milieu in which Claire is forced to frequent. She is secretly appalled at the pretension they exhibit in wearing such apparel. Each situation dictates another way of dressing, all of which serve to obscure the real person behind the costume. Their pretension simulates the court of King Henri Christophe, the commander who succeeded in his war for Haitian independence and his influence in sponsoring the declaration of the first black republic in 1804. In his esteemed role, he surrounded himself in the style of the French nobles of the *ancien régime*, including the palace, furnishings, and livery. The costumes and all the necessary accoutrements were dictated by Parisian aristocrats and adopted by the Haitians, delighted to imitate them. When Henri Clamont hosts a ball in his home, he takes pride in adapting the whims of the latest Parisian dictates. His rooms are decorated in French style, and the clothes worn by the guests reflect the latest in Parisian fashion. Jewelry, lace, and velvet all contradict the geography and the tropical climate that surrounds them. This adoption of the European standards of the aristocrats is reminiscent of the *bovarysme* in Flaubert's novel.

Most striking, but inappropriate, is the outfit that Henri forces Claire to wear when she goes to visit his coffee plantation. She presents an amazing picture to his workers by wearing Parisian riding attire. Her elaborate equestrian hat has plumes so tall that they catch the branches of a tree as she rides, causing her embarrassment and shame—more reason to resent patriarchal domination. Claire also remembers that she was devastated when she had consented to be member of the wedding ceremony of her mature friend who had dressed inappropriately as a very young bride: “Elle s’est fardée en petite fille.”²⁷⁷ Claire was deeply troubled by this ridiculous parade and did not want Jean Luze to see her participating in this event. Even though she wears virginal white to church, her usual clothing consists of long-sleeved, high-necked dresses that conceal her body, as an extended mask. She is always cognizant of the color of her skin and seeks to hide it by any means.

To add to the dilemma of skin color, Claire is thirty-nine years old, unmarried and unloved, both factors constituting a disgrace in this Haitian society, where the destiny of a woman involves marriage and children. “If one thinks that Claire’s obsessive meditation on her virginity is excessive, it is noted that one of the most feared ghosts in Haitian folklore is the

²⁷⁷ Chauvet, 153.

diabliesse: a female ghost, who must live in the woods for years as punishment for the crime of having died a virgin, before she can enter heaven.”²⁷⁸ Claire suffers greatly by the double curse that she must bear. She is dark and she is a virgin. Her frustration is exacerbated by her attraction to her sister’s husband whom she loves secretly, a further contribution to the jealousy which consumes her. Her outlet for sexual fantasy is placated by her collection of pornographic postcards and erotic novels, which she reviews behind a double-locked bedroom door. It is through the keyhole that she becomes the voyeur and the manipulator of the lives of those she begins to hate. “Je fais le guet,”²⁷⁹ and silently wills her evil thoughts into action. All of her frustrations are thus released as she causes others to suffer. She remains invisible, lucid, and dangerous. She enjoys her secret power as a spy and a manipulator.

The novel is further complicated by the presence of Calédu (the name in Creole means someone who hits or beats hard), the very dark-skinned tyrannical police commander who sexually arouses her and repels her at the same time. Her feelings are reflected in dreams and nightmares, such as the one where Calédu enters as she stands nude in front of a large

²⁷⁸ Joan Dayan, Reading Women in the Caribbean: Marie Chauvet’s *Love, Anger, and Madness*, 235.

²⁷⁹ Chauvet, 12.

statue of stone. “La statue pourvue d’un phallus énorme tendu dans un spasme de voluptueuse souffrance était celle de Calédu.”²⁸⁰ Claire is agitated and revolted. The dream is significant in that it reflects her terror and desire at the same time. She is reminded of her father’s brutality and her love/hate feelings for Calédu. She tries to escape, but the circumstances surrounding this unlikely scene in her dream encourages Calédu to assassinate her.

Freud interprets dreams as hidden sexual drives and castration anxiety. He theorizes a dream such as this to indicate aggression and love. “The woman’s lack of a penis becomes an intolerable sign of the possibility of castration; the woman’s sexual organs appear to be mutilatedtransforming the female genitals from a terrifying to a desirable object.”²⁸¹ Freud furthers this theory to indicate sexual differences and the love/hate syndrome. The importance of his theory is that Claire’s unconscious is revealed. Her dreams of sexuality combine love and hate. She tried to love her father but could not because he was cruel to her during her formative years. He exhibited the same cruelty toward others who were in his employ. She learned to hate the one she was supposed to love. Freud also writes of the intimate connection between sexuality and dreams of domination. In spite of herself, Claire cannot help but feel somewhat

²⁸⁰ Chauvet, 145.

²⁸¹ Britton, 190.

attracted to Calédu, although she tries to sublimate her feeling: “Je n’aime pas les longs regards que Calédu continue de poser sur moi chaque fois que je le rencontre dans la rue.”²⁸² She would prefer to maintain an aristocratic disdain that emphasizes the class distance between them, “et le forçait honteux, à baisser les yeux”.²⁸³ Yet he continues to haunt Claire’s conscience and subconscious. She is affected emotionally when at a party that he is invited to attend because of his military rank, she is compelled to dance with him. He holds her too tightly. She cannot control the love/hate feelings that arise in her body when she is close to him. She is sexually attracted to him. Perhaps she hated herself because of this irrepressible attraction that she felt towards Calédu. Under more usual circumstances, Claire would have power over him because of her aristocratic birth and belonging to one of the town’s influential families, but to her horror, she is forced to recognize that Calédu is more powerful because of his military might. Chauvet highlights the contradictions that were inherent in the Duvalier regime where, “all the usual equivalencies between class, race, and

²⁸² Chauvet, 171.

²⁸³ Chauvet, 171.

power were overturned, deconstructed, and perverted with violence and terror.”²⁸⁴

Claire’s wish for invisibility is comparable to the way in which the Haitian government exerts its authority. “Claire’s silence is comparable to the silence of those fearful of persecution by the power-hungry groups who continue to vie for power in Haiti.”²⁸⁵ Punishment for major and even minor crimes is enforced by Calédu. Dora Soubiron, a religious woman, and a descendent of Paris-educated César Soubiron, director of the schools and ambassador to France, is physically abused by Calédu and the Tontons-Macoutes. These men were Devalier’s personal henchmen, recruited from the urban poor. Dora refused to substitute the commands of these militants for the words of God. “Elle n’a pour chef suprême que Dieu.”²⁸⁶ She was duly chastised. The punishment inflicted upon her body and particularly her genitals is so severe that she could barely walk when she was released. No one dares to help her for fear of self-incrimination. It was only at a later date, after Claire has put her personal revolt into action, that she is bold enough to run to the aid of Dora, who had again fallen into the street. Claire’s warped hatred of Calédu is exacerbated by this inhuman treatment of her

²⁸⁴ Ronnie Sharfman, “Theorizing Terror: The Discourse of Violence in *Amour, Colere Folie*,” in *Postcolonial Subjects: Francophone Women Writers*. Ed. By Mary Jean Greed, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 234.

²⁸⁵ Larrier, 187.

²⁸⁶ Chauvet, 22.

friend. He is part of Duvalier's regime, one that imprisons mulatto women of the bourgeoisie so that he can whip and torture them: "A chaque coup, il criait: aristos, bande d'aristos, mulâtres-aristos, je vous estropierai tous, aristos, aristos..."²⁸⁷

In depicting the society in this small town, far from the metropolis of Port-au-Prince, Marie Chauvet stresses the atmosphere of invisibility and silence which pervades. The fear of persecution keeps the people behind closed doors and silently watching through their window blinds (*derrière les persiennes*). They clandestinely observe the evil deeds performed by Calédu and his henchmen. Women and men hide their faces when Jacques Marti is shot by Calédu. They all fearfully watch behind their shutters when his brother tearfully recovers his body. Renée Larrier speaks of "the stifling atmosphere of the predatory state—in the form of corruption and injustice [which] reproduces the oppressive conditions under the Duvalier regime of the 1960's."²⁸⁸ The prison in the background of this deadly town is opposite the Clamont home and is the site of physical and mental abuse. It reeks of horror and terror and reverberates with the cries of the abused. Although the action of *Amour* takes place during the early twentieth century, the same

²⁸⁷ Chauvet, 163.

²⁸⁸ Larrier, 87.

conditions applied in the 1930's. The description of the Duvalier regime is reminiscent of Foucault's Panopticon:

Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. To achieve this, it is at once too much and too little that the prisoner should be constantly observed by an inspector: too little, for what matters is that he knows himself to be observed; too much, because he has no need in fact of being so. In view of this, Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so. In order to make the presence or absence of the inspector unverifiable, so that the prisoners, in their cells, cannot even see a shadow, Bentham envisaged not only venetian blinds on the windows of the central observation hall, but, on the inside, partitions that intersected the hall at right angles and, in order to pass from one quarter to the other, not doors but zig-zag openings; for the slightest noise, a gleam of light, a brightness in a half-opened door would betray the presence of the guardian. The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.²⁸⁹

The prison system of surveillance by the militants and by the people of the town continue to be a threat to every action taken either publicly or privately. Every person watches another person. It is similar in scope to the Panopticon of Foucault.

²⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison, (New York, Vintage Books, 1995), 197.

Jane Bavière has a child out of wedlock, and although she was engaged to the father of the baby, he is killed before the wedding. Jane's family, belonging to the mulatto aristocracy, is horrified at her lack of discretion and sends her to live penniless in another town. She is deemed an outcast because she has not rigorously adhered to the prescribed laws concerning sex and marriage. As a result, she is closely watched: "Tout le voisinage la surveille."²⁹⁰ It could be said that Calédu becomes almost superfluous in the entire neighborhood because the community itself turns into spies to support the regime. It never occurs to them that by so doing they are furthering their own imprisonment. In spying on each other, they become accomplices to Calédu's inhumane treatment of the people.

Michel Foucault also talks about how punishment becomes a theatrical spectacle. Everyone in the town watches with bated breath. "Ce matin, Calédu a matraqué quelques paysans. J'ai assisté à toute la scène derrière les persiennes de ma fenêtre. D'autres yeux épiaient aussi dans le voisinage. Je voyais remuer les rideaux sous des mains fremissantes, luire des regards a travers d'autres persiennes."²⁹¹ The words « la scène » et « les rideaux » leave no doubt that this is a spectacle and, as horrifying as it is, everyone attends.

²⁹⁰ Chauvet, 165.

²⁹¹ Chauvet, 90.

Another cause for political dissatisfaction was the American Occupation of Haiti from 1915-1934. The occupation influenced the themes of Haitian literature of the 1940's and the 1960's, and included accounts of cultural alienation and political engagement. There are only complaints and derision included in the contemporary literature. Chauvet describes the Occupation in her work: "C'était l'occupation avec tout ce qu'elle comporte d'humiliations et de bénéfices aussi pour le pauvre peuple indiscipliné, endetté, miné par les luttes intestines que nous représentions".²⁹² The arrival of the Americans was shocking at first to the Haitians, but "les années passèrent. Nous nous habituâmes peu à peu à l'uniforme kaki des Américains et de nos gendarmes."²⁹³

J. J. Dominique, author of *Mémoires d'un amnésique* (1983), opens her book with the American Occupation and how the arrival of the ships in the port caused trauma in the memory of a child. The view of the ships and the uniforms of the soldiers clouded her memory forever. It was said to be an intrusion, a worthless invasion and cause for dissension. "North American marines who invade Haiti represent the absolute power to terrify and control everyone, even a small recalcitrant boy (Paul's father) who refuses to drink

²⁹² Chauvet, 132.

²⁹³ Chauvet, 133.

his milk.”²⁹⁴ Paul, who was a girl in spite of her name, suffered along with her family in a constant state of fear. Edwidge Danticat in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* shares the same criticism of the American occupation. The American marines were blamed for crushing the peasant revolts (*caco* revolts), further reducing their standard of living, and restricting opportunities for full participation in Haitian society.

In *Amour*, M. Long, the American business man, represents America’s intrusion and its destructive presence among the Haitians. In cutting down the beautiful trees of the island and exporting them for lumber, he rapes the forests as he defrauds the peasants. M. Long succeeds in desecrating the country and ruining the economy to the point where the starving Haitians have no other recourse than to leave their own country to work in the sugar cane fields of the Dominican Republic. The trees and the island suffer physical violation similar to the violation of the women. The trees and the women are unable to withstand destruction. “The ancestral lands are ravaged by the demands of capital; the mulatto women are raped by the revenge of race; and the literary ideals of love are exposed by the lust of the “femme stérile.”²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ M.M. Adjarian, *Allegories of Desire*, (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 94.

²⁹⁵ Dayan, 238.

Claire becomes evil in her web of agitation and intrigue. Her feeling of alienation causes her to retreat into the shadows of oblivion. It is here that she can observe and eavesdrop. Unable to have Jean Luze as her lover, Claire decides to vicariously enjoy his sexual pleasure with another. She manipulates her characters, in puppeteer fashion, so that Jean Luze will have an affair with her sister Annette, who displays signs of her attraction to him and her willingness to engage in forbidden love. “Je veux qu’Annette soit à Jean Luze. Je veux qu’elle prenne dans la vie de cet homme la place de Felicia.”²⁹⁶ Claire works on several levels simultaneously: she encourages Jean Luze’s dissatisfaction with his pregnant wife, she runs the household so that Jean Luze and Annette can have more time together, and encourages the two to enjoy the music recorded on the discs of Jean Luze—and then watches as they listen to Beethoven’s Fifth, played loud enough to drown out the screams heard from the prison.

While the sexual attraction increases, Claire vicariously enjoys this illicit affair. Shockingly, she seems to have no remorse. Claire’s narcissistic and perverted behavior is the result of her sublimated feelings of neglect and inequality. She loses control of reality and now seeks retribution. Her own desire is repressed through a diabolical plot. An explanation for Claire’s

²⁹⁶ Chauvet, 18.

outrageous behavior is that she believes Felicia to be unworthy of Jean Luze: she is too white, too blond, and too placid to deserve this beautiful man. More importantly, in this aristocratic Catholic world, all acts of sexuality can only occur within marriage. Since marriage has been denied Claire, she can transgress the rigid laws which were part of her strict upbringing. Once she ignores the teachings of the church, she no longer feels bound by any moral code or set of ethics. She can rise out of her oblivion and allow her natural instincts to take command. Her power to control is increased by the fact that no one ever notices her: “Il l’observe [Annette] sans faire attention à moi.”²⁹⁷ Even though Claire seems to be in a position of power, playing with other people’s emotions, she herself trembles, “au moindre bruit”²⁹⁸ and avoids making eye contact with people. She remains in the background, a self-conscious non-entity. Her sisters treat her as a household maid. Her invisibility is heightened by her voicelessness. She listens quietly as others speak. Her silence harbors her resentment and plans for revenge. She speaks only silently, through the pages of her journal.

Despite being a regular member of the church and outwardly obeying the preaching of Père Paul, the emboldened Claire resorts to skepticism and disbelief. She knows of the priest’s rejection of the voodoo religion, which is

²⁹⁷ Chauvet, 21.

²⁹⁸ Chauvet, 25.

still practiced secretly. It is the belief embedded in the very soul of the peasant population. Even her father, a Parisian mulatto, regularly frequented the “loas.”* Claire once berated him for neglecting the Christian faith, but to no avail. She does not follow her father’s practice of voodoo in spite of the furious whippings she suffered for not obeying. She decides, in spite of her continued church attendance and her taking of communion, that she will no longer adhere to Catholic dogma. The “new Claire,” mindful of her inner revolt, has no sense of remorse for her lack of faith or her evil deeds. She can reject the church and the teachings of Père Paul, and engage in pretense as others do in her society. She becomes cognizant of the hypocrisy that reigns in the church-going citizens. She notices that most of the people who appear angelic in church have proven to be duplicitious and corrupt. In her attempt to forge a new identity, Claire comes to question all that she has been taught. In a moment of introspection, she wonders how she is able to reject her early teaching and questions where this desire comes from, “l’envie de me venger de l’éducation rigide que j’avais reçue?”²⁹⁹ Her father had told her, “Notre premier devoir est de ne pas scandaliser” although his entire life in business and in politics, “fut pourtant scandaleuse.”³⁰⁰ She

* Voodoo ceremony

²⁹⁹ Chauvet, 140.

³⁰⁰ Chauvet, 35.

realizes that many of the precepts with which she was raised are void and useless. “Pour ne pas y croire, pour ne pas rechercher la protection des dieux, il faut une fois pour toutes se libérer de tout, secouer le joug de toute divinité et ne compter que sur ses propres forces. Ce que j’ai fait.”³⁰¹ Her ultimate act of rebellion against the Church and its hypocrisies becomes evident when she voices her dissent to Père Paul. Having realized that Jane was cruelly castigated by society, Claire leaves the confines of her own home and befriends her. She provides Jane with a source of revenue by asking her to do some dressmaking for her. Père Paul and Felicia both warn Claire that her reputation will be compromised in the eyes of the community if she continues to visit Jane. The priest, not knowing of the plans for a revolt by some members of the town who meet at Jane’s home, falsely accuses her of entertaining male visitors for sexual purposes during the night and even says, “J’espère qu’il n’existe rien de coupable dans vos rapports avec Jane Bavière.”³⁰² Père Paul represents the status quo; he has never cared for the downtrodden but rather has done everything to maintain the power of the elite, “notre petit milieu.”³⁰³ In this scene, he is characterized as an “ange exterminateur” austere dressed in black, wielding a stick,

³⁰¹ Chauvet, 17.

³⁰² Chauvet, 158.

³⁰³ Chauvet, 158.

protecting the establishment, rather than acting as a benevolent protector for those in need. No longer fearful, Claire tests her newly-found courage and, rather than accept his admonishment, defies him and knocks at Jane's door. While Claire used to consider him as the essence of moral behavior, she now sees him as a panderer, a selfish person seeking public approval and an impediment to solidarity and social justice.

Once her evil machinations take hold, she no longer respects traditional boundaries; she goes to Felicia and Jean Luze's bedroom to examine the interior of their dresser drawers and to smell the love-making on their sheets. Her voyeurism is not sufficient to satisfy her sexual longings and becomes an act of substitution, "seeking an illusory compensation in erotic fantasies."³⁰⁴ Instead of Felicia, the lawful wife, she imagines Annette and Jean Luze naked in bed together. So aroused, she gets into bed naked herself, "incendiée de désirs. Je suis avec eux, entre eux. Non, je suis seule avec Jean Luze."³⁰⁵ There is only the briefest moment in which Claire is able to insert herself in Annette's place. "C'est moi Annette." Picturing herself in bed with Jean Luze, Claire imagines that if only she really were in bed with him her love would be strong enough to override the cries she hears from the prisoners in the jail across the street. "J'entendrais crier de la prison que je

³⁰⁴ Marie-Denise Shelton, "Haitian Women's Fiction" *Callaloo*, 15:3, 774.

³⁰⁵ Chauvet, 31.

n'y ferais pas attention."³⁰⁶ Chauvet uses the conditional tense, suggesting that Claire does not succeed in blocking out the irrepressible screams of the prisoners. Instead of the screams of passion that might normally punctuate a scene of love-making, she is reminded of the prisoners who serve as a backdrop to her family's daily existence. Suddenly, interrupting Claire's thoughts, the prisoners' cries are blocked out by the scream of her pregnant sister falling to the floor. The unsuspecting Felicia is overcome by the sight of Jean Luze and Annette in bed together, in a compromising position. She collapses into a deadly faint. The novel takes an unexpected turn; Claire must readjust her violent sexual maneuvers.

Just as the prisoners cannot escape their incarceration, Claire and her sisters cannot escape their imprisonment in their closely guarded space, and the town is imprisoned in its claustrophobic one; fearful, secretive, and illusive. The conception of space is a thread that is woven into the plot of *Amour*. Each group of characters inhabits a confined space; the prisoners in jail, the beggars on the street, Claire and her sisters in their home—the entire bourgeois community is constantly in hiding. Fear of the involvement in affairs counter to governmental authority, or of being seen by the Macoutes, keeps everyone virtually hidden in his own particular space.

³⁰⁶ Chauvet, 31.

Ultimately, in spite of her plans, the relationship between the adulterous lovers is unsatisfying. First and foremost because substitution does not provide unmediated pleasure, but also because Jean Luze's remorse puts an end to the relationship. His attraction gives way to disdain and hatred. Meanwhile, Claire is forced to take up her role of mother/caretaker and that of ignorant old maid. "Je ne sais rien. Je n'ai rien compris."³⁰⁷ Claire's suffering is hidden behind a mask. Her invisibility and voicelessness allow her to construct a private identity, but she questions, "Vais-je jusqu'à la fin de ma vie porter ce masque étouffant?"³⁰⁸

Claire is marginalized in every respect: she is childless in a society where women's power emanates from the maternal side, and she is sexually repressed and frustrated in a house where her two sisters' lighter skin affords them the sexual prowess which is denied to her. Claire feels sympathy for the downtrodden in a society that anesthetizes itself from feeling empathy for suffering compatriots. She mimes being a good, obedient Catholic, yet feels no inner conviction that Catholicism has answers to her questionable faith. Claire's decision is to take up her pen and chronicle the torments in her turbulent mind. The root cause for all of the indignities she suffered during her empty life is the color of her skin, but through writing, she is ultimately

³⁰⁷ Chauvet, 31.

³⁰⁸ Chauvey, 176.

victorious: writing is cathartic and can produce will and action. Claire obtains dignity in her revolt.

Claire's revolt is not limited only to her objections to religious insincerity. Her sexual revolt burns within her. "Elle brûle comme une torche insoutenable." She revolts against the inhuman practices of the political agenda of her small town. She feels the need to express herself and does so with a written voice. Claire can no longer live in her world of contradictions without trying to better understand it. Claire Clamont writes for herself primarily and asserts her individuality. Her writing exposes the contradictions in her world. Claire's writing clarifies her vision, makes her more aware of her inner conflicts, leads to her *prise de conscience*, and ultimately to revolt. Claire's revolt is an inner revolt that comes about because she refuses to continue to live as an inferior, voiceless, sexless, frustrated female. Yet her personal revolt has a very real impact on her entire society and it finally removes the yoke of Calédu. Her action exhorts his subjects to join forces for freedom. "Mais la force de ces narrations se trouve justement dans le royaume du subconscient qui transforme le silence en potentiel révolutionnaire."³⁰⁹

³⁰⁹ Jérôme Ceccon, "Diaspora Haitienne déplacée : Halte aux States!" Haiti plurilingue en Amérique du Nord.

In an article on Aimé Césaire, Glissant explains the role of an Afro-Caribbean writer: “Exposing the lies or the silences of the dominant discourse.” In so doing the writer, “struggles to effect an ideological transformation of the text of this discourse, tries to rewrite it.”³¹⁰ Although Claire has just begun to express herself through writing, her goals are the same as those advocated by Césaire. She is writing in order to come to terms with her world replete with contradictions, and in the process she undergoes an ideological transformation so much so that her mighty pen literally becomes a mighty sword, and in her final and supreme act of revolt, she kills Calédu.

“If psycho-analytical theory is correct in maintaining that every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety, then among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which recurs. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny.”³¹¹ Anxiety is pervasive in Claire’s society. Her anxiety and frustrations need an outlet. Her journal is her primary outlet for releasing some of the anxiety but it also manifests itself in her dreams and nightmares. It is only when she is temporarily appeased by being the

³¹⁰ Glissant, *Les Ecrivains afro-antillais*, (Paris: Karthala, 2008), 116.

³¹¹ Freud, *The Uncanny*, (USA: Penguin Classics, 2003), 241.

surrogate mother for Felicia's baby and the substitute wife for Jean Luze that she ceases her daily recording of hate and misery. Freud writes, "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar." His final definition states, "that the uncanny is something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition."³¹² The repressed knowledge that comes to light through her writing reflects her misery in being as black as she was in this family of light skinned mulattos. She also remembers the growing hatred she felt for her father as he whipped her for not conforming to his will and the realization of his unfair treatment of his employees.

M.M. Adjarian writes, "Through speech and writing the silence of the Haitian women was broken. Not only did they free themselves from stifling but they also opened expressive channels into the past through which the voices of the dead can mingle with those of the living to create a vibrant chorus of resistance."³¹³

Yet it is logical that in the end Claire's revolt is compromised and ambiguous. It would require an unnatural and implausible *deus ex machina* to resolve all the contradictions inherent in Claire's life and in Haitian

³¹² Quoted by Britton p. 122.

³¹³ Adjarian, 88.

society. Just as Claire's victory is ambiguous, so is Marie Chauvet's. Her victory was posthumous, her work praised, read, and prize-winning. The political aspect is still unsettled. "Blacks and mulattoes fight it out in Port-au-Prince, and the peasants continue to suffer [...] what begins as the most personal of memoirs ends up a chronicle of Haiti as Duvalier consolidates his totalitarian state."³¹⁴ Fanon explains, "to speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization."³¹⁵ According to Fanon, using French meant gaining access to a world and acquiring a lineage. "The *tâche* of writing could remove the *tache* of color."³¹⁶ Writing in French, Chauvet would not be read by the women of her social class—she was too critical of their milieu—and she could never be read by the majority of Haitian peasants and working-class women, who could not read French. Chauvet's victory lies in the fact that she "defies mythologizing or mystification."³¹⁷ Claire is transformed from a passive object to a thinking, active, and writing subject. "Chauvet knows however, that any call to "being" or to an "essential" self, whether defined as "black,"

³¹⁴ Dayan, 234.

³¹⁵ Fanon, 17-18.

³¹⁶ Dayan, 234.

³¹⁷ Dayan, 232.

“Haitian,” or “feminine,” can be manipulated by ideologues.”³¹⁸ Her protagonist and her discourse defy this manipulation. Part of Claire’s enlightenment comes at the end, when she accepts the fact that contradictions can coexist. “Noire dehors—Blanche dedans” is not a contradiction to resolve, but rather a coming together of opposites to forge something new and valuable. Thus when Claire looks into the mirror, her body becomes unrecognizable to her. She sees herself at first as a coward unable to kill her sister, but from that fury comes a revelation, “Je suis en train de décider de mon propre sort. Je jongle avec mon existence. Quelle ivresse!”³¹⁹ She vows to no longer lower her head in submission or to tremble in fear. She revels in her differences, in her asymmetries, and in her contradictions. It is from that source that she, for the first time, finds her own power: “Je contemple dans le miroir mon visage raviné. Je me decouvre, surprise, un facies asymetrique[...] Est-ce moi ou ce que je vois de moi?”³²⁰ But with all this bravoure, she has not really changed. She still wonders why she tastes the bile of distress: “Pourquoi ai-je dans la bouche un goût de fiel”?³²¹ Claire transfers her obsession with Jean Luze and is now obsessed

³¹⁸ Dayan, 233.

³¹⁹ Chauvet, 185.

³²⁰ Chauvet, 185.

³²¹ Chauvet, 185.

with Calédu. She feels shame and guilt, and has to kill him to squelch her erotic desire. Calédu is both desired and detested.

The town reflects the transformation that has occurred in Claire. As a result of Claire killing Calédu, the prison doors are opened and the prisoners escape. The townspeople are no longer imprisoned in their own homes—the entire city is liberated. Thanks to Claire, “Les portes des maisons sont ouvertes et la ville entière, debout.”³²²

There are many elements in this scene that echo her nightmare. In this instance, however, Claire is victorious. “And the violence that destroys Calédu is satisfying, both psychologically and aesthetically, because the arm/phallus that had so terrified Claire in her nightmare is transformed by her into an instrument of liberation.”³²³ She has overcome her terrifying nightmare and in many ways reversed the action. Instead of Calédu killing her, she kills him. Instead of his plunging the knife into her own skin, she takes the knife out of her nightgown and strikes him three times. The actions of the crowd in the dream that was exhorting Calédu to kill Claire are also reversed: “Les mendiants Pierrilus en tête, comme des fous, se ruent sur son

³²² Chauvet, 187.

³²³ Sharfman, 240.

cadavre.” And the “spasme de voluptuesement souffrance” is now “Le sang [qui] gicle.”³²⁴

The contrast between *Pluie et vent* and *Amour* is significant. The former is a gentle work endorsing the claims of ancestral landscape, matriarchy, and blackness. Schwarz-Bart presents the rural landscape as a depository of enduring value.³²⁵ In contrast, Chauvet writes her trilogy “to break down, subvert and confound [...] the claims of class, race, or gender.”³²⁶ Télumée discovers what it means to be a woman. Claire’s power comes from the idea that there is no definite answer as to what it means to be black or white, elite or peasant. History and desire converge to form her definition of a woman, which is a lot less definite, significantly less categorical, and as a result, richer and truer. Pineau and Abraham examine another woman’s conflict with having darker skin than the rest of her family. Pauline, of Pineau’s *Femmes des Antilles : Trace et Voix*, describes her situation, “Longtemps, j’ai pensé qu’être dans une peau de négresse c’était comme vivre dans une géôle. [...] Dans ma famille, je suis la plus foncée de peau. Mes autres sœurs sont des chabines. Je les ai longtemps jalouées.”³²⁷

This woman’s dream is to wear her black skin like a proud flag and not as a

³²⁴ Chauvet, 186.

³²⁵ Dayan, 233.

³²⁶ Dayan, 233.

³²⁷ Chauvet, 78.

prison. When Joel Marti screams, “À la prison! Libérons les prisonniers!”³²⁸ he is of course speaking specifically about the prisoners who are imprisoned opposite the Clamont house. In the same way that the prisoners are freed from their physical prisons, Claire is now freed from her mental imprisonment. She has escaped from her own prison. Her recognition of herself, her gaining of a voice, and her taking a direct action are all major aspects of her own liberation, which finally create her identity of self. Perhaps it is only a narrative identity but it gave her enough strength to impell action.

In the final analysis, Claire’s act in killing Calédu rejects finality. She returns to her bedroom and locks the door. The political environment in Haiti also lacks finality. From time to time, there is partial appeasement, but as Claire returned to her room and locked the door, Haiti’s problems are from time to time locked up, unsolved behind the door. Marie Chauvet did not cease fighting for her country’s freedom from tyranny. She could have enjoyed a life of pleasure. Chauvet was a beautiful, almost-white mulatto, raised in an aristocratic family, but she revolted against the evil regime of Duvalier, which was literally tearing Haiti apart. The people were repressed in every manner, according to race, religion, sex. Chauvet took it upon

³²⁸ Chauvet, 187.

herself to give voice to the horror. In writing, she showed her passionate resistance. Marie Chauvet's whole life was dedicated to the quest of justice, liberty, and solidarity. Her writing covered three dimensions of contention; the place of women in society, the color problem (black vs. white vs. mulatto), and above all, the violent political regime. Claire's diary, which constitutes the novel, is the vehicle through which she releases her voice, which had been *baillonnée*. Her narrative speaks for Marie Chauvet—Marie Vieux. The author paid the price for her heartfelt protest, her alienation, divorce, and exile. In writing, she revealed her passionate resistance and loyalty to a cause which was greater than her self-indulgence.

Chapter VI: Post-Colonialism

*L'Abolition, "une cérémonie vide"*³²⁹

The purpose of the Abolition of slavery in 1848 was to afford freedom for those held in bondage, but the result was questionable. How did one release the chains of slavery and rise into freedom? The Abolition inferred a complete break with the institution of slavery within the context of colonial domination, but the legacy of slavery and colonialism has endured. The aftermath of slavery was carried into the Post Colonial period, a term encompassing the notion of freedom from the enslavement by the Masters of the colonial system and the ruling country of the colonial regime. A new, independent order was to be established that would alleviate the struggle and turmoil suffered by the emancipated, but a new order poses problems that are not easily solved. It is difficult for the oppressed to shed a lifetime of colonial rule and subjugation and for the oppressors to relinquish their authority. The abolition, although a necessary step toward the redemption of humanity, would call for further measures to achieve the goal of unequivocal freedom. Freedom is not necessarily free.

³²⁹ Glissant, 123.

Frantz Fanon discusses decolonization in *Les Damnés de la Terre*.³³⁰ He claims that it is a challenge to dismantle colonialism and provide a new order which would not reproduce the old colonial system. Fanon warns against the forms of nationalism practiced by neocolonial governments, as nationalism often leads to violent conflict. Nationalism is significant in social and political history, causing dissent and rupture when more than one group claims national status. Fanon's treatise discusses the practices of a bourgeoisie which assimilates colonist thought and practice and nationalist practices that privilege one native group over others. He associates both bourgeois assimilation and nationalism within the structure of hegemonic domination.

The books that I will discuss in this chapter demonstrate the problems that evolved for the former slaves, who were supposedly rejoicing in their newly-found freedom. The novels, situated in Haiti and in Martinique, are sites of the struggles and contradictions analyzed by Fanon and others. Postcolonial Francophone literature resounds with criticism of colonial institutions and apparatuses of rule. The postcolonial subject of the formerly French-controlled countries faces the dichotomy of the contradictory cultures of the French Colonial establishment, which had

³³⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la Terre*, (Paris: Maspero, 1961), 178. The book was later translated at *The Wretched of the Earth* by Grove in 1968.

provided authoritative structure, and the emerging structures of native living conditions. Haiti has long been the site of dissension among the ruling class, the military, and the people. It continues to be a country of political ills and military aggression. Martinique, the island in which the other narrative in this chapter evolves, portrays the reality of life in the French West Indies after 1848. A significant number of blacks on the island felt that amalgamation with France was the only hope for cultural viability and security. They claimed that they had battled long enough with the white Creoles, the *Békés*. The intellectuals of Martinique decried this decision, claiming that this bond would cause loss of identity for native Martinicans. By joining the metropole, they said, they would not only lose their independence but be subject to French rule in structure and *modus vivendi*. Although the objectors have capitulated, the dissension continues and is a subject of debate and resentment in Martinique. Haiti was also a French colony but it gained its independence in 1804, amidst much strife against the ruling country. The Colonial influence remains in Haiti however, as French culture and language are part of its historical heritage.

Freedom did not erase the memories of incarceration or of the so-called passage to freedom. Mr. Medouze, an important character in the book

Black Shack Alley, written by Joseph Zobel, tells his story, which is typical of the after-effects of the abolition:

I was young...when all the blacks fled from the plantations because it had been said that slavery was over. I, too, danced with joy and went running all over Martinique because, for a long time, I had so wanted to flee, to run away. But when the intoxication of my freedom was spent, I was forced to remark that nothing had changed for me nor my comrades in chains. I hadn't found my brothers and sisters, nor my father, nor my mother. I remained like all the blacks in this damned country: the *békés* kept the land, all the land in the country, and we continued working for them. The law forbade them from whipping us, but did not force them to pay us our due.³³¹

Outside of the cruel treatment suffered, the enslaved suffered a secondary consequence of the long-lasting measures imposed on familial construction. After the Middle Passage, family codes became non-existent: husbands were separated from wives, causing men to become absentee fathers and mothers keepers of offspring. Other children, procreated by the Master to satisfy his sexual satisfaction, were then kept as slaves to increase his capital unit (an unfortunate reference applying to humans, not different from the Code Noir of 1685 which defined enslaved peoples as “*meubles*” and part of one’s estate). The docketts of plantation ledgers did not provide family ties or genealogies. Slavery interrupted “lines of transmission and communication that sustain humanity in humans...[the power of slave owners] hindered the right to pass on a name to children:... to communicate

³³¹ Joseph Zobel, *Black Shack Alley*, (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), 32-33.

or narrate stories: to keep track of chronologies.”³³² In the wake of slavery and colonialism, the dynamic of kinship was brought to the fore. The naming authority was built on familial illegitimacy; slaves were deprived of the right to name their children, masters assigned names for their slaves and chose noble names for themselves. Sometimes colorful or imaginative names were used in literary narrations.* Family ties were difficult to access in the chaos of post-abolition, but stories of valor emerged, as seen in the literary accounts of the period.

The Abolition also posed new problems of complicated and multiple sites of authority. Post-plantation or post-colonial ethics presented a loss of “authority.” There were no alternative political or economic models to follow. The former slaves, both men and women, seemed to be lost, in a proverbial state of limbo. They scrambled to find a place to live and a job to ease the pain of starvation. Lack of order reigned, leading to subsequent chaos. Stanley Milgram, in *Obedience to Authority*, affirms that a lack of authority affects the instability of an environment: “...a stable social organization enhances the group’s ability to deal with its environment and

³³²Valérie Loichot, *Orphan Narratives*, (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 29.

* Toni Morrison, in *Song of Solomon*, used biblical references for naming characters: Pilate for one, Corinthians for another, playful names such as Milkman, Guitar, the family name was Dead, Macon Dead.

by regulating group relationships reduces internal violence.”³³³ Hannah Arendt posits, “Authority required a single, absolute root, lest the complex construct fall into crisis.”³³⁴ She continues: “the loss of authority does not entail the loss of the human capacity for building, preserving, and caring for a world that can survive us and remain a place fit to live in for those who come after us.”³³⁵ This premise is based on the concern that human dignity will encourage man’s potential to act morally within a society. In her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she adds: “man had hardly appeared as a completely emancipated, completely isolated being who carried dignity within himself without reference to some larger encompassing order, when he disappeared again into a member of the people.”³³⁶ Armed with moral authority in this unsettled society, man was free to accept or reject the dictates of authority, a freedom unavailable under the hegemonic rule of the French. This freedom sustains a conception of human dignity in that it recognizes in each man a capacity for choosing his own behavior.

Freedom entails responsibility, as it encompasses the capability of man for thought, action, and choosing a competent ruler. In difficult times one becomes lost in a morass of potential leaders. Without the strong hand

³³³ Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, (New York: Haper Collins, 1974), 124.

³³⁴ Loichot, 30.

³³⁵ Hannah Arendt, *What is Authority? Between Past and Future*, (New York: Viking Press, 1961), 95.

³³⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 291.

of authority—someone directing occupations, assigning living quarters, assuming legal ramifications—the former slaves were bewildered. They were not alone in their newly-found status; the former slave owners were now faced with their own particular problems in the loss of slave labor. They did, however, manage to hire many of the unemployed at poverty-level wages and keep them confined in what was referred to in the past as the *habitation*. Here their meager wages were spent in the company-controlled store while the products of their toil were shipped to France. The entire economic structure went into transition.

In the two post-plantation novels that I wish to discuss, *Fils de Misère* (1973), an award-winning* work by Marie Thérèse Colimon, and *Rue Cases Nègres* (1983) by Joseph Zobel, it is the mother and the grandmother who sustain the family ties. The matriarchal setting focuses on the two women, Lamercie Mercurieu and M'man Tine, who portray the rock of stability in this environment of upheaval, starvation, and poverty: “Like Zobel’s Man Tine, Colimon[-Hall]’s heroine symbolizes the indomitable spirit of the Caribbean woman in front of the starkest reality.”³³⁷ It was thanks to them that José, living in *la rue Cases nègres*, rose out of the squalor of the *cas-*

* 1975 Prix Littéraire France-Haiti, pour *Fils de Misère*

³³⁷ Marie-Denise Shelton, *Haitian Women’s Fiction*, (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University, 1992), 775.

neg—the Creole equivalent of *une casse-a-s* (the dirt-floored wooden hut that housed the slaves during colonial times and continued in post-abolition periods). It was also thanks to his mother’s perseverance that Ti Tonton, the child personified as *Fils de misère*, eventually rose out of the poverty of his youth. He had lived in Cour Ravette in a miserable shack, where the neighboring houses were also built of old boxes and discarded materials. The living quarters in the post-abolition era did not improve with freedom: “This housing configuration mimics the economic, social and class hierarchies [which were kept] intact since the slave era. ...the vast sugarcane fields, stretched below the cases and also surrounding them, suggests their [the plantation managers’] power to exploit, hinder upward mobility, and stifle dreams of desire.”³³⁸ Renée Larrier poetically describes the muffled cry of the suppressed voices as the “stifled dreams of desire.” One is reminded of the myth of Sisyphus, the man eternally condemned to rolling a boulder up a hill, only to have it roll down again. His toil is a metaphor for all difficult and repetitive labor that is frustrating and unrewarding. The daily lives of the freed slaves closely resembled those of their enslaved ancestors, and are reminiscent of the futile labor of Sisyphus.

³³⁸ Renée Larrier, *Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 37.

The two young boys presented in the novels represent those who overcome the hardships of plantation life and ultimately succeed through education and upward mobility. They were able to climb out of a marginal lifestyle and become literate members of modern society. It is interesting to analyze the driving force which inspired the women, who were responsible for this major achievement. What deep-seated desire provoked the valiant women, who suffered a life of toil, hunger and hardship for the advancement of these boys? While it can be assumed that the success of their sons was a form of self-agrandissement, that alone does not explain the mothers' willingness to endure cramped living conditions and arduous labor for the sake of inspiring their charges to overthrow the yoke of subjugation and attempt to realize a better way of life. In their determination to succeed, the mothers ignored the jealousy of the neighbors who spewed evil prognostications. They lit candles in reverence to the Catholic Saints and frequented vodou spirits to encourage spiritual assistance in their drive for socioeconomic ascension through education for their two boys. Mothers of narrative distinction, such as Reine Sans Nom, Lamerchie, and Amantine (M'Man Tine) who were inspirations, providers, and teachers, served as examples of valiant women. The recipients of their efforts would, in turn, be in a position to elevate their emerging society and serve in the enlightenment

of others. It is through their hard work that these educated children could be separated from the proverbial herd. Edouard Glissant speaks of the blacks who succeeded through education and rose above their fellow men. They became lawyers, doctors, and directors of schools: “tous Nègres à talents séparés des Nègres de houé.”³³⁹

The efforts of these mothers are even more remarkable in that they overcame sexual abuse and humiliation. Both Lamercie and M’man Tine (Amantine) were raped in their youth. Lamercie was thrown to the ground and never even saw the man who committed the brutal act. Her baby later died. Amantine also suffered the shame of forced sexual assault. She was raped as a teenager by the *commandeur*, Monsieur Gabriel. Her baby, Délia, the mother of José, was the result. There was a history of rape in M’man Tine’s family, resulting in a hint of white in her genes. It was said that her grandfather was a *béké* and had taken liberties with her grandmother. Rape was common in slave societies and the women accepted their pain without looking for revenge. It was as fate decreed. Lamercie was more fortunate than M’man Tine, as she eventually conceived under more favorable circumstances. Ti Tonton was born after a capricious encounter and was welcomed with love and devotion. These fatherless children were raised in

³³⁹ Glissant, *Le Case du commandeur*, 151.

poverty and stressful conditions, but with sacrifice and determination many mothers lifted them from their environment and molded their lives to reach the highest level of achievement.

The postcolonial era continued to echo the days of slavery. Many former slaves returned to the cane fields after the Abolition and toiled, as had their enslaved ancestors. Others sought household positions in urban communities. Still others, feeling partially liberated, sought other means of employment. Some sold food and commodities on the streets (as Hortensia sold chrysothanas in Savane-Mulet). Lamercie worked as a maid for the Ledestins, as did José's mother, Délia, who was a domestic worker in the house of whites. M'man Tine went back to the cane fields, where the thorns of the branches tore at her hands and feet and left bleeding ruptures. Joseph Zobel suggests that, "colonialism, racism, and sexism determined the fates of these bewildered, newly-liberated women. Their jobs offered little remuneration or opportunity for advancement."³⁴⁰ Zobel emphasizes the woman's effort, struggle and sacrifice so that he (and José) could have another kind of life. The reality of life is accentuated in these novels, stressing the power of women in the absence of the father-figure.* These

³⁴⁰ Larrier, 35.

* The legacy of the devoted grandmother remains alive; Barack Obama interrupted his presidential campaign to visit his ailing grandmother, who he said was his mainstay in his

courageous women of the post-colonial society had a common goal—education for their offspring. Education was necessary for upward mobility, for social ascension. Education would take them out of the cane fields and poverty, and free them from further subjugation. Lamercie learns from her employer, M. Ledestin: “C’est dans le savoir qu’est la dignité.” He said that man must use his youth for study, for if he does not, “il n’arrive à rien dans la vie”.³⁴¹ In order to sleep on a soft bed, build palaces, or fill one’s plate, one must study. He must learn to speak French, and continue to go to school for further instruction. These lessons were combined with patriotic themes about the future of Haiti: “C’est une nation en train de se construire, il faut que chacun s’instruise afin d’aider à sa construction.”³⁴²

Lamercie hears the recommendation repeated by her neighbor, “Capitain, le vieux pêcheur.” He plays the role of the older, experienced man, and can be compared to Mr. Medouze of *Black Shack Alley*. He counsels Lamercie on the importance of keeping her child in school: “laissez votre enfant à l’école.”³⁴³ He explains further that the American Occupation

formative years. She is the one who insisted on education as the important road leading to success in life.

³⁴¹ Colimon, 33.

³⁴² Colimon, 34.

³⁴³ Colimon, 62.

of Haiti* changed the country from one where they “vivaient à l’aise, chacun avec son petit métier et les vivres, les fruits qui venaient des habitations. Maintenant tout a changé. C’é crayon ac papier qui parlé...c’est un autre temps à présent, les temps des automobiles allant vite, des avions volant dans le ciel et des radios qui parlent sans bouche. Il faut apprendre à l’école pour comprendre toutes ces choses.”³⁴⁴ The old Captain addresses the occupation of Haiti as being the impetus for further education. The Americans brought with them more sophisticated business practices and further education was needed to become successful within the American infrastructure. When studying the Post Colonial era in Haiti, it is necessary to study the effects of the American Occupation. It has been documented in historical records and in narrative tales as a source of discontent and criticism. The invading marines arrived on July 28, 1915 and did not leave until 1934. The original excuse for the invasion was to protect American business interests. The people however, were suspicious of foreign governments and particularly of those meddling in their affairs. Matters worsened when the invading Marine Corps officers and enlisted men showed signs of blatant racism. These men were chosen from the

* Ayiti cé ter glissé: L’occupation américaine, 1915-1934. The American Marines entered Haiti on June 28, 1915. They remained for nineteen years, leaving in 1934.

³⁴⁴ Colimon, 65.

American deep South and brought with them their bias of racial and color distinctions. The new order was “imposed largely by white foreigners with deep-seated racial prejudices and disdain for the notion of self-determination by inhabitants of less-developed nations. Such attitudes particularly dismayed Haiti’s mulato elite, who had heretofore believed in their innate superiority over the black masses.”³⁴⁵ Furthermore, the invading force evidenced “outright brutality of the forced labor system implemented to carry out building projects...”³⁴⁶ The improvements in transportation, roads and communication accomplished by the Americans did little to improve relations with the Hatian people or their government. Lamercie’s friend, the old Captain, scornfully hinted at the disdainful attitude of the people during the occupation.

Lamercie becomes more determined than ever to oversee her child’s lessons, including the new skills wrought by the “prograss” of the invading army. Nothing would shake her will to see him succeed. M’Man Tine and in time, her daughter Délia, exhibited the same devotion to the cause of Jojo’s education. These valiant women were able to witness the result of their arduous task.

³⁴⁵ Mary A. Renda. *Taking Haiti*. University of North Carolina Press, 2001, 12.

³⁴⁶ Mary A. Renda

The themes of overcoming plantation life and possible assimilation into the white man's world are explored in these post-colonial novels. The structure of colonialism pervaded however, and is visible in the inequities and discrimination suffered by the protagonists. Critics of this period condemn the living conditions endured by the former slaves. Edouard Glissant refers to "l'univers clos de la plantation," where plantation workers in postplantation society were still bound to the soil and were required to have passes to leave. Beverly Ormerod also empathizes with these pioneers, who had to endure the hardships of daily living conditions. She speaks of the backbreaking work in the fields, of child labor, of exposure to the sun, of women's vulnerability to rape by overseers, of poverty wages, and of food shortages.³⁴⁷ Many say that the resulting injury suffered by the Caribbean people is still felt deeply in the region's psyche.³⁴⁸

Lucienne J. Serrano writes about Marie-Thérèse Colimon, her rise to literary fame, and her prize-winning book, *Fils de Misère* : "la femme Haitienne a une prise de parole qui lui permet une place particulière dans les lettres haitiennes. Elle crée une littérature aux dimensions subversives qui

³⁴⁷ Beverly Omerod, 36, 37.

³⁴⁸ Omerod, 37.

concilie le privé et le public. Le chant et le cri, l'amour et la haine."³⁴⁹ This novel, set against a background of Haitian military violence, miserable living conditions, and personal tragedy, abounds with motherly love. Lamercie Mercurieu dedicates her entire life to the care of her son, providing enough food to sustain him while he attends school. Her personal sacrifices, her illnesses, and her shame in stealing a chicken to feed Ti Tonton ("cet enfant qui avait besoin de forces pour étudier...l'estomac d'un enfant est un trou sans fond..."³⁵⁰) ended in her final effort to save him from the enemy artillery during a school insurrection. She was struck by a stray bullet and succumbed in the arms of her friend, Rézia Régulier.

Although *Fils de Misère* and *Rue Cases-Nègres* were written ten years apart, not much progress had been made in the interim with respect to social conditions. The similarity in the upbringing of the two boys, Ti Tonton and José, is striking. Ti Tonton lived in a city slum where, "Toutes les couleurs, toutes les lignes, tous les conteurs se concertaient tel un orchestre de détresse pour crier, désespérance."³⁵¹ José lived in dire circumstances in the country: "Black Shack Alley comprised some three dozen ramshackle wooden huts, covered with galvanized metal, standing at

³⁴⁹ Suzanne Rinne et Joëlle Vitiello, *Elles Ecrivent des Antilles*, (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1997), 71.

³⁵⁰ Marie-Therèse Colimon, *Fils de Misère*, (Port-au-Prince: Editions Caraïbes, 1974), 43, 51.

³⁵¹ Colimon, 13.

regular intervals at the side of a hill.”³⁵² This area inside the confining walls of the plantation was called Petit-Morne. Both boys, while still children, had to stay at home by themselves, indulging in mischief or free play, while their caring relative was at work. When she returned home after a day’s work, harsh discipline—mixed with love—was often administered. School changed the lives of both boys. Teachers served as their new figures of authority.

It is interesting to note that both authors extol the inherent beauty of their country amidst the poverty-stricken milieu of the protagonists. Haiti is described by Colimon with lush vegetation, “les poinsettias...les manteaux Saint-Joseph, aux feuilles rougeoyantes...verdures tropicale...les bouganvillés... jetaient sur tout le passage une écharpe de magnificence.”³⁵³ Zobel describes a Martinican landscape: “There were large trees, groups of coconut trees, palm trees lining the paths, a large lazy river flowing through the grass of a savannah. And it was all so beautiful.”³⁵⁴

Marie-Thérèse Colimon grew up in an atmosphere of education and reading, encouraged by her parents. Even though women at that time were not accepted into schools of higher learning, Marie-Thérèse pursued a

³⁵² Zobel, 11.

³⁵³ Colimon, 45.

³⁵⁴ Zobel, 11.

literary career, writing poetry and articles for the newspaper under a pseudonym, as a “jeune fille ‘bien’ n’écrit pas dans les journaux.”³⁵⁵ She became a highly accomplished journalist, “defining herself as one of the first feminists in Haiti, she fought for women’s rights, served as president of the Ligue Feminine d’Action Sociale for eleven years and founded a private school [for young children].”³⁵⁶ Colimon used her position to promote social change. “She later furthered her education and studied in Brussels, London, and Hamburg. A career fostering youthful education followed: “Marie Thérèse Colimon-Hall a porté haut le nom d’Haiti dans le domaine de l’éducation en général et celle de la petite enfance en particulier”.³⁵⁷ It is therefore understandable that education is a major theme in *Fils de Misère*. In her life, as in her books, she consoled those of her students who were in trouble, and even protected young girls who went astray. In the same book, the author spoke of Lamercie’s friend Madame Rézia Régulier, who participated in church activities and lived in a house next to the church. She forgave the sin of illegitimate births and housed wayward girls during their pregnancies. Even though this work is not autobiographical, Colimon’s dedication to the education of the youth of her country is reflected in *Fils de*

³⁵⁵ <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ile.en.ile/paroles/colimon-hall.htm>

³⁵⁶ Larrier, 148.

³⁵⁷ Lehman, 2.

Misère. Her tone of warmth and compassion is evidenced in her work. “Amour inconditionel de notre terre d’Haiti. Amour du savoir. Amour de l’enfance haitienne, amour de la vie.”³⁵⁸

La Rue Cases-Nègres, the novel written by Joseph Zobel, marks a significant period in Francophone literature, and in Martinican literary history. It was first published in 1950 and later in 1974 by Présence Africaine, Paris. It was later published in English in 1980 by Three Continents Press, Inc. *La Rue Cases-Nègres* was written as an autobiographical-type narrative, a novel of autofiction in which the author used his own name José, as the protagonist. Although the story was set less than eighty years after slavery was abolished, Martinique was still a colony. France then issued decrees changing Martinique and other islands to overseas departments. Aimé Césaire helped set the stage for Zobel’s novel which depicted a country where race, class, and color conflict were exacerbated by departmentalization. Written by Zobel, a local, it served as an inspiration to those who could identify with him. The young José grows up on a plantation and then, through perseverance and hard work, is accepted to the Lycée Schoelcher in Fort-de-France. Zobel’s work was the result of his endeavor to validate, for historical purposes, the atmosphere of

³⁵⁸ Lehman, 3.

the post-colonial Martinique. The movie adaptation of Zobel's novel, *La Rue Cases-Nègres* (1983) by Euzhan Palcy gives visual proof of the abject poverty and exploitation of the field workers in Martinique during the 1930's. The American version of the film, *Black Shack Alley*, was produced by Keith Q. Warner in 1980. "The cinematic adaptation of the novel, which retains the young man's point of view, ends with the voice-off of José vowing that he will always carry his Rue Cases-Nègres origins with him."³⁵⁹ Zobel, like José, kept his word. He died at the age of 91 in June, 2006.

Both texts included in this chapter could be considered written documentaries, in that they give ample descriptions of the conditions that prevailed during the postcolonial period of the 1930's. The action in Zobel's novel takes place at approximately the same time as Colimon's text. The latter captures the quotidian activities of the characters, including their emotional reactions to the vicissitudes of life. The varied scenes of the Haitian landscape are vividly described, not like those presented by tour guides, but as realistic scenes of peasant life. One such scene follows Lamercie as she carries her provisions to her self-created tent, where she sells "son appétissante marchandise...aux poissons frits...s'ajoutant des morceaux de grillots...pois et riz mélangés (le succulent plat

³⁵⁹ Larrier, 41.

national)...mais moulu et haricots rouges.” Mademoiselle Régulier prepared special holiday foods for New Year’s Day or to celebrate the Proclamation of Independence Day: “succulentes assiettes de pois et riz...massepain arrosée d’une liqueur...dans toutes les demeures pauvres ou riches, l’on considère comme un devoir d’offrir aux visiteurs ...gâteaux pâteux et de boissons alcooliques sucrées”.³⁶⁰

Food, or the lack of it, was mentioned in *Black Shack Alley* when the children rick Man Tine’s house to find her hidden sugar (the sugar cane that the workers produced was for export and not for worker consumption). The children found some eggs and since they had never tasted this simple food, they tried to eat them quickly, before they were caught by the owner. Eggs, like sugar, were not to be eaten by plantation workers; they were a commodity for sale or barter. Poverty was an everyday reality for the slaves during colonial times and for the emancipated during postcolonial days. José Hassam was one of the hungry children who was born in poverty on a plantation. The novel examines the trajectory of this five-year-old boy, who against all odds, completes high school and passes the baccalauréat at a school of reknown. (Although the school is not specifically named, it is

³⁶⁰ Colimon, 26-27.

presumed to be the famous Schoelcher school, which accepted only students of high merit.)

Joseph Zobel traces the life of José, and probably his own life, on three separate sites, thus adding a valuable description of the landscape as well as emphasizing his passionate search for identity. In the initial site, Petit-Morne, José describes the plantation life with his Grandmother. It was here that he was influenced by her in matters of cleanliness, honesty, and the value of hard labor. From his evening visits with Mr. Médouze, he learned about his ancestors, and race and color distinctions. This weather-beaten old man silently complained that even though slavery was officially over, the same conditions still existed. Mr. Medouze often told Jose stories of their ancestors—slavery and liberty: “on était libre, mais on avait le ventre vide. Le maître est devenu le patron...La loi interdit de nous fouetter, mais ne les oblige pas a nous payer comme il faut.”³⁶¹ Nevertheless, he tried to subvert his dissatisfaction with class inequality and endeavored to teach the young José about the origins of most Martinicans. He also transmitted to his pupil considerable information about botany and black history. His lessons abounded with riddles and proverbs, and were always told with love. His shack or the space under the mango tree provided the classroom. It was

³⁶¹ Dialogue from the film *La Rue Cases-Nègres* by Euzhan Palcy.

always illuminated by a small fire or the pipe that he regularly smoked. As a knowledgeable mentor and teacher, he laid the foundation for José's future achievement. It was here that the young, impressionable lad was taught about the ways of the world. Mr. Médouze was the father-figure José never had, and the young boy was deeply saddened by the lonely death his friend suffered when he was found by the side of the road.³⁶² "Even in the darkness, I could make out the traits in the face and all the expressions of the master storyteller, carried away by his feelings into the magical domain to which he lifted up his enraptured audience."³⁶³ Inside this isolated area, a plantation space, José experienced a gradual awakening to the complexities of the world.

Petit-Bourg, the transitional site between plantation and city, was a factory city, larger than Petit-Morne. It was the second locus for José's uphill climb as described by Zobel in his autofictional narrative. It was populated by poor working-class people who lived in houses that were more substantial than those in Petit-Morne. It was more difficult for M'man Tine to live there, because she had a long daily commute to the plantation, where she was still working, but it was more convenient for José to live closer to

³⁶² Ti Tonton suffers the same experience with his old friend and neighbor the Captain, "le cher vieillard si bienveillant qui avait tenu lieu de père au fils de Lamerchie....Capitain si complaisant, si plein d'expérience, restait là, immobile à jamais !" (176)

³⁶³ *Black Shack Alley*, 59.

the school. M'man Tine always sacrificed her comforts for the benefit of her grandson. She “is fully invested in his budding literacy knowing it will make him eligible for a better job. His teacher, Stéphen Roc even hints as the possibility of a career as a doctor, lawyer, or engineer if he passes the exam for the prestigious high school, Lycée Schoelcher, in Fort-de-France.”³⁶⁴ José did develop many language and literary skills during his sojourn in Petit-Bourg, but other influences tended to destroy his boyish naïveté.

José is exposed to overt color and class prejudice in this small town, as it accomodates a mix of social and economic classes. The elementary school brings students from surrounding communities and gives José his first opportunity to meet others who scorned his humble roots. He is further exposed to class distinction when his old friend, “Jojo” Roc, is forbidden to play with him. (Jojo’s father’s name is Justin Roc, not to be confused with the devoted teacher, Stéphen Roc.) The fact that the two boys spoke Créole with each other further distances him from Jojo’s pretentious family. In spite of the family’s opposition, José develops a long-lasting friendship with his friend which carries into succeeding years.

The third site described in this text is Fort-de-France, the urban metropolis offering José a different experience in his development. The

³⁶⁴ Larrier, 43.

urban landscape of Fort-de-France, with its shops, movie theaters, fast cars, and government buildings, offers José a faster way of life. It is here that Délia, José's mother, is employed as a maid by a Monsieur Lasseroux, a rich béké, who lives in the Route Didier district. In describing the various neighborhoods and homesites in his novel, Zobel gives historic and sociological importance to his work. To this day, Route Didier is still considered an area where the rich build beautiful homes with all the accoutrements of wealthy living. The maids, cleaning ladies, cooks, and chauffeurs perform their work proudly, not bearing any malice towards their employers. They are content to serve the rich *békés*.

José earns the right to enter the most prestigious school on the island because he succeeded in a competitive exam. Délia now takes the reins in overseeing her son's education. She had to leave her desirable job to do outside laundry and live with her son in a rented space, on the outskirts of the city. Délia learned from her mother the importance of her son's education, and defies the authorities who gave only a small portion of the school fees for tuition. She declares with determination, "tu iras à l'école" and then she doubles her laundry load to meet the added expense. Délia now takes full responsibility in raising her son and meets her problems, including financial, and at times guiding him back to his books and learning.

Joseph Zobel wrote this story about the trials of a black boy growing up within the limitations of poverty and social snobbery in an effort to elucidate the outside world of the cultural and general atmosphere of post-colonial Martinique. “Where one lives in the capital city—divided as it is into neighborhoods separated by race, class, and color—reflects an individual’s condition.”³⁶⁵ José lives in three separate sites, giving him and the readers ample opportunity to examine the environment and living conditions at the plantation, the transitional city, and then the capital city. José survives his experiences in Fort-de-France with the help of his mother and a few friends. He is mostly helped by the training he received from his grandmother and the legacy he received from Mr. Medouze. From him he learned about the origins of his country, its mechanisms, its performance in the colonial system. As a young boy, he internalized the race and color conflicts, the economic problems that beset the poor. Medouze’s physical appearance gives a sense of his symbolic importance: “The rags that clothe his body and his resemblance to a bleeding Christ nailed to the cross symbolize the sacrifices his generation has made on behalf of younger generations.”³⁶⁶ His name, Medouze, evokes the mythological creature of Medusa. They were both able to captivate their listeners and put them under

³⁶⁵ Larrier, 49.

³⁶⁶ Larrier, 49.

a spell through the power of their speech. Medouze's power to capture the attention of an audience is incontestable: "At the mere intervention of Mr. Medouze, the world expanded, increased, teemed in a swirl around me."³⁶⁷ Medouze's stories laid the foundation for José's future achievements, many of which were of a more worldly nature than those included in the academic curriculum of the schools which José attends. Medusa used her magical powers to prevent Odysseus from leaving her island but in contrast, José is able to leave the plantation and meet the challenges of the outside world. Medouze's "ancestral memory passed on orally to José before he embarks on his physical journey, enables him to understand, survive, and confront various obstacles to academic achievement."³⁶⁸ These lessons learned also served to combat vicissitudes of later life.

José, in turn, becomes a modern Mr. Medouze. During his stay in Fort-de-France, Carmen and Jojo benefit from the reading instruction they receive from José. Their evening visits to José's room recall José's evening visits to Mr. Medouze. They learned to read, borrowed José's books, and formed a closely knit alliance. José was in a position to transmit his knowledge and better the lives of those who had resisted formal education. This was one of the goals of M'Man Tine, helping others to achieve a better

³⁶⁷ Zobel, 30.

³⁶⁸ Larrier, 49.

way of life. For José, his schooling was satisfying and promised social mobility as well as social ascension.

The question remains: what are José's sexual preferences?³⁶⁹ What are Ti-Tonton's preferences? Neither young man reveals a preference for the companionship of a blossoming female. Yet focusing on sexual preference misses the broader implications of the gender equality that exists on the plantation and in José's life. Both men and women equally performed the harsh duties of work in the canefields, working in the sugar mills and producing rum for exportation. Bernard Moitt, in his book, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles* exposes the gender equality in plantation work. Women performed hard labor as well as men. "On plantations in the French Caribbean, gender was not a consideration in the allocation of most tasks requiring hard labor, as women were required to do the same work as men for the most part."³⁷⁰ The allocation of tasks obliterated gender and for the most part, placed the burden of hard labor on women. The exceptions were occupations that were gender-specific, such as midwives, nursemaids, and housekeepers. There was also a further consideration; the black male body was considered threatening in colonial society and any overt display of

³⁶⁹ See Keith Q. Warner's article "Emasculation of the Plantation: A Reading of *La Rue Cases-Nègres*." In which he refutes Jacque André's theory that José is a homosexual.

³⁷⁰ Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles: 1635-1848*, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2001), 35.

masculinity was avoided. As Larrier notes, “While postabolition Martinican society reinforced many traditional constraints on expressions of black masculinity, José has numerous male role models—Mr. Medouze, Audney, Stéphan Roc, Carmen and Jojo—whose examples he is drawn to and either synthesizes or rejects.”³⁷¹ José’s teachers and mentors were both male and female: M’man Tine and Mr. Medouze are both fundamental to his development. He is also influenced by his teacher, Stéphen Roc, whose intellectual masculinity was in keeping with his manly clothing. He became one of José’s examples of masculine identity. He was a fine teacher who recognized his pupil’s academic abilities and helped to ensure José’s confidence as he approached manhood. Another exposure to manly pursuits was in the person of Audney, a new friend who familiarizes José with the male responsibility of taking care of horses. He also exposes José to the weekly ritual of workers who, after washing the horses, dive into the water, washing their own clothes and themselves. Zobel juxtaposes this with a scene of women washing clothes in the river. José however, is impressed with the beauty of the black, nude men as they swim in the river. “Et je n’ai jamais rien vu de si simple et d’aussi beau que de grands nègres nus, debout

³⁷¹ Larrier, 47.

à côté de robustes chevaux”.³⁷² José continues to seek examples of black male authority. He is accustomed to female authority, the *poteau mitan*, the cultural result of absentee fathers. The postcolonial arena did not return the fugitive father figure to the position of authority in the home. The female continued to be the mainstay of the family. It is she who kept the family together, who erased the stigma of slavery, who rescued the oppressed outside the confines of her home. The mothers, grandmothers, and aunts who changed the Caribbean scene by stubborn determination earned the coveted epithet of “dignity.”

It is therefore questionable whether José and TiTonton are homosexual, as neither young man indulged in youthful sexual adventure. José became indoctrinated into female wiles through the tales of his friend, Carmen, but he himself was only an interested listener. Carmen was also born on a plantation, but did not have the loving care and teachers to intervene when he faced with insurmountable difficulties. He became more of a man of the street and as a result was affected by female advances. José and TiTonton, on the other hand, were both warmly protected by their female guardians. Both young men were sensitive, considerate and caring, as is evidenced by their devotion to the older female influences in their lives.

³⁷² Joseph Zobel, *La Rue Cases-nègres*, (Paris: Distribooks, 2002), 178.

They enjoyed the company of the older men in their lives. Jojo revered Mr. Medouze and TiTonton respected the old Captain. Both mourned the deaths of the older men.

Two other books which appeared at a later date, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) by Edwidge Danticat and *Le Livre D'Emma* (2001) by Marie-Célie Agnant, attest to the fact that the effects of slavery and colonialism did not disappear immediately and continued to have a psychological impact upon the members of the freed society. The devastating results of captivity had not been completely erased from the memories of those who survived. This chapter would not be complete without referring to the women actants who overcame their personal difficulties in this arena so that they could triumph in their pursuit of dignity. It would be interesting to compare the earlier novels by Colimon and Zobel with the ones written by Danticat and Agnant. The vestiges of slavery still remain in a modern world. Sophie and Emma suffer the consequences of their ancestral heritage. Emma cannot cope and ends performing infanticide and suicide, mimicking her unfortunate predecessors. Sophie's mother cannot escape the psychological effects of trauma, transferring it to her daughter. The racial problems persist; they have not been ameliorated. The 1970's culture-versus-racism debate concerning the persisting

socioeconomic effects of colonialism continues. “Until [the world faces] up to the difficult task of dismantling the ghetto, the disastrous consequences of ...segregation will radiate outward to poison...society. Until we decide to end the long reign of...apartheid, we cannot hope to move forward...”³⁷³ It is hoped that an inspired person, spiritually endowed, will bring about change. Change for the betterment of society, and for the world at large.

³⁷³ Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 236.

Conclusion

One hundred and sixty years after the abolition of slavery, a black man has been elected to hold the highest office in the land—President of the United States of America and leader of the World. November 4th, 2008 is an historic night, an historic election. Americans have come a long way from the outrage and bigotry of former years when race and color influenced the mood and politics of a seemingly liberated country.

Barack Obama has been elected to lead the most powerful nation on earth. He is a black man, an African-American by definition, although his mother was white. Her mother, his grandmother, became the M'Man Tine and the Reine Sans Nom, who raised him, substituting for an absentee father and a mother who died too young. She stressed study and education for her young charge, encouraging him until he reached the ultimate goal of Harvard Law school, Law Review, and Professor of Law. His talents were recognized and he then became a Senator, representing the State of Illinois in the nation's capital.

In his acceptance speech, he expressed his love for his beloved grandmother, who died days before his great achievement. Thankfully, he had interrupted his presidential campaign to visit her in her home in Hawaii

when she was ailing. He was a devoted grandson who reaped the benefits of her teaching. Destiny has chosen Barack Obama to be the leader of all people, regardless of their color or religious affiliation. He will defend his country in a dangerous world and will cooperate in forming a free and peaceful universe. We wish him GodSpeed!

The world applauded the election of Barack Obama. Hope for peace and prosperity emerged as the cheers resounded. Obama's achievement sustains a conception of human dignity in that it recognizes in each man the capacity for choosing his own behavior. My thesis arrives at this joyous conclusion. The suffering and the victimization of the characters in the texts I have examined culminate in the success of this man, this José, this Ti Tonton, or his female equivalent, Télumée.

The works of the many authors that I have included in my thesis attest to the pain that was suffered during the life of slavery and post-slavery. The heartfelt narrations revealed the intense emotion due to the unrewarding results of hard labor in a crippling atmosphere. There were a few in my work who, through diligent study and unrelenting fortitude, escaped the rigid rules of slavery, colonialism, and postcolonialism. They are the Barack Obamas in my study. His grandmother, similar to Reine Sans Nom, M'man Tine, and even Mariotte's grandmother, Man Louise, all grew old with dignity and

with the satisfaction of creating a new world for the oppressed. They spent their lives, straining with exhaustion to sponsor the child of their dreams, hoping that he too would help his people come out of the depths of degradation and despair. Others have paved the way; Martin Luther King Jr. promised that one day the sun would shine on his own followers and the NAACP tried to keep the proverbial ball rolling, but it took a young man with magical dreams and high hopes to attain the unbelievable pinnacle, the apogee of success. Nelson Mandela said, “Your victory has demonstrated that no power anywhere in the world should not dare to dream of wanting to change the world for a better place.”

This amazing victory will not overshadow the voices in my thesis—rather will they be louder. They were coming from Guadeloupe, Haiti and Martinique to lay the groundwork for recognition, for identity, and for freedom. The storytellers wrote beautiful novels which carried their message between the lines. Their characters were their *porte-paroles*. The mothers and the grandmothers in the texts of this work, displaying the same determination as Barack Obama’s grandmother, strained and fought to raise their children to be a cut above the unlettered ones in the *petite bandes*. The voices of these valiant women are heard through the writings of Simone Schwarz-Bart, Gisele Pineau, and Maryse Condé of Guadeloupe; Marie

Chauvet, Marie-Thérèse Colimon and Edwidge Danticat of Haiti, and Edouard Glissant and Joseph Zobel of Martinique.

With the success of a black man, the world sees the dawn of a new era. *Reine Sans Nom*, *Man Cia*, *M'Man Tine*, and *Lamercie* have triumphed. The huge boulder of Sisyphus stayed on top of the hill. Their teaching was not in vain! The message that their authors imparted through their writing was heard. No longer will their words be stifled.

Other characters in the novels of my thesis join the chorus in painful songs of hurt, humiliation, and exploitation. There are also those who carry their message in silence, in voicelessness. Edouard Glissant says “What is important in a work is what it does not say.”³⁷⁴ His representation of slavery is a mute world of struggle with no witnesses.³⁷⁵ Glissant, in his role as a writer of poetry, novels, essays and as a postcolonial critic, “is undoubtedly one of the most important theorists of the French colonial experience and one of the greatest writers of the Caribbean.”³⁷⁶ Glissant uses his mute textual description in order to have no commentating narrator interfere between the written and the reading witnesses. “Silence is not only

³⁷⁴ Valerie Loichet, 52.

³⁷⁵ *Caribbean Discourse*, J. Michael Dash’s translation, p.150.

³⁷⁶ Celia Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory*. Charlottesville and London: Univ. of Virginia, 1999, p. 5.

represented but reproduced in the interruption of the reader's temporality."³⁷⁷ He effaces himself from the position of mistranslating the interpreter. "The key to reading Glissant, similarly to reading Faulkner lies in the absences [of the written word] in his texts—the unspoken, the disrespected, and the feared."³⁷⁸ As a way of explanation, in more simple terms, the reader sees such words as diaspora or *métisse* and a myriad of images and ideas come to mind. Mycéa and Pythagore say little. The reader must participate in comprehension. Marie Chauvet employs the same technique in the personnage of Claire, whose voiclessness offers many implications. Simone and André Schwarz-Bart paint Mariotte as voiceless; only the reader is aware of her inner suffering.

There was another type of silence suffered by the Caribbean woman, a forced condition ordered by male domination whereby her voice was stifled by fear. Her words were not to be heard. The woman became scarred by muted stress. Finally, she and several others became educated and little by little, their voices escaped the restrictions of oral history and appeared in written confessions, essays, and autofictional novels. Another woman, Elizabeth Alexander, Professor of African-American studies at Yale

³⁷⁷ Britton, p. 52.

³⁷⁸ Valerie Loichot, *Orphan Narratives*. Charlottesville and London: Univ. of Virginia, 2007, 120.

University, has joined the ranks of illustrious black women whose voices are heard. She has been chosen by President-elect Barack Obama to compose and read a poem for his inauguration on January 20, 2009. In her writing process, she is planning to have her voice reverberate in memory the “I Have a Dream” speech of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Other theorists have contributed to the analysis of the works included in my thesis. Frantz Fanon, a fellow Martinican of Edouard Glissant, wrote several books in which he considered the psychological and socioeconomic dimensions within the context of colonialism. His contention is that not only colonialism but all subsequent forms of racial discrimination include unconscious determinations that cannot be understood without psychoanalytical intervention. His theories were manifest in my attempted analysis of French Caribbean writing. Other theorists who offered increased credence to my work were Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, and Simone de Beauvoir. I am grateful to these illustrious writers for their insight into the underlying meaning of the works represented in this paper.

The theorists analyze the literature and its relationship to the intellectual concepts of those who inhabit the world. Oceans may separate the various cultures but the goal of freedom is universal. The stories referenced herein are peppered with much violence and tears. They are

emotionally moving tales which constitute the concepts of recognition and freedom. The Caribbean stories are inspirational and augure hope and peace for the future.

I am exceedingly grateful to those who encouraged me to pursue my interest in French Caribbean literature. Professor Lucienne Serrano introduced me to the world of Francophone literature. Up until that time, the word was unknown to me. It was not listed in my dictionary. For me, the Caribbean arena was a site of pleasure—beautiful landscapes, sunny beaches, and sparkling water. But my conception of French literature has expanded. I became intensely interested in this fascinating appendage to my beloved French novels. Professor Serrano assigned books of amazing beauty which captured my fantasy and imagination. She delved into the psychological aspects of each novel and recit with extreme acuity. Professor Edouard Glissant further enlarged my vision with the intensity of his courses and the lectures he delivered with charm and humor. Professor Francesca Sautman advised me with patience and understanding so that I could reach this point in my work.

My study of Francophone Caribbean literature has made me aware of the struggle of the indentured women, their fight for survival, their growing sense of identity, and the dignity for which they strived. President-elect

Barack Obama has hastened their quest for a recognized place in the world. “Growing Old with Dignity” is not only the title of my thesis, but an achievement gained by those whose principles reflect those of our new leader. We hope and pray for his success and for the future of those who suffered and now stand on the threshold of recognition and identity.

APPENDIX

NOTES ON THE AUTHORS AND THEIR WORKS

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APPENDIX

The Abolition of 1848 historically released the slave population from the yoke of subjugation. Humanity appeared to score a triumphant note. The bells of freedom resounded, but the results of emancipation did not reach their intended goal. The struggling masses could not adapt to their newly-found liberty. Poverty and lack of educational skills inhibited the weak from protesting their continued misery. It is also true that the former owners were reluctant to participate in the rehabilitation of their once-owned chattel. Out of the turmoil, a few stars arose. They shone brightly, telling their stories in poetry and in prose. They were the voices of men, however, as the women's voices were suppressed. It took one hundred years for the women to push aside their fetters of silence and finally tell their tales. They did not shout, but related their messages in poignant accounts of suffering and redemption. They chose to write in French, rather than in Creole, to establish their worldly achievement. In spite of common deprivation, a few women dared to express themselves in print. These writers exhibited intuitive skills not yet available to their less vocal sisters. The history of their lives attests to the difficulties they endured to reach recognition and self-satisfaction. Most of these gifted authors spent their formative years in a Francophone country,

either Haiti, Guadeloupe, or Martinique, and these islands serve as background for their tales.

A short biography of many of the authors whose works appears in my thesis are included in the following pages.

Authors:
Simone Schwarz-Bart

*All rivers, even the most dazzling, those that catch the sun in their course, all rivers go down to the ocean and drown. And life awaits man as the sea awaits the river.*³⁷⁹

Simone Schwarz-Bart is an internationally-known writer of Francophone literature. She is the author of six novels and a play, which have been translated and published in many languages; *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* was published in English as *The Bridge of Beyond*. She was born in 1938 in Guadeloupe, an island in the French West Indies. Her mother was a teacher and her father was a military man, which caused the family to travel from Pointe-a-Pitre to Paris and Dakar. This diaspora is reflected in all her writing, the imaginary triangle between Africa, Europe, and the Antilles. Her four novels have each achieved laudatory reviews in The New York Times Book Review, The Sunday Times, Présence Africaine, Figaro Littéraire, The French Review, Savacou, Nouvelle Revue Française, The New Yorker, and many others, both in the United States and abroad. Her oeuvre lucidly narrates the harsh realities that Caribbean women endured during slavery and colonization. When she was eighteen and a student in Paris, Simone met writer André Schwarz-Bart. They married in 1961 and, two years later, he won the Prix Goncourt for *Le Dernier Des*

³⁷⁹ Simone Schwarz-Bart, The Bridge of Beyond, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), 100. (English translation of *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*)

Justes (The Last of the Just). Both deeply politically committed, the couple began a stunning creative collaboration which resulted in two novels, Un Plat de Porc aux Bananes Vertes and La Mulâtresse Solitude. Simone and Andre Schwarz-Bart collaborated in writing an encyclopedia of six volumes, entitled *Hommage à la femme noire*, which is a collection of stories praising black heroines, particularly those “forgotten” in official history. They survive only in legends and Creole stories. Schwarz-Bart has lived in France, Africa, and Switzerland. She currently resides in Switzerland and Guadeloupe.

Oeuvres principales:

Romans:

- *Un Plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (avec André Schwarz-Bart). Paris: Seuil, 1967.
- *Ti Jean l'horizon*. Paris: Seuil, 1979.
- *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*. Paris: Seuil, 1979.

Théâtre:

- *Ton Beau Capitaine*. Paris: Seuil, 1987.

Essai:

- *Hommage à la femme noire*. (six tomes) (avec André Schwarz-Bart). Paris: Editions Consulaires, 1989.

Nouvelles:

- "Au fond des casseroles". "Espoir et déchirements de l'âme créole." *Autrement* 41 (1989): 174-177.

Gisèle Pineau

*Alors, elles se sont mises à rêver en plantant le manger de leur jardin créole, en retournant la terre de leurs mains, elles se sont prises d'amour pour ce pays de honte. Et, petit à petit, de mère en fille, elles ont retrouvé les gestes de leur dignité.*³⁸⁰

Gisèle Pineau, born in Paris to Guadeloupian parents in 1956, is an acclaimed author of Francophone literature. Pineau spent the first fourteen years moving around constantly, due to her father's career in the military. She lived in Guadeloupe, the Congo, Martinique, and primarily Paris. At the age of five, her family visited their native Guadeloupe during her father's leave of absence. They returned to Paris shortly thereafter in the company of Pineau's grandmother Man-Ya. Man-Ya filled the cultural void of Pineau's virtually non-existent Guadeloupian identity, providing direct access to an Antillean heritage that became a powerful tool in combating racial adversity.

Living in the Parisian suburb of *Kremlin-Bicotre*, young Gisèle was exposed to intense racial persecution by her peers. She was the only black student in an all-white classroom and was frequently harassed by white classmates, forcing her into a psychological state of displacement. Consequently, Pineau represents Paris as a Mecca of despair, a milieu of exclusion with open hostility towards immigrants. At the age of fourteen,

³⁸⁰ Gisèle Pineau and Marie Abraham, *Femmes des Antilles: Traces et Voix*, (Paris: Editions Stock, 1998), 200.

Pineau returned with her family to Guadeloupe and attended St. Joseph's at Cluny. After three years on the island, she returned to Paris, where she enrolled in the University at Nanterre. She studied classical literature, which influenced her own style of writing without overshadowing the Antillean oral tradition. Her subject matter leans toward the thematic nature of Pineau's own alienated, displaced and marginalized identity. Despite her devotion to literature, she was forced to end her studies due to a lack of finance. She then entered a psychiatric nursing program at the centre *Hospitalier de Villejuif*, while continuing to write. Her duties as a nurse in the psychiatric ward of the hospital has given her accurate documentation of various mental illnesses. In *L'Espérance-Macadam*, Pineau combines the devastating acts of natural disaster with figurative representations of human acts of violent abuse. Incest and domestic violence play a principal role in *L'Espérance-Macadam*, where two characters are raped by their fathers. The perpetrators are the men closest to the victims.

Femmes des Antilles: Traces et Voix, which was written by Gisèle Pineau and Marie Abraham, includes a brief history of slavery, and personal accounts of women who have suffered its devastating effects. Through prose and poetry, the women give vent to their innermost pain. Each voice cries out against the inequitable and unfair distribution of fate. Their poetic

denunciation announces victory over degradation. They no longer fear and they tell their daughters—and the world—that it is time to break the silence, forget the past, and start anew. They are true women of dignity.

Oeuvres principales:

Romans:

- *La Grande Drive des esprits*. Paris: Le Serpent à Plumes, 1993.
- *L'Espérance-Macadam*. Paris: Stock, 1995.
- *L'Exil selon Julia*. Paris: Stock, 1996.
- *L'Âme prêtée aux oiseaux*. Paris: Stock, 1998.
- *Chair piment*. Paris: Mercure, 2002.
- *Fleur de barbarie*. Paris: Mercure, 2005.
- *Morne câpresse*. Paris: Mercure, 2008.

Récit:

- *Mes quatre femmes*. Paris: Philippe Rey, 2007.

Romans pour la jeunesse:

- *Un Papillon dans la cité*. Paris: Sépia, 1992.
- *Le Cyclone Marilyn* (illustré par Béatrice Favereau). Montréal: Hurtubise HMH, 1998; Paris: L'Élan Vert, 1998.
- *Caraiïbe sur Seine*. Paris: Dapper, 1999.
- *Case mensonge* (illustré par Sylvain Bourrières). *Je Bouquine* 206 (avril 2001); *Je Bouquine* 153 (mai 2004); Paris: Bayard jeunesse, 2004.
- *C'est la règle*. Paris: Thierry Magnier, 2002.
- *Les Colères du volcan*. Paris: Dapper, 2004.

Ouvrage de référence:

- *Femmes des Antilles; traces et voix cent cinquante ans après l'abolition de l'esclavage* (avec Marie Abraham). Paris: Stock, 1998.

Nouvelles:

- "Paroles de terre en larmes," "Ombres créoles" et "Léna". *Paroles de terre en larmes*. Paris: Hatier, 1987: 5-20; 96-110; 112-128.
- "Une antique malédiction." *Le Serpent à plumes*, 15 (Printemps 1992): 37-52.
- "Aimée de Bois-Vanille". *Le Serpent à plumes*, 28 (1994).
- "Tourment d'amour." *Écrire la « parole de nuit »; la nouvelle littéraire antillaise*. Paris: Gallimard (folio, essais), 1994: 79-87.
- "Piéça dévorée et pourrie." *Noir des Îles* (collectif). Paris: Gallimard, 1995: 159-203.
- "Le ventre de Léocadie." *L'Express* (octobre 1998).
- "Amélie et les anolis." *Nouvelles des Amériques*. (Maryse Condé et Lise Gauvin, dir.) Montréal: L'Hexagone, 1998: 25-40.
- "Les enchaînés." *Tropiques, revue négro-africaine de littérature et de philosophie* 61 (2ème semestre 1998). (Dakar).
- "Fichues racines." *Paradis Brisé, nouvelles des Caraïbes*. Collection Étonnants Voyageurs. Paris: Hoëbeke, 2004: 199-218.

Contributions:

- "Écrire en tant que Noire." *Penser la créolité*. (M. Cottenet-Hage et M. Condé, eds.) Paris: Karthala, 1995: 289-295.
- "Le sens de mon écriture." In: « Aspects de la littérature des Antilles » numéro spécial de *LittéRéalité* 10.1 (Printemps/Été 1998): 135-136.
- "Sur un morne de Capesterre Belle-Eau." *À peine plus d'un cyclone aux Antilles*. (Bernard Magnier, dir.) Cognac: Le temps qu'il fait, 1998: 25-30.
- "Les Papillons noirs." *Une enfance outremer* (textes réunis par Leïla Sebbar). Paris: Seuil, 2001: 157-168.
- "L'Identité, la créolité et la francité." *La culture français vue d'ici et d'ailleurs*. Thomas C. Spear, éd. Paris: Karthala, 2002: 217-224.

Beaux Livres:

- *Guadeloupe découverte*. (avec Jean-Marc Lecerf; préface de Simone Schwarz-Bart) Paris / Fort-de-France: Fabre Doumergue, 1997.
- *Guadeloupe d'antan: la Guadeloupe au début du siècle*, texte de Gisèle Pineau avec plus de 400 cartes postales anciennes. Paris: HC Éditions, 2004.

Prix et distinctions littéraires:

- 1994 Grand Prix des lectrices d'*Elle*, pour *La Grande Drive des esprits*.
- 1994 Prix Carbet de la Caraïbe, pour *La Grande Drive des esprits*.
- 1996 Prix RFO, pour *L'Espérance-Macadam*.
- 1996 Prix Terre de France, pour *L'Exil selon Julia*.
- 1997 Prix Rotary, pour *L'Exil selon Julia*.
- 1998 Prix Amerigo Vespucci, *L'Âme prêtée aux oiseaux*.

Maryse Condé

Que devenait-il dans cette froide et funeste Amérique? Je savais que, de plus en plus nombreux, les négriers venaient accoucher sur ses côtes et qu'elle se préparait à dominer le monde, grâce au produit de notre sueur. Je savais que les Indiens étaient effacés de sa carte, réduits à errer sur ces terres qui avaient été les leurs.³⁸¹

According to the Chicago Tribune, “Condé writes elegantly in a style that beautifully survives translation from the French...gives readers a flavor of the French and Creole stew that is the Guadeloupean tongue. In so doing, Condé conveys the many subtle distinctions of color, class, and language that make up this complex society.” Maryse Condé was born to wealthy parents in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe in 1930. In 1953 she was educated at the Lycée Fénéleon and Sorbonne, majoring in English. In 1958 she married Mamadou Condé, an African actor; they divorced in 1981. From 1960 to 1964 she was instructor at École Normale Supérieure in Conakry, Guinea. She then worked at the Ghana Institute of Language in Accra (1966-68) and Lycée Charles de Gaulle, Saint Louis, Senegal (1966-68). Condé's years in Africa were restless. She had to move from one country to another to escape arrests of dissidents. These years of wandering, however, were fruitful for her creative development. She has argued that too much familiarity with a

³⁸¹ Maryse Condé, Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem, (Paris : Mercure de France, 1986), 260.

place does not allow an author to write about it more truthfully but only to “mythify” it. In 1975, Condé received her Ph.D. Her dissertation in comparative literature dealt with black stereotypes in Caribbean literature.

Condé's novels are set at cultural intersection, exploring the intrusion of European imperialism into Africa and the resulting diaspora cultures, particularly that of the West Indies. In her early works the author explored the myth that the rediscovery of African ancestry can solve the Caribbean question. Later Condé focused on West Indian net of past myths, contemporary corruption, and disillusionment about the possibility to erase a colonial past of dispossession.

Written as an autobiographical transcription of the heroine's life, *Tituba* is a story of the forgotten witch of Salem. In this work Condé has reinterpreted stories and historical events that have become a part of Western cultural heritage. Tituba, the daughter of a Barbadian slave woman, was arrested in Massachusetts in the village of Salem along with the white girls in the witch trials of 1692, which also inspired Arthur Miller's famous play *The Crucible* (1953). She was released from jail, but there is not much record of what happened to her afterwards. Condé adds to what little is known about her life, creating her a fictional childhood as an orphan in Barbados. There she is initiated into another, benign, kind of witchcraft,

which was brought from Africa by an old woman, Mama Yaya. She was then sold to a family who brought her to Salem. In Puritan New England her talent in magic was considered a threat to society.

Since 1986 Condé has divided her time between Guadeloupe and the United States. She has taught at the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Virginia, the University of Maryland, Harvard, and the University of Columbia. She maintained her home on Guadeloupe, her native island. Condé's husband, Richard Philcox, has translated many of her works into English. During her stay at the University of California at Los Angeles, Condé wrote *Moi, Tituba sorcière* (1986), which was awarded the Grand Prix Littéraire de la Femme. Condé has received several awards, including Prix Littéraire de la Femme (1986) and Boucheron prize (1986).

Oeuvres principales:

Romans:

La plupart des romans sont disponibles en version poche (folio, Livre de Poche, Presses Pocket).

- *Heremakhonon*. Paris: 10/18, 1976. Nouvelle édition, *En Attendant le bonheur (Heremakhonon)*, Paris: Seghers, 1988.
- *Une Saison à Rihata*. Paris: Laffont, 1981.
- *Ségou: Les murailles de terre*. Paris: Laffont, 1984.
- *Ségou: La terre en miettes*. Paris: Laffont, 1985.
- *Moi, Tituba, sorcière noire de Salem*. Paris: Mercure, 1986.

- *La vie scélérate*. Paris: Seghers, 1987.
- *Traversée de la mangrove*. Paris: Mercure, 1989.
- *Les Derniers Rois Mages*. Paris: Mercure, 1992.
- *La Colonie du Nouveau Monde*. Paris: Laffont, 1993.
- *La Migration des coeurs*. Paris: Laffont, 1995.
- *Desirada*. Paris: Laffont, 1997.
- *Célanire cou-coupé*. Paris: Laffont, 2000.
- *La Belle Créole*. Paris: Mercure, 2001.
- *Histoire de la femme cannibale*. Paris: Mercure, 2003.
- *Les belles ténébreuses*. Paris: Mercure, 2008.

Récits:

- *Le Coeur à rire et à pleurer, contes vrais de mon enfance*. Paris: Laffont, 1999.
- *Victoire, des saveurs et des mots*. Paris: Mercure, 2006.

Théâtre:

- *Dieu nous l'a donné*. Paris: Pierre Jean Oswald, 1972.
- *Mort d'Oluwémi d'Ajumako*. Paris: Pierre Jean Oswald, 1973.
- *Le Morne de Massabielle*. Puteaux: Théâtre des Hauts de Seine, 1974.
- *Pension les Alizés*. Paris: Mercure, 1988.
- *An Tan Revolisyon*. Guadeloupe: Conseil Régional, 1989.
- *Comédie d'amour*. Mises en scène: Théâtre Fontaine (Paris, juillet 1993); New York et Washington, D.C. (novembre 1993).
- *Comme deux frères*. Paris: Lansman, 2007.

Nouvelles et courts récits:

- "Trois femmes à Manhattan." *Présence Africaine* 121/122 (1982): 307-315.
- "Ayissé." *Soleil éclaté: Mélanges offerts à Aimé Césaire*. Jacqueline Leiner, ed. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1984: 81-87.
- *Pays mêlé* (recueil de deux nouvelles). Paris: Hatier, 1985. Nouvelle édition avec dix nouvelles: Paris: Laffont, 1997.

- "La châtaigne et le fruit à pain." *Voies de pères, voix de filles: Quinze femmes écrivains parlent de leur père*. Adine Sagalyn, ed. Paris: Maren Sell, 1988.
- *À ma mère: Soixante écrivains parlent de leur mère*. Marcel Bisiaux et Catherine Jajolet, eds. Paris: Horay Pierre, 1988.
- "No Woman No Cry." *Le Serpent à Plumes* (3e trimestre 1991).
- "Liaison dangereuse". *Pour une littérature-monde*, sous la direction de Michel Le Bris et Jean Rouaud. Paris: Gallimard, 2007: 205-216.

Marie Chauvet

*Tirillé par l'ambiguïté d'une situation particulièrement délicate, je commençai dès mon jeune âge à souffrir à cause de la couleur foncée de ma peau, cette couleur acajou héritée d'une lointaine aïeule et qui détonnait dans le cercle étroit des Blancs et des mulâtres-blancs que mes parents fréquentaient.*³⁸²

Marie Vieux Chauvet was born in Port-au-Prince, Haïti on Septembre 16, 1916, the daughter of Constant Vieux, a politician (senator and ambassador). Marie Vieux studied to become a teacher at the Annexe of the *École Normale d'Institutrices*. In 1933 she obtained the elementary certification. She married a doctor, Aymon Charlier, and after their divorce married a travel agent, Pierre Chauvet.

Throughout her life, Marie Chauvet fought openly against the poverty which oppresses so many of her fellow Haitians. Some of her key themes are voodoo, slavery, colonialism (external and internal) and eroticism. Marked by a distinct idealism, her work nevertheless shows the impact of an existentialism which, when deployed in increasingly complex textual structures, give her a powerful political voice. In the early 1960s, Marie Chauvet was a figurehead for all Literary Haïti. The only woman in the group of male writers, she held an open house in Bourdon on Sundays, where they met for lively social and literary gatherings.

³⁸² Marie Chauvet, *Amour, Colère et Folie*, (Paris : Editions Voix des Femmes, 1968), 10.

Faced with the increasing severity of the François Duvalier regime, Marie Chauvet withdrew into her home to write; in six months, she wrote a first draft of *Amour, colère et folie*. When she completed it, she sent the manuscript to Simone de Beauvoir who recognized its merit and supported its publication by Éditions Gallimard in 1968. Fearing the danger it might pose to Marie Chauvet's friends and relations, her family intervened and bought up the entire stock from Gallimard, forbidding its sale. For more than a generation, the trilogy circulated only in a few rare copies which sold for a high price; it was even published in an unauthorized underground edition in 2003.

After *Amour, colère et folie* was withdrawn from bookstores, Marie Chauvet decided to go into exile in New York and to divorce her husband. Marrying for the third time, in New York she wed an American, Ted Proudfoot. Her last book, *Les Rapaces* was written between 1971, when François Duvalier died, and in 1973, when Marie Vieux Chauvet died. It is a magnificent fable about the role of the writer, who is so committed that he sacrifices his life, as well as offering a sober but scathing commentary on the Haitian social classes and on the dependent relations between Haitian leaders and foreign powers. The book was published posthumously in Haïti in 1986 under the name Marie Vieux, by Henri Deschamps publishers, after

the fall of Jean-Claude Duvalier. Marie Vieux Chauvet died in New York on June 19, 1973.

Oeuvres principales:

Romans:

- *Fille d'Haïti*. Paris: Fasquelle, 1954.
- *La Danse sur le volcan*. Paris: Plon, 1957; Paris / Léchelle: Maisonneuve & Larose / Emina Soleil, 2004 (réédition avec une préface de Catherine Hermary-Vieille).
- *Fonds des Nègres*. Port-au-Prince: Henri Deschamps, 1960.
- *Amour, colère et folie*. Paris: Gallimard, 1968; Paris / Léchelle: Maisonneuve & Larose / Emina Soleil, 2005.
- *Les Rapaces*. Port-au-Prince: Deschamps, 1986.

Théâtre:

- *La Légende des fleurs*. Port-au-Prince: Henri Deschamps, 1947.
- *Samba*. Mise en scène vers 1948 à Port-au-Prince. Inédit.
- *Amour, colère et folie*, adaptation de José Pliya. Paris: Avant-Scène Théâtre, 2008.

Le roman *Amour, colère et folie* par Marie Vieux-Chauvet, adapté pour la scène par José Pliya. De cette adaptation, "Amour" est mise en scène par Vincent Goethals, avec Magali Comeau-Denis (Claire) et Cyril Viallon (danseur) et joué à l'Artchipel (Guadeloupe), sur la Scène nationale d'Evry et au Tarmac de la Villette, 2007-2008; "Colère" est mise en scène par François Rancillac, avec Nicole Dogué (Laura), prévu à l'Artchipel (Guadeloupe) en octobre 2008; et "Folie" sera mise en scène par José Exélis, en octobre 2009 à l'Artchipel.

Nouvelle:

- « Ti-Moune nan bois. » *Optique 7* (septembre 1954): 57-60.

Distinctions littéraires:

- 1954 Prix de l'Alliance Française, pour *Fille d'Haïti*.
- 1960 Prix France-Antilles, pour *Fonds des Nègres*.
- 1986 Prix Deschamps (à titre posthume), pour *Amour, colère et folie*.

Marie-Thérèse Colimon Hall

*Bon Dié papa, min maman pitite ou! ou ouè misè moin, ou ouè bésouin moin ! baille Ti Tonton la vie, baille Ti Tonton foce, ban moin force pou'm capab levé nin moin tou.*³⁸³

Born in 1918, in the capital city of Haiti, Port-au-Prince, Marie-Thérèse thrived in a family of students and intensive readers. In *Mémoire de femmes*, she confessed to Jasmine Narcisse Claude: “...toute ma vie a été remplie de littérature. Ce fut pour moi une passion dévorante dès ma plus tendre enfance, plus précisément dès l’âge de dix ans. Je publiais même à cette époque une petite revue que j’écrivais en entier, que j’illustrais moi-même en couleur, dont je cousais les pages et que je distribuais à mes frères, sœurs, amies et camarades. Il faut avouer que mes parents me soutenaient dans ma vocation, j’étais très bien entourée et je lisais énormément.”³⁸⁴

Since young women were not accepted for advance study at that time, Marie-Thérèse became an elementary school teacher. She felt professionally unfulfilled and pursued her studies abroad. While in France, she frequented the *Centre de Formation Pédagogique de France* and soon realized that her profession was oriented towards primary school care. With other members of her family, she founded

³⁸³ Marie-Thérèse Colimon, *Fils de misère*, (Paris: Editions Caraïbes, 1974), 8.

³⁸⁴ Jasmine Claude Narcisse, *Mémoire de Femmes*. Port-au-Prince : Unicef, 1997.

the *Collège Colimon-Boisson*, which offered courses in French, French literature, and advanced courses in history; the study of French and the French language were taught rigorously in all of the schools at that time.

During the time that Colimon became the true pioneer of preschool education in Haiti, she married educator Luis D. Hall. Colimon-Hall became well-recognized throughout Haiti as an advocate for children's education. She was also an advocate for women who were mute, as well as for unwed mothers. In one of her most beautiful poems, *Où sont les enfants*, she expressed her devotion, her intellectual probity, and above all, her love. She died in Haiti at the age of 79, but she will live eternally in the memory of those whose lives she affected.

Merci Marie-Thérèse Colimon Hall d'avoir été ce phare, ce guide, ce modèle et puisse les générations futures suivre votre lumineux sillage dans la voie royale de l'éducation des enfants d'Haïti.

Oeuvres principales:

Roman:

- *Fils de misère*. Port-au-Prince: Éditions Caraïbes, 1974, 200 pages.

Nouvelles:

- *Le Chant des Sirènes*. Port-au-Prince: Éditions du Soleil, 1979, 149 pages.
Du recueil, la nouvelle « Le plat de lentilles » est republiée dans *Conjonction* 177-178-179 (1988) et « Bonjour, Maman, Bonne fête, Maman ! » dans *Diversité: La nouvelle francophone*. Eds. James Gaasch and Valérie Budig-Markin. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995, 22-29; 2nd edition, 2000: 11-21.
- *La Source*, conte de Noël. Port-au-Prince: Ateliers Fardin, 1973, 17 pages.

Poésie:

- *Mon cahier d'écritures*; choix de poèmes. Port-au-Prince: Ateliers Fardin, [1973], 27 pages.
- *Au Pikipirite Chantant*, recueil de poèmes mise en musique par Angel Mendez, destiné à enseigner le chant au Jardin d'Enfants. Inédit.

Théâtre:

- *La Fille de l'esclave*, pièce « patriotique » en trois actes pour jeunes filles. Port-au-Prince: Dandin Frères, 1949.
Mise en scène par Raymonde Colimon Boisson, reprise régulièrement par les établissements d'Études Secondaires pour jeunes filles. Mises en scène par Paulette Pujol Oriol : Collège St François d'Assise, 1974; Collège la Charité de Saint-Louis, 1980, reprise au théâtre « Sanité et Charles Bel Air » à l'hôtel Moulin Sur Mer à l'occasion de l'inauguration de l'auditorium « 1804 ». Mise en scène par Marie-Claude Laforêt : Institution Sainte-Rose de Lima, 1996. Mise en scène par Emmanuelle Eugène Sainvil : Ti Moun Art, l'école d'art dramatique, 2005.
- *Le Chant du musicien*, féerie en 3 actes et 8 tableaux avec chœurs et ballets. Représentée au Rex Théâtre le 13 juillet 1949, interprétée par les élèves du collège Colimon-Boisson. 24 pages inédites, datées du 14 avril 1960.
- *Bernadette Soubirous*, théâtre religieux, 1955. Texte non retrouvé.

- *Vision d'Anacaona* (avec Elodie de Wend), 1955. Texte non retrouvé.
- *Marie-Claire Heureuse*, drame historique en 4 tableaux et un prologue, représenté au Rex Théâtre le 18 mai 1955.
- *Les enfants du monde*, saynète enfantine costumée pour les élèves du Jardin d'Enfants et du primaire. 7 pages, sans date.
- *Luciole*, drame en 3 actes (une tragédie dans une famille haïtienne), mise en scène de Gabriel Imbert au Rex Théâtre, octobre 1962. Inédite.
- *Haïtiennes d'autrefois*, ou *Le Message des aïeules*, sketch historique en 3 tableaux. 15 pages, 1974.

Essais, articles sélectionnés:

- *L'émancipation de la jeune fille (êtes-vous pour ou contre?)*. Communication présentée au Congrès national des femmes haïtiennes le 11 avril 1950, livret de 17 pages.
- *Femmes Haïtiennes*. Ligue Féminine d'Action Sociale (Collectif). Port-au-Prince: Deschamps, 1953, 263 pages. Textes de Marie-Thérèse Colimon : « Présentation » (pages 3-10); « Suzanne Louverture », portrait (22-26), « Joute Lachenais », portrait (61-67), « Visages d'Institutrices » (177-181), « Mercy Pidoux », portrait (218-221).
- *Séminaire de l'Enfance en Haïti, du 9 au 18 août 1953*. Action Sociale. Port-au-Prince: Département du Travail / Interamerican Children's Institute, 1954, 162 pages.
- Communication de Marie-Thérèse Colimon Hall, publiée dans *Les enfants dans les arts*. Congrès sur l'éducation du 30 décembre 1954. Lausanne: Imprimerie Held, 1954: 97-103.
- Allocution d'ouverture prononcée par Marie-Thérèse Colimon (Présidente), le 9 mai 1976. *Comité International Haïtien de l'OMEP*, 3e séminaire de pédagogie 9-15 mai 1976.
- *Rencontre : Andremise et Nathalie*. Au jardin de l'enfance. Essai pédagogique. Sans date.
- « Plaidoyer pour l'école maternelle populaire ». *Conjonction* 133 (mars-avril 1977): 5-28.
- *Bouquet d'hommages à Circé Douyon*. Texte d'hommage de Marie-Thérèse Colimon Hall. (18 juin 1977): 7.

- Contributions au magazine *Pot-pourri* :
 - « Interview accordée à la revue sur l'éducation préscolaire par Marie-Thérèse Colimon, fondatrice et codirectrice du Centre d'Etudes pour l'Education Préscolaire, Présidente de l'OMEP en Haïti ». *Pot-pourri* 5.8 (1er septembre 1977): 15-18.
 - « Une voix venue du Sud : Germaine Dennery » (Femmes Auteurs d'Haïti), compte rendu. *Pot-pourri* 5.11 (22 septembre 1977).
 - « Lélia Lherisson » (Femmes Auteurs d'Haïti). *Pot-pourri* 5.12 (22-29 septembre 1977).
 - « Un conte merveilleux, la famille Emeraude Muriel Darly », compte rendu. *Pot-pourri* 5.15 (13-20 octobre 1977).
 - « Un écrivain haïtien d'avant-garde Denise Roy, 1908/1974 » (Femmes Auteurs d'Haïti). *Pot-pourri* 5.16 (20-27 octobre 1977).
 - « Un écrivain haïtien d'avant-garde Denise Roy, 1908/1974 » (Femmes Auteurs d'Haïti, 2e partie). *Pot-pourri* 5.17 (27 octobre-3 novembre 1977).
 - « *Ces dames Catinat* d'Elizabeth Arnoux Magny » (Femmes Auteurs d'Haïti), compte rendu. *Pot-pourri* (sans volume ou date précise, 1977).
 - « Pour saluer un prix littéraire Liliane Devieux Dehoux » (Prix des Caraïbes). *Pot-pourri* 6.13 (30 mars-6 avril 1978).
 - Interview, « Marie-Thérèse Colimon Hall, une année au C.F.E.P. », interview de Linda Gonzales. *Pot-pourri* 7.3 (19 juillet 1978).

Edouard Glissant and Joseph Zobel

I cannot complete my work without including two male authors whose voices are heard above other contemporary intellectuals—Edouard Glissant and Joseph Zobel. They both grew up in Martinique and gravitated to many parts of the world to augment their scope of academic proficiencies.

Joseph Zobel

Joseph Zobel wrote *La Rue Cases Nègres* (1950), which was adapted for a movie in 1983. The novel portrays the reality of life in the French West Indies in the years between the World Wars. It is an important document in the history of the postcolonial era. Zobel also published collections of stories and a volume of verse. He then retired to spend his remaining years in Senegal, where he died in 2006.

Oeuvres principales:

Romans:

- *Les Jours immobiles*, roman antillais. Fort-de-France: Imprimerie officielle, 1946. Repris et publié sous le titre, *Les Mains pleines d'oiseaux*. Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1978.
- *Diab'-là*. Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1947, 1975, 1989.
- *La Rue case-nègres*. Paris: J. Froissart, 1950; Paris: Les Quatre Jeudis, 1955; Paris: Présence Africaine, 1974, 1983, 1984, 1997.

- *La Fête à Paris*. Paris: La Table Ronde, 1953. Repris et publié sous le titre, *Quand la neige aura fondu*. Paris: Éditions Caribéennes, 1979.

Nouvelles:

- *Laghia de la mort*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1978, 1996.
- *Le Soleil partagé*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1964, 1984.
- *Mas Badara*. Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1983.
- *Et si la mer n'était pas bleue*. Paris: Éditions Caribéennes, 1982.
- *Gertal et autres nouvelles*, suivi de *Journal, 1946-2002*. Petit-Bourg: Ibis Rouge, 2002.

Poésie:

- *Incantation pour un retour au pays natal*, poèmes. Anduze (Gard): Imprimerie du Languedoc, 1964, 13 pp.
- *Poèmes de moi-même*. Chez l'auteur, 1984.
- *Poèmes d'Amour et de Silence*. Fréjus: Librairie Prosveta, 1994.
- *Le Soleil m'a dit*. Oeuvre poétique. Ibis Rouge, 2002.

Prix et distinctions littéraires:

- 1998 Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur.
- 2002 Grand Prix du Livre Insulaire, pour l'ensemble de son oeuvre.

Edouard Glissant

“Edouard Glissant is undoubtedly one of the most important theorists of the French Colonial experience as well as one of the greatest writers of the Caribbean.”³⁸⁵ His novels portray characters who are woven into a vast landscape in which they wander through a series of books, keeping their persona intact. Elements of slavery, marronage, and heroic suffering are revealed as they search in the past for their present identity. The reader is obliged to participate in the development of the plot and the interaction of the protagonists for comprehension of the progression of events. Within the history of four generations of women, Glissant presents those who earn the title of dignity.

*Edouard Glissant, poète, romancier, et philosophe, a eu, des les années 50, l'intuition du formidable métissage qui allait saisir le monde... Il a inauguré en 2005 son Institut du Tout-monde qui fait fructifier ces recherches sur une autre manière de voir le monde : non pas comme un centre et une périphérie, mais comme un nœud vivant de relations entre partenaires égaux. Chargé par l'ancien Président Jacques Chirac, en 2006, de réfléchir à la création d'un Centre national pour la mémoire des esclavages et de leurs abolitions...Il organisait...un colloque qui se déroulait quasi simultanément sur trois sites : Fort-de-France, New York et Paris. Y ont été abordés trois aspects de la modalité que sont l'esclavage, la créolisation linguistique et la création culturelle.*³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ Celia Britton, Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial History, (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 5.

³⁸⁶ www.afrik.com/article11833.html

There is a relationship between Glissant's theories and his novels, and his novels and postcolonial history. His books and essays are published in many languages and he has acquired world-wide recognition. His theory concerning identity is an important topic and is under current political consideration in France. Glissant's cause for equality is based on his theory of relation, and deals specifically with immigration, integration, and national unity. The pamphlet entitled *Quand les Murs Tombent* was written recently in cooperation with Patrick Chamoiseau (a fellow Martinican), and relates to French immigration policies. In this publication, they claim that "walls" menace the world. The walls menace the free flow of immigration.

Glissant's theory of relation is based on the benefits of diversity. Relation is also "le chaos-monde qui se relate."³⁸⁷ "J'appelle Chaosmonde le choc actuel de tant de cultures qui s'embrasent, se repoussent, disparaissent, subsistent pourtant, s'endorment ou se transforment lentement ou à vitesse foudroyante."³⁸⁸ His theory of diversity includes his notion of *rhizome* whereby the roots of a plant are spread, they proliferate randomly from different points, and they enhance the result rather than taint it. This theory is explored in his most recent novel, *Tout-Monde*, in which he explains the advantages of plurality; different voices add to collectivity, and free and

³⁸⁷ Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation*, (Paris: Messageries du Livre, 1990), 109.

³⁸⁸ Edouard Glissant, *Traité*, 22.

equal participation. He also respects the opacity of the “Other,” which resists attempts to assimilate, although he firmly believes in the collective “Nous.”*

Edouard Glissant was born in Martinique and is a constant champion for its independence. He has traveled the world over, studied in Paris and taught in universities in Paris as well as in the United States. His novels, written with sardonic humor, offset the tragic lives of the protagonists. Written in richness and depth, they constitute a strategy of language and resistance. His essays and conferences reflect his continued battle for freedom and equality. Edouard Glissant remains a figure of world renown and acclamation.

Oeuvres principales:

Essais:

- *Soleil de la conscience*. (1956) (Poétique I) Nouvelle édition, Paris: Gallimard, 1997.
- *Le Discours antillais*. (1981) Paris: Gallimard, 1997.
- *Poétique de la Relation*. (Poétique III) Paris: Gallimard, 1990.
- *Discours de Glendon*. Suivi d'une bibliographie des écrits d'Edouard Glissant établie par Alain Baudot. Toronto: Ed. du GREF, 1990.
- *Introduction à une poétique du divers*. (1995) Paris: Gallimard, 1996.
- *Faulkner, Mississippi*. Paris: Stock, 1996; Paris: Gallimard (folio), 1998.
- *Traité du Tout-Monde*. (Poétique IV) Paris: Gallimard, 1997.

* Glissant's theories are complicated. I hope that my interpretation is in accordance with the intent of the author.

- *La Cohée du Lamentin*. (Poétique V) Paris: Gallimard, 2005.
- *Une nouvelle région du monde*. (Esthétique I) Paris: Gallimard, 2006.
- *Mémoires des esclavages* (avec un avant-propos de Dominique de Villepin). Paris: Gallimard, 2007.
- *Quand les murs tombent. L'identité nationale hors-la-loi ?* (avec Patrick Chamoiseau). Paris: Galaade, 2007.
- *La terre magnétique : les errances de Rapa Nui, l'île de Pâques* (avec Sylvie Séma). Paris: Seuil, 2007.

Poésie:

- *La Terre inquiète*. Lithographies de Wilfredo Lam. Paris: Éditions du Dragon, 1955.
- *Le Sel Noir*. Paris: Seuil, 1960.
- *Les Indes, Un Champ d'îles, La Terre inquiète*. Paris: Seuil, 1965.
- *L'Intention poétique*. (1969) (Poétique II) Nouvelle édition, Paris: Gallimard, 1997.
- *Boises; histoire naturelle d'une aridité*. Fort-de-France: Acoma, 1979.
- *Le Sel noir; Le Sang rivé; Boises*. Paris: Gallimard, 1983.
- *Pays rêvé, pays réel*. Paris: Seuil, 1985.
- *Fastes*. Toronto: Ed. du GREF, 1991.
- *Poèmes complets*. (*Le Sang rivé; Un Champ d'îles; La Terre inquiète; Les Indes; Le Sel noir; Boises; Pays rêvé, pays réel; Fastes; Les Grands chaos*). Paris: Gallimard, 1994.
- *Le Monde incréé: Conte de ce que fut la Tragédie d'Askia; Parabole d'un Moulin de Martinique; La Folie Célat*. Paris: Gallimard, 2000.

Romans:

- *La Lézarde*. (1958) Nouvelle édition, Paris: Gallimard, 1997; Port-au-Prince: Presses Nationales d'Haïti, 2007.
- *Le Quatrième Siècle*. (1964) Paris: Gallimard, 1997.
- *Malemort*. (1975). Nouvelle édition, Paris: Gallimard, 1997.

- *La Case du commandeur*. (1981) Nouvelle édition, Paris: Gallimard, 1997.
- *Mahagony*. (1987) Nouvelle édition, Paris: Gallimard, 1997.
- *Tout-Monde*. Paris: Gallimard, 1995.
- *Sartorius: le roman des Batoutos*. Paris: Gallimard, 1999.
- *Ormerod*. Paris: Gallimard, 2003.

Théâtre:

- *Monsieur Toussaint*. (1961) Nouvelle édition: Paris: Gallimard, 1998.

Prix et distinctions:

- 1958 Prix Théophraste Renaudot, pour *La Lézarde*.
- 1965 Prix Charles Veillon (prix du meilleur roman de langue française), pour *Le Quatrième Siècle*.
- 1989 Docteur Honoris Causa, York University (Toronto).
- 1989 Puterbaugh Foundation Biennial Prize, pour l'ensemble de son oeuvre.
- 1991 Prix Roger Caillois de poésie, pour *Poétique de la relation*.
- 1993 Docteur Honoris Causa, West Indies University (Trinidad).
- 1998 Prix de Poésie du Mont Saint-Michel.
- 2004 Laurea ad Honorem de l'Université de Bologne en Langues et Littératures Étrangères (Italie).
- Membre de l'Ordre des Francophones d'Amérique (Québec) depuis 1986.
- Président honoraire du Parlement International des Écrivains depuis 1993.



LE
CODE NOIR.



LETTRES
PATENTES

*Pour l'établissement d'un Conseil
Souverain à Surate.*

Donnée à Paris le 21 Janvier 1671.



LOUIS, par la grace de
Dieu, Roi de France &
de Navarre, à tous pré-
sents & à venir, Salut :
Nous avons par Arrêt de notre
Janvier 1671. A

Article premier.

Voulons que l'Edit du feu Roi de glorieuse mémoire, notre très honoré Seigneur et Père, du 23 avril 1615, soit exécuté dans nos îles ; ce faisant, enjoignons à tous nos officiers de chasser de nosdites îles tous les juifs qui y ont établi leur résidence, auxquels, comme aux ennemis déclarés du nom chrétien, nous commandons d'en sortir dans trois mois à compter du jour de la publication des présentes, à peine de confiscation de corps et de biens.

Art. 2.

Tous les esclaves qui seront dans nos îles seront baptisés et instruits dans la Religion Catholique, Apostolique et Romaine. Enjoignons aux habitants qui achètent des nègres nouvellement arrivés d'en avertir dans huitaine au plus tard les gouverneur et intendant desdites îles, à peine d'amende arbitraire, lesquels donneront les ordres nécessaire pour les faire instruire et baptiser dans le temps convenable.

Art. 3.

Interdisons tout exercice public d'autre Religion que la Catholique, Apostolique et Romaine. Voulons que les contrevenants soient punis comme rebelles et désobéissants à nos commandements. Défendons toutes assemblées pour cet effet, lesquelles nous déclarons conventicules, illicites et séditieuses, sujettes à la même peine qui aura lieu même contre les maîtres qui lui permettront et souffriront à l'égard de leurs esclaves.

Art. 4.

Ne seront préposés aucuns commandeurs à la direction des nègres, qui ne fassent profession de la Religion Catholique, Apostolique et Romaine, à peine de confiscation desdits nègres contre les maîtres qui les auront

préposés et de punition arbitraire contre les commandeurs qui auront acceptés ladite direction.

Art. 5.

Défendons à nos sujets de la religion P. R. d'apporter aucun trouble ni empêchement à nos autres sujets, même à leurs esclaves, dans le libre exercice de la Religion Catholique, Apostolique et Romaine, à peine de punition exemplaire.

Art. 6.

Enjoignons à tous nos sujets, de quelque qualité et condition qu'ils soient, d'observer les jours de dimanches et de fêtes, qui sont gardés par nos sujets de la Religion Catholique, Apostolique et Romaine. Leur défendons de travailler ni de faire travailler leurs esclaves auxdits jours depuis l'heure de minuit jusqu'à l'autre minuit à la culture de la terre, à la manufacture des sucres et à tous autres ouvrages, à peine d'amende et de punition arbitraire contre les maîtres et confiscation tant des sucres que des esclaves qui seront surpris par nos officiers dans le travail.

Art. 7.

Leur défendons pareillement de tenir le marché des nègres et de toute autre marchandise auxdits jours, sur pareille peine de confiscation des marchandises qui se trouveront alors au marché et d'amende arbitraire contre les marchands.

Art. 8.

Déclarons nos sujets qui ne sont pas de la Religion Catholique, Apostolique et Romaine incapables de contracter à l'avenir aucuns mariages valables, déclarons bâtards les enfants qui naîtront de telles conjonctions, que nous voulons être tenues et réputées, tenons et réputons pour vrais concubinages.

Art. 9.

Les hommes libres qui auront eu un ou plusieurs enfants de leur concubinage avec des esclaves, ensemble les maîtres qui les auront soufferts, seront chacun condamnés en une amende de 2 000 livres de sucre, et, s'ils sont les maîtres de l'esclave de laquelle ils auront eu lesdits enfants, voulons, outre l'amende, qu'ils soient privés de l'esclave et des enfants et qu'elle et eux soient adjugés à l'hôpital, sans jamais pouvoir être affranchis.

N'entendons toutefois le présent article avoir lieu lorsque l'homme libre qui n'était point marié à autre personne durant son concubinage avec son esclave, épousera dans les formes observées par l'Eglise ladite esclave, qui sera affranchie par ce moyen et les enfants rendus libres et légitimes.

Art. 10.

Les solennités prescrites par l'Ordonnance de Blois et par la Déclaration de 1639 pour les mariages seront observées tant à l'égard des personnes libres

que des esclaves, sans néanmoins que le consentement du père et de la mère de l'esclave y soit nécessaire, mais celui du maître seulement.

Art. 11.

Défendons très expressément aux curés de procéder aux mariages des esclaves, s'ils ne font apparoir du consentement de leurs maîtres. Défendons aussi aux maîtres d'user d'aucunes contraintes sur leurs esclaves pour les marier contre leur gré.

Art. 12.

Les enfants qui naîtront des mariages entre esclaves seront esclaves et appartiendront aux maîtres des femmes esclaves et non à ceux de leurs maris, si le mari et la femme ont des maîtres différents.

Art. 13.

Voulons que si le mari esclave a épousé une femme libre, les enfants, tant mâles que filles, suivent la condition de leur mère et soient libres comme elle, nonobstant la servitude de leur père, et que, si le père est libre et la mère esclave, les enfants soient esclaves pareillement.

Art. 14.

Les maîtres sont tenus de faire enterrer en terre sainte, dans les cimetières destinés à cet effet, leurs esclaves baptisés. Et, à l'égard de ceux qui mourront sans avoir reçu le baptême, ils seront enterrés la nuit dans quelque champ voisin du lieu où ils seront décédés.

Art. 15.

Défendons aux esclaves de porter aucune arme offensive ni de gros bâtons, à peine du fouet et de confiscation des armes au profit de celui qui les trouvera saisis, à l'exception seulement de ceux qui sont envoyés à la chasse par leurs maîtres et qui seront porteurs de leurs billets ou marques connus.

Art. 16.

Défendons pareillement aux esclaves appartenant à différents maîtres de s'attrouper le jour ou la nuit sous prétexte de noces ou autrement, soit chez l'un de leurs maîtres ou ailleurs, et encore moins dans les grands chemins ou lieux écartés, à peine de punition corporelle qui ne pourra être moindre que du fouet et de la fleur de lys ; et, en cas de fréquentes récidives et autres circonstances aggravantes, pourront être punis de mort, ce que nous laissons à l'arbitrage des juges. Enjoignons à tous nos sujets de courir sus aux contrevenants, et de les arrêter et de les conduire en prison, bien qu'ils ne soient officiers et qu'ils n'y ait contre eux encore aucun décret.

Art. 17.

Les maîtres qui seront convaincus d'avoir permis ou toléré telles assemblées composées d'autres esclaves que de ceux qui leur appartiennent seront condamnés en leurs propres et privés noms de réparer tout le dommage qui

aura été fait à leurs voisins à l'occasion desdites assemblées et en 10 écus d'amende pour la première fois et au double en cas de récidive.

Art. 18.

Défendons aux esclaves de vendre des cannes de sucre pour quelque cause et occasion que ce soit, même avec la permission de leurs maîtres, à peine du fouet contre les esclaves, de 10 livres tournois contre le maître qui l'aura permis et de pareille amende contre l'acheteur.

Art. 19.

Leur défendons aussi d'exposer en vente au marché ni de porter dans des maisons particulières pour vendre aucune sorte de denrée, même des fruits, légumes, bois à brûler, herbes pour la nourriture des bestiaux et leurs manufactures, sans permission expresse de leurs maîtres par un billet ou par des marques connus ; à peine de revendication des choses ainsi vendues, sans restitution de prix, pour les maîtres et de 6 livres tournois d'amende à leur profit contre les acheteurs.

Art. 20.

Voulons à cet effet que deux personnes soient préposées par nos officiers dans chaque marché pour examiner les denrées et marchandises qui y seront apportées par les esclaves, ensemble les billets et marques de leurs maîtres dont ils seront porteurs.

Art. 21.

Permettons à tous nos sujets habitants des îles de se saisir de toutes les choses dont ils trouveront les esclaves chargés, lorsqu'ils n'auront point les billets de leurs maîtres, ni de marques connues, pour être rendues incessamment à leurs maîtres, si leur habitation est voisine du lieu où leurs esclaves auront été surpris en délit : sinon elles seront incessamment envoyées à l'hôpital pour y être en dépôt jusqu'à ce que les maîtres en aient été avertis.

Art. 22.

Seront tenus les maîtres de faire fournir, par chaque semaine, à leurs esclaves âgés de dix ans et au-dessus, pour leur nourriture, deux pots et demi, mesure de Paris, de farine de manioc, ou trois cassaves pesant chacune 2 livres et demie au moins, ou choses équivalentes, avec 2 livres de boeuf salé, ou 3 livres de poisson, ou autres choses à proportion ; et aux enfants, depuis qu'ils sont sevrés jusqu'à l'âge de dix ans, la moitié des vivres ci-dessus.

Art. 23.

Leur défendons de donner aux esclaves de l'eau-de-vie de canne ou guildive, pour tenir lieu de la subsistance mentionnée en l'article précédent.

Art. 24.

Leur défendons pareillement de se décharger de la nourriture et subsistance de leurs esclaves en leur permettant de travailler certain jour de la semaine pour leur compte particulier.

Art. 25.

Seront tenus les maîtres de fournir à chaque esclave, par chacun an, deux habits de toile ou quatre aunes de toile, au gré des maîtres.

Art. 26.

Les esclaves qui ne seront point nourris, vêtus et entretenus par leurs maîtres, selon que nous l'avons ordonné par ces présentes, pourront en donner avis à notre procureur général et mettre leurs mémoires entre ses mains, sur lesquels et même d'office, si les avis viennent d'ailleurs, les maîtres seront poursuivis à sa requête et sans frais ; ce que nous voulons être observé pour les crimes et traitement barbares et inhumains des maîtres envers leurs esclaves.

Art. 27.

Les esclaves infirmes par vieillesse, maladie ou autrement, soit que la maladie soit incurable ou non, seront nourris et entretenus par leurs maîtres, et, en cas qu'ils les eussent abandonnés, lesdits esclaves seront adjugés à l'hôpital, auquel les maîtres seront condamnés de payer 6 sols par chacun jour, pour la nourriture et l'entretien de chacun esclave.

Art. 28.

Déclarons les esclaves ne pouvoir rien avoir qui ne soit à leurs maîtres ; et tout ce qui leur vient par industrie, ou par la libéralité d'autres personnes, ou autrement, à quelque titre que ce soit, être acquis en pleine propriété à leurs maîtres, sans que les enfants des esclaves, leurs pères et mères, leurs parents et tous autres y puissent rien prétendre par successions, dispositions entre vifs ou à cause de mort ; lesquelles dispositions nous déclarons nulles, ensemble toutes les promesses et obligations qu'ils auraient faites, comme étant faites par des gens incapables de disposer et contracter de leur chef.

Art. 29.

Voulons néanmoins que les maîtres soient tenus de ce que leurs esclaves auront fait par leur commandement, ensemble de ce qu'ils auront géré et négocié dans les boutiques, et pour l'espèce particulière de commerce à laquelle leurs maîtres les auront préposés, et au cas que leurs maîtres ne leur aient donné aucun ordre et ne les aient point préposés, ils seront tenus seulement jusqu'à concurrence de ce qui aura tourné à leur profit, et, si rien n'a tourné au profit des maîtres, le pécule desdits esclaves que les maîtres leur auront permis d'avoir en sera tenu, après que les maîtres en auront déduit par préférence ce qui pourra leur être dû ; sinon que le pécule

consistât en tout ou partie en marchandises, dont les esclaves auraient permission de faire trafic à part, sur lesquelles leurs maîtres viendront seulement par contribution au sol la livre avec les autres créanciers.

Art. 30.

Ne pourront les esclaves être pourvus d'office ni de commission ayant quelque fonction publique, ni être constitués agents par autres que leurs maîtres pour gérer et administrer aucun négoce, ni être arbitres, experts ou témoins, tant en matière civile que criminelle : et en cas qu'ils soient ouïs en témoignage, leur déposition ne servira que de mémoire pour aider les juges à s'éclairer d'ailleurs, sans qu'on en puisse tirer aucune présomption, ni conjoncture, ni adminicule de preuve.

Art. 31.

Ne pourront aussi les esclaves être parties ni être (sic) en jugement en matière civile, tant en demandant qu'en défendant, ni être parties civiles en matière criminelle, sauf à leurs maîtres d'agir et défendre en matière civile et de poursuivre en matière criminelle la réparation des outrages et excès qui auront été contre leurs esclaves.

Art. 32.

Pourront les esclaves être poursuivis criminellement, sans qu'il soit besoin de rendre leurs maîtres partie, (sinon) en cas de complicité : et seront les esclaves accusés, jugés en première instance par les juges ordinaires et par appel au Conseil souverain, sur la même instruction et avec les mêmes formalités que les personnes libres.

Art. 33.

L'esclave qui aura frappé son maître, sa maîtresse ou le mari de sa maîtresse, ou leurs enfants avec contusion ou effusion de sang, ou au visage, sera puni de mort.

Art. 34.

Et quant aux excès et voies de fait qui seront commis par les esclaves contre les personnes libres, voulons qu'ils soient sévèrement punis, même de mort, s'il y échet.

Art. 35.

Les vols qualifiés, même ceux de chevaux, cavales, mulets, boeufs ou vaches, qui auront été faits par les esclaves ou par les affranchis, seront punis de peines afflictives, même de mort, si le cas le requiert.

Art. 36.

Les vols de moutons, chèvres, cochons, volailles, canne à sucre, pois., mil, manioc, ou autres légumes, faits par les esclaves, seront punis selon la qualité du vol, par les juges qui pourront, s'il y échet, les condamner d'être

battus de verges par l'exécuteur de la haute justice et marqués d'une fleur de lys.

Art. 37.

Seront tenus les maîtres, en cas de vol ou d'autre dommage causé par leurs esclaves, outre la peine corporelle des esclaves, de réparer le tort en leur nom, s'ils n'aiment mieux abandonner l'esclave à celui auquel le tort a été fait ; ce qu'ils seront tenus d'opter dans trois jours, à compter de celui de la condamnation, autrement ils en seront déchus.

Art. 38.

L'esclave fugitif qui aura été en fuite pendant un mois, à compter du jour que son maître l'aura dénoncé en justice, aura les oreilles coupées et sera marqué d'une fleur de lis une épaule ; s'il récidive un autre mois pareillement du jour de la dénonciation, il aura le jarret coupé, et il sera marqué d'une fleur de lys sur l'autre épaule ; et, la troisième fois, il sera puni de mort.

Art. 39.

Les affranchis qui auront donné retraite dans leurs maisons aux esclaves fugitifs, seront condamnés par corps envers les maîtres en l'amende de 300 livres de sucre par chacun jour de rétention, et les autres personnes libres qui leur auront donné pareille retraite, en 10 livres tournois d'amende par chacun jour de rétention.

Art. 40.

L'esclave sera puni de mort sur la dénonciation de son maître non complice du crime dont il aura été condamné sera estimé avant l'exécution par deux des principaux habitants de l'île, qui seront nommés d'office par le juge, et le prix de l'estimation en sera payé au maître ; et, pour à quoi satisfaire, il sera imposé par l'intendant sur chacune tête de nègre payant droits la somme portée par l'estimation, laquelle sera régalé sur chacun desdits nègres et levée par le fermier du domaine royal pour éviter à frais.

Art. 41.

Défendons aux juges, à nos procureurs et aux greffiers de prendre aucune taxe dans les procès criminels contre les esclaves, à peine de concussion.

Art. 42.

Pourront seulement les maîtres, lorsqu'ils croiront que leurs esclaves l'auront mérité les faire enchaîner et les faire battre de verges ou cordes. Leur défendons de leur donner la torture, ni de leur faire aucune mutilation de membres, à peine de confiscation des esclaves et d'être procédé contre les maîtres extraordinairement.

Art. 43.

Enjoignons à nos officiers de poursuivre criminellement les maîtres ou les commandeurs qui auront tué un esclave étant sous leur puissance ou sous

leur direction et de punir le meurtre selon l'atrocité des circonstances ; et, en cas qu'il y ait lieu à l'absolution, permettons à nos officiers de renvoyer tant les maîtres que les commandeurs absous, sans qu'ils aient besoin d'obtenir de nous Lettres de grâce.

Art. 44.

Déclarons les esclaves être meubles et comme tels entrer dans la communauté, n'avoir point de suite par hypothèque, se partager également entre les cohéritiers, sans préciput et droit d'aînesse, n'être sujets au douaire coutumier, au retrait féodal et lignager, aux droits féodaux et seigneuriaux, aux formalités des décrets, ni au retranchement des quatre quintes, en cas de disposition à cause de mort et testamentaire.

Art. 45.

N'entendons toutefois priver nos sujets de la faculté de les stipuler propres à leurs personnes et aux leurs de leur côté et ligne, ainsi qu'il se pratique pour les sommes de deniers et autres choses mobilières.

Art. 46.

Seront dans les saisies des esclaves observées les formes prescrites par nos ordonnances et les coutumes pour les saisies des choses mobilières.

Voulons que les deniers en provenant soient distribués par ordre de saisies ; ou, en cas de déconfiture, au sol la livre, après que les dettes privilégiées auront été payées et généralement que la condition des esclaves soit réglée en toutes affaires comme celle des autres choses mobilières, aux exceptions suivantes.

Art. 47.

Ne pourront être saisis et vendus séparément le mari, la femme et leurs enfants impubères, s'ils sont tous sous la puissance d'un même maître ; déclarons nulles les saisies et ventes séparées qui en seront faites ; ce que nous voulons avoir lieu dans les aliénations volontaires, sous peine, contre ceux qui feront les aliénations, d'être privés de celui ou de ceux qu'ils auront gardés, qui seront adjugés aux acquéreurs, sans qu'ils soient tenus de faire aucun supplément de prix.

Art. 48.

Ne pourront aussi les esclaves travaillant actuellement dans les sucreries, indigoteries et habitations, âgés de quatorze ans et au-dessus jusqu'à soixante ans, être saisis pour dettes, sinon pour ce qui sera dû du prix de leur achat, ou que la sucrerie, indigoterie, habitation, dans laquelle ils travaillent soit saisie réellement ; défendons, à peine de nullité, de procéder par saisie réelle et adjudication par décret sur les sucreries, indigoteries et habitations, sans y comprendre les nègres de l'âge susdit y travaillant actuellement.

Art. 49.

Le fermier judiciaire des sucreries, indigoteries, ou habitations saisies réellement conjointement avec les esclaves, sera tenu de payer le prix entier de son bail, sans qu'il puisse compter parmi les fruits qu'il perçoit les enfants qui seront nés des esclaves pendant son bail.

Art. 50.

Voulons, nonobstant toutes conventions contraires, que nous déclarons nulles, que lesdis enfants appartiennent à la partie saisie, si les créanciers sont satisfaits d'ailleurs, ou à l'adjudicataire, s'il intervient un décret ; et, à cet effet, il sera fait mention dans la dernière affiche, avant l'interposition du décret, desdits enfants nés esclaves depuis la saisie réelle.

Il sera fait mention, dans la même affiche, des esclaves décédés depuis la saisie réelle dans laquelle ils étaient compris.

Art. 51.

Voulons, pour éviter aux frais et aux longueurs des procédures, que la distribution du prix entier de l'adjudication conjointe des fonds et des esclaves, et de ce qui proviendra du prix des baux judiciaires, soit faite entre les créanciers selon l'ordre de leurs privilèges et hypothèques, sans distinguer ce qui est pour le prix des fonds d'avec ce qui est pour le prix des esclaves.

Art. 52.

Et néanmoins les droits féodaux et seigneuriaux ne seront payés qu'à proportion du prix des fonds.

Art. 53.

Ne seront reçus les lignagers et seigneurs féodaux à retirer les fonds décrétés, s'ils ne retirent les esclaves vendus conjointement avec les fonds ni l'adjudicataire à retenir les esclaves sans les fonds.

Art. 54.

Enjoignons aux gardiens nobles et bourgeois usufruitiers, amodiateurs et autres jouissants des fonds auxquels sont attaché des esclaves qui y travaillent, de gouverner lesdits esclaves comme bons pères de famille, sans qu'ils soient tenus, après leur administration finie, de rendre le prix de ceux qui seront décédés ou diminués par maladie, vieillesse ou autrement, sans leur faute, et sans qu'ils puissent aussi retenir comme fruits à leur profit les enfants nés desdits esclaves durant leur administration, lesquels nous voulons être conservés et rendus à ceux qui en sont les maîtres et les propriétaires.

Art. 55.

Les maîtres âgés de vingt ans pourront affranchir leurs esclaves par tous actes entre vifs ou à cause de mort, sans qu'ils soient tenus de rendre raison

de l'affranchissement, ni qu'ils aient besoin d'avis de parents, encore qu'ils soient mineurs de vingt-cinq ans.

Art. 56.

Les esclaves qui auront été fait légataire universels par leurs maîtres ou nommés exécuteurs de leurs testaments ou tuteurs de leurs enfants, seront tenus et réputés, les tenons et réputons pour affranchis.

Art. 57.

Déclarons leurs affranchissements faits dans nos îles, leur tenir lieu de naissance dans nosdites îles et les esclaves affranchis n'avoir besoin de nos lettres de naturalité pour jouir des avantages de nos sujets naturels de notre royaume, terres et pays de notre obéissance, encore qu'ils soient nés dans les pays étrangers.

Art. 58.

Commandons aux affranchis de porter un respect singulier à leurs anciens maîtres, à leurs veuves et à leurs enfants, en sorte que l'injure qu'ils leur auront faite soit punie plus grièvement que si elle était faite à une autre personne : les déclarons toutefois francs et quittes envers eux de toutes autres charges, services et droits utiles que leurs anciens maîtres voudraient prétendre tant sur leurs personnes que sur leurs biens et successions en qualité de patrons.

Art. 59.

Octroyons aux affranchis les mêmes droits, privilèges et immunités dont jouissent les personnes nées libres ; voulons que le mérite d'une liberté acquise produise en eux, tant pour leurs personnes que pour leurs biens, les mêmes effets que le bonheur de la liberté naturelle cause à nos autres sujets.

Art. 60.

Déclarons les confiscations et les amendes qui n'ont point de destination particulière, par ces présentes nous appartenir, pour être payées à ceux qui sont préposés à la recette de nos droits et de nos revenus ; voulons néanmoins que distraction soit faite du tiers desdites confiscations et amendes au profit de l'hôpital établi dans l'île où elles auront été adjugées.

Décret d'abolition du 27 avril 1848

REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité

Au nom du Peuple français

Le Gouvernement provisoire,

Considérant que l'esclavage est un attentat contre la dignité humaine ; Qu'en détruisant le libre arbitre de l'homme, il supprime le principe naturel du droit et du devoir ; Qu'il est une violation flagrante du dogme républicain : Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité. Considérant que si des mesures effectives ne suivaient pas de très-près la proclamation déjà faite du principe de l'abolition, il en pourrait résulter dans les colonies les plus déplorables désordres, Décrète :

Art. 1 premier. L'esclavage sera entièrement aboli dans toutes les colonies et possessions françaises, deux mois après la promulgation du présent décret dans chacune d'elles. A partir de la promulgation du présent décret dans les colonies , tout châtiment corporel, toute vente de personnes non libres, seront absolument interdits.

Art. 2. Le système d'engagement à temps établi au Sénégal est supprimé.

Art. 3. Les gouverneurs ou commissaires généraux de la République sont chargés d'appliquer l'ensemble des mesures propres à assurer la liberté à la Martinique, à la Guadeloupe et dépendances, à l'Isle de la Réunion, à la Guyane, au Sénégal et autres établissements français de la côte occidentale d'Afrique, à l'Isle Mayotte et dépendances et en Algérie.

Art. 4. Sont amnistiés les anciens esclaves condamnés à des peines afflictives ou correctionnelles pour des faits qui, imputés à des hommes libres, n'auraient point entraîné ce châtiment. Sont rappelés les individus déportés par mesure administrative.

Art 5. L'assemblée nationale réglera la quotité de l'indemnité qui devra être accordée aux colons.

Art. 6. Les colonies purifiées de la servitude et les possessions de l'Inde seront représentées à l'assemblée nationale.

Art. 7. Le principe que le sol de la France affranchit l'esclave qui le touche, est appliqué aux colonies et possessions de la République.

Art. 8. À l'avenir, même en pays étranger, il est interdit à tout Français de posséder, d'acheter ou de vendre des esclaves, et de participer, soit directement, soit indirectement, à tout trafic ou exploitation de ce genre. Toute infraction à ces dispositions entraînera la perte de la qualité de citoyen français. Néanmoins les Français qui se trouveront atteints par ces prohibitions, au moment de la promulgation du présent décret, auront un délai de trois ans pour s'y conformer. Ceux qui deviendront possesseurs d'esclaves en pays étrangers, par héritage, don ou mariage, devront, sous la même peine, les affranchir ou les aliéner dans le même délai, à partir du jour où leur possession aura commencé.

Art. 9. Le ministre de la marine et des colonies, et le ministre de la guerre sont chargés, chacun en ce qui le concerne, de l'exécution du présent décret. Fait à Paris, en conseil de Gouvernement, le 27 avril 1848.

Les membres du Gouvernement provisoire,

Dupont (de l'Eure), Lamartine, Armand Marrast, Garnier-Pagès, Albert, Marie, Ledru-Rollin, Flocon, Crémieux, Louis Blanc, Arago.

Le secrétaire général du Gouvernement provisoire, Pagnerre

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