

***SA NOU YÉ: FILMMAKING PRACTICES AS FORMULATIONS OF IDENTITY IN
HAITI, GUADELOUPE, AND MARTINIQUE FROM 1976 TO 2011***

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in French in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

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Adviser: Professor Jerry W. Carlson

This dissertation considers the emergence of filmmaking practices in Haiti and in the French Caribbean (Martinique and Guadeloupe). I interpret the ways in which Haitian and French Caribbean collective and individual identities are reframed by the film medium in a series of films made between 1976 and 2011. I argue that these films do more than provide social commentary: they play an affirmative and contestatory role. Filmmakers renegotiate these identities by calling into question prevailing but limiting dichotomies: Martinique and Guadeloupe as assimilated French and now European Caribbean islands and Haiti as the first Black republic and the poorest country in the Western hemisphere.

Chapter 1, 2, and 3 concern Euzhan Palcy's landmark film *Rue cases-nègres*. In Chapter 2, I argue that Palcy transformed Joseph Zobel's novel into a *bildungsroman*, a migration, and a plantation narrative shot in the Hollywood Classical style. French critics who reviewed the film were unfamiliar with the cultural legacy of the (French) Caribbean. As a result they failed to understand the scope and meaning of the film (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 retraces the genealogy of filmmaking practices in Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe through the career of Darling Légitimus, a veteran actress who played the female lead in *La rue Cases-Nègres*. Chapter 5 focuses on several Haitian and French Caribbean historical films where the past is rewritten as a grand narrative or through storytelling techniques that use oral tradition, Caribbean tropes, and theories. Diaspora, displacement, and

alienation are the organizing principles of Chapter 6. This chapter examines recent Haitian and French Caribbean films that cast a critical look at the Haitian, Guadeloupean, and Martinican immigration experiences by proposing dystopian viewpoints. The ways in which Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers have embraced marginality as a form of dissent is the focus of Chapter 7. Finally, Chapter 8 reviews the material conditions of production, exhibition, and reception of francophone Caribbean films.

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Sa Nou Yé: Filmmaking Practices as Formulations of Identity in Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique from 1976 to 2011

Introduction

Until the late 1980s, informed analysis of the cultural and political characteristics of Haiti and the islands of Guadeloupe, and Martinique has been primarily drawn from literary and theoretical works. Religious practices, novels, poems, plays, and theoretical essays have proven to be complex sites of knowledge where questions of sameness, uniqueness, and distinctiveness are debated and redefined. Barring a handful of exceptions, scholars who study the Caribbean have focused on literature and history. For the most part, they have ignored films about and from Haiti and the French Caribbean despite the fact that the role of film as social commentary has long been established and that these films have existed since the 1950s and 1960s. Limited access to these films and lack of distribution partially explain this oversight: the idea that a significant filmmaking practice has emerged from Martinique and Guadeloupe or Haiti is met, for the most part, with dismay by mainstream audiences and scholars. My purpose in this dissertation is to offer a coherent and comprehensive study of Francophone Caribbean films from and about Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique.¹ In the title of this dissertation I use the Creole phrase “*Sa Nou Yé*” ‘What We Are’ to describe the ways in which filmmakers use the film medium to tell stories about Haiti and the French Caribbean that contest stereotypes, present an insider’s perspective, and redefine individual and collective identities

Rather than the words “cinéma antillais,” I have chosen Mbye Cham’s phrase “filmmaking practice” to describe a heterogeneous corpus of films that is not sustained by national institutions, part of a profit-driven industry, or purely designated as art. As examined in the last chapter of this dissertation, Haitian and French Caribbean films, depending on who direct them, can be viewed as

¹ For practical reasons, principally length, lack of access, and limited production by filmmakers of French Guianese-descent, films from and about French Guiana were not included in this research. A filmmaking practice has emerged in French Guiana since the late 2000s. Two decades after *Jean Galmot, Aventurier* (1990) and *Cayenne Palace* (1987), the films

the poor parents of Western cinema, an oppositional practice from the South, or instances of independent filmmaking.

To convey the scope, meaning, and nature of Haitian and French Caribbean film narratives, I begin with the better known film from the Francophone Caribbean: Euzhan Palcy's 1983 film *Rue Cases-Nègres*. A story about life in a Caribbean plantation, and a migration narrative is the adaptation of *La rue Cases-Nègres*,² the canonical Bildungsroman from Martinique by Joseph Zobel. Several elements in Palcy's film adaptation of Joseph Zobel's novel exemplify the development of a filmmaking practice in the Caribbean: the literary origin of the film, its chronicling the rise of a bourgeoisie of color among the educated children of field hands working on sugar cane plantations, a plot centered on race, class, gender, social mobility, and most importantly the affirmation of a French Caribbean identity anchored in the plantation culture of the Americas. Chapter 1, "Introducing a Landmark Caribbean Film: Euzhan Palcy's *Rue Cases-Nègres*," examines why Palcy's first film achieved a level of success no previous (Francophone) Caribbean films had attained. The awards its director and lead actress received from of the premier international film festivals in Europe allowed the film to break distribution barriers. Chapter 2, "A Formal Analysis of *Rue Cases-Nègres*," proposes several readings of this pivotal film and analyzes how Euzhan Palcy's reworked the novel as Bildungsroman told in the Hollywood Classical narrative style and reshaped *Rue Cases-Nègres* as a plantation and migration narrative. I examine the ways in which the intentions of the filmmaker were lost on many of the French journalists who reviewed the film in 1983 in Chapter 3, "A History of the Reception of *Rue Cases-Nègres*."

Haitian and French Caribbean filmmaking practices find their origins in the many versions of African American, West African, and Caribbean Francophone identities formulated in the Paris

² Throughout this dissertation, I make a distinction between the novel by Joseph Zobel, *La rue Cases-Nègres*, the film directed by Euzhan Palcy *Rue Cases-Nègres*, and references to a *rue Cases-Nègres*, the quarters where sugar cane workers lived.

of the 1920s. Chapter 4, “*Sé Grenn Di Ri Ka Plen Sak: The Genealogy of French Caribbean Films Darling Légitimus’s Career,*” retraces the genealogy of Francophone Caribbean films through the career of the lead actress in *Rue Cases-Nègres*, Darling Légitimus. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are devoted to themes that recurrently appear in films that focus on Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe: history, migration, marginalization and difference. Chapter 5, “Grounding Identities, Framing History, Telling Stories: Haitian and French Caribbean Historical Films Reclaiming Modernity,” examines the afore mentioned Caribbean historical films through one of Edouard Glissant’s most significant argument in *Le discours antillais*. In an effort to demarginalize Caribbean history, directors tend to focus on Caribbean heroic figures: they often rewrite the past as a grand narrative. Caribbean history is often written as a capital H narrative (History) to the detriment of the historicity of ordinary men and women and modes of narration inherent to the region: storytelling, silence, violence. While several directors articulate their historical films around tropes drawn from the oral and theoretical Caribbean traditions, many adopt a contributionist approach and construct grand narratives around a historical figure worthy of admiration. A small number embrace a fractured non-linearity.

Diaspora, displacement, and alienation are the organizing principles of Chapter 6, “Diaspora, Displacement, and Alienation: Dystopia in Haitian and French Caribbean Migration Films.” In this chapter, I examine several films made by directors that cast a critical look at the Haitian, Guadeloupean, and Martinican immigration experiences by adopting dystopian viewpoints. Chapter 7, “Talking Back: Marginalization and Difference in 21st Century Haitian and French Caribbean Film” discusses how second generation Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers have embraced marginality as a form of dissent in seven early and recent movies. Finally, this dissertation ends with what hinders and makes film production possible in Haiti and in the French Caribbean. To this effect, Chapter 8, “*Débrouya pa Péché: the Politics of Financing, Producing, Distributing, and*

Exhibiting Haitian and French Caribbean Films,” reviews the material conditions of production, exhibition, and reception of Francophone Caribbean film narratives. The findings in this final chapter also return to the discussion of film versus cinema.

This dissertation highlights the affirmative and oppositional role of films depicting the Haitian and French Caribbean experiences. I privilege fiction films made between 1979 and 2011, but include a small number of significant documentaries. In addition to delineating the cultural significance of Haitian, Guadeloupean, and Martinican films, this study implicitly concerns the political uses of filmmaking. Political recriminations and self-determination are not necessarily associated with the French Caribbean, except in the work of a few intellectuals (such as Suzanne Césaire, Aimé Césaire, Edouard Glissant and others) and the actions of a handful of political organizers. The month-long social conflict that began in January 2009 in French Guiana, spread to Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Réunion, resulted in disruptive strikes that dispelled the myth of a docile French Caribbean that enjoys harmonious economic and political relationships with the French motherland. In 2009, an alliance of trade unionists, community organizers, cultural, and political associations, the Lyannaj Kont Pwofitasyon (LKP), roused a wide range of citizens and launched a movement that put to a standstill the economies of Guadeloupe and Martinique and Réunion during forty-four days.

Social mobilization against the high cost of living in the French Caribbean remains a rarely used form of spectacular protest. Yet a tradition of affirmation and contestation has existed since the 1920s, when a nascent bourgeoisie of color composed of women and men educated in France began to explore and define Haitian and French Caribbean identities through performances (dance, theater, music) and literature (periodicals, essays, theater, novel). In the 1950s and 1960s, the film medium also helped redefine Haitian and French Caribbean identities. My dissertation contends that part of the Haitian, Martinican, and Guadeloupean intellectual elite uses films narratives as tools

of affirmation and contestation to explore and renegotiate cultural, collective, and individual identities.

Caribbean islands formerly colonized by the French differ in their contemporary historical, political, and cultural make-up. Unlike Martinique and Guadeloupe, independent nation Haiti, once France's richest colony, is not threatened by French cultural assimilation. Because of its two-century old political emancipation from France and its subsequent isolation, Haiti instead wrestles with a different kind of contradiction from its French counterparts: it is caught in a dichotomy of representations. In mainstream discourse, it is invariably described as the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere and the first Black republic. This dichotomy partially masks central issues of collective and individual Haitian identities. In Haiti, stark economic inequalities, class division, and the dispersal of a large percentage of the Haitian population in the Dominican Republic, throughout the Caribbean, North America and to a lesser extent to France have shaped individual and collective Haitian identities. Excised from journalists' reports on the 2008 food riots and the 2010 earthquake and elections, Haiti's compelling historical, religious, and cultural legacy is predominantly acknowledged within the restricted niche of academic research. Nevertheless, given Haiti's history of political upheaval motivated by power, money, race, and class, it is no coincidence that the Haitian filmmaking practice has been primarily shaped by the collective and individual questions of dictatorship, foreign occupation, exile, immigration, and diaspora. Like theater and literature, its parent cultural productions, the Haitian and French Caribbean filmmaking practices mostly developed in metropolitan centers and originated in trans-national, trans-racial, and post-colonial efforts.

I am indebted to scholars of the Caribbean but also to journalists, film festival organizers, filmmakers, actors, films editors, and screenwriters. Although influential French film periodicals reviewed world cinemas in the 1980s, few filmmakers wrote on the subject of Francophone

Caribbean cinema. To the best of my knowledge, only Haitian director Arnold Antonin, then exiled in Venezuela, published in a book form an early analysis of the Haitian filmmaking practice in 1982 both in French and in Spanish *Material para una pre-historia del cine haitiano/Matériel pour une préhistoire du cinéma haïtien*.

Initiatives such as the 1980 edition of the Festival de films de Douarnenez (Peuple des D.O.M. T.O.M.) in Brittany, France and Images Caraïbes (1989 et 1990) in Martinique presented film retrospectives that led to the publications more on the subject by Caribbean scholars. Two years after the 1989 edition of the pan-Caribbean film festival “Images Caraïbes (1989 and 1990),” journalist and cultural critic Osange Silou from Guadeloupe began to map out a historiography of Haitian and French Caribbean films in a groundbreaking study entitled *Le cinéma dans les Antilles françaises* (1991). Silou chose several organizing principles to present a fragmented corpus of films that spanned three decades (1968 to 1989). She not only traced back the emergence of film in the French Caribbean, but she also catalogued both chronologically and alphabetically about fifty films (short, feature films, documentary and fiction films) and provided detailed description such as length, type of film used (16 mm or 35 mm) and a synopsis (Silou 37-114). Most importantly Silou, in the form of brief quotations, published the filmmakers’ musings and concerns about what rendered their incursion into the film industry vital and yet often impossible. Finally she included black and white stills from a dozen of undistributed Haitian and French Caribbean films in *Le cinéma dans les Antilles françaises*. The boldness of this title hints at the wave of optimism that pervaded the late 1980s but also gives legitimacy to more than two decades of unequal and little known film production in the Caribbean. Silou’s use of the term cinema to characterize Haitian and French Caribbean films endured in subsequent analyses. Her book proves an invaluable resource since the majority of earlier Haitian and French Caribbean films have not been conserved or archived, and except when they are screened at rare film festivals, are lost to the public.

The following year, Mbye Cham published a major anthology *Ex-Iles: Essays in Caribbean Cinema* (1992) where he further interrogates the origins, functions, and material dimensions of Caribbean cinemas. Other groundbreaking collections of essays about the uses of cinema in non Western postcolonial contexts such as Martin T. Martin's (1995) *Cinemas of the Black Diaspora: Diversity, Dependence, and Oppositionality*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, Roy Armes's 1987 *Third World Filmmaking and the West*, and Keith W. Warner's *On Location: Cinema and Film in the Anglophone Caribbean* (2000). In conjunction with seminal writings in Richard D. E. Burton's 1995 *French and West Indian, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana* and Edouard Glissant's *Le discours antillais* (1981), Arjun Appadurai's analysis of culture and globalization *Modernity at Large* frame my analysis of the Haitian filmmaking.

Additional sources and documents that have informed my theoretical framework, include online articles and interviews, two special issues devoted to the West Indian and African presence in France published in the magazine *Autrement* in the early 1980s, the dictionary *Les cinémas d'Afrique* as well as films reviews, archived web pages. I have also collected precious information from press releases downloaded from the Internet and programs from local and international film festivals: (Vues d'Afriques, the New York African Diaspora Film Festival, New Directors New Films, the Saint Barth Film Festival, the Festival Régional et International du cinéma de Guadeloupe, FEMI, and the Association pour des Rencontres Cinématographiques en Martinique, and ARCM, and the Jakmel Film Festival). I have conducted numerous personal interviews with authors, filmmakers, editors, screenwriters, and political figures such as Alain Agat, Aimé Césaire, Jean-Claude Flamand-Barny, Euzhan Palcy, Guy Deslauriers, Camille Mauduech, Anne Lescot, Rachel Magloire, Elsie Haas, Ousmane Sembene, Alain Agat, Fabienne Kanor, Janluk Stanislas, and Walter Mosley. In addition, to a great number of other participants in Haitian and French Caribbean cultural

production, these women and men have closely or from afar impacted the Haitian and French Caribbean filmmaking practices.

Chapter 1

Introducing a Landmark Caribbean Film: Euzhan Palcy's *Rue Cases-Nègres*

Ce n'est pas tous les jours qu'un film nous vient de la Martinique. (Roy)

The desire to become a director came out of rage, anger. I was so upset when I would see all these stupid portrayals of black people in American movies. I knew that music, books, and theater could change that...that they could help but could never compete with film. The power of film is incredible to change people's minds, open their eyes, their vision of the world. (Glicksmann)

Le film illustre les trois étapes de l'expression de la conscience antillaise. La première est celle de la tradition orale, transmise dans le film, par Médouze; la seconde est la tradition écrite. Le message du vieillard passant par le roman de Zobel; la dernière étape est celle de l'expression filmique; le roman devient film; et l'allusion à la salle de cinéma n'est pas seulement un clin d'oeil de cinéphile... Rarement l'idée de tradition est esquissée avec autant de précision et de concision. Le trajet de la conscience d'un peuple reproduit celui individuel de l'enfant, de la cour devant la case jusqu'à la cour de l'école et à un hall de cinéma. (Curchod)

Eric Cachart: "Alors, Henri Chapier: Siméon...On parle beaucoup en tout cas, je l'ai lu dans la presse, d'un film antillais. C'est *d'abord* un film français?"

Henri Chapier: *C'est tout à fait la même chose, pour moi, pour nous, je pense, il y a lieu d'en être fier.* D'ailleurs cette année le prix Goncourt est allé à Patrick Chamoiseau et je ne vais pas reparler ici d'Aimé Césaire. Euh, non... Voyez-vous, je pense qu'il faut le dire pour une autre raison. D'abord parce que c'est une *culture* que l'on ne connaît pas assez." —*Le Soir* France 3 December 13, 1992. 22h48-22h52

***Rue Cases-Nègres*: A Pivotal French Caribbean Film Narrative**

When acknowledged, the notion of French Caribbean cinema usually brings to mind one single film narrative by a Martinican filmmaker: Euzhan Palcy's acclaimed 1983 motion picture *Rue Cases-Nègres*. *Rue Cases-Nègres* is the film adaptation of *La rue Cases-Nègres*, the eponymous semi-autobiographical 1950 French Caribbean novel by the late Martinican author Joseph Zobel. It uses the conventions of classical Hollywood narratives and follows the structure of a Bildungsroman to depict post-slavery Martinican plantation economy, society, and culture through the eyes of a clever eleven-year old schoolboy, José Hassam. As the first French Caribbean film to become a "national" and international breakthrough, Palcy's adaptation introduced audiences around the world to life on a plantation in a Caribbean island in the 1930s. A landmark film, *Rue Cases-Nègres*, like many other Haitian and French Caribbean films made in the 1970s, proposed an insider's view of the Caribbean experience.

Rue Cases-Nègres reached a wider audience than previous French Caribbean films. In the words of the director Julius-Amédé Laou (Bélangier and Coulombe 23) and a former French Minister of Culture and Communication, it gave "*une reconnaissance mondiale au cinéma antillais*" (Donnedieu de Vabres). This first chapter of my dissertation examines why *Rue Cases-Nègres* became such a pivotal film and describes the film's exceptional trajectory. It revisits the significance of the first film about the French Caribbean experience that went to achieve broad "national"³ and international success despite dialogues in Creole and French and a cast of relatively unknown black actors. To contextualize the film's success with mainstream audiences and critics, "Introducing the First Mainstream (Francophone) Caribbean Film Narrative: Euzhan Palcy's *Rue Cases-Nègres*," first

³ The use of the term "national" here marks the oppositional gazes of French Caribbean intellectuals who, despite or because of the colonial status of French Guiana, Guadeloupe, and Martinique as French colonies and therefore non-nations, have constructed formulations of identities that stand for cultural sovereignty and present the French Caribbean as *peyi* with a complex cultural foundation, language, and historical past. It infers that they formed a distinctive Caribbean discursive space.

presents a treatment of the film, then retraces its major accomplishments, and recounts some of the setbacks and breakthrough the director experienced. I conclude this first chapter with a brief discussion about one of the other dimensions that contributed to the unprecedented success of this movie: its Caribbeanness.

A synopsis of the film *Rue Cases-Nègres* reads as the formative and spiritual years of José Hassam, the character in Joseph Zobel's semi-autobiographical novel. In 1936 in Martinique, a French colony in the Caribbean, José Hassam (Garry Cadenat), a gifted eleven year-old boy, lives with his illiterate elderly grandmother, M'man Tine (Darling Légitimus), in a rue Cases-Nègres, the quarters on the grounds of a plantation where sugar cane workers reside. M'man Tine barely ekes out a living cutting cane and she has resolved that her grandson will not meet the same fate. In the French Caribbean, slavery has been abolished in 1848 but the former slaves, who like M'man Tine, work as field hands for the plantation owner are still undermined by harsh and exploitative labor conditions. Yet their cultural identity remains strong and they strive to live with dignity.

Under his grandmother's close watch, thanks to the guidance of an elderly field hand, Médouze (Douta Seck), and the encouragements of his primary school teacher, José begins the difficult path to upward mobility. Despite financial limitations and as a result of M'man Tine's sacrifices and his own determination, José passes a series of exams that allow him to pursue his education in the capital, Fort-de-France. Grandmother and grandson move to the city where a hectic pace, disappointments (an insufficient scholarship, allegations of cheating), and ultimately the fulfillment of their goal awaits them. *Rue Cases-Nègres* is not exclusively about how a tenacious boy born into poverty on a plantation gains access to (higher) education. By the end of the film, José has the mettle of a Caribbean writer. His grandmother dies peacefully in her shack at the rue Cases-Nègres, finally relieved that her grandson will have the same prospects as the nascent educated bourgeoisie of color. Such a general summary does not adequately express what made Palcy's first

feature film such a critical success. I now propose to examine how well the film fared with various audiences.

International and “National” Breakthrough: Silver Lion, Best Actress at the Mostra in Venice and a French César

Rue Cases-Nègres's complex portrayal of colonial Martinique resonated strongly among French Caribbean, international, and French cinema circles. The film was released in different stages and in several territories between 1983 and 1984 and received wide recognition during each of its exhibition phases. First released in the French Caribbean in the summer of 1983, *Rue Cases-Nègres* was awarded two significant prizes at the Mostra film festival in Venice in August of that year. A few weeks later on September 1983, the film was released in *la métropole*, France, where it unexpectedly crossed over to a mainstream French audience. The film was awarded a César (French national film award) in 1984 and was also screened in New York at the New Directors New Films festival in April 1984 where it was favorably reviewed in the *New York Times* (Canby).

***Rue Cases-Nègres* in Martinique and Guadeloupe**

Euzhan Palcy elected to release *Rue Cases-Nègres* first in Martinique and Guadeloupe. The film opened in the French Caribbean in the summer of 1983 where it had an unprecedented success.⁴ In his essay “Rue Cases-Nègres ou les Antilles de l’intérieur,” later included as an English translation in Mbye Cham’s anthology *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, the Martinican writer and

⁴ An unsigned article from the newspaper *L’humanité*, “Lion d’argent ‘couleur sépia’ pour assasiner la carte postale,” states that the film’s audience was four times that of Spielberg’s movie *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*: “*Rue des cases-nègres*, sorti cet été à la Martinique et à la Guadeloupe, y a fait quatre fois les recettes de *E.T.*”

philosopher Alain Ménil praised the film for its evocation of a Caribbean narrative told from the inside (Ménil; Ménil). He remarked that:

There is no denying that a community possibly “recognized” itself in Euzhan Palcy’s film, and one should indeed take seriously this recognition effect as if spectators had come primarily to see themselves on the screen rather than a film adapted from a novel which perhaps they had not read. Thus the success of the film demonstrates that people were, to a large extent, satisfied that their expectation had been fulfilled, their frustration lifted. How else should one interpret the fact that some spectators went to see the film several times, even though it meant traveling across the island or discovering cinema for the first time. (Cham 156)

Spectators in the French Caribbean identified with many of the characters in *Rue Cases-Nègres*. In France the film’s unprecedented success in Guadeloupe and Martinique and at the Mostra took many French journalists by surprise. In their reviews of *Rue Cases-Nègres*, before the film was released in continental France and after it was recognized with two awards at the Venice film festival, French journalists often alluded to record attendance at screenings held in the French Caribbean. In the week-end edition of the newspaper *Le quotidien de Paris*, journalist Dominique Jamet remarked that: “Distingué à Venise, le film a fait 125 000 entrées en Martinique et en Guadeloupe, pulvérisant les chiffres d’ ‘E.T.’ (35 000 entrées)” while J. Roy, another journalist, mentions that Palcy’s film “fait un tabac là-bas.” In France, film critics did not necessarily understand Palcy’s aesthetic and narrative choices and many misinterpreted the film on the basis of its otherness, as I examine in the third chapter of this dissertation, “History of the Reception of *Rue Cases-Nègres*.” The local success of *Rue Cases-Nègres* in the French West Indies was just the beginning: the film also competed at one of the premier and oldest European film festivals and won over its jury. It became a phenomenon beyond the French Caribbean.

Winner of the Silver Lion for Best First Work at the 1983 Mostra in Venice

Rue Cases-Nègres received two coveted awards at the 1983 Mostra Internazionale del Cinema, the Venice Film Festival.⁵ Darling Légitimus, who portrayed José's grandmother, received the award for Best Actress (Grand Prix de l'interprétation féminine) and twenty-eight year old director Euzhan Palcy was awarded the Silver Lion award for Best First Work (le Lion d'Argent pour la meilleure première œuvre). At first, Palcy could hardly believe she and Légitimus had earned the awards: "*Ce n'est que quand Bertolucci l'a annoncé sur le podium et que le public s'est levé pour applaudir que j'en ai été convaincue* (Paty; "Lion d'argent 'couleur sépia' pour assasiner la carte postale")." Before it was even released in the French *hexagone*, a film by an unknown French black woman from Martinique was already a talking point. When they reviewed *Rue Cases-Nègres* between September and October 1983, French critics could not ignore the international succès d'estime the film had garnered at the Mostra. In their reviews of *Rue Cases-Nègres*, a couple of French journalists noted that the announcement for both prizes drew applause from the Venice Film Festival crowd for fifteen minutes (Paty, Assayas).

In 1983 the Mostra ran from August 31 to September 11. On its jury sat thirteen filmmakers, producers, and screenwriters of international renown: Bernardo Bertolucci, Jack Clayton, Peter Handke, Leon Hirszman, Marta Meszaros, Nagisa Oshima, Gleb Panfilov, Bob Rafaelson, Ousmane Sembene, Mrinal Sen, Alain Tanner, and Agnès Varda. Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembene, a member of the jury who voted in favor of the film, recalled that the vote for *Rue Cases-Nègres* was not unanimous because a few members of the jury were opposed to granting the film the two awards it received.⁶ Sembene confided, in a personal conversation at the 2005 edition of the Festival Panafricain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou (FESPACO) in Ouagadougou, that it was Darling Légitimus's overall performance in Palcy's first film, her long-

⁵ Before 1995, the Silver Lion award was intermittently given to first films.

⁶ According the list of the jury members of the Venice Film festival in 1983 listed on imdb.com.

standing career in subaltern roles, and the significance of the film that led him to use his weight to sway the jury.

In 1983 in Venice, the same year that Michelangelo Antonioni won a Career Golden Lion and Jean-Luc Godard won a Golden Lion for *Prénom Carmen*, a twenty-eight year old director and a seventy-six year old veteran actress, both from a Creole and French-speaking small island in the Caribbean, stood in the limelight with *la crème de la crème* of French, European, and world cinema. Most importantly, the attribution of the Golden Lion to the Franco-Swiss New Wave pioneer director Jean-Luc Godard and of the Silver Lion and Best Actress awards to Euzhan Palcy and Darling Légitimus presented a contrasting *tableau* of the French cultural landscape. Alain Ménéil notes in his essay “*Rue Cases-Nègres* ou les Antilles de l’intérieur” that in 1983 France was not only represented by Martinique but also by two other non hexagonal filmmakers: Lam Lê (b.1948) from former French Indochina, and an exiled Chilean filmmaker living in France, Raoul Ruiz (b.1941) (158).

One dimension of the film that won over the jury and audience of the Venice Film Festival and audiences throughout the world was the film’s conventional storytelling and the ways in which Euzhan Palcy connects the theme of social mobility to her protagonist’s pride in his Afro-Creole origins as I examine at length in the second chapter of this dissertation, “A Formal Analysis of Euzhan Palcy’s *Rue Cases-Nègres*. By acknowledging the cultural currency of a Caribbean-centered *France des Amériques*, the jury’s decision in Venice questioned the perennial idea of hexagonal France and Europe as exclusive sites of high-culture. The recognition achieved through both awards interrupted the preferred narrative of that nation as a center of European culture and revealed France’s imperial legacy, signaled by Palcy’s cultural contradictions of nationality, race, cultural origins, and voice. In the *brouhaha* surrounding the film after its local “national” success in Martinique and Guadeloupe and its recognition in Venice, the filmmaker’s identity wavered between

the métropole and its French Caribbean periphery. Ascertaining the filmmaker's identity often meant selecting or excluding the métropole over its Caribbean periphery and vice versa. It meant deciding to draw a distinction (or not) between Martinique and France or electing to emphasize the director's French citizenship over her Caribbean cultural background and origins. Commenting on *Rue Cases-Nègres* and Euzhan Palcy's "variable identity," Alain Ménil pinpointed the double-consciousness inherent to Martinican and Guadeloupean identities (157): "By recognizing Euzhan Palcy with an award, a festival unconsciously threw the spotlight on the blocked dialectic between France and her colonies, old or not. Who was really honored in Euzhan Palcy? The filmmaker of French citizenship or the woman from Martinique (158-159)?" Those questions were still unresolved when in December 1992 Palcy was promoting her second film *Siméon* on a late night newscast program.

The exchange between cultural critic Henri Chapier and journalist Eric Cachart (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) before Palcy's interview on France 3, reveals that almost a decade after *Rue Cases-Nègres* defining her second feature, *Siméon*, as both a French and a Caribbean film proved fraught with contradictions. Cachart refutes the assertion in the French press that *Siméon* is a "film antillais" by inquiring of Chapier whether it is "d'abord un film français?" Chapier's well-meaning answer is utterly confounding: he initially acquiesces and states that *Siméon* is first and foremost a French film and then adds as an afterthought that: "C'est tout à fait la même chose, pour moi, pour nous, je pense, il y a lieu d'en être fier," thus implying rather inaccurately but perhaps to avoid an inconvenient and protracted discussion that *un film antillais* is *un film français*.

Chapier then draws attention to the accomplishments of two French Caribbean (Martinican) intellectual figures: Patrick Chamoiseau, who that year was awarded the Goncourt, the most important French literary prize, and the poet, essayist, playwright, and politician Aimé Césaire. What makes Chapier's response ambivalent to the French television audience in the *hexagone* is his use of

the personal pronoun “nous.” One wonders whether his “nous” is the voice of the informed cultural critic who ascribes value to a work for art’s sake, or whether this is a republican *un et indivisible* “nous” that also includes French people from the Départements d’Outremer (DOM) and Territoires d’Outremer (TOM) but erases their Caribbean distinctiveness? Because Chapier continues non-committally with “*pour moi, pour nous, je pense, il y a lieu d’en être fier,*” he leaves these questions unsettled.

But after asserting Chamoiseau’s and Césaire intellectual recognition as a source of French (Caribbean) pride, Chapier interjects “*Euh, non...*” to use and introduce a separate line of reasoning and to stress the specificity of Caribbean culture. He also suggests that French Caribbeanness constitutes a site of difference lost on “*on*.” The personal pronoun subject “*on*” in French can be translated as “one,” or “we” but here in light of Chapier’s own commentary this generic and universal “*on*” can be interpreted as specifically referring to the French public at large, as well as to journalists and cultural critics whose knowledge of the French Caribbean often remains superficial at best. A decade earlier, as the date for the film’s French release drew near, the tension between her Caribbean cultural identity and her French citizenship had not been lost on Palcy.

Hexagonal Release and 1984 César for Best First Work

In France the national release of *Rue Cases-Nègres* was scheduled ten days after the end of the Mostra film festival and although the triumph in Venice was still on her mind, Euzhan Palcy felt apprehension at the prospect of showing her first film to audiences in the *hexagone*. A journalist who was following the young filmmaker described Palcy’s somber mood on the first day of release of *Rue Cases-Nègres* in the following terms:

Paris. Mercredi 21 septembre. La pluie tombe à verse. Dans les bureaux de Claude Nedjar, une jeune femme noire attend, impassible. Dans quelques heures, les premiers chiffres des entrées de cinéma tomberont sur le bureau du producteur. Alors la réalisatrice de *Rue Cases-Nègres* saura si elle a gagné; si elle a perdu; si tout est à recommencer. Elle n'a pas quitté son impermeable, ni son sourire crispé.

Rien ne fera rire Euzhan Palcy ce jour-là. Même pas les chiffres, plus prometteurs, plus enthousiastes de quart d'heure en quart d'heure. Raidie dans ses souvenirs, fermée, Euzhan Palcy se contentera de regarder la pluie battre contre les carreaux du bureau, imperceptiblement voutée, mal à l'aise. (Rouchy)

The director's anxiety was expected: this was her first feature film and the stakes were high. *Rue Cases-Nègres* opened in France on September 21, 1983 and played in no less than ten Parisian theaters, remarked M.M., a journalist who reviewed the film for the weekly *Le nouvel observateur*. In France, the film was released in fourteen theaters for an unprecedented period of forty weeks (*Rue Cases-Nègres: Dossier Collège au cinéma* 92 23). On its first week alone, the film sold 50, 656 tickets. By the fortieth week (the end of its run as a first release), *Rue Cases-Nègres* had sold 360, 326 tickets in Paris (*Rue Cases-Nègres* (1983) Euzhan Palcy BiFi Ciné-Ressources: Exploitation).⁷ The following year, the film struck another cord in the motherland, France, with another award: the César (a French academy award) for Best First Work (*meilleure première oeuvre*).

From J. Roy's remark on the unlikelihood that a film such as *Rue Cases-Nègres* would be completed, "Ce n'est pas tous les jours qu'un film nous vient de la Martinique," Olivier's Curchod's interpretation of the film as charting the course of French Caribbean consciousness, to Palcy's framing her decision to become a director as an affirmative and contestatory act, and Henri Chapier's laudatory but confusing description's of Palcy's subsequent film, *Siméon*, as a film equally

⁷ According to figures the Bibliothèque du film (BiFi) compiled about the exhibition of the film *Rue Cases-Nègres* in French theaters on its website: <http://cine5ma.encyclopedie.films.bifi.fr/index.php?pk=50527>.

“français” and “antillais,” each of the four quotations at the beginning of this chapter emphasize the film’s exceptional trajectory. Because of its groundbreaking visibility, categorizing *Rue Cases-Nègres* proved challenging. The exchange between the French television journalist Eric Cachart and the film critic Henri Chapier at the beginning of this chapter, for instance, indicates how perplexing Palcy’s sudden visibility as a young prize-winning French black female filmmaker from Martinique was. Miraculously, it seemed, the film had crossed over to mainstream French and international audiences by both using the literary conventions of the coming-of-age story, the cinematic language of the Hollywood Classical Style, and a Caribbean “cultural insiderism” set in the past.

Rue Cases-Nègres became a benchmark against which subsequent films about the French Caribbean experience would be measured. For the first time, not only the Martinican and Guadeloupean public had recognized itself in a French Caribbean movie but that film had earned two coveted awards at a major European film festival, fared well at the French box office, and received a César. These accolades greatly served *Rue Cases-Nègres* and allowed the film to reach an international audience. The film was exhibited in theaters around the world and, a remarkable achievement at the time for a Caribbean film, was subsequently distributed on VHS tape and later on DVD. Its critical success broke down exhibition and distribution barriers that very few films from and about Africa, Haiti and the French Caribbean films have since managed to overcome.

Completing *Rue Cases-Nègres*: Setbacks, Determination, Decisive Encounters

As I explain later in my “Formal Analysis of *Rue Cases-Nègres*,” the second chapter to this dissertation, the film struck a cord with a wide audience because the director deliberately relied on conventional storytelling techniques. Palcy’s ability to elicit compassion from her audience also partially explains the success of the film. The director used her own setbacks to convey M’man

Tine's disappointment when José's only receives a partial scholarship. Palcy experienced similar rejection when she was seeking funding for her film: "Quelques malheureux millions qu'on lui offrait à condition qu'elle trouve un producteur, d'autres mécènes. Elle avait vingt six ans. Elle était noire et c'était une femme. Alors, on l'invitait à diner. On la blessait. On lui riait au nez. Et *Rue Cases-Nègres* restait sans producteur"(Rouchy). Her determination to faithfully record the cultural legacy of the plantation in her first film was met with resistance, skepticism, and hostility: her youth, her Caribbean origins, and her gender put her at a considerable disadvantage and in interviews she cites moments of sheer despair.

Regardless, Palcy found support with accomplished French directors. In the interview "Regagner la Martinique" she cites the encouragement of filmmakers such as Jean Rouch and François Truffaut in helping her overcome her relative lack of experience in 1983 in interviews with French newspapers *Le monde*, *Le figaro*, and *Le quotidien de Paris* (Marcorelles). She explains that she had met and befriended Truffaut's daughter, Laura, while pursuing a B.A. in French literature at the university La Sorbonne and that the Nouvelle Vague director gave Palcy feedback on several versions of her screenplay (Marcorelles). A close reading of this interview shows that Palcy repurposed François Truffaut's words of encouragement: "Je ne me fais pas trop de soucis pour vous, vous êtes une femme de combat" ("Regagner la Martinique"). In the scene where M'man Tine is told by an indifferent mulatto accountant that José's tuition fees are only partially covered, Palcy defiantly makes a pledge of perseverance: "Mais ils ne savent pas quelle femme de combat je suis!" that echoes her own travails in completing her first film. I will revisit the meaning of that statement in chapter two.

Truffaut's influence, notably his first feature, the semi autobiographical film *Les 400 coups* (1959), is apparent in *Rue Cases-Nègres*. To edit the movie, Euzhan Palcy used Marie-Josèphe Yoyotte, the editor whom Truffaut had hired in his first film, *Les 400 coups*. In the late 1950s,

Yoyotte was just beginning her career: she had been an assistant editor in Jean Rouch's Nouvelle Vague film *Moi un noir* (1958) and in André Berthomieu's *A la Jamaïque* (1957), a Luis Mariano vehicle. By the time Yoyotte edited Palcy first feature film, she was an accomplished editor: she helped Palcy shape Zobel's novel into a seamless narrative that subtly delivers meaning.

In two scenes in *Rue Cases-Nègres*, Euzhan Palcy and Marie-Josèphe Yoyotte pay homage to Truffaut, particularly to *Les 400 coups*. Although they have different outcomes, in both films the scenes are set in classrooms where teachers accused the film's young male protagonist of plagiarism. In *Les 400 coups*, unloved son turned truant Antoine Doinel is accused of plagiarizing Balzac's novel *La recherche de l'absolu* in an essay he wrote about his grandfather. Similarly in *Rue Cases-Nègres* José's high school teacher in Fort-de-France doubts that his student is capable of writing a compelling essay on his spiritual mentor, Médouze. Whereas José, an exemplar pupil, loved by his grandmother is later exonerated and even rewarded with a much-needed scholarship, Antoine Doinel's repeated acts of rebellion brings him to a reformatory school from which he escapes in the final scene of *Les 400 coups*.

Euzhan Palcy repurposes the grid of that enclosed Antoine Doinel at the center for troubled youth in another scene in *Rue Cases-Nègres*. She uses a similar lattice pattern to convey the close-mindedness of a young black woman who sells tickets at a cinema theater in Fort-de-France. Both the grid and the woman's candid remark: "Comment veux-tu que je sois fière de ma couleur lorsque je vois ces gens-là faire des casses tous les jours! Tout ça me dégoûte! D'ailleurs, sauf ma couleur, je ne suis pas Nègre! J'ai un caractère de blanc!" indicates that the usher sees herself through the prism of Western racialized discourse. She has internalized racial prejudice and believes in the social hierarchy upon which the plantation economy and West Indian societies were built: she reneges on her racial identity after being the victim of a misdemeanor perpetrated by a person of color.

Finally Palcy repurposes Truffaut's words of encouragement to her as a younger director, "Je ne me fais pas trop de soucis pour vous, vous êtes une femme de combat," in a pivotal scene *Rue Cases-Nègres*. This scene functions as a motif that hints at the larger thrust of the film: the strength of character shown by women (and by extension men) of modest origins who became Caribbean cultural icons. The director draws a parallel between herself, José, and M'man Tine in a scene that implicitly mirrors her own but also the setbacks Joseph Zobel and Darling Légitimus encountered during their own formative years, before they became iconic yet marginally successful Caribbean cultural figures.

The path to funding and producing *Rue Cases-Nègres* was indeed paved with numerous obstacles and it took Euzhan Palcy eight years to complete the film. Her first attempt at financing the project as a made-for-television film failed but she persevered. She eventually managed to secure financial backers on her own, including funds from the Centre National de la Cinématographie's (CNC) precious *avance sur recette* (Rouchy; *CNC Rue Cases-Nègres Dossier College au cinéma* 6). When Palcy approached Zobel to adapt *La rue Cases-Nègres* into a film, Zobel had long given up on his dream to become a sculptor at the prestigious Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. He had been discouraged to pursue studies deemed frivolous for a man of color. When he was offered an insufficient scholarship, he opted to study ethnology instead and as a result. In 1975 when Palcy arrived in Paris, Zobel had lived and taught in Senegal where he had been in charge of programming for a radio station. One year later he would retire in the south of France (Marcorelles) and (César 22). He initially met her interest in his best-known novel with skepticism. Palcy was not the first filmmaker who wished to adapt *La rue Cases-Nègres* into a film. Upon its publication, the novel had been awarded the Prix des lecteurs de la Gazette des lettres and shortly thereafter several film adaptations had been considered but abandoned after they encountered resistance (Pétat 4).

Despite reluctance in continental France to bankroll a movie about colonial Martinique, with a mostly black and unknown cast, bits of dialogue in Creole, and by a first time female director, an audience for the film was readily available. Working-class French Caribbean workers who had massively emigrated to the *métropole*, their mostly French-born children, not to mention their family members who had elected to stay in Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Martinique were ideal spectators (Paty). The genesis of the film coincided with the waning phase of the first large migration of French Caribbean men and women to France.

The 1970 report from the Bureau pour le développement des Migrations dans les Départements d'Outre-Mer (BUMIDOM) cites close to a hundred and fifty thousand French Caribbean migrants living in France (Anselin 7). While colonial and judicial ties dating back to the end of the seventeenth century (the 1685 Code Noir) and their French nationality made them citizens, their skin color, culture, and Caribbean accent marked them as foreign and as virtual immigrants in France. The French capital had considerably changed since Zobel had come to study there in the mid-1940s. By the 1970s the small number of *étudiants de couleur* who were part of the urban cultural landscape had been replaced by a larger community of young uneducated men and women from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana who settled primarily in Paris and its vicinity. As a nod to the visible presence of young workers Martinique and Guadeloupe in the geographical area known as *île de France*, Paris and its suburbs came to be known as *la troisième île*, the third island (Anselin 8) and France, the *métropole*, as *en l'autre bord* (See Chapter six).

Students of color and would-be artists (from the Caribbean but also Francophone colonial West and North Africa, and Indochina) who had trickled in to France since the 1920s from the 1960s onwards had become a minority had been replaced for the most part by uneducated young men and women. Among the latter, a great number had left the French Caribbean countryside to fill the numerous menial positions left vacant in car factories and as civil servants state-owned

service industries such as hospitals, urban transportation networks, and the post office during the period of prosperity known as the Trente Glorieuses. In all likelihood most had not read Joseph Zobel's semi-autobiographical novel because few of the French Caribbean migrants had a level of education above primary school and even fewer had passed and received José's prized *certificat d'étude*. Yet José's story of upward mobility echoed their own unfulfilled aspirations and the type of educational success they hoped their children would achieve.

As it happened, these French-born children often were in the same age group as the very young male and female protagonists: José, Tortilla, Léopold, Viriel, etc..., in Euzhan Palcy's film. Their parents had left behind in the Caribbean countryside or larger cities such as Fort-de-France, Pointe-à-Pitre, or Basse-Terre relatives that bore resemblance to M'man Tine, Médouze, or Douze-Orteils. Had Palcy's film adaptation not crossed over to a mainstream French audience, *Rue Cases-Nègres* would have probably resonated with French Caribbean children, parents, and grandparents on both sides of the Atlantic. Euzhan Palcy and her film crew knew this and they produced a conventional film (a Caribbean Bildungsroman framed as a story of upward mobility) that directly spoke to migrant men and women from Guadeloupe and Martinique, their *négro-politains* (of French-Caribbean descent but born and raised in France) children, and to family members who never left for *l'autre bord* (Paty).

What Ménil calls the recognition of the French West Indian public is partly predicated on Euzhan Palcy's ability to conceive the film as an instance of Caribbean discourse. She constructed a story that emphasizes Caribbean subjectivities, primarily but not exclusively, for a Caribbean audience. In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, the British Guyanese theorist Paul Gilroy defines "cultural insiderism" as a "clutch of rhetorical strategies" that provide "an absolute sense of ethnic difference" (3). For Palcy, emphasizing the cultural distinctiveness of French Caribbean identity was a necessary step in legitimizing the cultural significance of islands that are

often the objects of warped representations. As Palcy has herself forcefully stated (see the second epigraph) and as Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*: “In many First World films set in the Third World, the ‘word of the other’ is elided, distorted, or caricatured” (192).

In *Rue Cases-Nègres*, French is also identified as the hegemonic language of the colonial Other. It is widely spoken in the film partly because it is the language imposed by the French cultural institutions that financed the film and partly because it the language must master to climb the social ladder and escape a life of exploitation. The French Caribbean director uses Creole as a trope that contests *parler petit-nègre*. By judiciously deploying Creole as the “‘real’ language of communication” in pivotal scenes Palcy objects to the ways in which Creole is often portrayed in movies as “undecipherable murmur” (Shohat 192).

Her meticulous portrayal of Afro-Caribbean life in rural and urban Martinique flew in the face of images of tropical farniente and of compliant, lovely, and exotic female Caribbean companions commonly associated with French Caribbean islands in Western representations. By adapting a canonical novel from and about colonial Martinique, Palcy replaced Western mainstream depictions of the Antilles with Caribbean affirmations of cultural identity that rang true to French Caribbean audiences and beyond. Both the timing and the aesthetics of *Rue Cases-Nègres* contributed to the film’s success. The film resonated with people who can trace back their roots to the New World, viewers who have roots in rural agrarian societies, and beyond.

Perhaps as a reaction to stereotypical depictions of the Caribbean in mainstream French culture, when *Rue Cases-Nègres* was shot, established intellectuals and young militant artists in Martinique and Guadeloupe had put cultural institutions in place to explore, preserve, and resurrect traditional music, storytelling, and other Caribbean artistic modes of expression. As the director Julius-Amédé Laou underlined, it is in the 1970s that the novel written in the 1950s was censored

(Bélanger and Coulombe 23). As I describe subsequently, Pacey achieved a measure of triumph by tapping into this cultural ferment. She embraced its discursive affirmation and expression of “cultural insiderism.” When the director transcribed Zobel’s novel onto the screen, she emphasized the cultural value of Caribbean identity at a time when a waning plantation economy, the closing of local factories, and massive emigration to the French métropole had struck at the rural roots of that very identity.

Chapter 2

A Formal Analysis of Euzhan Palcy's *Rue Cases-Nègres*

The poster designed to promote *Rue Cases-Nègres* in France, unequivocally announces the movie as a plantation narrative. The French title at the bottom of the page situates the film in the specific context of the French Caribbean. *Rue Cases-nègres* appears in dark brown capital letters in an art deco font filled with the yellow, blue, red and blue streaks of *madras* fabric. Notwithstanding the title of the film, the poster presents familiar pan-Caribbean signifiers, a choice that Palcy reiterates visually and in the opening credits and foreword to the film: “Pour toutes les *rues Cases-Nègres* du monde.” Above the French title, the bottom of the poster is lined with a sepia-tinted plantation scene where workers hands clear a field of cut sugarcane stalks under a scorching sun. Each of the photographic elements dividing the poster stems from the plantation economy and depicts the Afro-Caribbean experience. This experience is mostly evoked through the close-up of an eleven-year old boy and unidentified black men and women working in a cane field.

Chapter 2, “A Formal Analysis of Euzhan Palcy's *Rue Cases-Nègres*,” accounts for *Rue Cases-Nègres*'s construction as a multilayered yet narrative that uses conventional storytelling techniques. It looks at the ways in which Euzhan Palcy applied traditional film language to reconstruct Zobel's Caribbean bildungsroman as both a plantation and a migration narrative. The director drew from her own personal history and interest in Caribbean ethnography and used *mise-en-scène*, cast, and narrative technique to make her film adaptation compelling not only to an insider Caribbean audience but also to an outsider mainstream Western audience. I propose that understanding the ways in which *Rue Cases-Nègres* lends itself to different readings explains its wide appeal.

The traditional narrative style that Palcy, her director of photography (Dominique Chapuis), and her editor (Marie-Josèphe Yoyotte) adopted espouses the principles of the bildungsroman in

whereby: “the protagonist’s mind and character emerges in [his] passage from childhood through varied experience—and usually through a spiritual crisis—into maturity and the recognition of his identity and role in the world” (Abrams, 121) and allows a larger audience to identify with José’s dilemmas. It is precisely because Palcy chose a canonical French Caribbean novel, relied on a familiar literary genre, and used the conventional language of cinema that her film, unlike earlier French Caribbean films, crossed over to the mainstream. I am using Shohat’s and Stam’s terminology to argue that in *Rue Cases-Nègres*, Palcy disputes “condescending characterization” and “distorted social portraiture” (192) by imbuing a “First World” narrative style with a Third Cinema approach, one that criticizes capitalism, colonialism and yet integrate the dominant narrative cinematic language: Hollywood’s.

A Bildungsroman with an “Auto-Ethnographic Impulse”

Palcy’s decision to adapt onto the screen Joseph Zobel’s coming-of-age story cannot solely be attributed to the popularity of the novel in Martinique and Guadeloupe. Though she concedes in interviews that Zobel’s novel is a mandatory reading in the French Caribbean: “Il est étudié dans toutes les écoles, depuis les petites classes jusqu’en terminales,”(*CNC Rue Cases-Nègres Dossier College au cinéma* 6) Palcy’s interest in *La rue Cases-Nègres* more likely originated in the currency of the novel, specifically in the ways its genre and themes reconcile the ethnographic with the cultural, the personal, and the political. It is the ways in which the novel pertains to identity, as she herself puts it: “la quête et le respect de ce que l’on est” that interested her (Baudin).

In a seminal article about both the novel and the film Gerise Herndon describes Palcy’s first film endeavor as an:

auto-ethnographic impulse” [that] represents the under- or mis-represented Afro-Caribbean culture (ignored, misnamed, or distorted by the French colonial and educational system and media). *Rue Cases-Nègres*, anchored to this site, is a particular

space where race, class, and power apparatuses intersect, where the colonized artist/intellectual negotiates the decolonization of his/her mind, and where struggle over resistance strategies is articulated (261).

Interviews and film reviews that retrace the director's early fascination with Zobel's novel stress Euzhan Palcy's own trajectory of upward social mobility and her high regard for the vernacular —as in slave— customs and cultures of the people of Martinique.

Jean-Marc Paty's film review "Si vous passez par la Rue Cases-Nègres" devotes substantial space to Palcy's motivating force in shooting the film. Paty explains that Palcy chose to adapt *La Rue Cases-Nègres* onto the screen because autobiographical elements in Zobel's novel mirror not only her father's but also her own trajectory and values. The journalist explains that Palcy found currency in Zobel's careful depiction of Caribbean life in the early part of the last century. It is this shared knowledge that Palcy communicated to Paty when he interviewed her and that wrote about in his article:

Car Zobel sait. Il raconte ni plus ni moins que son enfance et son accession à la culture. La même que le père d'Euzhan, la même que celle de presque tous les pères martiniquais. La pauvreté, l'école obligatoire et une incroyable volonté de s'en sortir, de quitter la rue Cases-Nègres de son village pour acquérir la dignité dans la négritude et l'antillianité (sic) brandies comme des étendards. Et comme Zobel (sic) sait, il raconte très bien, sans fioritures, avec des mots du peuple, des mots qui touchent d'autant la jeune fille qu'elle les a entendus dans son entourage. N'a t-elle pas, comme le petit José du film, été obligée de quitter son village pour avoir droit au lycée de Fort-de-France, après que son père eut lui-même quitté sa campagne pour rapprocher ses enfants de l'école du bourg? Si l'histoire ne se répète pas, l'histoire du peuple, elle se répète, souvent. Mais malgré tout j'ai eu une enfance heureuse. C'est

mon père qui m'a appris à regarder et j'ai aussi appris à observer et à respecter les gens de la campagne, ils sont libres et ouverts. Il n'y a pas si longtemps quand vous demandiez à boire à un paysan même le plus pauvre, il rentrait chez lui et en ressortissait avec un verre d'eau posé sur son plus joli plateau. C'est de ces personnes-là que j'ai toujours voulu parler. Je crois que si j'avais écrit un livre, j'aurais écrit *Rue Cases-Nègres*. (Paty)

The filmmaker translates on the screen the dreams of the underclass: those of sugar cane workers who live in the countryside. Although Zobel's bildungsroman focuses primarily on a male protagonist and seemingly excludes her, *Rue Cases-Nègres* still echoes Palcy's own educational trajectory but not only hers. Zobel's novel conflates two formative elements of French Caribbean cultural identity, the rural (life on the plantation) with the urban (access to French colonial institutions) (César 15).

Euzhan Palcy's Martinican version of Caribbean life on the big screen originates in Zobel's autobiographical ethnography because, according to Gerise Herndon, his novel plays a significant part in the "valorization of Martinican experience rather than a simple imitation of metropolitan French writers" (261). Both the novel and the film are inscribed in a cultural continuum of voices that have defined for decades the theories about Francophone Caribbean identities. For Zobel, Palcy, or her cinematic version of José, education does not equate complete assimilation or fully joining the colonial fold. Rather, José's narrative of emancipation through education in the movie version of *Rue Cases-Nègres* as in the novel may also be read as an allegory of the political, cultural, and economical evolution of colonies in the Caribbean where twentieth century leaders did not seek independence from France.

Like several major but not all political and intellectual figures, José agrees to a certain degree of assimilation but chooses to be a French colonial subject who uses his dual intellectual capital to

transmit his Caribbean heritage. Almost four decades after other colonized lands began their struggles to obtain independence and Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Martinique became overseas departments and regions of France (Départements d'Outremer or D.O.M.s) with the 1946 Departmentalization law, Palcy, a young female filmmaker born and raised in Martinique but educated in France pays tribute in her film to social mobility through a model of French colonial education mitigated by a strong Caribbean cultural identity.

José as reconstructed by Palcy thus mirrors the personal trajectories and success of Euzhan Palcy and Joseph Zobel. As Sylvie César states: “La réalisatrice Euzhan Palcy est, tout comme Joseph Zobel, la narratrice réelle du film” (30). At the end of the film, the male protagonist is set to become like authors Zobel and Palcy and join the ranks of the (Francophone) Caribbean intelligentsia of color that began to make its mark in the 1930s. Like José, the men and women born in the 1910s and onwards now part an established and influential Caribbean intellectual elite had no choice but to *physically* leave the plantation, their native island, and go to Europe to pursue their education. They studied humanities or sciences through the lens of Western theory at high-ranking institutions and employed cultural production as tools and tropes to speak back to the *métropoles* that trained them. *Rue Cases-Nègres* is part of a continuum of Caribbean cultural productions formulated by men and women who have questioned and interrupted limiting Western constructions of themselves as the colonial Other. Palcy therefore is one of these grains of rice that fill a bag of rice.

***Rue Cases-Nègres's* Caribbean Discourse as Political Resistance**

Palcy's *Rue Cases-Nègres* does not begin in media res. Instead while the opening credits appear, the filmmaker and editors use sepia photographs accompanied by the traditional music of

the Caribbean band Malavoi⁸ to seamlessly transport their audience back in time to a Caribbean society still shaped by the slavery economy in the 1930s. The sepia-tinted images and non-diegetic traditional music in the opening sequence situate the film in the rural and urban Martinique of the early twentieth century. It is José's Creole-accented voice that ascribes meaning to these photographs. His initial voiceover as an adult narrator who reminisces about his childhood indicates that although he has escaped plantation life, he is claiming the *rue Cases Nègres* as the locus of his identity. But in the film's the protagonist, now an adult *raconteur*, is also the product of the writer Joseph Zobel's semi-autobiographical fiction, Euzhan Palcy's cinematic adaptation of the author's work, and her own rendition of this Caribbean bildungsroman.

Opening scenes in *Rue Cases-Nègres* show men and women leaving at daybreak to work in the cane fields while children are left unsupervised. The absence of adult guardianship allows the protagonist and his friends to explore the surrounding plantation grounds and get into trouble until they attract the attention of the overseer patrolling. Such scenes depict the economy of the plantation as a labor-intensive enterprise where young children left to their own devices engage in mischief. They may accidentally set on fire their parents' makeshift shacks or might be forced to work as *ti bandes*, toiling in the fields at an early age alongside their parents. The child's narrative voice implies the accomplished career of the adult writer who inspired a cineaste—and serves as the point of entry into the world of a sugar cane plantation in colonial Martinique.

José's coming-of-age story requires his proving an ability to master the pen and the word: to answer to the Creolized African call and response (“*yéééé krik?*,” “*yé krak!*,” “*yéééé mistikrik*,” “*yé mistikrak*”) that Médouze taught him and to show an intimate knowledge of the “bruissement” of the French language with Mr. Roc, the schoolteacher. In Palcy's film, the child has learned to solve

⁸ Malavoi is defined as: “a musical ensemble devoted to the fusion of traditional French West Indian dance rhythms (mazurka, beguine, quadrille) and foreign influences like salsa and even jazz” on Radio France International's English language website rfi.com.

riddles steeped in Afro-Caribbean references and to describe the nuances of the French verb “caqueter.” In this dual mastery, he eventually finds his calling in the production of an in-between text: a discourse of affirmation of his Caribbean identity and the appropriation as well as the contestation of French colonial knowledge. The film *Rue Cases-Nègres* conveys nostalgia for a self-knowledge rooted in the Caribbean landscape from which emanates Zobel’s, José’s, and Palcy’s cultural history.

In addition, Palcy’s film adaptation of Zobel’s novel also partially captures the cultural zeitgeist of the 1970s and 1980s. Both in the métropole and in the French Caribbean the emphasis was on political action and militancy. The late 1970s saw the re-emergence—almost three decades after the advent of the Groupe d’Organisation Nationale de la Guadeloupe (GONG)—of radical nationalist political groups. Founded in 1978, the Groupe de libération armé (GLA), a more radicalized arm of L’Union populaire pour la libération de la Guadeloupe, used, for instance, guerilla tactics to carry out numerous bombings, one abduction, and a couple of arson to demand independence from France in the early 1980s (Canneval 68-69). The Mouvement Populaire pour une Guadeloupe Indépendante and the Alliance Révolutionnaire Caraïbe (ARC) continued some of the actions the GLA when the latter was dismantled when five of its purported members were arrested in emprisonned (Canneval 68-69).

While Palcy was in the preproduction stages for *Rue Cases-Nègres* in the early 1980s, she was most certainly aware of the GLA’s operations. Yet her first film contains virtually none of the *independentiste* ideology of the time. Léopold’s actions against his father at the end of the film, his burning down the ledger shows and eventually sides with the plantation workers is the most extreme gesture in the film. Although Léopold’s arson resemble a terrorist act, Palcy does not present it as a call for self-ruling or independence from France. His gesture is a way to decry the unfair labor and accounting practices on the plantation and to side with the sugar cane workers’ rights through

political action. Palcy thus chose to emphasize José's and M'man Tine's longing for upward mobility and embrace cultural discourse to epitomize political resistance against French assimilation capturing some of the zeitgeist of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In Martinique and Guadeloupe, the decade that precedes the film saw distinctive affirmations Caribbean identities emerge in music, literature, and in the visual arts. Contemporary critiques of the danger of French alienation can be found, for instance, in Daniel Maximin's *L'isolé soleil* (1981) and Edouard Glissant's *Le discours antillais* (1981).

Throughout the film Palcy insists on genuinely depicting Creole cultural practices that originated at the time of slavery. She uses characters such as the elder Médouze and children such as José's classmates, Gesner and Viriel, to assert that access to formal (colonial) education does not come at the detriment of resilient cultural practices and customs. In her comparative analysis of the film and the novel, "Sugar Cane Alley: Re-Reading Race, Class, and Identity in Zobel's *Rue Cases-Nègres*," Haseenah Ebrahim remarks that:

Palcy's narrative strategy draws heavily on orality, storytelling, and the elided historical consciousness, to reveal José's identity—and Caribbean identity—requires negotiating a path between two cultures, an imperial and an ancestral dance movements. Cultural elements and practices drawn from the African oral tradition, such as the *laghia* or the storytelling at wakes, compete with the elite's elevation of the French language, and of French customs and practices. (148)

I argue that Euzhan Palcy deliberately weakens the French colonial presence and in order to emphasize Martinique's Caribbean cultural legacy as a result of the plantation economy. This validation of Caribbean culture is mostly achieved through casting, as Palcy's use of ethnography extends to the cast.

***Rue Cases-Nègres's* A-List Cast: Professional Actors, Artists, and Amateurs**

Contrary to what is most commonly believed about the cast of the film *Rue Cases-Nègres*, several of the peripheral characters in the film were experienced performers. A few were already popular with a French Caribbean audience. Casting relatively well-known Caribbean artists greatly contributed to the aesthetic of *Rue Cases-Nègres* and this in turn served the film by appealing to mainstream and informed audiences. Artists selected for secondary parts help flesh out what life in Martinique in the 1920s was like. They convey authenticity and underline the social and cultural dimensions of plantation society. Locally significant, these artists also bring to informed spectators (who are familiar with the nuances, rhythms and trials of plantation life in the French Caribbean, the American South, Third World countries) but also to an uninformed Western (or first world audience) the Caribbean cultural insiderism Alain Ménil has praised the film for. Palcy produced an A-list cast of intellectual figures, veteran professional, non-professional, and emerging actors, and local artists who in the 1970s and 1980s were part of a defining cultural moment: the revival of traditional music.

In 1983 in interviews to promote the film, Euzhan Palcy stated that most of the actors in the film were non-professional (Marcorelles; Rouchy; “Lion d’argent ‘couleur sépia’ pour assassiner la carte postale”). She explained that for the lead role of José, she auditioned close to two thousand children before choosing Garry Cadenat. To obtain convincing performances, Palcy befriended and lived for several weeks with the group of children who were to play Gesner, Viriel, and Tortilla on the “real” exterior set of a *rue cases-nègres* built for the film to observe them and better direct them. She also incorporated a few techniques from Italian neo realist cinema: actual locales, the use of professional actors (Darling Légitimus and Douta Seck) and first timers (the children featured in the film along with artists and performers from Martinique), revealing social conditions, and realistic look and behaviour (Bordwell and Thompson 489).

When Palty set out to cast her first film, she could draw from a list of professionally trained actors from the Francophone Caribbean and West Africa. This includes the Paris-based Compagnie des Griots, an all-black theater company active from the late 1950s to the mid 1960s that contributed to the training of pioneer actors such as Toto Bissainthe, Robert Liensol, Doua Seck, and Darling Légitimus (see chapter two for the significance of the Compagnie des Griots in the French Caribbean filmmaking practice). Parts were rare, many were unemployed and some, like Robert Liensol, made a living dubbing African American characters in series and film from the United States. Singers and actresses such as Toto Bissainthe (b.1934) and Moune de Rivel née Cécile Jean-Louis (b. 1918) looked too young to portray M'man Tine. In fact Palty only two French Caribbean actresses old enough and with proven experience in film, theater, and music who could play the part of M'man Tine: Jenny Alpha and Darling Légitimus.

Palty first began filming with Alpha but finally settled on Légitimus. In a personal interview in Paris in 2004, Jenny Alpha explained that she was initially cast in the role of M'man Tine. Production began but then inexplicably lost the role to Légitimus. During my research two explanations from three different sources were offered for that replacement. At the beginning of my research, I was told that Alpha proved not to be such a good match for the part. It was also rumored that the producer requested Légitimus rather than Alpha and that Palty had no choice but to obey her financial sponsor work with Légitimus. In 2010, Palty clarified this matter in the updated edition of the *College au cinéma* pedagogical dossier on *Rue Cases-Nègres* published by the CNC and confirmed the latter explanation (Krezinski and Cyprien 13). Because she had trouble reading, Légitimus closely worked with her son Theo to learn and memorize her lines in preparation for the film. Given her remarkable performance in the film, one would be hard pressed to guess that she was a replacement for one of the lead roles or that her sight was failing her. Osange Silou, an expert on the French Caribbean filmmaking practice illustrated the cover of her 1989 study, *Le cinéma dans les*

Antilles françaises, a still of L'Égitimus as M'man Tine, suggesting that L'Égitimus's performance in *Rue Cases-Nègres* could single handedly embodied *le cinéma antillais*, its marginality, and its very existence in the late 1980s.

In her film version of Zobel's novel, Euzhan Palcy combines several narratives in one about the Caribbean colonial experience. Her chronicle of plantation life merges into a migration narrative that retraces the upward mobility of the protagonist. José's social ascension is part of a complex depiction of rural and urban Martinican society achieved through the insertion of credible secondary characters. The first chapter of this dissertation pays particular attention to the role of women and children. In her cinematic interpretation of Zobel's novel, Palcy utilizes them to emphasize Caribbean cultural beliefs but also the gender, racial, and class issues inherent to Caribbean social society within and without the plantation.

Palcy employs a traditional three-act structure to provide her viewers with a familiar viewing experience. In the film's first act, she establishes the Caribbean economic and cultural landscape of colonial Martinique as a foundation for the island's collective identity and for her protagonist's motives. It is to break free from the oppression that sugar cane workers like his grandmother M'man Tine that José must succeed in school. In order to become a successful writer he must rewrite the French Caribbean as a site of affirmation and contestation. True to conventional plot lines, Palcy has José encounters several obstacles in Act II. Just as he is close to achieving his goal, he and his grandmother experience dramatic reversals. This climax is followed in Act III with a bittersweet *dénouement*: once José's main conflict is resolved and his achievement assured, one of his two mentor figures, his grandmother dies, leaving him as the successful author-raconteur who introduces and ends the narrative through voiceover. An unusually large number of viewers embraced a different depiction of the French-Caribbean and Martinique because of *Rue Cases-*

Nègres time-honored arc and familiar coming of age story. The film certainly owes its success to its traditional narrative structure. Thus understanding the groundbreaking success of *Rue Cases-Nègres* first requires looking at the ways in which this film was deliberately constructed as a traditional coming-of-age story made in the classical Hollywood style.

***Rue Cases-Nègres*: A Caribbean Bildungsroman in the Classical Hollywood Style**

In the true fashion of novel to film adaptation, Euzhan Palcy's version of Joseph Zobel's novel *La rue Cases-Nègres* is not an entirely faithful rendering of Zobel's novel. While Keith Q. Warner, who also translated the French novel into English, saw in the film a "faithful and elegant interpretation of *La rue Cases-Nègres*," (*On Location 2*) Sylvie César in her comparative study *La rue Cases-Nègres: du roman au film (étude comparative)*, argues that Palcy's translation of Zobel's best-known work is a revised and condensed interpretation (29-50). The different stages in José's life are more clearly delineated in the film than in the novel because the narrative adopts both the language of the dominant cinematic narrative mode and the conventions of the bildungsroman. The director explicitly rewrote the novel as a coming-of-age story that draws on the formal principles of American studio films known as the classical Hollywood cinema. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson define such cinema as "a conception of narratives [that] depends on the assumption that the action will spring primarily from individual characters as causal agents (89).

To achieve clarity, greater dramatic effect, and elicit a stronger identification with the characters, Palcy eliminated numerous characters (for instance Palcy killed José's mother, Delia), combined others, and altered parts of the novel (M'man Tine's move to Fort-de-France), as Sylvie César has demonstrated. Unlike the novel *La rue Cases-Nègres*, the film *Rue Cases-Nègres*'s structure therefore revolves around a highly economical plot centered on José and M'man Tine as protagonists and causal agents with specific goals and desires. Helped by the determination of his

grandmother, José must excel at school to be spared the backbreaking labor of the sugar cane plantation where they live. His world is divided between the cultural legacy of the plantation—embodied by the elder Médouze who teaches him African and Creole cosmogony through storytelling and riddles—and the knowledge imparted to him by the French colonial educational system.

A chain of action proceeds from José's desire to reconcile both worlds. To advance the plot, Palcy places obstacles, a high point of conflict, and great problems that threaten her protagonist's success. She achieves dramatic effects by simply underlining that José and M'man Tine fulfill their wish of social mobility at the price of great sacrifices. M'man Tine's health declines as she moves from the Rue Cases-Nègres to the bourg in order to bring José closer to school but her sacrifice pays off. José brilliantly passes a local exam and, encouraged by his local teacher, he then takes a second exam in Fort-de-France, the capital. Unfortunately he faces a new setback: he only receives a partial scholarship.

As I will examine later, Palcy constructed this scene as a pivotal moment in the film. The *mise-en-scène* stresses the indifference of middle-class colonial civil servants to the plight of poor families and the unfairness of the education. If this scene rings particularly true it is likely because, unbeknownst to her French and international audience, the director also draws a parallel between M'man Tine's determination, José's struggle, and the challenges she faced as a young French Caribbean female filmmaker in getting her first film done. The characters' problems indirectly mirror hers.

When José writes a heartfelt personal essay on his spiritual mentor, Médouze, his new teacher doubts his abilities and unfairly accuses him of plagiarism. The high point of great conflict and problems (hallmarks of the Classical Hollywood Style) José and M'man Tine encounter is resolved in the end as the plot reaches complete closure. For José to succeed, M'man Tine and her

grandson must literally move from the periphery, the rue Cases-Nègres, to the center, symbolized in the film both by the bourg (the center of the township) and Fort-de-France (the urban center of the island). Conversely Fort-de-France's fast pace and urban sophistication require great adjustment of M'man Tine. The city teacher who had admonished José for cheating visits M'man Tine's humble abode and realizes that José is a hard-working, honest, and deserving student.

The boy's efforts (and M'man Tine's) are finally rewarded: he obtains a full scholarship that allows his grandmother to stop working and return to her Rue Cases-Nègres in rural Martinique to "rest". Seeing that she fails to come back to the city on the day they had planned, a worried José goes back to the rue Cases-Nègres. There, he finds out that his grandmother's health has taken a turn for the worse: she expires in her shack shortly thereafter. A return to José's voiceover and the group Malavoi's traditional musical theme that had accompanied the film's opening credits signals the end of the narrative.

The film's last sequence, M'man Tine's wake, and José's last words herald him as a Caribbean cultural figure loyal to his origins. As he becomes a writer, he will not assimilate into French colonial culture and lose his voice. By honoring his grandmother's memory, as well as Médouze's, and that of all of the inhabitants of the Rue Cases-Nègres, he reconciles both worlds: the cultural legacy of the plantation and the knowledge of French geography, history, and literature he now masters. To the Caribbean audience familiar with Zobel's novel, José has become the French Caribbean writer (Joseph Zobel) and the filmmaker (Euzhan Palcy) who wrote first as a literary then as cinematic narrative the fictionalized memoir of a child from the plantation.

This succinct summary of *Rue Cases-Nègres* emphasizes the ways in which Palcy and her film crew applied the principles of the Classical Hollywood Style to create a seamless and compelling Caribbean story. Despite Caribbean locations unfamiliar to cinemagoers in the West (the world circum the plantation and urban colonial Martinique), the use of Creole, and an unknown cast, the

film's legible expository style resonated with a large audience. The strategy to create a fluid story, albeit with a French Caribbean point of view, is mostly evident in the screenplay. To remove the novel's digressions, increase the audience's identification with José's struggle, and heighten the movie's dramatic effects, Palcy eliminated a great number of characters from Zobel's original novel, not the least José's mother, Délia, who in Zobel's novel lives and works as a domestic servant in Fort-de-France.

Palcy chose to depict M'man Tine José's grandmother as his sole mother figure. Developing the narrative around a female character born, raised, and who ultimately dies on the plantation locates the sources of José's struggle within its harsh labor conditions. The director employs two central elderly characters, M'man Tine and Médouze, and their strikingly different appearance to show the legacy of institutionalized poverty and exploitation upon which the plantation economy rests. M'man Tine's trudge back to the rue Cases-Nègres at dusk, her labored breathing, and sweaty round short figure are contrasted with Médouze's dramatically emaciated frame.

M'man Tine's and Médouze's marked bodies and living conditions epitomize the workers' humble living conditions and the heavy toll years of cutting cane in the fields take on the workers' health. Yet the filmmaker by foregrounding the rue Cases-Nègres as the site where Caribbean culture is produced insists that neither M'man Tine nor Médouze sacrifice their dignity or their sense of self. It is that insistence on pride and self-respect that compels Caribbean and non-Caribbean audiences to identify with M'man Tine's dream and José's drive and to embrace the film and its conventional yet never before portrayed on screen narrative.

José is determined to bring with him the cultural geography of the plantation—embodied by Médouze—into the colonial space *par excellence*, the classroom of the *lycée* in Fort-de-France. However as child is unaware that his heartfelt and successful attempt at preserving and disseminating his cultural identity through writing may provoke suspicion and discredit him. The

high school's teacher reaction to José's personal essay about Médouze, José's spiritual mentor, and the teacher's accusation of plagiarism brings to mind the filmmaker's own interloping in the closed world of French mainstream cinema in the 1980s. It is tempting to read Palcy's exemplary characterization of José as a surrogate of the filmmaker's struggle to bring to fruition her first feature film. Despite some providential encounters, the director made the film in challenging conditions, as she recounted to Marlaine Glicksman for an interview in *Film Comment*:

I worked on the film until 1980 when I got a grant from the government for best screenplay.

It was very difficult to find a producer. Finally I found Claude Nedjar who used to produce women's films, to produce and distribute the film.

Truffaut and [his collaborator, Suzanne] Schiffman helped me pick up a small crew, which I took to Martinique. It's a very low budget film, less than \$1 million. The whole *country* was behind me helping. (65)

Palcy's use of the noun *country* (my emphasis) to refer to the French Caribbean is not a mere creolism but another means to assert the cultural autonomy of the *département d'outre-mer* and to question the representation of Martinique as a tourist destination. Like, José, Palcy is a deserving candidate who receives insufficient financial support from institutions and yet ultimately plays a substantial role in the cultural production of the French Caribbean. As a model student herself, Palcy believes like Monsieur Roc, José's teacher, that "*L'instruction est la deuxième porte qui ouvre la porte de notre liberté*," but unlike Monsieur Roc she is convinced that the culture of her country, her symbolic rue Cases-Nègres, is a central component of her education.

Rue Cases-Nègres: A Plantation Narrative

Occupying more than half of the surface of the poster, the young face of Garry Cadenat as José, the film's protagonist, literally introduces him as a poster child for the culture of the plantation. On each side of the photographed scene, a woman and a man stand, their backs to us and they are smaller in size. The man is shirtless and the woman is dressed in a shapeless gown. They look at the other workers and frame the scene of backbreaking labor. She wears a straw hat (a *Bakoua*) that lends additional authenticity to the scene. Rising from dry stalks of sugarcane, the close-up of José's face takes up most of the rest of the frame. Like the woman in a gown, he is wearing a traditional straw hat. Although the sugar cane workers are situated underneath him, Palcy is evidently establishing a kinship between José and the workers by way of repetition of the hat as a visual cue.

The poster for the film directly alludes to the protagonist's trajectory. Although he is from the same social fabric as the sugar cane workers, he seems to rise above them. José's larger face and the position it occupies within the poster marks him as different. He is looking up and his lips are slightly parted in an expression that ambiguously reflects aspiration and confidence. The right side of his hat is surrounded by red on the left and by blue sky on the right, hinting at the kind of evolution that will propel him forward. His presence within the plantation is already associated with social mobility. José directly emerges from the familiar representation of plantation life. At the same time, his oversized head belongs to a separate layer altogether as if his presence looms beyond the confines of the plantation. The poster hints both at the larger themes of upward mobility and migration and presents the *rue Cases Nègres* as a valuable site of cultural knowledge.

Sugar Cane Workers, Overseers, and Planters: The Selective Human Geography of the Plantation in *Rue Cases-Nègres*

Following her self-professed desire to imbue Zobel's text with authenticity, Euzhan Palcy's *Rue Cases-Nègres* declines the landscape of the plantation on a human scale. The first part of her film

focuses on the daily life of a Creole-speaking community living on Caribbean plantation in the post abolition Martinique of the 1930s (that is she, she has chosen to rewrite and direct a period piece that takes place half century before the time of the film). The director depicts Martinique as a site of colonial encounters where French colonial rule is still partially defined economic and societal norms, customs, laws, and organization. The film erases the Indian, Syrian, and Lebanese presence and instead shows how a community of people of African, European, and of mixed European and African descent has shared and shaped the culture of the plantation. The first part of *Rue Cases-Nègres* also impresses upon its audience that in a French island such as Martinique, colonialist discourses are challenged by and through cultural production. The deliberate inclusion of work songs sung in the sugar cane fields, riddles, conversations about local beliefs in *dorlis* (duppies) and *cheval à trois pattes* (three-legged horses) suggest that the culture of the former slaves is the dominant cultural discourse of the film.

In his seminal text, *Le discours antillais* (1981), Edouard Glissant states that: “Ce qui ‘détermine’ la société martiniquaise est qu’elle est structurée à même le désordre colonialiste. 1. Ce désordre n’est pas manque mais structure (structure imposée, *instruite*, incrustée à force). Le vrai désordre résolutoire introduirait à une re-structure autonomisée” (357). Palcy’s rendition of Zobel’s novel and particularly her careful characterization of the cultural legacy of the plantation partakes in this “re-structure autonomisée.” The film *Rue Cases-Nègres* is not constructed as a form of “désordre résolutoire,” but as an instance of Caribbean discourse deployed through the medium of cinema. In the French Caribbean, the longing for independence (sovereignty) or autonomy (self-government) virulently expressed late 1960s to early 1980s, despite attempts from organized political groups such as the Groupe de Libération Armée (GLA) and the Alliance Révolutionnaire Caraïbe (ARC) ranging from terrorist attacks to murders (Canneval 68-73), that desirable solution, “re-structure

autonomisée” was increasingly expressed in cultural discourse that reassessed the hegemonic role of France and the West in the French Caribbean cultural tradition and legacy.

I have previously cited Palcy’s personal motivations for directing *Rue Cases-Nègres*. Her insistence in the first part of the film that José’s identity stems from the *rue Cases Nègres* reflects a keen understanding of a contemporary modes of resistance. Locating Martinican identity within the lives of impoverished, exploited, and yet dignified rural workers without ignoring other segments of Caribbean society is a contestary act. In the 1980s, French Caribbean intellectuals such as Edouard Glissant decried alienation and identified discursive modes of resistance: “On peut encore supposer que des modes sociaux (organisation de la vie paysanne par exemple) se développent en structure de résistance. Ou que le contenu de tradition soit érigé en force active de contestation” (*Le discours antillais* 357). The filmmaker aligns herself with the essayist and grasps the importance of “action culturelle.”⁹ She buries the film’s oppositional discourse in plain sight within intimate scenes of the daily life of the field hands. Thus in the first third of the film, Palcy constructs the geography of the plantation through a series carefully composed characters and scenes that evokes a rural and community-oriented microcosm familiar to a Caribbean working-class audience.

Far from some of the pervasive doudouist images and sounds that graced the French television screen and radio airwaves in the late 1970s and early 1980s in France, the film offers an affirmative and oppositional reading of *les Antilles françaises*. *Rue Cases-Nègres* replaces the perceived benevolent minstrelsy of the French Caribbean band La Compagnie créole and the singer Carlos’s mock saccharine Caribbean pictured in the Oasis soft drink advertising campaign with visual tropes of struggle, resourcefulness, and defiance. The conventions of the bildungsroman allow the filmmaker to include two readings of that literary genre as a form of counter discourse. In *Rue Cases-Nègres* the struggle inherent to the coming-of-age story is expressed in José’s hard road to social

⁹ Glissant stresses the importance “la pratique culturelle” as an alternative to colonial disorder in *Le discours antillais* (356).

mobility. It is also expressed in the gender, race, and class limitations colonial Martinique imposed upon secondary characters encounter.

Feminist and Class and Race-centered Subplots

The director capitalizes on the characteristics of the Bildungsroman (a genre of novel that focuses on the formative years of the main character as the basis for moral and psychological development) to emphasize the social structure of colonial Martinique. The friendship developing between José and Léopold, a mulatto classmate whose parents strictly forbid him to spend time with “petits nègres,” plays a decisive role in the demise of Léopold’s father, M. de Thorail who is a *béké*.¹⁰ In a scene where José plays with his friend Léopold by a river, José’s closeness to Léopold, provokes the wrath of Mr. de Thorail and causes him to get severely hurt and die. It is important to note that here Palcy’s mode of representation of the M. de Thorail as the figure of the *béké* veers on iconography.¹¹

Palcy carefully sets up the scene: she shows that Léopold and José are quietly enjoying riding Léopold’s horse in the river. Further up the river Douze Orteils and other men from the rue Cases-Nègres are shown exchanging jokes as they are bathing and washing horses and mules. Palcy’s mise-en-scène emphasizes the relaxed atmosphere. The arrival of M. de Thorail who is wearing a white *casque colonial*, a white linen suit, and nervously driving a white convertible car is shown as an intrusion. Thorail’s emits anger: he has just left the factory where he and M. d’Auberville, a

¹⁰ In *La Question de l’immigration indienne dans son environnement socio-économique (1848-1900)*, Juliette-Amon explains in a footnote that: “Le terme ‘béké’ signifierait ‘blanc’ en dialecte Ibo, d’après Césaire. Equivalent du terme “créole” dans la langue vernaculaire (information fournie par M. Roland Suvélor” (7).

¹¹ As memory is highly subjective, it is not clear whether it is his own recollection or he was inspired by the scene in the film but in Camille Mauduech’s documentary *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe*, one of the interviewees, recalls how his mother would describe the *béké* almost exactly the way Palcy characterizes M. de Thorail in *Rue Cases-Nègres*.

wealthier *béké* and his employer, have admonished the mulatto overseer for the poor quality of the sugar cane harvest. As retaliation against the sugar cane workers and to increase production, they have ordered the children of the *rue Cases-Nègres* to work in the field along with their parents.

When Léopold runs to his father to greet him, M. de Thorail bemoans his son for playing with José, “*ce nègre aux pieds nus.*” Incensed, Thorail orders José to lead the horse to him but José freezes and when he tries to guide the horse it resists and begins to stamp on the water. M. de Thorail impatiently walks to the horse and the animal nervously kicks him in the spleen. Palcy shows that the balance of power is reversed: it is the powerfully built sugar cane worker Douze Orteils who carries the weakened white out of the water. Although the scene plays like an accident, it also unfolds as comeuppance for Léopold’s father who is punished for trying to enforce and maintain racial and social hierarchies he has himself transgressed. Thorail has fathered Léopold with Honorine, an educated brown-skinned mulatto woman who appears to share his contempt for the lower class of sugar cane workers.

Palcy and Marie Josèphe Yoyotte, her editor, establish racial and class-based hierarchies within the plantation in an earlier scene. They demonstrate that there is a pecking order among the small white landowning class that manages the sugar cane industry. M. de Thorail, a *béké* (planter) is accountable to M. Auberville who may or may not be a *béké* himself. Unlike Thorail, Auberville does not have a Creole accent. He has a French southern accent and thus possibly embodies the commercial ties that bind France to its Caribbean colonies. Thorail admonishes in French then in Creole a mulatto overseer who in turn admonishes a black employee who supervises the work of the sugar cane cutters. This scene further substantiates the fact that the colonial sugar industry is solely driven by profit. It also reinforces that this profit depends on the perpetuation of racial and class-based hierarchies. Palcy demonstrates repeatedly in *Rue Cases-Nègres* that within and without the plantation economy the rigidity of these barriers is always under attack. The personal and intimate

ties inherent to Creole culture encroach upon the power dynamics between blacks, whites, and mulattoes.

Palcy's *mise-en-scène* initially portray Thorail, the figure of the *béké*, as a new world feudal lord but Thorail's insistence on maintaining the rigid racial and social order of the plantation has, most surprisingly in her film, serious consequences for... the *béké*. Badly injured, Thorail succumbs to his wounds. On his deathbed he refuses to recognize Léopold, his mulatto son, as a Thorail. The rejection stings Léopold when he overhears his black mother's plea to his white father and witnesses the latter's enduring allegiance to the economically powerful social group of white planters. Therefore it is because Thorail remains loyal to his class that his son, Léopold, perhaps initially but wrongfully perceived as a young figure of the tragic mulatto, chooses the camp of the oppressed and turns into the archetype of the maroon whose elects to dismantle the master's/father's house. And thus Palcy and Zobel do not give the role of the maroon to the traditional black character. After his white father disown him, Léopold's allegiance becomes clearer: he embraces the struggle of the oppressed sugar cane workers and turns against both the black bourgeoisie (his mother) and the white plantocracy (his father).

Euzhan Palcy constructed the sequence where Léopold overhears his parents' conversation to achieve several goals. This sequence is a heartbreaking moment for mother, father, and son. It also simultaneously elicits the outrage of the audience as it shows in a concrete fashion how race, gender, and class produce fluid yet rigid hierarchies in plantation societies. The same bourgeois black mother previously shown confidently running her household, giving orders to servants, and scolding her light-skinned son for playing with black children is being dismissed as a mere concubine by her loving white companion. The uninformed audience understands that Thorail chooses class and racial affiliations over his family to comply with the rigid practice of keeping name, properties, and economic influence within the strict confines of endogamy, despite the transgressive practice of

what was called in the context of plantation society in the American South was called miscegenation. The effect produced by the exchange between Honorine and Thorail is both that the historical legacy of slavery is acknowledged and that an informed audience feels vindicated by its injustice. Yet as soon as the injustice of Thorail's refusal to recognize his son of Léopold is dramatized, the director challenges the supremacy of the oppressor figure, perhaps questioning along the way the idea of the mulatto class reluctant to align itself with the black masses.

Palcy implies that symbolically, José's closeness to his mulatto friend is a catalyst for the death of the colonial father and planter and the conversion of the rejected mulatto son as a post-plantation maroon figure who sets ablaze the sugar factory and sides with the rights of black workers. Palcy relies on the conventions of the Bildungsroman to contrast José's and Léopold's self-development. By the end of the film, although he has been caught and will certainly be harshly punished, Léopold appears as a redeemed figure and no longer as a tragic mulatto. Belligerent, bruised, and in chains, the mulatto son of the *béké* has found a place among the inhabitants of Caribbean by leaving the *habitation* and dismantling the master's house and becoming a maroon.

Palcy is partially faithful to Zobel's novel. She constructs Léopold as a composite of two characters in Zobel's novel (Hall Halley and Warner 384-385): Georges Roc or Jojo, the son of the octoroon Gracieuse and Justin Roc (151-152)—himself the mulatto son of a *béké* and a foreman at the factory—and Léopold. Léopold in the film is an echo of Jojo, José's best friend in Zobel's novel: "Jojo s'était sauvé de chez son père. Comme un nègre marron il s'était enfui dans les bois..." (198). While Léopold in Zobel's novel becomes a trade-union organizer, in Palcy's film he seeks to dismantle his father's economic power by stealing the plantation ledger, burning the sugar factory, and exposing irregular accounting practices as exploitative and profit-driven. Palcy also deploys afro-Creole as modes of expression as a form of cultural marooning.

Creolizing the Past: Work Songs, Storytelling, Call and Response, and African Derived Dances

Key performative elements of the culture of the plantation appear prominently in *Rue Cases-Nègres*. Palty shows the human geography of the plantation by insisting that Martinican culture is predicated on meaningful music and dance.¹² Although the action in *Rue Cases-Nègres* takes place around the township of Petit-Bourg, the film features a memorable scene of dances at a funeral: Médouze's wake. The description that ethnomusicologist Dominique Cyrille gives of a traditional wake in northeastern Martinique shows that Palty's *primary* goal is not necessarily authenticity but ascribing value to the culture of the plantation.¹³ The filmmaker did not condense the French Caribbean mourning practice *à la lettre*: she excised the Catholic component from the wake and only emphasized African-derived Creole elements such as the stories told about the deceased, the drumming, and the dance.

In several other scenes in the film, diegetic and non-diegetic music establish the importance of music as a means of cultural expression in plantation life and as a means to get the field hands to work. Cyrille explains that: "Martiniquan *Bèlè* is also work music. Most people born in the *Bèlè* tradition of the northeastern part of the island refer it as work music to accompany the sugarcane harvest, which requires a cutlass with a sharp blade" (241). Palty's insistence on showing the culture of the plantation is evident in her inclusion of a scene with the artist Eugène Mona as Douze Orteils

¹² "Drum music is considered the genuine creation of the blacks in the French Caribbean. The rural songs carry the collective memory of the community and for a long time they were the avenue of expression for people whose opinion was never sought. Once used for keeping track of events that affected the life of family members and neighbors, they now address issues that are important to the larger community. Many songs contain allusions to slavery and the African past. The rural repertoire is an important aspect of the Creole culture that has contributed to re-creating a sense of belonging that blacks had lost in the Middle-Passage" (Cyrille 230).

¹³ "During the night following a death in a community, neighbors, coworkers, friends, and relatives gathered for a wake at the home of the deceased. Inside the house, usually in the largest room, the deceased was laid in an open casket. Close family members surrounded the coffin and mourned silently. A few yards away, a small number of men and women sang old *cantiques* in French and Latin and offered prayers from the Catholic liturgy. Outside the house, a crowds of friends listened to traditional tales of life and death in Creole. The performance of the storyteller consisted of singing as much as of telling stories. The songs, in call and response style, were accompanied by hand clapping from the audience). After about three hours, the crowd usually dispersed and the dance began later. It was performed to the sound of the *bèlè* drum and *tibwa* and had a strict choreography and rhythmic pattern" (Cyrille 237-238).

in a scene that includes one of the most pervasive traditional dances in Martinique: the *ladja*.¹⁴ Mona's convincing performance and his own effort at resurrecting past cultural practices throughout his career give credibility to *Rue Cases-Nègres*. In the colonial primary school José learns French geography, the spectator who is not from the Caribbean also receives a visual and aural lesson about salient elements of French Caribbean cultural tradition.

Inserting into the film known Caribbean contemporary artists (acclaimed master of *bèlè* such as Ti-Emile, militant sculptor and painter Khokho Joseph René-Corail into José's background, and storyteller Eugène Mona) as nameless extras or secondary characters as the basis of the character José's formative years serves one of Palcy's goals as a director. The filmmaker replaces colonial images with an insider's authenticated reconstructions of Afro-Caribbean artistic traditions. The use of the *ladja* dance in several scenes in *Rue Cases-Nègres* encapsulates Palcy's aesthetic of resistance as she prominently displays the culture of the plantation but diminishes the French colonial influence in the daily life of the field hands. Although: "it [the *ladja*] was customary to see it performed after a hard day of work, or in front of a church at the end of Sunday mass," (Cyrille 240) to make her point, Palcy shows the *ladja* as a Creolized mode of expression that relegated the French Catholic colonial religious heritage to the margin.

As a contrast, the filmmaker obliquely shows the ruling class's preoccupation with Western culture as a form of status. In one example, Léopold's father, a *béké* pompously brings to the church in Petit-Bourg a crucifix that has been blessed by the Pope and sent from Lourdes. Or Carmen's genteel boss, who lives in the exclusive neighborhood of Didier in Fort-de-France, has *Chéri* (1920), a novel by the French author Colette, on her night table. Paradoxically or ironically because the film is set in the 1930s, members of the elite also consumes culture from the African diaspora that has become popular during the Roaring Twenties in the French Métropole. The non-diegetic music

¹⁴ Cyrille explains that: "*Ladja* is found throughout Martinique in urban and rural settings. This highly acrobatic fight-dance, called interchangeably *ladja* or *damie*, is performed by two men to the sound of the drum (240)."

associated with Carmen's genteel boss is the Charleston and Léopold's mother listens to Joséphine Baker's song "J'ai deux amours" (1930). But music is not the only way in which Palcy articulates her aesthetic her resistance. She questions the colonialist perspective in which the Caribbean is usually portrayed by reconsidering the place of religion in colonial Caribbean society.

Palcy's treatment of religion in *Rue Cases-Nègres* challenges more than it illustrates the preeminence of Christian religion over afro-Caribbean beliefs. Traditional understandings of slavery societies and plantation economy usually link Western religion to the colonial enterprise. For instance, Cuban essayist and novelist Antonio Benítez-Rojo and Canadian sociologist Kovàts-Beaudoux see the imposition of the Christian religion in plantation society as a powerful tool to control the (former) slaves and quell dissent. Benitez-Rojo and other theoreticians of the region have described Caribbean religions as hybridized and creolized versions of European, West African and, to a smaller extent, Native American forms of worship. In his essay "From the plantation to the Plantation" in *The Repeating Island*, Benitez-Rojo also speaks of "Christianization as deculturation" (Benitez-Rojo 56). Similarly, in *Les Blancs créoles de la Martinique: une minorité dominante*, Kovàts-Beaudoux notes that: "La femme créole enseigne souvent le catéchisme aux enfants du bourg ou à ceux des ouvriers de la propriété: comme le notait un de nos interlocuteurs mulâtres, 'elle va prêcher la résignation aux petits Noirs' (154)." Because she deliberately empowers her the inhabitants of the rue cases-nègres, Palcy characterizes Western religion as an ineffectual colonial tool in *Rue Cases-Nègres*.

Religious Practice on the Plantation: Palcy's Marginalization of the Catholic Faith

The film *Rue Cases-Nègres* presents the French Catholic Church as a failed instrument of control for the Creole colonial elite. In Palcy's film, Christianization has very little influence on the

spiritual life of the plantation workers. The Catholic religion only exists outside of cultural confines of plantation life, in the church located in the town center. Western religious practices therefore have not seeped into everyday life. *Au contraire*, in the end of the opening sequence, the film establishes that field hands work from dusk to dawn and that their everyday life is punctuated by their own version of religious and spiritual rituals: the African-derived work songs that accompany the hard labor of cutting cane. Despite the fact that M'man Tine asks José to pray before going to bed, that she is shown making the sign of the cross, and that she repeatedly asks God to help her in difficult times, she is not extremely religious: in the film she is never shown going to church. In fact, in Palcy's film none of the adult sugar cane workers set foot in a church.

The filmmaker's take on the colonial use of the Catholic religion is solely offered in one scene when José and his friends (Tortilla, Léopold, Gesner and the youngest of the children living at the Rue Cases-Nègres) attend catechism. Although a black priest (played by Joseph Zobel) and his attending nun officiate, the figure of authority in the church initially appears to be the *béké*. The arrival of M. de Thorail provokes wonder among the children and interrupts their simulacrum of religious recitation. In the only scene of the film devoted to the Catholic religion, Palcy divests the Christian liturgy of its colonialist intent. It is in this scene that Palcy decides to explain the blood ties that link Léopold to Mr. de Thorail, as José discovers that his mulatto friend is the *béké*'s son.

The arrival of M. de Thorail with a magnificent crucifix from M. Auberville, no less than "a present from the Vatican," does not reinforce the idea of religion as a means for the plantocracy to subdue the children cane field workers into docile workers. The film's *mise-en-scène* achieves the opposite effect. While the black priest of the congregation and his attending nun respectfully greet M. de Thorail, Palcy has the children perform catholic church-based religious rituals, such as the recitation of prayers, a perfunctory mimicry. The film shows catechism as a form of colonial brainwashing but the children of the cane cutters seem indifferent to the principles of Catholicism.

Palcy uses the children's lack of attention and their robotic repetition to present catechism as meaningless and unconvincing recitation: it is learned by rote. Although they appear to be neatly seated in rows and seemingly well behaved, they only follow the nun's verbal cues so as not to attract her wrath. In reality, they are either playing tricks on one another to pass the time or absent-mindedly repeating the prayer they memorized, bored to death. José's, Gesner's, and the other children's unruly behavior and feigned compliance question the authority of the *béké* and the influence of the Catholic religion. Not only does Palcy dispute the idea that Catholicism is a colonial tool that diminishes elements of the Creole culture but she also presents the attempt to instill fear of God and discipline in the children of the planters through catechism as futile.

Instead in *Rue Cases-Nègres* Afro-Caribbean practices and beliefs play a central role on the grounds of the plantation: first, as previously discussed in the *Bélé* music and African-derived dances such as *ladja* that the workers practice; secondly in the children's discussion and appropriation of Caribbean beliefs. Whereas she shows the children hardly engaged in their catholic religious lesson, Palcy depicts them as passionate when they discuss ghosts and spirits from their own Caribbean cultural tradition. In a short scene where during recess children of different complexion and social background argue over *soukougans*, *bâtons volants*, and *gens gagés*, Palcy also implies that these Caribbean beliefs are variable evidences of empowerment and helplessness.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the verbal confrontation between Viriel and Léopold. Palcy frames their heated exchange in terms of colorism (the intersection of class and skin color), class, religious, and cultural legitimacy. The two children confront their respective interpretations of the power of "*gens gagés*" (persons who can use witchcraft to turn into animals). Viriel, who is dark-skinned and has been shown to be a student in very good standing, announces that *gens gagés* and *zombies* have the power to turn into dogs, cats, and snakes. His recommendation to stay indoors at midnight to avoid meeting three-legged-horses represents the field hands' beliefs. On the contrary,

the light-skinned Léopold, who has not yet been identified as M. de Thorail's illegitimate mulatto son for the viewer, contests Viriel's beliefs in the metamorphic faculties of *gens gagés*.

Palcy reiterates these beliefs onscreen to pay them respect: she has Viriel articulate them with precision and fervor while Léopold, an anxious mulatto child whose parents, a *béké* and a mulatto woman, despise the field hands, defensively refutes their soundness. Léopold angrily belittles Viriel's assertions and argues for the unchallenged authority of the white planters.¹⁵ His aggressive response is contrasted with Viriel's calm confidence and raises red flags about the source of Léopold's irritability for the viewer, hinting that there is more at stake in their conversation. Léopold has seemingly internalized the racial, economic, and cultural hierarchies upon which plantation society is built and Viriel's enthusiastic summoning of Afro-Caribbean beliefs calls into question the prominence of French culture, Catholic liturgy, and of the place of the *béké* in what constitutes the realm of the real and symbolic for the sugar cane workers. His reactions mark him as an outsider who is ill at ease among the other children.

The filmmaker depicts Afro-Caribbean cultural practices and beliefs as resilient of beliefs and deploys her film *Rue Cases-Nègres* as a site of affirmation and contestation. She simultaneously reminds her displaced and increasingly assimilated Caribbean spectatorship of the importance of its cultural legacy. Not unlike the beliefs found in American and European rural settings, Afro-Caribbean cultural beliefs and practices originate in various societal check and balances and fulfill a prohibitive as well as collaborative function. Palcy makes the point that they constitute not only a coping mechanism but also parts of a complex cohesive belief system born out of the plantation's coercive system. She also implies that beliefs in three-legged horses threaten the social order and the power of the *béké* as the former slaves draw from their own imaginary as a form of resilience.

¹⁵ Léopold as qtd. in Sylvie César's *Rue Cases-Nègres: du roman au film (étude comparative)*: "J'ai dit que tu es un grand menteur! Tu les connais pas les békés, ils ont tout et ils font tout ce qu'ils veulent. Ils n'ont pas besoin de se changer en chat ou en chien! D'ailleurs demande à ton père si c'est un chien ou un chat qui l'envoie dans l'usine! (164)"

Palcy's treatment of religion circum the plantation shows that the deployment of catechism as a form of brainwashing is ineffective. While Martinique in the 1930s is a French colony, in *Rue Cases-Nègres*, the beliefs articulated by former slaves have more currency and have a longer lasting legacy than those of the Creole (white) colonial elite. Adults and elders like Médouze transmit Afro-Caribbean beliefs to their children who in turn fight to preserve the latter's currency (as demonstrated in the scene at school where the children argue during recess about the meaning of the noises they hear at night). Palcy briefly hints at this transmission at the beginning of the film in a scene that shows the sugar cane workers leaving for the field early in the morning. A field hand mocks Douze Orteils slowness in the morning by playfully accusing him of being a *volan*: "*Douze Orteils, fè débrouya! Ou té ka volé o svè?*" 'Douze Orteils, hurry! You were a *soukougnan* last night, weren't you?' Always gregarious, Douze Orteils replies with a comical and salacious remark that typifies the exchange about ghosts and spirits between the two men as daily banter. Through examples as different as Médouze's riddles and Douze Orteils's taunt, Palcy shows that the transmission of Afro-Caribbean beliefs from adults to children is both purposeful and ubiquitous.

The inhabitants of the rue Cases-Nègres rely on the symbolic value of their beliefs when facing a challenge: Tortilla swears that the prophylactic gesture: "*trois noeuds dans un brin de cabouillat*" should prevent José's from being punished by his grandmother after M'man Tine finds out about the broken bowl. *Rue Cases-Nègres* allows Euzhan Palcy to dispute prevalent clichés about the Caribbean. Instead of the postcards highlighting sea, sex, and sun that proliferated in the late 1970s and early 1980s, she presents through José, the elders M'man Tine and Médouze, and the children and adults from the *rue Cases-Nègres* a narrative that locates the production of culture (the descendents of the slaves' oral literature, music, religion, and education) within the Caribbean. Ways of imparting knowledge—Caribbean riddles, traces of African cosmogony in the words of old people, beliefs in *gens gagés* and in Caribbean mourning rituals where, M. Saint-Louis, is the *chanteur de*

veillées ‘the singer and storyteller during wakes’ (played by poet and performer Joby Bernabé) narrates the life of the dead during wakes—featured in the film underscore that the Plantation (the site of origin and of cultural production for Caribbean peoples) is the central organizing principle of the French-Speaking Caribbean (Benitez-Rojo 37).¹⁶

In her seminal essay “Auto-Ethnographic Impulse in *Rue Cases-Nègres*,” Gerise Herndon argues that: “Palcy’s fascination with Zobel’s novel stems from the novel’s parallels with her own experience in the French educational system as it is reproduced on the island, as well as from the novel’s valorization of Martinican experience rather than simple imitation of metropolitan French writers, a strategy employed by Martinican writers before Césaire arrived on the literary scene (261).” Instead of criticizing the French colonial education, *Rue Cases-Nègres* retraces and embodies the ways in which *l’école coloniale* produced Caribbean intellectuals who have articulated discourses of cultural difference. Gendered difference is another significant component of the film. The filmmaker does not present an exclusively male point of view. She also turns her lens on the island’s social fabric through the plight and the lives of women within and without the plantation economy.

Women Within and Without the *rue Cases-Nègres*

Scholarship has situated Palcy’s *Rue Cases-Nègres* as a Caribbean film narrative on the cusp of feminist rewriting (Ebrahim 146) and (Gaudry-Hudson) defined by the director’s own training and trajectory or “auto-ethnographic impulse” (Herndon). Sylvie César, Gerise Herndon, and Haseenah Ebrahim have all discussed how Palcy’s characterization of José Hassam in her film differs significantly from Zobel’s semi-autobiographical novel. In “Feminist Rewriting of Sugar Cane

¹⁶ In his essay “From the plantation to the Plantation,” Antonio Benitez-Rojo defines the Plantation as an organizing principle of societies built on the slave trade: “The complexity that the multiplication of the Plantation —each case a different one— brought to the Caribbean was such that the Caribbean peoples themselves, in referring to the ethnological processes that derived from the extraordinary collision of races and cultures produced, speak of syncretism, acculturation, transculturation, assimilation, deculturation, indigenization, creolization, culture *mestizaje*, cultural *cimarronaje*, cultural miscegenation, cultural resistance, etc...Which illustrates not just that these processes occurred again and again, but also, and above all that there are different positions or readings from which they may be examined” (37).

Alley” Christine Gaudry-Hudson sees the film as “a[n] homage to strong black women” (482). Palcy’s “auto-ethnographic impulse” becomes even more evident as she injects inflexions of her own voice into Zobel’s semi-autobiographical narratives. In a sense, in the film adaptation of the novel, José’s trajectory mirrors that of Palcy herself. Palcy turns José Hassam into a deserving student as hard working and focused as she is: he succeeds in appropriating both the complex cultural life of the plantation and Western knowledge (César 97-105).

Palcy’s preoccupation with the place of women within and without Martinican plantation society and the ways in which women gain agency (or not) predates *Rue Cases-Nègres*. Journalist and magazine editor Marlaine Glicksman retraced Palcy’s formal and informal training in Martinique in a 1989 article in *Film Comment* and saw in *La messagère* (1972) a precursor to *Rue Cases-Nègres*. Shot in 1972, *La messagère*¹⁷ is, according to Palcy’s official website, “a political fairy tale about a grandmother who works on a banana plantation and her granddaughter who wants to escape it” (Glicksman 65). This short film is often cited along with her later film *L’atelier du diable* (1982) as one of her earlier works.

The foci of *Rue Cases-Nègres* are already laid out in *La messagère*. The two characters’ determination to leave the plantation bears close resemblance to M’man Tine and José in *Rue Cases-Nègres*. In fact, its synopsis practically reads as a female version of *Rue Cases-Nègres*: the trans-generational focus is the same except that in *La messagère* the protagonists are two women. *La messagère* also revolved around four central themes present in Joseph Zobel’s 1950 novel and later clearly delineated in Palcy’s *Rue Cases-Nègres*: oppression, the culture of the plantation, emancipation through education, and emigration.

¹⁷ Sylvie César offers a different date for Palcy’s first foray into filmmaking. She refers to *La messagère* as “une des premières dramatiques antillaises [...] pour la télévision martiniquaise en 1974” (29) but on Palcy’s own website, <http://www.euzhanpalcy.co/Filmography.html>, the featurette is assigned the date 1972 (retrieved on 17 March 2011).

While her film version of Zobel's semi auto-biographical novel stayed true to the original focus on José, a male narrator, Palcy has nonetheless integrated into her film the distinctive voices and experiences of women circum the Plantation. Far from a fairy tale, Palcy's first feature film looks at post-slavery Martinique through the eyes of a very studious child. The film therefore, unlike the novel, abstains from depicting sexual violence and the commodification of black women's bodies sustained the plantation economy. Yet inserting women as supporting character into José's narrative allows Euzhan Palcy to highlight power relations shaped by race gender and class.

M'man Tine, José's grandmother and only family member alive, is incontestably the central female character in the film. She remains José's anchor until a significant scholarship allows him to become highly educated. Palcy (and Zobel before her), however, ensures that the nurturing figure of the grandmother is not the only adult that shapes José's formative years and spiritual education. A wide range of men and women expand his understanding of the social and cultural worlds within and without the *rue Cases-Nègres*. The presence and bodies of black and white women function as key layers that recreates onscreen the complexity of a society shaped by the plantation.

Selectively chosen and purposefully developed, female characters add multidimensionality to José's trajectory and the ways in which the eleven-year boy navigates the world of the plantation and beyond. They accompany José's transition from the plantation grounds and the surrounding town center (*le bourg*) in Petit-Bourg to Fort-de-France, the island's main urban center. Palcy's has developed at least several paradigms of such women in *Rue cases-nègres*. They fall into two broad categories: women within the rural plantation economy and women within the urban economy of Martinican society.

Women Within the Rural Plantation Economy

In Palcy's film adaptation of Zobel's novel, the central woman in José's life is M'man Tine. M'man Tine is actually a composite of two characters from the novel: Delia, José's mother and M'man Tine, his grandmother. In Zobel's novel both the mother and the grandmother characters exist although they occupy different symbolical and geographical spaces and fulfill different functions. Delia works as a domestic servant in Fort-de-France for a *béké* family while M'man Tine is an aging field hand who lives and works in a sugar cane plantation near Petit-Bourg. When M'man Tine dies, Delia takes over José's education while he comes to study in Fort-de-France whereas in Palcy's film adaptation M'man Tine as the sole living parent moves to Fort-de-France and takes in washing to pay for her grandson's higher than expected tuition fees. In her film adaption of *La Rue Cases-Nègres*, Palcy "kills" Delia. The director seamlessly explains Delia's absence from the film to spectators who may have read Zobel's *La Rue Cases-Nègres*. In the scene when M'man Tine finds out that her only china bowl has been broken, José's grandmother reproachfully exclaims to her grandson: "C'est tout ce qui me restait de ta défunte maman Délia!"

Combining the two women in the person of M'man Tine also allows Palcy to concentrate the burden shared by those two characters in Zobel's novel on one person. In the semi-autobiographical novel it takes two women of two generations to raise a José/Joseph Zobel but in the film that feat is achieved by M'man Tine. By using M'man Tine as José's sole mother figure, Palcy emphasizes the arduousness of women's labor within the plantation economy. In the condensed one hour and half version film narrative of *Rue Cases-Nègres*, M'man Tine occupies both end of the labor spectrum that befell poor black women at the time: field work and domestic work. It is not clear whether the former of the latter eventually kills her but in true Classical Hollywood narrative style, M'man Tine only dies once her grandson José has received the full tuition that will

allow him to complete his high school education. With the character of M'man Tine, Palty gives Darling Légitimus one of her most multidimensional roles to date. The veteran actress plays an archetype of Creole womanhood: a *fanm doubout'* (a woman standing erect). By constructing the elderly M'mantine as José's only mother figure, Palty replaces one of the most prevalent stereotypes of black womanhood, the mammy figure, with a Caribbean construction.

In mainstream movies, black women who—like M'man Tine in the third act of *Rue Cases-Nègres*—wash clothes are generally marginalized non-speaking characters who are caricatured as benevolent mammy figures. As Palty emphatically explains in one of the opening quotes in this chapter, her desire to pursue a career in film was in great part motivated by a desire to replace such stereotypical portrayals with more accurate and full dimensional characterizations. M'man Tine's determination to secure her grandson's future outside of the plantation calls into question the roles of the loyal Mammy figure that Darling Légitimus had hitherto played as a heavysset female black woman performer throughout her long career in French mainstream French films.¹⁸ Because M'man Tine is an elderly woman and because in *Rue Cases-Nègres*, Palty shows mostly a child's point of view (albeit through his adult recollections), M'man Tine is presented as an asexual female character. On the contrary, in the novel, both mother (M'man Tine) and daughter (Delia) underwent multiple forms of oppression: sexual harrassment and labor exploitation.

In *La rue Cases-Nègres* Joseph Zobel bluntly chronicles M'man Tine's rape by the plantation overseer. He also recounts that Delia's first sexual experience at a young age resulting in a pregnancy and the birth of José. José's birth initially deferred M'man Tine's dream to see Delia, her daughter, live a life different from hers. After the father of Delia's child abandoned them and went abroad, it seems that the young mother could not longer achieve social mobility through education.

¹⁸ For instance, Darling Légitimus was cast as the black witch Tituba in *Les sorcières de Salem* (1957), Raymond Rouleau's French cinematic version of Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, along with French movie stars Simone Signoret and Yves Montand.

Delia nevertheless partially escaped M'man Tine's fate: she moved to the city to seek domestic work and left her son on the plantation in the care of her mother. In Zobel's *La rue Cases-Nègres* black women are often lone heads of household because the bodies of black women are sites of subjection and exploitation through sexual violence. They support the economy of the plantation by producing children that provide cheap labor.

Tortilla Saint-Louis: The Face of Gender Inequality

On the contrary, Palcy eschews sexual violence within the plantation because her film presents a child's (José's) uninformed perspective, not Zobel's (as José) semi-autobiographical omniscient account. Even so she takes on the question of gender inequality through the character Tortilla Saint-Louis when she explores the ways in which class, gender, and access to education intersect. The filmmaker devotes substantial screen time to Tortilla Saint-Louis (Tania Hamel), José's best friend on the *rue Cases Nègres*. A black girl his age, Tortilla is subtly depicted as smarter than José. As the oldest of a growing family she has more duties: in addition to attending school, she is responsible for her younger siblings while both her parents, Monsieur Saint-Louis (Joby Bernabé) and Madame Saint-Louis (Marie-Ange Farot), work hard in the sugar cane fields. Yet, like José, she is one of the few children on the plantation who passes the prized *certificat d'étude*.

Palcy uses an object external to the world of the plantation, a watch, to symbolize both the enduring friendship between Tortilla and how gender differences shape José's and Tortilla prospects. The watch comes from the city by way of Carmen (Joël Palcy), an illiterate young man who works and lives in Fort-de-France and has befriended José. Carmen's urban sophistication reiterates the dual themes of migration and social mobility. Carmen offers the watch to José because it no longer works and no longer tells the time. Indeed, in the world of the *rue cases-nègres* city time

is irrelevant: the long days and harsh working conditions are marked by the demands and rhythms of the sugarcane crop. Because it comes via Carmen who operates the riverboat from Fort-de-France, “la ville qui fait rêver tous les enfants du village,” the watch is an exceptional objet for both children (*Rue Cases-Nègres*). As a beautiful and rare objet owned and used by civil servants and the leisured upper class, the watch has an aspirational value for José and Tortilla. The ways in which this watch circulates, and to whom it is given functions as a trope for class and gender inequality in the film *Rue Cases-Nègres*.

In José’s hands, the old fashioned watch, a *montre de gousset*, is not associated with accrued productivity but the possible gentility that comes with access to education, urban living, and social mobility. The watch also establishes early in the film the theme of migration. Its presence introduces the idea of “city time” in the rural world of the *rue Cases-Nègres* where time revolves around the sugar cane crop. Tortilla who covets the watch attempts to win it from José as they both wager a bet on a snake and mongoose fight, a common gambling practice in the Caribbean. Although José loses the bet, he refuses to hand Tortilla the cherished object at the risk of jeopardizing their friendship.

Later in the film Palty repurposes the watch as a consolation prize for Tortilla. Like José she has successfully passed the prized *certificat d’études* exam. The watch resurfaces, in the scene when Tortilla’s father, M. Saint-Louis (Joby Bernabé), declines the schoolteacher’s offer to prepare his oldest daughter for *l’examen des bourses*, the round of exam that will allow Tortilla to pursue her studies in Fort-de-France. It is only when Tortilla is being denied an education and that he is assured that he will pursue his that José offers the watch to her. This is confirmed in a later scene that reinforces the idea that José is climbing the social ladder. A working *montre de gousset* watch, similar to the one Carmen offered José, reappears in Fort-de-France when José is taking the second-round of exam that will allow him to attend the *lycée*.

Both José and Tortilla pass the *certificat d'étude* but Tortilla's fate is sealed by her father's refusal to let her continue her studies. In one of the film's most poignant moments, the camera lingers on her crestfallen face and cuts to José as he discretely gives her one of his most valued possessions. In that scene Palcy deliberately leaves Tortilla's mother out of the decision-making process. Yet the director does not condemn M. Saint-Louis's shortsightedness. Instead in an equally moving montage she uses dialogue and *mise-en-scène* to contextualize Tortilla's father decision. M. Saint-Louis is shown respectfully holding his *bakoua* hat and in a French profuse with Creole that betrays that he is intimidated, he explains to the district teacher, Monsieur Saint-Roc, that his decision is simply an economic one. For the sugar cane worker and father of a large family, Tortilla will be lucky to work as a civil servant for the post office. Although Tortilla will not have to cut cane like her mother, she will not have the opportunity to pursue her education because her duty is to help her parents raise her numerous siblings by supporting them financially.

As she develops the character of Tortilla throughout the film, Palcy shows that gender is an additional hindrance for the children of field hands. She goes as far as to suggest that upward mobility is the work of female-headed households such as M'man Tine's. She implies that in poor male-headed households, securing higher education for gifted girls is not a preferred path. The director contrasts the symbolic "*non*" *du père* with M'man Tine's certainty that her grandson will pass the exam and her unwavering determination to see him through. Palcy shows that M'man Tine had anticipated her grandson's graduation when José unpacks a brand new custom-made school uniform that his grandmother had ordered months before just for the occasion.

Mother, Wife, Concubine: Madame Saint-Louis, Honorine

Mme Saint-Louis, Tortilla's mother, is one many supporting characters that lend verisimilitude and layers to the different roles women occupied within the economy the plantation. Instead of giving credence to the stereotypical image of black women as lazy and sexually aggressive breeders, *Rue Cases-Nègres* depicts the lived experience of a female field hand who is an uneducated married mother. She is shown cutting cane even towards the end of a pregnancy. The trope of her belly weighted by repeated pregnancy echoes M'man Tine and Delia's trans-generational oppression as more cheap workers are needed on the plantation (Oudin-Bastide 176). The film shows, as it has been documented, that within the economic system of the plantation women to work as much as men (Oudin-Bastide 170-174). Her repeated miscarriages are, according to M'man Tine, a source of relief: "Encore un pauvre diable qui a échappé à la canne des békés!" and attest to the harsh working conditions women who worked in sugar cane fields and received lesser pay than their male counterparts experienced.

Palcy develops this further in a scene where Tortilla's mother, Mme Saint-Louis, goes to the plantation store to buy food on credit. Yoyotte, the film's editor, and Palcy placed the scene at the store immediately after a scene that shows the workers (and among them a particularly vocal Mme Saint-Louis) complain about their meager pay, the film presents plantation work as virtual slavery. In a contrast to a previous scene where Mme Saint-Louis bitterly complains to the overseers that her husband is underpaid, Palcy has Tortilla bear silent witness to her mother's mix of discouragement and bravado as the latter buys on credit delicacies (pigtails, flour, and butter) she can hardly afford for her family. Palcy demonstrates here that on top of backbreaking labor, families of sugar cane-workers are caught in an unending cycle of debt and poverty.

Palcy further explores the dynamics of class, gender, and race within the plantation through Léopold's brown skinned mulatto mother, Honorine (Marie-Jo Descas). Despite her skin color, she is in a public relationship with a *béké* and lives a sheltered comfortable bourgeois life but as long as

her companion is alive. Honorine is at first portrayed as the quintessential upper middle-class *maîtresse de maison*. Respectfully called “*Madame*” by Julia, one of her black servants, Honorine appears in full in command of her household. Seemingly empowered, elegantly dressed, and formal in her demeanor, she nonetheless remains “Honorine,” a *béké*'s concubine.

Her first name is a signifier of the contradictions that characterize her life. It is a reminder of her own pride in her distinction, in her *honneur* (honor) yet because she is only referred to by her first-name it is also an implicit reminder of her subaltern status. Not entirely like her black servant, Julia, she is called just called by her first. Although the boundaries of class between servant and mistress are clearly delineated, Honorine's lack of last name calls her respectability into question: she cannot become Mme de Thorail. Racial purity, endogamy, and ethnocentrism preclude *békés* from marrying outside their group mainly for economic reasons and for fear of being ostracized. In *Les blancs créoles de la Martinique: une minorité dominante*, Edith Kovats-Beaudoux explains that *béké* men can engage in relationships with black women as long as they do not result in marriages: “Les unions naturelles, si elles ne sont pas recommandées, demeurent courantes et admises (pour les hommes de race blanche) puisqu'elles ne constituent pas une menace pour l'homogénéité ou la position du groupe” (110). Honorine is therefore implicitly contrasted with Madame Saint-Louis who although she is an uneducated sugar cane worker is married and part of a community while Honorine, an educated mulatto bourgeois woman is an out of wedlock relationship.

Because Léopold's mother is never seen outside the house she shares with Thorail, Palcy also suggests that Honorine's status is contentious. As a non-white bourgeois mulatto woman, Honorine is excluded from M. de Thorail's public and official duties. She does not even accompany Thorail in the church even when he offers the crucifix to the black priest. Her impeccable and self-possessed demeanor woman's perhaps signals that Honorine has been ignoring her own and her son's predicament and the confines inherent to the complex relationship between an educated

colored woman and a *béké* such as M. de Thorail, loving and intimate yet restricted by race in the plantation system.

While Palty does not limit her to the figure of a tragic mulatto, Honorine is nevertheless reminded the hard way of the social boundaries that maintain strict racial and class hierarchies. Because his parents' relationship is both loving and limited by race, Léopold does not find solace in his dual racial identity. Once excluded from his father's family tree, he sides with the black workers of the rue Cases-Nègres. Like the clerk at the cinema booth in Fort-de-France, Honorine is another example of women who have internalized racism. She aligns herself with her companion and forbids her son to play with "petit nègres" such as José. Although her use of the informal pronoun "tu" when she addresses her companion denotes genuine intimacy with M. de Thorail, Honorine is unable to convince him to recognize their son, Léopold, on his deathbed.

Honorine's reverence for all things French is associated with snobbishness but also with the melancholy in Baker's song "J'ai deux amours mon pays et Paris." The song reinforces her racial in-betweenness as a mulatto woman but Palty chooses to dramatize the latter with Léopold rather than with Honorine. Josephine Baker, an African American icon in the Paris of the 1930s remains a complicated figure within the African diaspora. Accomplished, admired, and highly successful she was nevertheless treated as a female colonial Other. Coupled with her talent and creativity, this otherness helped her achieve success by performing exotic constructions of blackness.¹⁹ Palty identifies Baker as an icon for Honorine, because the African-American performer is the reminder

¹⁹ In Marc Allegret's French film *ZouZou* (1934), Josephine Baker plays the female protagonist, Zouzou, a kind-hearted, resourceful, and talented mulatto woman from Martinique who despite those qualities does not get the man in the end. Adopted as a child in the circus by Papa Mélé (Pierre Larquey), Zouzou grew up with her white "brother" Jean (Jean Gabin) with whom she falls in love as an adult. A sailor and notorious womanizer, he only sees her as a sister. Although she rescues him when he is unfairly accused of a crime, Jean marries Zouzou's friend, Claire, a more traditional, non-threatening, and patriotic example of French womanhood. According to Tyler Stovall, Zouzou as opposed to Claire, the daughter of a French small business owner, embodies both the colonial female Other, fear of racial mixing, and the permissive life associated to the New Woman (sex outside marriage with men and women, the rejection of domesticity, and the absence of procreation). In the context of post World War I and low birth rates, Zouzou's qualities, her assertiveness, sensuality, and gift for large-scale spectacle represented a threat to French national identity.

of the restrictions imposed on black women who attempt to break and overcome racial barriers in the beginning of the 20th century. Baker also brings into the film's larger narrative the French cultural landscape of Otherness that Francophone Caribbean intellectuals in the making such as José will produce and interrogate.

Witches vs. Nurturing Figures: Madame Léonce and Madame Fusil

More than a woman whose apparent benevolence disguises a propensity to exploit children, Mme Léonce also portends José's migration. Because she lives on the outer border of the plantation and on the road to the bourg, Mme Léonce is a liminal figure whose function in the film is to test José's resolve. A quasi witch, she presages the obstacles awaiting José in Fort-de-France: hunger, hard work, and unforeseeable hurdles. Financially better off than M'man Tine, Madame Léonce however does not possess José's grandmother's work ethic. She is, in fact, intent on finding ways to avoid working and take advantage of the poorer and thus more vulnerable José. Her increasing demands that José helps her around the house and accomplish an increasing number of chores to "pay" for the food she gives him at lunch causes him to be late and briefly jeopardizes his success. José's ability to extricate himself from the situation and seek revenge allows Paly to elicit compassion from her audience and to mark José's trajectory as even more exceptional. Paly contrasts Mme Léonce with another inhabitant of the bourg, Mme Fusil, who is helpful and nurturing and expects nothing from José as she takes care of M'man Tine when the latter is ailing.

Upper Middle-Class and Working Class Urban Martinican Women

Women who live in the city constitute another dimension of Caribbean society in *Rue Cases-Nègres*. When M'man Tine and José move to the city, they are confronted with the accelerated pace of modern life, stark class differences, and characters preoccupied with their place in society. Euzhan Palcy inserts an upper middle-class such as Carmen's boss, working-class Martinican women such as Mademoiselle Flora who works an usher at a movie theater), and numerous conquests into José's narrative in order to construct a compelling picture of Caribbean city life.

If as opposed to Zobel, Palcy steers clear of the rape of black women by overseers and white planters, she does not totally eschew the issues of gender, power, class, and race. In fact she confronts these issues when she reflects on the question of choosing one's sexual partners in colonial Martinique from the perspective of a male character who has a way with women. In an unexpected and bold sequence Carmen (Joël Palcy), José's adult friend who lives and works in Fort-de-France, reveals to the boy that he is sleeping his white upper-middle female employer. The director stages Carmen's confession to José as a performance carried out with gusto.

Built to achieve the utmost surprise, this sequence tilts the balance of power in favor of the white woman serviced by her black employee. Carmen's play acting is punctuated by a series of comical, "oui, Madame," as he proudly recounts the first time his distinguished boss initiated a sexual relationship with him. He reveals the unthinkable, enacts, and recount's the white supremacists' nightmare: white women's desire for black men. Although the scene shows Carmen, its focus is on "Madame": her power, his convincing bravado performance, and yet his emasculation. The director of photography frames the scene so one feels that "Madame's" presence rather than her absence. The camera cuts to a black and white photograph of "Madame" and to her

livre de chevet: Chéri (1920), a novel by the French author Colette, an artist whose sexuality was notoriously brazen.

A stylish middle-aged and attractive yet stern-looking woman, she is for obvious reasons (chiefly race and class) highly unlikely as one of Carmen's conquests. Bound by the frame of the photograph, she looks disapprovingly at Carmen who is dressed in her silk bathrobe and is imitating her. Palty builds this scene in ways that subverts the traditional miscegenation narrative. Carmen's trysts with his white *maîtresse* (in both senses of the word female master and lover) bring up a controversial account of sexual encounters between a black male servant and his white female employer: one in which the upper-class white woman is oversexualized and makes sexual overtures to her black male servant. Although Carmen as a womanizer appears to derive pride from this liaison, he remains in a subaltern position. His bragging to José can be read as an attempt to mask his discomfort about being unable to refuse to perform sexual favors for "Madame" for fear of losing a lucrative and esteemed position.

Indeed, "Madame" lives in the posh and then exclusively *béké* neighborhood of Didier and Palty reinforces the degree of racial and sexual transgression by offering a glimpse of an exclusively white neighborhood prior to the scene of the revelation. To heighten its effects, the director then sets the scene Carmen's and Madame's unthinkable intimacy in the bedroom where Carmen should not belong and José is also trespassing. Palty defuses the tension caused by their entering Madame's bedroom and Carmen's confession by injecting humor into the scene using the editing. She also downplays the transgression of the situation by returning to José's concerns. Towards the end of the scene, Palty turns the focus back on José. The latter absent-mindedly listens to Carmen because he is more preoccupied with his high school's teacher false accusations of plagiarism. Instead of using this scene to stage José's loss of sexual innocence, Palty, through dialogue, continues to characterize José as a gifted and non-judgemental student. The pupil summarizes Carmen's

revelation with a logical explanation: “Carmen cela veut dire charme en latin.” Palcy’s motivation for shooting this scene might also be a comment on the popularity of Martinique as a destination for white women seeking the company of young Caribbean men in the 1980s at a time when the flight company Air Canada was referred locally as Air Coucoune (Air Chocha).

While not exactly an urban counterpart to Honorine (Léopold’s black mother and Mr. de Thorail’s black companion) Mademoiselle Flora, a ticket-booth clerk at a movie theater in Fort-de-France, is another urban female character who puts down blackness and shapes José’s understanding of urban Martinican society. Mademoiselle Flora reacts bitterly to a petty theft by disavowing and condemning black people. During this encounter, José is yet again confronted with the racial alienation that some black women have internalized. Despite using her as a mouthpiece for the virulent condemnation of black people who commit crimes, Palcy portrays Mademoiselle Flora like she portrays Honorine as a nuanced character. The young black woman who is quick to condemn and distance herself from a black thief also helps M’man Tine and José find cheap but decent housing by the bay of Fort-de-France.

In her diatribe Mademoiselle Flora’s equates dark skin color with misconduct in a manner that brings to mind Frantz Fanon’s harsh comments on Mayotte Capecia’s self-loathing in *Peau noire masques blancs*. Recent black feminist critiques of Fanon (Vergés, Sharpley-Whiting) have questioned Fanon’s hostile reading of Mayotte Capecia’s novel *Je suis martiniquaise* and deemed it replete with double-standards. In the film, Euzhan Palcy’s brief insertion of a black woman critical of blackness and ashamed of her racial identity is mitigated through José’s again sensible reaction and Palcy’s mise-en-scène. The filmmaker places Mademoiselle Flora behind a grid to illustrate that the young woman is confined to her own narrow-mindedness, a clear reference to Truffaut’s *Les 400 coups*. Even though Palcy gives her a chance to explain her position, her rigidity is equated with self-loathing and it is contrasted with José’s sensible response: “Je suis sûr qu’aucun Blanc n’a jamais crié:

je hais ma race quand un Blanc comme lui a commis un vol ou un assassinat” (*Rue Cases-Nègres*; César 205). Mademoiselle Flora represents what Michel Giraud’s calls by way of Edouard Glissant one of the “divers aspects du réel antillais” (V).

The insertion of women in José’s coming-of-age story helps Palcy give a sense of the life across social class in urban Martinique in the 1930s. M’mam Tine and José “return” to the sepia-colored postcards displayed in the opening credits when thanks to Mademoiselle Flora, they find living quarter’s: a *caisse à auto* transformed into a wooden shack in a working class neighborhood by the bay of Fort-de-France. Many of the women working in the city remain faceless and nameless and are used as extras. Yet their presence gives verisimilitude to M’mam Tine’s having to take in washing in order to pay for José expensive tuition. Women who work in Fort-de-France as street vendors and who live by the harbor inscribe gender into the city landscape and give credibility to the film as a period piece.

Although hardly developed as characters, the black women that Carmen easily seduces contribute for Palcy to a more accomplished rendering of Martinican society. For instance, the pretty young black woman on the boat that stands behind Carmen as he practices writing his letters with José provides interesting subtexts to gender relations. Attractive, nameless, and silent, the young woman is asked by Carmen to step aside and is shown looking over José’s and Carmen’s shoulder. The director shows that Carmen’s sense of self-worth is predicated on her beauty, as he inquires to José: “Elle est mignonne, hein?” To which José replies: “Et celle d’hier?” In this scene, Palcy implies that for a hard-working uneducated black man employed in several subaltern jobs like Carmen, success with pretty women is a key component of his Caribbean masculinity.

Because she modeled her film adaptation after a coming-of-age story told from the perspective of a studious ten-year old boy, Palcy removed the allusions to sexual violence and the commodification of the bodies of black women that Zobel mentions in his semi auto-biographical

novel. Instead in an effort to dispel clichés about the insatiable sexuality of black men and boldly reassess power dynamics within colonial Caribbean society, she inserts an unexpected scene where Carmen, a male character known for his conquests, brags to José that Madame his upper-class employer requests of him to have sex with her. Carmen's convincing performance conceals the powerlessness of his situation.

Euzhan Palcy's film *Rue Cases-Nègres* circum-navigates the complexity of the plantation economy through the multiple lenses of class, racial, and gender politics in the Caribbean. In Palcy's cinematic interpretation, José's coming-of-age story becomes a tale of sacrifices shouldered both by the boy and his grandmother. Subsequent characterizations of women in the film are implicitly contrasted with these two protagonists. Spectators are asked to identify mostly with José and M'man Tine but a closer look at Palcy's film version of Zobel's novel reveals a great number of female characters. The range of secondary yet clearly delineated female characters in the film allows the director to put into perspective the key part M'man Tine plays in José's rags-to-riches story. Secondary female characters also serve another purpose. They bring heterogeneous versions of women's experiences to José's seemingly exclusively male-centered coming-of-age story, plantation, and migration narrative.

From the Plantation to the Colonial Capital: *Rue Cases-Nègres* as a Migration Narrative

In addition to deploying racial and feminist discourses, Euzhan Palcy presents José's formative years as a migration narrative. The theme of migration is developed as a series of geographic changes for the main character. The film highlights that José's and M'man Tine's world must expand beyond the plantation if José is to gain access to higher education. Escaping the oppression of the cane fields requires moving to the bourg to attend school without depending on Mme Léonce's false kindness, being under her obligation, and jeopardizing José's success. As

previously mentioned, the themes of social ascension and migration are introduced at the very beginning of the film and move the plot forward. In the film's opening credits, sepia photographs of urban and rural colonial Martinique accompanied by a musical introduction scored by the traditional band Malavoi situate the film narrative and establish the theme of migration in reverse.

Disguised in the voice his younger self, the adult writer posing as a narrator revisits his childhood in rural Martinique. The film goes back in time: from the city to the Caribbean countryside and from adulthood to childhood. The first scene in the film is an expository sequence that introduces the spectator to the landscape of the plantation. From the sugar cane fields to the *rue Cases-Nègres*, the camera guided by José's narrative cues spends time on the routine of the unsupervised children of the workers. The quarters where they live are the point of departure from which the audience explores the rest of the estate. José's interaction with the other children implies mischief (stealing the egg, lying to obtain the rum), transgression or respect of the boundaries (forbidding entry to M'man Tine's space) laid by the absent working adults.

The young narrator presented as the film's protagonist also stands out among the other children because of his discipline and his avid desire to acquire knowledge both in school and at the Rue Cases-Nègres. Paly characterizes José as a promising student but that potential is not limited to his succeeding within the French educational system. In Paly's interpretation of *Rue Cases-Nègres*, José's education is twofold: it takes place within and without the plantation. Paly's first film firmly insists on social ascension through education and loyalty to cultural transmission. It is a yearning for both cultural traditions that sets in motion the protagonist's formation. Not only is José tenacious, curious, and observant but he is also dedicated to the transmission of Francophone Afro-Caribbean culture (oral and visual).

Early in the film, the director shows that although she cannot read M'man Tine helped him acquire excellent reading skills by establishing a simple ritual. José pastes to the wall of their shanty

house the old newspapers that she brings back daily and eagerly reads them to her. If M. Stephen Roc, his primary school teacher, facilitates the transition from the countryside school to the city lycée, and the elderly storyteller Médouze passes on to José his Afro-Caribbean imaginary, it his illiterate grandmother who is the driving force behind his success. Besides, articulating that obligatory migration to Europe contributed to the formation of a Caribbean intellectual elite, the film *Rue Cases-Nègres* ties the theme of migration to social success after decades of strained political relationship between the motherland and its French colonies in the Americas, as explained in Chapter Two. The release of Palcy's film adaptation of Zobel's *Rue Cases-Nègres* coincides with mounting evidence of that strained relationship 1) resistance through terrorist acts 2) the publication in 1981 of Edouard Glissant *Le discours antillais* and Daniel Maximin *L'isolé soleil*, 4) the end of institutionalized migration for men and women from Martinique and Guadeloupeans to the Métropole through the BUMIDOM, the Bureau des Migrations des DOM TOM.

With its underlying themes of migration and emancipation from the exploitative labor on the plantation developed, the film *Rue Cases-Nègres* evokes two significant examples of professional success involving migration: Zobel's (literary) and Palcy's (cinematographic) accomplishments. Thus, José's social ascension through education can be read as the success story of several generations of Caribbean intellectuals whose success story can be credited to one or two forms of migration: emigration to the capital Fort-de-France and then to France, the *métropole*, to further their education. Their work has become available locally or abroad and entered in the global North. It has received recognition in academic circles. A few of these intellectuals teach at or have become public speakers in American universities.

With *Rue Cases-Nègres*, Palcy firmly inscribes herself in this continuum (Chapter Two) and beyond. Like José, the intellectual legacy that enabled her to write colonial Martinique into a film involves embracing the tension that comes with multiple legacies: obtaining institutional funding

from the Centre National de la Cinématographie, the encouragement of established filmmakers such as of Jean Rouch and François Truffaut to make a French Caribbean film that speaks from the inside. Despite the progressive changes in location that mark his social ascension, José never really leave the world of the plantation far behind. Palcy's reliance on the genre of the *bildungsroman* suggests that José's strength and success lies in his ability to reconcile the values taught to him by M'man Tine, the oral histories, herb remedies, and riddles learned with Médouze with the French colonial history and geography.

M'man Tine's sacrifice and death and José's scholarship signal the possibility for a burgeoning elite to criticize the plantation through cultural discourse. Whether Palcy's adaptation of *Rue Cases-Nègres* is a clear departure from an assimilationist perspective remains arguable. Her film certainly updates and questions the *schoelcherisme* ideals that earlier French West Indian intellectuals such as Maurice Satineau, editor of *La dépêche africaine* (1928-1932) formulated in the early 1930s: "School is the cradle of equality...[I]here must not be any corner of the Island where the child who inhabits it does not find at its door free, secular, and mandatory education (Sharpley-Whiting, 33).²⁰ Palcy's use of the migration theme as one of many underlayers to José's coming-of-age story squarely puts access to education as a pre-requisite to social emancipation but not necessarily to political participation.

One of the differences between Zobel's novel and Palcy's film remains the visibility of trade union movements. In the novel one of the characters that make-up the composite that is Léopold is involved with militant local trade unions in Fort-de-France. In the film, the disowned mulatto Léopold transcends the archetype of the tragic mulatto by becoming a *lone* maroon figure. Towards the end of the film, his gesture, sabotaging the *béké's* usine, implies that he has rejected the colonial

²⁰ Translated from the original text, Maurice Satineau's "Le Schoelcherisme: Doctrine politique, économique, et sociale in "La Dépêche africaine," February 15, 1932, 1, and Qtd. by T.Denean Sharpley-Whiting in *Negritude Women*.

values his mulatto mother and white father instilled in him and marks his political, racial, and cultural alliance with the black masses his father exploited.

The statement that Mr. Roc, José's primary school teacher writes on the board: "L'instruction est la clé qui ouvre la *deuxième* porte de notre liberté" is not a call to political action (my emphasis). Although the film is made in the early 1980s, at a time when militant political movements that favor independence are using terrorist activities to rally the population to their cause, freedom is no longer couched in political terms. In the film, emancipation means escaping the colonial yoke and the cane fields through social mobility by gaining access to education. Palcy adopts a middle ground position that includes past and contemporaneous French Caribbean thinkers. *Rue Cases-Nègres* translates onto the screen both the racial awareness of Suzanne Roussi Césaire in her essay "Le grand camouflage," and the political and cultural dissent of Edouard Glissant's *Le discours antillais*. *Rue Cases-Nègres* takes to task the contradictions of French colonial history by conflating two historical and social moments in the late 19th century that still impact France Today: minister Jules Ferry's role in implementing *l'école laïque et gratuite pour tous* and his belief in the economic necessity of French colonial expansion. José's success is only possible because he remains loyal to his Afro-Caribbean origins.

As discussed earlier, Palcy, in *Rue Cases-Nègres*, creates a José in her image (and to a certain extent in the image of some of the members of the Caribbean intellectual elite). José's and M'man Tine's move to the rural burg of the township of Petit Bourg and their arrival in Fort-de-France chronicle the process of social mobility. These changes stand for his emancipation from the oppression of the plantation. Most importantly their relocation and his progress retrace the construction of Caribbean cultural identities from the inside. The production of a subjective Caribbean culture as an oppositional practice looms large in *Rue Cases-Nègres*.

Palcy concludes *Rue Cases-Nègres* with José transformed by his formative years (encapsulated in the film's narrative). He is now equipped with the qualities that Zobel and Palcy have acquired.

In the film's *dénouement*, the young boy has become a storyteller who is able to carry the voices and stories of M'man Tine, Médouze, Tortilla, etc... into the cinematic mainstream. Walking the fine line of suspended disbelief, Palcy suggests that the voice of the child that ends and begins the film is in fact the voice of an adult Caribbean author (Joseph Zobel) who is looking back at his humble origins because they have shaped him as a writer. José is a surrogate of Zobel and Palcy whose personal educational trajectory echoes that of many of Martinican and Guadeloupean intellectuals figure who first move from the countryside to the burg, then the city and finally migrated to the Métropole (Motherland) to pursue degrees in higher education.

Rue Cases-Nègres articulates the initial pattern of migration to Europe that contributed to the formation of an intellectual Caribbean elite, the film ties the theme of migration to social success after decades of strained political relationships between the motherland and its French colonies in the Americas, as explained in Chapter 4. Migration to the métropole and beyond informed the writings of authors such as the Nardal sisters, Aimé Césaire, Daniel Boukman, Edouard Glissant, and Maryse Condé. Their view of the world and their constructions of French Caribbean identity were altered by what Glissant has called *détour* in *Le discours antillais*. Such authors have contributed to that oppositional practice through their poems, plays, novels, and essays. Their literary works (essay, poems, novels, plays) not only imparted difference into the French literary landscape, even if marginally, but also framed France's colonial past and future by producing Caribbean literary narratives that conveyed the complex cultural make-ups and histories of non-Western cultures.

With *Rue Cases-Nègres*, Palcy firmly inscribes herself within this continuum (Chapter 2). Like José, the intellectual legacy that enabled her to write colonial Martinique into a film requires embracing the tension that comes with multiple legacies. Progressive changes in location mark José's social ascension but he never really leaves the world of the plantation far behind. José's strength and success stem from his ability to reconcile the values taught to him by M'man Tine, the

oral histories, herb remedies, and riddles learned with Médouze with the French colonial history and geography studied in the French colonial school.

In the film, the grandmother dies when her grandson's educational success is assured. M'man Tine's numerous sacrifices and her death immediately after José receives a sufficient scholarship signal the possibility for a burgeoning elite to construct and criticize the plantation through cultural discourse. M'man Tine death's Palcy suggests is caused by a life of hard labor in the sugar cane fields and because she takes inwashing in Fort-de-France. In *Rue cases-nègres*, migration in the larger sense is constructed as an allegory of an upward mobility achieved paradoxically both through literally and physically leaving the plantation behind and recognizing of the culture the former slaves produced.

How Departmentalized Martinique Represents Colonial Martinique

With its mix of nostalgia and cultural integrity, Euzhan Palcy's first feature film simultaneously comments on colonial and departmentalized Martinique. On the one hand, the novel and the diegetic world of the film are set in the colonial Martinique of the 1930s. On the other hand the film was shot between 1982 and 1983 and released in 1983, some fifty years later and thirty-seven years after Departmentalization. Herndon and César (13-19) underscore that besides self-scrutiny, time is another parameter of the "variable identity" Ménil insists on in his review of the film, "*Rue Cases-Nègres* ou les Antilles de l'intérieur." Burton reminds that: "Creole culture had its roots in the world of the *habitation*, but the foundation of that world was the gross exploitation of labor, not least that of women (the *amarreuses*), and children (the *petites bandes*) (139)." In the early 1980s, as massive immigration to the *métropole* described by Aimé Césaire as a "génocide par substitution," had begun to wane, the film's subtext spoke both to dreams of social mobility and the

lived experience of hundreds of thousands of West Indian men and women working and living in France, often as civil servants employed in manual jobs.

Palcy imbues her 1983 film *Rue Cases-Nègres* with nostalgia for the practice of Caribbean culture in everyday life. She assigns to each of the secondary characters living in the rue Cases-Nègres and its surroundings a limited yet essential role in dramatizing the resilience of Caribbean customs in the French *gouvernorat* that was 1930s Martinique. At the same time, the director critiques the site of origin of that practice, the plantation economy, when she demonstrates that it is sustained by the poor conditions of the sugar cane workers, racial inequality. Because of its overlapping timelines: the date of publication of Zobel's novel (1950), the time when *La Rue Cases-Nègres* is set (1926-1928), the year when the film was shot (1982-1983) and first released (1983), and when the narrative takes place (1930s), Euzhan Palcy's film *Rue Cases-Nègres* is also about the gaps in that timeline (César 33). The director's nostalgia for a certain Martinique is predicated on the historical and social events that occurred between 1930s and 1980s and profoundly reshaped Martinique but are not portrayed in the film.

The film's dotted historicity therefore suggests another timeline: one that conspicuously absent but concerns its French Caribbean audiences: the rise of workers rights, Departementalization, the wiping out of subsistence farming, the closed-down of factories, massive migration to the métropole, the radicalization of political discourse between the 1960s and 1980s, and the absence of economic production identified as *néantisation* in *Le discours antillais*. By portraying elements of Afro-Creole Caribbean culture as a basis for community and resilience, Palcy indirectly comments on the lived experience of French Caribbean workers who settled in France. She reminds part of her intended audience it has left behind the essence of its Caribbean identity: the rue Cases-Nègres. This is implicitly conveyed in the directors' construction of Caribbean dance (*laghia*) and musical traditions (the Bèlè, the music of Malavoi) that have not been by compromised by French

popular culture. For instance, through its portrayal of the traditional *laghia* dance, the film suggests that in the French musical landscape in the 1980s a Caribbean musical group such as La Compagnie Créole could only be welcomed into the popular mainstream if it conformed to a clichéd depiction of *les Antilles*.

Significant Omissions in *Rue Cases-Nègres*

Absent from *Rue Cases-Nègres* are significant elements in the Francophone Caribbean experience. Palcy deliberately excludes the sea or any other tropes associated with tourism—rhum in the form of a cocktail, *far niente*, and Caribbean music as a leisure activity—from her narrative. On the contrary, in two thirds of the film, Euzhan Palcy depicts the cultivation of sugar cane and the production of rhum as a labor-intensive profit-driven economic enterprise and as instrument of oppression. The dry sugar cane stalks featured prominently on the poster for the film—above which and from which José rises—epitomize the *raison d'être* of the plantation system: the exploitative work conditions of the inhabitants of the sugar cane alley.

Within the Caribbean archipelago, local labor unions began to organize the rural workforce by demanding better wages in the first half of the twentieth century. She steers clear of the ways in which communism contributed to the heightened political awareness and militancy of workers in the French Caribbean in the 1930s onwards, the subject of Camille Mauduech's documentary *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe*. Palcy does not depict the inhabitants of the rue Cases-Nègres as victims either. They live dignified lives, are part of a community, and protest vehemently unfair wages but they do not harm their employers. However unlike Zobel, she only tangentially alludes to the sugar cane workers' strikes. In Caribbean islands that did not become independent nations in the second half of the twentieth century, the intelligentsia was particularly aware of decolonization. Referring to

Departmentalization in the French Caribbean in the introduction to his dual analysis of *The Harder They Come* and *Smile Orange*, Raphael Dalleo points that:

Even places like Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Puerto Rico, while not becoming independent, nonetheless experience this transitional moment, moving from modern colonial status to something different during the 1940s and 1950s. (2)

This dissertation considers that one of the ways in which French Caribbean intellectuals questioned Departmentalization was by making the cultural political. After French authorities imprisoned the radical leaders of pro independence political parties in the 1980s, members of the French Caribbean intelligentsia who had been political activists turned to cultural production.

One of the most glaring omissions in *Rue Cases-Nègres* is the erasure—a gap Glissant decried in the early 1980s²¹—of the Indian, Syrian, and Lebanese presence as founding elements of the Francophone Caribbean experience post-abolition of slavery and contemporary Creole identity. Indentured servants who immigrated and settled in Guadeloupe Northern Martinique from India French *comptoirs* (called *Coolies* in Martinique and *Zindiens* in Guadeloupe) after the 1848 Abolition of Slavery are conspicuously absent from Palcy’s Afro-Caribbean narrative narrative. They briefly appeared in Zobel’s novel in derogatory terms when José and his friends leave the former slave quarters to find wild ripe fruits left along various paths “Il doit y avoir du manger-coulie” (Zobel 25) but are absent from Euzhan Palcy’s film.

The children’s careless use of derogatory terms illustrates the discrimination and lack of regard for indentured servants turned sugar cane workers from Southern India experience. Edith Kováts-Beaudoux aptly summarizes how they arrive and how they were perceived by the black

²¹ See Edouard Glissant’s *Discours antillais* (825): “COOLIES. J. Ivor Case reproche aux écrivains antillais de langue française de ne pas s’être penchés sur la question des Hindous transbordés à partir de 1850. Ces derniers gardent leurs coutumes; ils ont pendant longtemps subi le racisme des Noirs. L’appellation est souvent considérée comme injurieuse. La présence hindoue pose problème, par rivalité avec le groupe des Africains (ou inversement dans beaucoup des Antilles anglophones. Les Hindous sont appelés Malabars en Guadeloupe.”

population: “Le contingent le plus important consista en quelques 30 000 ouvriers provenant du Sud de l’Inde, dont plus de 10,000 moururent assez rapidement et dont 4000 furent rapatriés avant 1885. Vivant longtemps repliés sur eux mêmes, ils ne s’assimilèrent que lentement à l’ensemble de la population de couleur, et les Noirs désormais libres méprisaient ces “Coolies” pour avoir accepté un travail considéré comme dégradant (39).”

Although no film can singlehandedly do so, the fact that no inhabitants of the *Rue Cases-Nègres* is *Kouli* ‘of Indian-descent’ indicates that *Rue Cases-Nègres* paints an incomplete picture of Martinique in the 1930s. The conspicuous absence of *Kouli* in Palcy’s film narrative could be explained by their difficult integration into plantation life integration or by Palcy’s deliberate desire to make a film that emphasizes and considers the value of Afro-Caribbean identity. One would have to wait for Camille Mauduech’s groundbreaking documentary *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe* (2009) for an examination of post-slavery plantation life that explains the complex ties that binded békés, black and *kouli* (of Indian descent) sugar cane workers. Their participation to plantation life brought lasting economic and cultural changes to Creole Caribbean culture. Similarly, Martinicans of Syrian and Lebanese-descent are also absent from *Rue Cases-Nègres*.

Most significantly the film’s narrative posits the ideas of cultural discourse in lieu of political resistance and opposition. In *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean*, Richard D.E. Burton borrows from Michel de Certeau’s “On the Oppositional Practice of Everyday Life” to explain the difference between resistance and opposition the ways in which slaves in Jamaica “assert[ed] [...] their subjectivity in the face of the uniquely objectifying character of slavery” (49). I am arguing here that Palcy, to reprise Herndon, “the colonial artist/intellectual negotiates the decolonization of his/her mind, and where struggle over resistance strategies is articulated (261), aims both for resistance and opposition when she constructs *Rue Cases-Nègres* as a conventional film narrative).

According to Burton's interpretation of Certeau's theories, the difference between resistance and opposition lies in one's position within or without dominant institutions:

“Resistance requires an “elsewhere” from which the system may be perceived and grasped as a whole and from which a coherent *strategy* of resistance maybe elaborated. *Opposition*, on the other hand, has no space it can properly call its own. It takes place of necessity *within* the system, on ground defined by the system, and in the absence of any concerted strategy of resistance, it operated, says de Certeau, “blow by blow,” moving from one tactical maneuver to another within and against the system (50).”

Euzhan Palcy depiction of the rue Cases-Nègres as a valuable site of culture is her way of formulating oppositional discourse but her attempts at resistance are mitigated by the simultaneous (unprecedented) visibility of her film and the marginalization of its painstakingly constructed Caribbean discourse. Because hers is a crossover film, its elsewhere, what Burton via de Certeau sees as *sine qua non* to resistance (50) is in fact limited. While *Rue Cases-Nègres* is constructed as cinematic Caribbean discourse, this discourse is marginalized at the same time that it becomes unexpectedly visible. The film was embraced by the jury of an international film festival and audiences beyond the French Caribbean and yet hastily labeled by a reviewer as “un film UNESCO” (Assayas). It is part of a Caribbean theoretical continuum but equivocally labeled as French. As I argue in Chapter 3, “A History of the Reception of *Rue Cases-Nègres*,” many French journalists who praised the film also unwittingly undermined it. They were often unable to articulate its cultural value outside of the distorted lens of clichés inherited from the colonial ideological apparatus. They used offensive terminology because they were unable to conceive a novelist a film, a director, a veteran actress, Martinique as part of a literary and cinematic continuum.

In Palcy's film also lies the desire to retrace the birth of a colored elite of Caribbean intellectuals. José's story becomes the superimposition of other narratives and narrative voices: Zobel's, Palcy's, and several generations of successful (Caribbean) intellectuals, men and women whose parents—unlike the parents of icons such as Aimé Césaire or Maryse Condé—were not originally part of a small bourgeoisie of color. In the introduction to his anthology *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana Today*, Richard D. Burton makes a reference to Palcy's first feature film strictly by virtue of its focus on social mobility: "The acquisition of French schooling and, above all, of the French language itself was a crucial part of this project of individual and collective self-advancement, memorably captured in Euzhan's Palcy *Rue Cases-Nègres*" (*French and West Indian 2*).

Chapter 3

A History of the Reception of *Rue Cases-Nègres*

This third chapter of my dissertation sheds lights on the ways in which *Rue Cases-Nègres* was received in the French Caribbean and in the French press. In the first part of “A History of the Reception of *Rue Cases-Nègres*,” I examine why in the contemporary French press the critical response to the film oscillated between various degrees of praise, criticism, and offensive remarks when the film was released. Many well-intentioned French journalists who reviewed *Rue Cases-Nègres* found themselves in unfamiliar territory. In hexagonal France, film critics generally failed to describe and understand the film on Euzhan Palcy’s terms. They struggled to reconcile their idea of an exotic, a-cultural, and *French* Caribbean with the beachless, Creole-speaking, and unfamiliar depiction of the highly hierarchical colonial Martinican society reconstructed in the film diegesis. They, for the most part, relied existing colonialist imagery in their reviews of the film. As a result, contemporary reviews of the movie rarely acknowledge the deliberate ways in which *Rue Cases-Nègres* relegates the French colonial presence to the margins and claims the plantation as the primary site of French Caribbean cultural identity. The second part of this chapter emphasizes elements of the films that French journalists did not fully grasp. It sheds further light on the ways in which constructed *Rue Cases-Nègres* as cinematic Caribbean discourse.

Film Negative, Film Positive: French Critics Review *Rue Cases-Nègres*

Released in ten Parisian theaters on September 21, 1983, merely ten days after its Venice consecration, *Rue Cases-Nègres* sparked contradictory reactions. Reviews of the film in the French press were often favorable, as Keith Q. Warner noted (“Adapting a West Indian Classic” 270), but

also baffling. Out of twenty-four critiques published in French newspapers between September and November 1983, approximately four distinct types of reviews emerge: enthusiastic, negative, mixed, and quasi neutral. Most reviewers consciously and unconsciously inserted pervasive *clichés* into their appraisal of the film. Only two reviewers drew attention to the difficulty of avoiding a colonial language when speaking about the Caribbean and they still employed *clichés*. Eight or so reviewers praised the film in paternalistic *doudonistes* terms, eight positively critiqued the film using virtually no offensive language, but seven well-meaning commentaries on the film slipped into unsavory territory. Many film critics simultaneously used a laudatory and condescending tone.

As a whole the twenty-four reviews signal how challenging it was to rethink the Caribbean on the new terms set by the filmmaker. Finding adequate words to describe her cinematic construction of a Martinican experience where colonialism intersects with race, class, and gender; where the protagonist's social mobility is rooted in his knowledge of plantation life and his respect for sugar cane workers *along with* his mastery of the French canon was atypical for journalists unacquainted with Caribbean written, oral and traditional musical cultures. At best, reviews of the film revealed on the part of a great number of journalists a limited understanding of the Caribbean social landscape and its cultural terminology. At worse, they betrayed a resistance to view the French Caribbean as a distinctive site of culture and cultural production. In *Rue cases-nègres* the French Caribbean is re-defined by its Caribbeanness, as a complex Creole culture that is not so French anymore; nor does it look like a contemporary exotic postcard. Instead it looks like a poorer foreign country with a distinct historical past where the French colonizing presence although visible is also minimized.

I now propose to describe how the Caribbean aesthetic of colonial Martinique chosen for the film unsettled many of the reviewers and informed their reviews. In their respective reviews of *Rue Cases-Nègres* two journalists, M. M. in *Le nouvel observateur* and P.F. in *La nouvelle république du Centre*

Ouest obliquely recognize that selecting a language that fairly critiques the film prove not to be an easy task. Rather than draw attention to their own responsibility as film critics, they focus on Palcy's. M. M. writes: "la jeune réalisatrice devait à la fois rester fidèle à un classique connu de toutes les Antilles et ne pas s'appesantir sur les clichés des sociétés colonialistes." Jacques Siclier in *Le monde* warns of the temptation to reductively interpret the film's meaning through existing lenses: "Ne forçons pas le sens social. Les émotions sont là, assez puissantes pour qu'on aime, beaucoup, ce film un peu rétro, sans lui faire l'aumône due au "tiers mondisme" (Siclier).

Referring to the director's particular color scheme and use of photography, M.M. notes that to "les couleurs ont été volontairement " 'éteintes,' " The critic is aware that the prevalence of sepia tones in the film by evoking timelessness calls into question the color-saturated tropical images often associated with the Caribbean. Yet in this brief laudatory review, the same journalist concludes "Bref, Palcy a créé un vrai *petit monde grouillant* de vie, d'émotion" (M. M.). The verb *grouiller* although applied here to feelings, not individuals, still evokes in French unpleasant images of (over) crowded larvae, the movement of hordes, or of a herd, while the adjective "petit" belittles the director's efforts.

Similarly P.F., in an article entitled, " 'Rue Cases-Nègres' Loin de l'exotisme," despite admiration for the film, verses into exoticism when describing Darling Légitimus's performance as "savoureuse," an adjective more apt at describing the palatability of a(n exotic) dish than the performance of a veteran black actress. Such food analogies summon a sensuality that is deliberately absent from the film but is expected of Caribbean texts in the mainstream French culture. Similarly even after insisting that Palcy managed to be faithful to "la mémoire d'un peuple trop souvent perçu à travers *des prismes déformants de regards étrangers*," this journalist recounts that the viewing experience, "la vision de ce film apparemment naïf," is enhanced by the cast. The adjective "naïf" brings to mind

nature and simplicity and, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, expresses a disregard for *Rue Cases-Nègres*'s deliberate emphasis on Afro-Creole culture as a site of intellectual pursuit.

At loss for other words, both reviewers describe the discursive space of the rue Cases-Nègres as a “rue” or “bidonville”, inadequate terms for a story set in a rural setting and a noun that takes away from the cultural and historical specificity of the film. What Palcy has indeed achieved with her first film is delivering enough contextual material so that the concept as well as the physical existence of a rue Cases-Nègres is formed and taught to the spectator, thereby making the phrase stick. “Rue cases-nègres” is in fact the best possible term here because it posits Zobel’s and Palcy’s Caribbean literary and cinematic points of view not only as part of the Caribbean lexicon but also as authoritative terminology. The mainstream use of the phrase “Rue cases-nègres” would have signalled that acceptance: Martinique has entered the Glissantian relation and exists on the cultural world stage.

In contrast, the reviews’ takes and mistakes are also revealing. In “Lion d’Argent ‘Couleur sepia’ pour assassiner la carte postale,” a review published in the left-wing daily newspaper *L’humanité*, Palcy’s made-for-television featurette, *La messagère*, is misspelled as *La ménagère*, a telling slip when retracing the career of a black female filmmaker. The figure of the prize-winning young black female director is rewritten into the less unsettling and more common trope of the help. As a testament to his unfamiliarity with the term, Joshka Schidlow in *Télérama* misspells the noun *békés* and writes it as “becqués” as if the word “*béké*,”—that he confusely explains in a footnote as: “(1) nom donné au Français des Antilles,”—originated in the noun *bec* (beak). Limited by the length and format of the review and his own understanding of Martinique, Schidlow conflates racial and cultural identity, equates Frenchness with whiteness, and denies French citizenship to the black colonial subjects in the film who are also French. The reviewer simplifies what being from

Martinique (and Guadeloupe and French Guiana) means in the diegetic world of the film (1930s) and at the time of its release (1983).

While Palcy insists on their Caribbean cultural identity, the black characters in the film are also “Français des Antilles,” and the *békés* or planters Schidlow attempts to racially distinguish from the black and mulattos characters without resorting to racial terminology speak French with a Creole accent because they are also speakers of that language. His misspelling of the word *békés* and mistaken attempt at clarifying the meaning of a term that designate white plantation owners in Creole betray an ignorance of French Caribbean culture and an inability to discuss the film on its ethnographic terms. Schidlow awkwardly describes the film’s protagonist, José, as “un môme d’une famille indigène et indigente.” Employing, the noun “*indigène*,” a colonialist term, even in alliterations and assonances to in the context of *Rue cases-nègres* is resorting to the distorting lense of Western prejudice and denying the film the Caribbean identity its filmmaker has meticulously translated onto the screen.

A recurrent motif in the reviews is the overlapping of existing colonial imagery and French cultural markers to describe the ethnographic dimensions of the film. J.M.F. opens his review in the weekly *Le Point* with the exclamation “*Ab la Martinique, c’est ça qu’est chi!*” a verse quoted from “A la Martinique, chanson nègre,” a popular French 1912 song by Félix Mayol that would have been considered offensive in the 1980s. In the conclusion to the same review, Euzhan Paclý is praised but also sexualized and infantilized. The value of her work is summarized in another a reductive food (drink) metaphor replete with sexual connotations underlined her by my italics: “Jouant avec habileté d’un folklore vécu de l’intérieur, Euzhan Paclý, *aguicheuse mais pas racoleuse, arrose copieusement de sucre son ti-ponch* pour raconter l’histoire des siens *avec un grand sourire d’enfant.*” Uncalled for, the phrase “*Euzhan Paclý, aguicheuse mais pas racoleuse,*” ‘Euzhan Paclý, a tease but not a streetwalker’, invokes both sexual titillation and sex work as it reveals that the reviewer is fantasizing about the

black female director instead of reviewing the film José. The phrase “un grand sourire d’enfant” may refer to one of the rare scenes in the film where the protagonist is laughing but it also reads as part of a long tradition of depicting blacks as *grands enfants*, harmless children.

Regardless of the political persuasion of the newspaper for which they work, journalists frequently failed to grasp the intentions of the filmmaker. In the left-wing daily newspaper *Libération*, a young Olivier Assayas (now a prominent French director) takes issue with Palcy’s conventional narrative technique. He deplores that despite its Caribbean setting, the film does not transport its audience to a new location and cover new grounds: “[...] Rue Cases-Nègres fait appel à une palette de sentiments, de choix sociaux, d’options morales *qui malgré l’exotisme du décor (le film se déroule en Martinique) ne risque guère de dépayser qui que ce soit.*” The last part of Assayas’s comment implies that *Rue Cases-Nègres*’s greatest and sole value should have lied in its exoticism and its ability to entertain its audience by disorienting the viewer. I argue that Assayas himself is disoriented by the thrust of the film and that make him reject rather than interpret the film in depth.

The film critic’s bias that a film set in Martinique by dint of its location should necessarily capitalize on its exoticism and transport its audience to an elsewhere, prevents the film critic from discussing, even briefly, the elements in the films that belie his expectations. Assayas derogatively calls *Rue Cases-Nègres* “Un film UNESCO.” The label “Un film UNESCO” is opaque: it may imply that the film’s aesthetic evokes an institution devoted to Third World politic and culture. What is interesting here is that the phrase is presented as meaningful by itself: given the overall tone of the critique of the film it is also *demeaning*, as in both humiliating and devoid of meaning.

Assayas, in effect, takes the meaning out of Palcy’s film by assigning a label that should help readers of the newspaper decide or not if they should go and see the film but is instead as puzzling as is to the critic. In the conclusion to his critique, he shows little effort at elucidating the meaning of the film: “Jouant adroitement sur la couleur locale, les grands sentiments et les bonnes idées, le

film d'Euzhan Palcy est tout à fait réussi dans le contexte d'un projet très peu ambitieux." The belittling nature of this comment suggests that for Assayas *Rue Cases-Nègres* falls short: it is not exotic enough and *yet* too simplistic. Whether it is because Assayas had little interest in reviewing a film that portrays (colonial) Martinique as a plantation society, was not conversant in or familiar with such depiction, or felt that the film's conventional narrative really had limited value is difficult to ascertain. Assayas's review leaves out entirely the various layers of Caribbean discourse Euzhan Palcy inserted in the film: he does not examine *how* these layers define her conventional film as a Caribbean narrative that relegates French colonialism to the margins.

Mindful and well-intentioned reviewers do slip as well. Their laudatory reviews are frequently punctuated with poor word choice. As previously quoted in "Euzhan Palcy: la dame de la 'Rue Cases-Nègres,'" Marie-Elisabeth Rouchy recounts the somber mood that accompanied Palcy on the day her first feature film was released in France: "Rien ne fera rire Euzhan Palcy ce jour-là." Yet after giving an insightful and detailed account of Palcy's anxiety, the film reviewer describes the cast of the film as "une joyeuse kyrielle *d'autochtones*" 'a flock of joyous natives' (Rouchy). Such phrases evoke the questionable belief that "la misère est moins dure au soleil."

The journalist directly contradicts this statement when in the previous sentence she declares: "Pas un jour où la télévision n'informât le public des péripéties du tournage." Besides the usual typographic errors found in most texts, the poor word choice in several of the film's reviews reflects on the one hand ignorance of the political and cultural make-up of the French-Caribbean and a reluctance to accept and disseminate the cultural discourse of Caribbean difference that *Rue Cases-Nègres* represented. Palcy's careful but reconstruction of life in colonial Martinique unsettled many of the reviewers unfamiliar with the customs, arts, social institutions, and intellectual tradition of French Caribbean islands. Some reviewers had trouble reconciling the idea of the Caribbean as a

vacation spot with the film. Others struggled with the depiction of a Caribbean island defined by its status as a French colony that looks like a Third World country *and claims to be a site of culture*.

Last but not least, even laudatory reviews included inadequate word choice because their authors frequently employed a colonial terminology still considered offensive in the 1980s to underline how exceptional *Rue Cases-Nègres*'s mainstream success was. Contemporary film reviews disclosed that most reviewers were poorly equipped to identify the film's theme and its significance to their newspaper readers. In many cases, the reviewers' limited knowledge and understanding of Martinican culture and history as well as their own preconceived ideas and fantasies about the Caribbean prevented them from accounting for the film's significance. They were often unable to leave behind the stereotypes about Caribbean life that Palcy sought to question in her depiction of Martinique in the 1930s. They failed to see what Ménéil aptly summarized that Euzhan Palcy had attempted to recreate through Zobel's novel her own construction of the French Caribbean from the inside.

“Les Antilles de l'intérieur”: French Caribbean Artists and Performers in *Rue Cases-Nègres*

For the cover of her book, *Le cinéma dans les Antilles françaises*, Osange Silou selected a black and white still photograph of actress Darling Légitimus as M'man Tine in *Rue Cases-Nègres*. M'man Tine is dressed elegantly though modestly in the traditional fashion that evokes a *fanm matadò* or *femme-matador*,²² a resourceful and hardworking woman who find ways to earn her own money. As José's grandmother, Légitimus is caught mid-sentence: defiant and dignified. Although she is not

²² Richard Burton explains that: “*Femme Matador* was the name given to the beautiful, self reliant ‘killer women,’ usually mulâtresses, of traditional society (Burton French and West Indian, 16).” In the press release for Jean-Claude Flamand-Barney's mini-series *Tropiques Amers*, screenwriter Virginie Brac describes the character of Adèle (Fatou N'Diaye) as a Matador: “C'étaient des femmes, en général couturières, très habiles et très commerçantes, qui tout en étant techniquement esclaves, gagnaient de l'argent qu'elles donnaient à leur maître mais en en détournant une partie. Elles amassaient des fortunes et devenaient indispensables. Ils arrivaient qu'elles épousent un Blanc, mais pour cela il fallait qu'elles soient affranchies (12).”

directly looking at the spectator, one of her fingers is pointed out. She is vowing not to waver in her determination.

The photograph that Silou selected for the cover of her study devoted to Francophone Caribbean cinema corresponds to a high point of drama in the film. Despite all of M'man Tine's and José's conjugated efforts and his proved abilities, her gifted and hard working grandson has only obtained a partial scholarship at a prestigious *lycée* in Fort-de-France, giving a sour taste to their victory. In the photograph of Légitimus, the geometrical pattern of the white squares of a *porte-fenêtre* (French window) emerges behind her, out-of focus. For all the optimistic use of the term "cinema" in her title, with this still photograph from *Rue Cases-Nègres*, Silou draws attention to the marginality of the French Caribbean filmmaking practice. The symmetry of the motif frames M'man Tine's defiant gesture within the confines of a French colonial institution that may arbitrarily reject deserving, hard-working black candidates of modest origins like her grandson. Furthermore, the pattern of squares behind M'man Tine directly encloses Légitimus the performer. They function as a signifier for the close-mindedness of the French film industry.

Darling Légitimus as M'man Tine

For Silou, the veteran actress embodies *Le cinéma dans les Antilles françaises*: Légitimus personifies both belated recognition, and the groundbreaking success of the film. Légitimus also personifies the difficulty for francophone actors, screenwriters, and filmmakers to be cast in multidimensional roles, push doors, integrate, and obtain funds from French mainstream cultural institutions, crucial elements that I revisit in my eighth and last chapter. Even if as M'man Tine, Légitimus seems to be framed again and again by the racial and colonial hierarchy depicted in the

film— and in most of the films in which she was cast during her long career—she vows to stay in the picture and occupy the frame.

As previously mentioned, in her interview with Jean-Marc Paty for *Le quotidien de Paris*, Palcy recounts how she felt as a director when Légitimus was awarded le Grand Prix d'interprétation féminine at the Mostra in the 1983: “j'étais bouleversée de voir cette femme de 76 ans, qui a joué 140 rôles de ‘négresse de service’ acclamée par un public déchaîné.” The scope of Darling Légitimus's career has been documented by one of her grandsons, Pascal Légitimus, a comedian well known in France. He retraced her life and her marginal place in the French cultural landscape as a performer and actress in the 1996 documentary, *Darling Légitimus: ma grand-mère notre doudou*. The use of the term “*doudou*” in the title of his documentary emphasizes both his blood ties and attachment to an actress with a long-standing career but also highlights the limitations imposed on his grandmother's career.

Pascal Légitimus ironically reprises the word *doudou*, a Creole term of endearment now commonly used in French, to demonstrate how his grandmother's career coincided with a proliferation of images of the Other. Such images were made acceptable by the demeaning exoticism of *parler petit-nègre* in French advertisements that used colonial imagery to sell products associated with tropes of empire (chocolate, coffee, molasses, and rum). Despite the limited, stereotypical Aunt Jemima-like black roles she was initially offered, Darling Légitimus saw her career evolve in parallel with historical changes: decolonization, Departmentalization, and the Civil Rights movement. From the 1960 onwards and until the end of her career, she acted in plays and films that simultaneously interrogated stereotypes prevalent in Western culture (see chapter 4 for an overview of Légitimus's career) and highlighted the cultural legacy of the African diaspora.

Pioneering Francophone black actors such as Légitimus mostly began to work with white directors and only much later in their career with playwrights and filmmakers of color. Therefore

her role as M'man Tine, a dignified and unwavering grandmother, provided a rich subtext at the end of her career: one in contrast and in contradiction to her earlier roles. With *Rue Cases-Nègres* Palty not only fleshed out multi-dimensional Caribbean characters (M'man Tine, Médouze) by making them central to the plot but she also gave them to black francophone actors who had been pioneers in film and theater and yet remained unrecognized. Even after black Francophone actors founded or trained in theater companies, they rarely obtained gratifying roles in mainstream French films.

Because it was so unexpected, the success of *Rue Cases-Nègres* emphasized the degrees to which (Francophone) films about people of color were being overlooked or simply not completed. The awards acknowledging Darling Légitimus's performance in *Rue Cases-Nègres* foregrounded the dearth of such opportunities for actors of color who were often "playing in the dark"—that is appeared as foils to white protagonists whose identity is predicated on the classic virtues that help exert control over their world and racialized subjects—as Toni Morrison describes in her series of essays: *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. The use of veteran black (francophone and anglophone) actors as leads or key secondary characters in the better-known Francophone films must therefore be considered not merely as expression but *as reaction, as affirmation*, as part of a *national* aesthetics that is acutely political. Légitimus's belated consecration gave greater validity to Palty's work as a young director who not only had a vision but also inscribed herself in a cultural continuum.

Douta Seck as Médouze

Finding a suitable actor to play another supporting yet emblematic character, Médouze, proved equally challenging for Palty. In *Cinquante ans de cinéma africain: Hommage à Paulin Soumanou*

Vieyra, a special issue of *Présence africaine* devoted to the fiftieth anniversary of African cinema, Euzhan Palcy recounts her frantic search for the right actor to portray José's spiritual mentor:

Et c'est encore Aimé Césaire qui fut le merveilleux artisan de ma rencontre avec Douta Seck en 1983. Je menais alors une recherche désespérée pour trouver celui qui allait donner vie à Médouze, personnage marquant du roman *Rue Cases-Nègres* de Joseph Zobel. 'Votre Médouze est au Sénégal. Il se nomme Douta Seck!' me dit Césaire. La description qu'il me fit de l'homme correspondait parfaitement à celle de mon personnage. (89)

The poet, playwright, and political figure Aimé Césaire suggested that she cast the Senegalese actor Douta Seck as Médouze because the latter had already shown his mettle as an actor. Under the direction of Jean-Marie Serreau, Seck had played the lead role, Christophe, in Césaire's 1963 play *La tragédie du roi Christophe*. Seck who worked with other black actors from the Compagnie des Griots, notably in *Les nègres* (1958), Roger Blin's 1959 productions of Jean Genet's controversial play, credits Aimé Césaire's with writing more roles for Les Griots and black francophone actors (Palcy "L'acteur et la réalisatrice: Souvenir de Douta Seck" 90).²³ As biographical notes culled by one of his daughters Emmanuelle Vidal Simoës de Fonseca show, in some ways Seck's own path mirrors Zobel's and Palcy's.

Born in 1919 in Saint-Louis du Sénégal, Douta Seck initially pursued a career in education: he became a teacher like his father. After he received a scholarship in 1946, he left Ziguinchor and Dakar for Paris to study architecture (1957-1954) at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts. It is only when in 1949 the stage director Sylvain D'homme offered him to play the role of the

²³ "En France, les rôles que peuvent tenir les Noirs sont très rares. Quand il y en a, c'est toujours des rôles de domestiques, de chauffeurs etc. C'est avec Césaire que les acteurs nègres ont eu le bonheur de se révéler au public. C'est lui qui a écrit pour nous." Qtd in Palcy, Euzhan. "L'acteur et la réalisatrice: Souvenir de Douta Seck." *Cinquante ans de cinéma africain: Hommage à Paulin Soumanou Vieyra*. Spec. Issue of *Présence Africaine* 50: 89-90.

sorcerer in a French production of Eugene O'Neill's play *The Emperor Jones*, Seck began to seriously consider becoming an actor and a singer (Vidal Simoës de Fonseca). In addition to a series of theatrical roles, he appeared in several racially charged French and American films made during the Civil Rights era. Most notably, he played small parts in John Berry's 1958 film adaptation of Prosper Mérimée's short story *Tamango* with Dorothy Dandridge, Curd Jürgens and Jean Servais. He also acted with Toto Bissainthe and Roger Blin in *Les tripes au soleil* [*Checkerboard*], a 1959 French-Italian coproduction directed by Claude-Bernard Aubert. Seck was also cast as Joseph, the hobbling Haitian servant of Mr. Brown (Richard Burton), the owner of a hotel, in Peter Glenville's *The Comedians* (1967), a star-studded film adaptation of Graham Greene's 1966 novel about the François Duvalier dictatorship. Although he plays a seemingly subservient character, Seck's Joseph is associated with retaliation. To avenge the brutalities exerted on him, he becomes part of a small network of ill-armed insurgents. The "vodou lwa of politics, war, and power" (Kausen x) rides Joseph in a scene that reveals the latter's involvement against a planned insurrection against François Duvalier's militia army of *Tonton Macoutes*. While his film career was not as extensive as L'Égitimus's, Seck was nevertheless a highly respected actor within the Francophone African diaspora.

The sporadic parts he played speak to the challenges many black actors encounter to this day. Along with his acting career, Seck developed a musical career: he performed as a singer of negro spirituals, as a lyrical singer, and was the composer for the 1967 run of Césaire's play *Une saison au Congo* at the Théâtre de l'Est Parisien. If in the early stages of his career he often had to portray Western constructions of "black" others, later, in the 1970s and 1980s, Seck contributed a small number of more compelling roles especially in African films. In 1975, Senegalese director Ousmane Sembene cast Seck in his comedy *Xala*. Seck was also part of the Moroccan, Senegalese, and Guinean production *Amok* in 1983. Last but not least, as he had in the 1950s and 1960s as a

member of the Compagnie des griots, he secured roles in the rare experimental theater productions that collapsed cultural boundaries. From 1984 to 1986, Doua Seck played in Peter Brooks's and Jean-Claude Carrière's controversial staging of the Indian epic *The Mahabharata*. For the Senegalese actor the role of Médouze in *Rue Cases-Nègres* was part of that later consécration.

As Palcy reduced the number of characters in Zobel's novel to convey the human geography of a *rue Cases-Nègres*, casting itself became a significant part of the affirmative and contestatory discourses of the film. Assigning the roles of Médouze and of M'man Tine, Palcy's fulfilled a double objective. She gave three-dimensional parts to veteran professional actors from the African diaspora and she also used characterization to give depth to her portrayal of plantation life. Under Palcy's direction José's rite of passage becomes writing and defending a personal essay where he reconciles both Médouze's and M'man Tine's teachings. As elderly field hands, Médouze and M'man Tine play pivotal roles in José's education. Yet they stand at opposite ends on the spectrum of his psychological and moral growth. As M'man Tine, José's illiterate practical grandmother, Légitimus is the nuanced lone matriarchal enforcer of discipline. She insists on reading, homework, and proper behavior, makes great sacrifice to reward him with a treat such as a piece of bread but disapproves of Douze-Orteil's harsh corporal punishment after the children accidentally set the quarters of the *rue Cases-Nègres* on fire.

On the contrary, Doua Seck, as Médouze, awakens José's imagination and teaches him pride in his Caribbean cultural identity by way of their African ancestors' oral history. Médouze embodies the African slaves' spiritual world recreated and transmitted on the plantation in the form of the knowledge of plants, Creole cosmogony, riddles, and objects such as the wooden statue he offers to José. Euzhan Palcy has Doua Seck bring to life what Edouard Glissant explains about the African trace brought by the African captive "le migrant nu" in *Le discours antillais* (1981): "Bien entendu l'esprit ancestral ne l'a pas quitté; il n'a pas perdu le sens du geste ancien. Mais il faudra des siècles de

lutte pour qu'il en reconnaisse la légitimité (112).” Médouze’s “geste ancien” marks more than José’s passage into adulthood: it inscribes the *rue Cases Nègres* and life on a plantation, as the site of origin where the young boy’s cultural consciousness is awakened and shaped.

“Les Antilles de l’intérieur”: French Caribbean Artists and Performers in *Rue Cases-Nègres*

Several other actors in *Rue Cases-Nègres* were not totally inexperienced or unknown performers. Francisco Charles who plays an overseer (*gèreur*) had already been cast in three of Guadeloupean director Christian Lara’s films (*Chap’La*, *Mamito*, and *Vivre Libre ou Mourir*). Palcy cast her own brother, Joël Palcy, as Carmen and gave a non-speaking role as a priest to Joseph Zobel, the author of the eponymous novel *La rue Cases-Nègres*. To accurately render the Caribbean cultural practices depicted onscreen and directly speak to an Caribbean audience eager to see itself onto the screen, Palcy also chose two performers who were not professional actors but were highly regarded by local French Caribbean and immigrant communities: Joby Bernabé (Monsieur Saint-Louis, Tortilla’s father) and Eugène Mona (Douze-Orteils). Bernabé and Mona who portray sugar cane workers in the film represent the voice of the people. Both came of age in the 1970s and helped revitalized a traditional, poetic, and musical form of storytelling in Martinique at the very moment when Palcy was writing drafts of her screenplay.

Prior to *Rue Cases-Nègres* Joby Bernabé had studied at the Lycée Schoelcher in Martinique and then began the compulsory trip to France to study... Spanish, according to the website jobybernabe.com. He moved to a Paris suburb, Nanterre, and hitchhiked to West Africa where he traveled in 1972. Back in Paris, Bernabé tried professional and amateur theater with the theater group Kimafoutièsa, a company composed of workers and students, and authored a play of the same name. During that period, he found his voice as a *raconteur* (jobybernabe.com). From the first album, *Bwa Brilé* (1973), to the last, *Blan manjé* (1990), released one year before his death, the music

of the Martinican musician Eugène Mona (born Vénus Eugène Nilécame) ranked him as one of the worthy successors of the pillars of traditional French Caribbean music such as Ti-Emile. Mona trained as a carpenter but he believed his calling was music he played the flute and perfected his technique with another significant flutist from Martinique, Max Cilla (Berrian 115-116). A multi-instrumentalist and a composer who also wrote songs and sang, Mona was particularly appreciated for his use of parables in Creole. Euzhan Palcy cast him in *Rue cases-nègres* because he “sang with barefeet” and as “A man of the land and of the hills, Mona did not want to break contact from the land from whence he came” (Berrian 114). To many of his fans he symbolized Martinican identity (Cyrille *Imagining*).

Euzhan Palcy and the film crew behind *Rue cases-nègres* took seriously their commitment to provide their informed French Caribbean audience allegories of national identity. They cast accomplished local artists—Emile Casérus, known as the master of bèlè (Kanor and Casérus), Ti Emile (1928-1992) and the flutist Max Cilla (b. 1944), widely considered as the father of the flûte des mornes—as extras to contribute authenticity and verisimilitude to the diegetic music in the film in scenes with the sugar cane workers. Euzhan Palcy also cast the visual artist and militant political figure Joseph René-Corail (b. 1932), whom she had already directed in her featurette *L’atelier du diable* (1982), to play “against type” a light-skinned overseer. While not all emerging actors will continue, actresses such as Lucette Salibur (Madame Léonce) and Marie-Jo Descas (Honorine) who had little previous experience before *Rue Cases-Nègres* will pursue local acting careers mostly in theater at the Centre Martiniquais d’Action Culturelle.²⁴ Because of who they were before the film: symbols of Creole culture, revival, and the conservation of a national musical, artistic, and literary legacy, the diverse and experienced cast of emerging actors was central in shaping *Rue Cases-Nègres* as a

²⁴ Both Marie-Jo Descas and Lucette Salibur appeared in a Théâtre de la Soif Nouvelle production of Jean-Genet’s play *Les Bonnes* in 1986 at the Centre Martiniquais d’Action Culturelle. See also CMAC Scène nationale: 25 ans. Fort-de-France, Martinique June 2000 (29). Salibur plays a minor role in Jean-Claude Flamand-Barny’s *Tropiques Amers*.

plantation narrative. As previously mentioned, music in the film is associated with cultural traditions and Caribbean identity. To lend authenticity to scenes that depict the roots of Afro-Caribbean culture, the director chose to cast in supporting roles artists who revived traditional genres. The presence of Ti-Emile, Max Cilla, Joby Bernabé, and Eugène Mona highlights the former slaves' own meaningful tradition within Creole culture in scenes such as Médouze's wake and rituals of initiation or sequences featuring *laghia* or *damier*, a "dance en forme de combat" (Glissant 827).

Conclusion: *Rue Cases-Nègres* as Cinematic Discourse of Affirmation and Contestation

Although novelist Joseph Zobel and director Euzhan Palcy like their protagonist, José, left the plantation behind to pursue an education, they brought with them the Rue Cases-Nègres, the community of workers and the culture they created circum the plantation. The novel *La rue Cases-Nègres* and the film *Rue Cases-Nègres* reflect through Zobel and Palcy the dual—French and Caribbean, colonial and Creole—process of writing their cultural identity into a larger narrative (Hall "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," 210). In *Rue Cases-Nègres du roman au film (étude comparative)*, Sylvie César replaces the film in its Caribbean literary context. "Outre les qualités artistiques du film, un de ses mérites est sans doute d'avoir fait connaître à un public peu féru de littérature, une œuvre de cet art qui a tant de mal à s'affirmer dans une région où la lecture reste l'occupation de quelques intellectuels (13)."

Palcy's first feature film, *Rue Cases-Nègres* develops the formative years of its protagonist José's through the superimposition of several narratives and seemingly peripheral narrative voices. The film reprises several elements from the original novel and include several of Zobel's semi-autobiographical elements. It also echoes the life (although this narrative has its limits) of several other successful Francophone (but not exclusively) and Creolophone literary figures with a post-departmentalization distance and an assessment of its mitigated outcomes. Migration to the

métropole and the cultural assimilation into France that Glissant denounces in *Le discours antillais* is the dear price of social mobility that kills a certain Martinique that of M'man Tine and Médouze. In Palcy's cinematic interpretation, José's formative years become the fate of several generations of successful Caribbean figures including hers.

For directors who come from the Caribbean, whether or not from a nation-state, stepping into the movie industry is simultaneously an act of affirmation and contestation. Because Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique have a different history, the ways in which filmmakers seek to affirm and contest on the one hand Haitian identity and on the other Guadeloupean and Martinican identities diverge. Yet the Creole and French-speaking Caribbean locales share as a common trait the advent of filmmaking practices in Creole and French that date back to the 1960s. Their mere presence can be interpreted as separate acts of resistance. When *diaspora*²⁵ Haitian filmmaker Raoul Peck's film *L'homme sur les quais* (1998) is selected at the Cannes film festival, the film's marginal presence at a preeminent film festival is contesting the idea of Haiti as the most-impooverished-country-in-the Western Hemisphere and its grand historical narrative as the first black-republic.

A decade after Palcy, Peck is one of the few Francophone Caribbean filmmakers who enter[ed] into the cultural worldstage the equivalencies of Relation (Glissant 31 *Poétique*). Palcy states at the beginning of this chapter that: "The desire to become a director came out of rage, anger. I was so upset when I would see all these stupid portrayals of black people in American movies" (Glicksmann). Palcy blames "American movies" or Hollywood for its unfavorable portrayal of black people but as a French female black filmmaker born and raised in Martinique who studied in

²⁵ The italicized spelling corresponds to one of the Haitian Creole spellings. Given the proliferation of the term diaspora in contemporary studies, Rogers Brubaker lists three criterion in its definition in "The 'diaspora' diaspora": "The first is dispersion in space; the second, orientation to a 'homeland'; and the third, boundary-maintenance" (5). All three apply to Peck, a filmmaker born in Haiti, raised in the Republic of the Congo, and trained as a filmmaker in Berlin but whose films directly or indirectly examine violence and political strife. His parent's forced exile under the François Duvalier dictatorship shaped his Haitian identity and the violence associated with their departure constitutes for him a site of origin. To understand how Peck defines his films and himself as a director, see Clyde Taylor's interview with Peck, "Autopsy of Terror."

France at La Sorbonne and at the prestigious film school Louis Lumière she also casts her oppositional gaze at the French *métropole*. In *Rue Cases-nègres*, Palcy both mocks and embraces the French Republican school model established by Jules Ferry (Krezinski and Cyprien 2). José's and M'man Tine's resolve to follow the local teacher's motto "L'instruction est la deuxième porte qui ouvre la porte de notre liberté," spares José the backbreaking in the sugarcane fields. As his essay on Médouze suggests, José becomes a successful writer (first accused of plagiarism and then applauded by the Fort-de-France teacher) because he has not abandoned his Caribbean heritage and modest origins.

I argue here that *Rue Cases-nègres* is Palcy's 1980s response to the massive emigration of *Martiniquais* to France: it is oppositional because despite its nuanced message on meritocracy, the director rejects cultural assimilation and explores the tension inherent to French Caribbean cultural identity it celebrates "le désir profond de regagner le pays, de retourner là-bas" (Marcorelles). Guadeloupe's, French Guiana's, and Martinique's ambiguous status as Overseas French Department (Départements d'Outremer or D.O.M.), and Ultra Periphial Regions (Régions Ultra-Périphériques or R.U.P.), after the advent of the European Community symbolizes according to Edouard Glissant "the most pernicious forms of colonization: the one by which a community becomes assimilated (*Poétique* 5)."

At time where British colonies such as India and the future nation of Vietnam were fighting for independence, under the leadership of then *député* Aimé Césaire whose hope of higher living standards and de facto equality with France, Martinique and Guadeloupe did not become nation-states but French regions and departments. Infusing New Worlds aesthetics into French Caribbean film narratives, is contesting that status. It is questioning Guadeloupe's and Martinique's Frenchness and displacing it further onto Caribbean-ness. With *Rue Cases-nègres*, Euzhan Palcy's inscribes herself in a cultural continuum that began in the 1920s in the French capital, when artists—such as Darling

Légitimus, the actress who plays M^{me} Tine—and intellectuals from the African diaspora met and set in motion dialogues that their identity as African American second-class citizens, Haitian citizens, and French black colonial subjects.

Chapter 4

Sé Grenn Di Ri Ka Plen Sak: Darling Légitimus's Career and the Genealogy of French Caribbean Films

Underneath a photograph reads a simple caption: “Darling arrivant du Vénézuéla à Paris” (Myspace.com “Darling Paruta”). A feeling of sadness permeates the black and white picture. The young woman’s brown face looks stricken with grief, fear, or perhaps worry about the future. Her mouth is slightly pursed and her chin quivers, as if she has just grasped the boldness of her action. Looking askance far behind the photographer, her eyes betray a youthful vulnerability. Thick hair neither natural nor straightened but elegantly pulled back frames her delicate features. There is a plain tastefulness in her appearance that betrays a lack of affluence. Although they are not pearls, her white round earrings suggest elegance. Despite its loose cut, the outside of her black coat nicely contrasts with its expansive furry white collar. Finally, the collar uncovers her neck and reveals a silk blouse with a tasteful spotted pattern.

The caption underneath the photograph is partially accurate. The sad-looking black teenager dressed as a woman has indeed recently arrived from Caracas. However her name is not Darling Légitimus, yet. She was born Mathilde Paruta on the French Caribbean island of Martinique. It is the Paris of the 1920s, of *les Années Folles* (1919-1929) and *la folie nègre* that will see to her transformation into the performer known as Miss Darling or Darling Légitimus. Légitimus will sustain a six-decade-long career albeit overwhelmingly filled with stereotypical black roles but not entirely. In one of her final roles, she will portray M’man Tine in Euzhan Palcy’s film *Rue Cases-Nègres*, a part for which she received the award for Best Actress at the Venice Film Festival in 1984.

This chapter, “*Sé Grenn Di Ri Ka Plen Sak: Darling Légitimus’s career and the Genealogy of French Caribbean Films*,” examines the ways in which her professional life intertwines with the development of Haitian and French Caribbean literature, theater, and film. It is dividing into three

parts and each part corresponds to a defining moment that places Darling Légitimus's career into the larger historical, political, and cultural context that permitted the emergence of a filmmaking practice in Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Haiti. The Creole saying "*Sé Grenn Di Ri Ka Plen Sak,*" 'Grains of rice fill a bag of rice' used in the title of this chapter refers to cultural productions within and without the Francophone African diaspora as an accumulative process.

Part one, "Black Paris in the 1920s: Colored Soldiers, Jazz Age, Diasporic Encounters, and Racially Aware Assimilationist Black Elites (1921-1945)," focuses on the transformation Mathilde Paruta into Darling Légitimus and the initial phase of the artist's career. Part two, "Post World War II: A Dying Colonialism? Departmentalization as an Anomaly (1945-1959)," examines her career as an actress through the enduring colonial relationship of the French Caribbean with France at a time when European imperial powers see their hegemony contested by the rise of independence movements on the international stage. Finally, part three, "Displacement, Dictatorship, and Emigration: Investing the Cultural as Political (1960-1983)," contends that from the 1960s onward, Légitimus's roles in theater and film increasingly reflected political contestation through cultural production.

During her lifetime, Légitimus was cast in countless French commercial movies as the iterative face of the black caregiver or *da* in Creole,²⁶ the reassuringly asexual and benevolent colored domestic servant, or even the threatening black voodoo witch. Later in her career she also embodied the complex dignity and determination of a Caribbean *janm poto mitan* in plays and films. Her later performance as Man'tine in Euzhan Palcy's 1983 film *Rue Cases-Nègres*, Légitimus symbolized the arrival of Francophone and Creolophone films on the world cultural world stage. The emergence of a filmmaking practice in Haiti and in the French-speaking Caribbean corresponds to a turning point

²⁶ In his glossary to *Le discours antillais* Glissant defines the *da* or Creole nanny figure as the archetype of the black victim: "DA. La nourrice noire. A son equivalent dans toute la région Caraïbe et dans le Sud des Etats-Unis. Personnage de roman idéal (victimaire). Noire esclave et *pourtant* aimant et héroïque (826)."

in a career shaped by defining encounters within and without the African diaspora in Paris. For that reason, accounting for her career requires drawing from scholarship about the African-American experience in Paris and early formulation of black Francophone identities.

Monographs, essays, and studies about the Roaring Twenties in Paris and beyond such as Brent Hayes Edward's *The Practice of Diaspora*, Michel Fabre's *From Harlem to Paris*, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's *Negritude Women*, Tyler Stovall's *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Lights*, Jean-Price Mars's *Ainsi parla l'oncle*, Lilian Kesteloot's *Les écrivains noirs de langue française*, shed a light on Darling Lègítimus's beginnings at *La revue nègre* in the mid 1920s and the artistic and cultural cross-pollination that elicited formulations of black francophone identities. This chapter also culls facts from two documentaries, Pascal Lègítimus's *Darling Lègítimus ma grand-mère notre doudou* and Jill Servant's *Paulette Nardal: la fierté d'être négresse*, to depict the career and the transformation of Darling Lègítimus into Mathilde Paruta. I owe the analysis of her demeaning roles, to Robert Stam's and Ella Shohat's *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*.

Like many French and Francophone actors of African descent, Lègítimus occupies a marginal yet central space "within colonialist, metaphors, tropes, and allegorical motifs" in mainstream French cinema (Stam and Shohat, 137). For Euzhan Palcy, the French filmmaker of Martinican descent who directed Lègítimus in the French Caribbean film *Rue Cases-Nègres*, the award for Best Actress (*Grand Prix d'interprétation féminine*) that Lègítimus received in 1984 at the Venice film festival both publicized and masked the actress's subaltern role in French mainstream cinema (Paty).

Were it not for the French documentary *Darling Lègítimus: ma Grand-mère notre doudou*, a 1996 tribute on broadcasted on French television, three years before she died, the scope and meaning of Darling Lègítimus's career would have certainly been overlooked. Her career straddles changing times: from the a visible black presence in Paris in the 1920s, and the American Occupation of Haiti

(1915-1934), to the trials of World War II, the Departmentalization of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana in 1946 to the decolonization of former French colonies and beyond, the Duvaliers dictatorships, and massive emigration: to the Métropole during the period of economic boom called *Les Trentes Glorieuses* for Martinicans and Guadeloupean to North American for Haitians. Her career took off because she was offered roles that articulated imperialist notions but it also experienced a marked shift when playwrights and filmmakers contested and rewrote colonial history.

In 1996, Pascal Légitimus, comedian, (former) member of the French trio of humorists *Les Inconnus*, and grandson of actress Darling Légitimus directed and produced *Darling Légitimus: ma Grand-mère notre doudou*, a documentary retracing his grandmother's career. Spanning sixty years and narrated by Mauritanian director and actor Med Hondo, the fifty-two-minute film examines the life, long career, and achievements of one of the *doyennes* of French black actors.²⁷ While focusing on the evolution of her career, the film also indirectly reveals the increasingly important role of cultural productions in affirming formulations of Black identity. Darling Légitimus's evolution as an artist parallels the emergence of a significant literary corpus in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Haiti. Like Francophone cultural productions, her career was impacted by the political, historical events, and demographic changes of the 1960s. In turn, this literary corpus develops into discrete and yet overlapping branches: poetry, novels, and theater and, in the late 1960s, includes a nascent body of films translating the Haitian, Guadeloupean, and Martinican experiences from the inside. Scattered, the films reveal a fragmented and heterogeneous filmmaking practice. Despite its marginal status this corpus of films has slowly increased in visibility.

Mathilde Paruta's Early Years: Martinique, then Venezuela

²⁷ Other *doyennes* and *doyens* include but are not limited to the actress Jenny Alpha (1910-2010) and actors Habib Benglia (1895-1960), Douta Seck (1919-1991), and Robert Liensol (1922-2011).

Darling L gimus was hardly destined to a lasting career as a performer in France. The youngest of five children, she was born Marie Berthilde (Mathilde) Paruta on November 21, 1907 at Grand Anse in Le Carbet. Taking its name from a communal dwelling where Carib Indians used to hold ceremonies, Le Carbet is a seaside town in Northern Martinique overlooked by the *Montagne Pel e* and bordered by sugar cane plantations owned by *b k *²⁸ families. Her grandparents, Philippe Paruta (born circa 1837) and Mathurine (b. 1843) are described on her mother’s birth certificate as “farmers” (*‘cultivateur’* and *‘cultivatrice’*) and were born before the 1848 Abolition of Slavery in Martinique. Her own mother, Marie-Joseph Oculine Paruta (born March 9, 1874) worked as a seamstress and her father’s identity does not appear on her birth certificate.

Very little is known about Mathilde Paruta’s first years in Martinique except that she became an orphan at a young age and as a consequence was sent to Venezuela to stay with an uncle and an aunt. Her uncle known as Papa Jean or Mr. Garcia worked for the French consulate in Caracas. Paruta described her aunt as “a mystic and a renowned *voyante*” who was strict and disapproved of her niece’s early dancing and singing abilities (*L gimus Darling L gimus: ma grand-m re notre doudou*). She essentially grew up in Caracas and, throughout her life, her French will remain slightly accented with a distinctive Latin American rolling of the ‘r’ s.

In 1996, well in her eighties, as her grandson’s documentary allows her to publicly look back at her life, Darling L gimus mischievously recalls an argument she had with her aunt circa April 1912. Her aunt forbade her to pursue a career as a performer: “Moi vivante, elle ne sera jamais artiste...danseuse!” ‘As long as I am alive, she will never be an artist...A dancer!’ To which Paruta, then no older than six, replied: “Tante Mathilde, je chanterai, je danserai parce que tu vas mourir!”

²⁸ White planters from Martinique who are descendants of European settlers also referred to as *Blancs cr oles*. In Joseph Zobels’ *La Rue Cases-N gres*, a footnote that explains the term reads: “Blanc-cr ole propri taire de plantations et d’usines” (19).

‘Aunt Mathilde, I will sing! I will dance because you will die!’ Her aunt passed away a few months later on August 2, 1912 (*Légitimus Darling Légitimus: ma grand-mère notre doudou*). Were it not for her dispositions, boldness, and versatility, Mathilde may have never become one of the few black veteran actresses of the twentieth century.

Mathilde Paruta decided to leave for Paris when she was a teenager. Her fascination with the city of lights had stemmed from an encounter with another French-speaker, Mr. Albertini, the Corsican owner of *La Bijouterie Française* a jewelry store in Caracas. When Albertini learned that Mathilde was not originally from Venezuela but from the French colony of Martinique, he started to share with her his love of the French capital through ecstatic descriptions of Parisian monuments. The opportunity to leave Caracas presented itself sometimes in 1921: Paruta took advantage of her uncle’s absence and unbeknownst to him went to the French Embassy to have a passport issued. The bold teenager concocted a story about planned vacations in France and explained that her uncle requested to have a passport issued in her name. Before her uncle returned from touring various consulates throughout the country she had promptly boarded a ship with a religious group, *Les Pèlerins de la Touche* (*Légitimus Darling Légitimus: ma grand-mère notre doudou*).

Aboard the ship that took her from Caracas to the French port Le Havre, Paruta became acquainted with a black French West Indian man in his mid-fifties. Intrigued and concerned by the lone teenager, he decided to take her under his wings throughout the passage.²⁹ This man happened to be Hégésippe Légitimus, a prominent black figure in Guadeloupean politics (Oruno Lara 47-48). Born in 1868, he held several major political offices: he was elected *Président du Conseil Général* and *député* (1894-1898) of Guadeloupe (Noiriel). Hégésippe Légitimus also rose to the rank of mayor of Pointe-à-Pitre. His leadership was marked by a commitment to workers rights, socialist ideas, and affirmations of black identity through his *Parti Nègre* in the 1890s (Burton *French and West Indian*, 10).

²⁹ Théo Légitimus volunteered this information in a personal telephone interview on September 27, 2008.

Still L g tismus favored assimilation and was influenced by the French abolitionist and writer Victor Schoelcher who, in 1833, rather than embrace the Haitian political model of independence, had envisioned French colonies in the Americas as “d partement franais” (Lara, 215). Neither Mathilde Paruta nor H g sippe L g tismus knew that their path would soon cross again in Paris.

Black Paris in the 1920s: Colored Soldiers, Jazz Age, Diasporic Encounters, and Racially Aware yet Assimilationist Black Elites

When in 1921 fourteen year-old Mathilde Paruta decided to leave Caracas for Paris to become a performer, the French Capital was still reeling from the First World War. Entangled in a post-war economic depression, Paris was nevertheless experiencing an unprecedented cultural renaissance. French and foreign artists, students, intellectuals, Black and white American expatriates, and former soldiers of African-descent were reviving the cultural life of the city. There, she would become a French black singer, dance for *La revue n gre*, sing biguine and jazz, and model for renowned avant-garde artists such as Pablo Picasso and Paul Belmondo.

The year Mathilde Paruta decided to leave Caracas for Paris, black intellectuals were entering the French cultural landscape. In 1921, French poet Blaise Cendrars had introduced African tales to the French literary establishment as an editor of the *Anthologie n gre*. That same year, Ren  Maran’s novel *Batonala: v ritable roman n gre* was awarded the very prestigious Goncourt literary prize. Maran whose parents were from French Guiana was born in Martinique. After serving as a civil servant in Francophone colonial West Africa, he published *Batonala: v ritable roman n gre*, a novel that sought to condemn French colonialism in Equatorial Africa (Jules-Rosette *Black Paris*, 3-4; Stovall *Paris Noir*, 32). If Maran was critical of the colonial administrators in l’Afrique Occidentale Franaise, he also viewed *the m tropole* as an egalitarian space (30-31 Sharpley-Whiting).

In 1921, the City of Lights Mr. Albertini had described to Mathilde Paruta was more than the sum of its monuments: it also existed as a site cultural ferment and political activism for intellectuals from the African diaspora. After London in August, the second Pan African Congress was held in Paris in September of that year. Two years earlier from February 19 to 21, 1919, French *député* of Senegalese-descent Blaise Diagne along with the African American activist and scholar W. E. B. du Bois, and the Guadeloupean *député* Gratien Candace had helped put in place the first Pan-African Congress in Paris (*Negritude Women* Sharpley-Whiting 26). By individually and collectively writing black French subjective identities into the French cultural landscape, these political events signaled “a decentering of Frenchness” along racial lines (Sharpley-Whiting 43). Yet, as citizens of the French empire, the nascent black Francophone elite of the time did not necessarily view its novel affirmation of Blackness as separate from its French colonial identity. They were putting the first stones on the edifice of Francophone cultural production: performance and periodicals.

Nègres!: La Revue and les revues

The first step to formulating this black French colonial identity was to produce literature. Periodicals filled with essays, reviews, and poems flourished. From the 1920s on, a substantial number of short-lived publications and journals such as *La dépêche coloniale* (1922), *Les continents* (1924-26), *Le libéré* (1923-1925), *Le paria* (1926), *La voix des nègres* (1926-1927), *La dépêche africaine* (1928-1932), and *La revue du monde noir* (1931-1932) were published under the initiative of prominent members of the African Diaspora, newly arrived students of color, and progressive white intellectuals. The French capital had become one of the nexuses of the black world. Members of a nascent dark-skinned black bourgeoisie in Martinique (such as the Nardals and the Césaires) and in Guadeloupe (the Laras and the Légitimuses) were not only sending their children to be educated in France but also negotiating the cultural and political space between the French Caribbean colonies

and France. This Francophone black bourgeoisie produced the first texts that formulated Caribbean identity within and without French colonial discourses. Early formulations of identity were in some regards influenced by ideas of the French Revolution such as Jacobinism: “The Jacobin ideology [even] viewed slavery as beneficial since it was the first step towards equality, liberty and fraternity within the French Republic” (Hintjens 39). Although they viewed themselves as French subjects, for the students and writers who were regulars at the Nardal salon, race was a frequent topic of conversation (Sharpley-Whiting 26).

In 1921 Oruno Lara, a black French historian from Guadeloupe, published *La Guadeloupe physique, économique, agricole, commerciale, financière, politique et sociale*. An extensive study of the French Caribbean island, it questioned the *békés*' version of history while keeping in line with an “egalitarian relationship between France and its colonies” (Bongie 4). On the contrary, in an anthology of essays entitled *Ainsi parla l'oncle*, the Haitian ethnologist Jean Price-Mars denounced the American Occupation of Haiti (1915-1934) and criticized the mimicry of French culture favored by the Haitian Black bourgeoisie and upper class of the time.

Paulette Nardal was the archetype of the French Caribbean black *bourgeoise*. Nardal was the oldest of seven sisters, (Paulette, Emilie, Alice, Jane, Lucie, Cécile and Andrée), all educated. She arrived in Paris in 1920, one year before Mathilde Paruta decided to leave Caracas. Although Mathilde Paruta and Paulette Nardal were both black women born in Martinique, their formative years could not have been more different. Unlike Paruta, Nardal came from an upper middle-class family. Thanks to a grant from the *Institut des Arts et Métiers*, Nardal's father, Paul Nardal, had been the first French black engineer from Martinique to train there. When Paulette Nardal was taking classes at La Sorbonne, going to the Opera, and setting up a literary review, penniless Mathilde Paruta, was posing for photographers or painters in their studios, worrying about whether her

decision to leave Caracas on a whim would really translate into a big break in one the Parisian venues she was hearing about.

The first black female student from Martinique to attend La Sorbonne, Nardal had arrived in Paris in 1920 after having successfully passed her *brevet supérieur* (middle-school diploma), her *diplôme d'études secondaires* (high-school degree), and having taught in Martinique for two years. While a student at La Sorbonne, she took English courses, became familiar with African American authors, and studied the works Harriet Beecher Stowe. Paulette Nardal led an active cultural life in Paris: she was a classically-trained musician who attended Stravinsky concerts as well as frequented Montparnasse's *bals nègres*. Negro-spirituals were among the musical forms that she appreciated the most:

Pendant mon séjour en France, j'ai connu beaucoup de noirs américains et je dois dire que je n'imaginai pas que j'aurais rencontré chez les noirs une telle richesse. Parce qu'étant étudiante dans le milieu européen, n'est-ce pas, et bien évidemment, je ne voyais que les réalisations du monde blanc. Et réellement les Negro Spirituals ont fait irruption dans ma sensibilité et j'étais fière de voir cette musique que des noirs avaient composée. Mais encore cette musique me touchait profondément. (Servant)

If she was sensitive to the religiosity of American southern black music, Paulette Nardal did not embrace all aspects of African American musical performances. For instance, she did not react favorably to the 1925 performance in *La revue nègre* of a black dancer from Missouri who went by the name of Joséphine Baker. Nonetheless, her interest in African American culture and her desire to theorize the African diaspora motivated her to create a forum where African-American, French African and Caribbean artists and writers would regularly meet and talk. With her sister Jane, Paulette Nardal held a literary salon in Clamart, the suburb in Paris where the Nardal sisters lived.

The salon of the Nardal sisters welcomed other black intellectuals: African American writers such as Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen, English author of Jamaican-descent Claude McKay, Caribbean authors such René Maran, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and also the Haitian ethnologist Jean Price-Mars among others. Additionally, Jane and Paulette Nardal along with Léo Sajous published the bilingual periodical *La revue du monde noir* where theories such as *Afro-Latinité* and *internationalisme noir* were developed, well before Aimé Césaire coined the term *negritude* in 1939.³⁰ Jean Price-Mars, admirer of the work of Haitian anthropologist Anténor Firmin, contributor to the review, and salon visitor, denounced the American occupation of Haiti (1919-1934) and published *Ainsi parla l'oncle* a series of essays examining Haitian rural folklore. They would serve as the basis for *indigénisme* and its celebration of Haitian culture.

This cultural and intellectual ferment led to new definition of the self. Before long, the cultural became political until the cultural replaced the political. In many regards, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Léon Damas who frequented the salon will follow in the footsteps of Nardal sisters. Paris in the early 1920s functioned both as a link across the African Diaspora and as a political and cultural center. French-speaking Caribbean and African students and intellectuals were not only redefining the Parisian cultural landscape but also articulating early formulations of black identity. Neither a writer nor a student, Mathilde Paruta certainly was not part of the black intellectual elite, however she aspired to become an artist in Paris. The one group that had a lasting influence on Mathilde Paruta and helped ignite her career was African-American performers.

³⁰ As Sharpley-Whiting has noted: “Perhaps the most glaring omissions in *Négritude*’s evolution have been “the by-the-by” analyses of Paulette Nardal’s body of ideas, the complete erasure of Jane Nardal, and the ceding of Suzanne Césaire to the Surrealist camp. In effect if African-American male writers of the 1920s radicalized the consciousness of young and aspiring Francophone black writers; if the race-conscious New Negro of the United States planted the seeds of *Négritude* in the Francophones’ collective imagination, then the three future *Négritude* poets also undeniably received inspiration from Melles Jane and Paulette Nardal.[...]The *soeurs* Nardal, with their Sunday literary salon and review, did more than provide a cultured space (their apartment) and literary space (*La revue du monde noir*) for the intellectual coming-of-age of Césaire, Damas, and Senghor. Jane Nardal, who published poetry under the pseudonym “Yadhé”, invoked Africa in her poems on the Antilles before it became fashionable. Her essay on Black humanism, “Pour un autre humanisme noir,” served as a model for Senghor’s first essay on humanism and René Maran, published in *L’étudiant noir* (*Négritude Women* 17).

Becoming Darling: Encounters, Transformation, and Performance in the Paris of the 1920s

It is not clear what year³¹ Paruta arrived in Paris, how well she adjusted to the Parisian way of life, and how she supported herself financially, although it has been established that she was actually living in Paris in 1924 (*Légitimus Darling Légitimus: ma grand-mère notre doudou*). When she arrived in Paris she found a substantial black presence and people of various origins. African American soldiers and soldiers of color from the French colonial empire, such as *tirailleurs sénégalais* reluctantly recruited by French député of Senegalese descent Blaise Diagne, had fought in the First World War and had remained in France afterwards. A few converged to Paris and their presence changed the cultural landscape.

In his seminal study of the African American presence in Paris, *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in France 1840-1980*, Michel Fabre credits the popularity of Jazz music to the African American men and few women who enlisted during the First World War to fight in France: “The soldiers brought over Jazz, introduced in France by Jimmy Europe’s orchestra in 1918 (Fabre 2).” In *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* Tyler Stovall refers to the neighborhood of Montmartre as a Parisian Harlem with its own Black Renaissance (60). Paruta certainly could not have helped but noticing the popularity of various versions of black music and dance across the Parisian African diaspora and beyond. She heard African American musicians perform Jazz, dance the Charleston and the Black Bottom from Louisiana and Florida at popular clubs such as Le Grand Duc, Chez Florence, or the biguine of her native Martinique that the African American sculptor Augusta Savage grew so fond of and invoked earlier.

³¹ Although Paruta states in *Darling Légitimus: ma grand-mère notre doudou* that she boarded a ship bound for France when she was barely fourteen years old, in a personal interview on September 27, 2008, one her sons, Théo Légitimus believed that she arrives in Paris at sixteen years old that would place her arrival in 1923.

In 1925, Mathilde Paruta attended a performance of *La revue nègre* that featured African American dancer and singer Josephine Baker and musician Sydney Béchét at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées. The performance had such a lasting impression on her that she emphatically declared that she would join the cast of the show.³² Shortly thereafter, she introduced herself to Louis Douglas, an African-American dancer who was also the choreographer³³ for the review and boldly enquired:

Mathilde Paruta: Vous n'auriez pas besoin d'une danseuse?

Il [Louis Douglas] me dit: Parce que vous êtes danseuse?

Mathilde Paruta: Oui, oui.

Louis Douglas: Savez-vous danser le Charleston?

Mathilde Paruta: Oui, oui.

Louis Douglas: Et...Le Black Bottom?

Mathilde Paruta: Ah Oui...Le Black Bottom. (Je dansais de tout mais pas... Rien du Charleston).

Il [Louis Douglas] me dit: Mademoiselle vous ne connaissez (sic) pas danser le Charleston mais je vous engage.

Mathilde Paruta: Ah oui?

Louis Douglas: Vous savez pourquoi? Parce que vous avez du culot! Et j'aime les gens qui ont du culot et vous avez un fameux culot! Je vous engage!

This exchange between the choreographer and a teenage Paruta highlights the young woman's determination. Their conversation speaks to her ability to talk herself into a prominent first gig and her desire to aim high. Won over by her spunk, Douglas decided to hire Paruta although she

³²Légitimus states in *Darling Légitimus: ma grand-mère notre doudou*: "J'ai dit aux camarades: je vais jouer dans cette revue. Vous pensez qu'ils se sont bien payés ma tête."

³³Phyllis Rose identifies Douglas as a dancer and choreographer for *La revue nègre* in *Jazz Cleopatra: Joséphine Baker in her Time* (9).

did not have all of the pre-requisite dancing skills. Paruta had spunk but was spunk enough to launch her career? Her residency at *La revue nègre* proved to be the first turning point of her career. There, she met and befriended her idol, Josephine Baker.

Freda J. McDonald, the African American performer known as Joséphine Baker had arrived in Paris in 1925. At only nineteen, Baker was already a star (Stovall, 52): her big break had taken place four years earlier in New York in the Broadway revue *Shuffle Along*. She had also performed in *Chocolate Dandies* and subsequently at the Plantation Club where an American socialite married to American attaché in France hired her to perform in Paris. In *The Practice of Diaspora*, Brent Hayes Edwards remarks that often “the performer the French called “La Baker” is portrayed as exceptional, with no links to the community of black performers in France (130).” In her grandson’s documentary, *Légitimus* (and others) say otherwise: “Joséphine Baker, elle adorait Baby Darling. Il fallait un nom anglais. Mon nom, c’est Darlin: d-a-r-l-i euh –n-. Donc on ajoute la letter –g-. C’est elle qui m’a donné le nom de...” (*Légitimus Darling Légitimus: ma grand-mère notre doudou*)

Also interviewed for the documentary *Darling Légitimus*, French journalist Jacqueline Cartier confirms that Paruta grew to be a loyal friend of Baker. Cartier recounts how Paruta saved Josephine Baker from being hit by a knife thrown by the lover of another dancer at *La Revue* who had a heated argument with the African American star. Baker liked to call Mathilde Paruta “Baby Darling” and suggested that Paruta adopt “Darling” as her stage name. By her own account,³⁴ Mathilde Paruta was also going by the name Darlin, although this name does not appear on her birth certificate. One of her sons, actor Théo Légitimus, could not confirm³⁵ the origin of the name that later became the inspiration for her name with which she became associated from then on. What is certain is adopting Darling as her stage name signaled the beginning of her multifaceted career.

³⁴ Qtd. in Pascal Légitimus’s documentary, *Darling Légitimus: ma grand-mère notre doudou*. “Mon nom c’est Dalin.”

³⁵ Personal phone interview on 27 September 2008.

“Il fallait un nom anglais.” Given the popularity of Jazz in the Paris of the 1920s, an anglicized stage name that invokes this musical form simply seemed an opportune decision. Nicknames and stage names facilitated recognition. Becoming Darling may have been a form of Glissantian *Détour avant la lettre* for Mathilde Paruta. As Darling, Paruta was more likely to integrate the popular circuit of working black performers and to launch her career in Paris. The image of African American star ‘Josephine’ Baker (nicknamed La Baker by her the French public) with her French first name advising a Spanish and French-speaking Caribbean woman her age, Mathilde Paruta, to adopt an English-sounding stage name may seem ironic but it was first and foremost an astute move. Mathilde Paruta’s appropriation of the first name Darling should be understood in terms of Diasporic black identities, playfulness, and racial awareness. By accessing a range of black identities, Paruta reinvented herself as a female artist whose sense of belonging was instable and therefore more easily commodified. Her name, even if only in theory, commanded respect and evoked (African) American Southern formality as when she asked to be called by the Southern moniker Miss Darling.

Images of the French colonial empire were pervasive and infiltrated popular forms of French entertainment such as film, advertising, and music. For Paruta, adopting the name Darling also meant rejecting the term *doudou*: a symbolic retreat from the prevalent stereotypical and sexualized image of Caribbean women associated with the popular *biguine* music that Darling would perform as a living. Desirous to become a full-fledged performer, Paruta was aware of the success of *chansons nègres* such as “A la Cabane bamboo: lamentations d’un nègre” (1910). It is likely that she had been struck by the playful yet offensive lyrics of “A la Martinique: chanson nègre,” a 1913 French song made popular by Félix Mayol.

A la Martinique, Martinique, Martinique

C'est ça qu'est chic, c'est ça qu'est chic

Les p'tites femmes se mettent simplement
 Une feuille de bananier par devant
 Y en a du plaisir, du plaisir, du plaisir
 Jamais malade, jamais mourir
 Et la feuille ça sert à rien du tout
 On sait bien c' qu'y a en d'ssous.
 In Martinique, Martinique, Martinique
 Tis' so swell, tis' so swell
 Lil' women simply put
 A banana leaf in the front
 Der is pleasure, pleasure, pleasure
 Never sick, never die
 And the leaf is of no use at all
 We all know what's underneath. (my translation)

Parutha had probably cringed at the use of fragmented speech mimicking the colonialist pidgin-like *parler petit nègre* in Mayol's song. It is plausible that she sought to distance herself from Mayol's characterization of black female French subjects as barely clothed, close to nature, open, willing, and healthy sexual beings. In reaction to such *clichés*, she chose the first name 'Darling' because it was farther from the words 'doudou' and the *doudounisme*³⁶ prevalent in some of the Western constructions of black identity that emerged in the 1920s (Edwards *Practice of Diaspora*, 159 and Régis and Antoine *Rayonnants écrivains de la Caraïbe*). Parutha knew that the English noun Darling—used as a first name—would be received as a sophisticated term of endearment by a French audience enamoured

³⁶ The lyrics of a popular French song by Félix Mayol entitled "Chanson nègre" portrayed the French Caribbean as: "In Martinique, Martinique, Martinique/tis' so swell, tis' so swell/Lil' women simply put/a banana leaf/in the front/Der is pleasure/Pleasure/Pleasure/Never sick/Never die/and the leaf is of no use at all/we all know what's underneath (my translation)."

with Jazz music and the novelty of African American dances from the South. The moniker set her apart and captured the zeitgeist of *les années folles*. Although unlike Paulette and Jane Nardal, she was not part of the Parisian black intellectual establishment, Paruta as a young struggling black female artist was exposed to formulations of counter colonialist discourses that circulated within political and cultural circles of progressive whites and men and women from the African diaspora who lived in Paris. Another decisive encounter played a part in completing her unforgettable *nom d'artiste*.

Darling Becomes Légitimus: Wife, Mother, Black Performer

In 1924, Mathilde Paruta met the man that would give her the last name that would so charismatically complement her stage name, Darling. His name was Victor-Etienne Légitimus (1903-1982), and he happened to be the son of the *député-maire* of Guadeloupe Hégésippe Légitimus, the older man whom Darling had met on the ship that took her from Venezuela to France. She was seventeen years old and had not yet seen Josephine Baker and Sidney Bechet perform at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées. She was focused on finding work and did not really pay into attention to the young man she kept running into at different venues. Their first encounter took place backstage at the Casino de Paris. Victor-Etienne Légitimus worked as an administrator at the Théâtre de Paris and tirelessly pursued her.

Victor Etienne Légitimus relentlessly pursued Darling. They had five children: Théo (born in 1929), Gésip (Victor-Hégésippe, born in 1930), Clément (born in 1939), Marcelle (born in 1937), and Gustave (born in 1942). In 1935, Mathilde Paruta was elected Miss Antilles in Paris. As she was looking for regular work and to contribute to the household she continued to diversify her skills. She soon began to accept small part in maistream French movies but the Second World War interrupted her fledgling career. Paruta was now going by her stage name Darling Légitimus. From

then on, when she would be credited for her work it would be as Miss Darling, or Darling L gitimus. Like many aspiring but struggling performers, she supported herself by seizing jobs opportunities in the art world.

Biguine, Jazz, and Cuban Music: Darling as a Dancer, Model, and Singer

“I want to do the biguine and play belote,” wrote the African American sculptor Augusta Savage from her little studio on the Avenue de Chatillon in 1931 (Fabre 84). The dual popularity of *biguine*, a dance that had originated in Martinique in the 19th century, and of *bals populaires antillais* (West Indian nightclubs) resonated with African Americans artists who had come to Paris to further their artistic training (*Practice of Diaspora* Edwards, 146). African Americans musicians and artists tended to flock to the neighborhood of Montmartre, a Parisian district with its own Harlem Renaissance but they were invited to the Salon of the soeurs Nardal and danced to the rhythm of Afro-Caribbean music. The explosion of Cuban music and the introduction of Jazz music by African American expatriates and soldiers afforded Darling L gitimus and other Black artists in France different plenty opportunities to work as dancers and singers. L gitimus took advantage of the wave of “Negrophilia” (Archer-Straw) that struck the Paris of the 1920s to forge a career. She recorded songs, danced in traditional West Indian outfits, and she worked hard to become a versatile performer.

The success of Jos phine Baker and Sidney Bechet at the Th atre des Champs Elys es in 1925 attests that the black presence in the Paris 1920s was widely associated with musical performance: Jazz, Negro spirituals, and the Charleston brought by the numerous African American soldiers who fought during World War II and stayed afterwards. Biguine was also an extremely popular form of musical entertainment, was avidly consumed by white and black patrons alike. The

Montparnasse neighborhood was known for its popular bals nègres: Le Dome, L'Oasis, and La Boule Blanche. As one reveler puts it: "Les noirs tenaient le haut de l'affiche dans les années vingt" (Servant).

Darling Models: The Vogue of African Art, Harlem Renaissance, and Cubism in Paris

"L'art nègre? Connais pas!" had exclaimed Picasso in 1920 (Lemke 31). A photograph of a young Picasso, dated 1908, in his studio in the Bateau Lavoir belies this sarcastic statement (Archer-Straw 54). *Au contraire* l'Art Nègre was everywhere and in different alliterations. The vogue of Art Nègre, Jazz, and Surrealism brought together black and white visual artists and performers. Interest in African art, what was called at the time Primitivism, was revitalizing the French arts. While the French colonial empire found legitimacy in museums such as the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, French colonial subjects of African descent who frequented intellectual circles looked critically at essentialist depictions. They published in the numerous periodicals they had started with progressive whites.

In 1925 the show in which Joséphine Baker starred with Sidney Bechet *La revue nègre* was being promoted in a striking poster by an unknown artist: Paul Colin. Paul Colin's 1925 poster for *La revue nègre* had favored a slender light skinned Joséphine Baker against the heavier blues singer Maude de Forest. However Colin was less discriminatory when he sought black models (Haney 55). Darling made a living as a model for artists in Parisian *ateliers*. From 1925 to 1929, she found work modeling for renowned artists such as the painter Pablo Picasso, the painter and draftsman Paul Colin, and the sculptor Paul Belmondo *père* (father of French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo). Posing as a model was one of her many occupations: dancing and singing naturally led to acting.

Francophone Black actors and performers while not numerous, were not unheard of in France. From dance recital to music hall to cinema, the *folie nègre* that was shaking Paris in the 1920s

included Habib Benglia, one the first black actors to appear regularly on French stages. In 1923, Benglia had reprised the titular role in Eugene O’Neill’s play *The Emperor Jones* in a mise-en-scène by Gaston Baty (*Nègres en images* Chalaye 156). However sophisticated and seductive her stage name was, for big-boned black women of Darling Légitimus’s complexion, acting often meant being cast as iterations of the benevolent mammy figure.

In 1933, Légitimus and her first-born son Théo (credited as Jean) played their first part in Léo Mathot’s film *Bouboule 1er roi nègre*. Théo Légitimus played the eponymous African child king Bouboule. Released two years after the 1931 Exposition Coloniale in Paris the film provided entertainment through escapism.³⁷ For Légitimus, this first film however was the beginning of a long career where she consistently rubbed elbows with the most famous French actors and directors of her time and yet often remained cast in subordinate roles. The year 1940 hit them particularly hard and Darling Légitimus used her culinary skills to help keep the family afloat. Darling and Victor-Etienne survived World War II with difficulty and resumed their career after the war. According to Gérard Laviny, the singer behind the popular biguine “*Ba moïn an ti bo dé ti bo,*” they played a prominent role in the French Caribbean community. The Légitimuses became a fixture of the Parisian French West Indian cultural life organizing soirées and banquets.

An Ubiquitous Black Actress in French Mainstream Productions: Post World War II (1946-1960) Decolonization and Departmentalization as an Anomaly

In 1946, immediately after the war Darling Légitimus accepted a minor role in the war drama *Un ami viendra ce soir* directed by Raymond Bernard. While French film production diminished

³⁷ The synopsis for the film *Bouboule 1er roi nègre* on the website *Africultures.com* reads: “Bouboule est chargé par des bandits de passer frauduleusement des diamants de France au Sénégal. Les bandits ont pris sur sa tête une assurance-vie et tentent de le faire disparaître au cours de la traversée. Mais Bouboule déjoue leurs manœuvres et s'installe dans un village sénégalais dont il devient roi.”

during the conflict and the German Occupation, Légitimus was able to get minor roles in French mainstream films right after the War. In 1947, she played in Maurice Gleize's film *Le bateau à soupe* and Jean-Daniel Normand's *Les trois cousines*. From the early 1950s on, Légitimus worked steadily, accepting the only parts available to black women her complexion and size: familiar versions of the Mammy character. For instance, in Richard Pottier's *Casimir* (1950), starring French star Fernandel as the eponymous character and Germaine Montero as Angelina, his paramour, Darling Légitimus plays Carolina, one of Angelina's servants.

By 1946 when she resumed her work as a black actress assigned minor roles, the unity French colonial empire was under assault and it had to be redefined. Légitimus's presence in popular French films inserts tropes of Empire where a strict colonialist racial hierarchy is enforced. Seeing black actors confined to subaltern roles reassured the mainstream French audience who had welcomed African American soldiers with relief, curiosity and sometimes warmth. French spectators had watched Légitimus's mentor, the African American entertainer Joséphine Baker play a talented mulatto woman, Zouzou, who falls in love with Jean (Jean Gabin) and had breathed a sigh a relief when Jean had chosen Zouzou's more traditional and less threatening friend Claire (Yvette Lebon) in Marc Allegret's 1934 film. Mainstream French audience may have loved listening to Jazz and enjoyed La Baker's dazzling numbers yet they were not ready to see "their" own *indigènes* as full fledged characters who get the man (Stovall *New Woman and the Interwar*).

From de "Nègresse de service..."

Although by the end of her career she had acted in more than 120 films, Darling Légitimus was not always listed as part of the cast in many of the films she appeared.³⁸ In other instances, she is only partially credited that is when her name does appear in the credits, as in *Le bateau à soupe*, it is

³⁸ The films she was cast in are grossly undercounted. Légitimus is only credited for thirty or so roles in the Internet Movie Database website imdb.com.

not necessarily attached to the name of the character that she embodies, indicating the character's seemingly negligible importance. In fact in *Le bateau à soupe* the character played by the French Soudanese (now Mali) actor Habib Benglia is simply referred to as «le nègre». This is also the case in films such as *Le chemin de Damas* (1952) by Max Glass with Michel Simon and Roger Hanin who was starring in his first role: Légitimus is listed in the credits but not as a character.

Constructing the colonial Other as nameless, submissive, or as foil was anything but trivial: it reinforced French imperial discourse at a time when *l'empire colonial français* was beginning to crumble. At the outset of World War II, France became involved in two major conflicts that would threaten the unity of its colonial empire: La Guerre d'Indochine (1946-1954) and La Guerre d'Algérie (1954-1962). The process of decolonization already underway in India was also part of the post Second World War would redefine the French nation. The *indigènes* who demanded independence from European nations appeared all but submissive in French newscasts. Summoning tropes of empires by featuring subaltern colored Others in French mainstream films became increasingly urgent.

During the war local populations across the French colonial empire had paid a heavy tribute. The Senegalese infantry man *tirailleurs sénégalais* who had also fought in the frontlines during the first World War had come home from World War II realizing that they were equal to French soldiers. In several instances, opposition to French colonialism predated the war but after the demands for independence grew more insistent: “émeutes et repressions sauvages en Algérie (Sétif et Guelna) en 1945, grève au Cameroun (1945), début de la guerre d'Indochine (fin 1946), grève générale dans la production sucrière en Guadeloupe (1946), grève à Dakar (1946), émeutes et grèves en Côte d'Ivoire (1948), insurrection de Madagascar (1947), troubles à Treichville à Abidjan (1949), grève générale en Guinée, au Dahomey et au Kenya (1950) (Ngal 22).”

In 1944 as the war neared its end, the Comité Français de Libération Nationale (CFLN) under the leadership of the Général de Gaulle decided on charting the course of the French colonial

empire at the Conference de Brazzaville. At the suggestion of Felix Eboué, a Guyanese of African-descent who rose through the ranks to various prominent political positions, assimilation was chosen as a political route. On October 1946, the French colonial empire became the Union Française. The French colonies in the Caribbean became départements d'outremer and in the rest of the French colonial empire the forced labor that had been part of the Code de l'indigénat ended as the right to citizenship made all former colonial subjects French. Still, the power to administer the land remained in the hands of a few French administrators even if a few select educated locals recruited as *cadres* in managerial positions. In French films, the construction of the colonial native endured.

In 1953, the French filmmaker Henri George Clouzot used of Darling Légitimus's talent as a singer and as a dancer to typecast her as a native (*indigène*) whose main function is to provide *couleur locale* in one of his masterpieces, the gripping *Le salaire de la peur*. Unlike the French protagonists Yves Montand, Charles Vanel and to a lesser extent an oversexualized Vera Clouzot, Légitimus is used as part of the décor. She appears as a human prop whose singing and dancing abilities add an exotic dimension to the mise-en-scène and contributes to the verisimilitude of an unnamed Latin American country as a Godforsaken place. In 1953 Darling Légitimus acted in Alfred Rode's *Tourbillon* (1953). The following year she was cast in Robert Siodmak's *Le grand jeu* (1954) with internationally known actresses Gina Lollobrigida and Arletty. Despite the decolonization process, she continued to be cast as the help.

1955, the year the Bandoeng conference between non-aligned countries was held, provided Darling Légitimus with at least three conventional minor parts. She played a black nanny in Sacha Guitry's biopic *Napoléon* and shared the screen with a long list of French and international actors such as Daniel Gélin, Pierre Brasseur, Daniel Darrieux, Pierre Aumont, Orson Welles, Erich Von Stroheim, Yves Montand, and Michèle Morgan. She also appeared in Edmond Greville's film noir

Le Port du Désir with actor Jean Gabin (Gréville had worked with Joséphine Baker in 1935 when he directed *Princesse Tam Tam*) and reunited with renowned French actors Charles Vanel and Yves Montand in Maurice Cloche's film *Un missionnaire*. Although the latter film still entertains a vision of France as a colonial power dispensing the largess of its *mission civilisatrice*, the younger naive French missionary played by Yves Montant does not leave unscathed.

Combatting the pervasiveness of the *mission civilisatrice* ideology by showcasing “the dignity of otherness” was as a matter of fact one of the underlying goals of *Présence Africaine*. Alioune Diop, a thirty-seven year old Senegalese student living in the Quartier Latin in Paris founded the periodical and future publishing house in 1947. In the preface to the first issue, he indicated that the idea for *Présence Africaine* dated back to 1942-43. Diop had seen the French colonial enterprise from several perspectives. Educated in Senegal, in Algeria, and in France, he had taught, seen the colonial process up close (he worked for the *gouverneur général* of l’Afrique Occidentale Française), and served as a soldier during World War II. As Albert Mouralis has pointed out, *Présence Africaine* was contemporaneous to other post-war periodicals such as *Les temps modernes* and *Critique* and proposed both “a discourse *on* Africa and a discourse *by* Africans” (Mouralis “Présence Africaine: Geography of an ideology” 5).

During a period that includes the French Indochina War (1946-1954) and the looming Algerian War (1954-1962) contributors to *Présence Africaine* adopted a marked anti-colonialist stance. The review featured contributions from African Americans intellectuals (Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brooks) and French thinkers of European-descent (Marcel Griaule, André Gide, Jean-Paul Sartre) and of African descent (Birago Diop, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Jacques Roumain), to name a few. The review was part of a cultural continuum where Francophone authors and artists from the African diaspora had been redefining their cultural identity and collaborated with progressive segments of French society.

In Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana, the *vieilles colonies françaises d'Amérique*, a few influential Francophone intellectuals turned politicians such as Aimé Césaire chose not to embrace nationhood. Regardless of the ways in which Francophone intellectuals positioned themselves differently *vis à vis* the French colonial power, their literary works and artistic production mirrored historical changes. Diasporic encounters between members of the Francophone and African American intellectual and artistic communities in the Paris of the 1920s had helped transformed Mathilde Paruta into Darling Légitimus, an ubiquitous yet invisible artist relegated to stereotypical performances of black female Others. The period when the empire struck and wrote back saw artists participate in the reversal of those clichés. They were at the vanguard of theatrical productions that made the advent of a French Caribbean filmmaking practice possible.

Contested Political Assimilation for Martinique and Guadeloupe, Political Instability for Haiti

Darling Légitimus' post World War II roles in French cinema and beyond captured, in a sense, opposite spectrum of the French decolonization process: Departmentalization and independence. Her career after the war came to embody both the 1946 assimilation of Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana into the *giron* of a protective benevolent France and the desire from French subjects in West, Central, Northern Africa, Indochina and in the Indian Ocean to administer their own land and obtain nationhood status. But while this divide is useful, it does not tell the whole story. Aimé Césaire, the poet from her native Martinique who in 1939 had published a seminal poem in the review *Tropiques*, "Cahier d'un retour au pays natal," was now a member of the French Constituent National Assembly. In May, Césaire who had joined the communist party was elected mayor of Fort-de-France. Thanks to L'ordonnance du 22 août 1945, the Overseas French Territories were for the first time represented in the French general assemblies, in February 1945 the code de l'indigénat had been abolished, and in April of the same year trade unions were allowed in

French Overseas Territories (Ngal 20-21). As a député and as a special *rapporteur*, Césaire signed into law a new political status for Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana: Departmentalization on the grounds of “promptly obtain[ing] the benefits of social and labor laws for the workers of the colonies” (Hintjens “Constitutional and Political Change in the French Caribbean,” 23).

From the onset of her career, Darling Légitimus had commonly been cast in subaltern benevolent roles. French film production did not necessarily reflect the reality of the country’s waning imperial power at a time. Her presence as a foil (*faire-valoir*) elevated the status of Western protagonists in mainstream French movies. Raymond Rouleau’s film 1957 adaptation of Arthur Miller’s play, *Les sorcières de Salem*, afforded Darling a more substantial part as the black witch and pivotal character Tituba. Légitimus had already worked twice with Raymond Rouleau. In 1949 she was part of a French stage adaptation at the Théâtre Edouard VII of Tennessee Williams’s *Un tramway nommé Désir* that starred film *vedettes* Arletty and Louis de Funés and secondly In 1955, she returned to the stage with Rouleau at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt in Rouleau’s adaptation *Les sorcières de Salem (The Crucibles)*. Yves Montant, Simone Signoret, Nicole Courcel, and Pierre Mondy were cast in the main roles. When Jean-Paul Sartre adapted *The Crucibles* into a film directed by Rouleau in 1957 Darling Légitimus was cast as the black witch Tituba.

Principal photography on *Les sorcières de Salem* was reportedly difficult: several actresses in the film described Rouleau’s directing style as virtually abusive. Légitimus probably used her previous acting experience and her familiarity with Rouleau to weather the storm. Her own part as the black witch Tituba was both pivotal and demeaning. In an uncomfortably poignant scene in the film, Tituba, wrongly accused of witchcraft begs Abigail for mercy in a hopelessly resigned yet defiantly anguished tone. The sheer cruelty Abigail displays towards Tituba and Légitimus’s wounded performance highlights multiple degrees *object*-ification. As the lone black other female,

she is also revealed and branded as a marginal historical figure in an American play adapted into a French film.³⁹

In the late 1950s the colonial model was under attack. On television, in movie theaters, and in newspapers the coverage of the international political climate included the Civil Rights movements, the Algerian War. Intercontinental news reflected a broader movement towards decolonization. For visionary French playwrights putting the margin at the center of theatrical performance held the key to revitalizing French theater. This revitalization was possible because it coincided with the publication of plays centered on the black experience. They paved the way for the beginning of a filmmaking practice less than a decade later. The existence of black theater companies such as La Compagnie des Griots allowed actors such as Darling L'Égitimus and Robert Liensol to expand their range and showcase their acting skills while performing in plays that confronted whiteness and blackness in baffling and elliptical ways.

...To *Les nègres*

In 1959, as a member of all-black theater company La Compagnie des Griots Darling L'Égitimus played a pivotal part in the theatrical production at the Théâtre de Lutèce of a seminal French play written by the controversial playwright Jean Genet and directed by the *metteur en scène* Roger Blin: *Les nègres*. The Belgian actor and director Raymond Rouleau with whom L'Égitimus had

³⁹ Was the Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé aware of Raymond Rouleau's demeaning portrayal of Tituba in *Les sorcières de Salem* when she rewrote the black witch into History in her novel *Moi, Tituba Sorcière de Salem*? Although she credits her writing *Tituba* to a suggestion by publisher Simone Gallimard and her own interest in Ann Petry original novel on Tituba (Pfaff 58-59), it is very possible that Maryse Condé may have seen Raymond Rouleau's film or heard about it. Condé was in Paris at the time and was an avid cinéophile. Besides she and L'Égitimus were part of the same theatrical circle. Née Boucolon, she met and married Mamadou Condé, her first husband, in Paris. An actor from Guinée, Mamadou Condé, was one of the members of the all black Francophone theatrical company La Compagnie des griots founded in 1956 and based in Paris. When Maryse Boucolon met him in Paris in 1959, he played the part of Archibald in Jean Genet's play *Les nègres*. Darling L'Égitimus played the part of Félicité in the same play.

worked several times had asked Jean Genet to write the play (Kennelly, 123). Faithful to the title of the play, the cast was almost entirely black: Robert Liensol (Ville de Saint Nazaire), Bachir Touré (Village), Mamadou Condé (Archibald), Gerard Lemoine (Diouf), Lydia Ewandé (Vertu), and Toto Bissainthe (Bobo). Two *Légitimuses* were completing the cast, Darling (Félicité) and her first-born son, Théo (Archibald).

For Robert Liensol, one of the founding members of La Compagnie des Griots (1956-1964), Jean Genet's 1958 play *Les nègres* directed by Roger Blin was a watershed moment. He explains: "Pour nous, cette pièce a été une bouffée d'air pur, dit Robert Liensol, directeur de la compagnie jusqu'à sa dissolution en 1964. Cela dépassait le plan théâtral. Nous nous exprimions en tant que comédiens, mais aussi en tant qu'hommes et en tant que femmes" (Libong). *Les nègres* with its "vicious and inflammatory rhetoric" (*The Rites of Passage of Jean Genet* 218) was meant to upset the audience from which it demanded participation.

Robert Liensol: Alors on a donc joué *Les nègres* pendant 150 représentations. Alors on a commencé à la jouer au Théâtre de Lutèce et puis on a joué en Rome en Italie et puis au Théâtre de la Renaissance. C'est une pièce qui était très importante pour nous tous parce qu'il faut dire les choses comme elles sont, le comédien noir ou la comédienne noire en France a beaucoup de mal à travailler. (Libong)

Playing the role of the confrontational Félicité signaled a shift in Darling *Légitimus*' career. From *Les nègres* on, the roles that *Légitimus* took on were no longer limited to subaltern characters in French mainstream films. Because she appeared on theatrical stages cast in parts written by African American, Haitian, and French Caribbean playwrights, her career took a different course. She occupied dual spheres and played on opposite ends of the discourse about blackness. In mainstream French films, *Légitimus* appeared as a variant of the benevolent mammy figure but in theatrical productions about the African experience, she played roles that counter-staged essentialist

performances of blackness or confronted white audiences. In 1960, L'Égitimus reprised the role of Mama Younger in a 1960 French adaptation of Lorraine's Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) by Emanuel Robles. L'Égitimus's role as a black matriarch who wishes to use her late husband's life insurance money to buy a house and therefore improve her family's lot sharply contrasted with her earlier roles. This novel dimension in her career is subsumed in this excerpt from *Les nègres*.

LA REINE (inspirée)

Vous n'empêchez, ma belle, que j'ai été plus belle que vous. Tous ceux qui me connaissent pourront vous le dire. Personne n'a été chantée plus que moi. Ni plus courtisée, ni fêtée. Ni parée. Des nuées de héros, jeunes et vieux sont morts pour moi. Mes équipages étaient célébrés. Au bal chez l'empereur, un esclave africain soutenait ma traîne. Et c'est pour moi qu'on a décroché la Croix du Sud. Vous étiez encore dans la nuit...

FÉLICITÉ

Au delà de cette nuit foudroyée, fragmentée en millions de Noirs tombés dans la jungle, nous étions la Nuit en Personne. Non celle qui est absence de lumière, mais la mère généreuse et terrible qui contient la lumière et les actes.

Félicité's interruption of the queen marks a disruption in the order of things. The queen fights her waning power by invoking her past attractiveness and the status it gave her. Flaunting this status was predicated on the enslavement of black people: "Au bal chez l'empereur, un esclave africain soutenait ma traîne." The queen seeks to maintain and reassert her sovereignty by equating the night with ignorance "Vous étiez encore dans la nuit..." but Félicité contests the queen's notion of darkness. She challenges the queen's sense of entitlement and her narrow understanding of night

and darkness by turning the queen's words (the familiar trope of the dark continent) against her and turns them into her own weapon.

Felicité's response is to humanize and personify "the night" and depict darkness in terms of flamboyant maneuver. In her riposte, the night morphs into the threatening and bountiful body of a "mère généreuse et terrible" that gives birth to a throng of belligerent black individuals. Despite Departmentalization, the year 1948 saw marked tensions and eruption of violence between a poorly paid but increasingly unionized workforce influenced by Communist ideals and the *béké patronat* in northern Martinique. In the seaside town of Le Carbet, where Darling Légitimus (née Paruta) was born, three sugar cane workers died and six months later in Basse-Pointe workers hacked a *béké*, Guy de Fabrique, to death in a sugar cane field (Mauduech *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe*).

The changing international political context and the emergence of the Third World as a geopolitical entity added a militant anti-colonial streak to a greater number of cultural productions within the Francophone Diaspora. 1959 was also the year that the Marcel Camus Franco-Brazilian film *Orfeu Negro* received an Oscar for Best Foreign Film and the Palme d'Or at the Cannes film festival although "The thousands of Black Brazilians who played at an out of season carnival, with virtually no pay, for the benefit of Marcel Camus' French cameras, never saw any of the millions of dollars that *Black Orpheus* (1959) made around the world (Shohat and Stam, 187)." In 1954, the outcome of the Battle of Dien Bien Phu indicated that France was losing the war in Indochina. After the international Conference of Non-Aligned countries in Bandoeng in 1955, the 1956 *Congrès des Ecrivains et des Artistes noirs* in Paris re-convened in Rome in 1959, formulations of black identities operated more freely within and without, the decolonization process. More than a decade after Departmentalization, resentment in the French *Departments d'Outre-Mer* brewed.

In 1959 and 1961 political unrest ensued. In December 1959, a routine traffic incident, the confrontation between a motorist and an automobilist turned into a larger clash. Although the

conflict was resolved around a drink in a nearby hotel (Mencé 15), the muscled intervention of the Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité (CRS) in that hotel turned citizens' outrage into a full-scale riot. The crowd reacted by burning tires and throwing rocks. Nationalist slogans such as "La Martinique aux Martiniquais" appeared on the walls of buildings in Fort-de-France and throughout the island. The desire for sovereignty found an echo in a small but militant group of West Indians students who had returned from France and founded l'Organisation de la Jeunesse Anti-colonialiste de la Martinique (l'OJAM).

In Haiti the first films were shot at the onset of the Duvalier dictatorship. In Jonathan Demme's documentary *The Agronomist*, Joseph-Yves Médard, Rassoul Labuchin, who directed the Haitian film *Anita* (1980) traces back the interest in cinema as art and as a potential expression of Haitian identity to a Haitian agronomist who became a militant journalist.

Jean Dominique presented a conference on cinema. He was a man who spoke with extraordinary eloquence about cinema, 'the seventh art' and the importance for Haiti to develop...a cinema of its own. Jean visualized for us the great potential of a Haitian national cinema to benefit the Haitian people because 80% of the population were (sic) illiterate. He asked all the assembled intellectuals and writers to get to work, in action to start writing screenplays drawn from the life of the Haitian people so we could bring to the screen...stories rich in meaning and significance...to all Haitian people.

Laboussin adds that Jean Dominique's cine club played a role in developing cinema in Haiti.

Poets, playwrights, novelists, and soon filmmakers from the African Diaspora and beyond were rewriting history from the perspective of the colonial subject. The reshuffling of the cards of the cultural as political representation allowed black actors like Darling Légitimus to expand their range. While she continued to operate within the French mainstream discourse of representation,

from the mid-1950s on Darling Légitimus joined a cast of marginal and yet influential producers of cultural discourse. Essays, Aimé Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1953) and *Toussaint Louverture: la révolution française et le problème colonial* (1960), and poetry had proved enough of a militant weapon but theater was fast becoming a medium of interest for a nascent group of Haitian and French Caribbean intellectuals and beyond.

Although he had been a member of the communist party from the 1940s to 1956, Césaire's activism was more apparent in his literary work than in his political stances. The militant denunciation in his plays, in his *Lettre à Maurice Thorez* (1956), or in his essay *Discours sur le colonialisme* stood out sharply against his determination to maintain the colonial ties between France and Martinique and Guadeloupe. In 1946 as the *député* for Martinique, he had voted on a law that granted the two islands the status of Départements d'Outre Mer: "The raison d'être of the law of 1946 had been to obtain the benefits of social reforms introduced in France during the inter-war years and immediately after the war" (Hintjens 42). At a time when former Western colonies were fighting for and obtaining independence, political dissent did not spare Martinique, Guadeloupe or Haiti. Younger intellectuals in Martinique and Guadeloupe struggled with Departmentalization (Hintjens "Constitutional and Political Change in the French Caribbean" 20-33). They questioned a political status they equated with assimilation and neo-colonialism. Among intellectuals and artists living in Paris connected to the African diaspora, one way to refuse cultural assimilation was to speak back to the métropole through cultural productions by and for the African diaspora. Theater and then film become political tools for intellectual activists: Med Hondo explains: "Lorsque je suis arrivé à Paris, j'ai trouvé que les acteurs africains et antillais s'étaient organisés et se donnaient la main. Ils avaient fondé une compagnie et monté *Les nègres* de Jean Genêt. Le responsable de la troupe était Robert Liensol, un guadeloupéen. Il y avait aussi Bachir Touré un sénégalais, Toto Bissainthe, une Haïtienne (Signaté 26).

C. (1960-1983) Individual Rights, Dictatorship, Displacements, Emigration: Investing the Cultural as Political

The polarizing nature of the Cold War, the 1959 Cuban Revolution, the Civil Right movements in the United States, and the acceleration of the decolonization process signaled a shift in international relations. The 1960s emerged as a period of emphasis on individual identities, youth culture, and feminism as racial, and class-based political dissent put old values to the test. French playwrights of African and European descent based in Paris and elsewhere took notice and were heavily influenced by anti-colonial discourse. Aimé Césaire's plays *Et les chiens se taisaient* (1958), *La tragédie du roi Christophe* (1963), *Une saison au Congo* (1968) and *Une tempête: adaptation pour un théâtre nègre* (1969) found an immediate if limited audience. Racial discrimination is at the heart of Jean-Paul Sartre's play *La putain respectueuse* (1952). Collaborations between a few formally trained black actors and metteurs en scène of European descent interested in experimenting with the medium (such as Peter Brook, Jean-Marie Serreau, Roger Blin, and Jean-Christophe Averty) were renewing the genre but the mainstream French audience of the 1960s was did not react favorably when theatrical performances with an all black cast was broadcast on prime TV.

On December 1964, French households who had kept their TV on while they were enjoying their copious Christmas dinner had started their *réveillon de Noël* with crowd-pleasing popular French fare on the first channel. From 8h59 to 9h34 PM *Au ciel des idoles* entertained young and older spectators. Middled-aged « French » crooner Tino Rossi and Marcel Pagnol guest starred. The show invited fans to share their Christmas celebration from the comfort of their living room with no less than French rock sex symbol Johnny Halliday, his wife Sylvie Vartan, and their friends. In a similar vein, at 9h35, *La nuit écoute* featured the friendly novelist Jean-Pierre Chabrol by the fire. The surprise of the evening came in the form of an unlikely spectacle, a play about the New Testament told from an African American perspective. On December 24, 1964 a virtually all black cast that

included Darling L'Égitimus starred in Claude Santelli's made for television adaptation of a 1930 play by Marc Conelly and that had been a Broadway phenomenon: *The Green Pastures*. Translated in French as *Les verts pâturages*, the television adaptation included two of L'Égitimus's sons, Théo and Hégésippe along with several actors from La Compagnie des Griots (Med Hondo, Robert Liensol) were also part of the cast. Several actors played double roles. The broadcast on a holiday of a theatrical version of the New Testament with an all black cast on Christmas day provoked outrage. Theater became the training ground for artist activists like Hondo who soon turned to cinema. Several Haitian actors were also in Paris at the time: the actress Toto Bissainthe played in La Compagnie des Griots for instance.

According to the 2001 *Catalogue du forum du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel en Haïti* for the foundation forum Eldorado, the first cinema studio in Haiti, Citadelle Films, was established between 1946-1950 (9) under the aegis of Ricardo Widmaier: it specialized in newsreels. 1962 marks the year where the first Haitian documentary and fiction film completed: Carl Lafontant, Jean Dominique, and Edouard Guilbaud's *Mais je suis belle*, a documentary about a beauty pageant in Port-au-Prince. Guilbaud was trained at the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques (IDHEC) film school in Paris and had directed several documentaries for Haitian presidents (Estimé and Magloire) and for American television channels.

In Haiti as well, theater played a key role in the transition to cinema. The cast to Raphael Stines's twenty-five minute Creole adaptation of Jean Cocteau's melodrama *Le bel indifférent, Map Palé Net*, included stage actors such as Maurice Maximilien, Jessie Alphonse, and François Latour (*Matériel* 69). Although in intellectual circles a controversy arose about the focus and the French origin of the play, in *Matériel pour une histoire du cinéma haïtien* Arnold Antonin defended the film on the grounds that Stines was in favor of a popular Haitian cinema with dialogues in Creole (*Matériel* 69).

The period that encompasses the Cuban Revolution, the Civil Rights movements in the United States, and the May 68 riots in France movement also saw the institutionalization of black cultural productions. In cities like New York progressive whites, African Americans, and Latinos demanded political participation and used urban protest to force diversity if not yet inclusiveness. Political contestation led to stronger demands of cultural affirmations and requests that physical spaces that would help institutionalize marginalized cultural production have *pignon sur rue*. This led to the construction of venues that welcome and featured the works of minority artists. It is no coincidence that both the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Museo del Barrio in East Harlem were founded in 1969. After the 1959 Cuban Revolution and the publication of Glauber Rocha's essay "The Aesthetics of Hunger," cinema was increasingly viewed as a tool of liberation (Pine 4). The Studio Museum in Harlem initiated a program that supported filmmakers of African descent. The construction of museums gave artists who were racial minorities the possibility to archive their work but also cultural legitimacy and permanence. The impetus to establish societies and organizations to conduct research and educate the larger public about the Caribbean was also felt in the French Caribbean. In Martinique, in 1965, Martinican novelist and poet Edouard Glissant founded L'Institut d'Etudes Martiniquaises (IME).

Although it split up in 1964, the impact of La Compagnie des Griots continued well beyond the 1960s. Not only did the company train a crop of black Francophone from the Caribbean and West African actors but that theatrical training provided also an essential bridge to filmmaking. For instance, actors like Toto Bissainthe (Haiti), Timité Bassori (Ivory Coast) started with Les Griots and then participated in the African and Caribbean filmmaking practice. In 1966, the Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembene decides to use the forceful voice of Haitian actress Toto Bissainthe to reveal the inner thoughts of Diouana (played by Mbissine Thérèse Diop), a Senegalese woman who is the protagonist in his film *La noire de...* (*Black Girl*). Toto Bissainthe's voiceover narration is

one the most striking features of the film: it creates a jarring experience for the spectator. Sembene uses Bissainthe's voice to contrast Diouana's quasi silence, her naiveté, and her initial submissiveness.

Bissainthe's voice suggests that the colonizer no longer can manipulate and use the formerly colonized. While Diouana as a character appears compliant and only belatedly rebellious, her voice sounds omniscient and aware. It is the voice of a Diouana that has left her body and that narrates to the spectator of the Diouana that she was once. Disembodied by Toto Bissainthe, Diouana's voice, oddly devoid of a Senegalese accent, becomes the voice of the Other filled with muted anger. Diouana's anger finally explodes and culminates in a personal and controversial act of rebellion against oppression and objectification.

Sembene carefully sets up Diouana's final act of free will (the first being Diouana's repossessing the mask she had offered to Monsieur and Madame when they hired her). He leads the audience on only to crush its expectations of an happy ending. Provocative and unsettling, Diouana's decision to leave allows Sembene to warn his intended audience against the morbid consequences of emigration to France. The theme of migration to France as alienating so central to Ousmane Sembene: *La noire de...* will be revisited by the early filmmakers producing films about the Guadeloupean and Martinican experience.

Emigration and Displacement

Toto Bissainthe herself, Diouana's voice in *La Noire de...*, will revisit this theme in Jérôme Kanapa's film *En l'autre bord* (1978). The transition from theater to film took place against this unprecedented immigration to the métropole.

En 1970, on dénombrait déjà près de cent cinquante mille Antillais en France, souvent arrivés dans la décennie précédente (1).

Vingt ans plus tard, la population antillaise tourne autour de quatre cent mille personnes. Deux antillais sur trois y sont nés dans la Caraïbe, le troisième en France. (Anselin 7-8)

(1) Alain Anselin, *L'Emigration antillaise en France*, 1979, Paris. Rapport d'activité du Bumidom, 1970.

Now that Francophone Caribbean literature (poetry, plays, and novels) was two generation old, film seemed the next logical medium of choice. In 1978, Daniel Boukman⁴⁰ (born Daniel Blérald), a playwright from Martinique who had participated in the Algerian Liberation movement, publishes *Les négriers*. The play whose title can literally be translated as The Slave Ships is a searing condemnation of the BUMIDOM (Bureau des Migrations Intéressant les Départements d'Outre-Mer), the French governmental agency that organized between 1960 and 1980 the emigration of French citizens of Guadeloupean, Martinican, and Guyanese Descent to France to fill low paying civil servant jobs in times of economic boom (Anselin *La troisième Ile* 116). Eight years later, in 1979, Mauritanian actor and filmmaker Med Hondo adapts the play into an epic musical entitled: *West Indies: les nègres marrons de la liberté* and as previously mentioned casts many black actors trained at the Compagnie des Griots in pivotal roles such as Toto Bissainthe, Robert Liensol, and Darling Légitimus as well as her son the actor, Théo Légitimus.

Many of these actors also had unique exposure to the black presence in American and international films. Steady work was hard to come by for Francophone black actors and actors such as Robert Liensol, Théo Légitimus, and Med Hondo supplemented their income by working as voiceover actors, dubbing mostly African American actors. Liensol became the voice of Sydney Poitier and Théo Légitimus started his voiceover career in 1959 in Albert Camus' *Orfeu Nègre*.

⁴⁰ Blérald adopted the last name Boukman as his pen name in honor of the Jamaican slave who became a *oungan*, a Vodou priest, and participated in the Cérémonie du bois Caïman at the onset of the Haitian Revolution. Daniel Boukman lived in Algeria from 1962 to 1981 and taught French in a school from 1966 onwards.

While American films were at times screened in their original version, more often than not, they were shown in a French dubbed version. Robert Liensol and Théo Légitimus had already worked with Hondo in his film *Soleil O* (1970).

Before Rue Cases-Nègres, Légitimus continued to play on television, in plays and in movies, in mainstream films. In 1972 she was in Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris*, and three years later she was in a play adaptation of Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneur de la rosée*. In Martinique and in Guadeloupe institutions such as the Centre Martiniquais d'Action culturelle (CMAC) and the Service Municipal d'Action Culturelle (SERMAC) were established respectively in 1975 to encourage local artistic production. Marie-Claire Delbé Cilla, who still managed photography workshops SERMAC in 2007, joined the SERMAC in 1976 and started to teach photography workshops in 1978. She described the atmosphere at the time as one of militant cultural assertiveness (*militantisme culturel*).

Mayor of Fort-de-France Aimé Césaire founded the SERMAC in the mid 1970s to make arts and culture available to the working-class and the working poor. Formerly located in the Parc Floral in the city of Fort-de-France nearby poor neighborhoods, it occupied several buildings where workshops in filmmaking, photography, theater, pottery and sculpture were offered. In the botanical gardens turned cultural park, all workshops were initially free and later available for a nominal fee in the spirit of "la culture à portée de tous." A young woman from Martinique attended workshop at the SERMAC while Légitimus was playing in Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée*. Her name was Euzhan Palcy. She had read the novel *La rue Cases-Nègres*, which she planned to adapt onto the screen. She will offer Légitimus one of her most important parts in her career.

Conclusion

“*Sé Grenn di Ri Ka Plen Sak: The Genealogy of French Caribbean Films*” puts an emphasis on the lineage of cultural productions of the African Diaspora. It explores the circumstances that led to the emergence of a Francophone Caribbean practice through the career of a black francophone actress: Darling Légitimus. Immigration, exile, diasporic encounters in Paris, cultural renewal, production of African diaspora have all played a part in ascertaining film as the next medium of choice in Haiti and the French Caribbean. The transformation of Mathilde Paruta into an actress who played subaltern roles in hundreds of mainstream French films but also participated in the most avant-garde plays and anti-colonial films of the twentieth century is used as thread to connect the dots between the 1920s and the 1980s.

Films from Martinique Guadeloupe and Haiti are the consequence of an accumulation of these *grenn di ri* ‘grains of rice.’ As one of many streams of cultural black productions, French Caribbean films emerged out of and in reaction to existing forms of black performativity tied to colonial representations of a racialized other. Early transnational diasporic encounters, political, literary and artistic formulations of black identities, post-war changes in political status or regime (whether assimilationist, dictatorial or emancipatory), and migration, constitute each of the meaningful steps that have propelled intellectuals and artists interested in the Haitian, Guadeloupean, and Martinican experience to create a filmmaking practice. History is one of the recurrent themes in those films.

Chapter 5

Grounding Identities, Framing History, Telling Stories: Francophone and Creolophone Caribbean Historical Films Reclaiming Modernity

Historical narratives figure prominently in the corpus of films translating the Francophone Caribbean experience. Like their literary counterparts, Francophone and Creolophone filmmakers have been exploring past events that have shaped the culture, economy, demographic changes, and political status of Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. Such films propose critical formulations of collective and individual cultural Caribbean identity. Chapter 5, “Grounding Identities, Framing History, Telling Stories: Haitian and French Caribbean Historical Films Reclaiming Modernity,” considers the construction of historical narratives by prolific filmmakers from the French and Creole speaking Caribbean: Raoul Peck and Arnold Antonin in Haiti, Christian Lara in Guadeloupe, and Euzhan Palcy, Guy Deslauriers, and Camille Mauduech in Martinique as a way to reclaim modernity.

In “Breaking Medusa’s Spell,” her introduction to *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity*, Maria Cristina Fumagalli uses the ancient figure of Medusa, a Gorgon who “in order to legitimize itself, [it] petrifies those who stand before it, freezing them into a state of what she calls perpetual backwardness, primitivism, or non-modernity” as a symbol of a “Eurocentric” “periodization” that excludes the New World from modernity (1). To call into question existing hegemonic discourses, Fumagalli calls conventional western historical markers of modernity: “North American modernity” (2). In this chapter, I use Fumagalli’s introduction to argue that filmmakers who direct Caribbean historical narratives explore and assert Caribbean modernity. By modernity I suggest the exploitative conditions that come with wide industrialization, commodification, and alienation.

For small Caribbean nations such as Haiti, and non-nations like Martinique and Guadeloupe, even more so than large powers, historical accounts function as sites of legitimacy, affirmation, and contestation from which collective cultural identity is derived, questioned, and

renegotiated. In “Histoire, histoires,” a segment from his seminal essay *Le discours antillais*, Edouard Glissant has remarked that for Caribbean intellectuals the production of history has been “un piège” ‘a trap’: a lack or a longing shaped by dominant European ideologies (221). Rather than exploring this anguish, he argues, Caribbean intellectuals have attempted to fill this longing by appropriating and adhering to the codes of Western official History. As a result, they have often privileged linear, teleological, and orderly historical narratives, and often ignored Caribbean modes of storytelling.

Chapter 5 explores the treatment of history in several fiction and documentary films about and from Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. If a filmmaker like Christian Lara produces official, chronological, and factual, narratives revolving around historical figures to revisit the salient moments of Francophone Caribbean history, other directors such as Deslauriers, Peck, and Camille Mauduech (except in her epic documentary *Aimé Césaire, une voix pour l’histoire*) demystify historical narratives by embedding their narratives in oral accounts told from the perspective of ordinary characters. Euzhan Palcy’s three-part documentary and historical portrait *Aimé Césaire, une voix pour l’histoire* (1993) focuses on the towering political and literary figure Aimé Césaire. It is a prime example of what Glissant has History, or capital H history: Palcy looks at the twentieth century through the lens of the political and literary contributions of Aimé Césaire.

Haitian naïve art as the joint fabrication of two American visitors in Haiti and of the François Duvalier’s regimes to sustain tourism and profit economically is the central argument of *Art naïf et répression*, Arnold Antonin’s 1979’s film. Raoul Peck, a diaspora Haitian filmmaker, recreates the climate of repression that precipitated the departure of the Haitian middle-class in the early 1960s in his film 1993 *L’homme sur les quais*. Euzhan Palcy’s film *Aimé Césaire: une voix pour l’histoire* makes visible the simultaneity of colonial history, western hegemony, and discourse of resistance. In contrast, *Le passage du milieu*, a 2000 film directed by Guy Deslauriers and written by

Patrick Chamoiseau and Claude Chonville replaces Western markers of history such as dates and events with historical process and Caribbean theories. In lieu of “siècles, guerres, règnes, crises, etc...” (*Le discours antillais* 269) *Le passage du milieu* often reprises distinctive Caribbean theories, most evidently the theoretical work of Edouard Glissant but not exclusively. Last but not least, Camille Mauduech’s *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe* (2009), I conclude this chapter with Camille Mauduech’s first feature-length documentary, a significant departure from History and a challenging open-ended, and plurivocal historical film narrative that questions “cette conception univoque de l’Histoire et donc du pouvoir, que l’Occident a imposé aux peuples” (Glissant, 276).

Michael Dash has paraphrased Glissant’s rumination on history in the French Caribbean as a “dangerous longing” for history (Dash *Edouard Glissant*, 152). In Martinique and Guadeloupe, where a substantial part of the population views favorably its French citizenship and high standards of living and yet see the erosion of its Caribbean cultural identity as a site of struggle, historical films serve a double purpose. For one, they function as affirmative and contestatory modes of cultural production against French and European acculturation by giving the French and European islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe the cultural legitimacy they lack politically.

Historical film narratives aimed at satisfying or fueling a Caribbean nationalist sentiment in men and women defined by their dual Caribbean and culture and French citizenship without jeopardizing the political and economic relationship between France (and now Europe) and its Caribbean Ultra Peripheral Regions (RUP). Secondly, as cultural products inscribed in an oppositional continuum of cultural production, they disseminate some of the intelligentsia’s political recriminations while questioning the islands quasi-colonial status or marginality. On the contrary historical films about and from Haiti focus less on affirming a Caribbean identity than exploring themes that address the fragmentation of Haitian collective identity: diaspora, displacement, and

alienation. They tend to revolve around past events that contributed to the fragmentation of Haitian national and individual identity.

The treatments of history in Haitian, Martinican, and Guadeloupean films are closely linked to the desire to continue affirming a Caribbean cultural presence on the world stage by producing narratives that warrant the authenticity of cultural insiderism. As such, these film narratives produce cultural formulations of identity. Historical films that ignore Western narrative codes operate as substitute forms of nationalism that belie Martinique, Guadeloupe, or French Guiana colonial status as mere French and now European regions and question the Haitian dichotomy as first black republic and poorest country in the Western hemisphere. Instead, these types of historical film narratives ground their cultural distinction in the Caribbean cultural specificity formulated by intellectuals, postcolonial writers, and artists of the last six decades.

Art naïf et répression: Questioning the Historicity of Haitian Naïve Art

The naïve painting looks like a colorful rendering of a biblical scene. As the camera zooms in to its most intricate details, close ups of “Adam and Eve” are accompanied by the guttural sound of the vaksen, an instrument made of bamboo used in Haitian rara music. Little in the painting’s saturated colors, round shapes, and animals painted in an Eden-like garden, commonly labeled as Art Naïf, evoke historical or political context. Yet the credits that follow read in Haitian Creole “Prodiksyon oganizasyon revolusyon 18 me demokrasi nouvel,” and announce that the film militant perspective will offer a political interpretation Haitian naïve art. The voice of Joseph Antonio, a poet, describes in Creole, an artist’s desperate artistic gesture after he was jailed under the François Duvalier dictatorship. Guy Antoine Nazaire nicknamed Douze, used bones, his urine, and colored paper from a kite to make paintings and works of art while in prison. An inter-title followed by the

sound of a gunshot reads: “Can a CIA agent be a great patron?” The provocative question and the gunshot disrupt the serene and artificial exoticism of the earlier painting. The first images in Arnold Antonin’s 1976 documentary *Art naïf et répression* subtly call into question the authenticity of Haitian naïve art. Shot while Antonin was in exile in Venezuela (1973-1986), the film tells “the true story of Naïve Art in Haiti” as it examines the historical connections between politics and cultural production.

Antonin historically frames Art Naïf both as the indirect result of the American Occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 and as a consequence of the dire economic situation of Haitian painters under the Duvalier père and fils régimes. He shapes this argument by juxtaposing brief interviews of Western art dealers with series of naïve paintings. Interviews of Haitian and Caribbean artists discount prevailing myths and shed a new light on Haiti’s best-known visual art form. Between footage of Haitian life, of gallery openings in Europe and of Jean-Claude Duvalier marching with his militia the Tontons Macoutes, Antonin argues that Art Naïf is a distorted representation of Haiti’s complex visual legacy.

The director tells the story of Haitian naïve art from a political perspective framed by the Duvalier’s dictatorships’ interest in developing American and European tourism. Antonin uses Antonio to lay the claim that Haitian art has been resilient, even under the most violent political repression. The poet Joseph Antonio is identified as a professor and as an authority on Haitian issues. Antonio argues that Haitian Art Naïf is a commodity manufactured for Northern American and European markets for tourists visiting the island during the Duvalier dictatorships. His interventions allow Antonin to present an insider’s (a Haitian artist) perspective on Haitian naïve painting. Antonin thereby proposes a Third-World Marxist reading of the figure of Haitian painter as worker who produces a commodity: Art Naïf.

In Antonio's words and Antonin's film, the Haitian painter of Art Naïf appears no longer as an artist but as a slave to American capitalism. A caricatural animation film summarizes the demiurgic role of an American patron plays in selling naïve art as authentically Haitian. Through interviews and voice over narration employing several different voices, Antonin denounces the roles private American interests and the Duvalier regime played in fabricating and promoting Art Naïf. Creole inter-titles insert unsettling questions such as: "do naïve paintings resemble what is happening in Haiti?" to dispute the authenticity, in themes and in execution, of Art Naïf. The exiled filmmaker also denounces the repressive regime of the Duvaliers and the lasting American economic diktat in Haiti, as he delineates three important moments in the country's history a brief historical context: Haiti's independence in 1804, the American occupation, and the Duvalier dictatorships. The voiceover comment connects footage of Jean-Claude Duvalier in uniform accompanied by Tonton Macoutes to the American economic liberalization policies based on profit and how they curtailed artistic freedom.

Antonin uses editing to juxtapose interviews of Western consumers, resellers, and footage of the daily life of the struggling Haitian majority. He interspaced the views of a prejudiced American patron and an Italian art dealer with Antonio to show an unfiltered Western perception of Haitian art. This perception is expressed in voiceover by a Western male voice that assesses current literature about Art Naïf. Although brief, his review of books is loaded with prejudice and echoes an American woman's offensive comments. The footage is reminiscent of a news report on Haiti and its poverty. The voice of a journalist declines in cold numbers and statistics the living conditions of a larger segment of the Haitian population. His monotone delivery shows his disinterest in Haitian issues and betrays that he has adopted the position of an outsider. Antonin contrasts this journalistic account with Antonio's commentary in Creole about the Haitian artistic legacy framed within the political contexts of the 1970s. Antonio's interventions, such as his early account of

Douze's resilience, and his artistic commitment discredit the news report images, of working class men and women, going about their business and leave them open to interpretation.

To further illustrate his argument, Antonin inserts a rare French interview of the Cuban artist Wilfredo Lam sitting in front of sculptures that resembles totems. Lam describes the colonialist attitude of American patrons towards painters of Art Naïf he encountered during his own exhibition at the Centre d'Art in Port-au-Prince in uncompromising language: "And there was an attitude of *métropolitains* in a colony." Using saloon music to undercut his narrative of American conquest of the art world, Antonin switches from film to cartoonish drawings in lieu of animation to illustrate the role of Dewitt Peters played in institutionalizing Art Naïf in Haiti. Upon his arrival in Haiti, Peters, an uninspired American artist found artistry in the works of painters from rural areas. Antonin's caricatural recounting of Peters' creation of the Institut d'Art criticizes the enterprise as simplistic and exploitative and notes that although most painters accepted Peters' artificial categories, several resisted his injunctions. In the cartoon, Peters' relationship to the work of Haitian painters is depicted as akin to that of a manager on a factory floor.

Art naïf et repression's Marxist argument revolves around the contestation of Art Naïf as genuine Haitian artistic expression. The film's denunciation of Dewitt Peters and Selden Rodman reveals their Institut d'Art rather than support the painter's organic vision stifled their creativity. Haitian and Cuban artists such as Max Pinchinat and Wilfredo Lam attest of the heterogeneity of Haitian artistic production. Countering Peters' appropriation and circumscription of originality, Antonin uses Haitian painter Max Pinchinat's insights on the characteristics of a distinctive Caribbean pictorial tradition to underscore the development of Art Naïf as an economic enterprise.

It is the very seeming historicity of Art Naïf, widely considered a genuine manifestation of Haitian art that is challenged here. The film Marxist's critical perspective challenges notions of artistic primitivism to propose a Haitian historical narrative that foregoes History in favor of an art

production that does not silence Haiti's own modernity. Antonin's partisan film, while not a Haitian historical account per se mixes footage, interviews, and a cartoon segment with close looks at paintings to reject simple assumptions about the Haitian pictorial tradition. *Art naïf et répression* indirectly reflects on historicity and the veracity of the construction of pervasive Haitian narratives. It considers the problematic ways in which some Haitian painters agreed to a degree of commodification of their work and became "modern enterprises" (Fumagalli 3) that produced goods that circulated on a global scale. In this regard the film invalidates the usual primitivist argument of Art Naïf and emphasizes resilience and necessity.

Narrating the Duvalier Dictatorship: Childhood, Memory, and Storytelling in Raoul Peck's *L'homme sur les quais*

François Duvalier's diminutive frame appears late in *L'homme sur les quais*, a film about the plight of a black bourgeois family that was nominated for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes film festival in 1993. Duvalier's rousing words,⁴¹ however, set in motion the film's climate of terror, chiefly because the director Raoul Peck inserts them between the ominous lyrics of the 1955 Gérard Montfistion Creole song "Batèm Rat" 'The Baptism of Rats.' The lyrics, "*Yo manje manman, yo manje papa. Ay, lami mimi ou malonnèt. Yo manje tantine e yo manje tonton. Yo manje marèn, yo manje parin*" "They ate the mother, they ate the father. Ah, my friend the cat, you are dishonest. They ate the auntie and they ate the uncle. They ate the godmother, they ate the godfather' (my translation), precede a brief passage from a speech from the president. They are followed by an old-fashioned *konpa* song by the Orchestre Septentrional, "Duvalier à vie." The song "Duvalier à vie" ironically praises Duvalier immediately and follows the nasal voice of François Duvalier reciting a populist message.

⁴¹This part of the speech hints at the segment of the population that will be victimized. "Populations du nord-ouest, du nord, de l'Artibonite, peuple du sud ouest, peuple de la grande Anse, classe moyenne de Port-au-Prince, intellectuels, maîtres de la pensée et de l'art, professeurs, instituteurs, étudiants, ils ont décidé de vous ignorer. Ils sont devenus fous (Cheering and clapping)."

Heard not seen, Papa Doc delivers a campaign speech with noirist undertones over the movie's sober black and white opening credits. Raoul Peck introduces early in the film the tone of cruelty inherent to the Duvalier dictatorship so that his conspicuous absence looms large in *L'homme sur les quais's* depiction of the climate of terror that plagues an unidentified small Haitian town in the early 1960s. In a pivotal scene later in the film, the figure of Papa François materializes as a black and white photograph hung on the walls of a bar. As the camera pans on a street where a man drags on a cart heavy with bags and women sit outside at their stalls surrounded with white and pastel-colored colonial wooden houses bathed in the harsh sunlight, a speeding black car cuts through and interrupts the chitchat in the background. The film's musical theme, the song *Twa Fèye*, distills its longing melancholy: "Twa fèye, twa rasin' ho, jete blie ranmasse sonje. Il y a si longtemps de ça. (pause) Pourtant c'était hier."

Singing the song is the voice of an adult woman with a faint Creole accent. To transport his audience back in time, Peck adds in the background the non-diegetic sound of a wooden boat swinging on the sea to the diegetic sound of leaves stirred in the wind. The director also uses voiceover narration to introduce his protagonist's narrative, Sarah. Sarah's "Il y a si longtemps de ça. Pourtant c'était hier" signals that her narrative will be told from the point of view of an adult Haitian woman parsing childhood memories of her former self as a little girl experiencing the trauma of a violent dictatorship. Her out of sequence personal memories function as a highly subjective but nonetheless reliable narrative thread to the historical origins of the first wave of Haitian emigration. Peck's Increasingly targeted by François Duvalier's new policy, the Haitian mulatto and black upper middle class and bourgeoisie start to leave the country. Peck's non-linear film chronicles the starting point of the Haitian diaspora as deeply traumatizing and personal events in the life of little Haitian girl.

When her parents flee Haiti for Cuba in the early 1960s, Sarah's world crumbles. After unsuccessfully hiding in the town's convent, Sarah (Jennifer Zubar) and her sisters stay out of sight in their bourgeois grandmother's attic but an impromptu visit by Janvier force them to leave in the open. She and her two sisters have been left in the care of their aunt Zélide (Mireille Métellus) and their grandmother Camille Desrouillère (Toto Bissainthe), a defiant bourgeois store owner who pays dearly for her confrontational disapproval. It is from the balcony of this attic, that Sarah had accidentally witnessed the vicious beating and rape of Sorel (Patrick Rameau), her godfather, as her father, Jansson (François Latour), confronted Janvier (Jean-Michel Martial), his then subaltern officer, about his extreme use of violence. This beating heralds a power switch and the advent of a new political era: Janvier's self-appointment as the new chef de section. Homeless, limping, and uttering nonsensical sentences, Sorel, now nicknamed Gracieux, can under the cover of his madness denounce Janvier's actions: he has because the harmless village's fool.

L'homme sur les quais deploys a personal narrative to chronicle the historical moment when the increasingly repressive regime of François Duvalier triggers the departure of the Haitian middle-class. Peck depicts the small town's increasingly gruesome climate of violence through Sarah's piecemeal recollections of repressed memories. The film slow and deliberate pace, stark use of color, and insertion of strikingly beautiful landscapes contrasts with the oppressive atmosphere and arbitrary retaliation Sarah witnesses. Peck's non-linear film narrative relies on the Haitian memories of a precocious eight-year little girl. The director Sarah as a reliable witness to the violence the military men known Tonton Macoutes exacted on citizens who questioned the regime of François Duvalier. With Sarah's incremental understanding of the militarization of political life, Peck revisits the political climate that caused the dispersal of the Haitian people, the *Haiti du dedans* and the *Haiti du dehors* (Haiti from within and without). He revisits the inception of the Haitian diaspora as the disruption of the ordinary lives of middle-class men and women whose family members disappear,

go in exile, and are tortured. In fact Sarah's personal narrative deployed in *L'homme sur les quais* echoes Raoul Peck's early life in Haiti.

The protagonist's age cannot be read incidentally: Peck's parents left Haiti in 1961 for the *République du Congo* (the present Democratic Republic of the Congo) when he was eight years old after his father, an agronomist, was imprisoned because he had helped farmers organize (Pierre-Pierre). Educated upper middle-class Haitian expatriates filled a crucial void in newly independent Francophone West African nations with virtually no African middle-class to fill positions in the government until then limited to Belgian settlers. Interviewed for the New York Times when *L'homme sur les quais* was released, Peck admits: "It was until after I finished the films I realized how much it came from my own memories." (Pierre-Pierre) In Zaire, his mother, Gisèle Peck, worked as "a secretary to several mayors in Kinshasa" and was privy to the political transition between the colonial Belgian administration and Patrice Lumumba's brief tenure as Prime Minister. As a civil servant close to the political she was in and assassination. Peck's oeuvre focus on violence and his interest in political violence can be directly linked to the François Duvalier dictatorship as a dramatic point of rupture leading to forced emigration.

It is that emigration from Haiti that has shaped Peck as a diaspora Haitian filmmaker and that explains his continued interest in political power, conflict, and violence. Although he depicts political repression during Duvalierism as Peck consistently reveals the crimes committed on behalf of the Duvalier regime through the prism of sexual violence. An early scene at the nun's convent characterizes Capitaine Janvier and the Tontons Macoutes that accompany him as sexual predators. Thus, casting his main character as a little girl allows Peck to heighten the dramatic tension that will carry the audience to the last scene and climax of the film: the point of trauma and the reason for her departure.

The man that Janvier and his henchmen beat and rape with a wooden stick, is Sarah's godfather, Sorel. A poet punished for his denunciation of their crimes when he wrote "Macoute assassin" 'Macoute murderer' in red paint on a wall in the town, Sorel has been beaten up into apparent submission and is now nicknamed Gracieux. In a scene where Gracieux performs patriotism, a poster of François Duvalier glued to buildings briefly appears within the frame. Sorel limps rhythmically to the sound of the national anthem and salutes like a faithful soldier the red and black Haitian flags an invisible crowd. Peck uses camera movements and editing to convey the climate of terror.

Close-ups of loudspeakers and empty streets save for Gracieux's mock military parade hint at the fear of the inhabitants. Like the Tonton Macoutes, the camera's penetrating gaze pries and enters attics behind drawn curtains where upper bourgeois black families (such as Camille Desrouillère's) hide their daughters. It warns that under the François Duvalier's regime no private space is safe. These subtle cues mirror Sarah's fleeting recollection as much as they announce the terrifying (final) scene that gives the film its title. Gracieux/Sorel, the titular man by shore, emerges as the redemptive figure who helps save Sarah and her friend. The shore jogs Sara traumatic memories and brings her back to a second repressed memory: it is associated with Janvier's attempt to rape her, Gracieux/Sorel's intervention, her killing Janvier's murder, and her inevitable departure from Haiti.

The title *L'homme sur les quais* does not allude to a historical moment in the Haitian national narrative but to the film's climax and to the traumatic moment that decides Sarah's traumatic departure. What the music accompanying the opening credits, the plot, and the mise-en-scène convey about Duvalierism, the title of the film barely registers. Strangely removed from Sarah's personal account and memories of terror, the film's title evokes instead a European or American film noir, possibly a mystery or a thriller. It is a film about trauma, childhood, and piecing back a

family's fragmented story by way of fleeting impressions from which the adult self seek to derive meaning. Yet the *quai* implies the shore invoked in the English version of the title and thus suggests departure. By extension *L'homme sur les quais* is also about a nation's dispersal. Interviewed about his cosmopolitanism in 1996, Raoul Peck explains to Clyde Taylor that both a European aesthetics and a Haitian "issue or feeling" strongly permeate his films.

CT: You have an extraordinary international filmmaking record. You've made films in New York, Santo Domingo, Paris, and Germany. How do you feel about that cosmopolitanism? What's "Haitian" about that?

RP: That's something I'm always fighting against. Journalists ask me if I'm a Haitian filmmaker, but that's not the way I relate to my work. The films I make never start with Haiti; they start with an issue or with a feeling, and then I look for a story. It ends up as a Haitian story, but that's only because I know that location well—it's inside of me. To me, it's a joke when critics and the public try to identify what is specifically Haitian in my films. How can I make Haitian films when I have no examples of Haitian films? How do you film your own community when you have never seen an image on the screen of this community? I can easily sit down and write a western without doing research because I've seen hundreds of westerns, but I can't do the same for a scene set among Haitians in Flatbush, Brooklyn. I'm influenced by Charles Burnett, by German cinema, by Cassavetes, Godard. When I look at a film like *Haitian Corner*, I see a quintessentially German film (242).

While nothing in the film's title indicates its Haitian focus, its director alludes to the moment of violence that precipitates the departure abroad. Peck's trajectory and the themes in his internationally known films remain directly or indirectly connected to a defining historical moment

in recent Haiti, the moment of forced departure, the moment of dispersal. As a Haitian diaspora filmmaker, born in Haiti raised in Zaire, educated in Berlin and whose filmography spans Europe, the Caribbean and the United States, Peck has succeeded in integrating selective film festivals, private (HBO, Canal +), public television channels (France Télévisions), and European film institutions (Fonds Sud, CNC, and La FEMIS). Thank to the rise of digital technology, recent Haitian film production, mostly composed of low-budget films, grew exponentially. It essentially emerged out of the necessity to sustain a Haitian national identity and to bridge the gap between the Haitian diaspora and the Haiti *du dedans*. Appadurai's idea of deterritorialization helps understand the advent of new cultural markets.

She Makes (His)-Story: Palcy's Trilogy on Aimé Césaire *Aimé Césaire une voix pour l'histoire*

Euzhan Palcy's 1994 documentary on Aimé Césaire is an epic of documentary. Palcy structures her three-part exploration of Martinican History around Césaire's multi-faceted life as a poet, political figure, and playwright. Written and directed by Euzhan Palcy, the film bears the conceptual mark of two women both Euzhan Palcy and Annick Thebia-Melsan. Aware of their potential, Césaire was instrumental in the success of both women. He took them under his wings and encouraged them to have careers of an international scope. Of Guyanese descent, Thebia-Melsan like Palcy turned out to be a very successful Césaire protégée: she worked at the UN, at UNESCO in the Luis Inacio Lula da Silva administration.

The expansive and didactic format the documentary adopts reflects the historical reportage genre developed in France as if to prove the point that it can stand with the best of its genre. Thebia-Melsan and Palcy had unprecedented access to Césaire and their massive research make the film an extremely valuable teaching tool but this access also informs the tone of their homage. In

fact, what makes *Aimé Césaire une voix pour l'histoire* even more significant is how the film insist on the absolute reverence Césaire deserves. It is valuable because of the boundaries that Palcy and Thébia-Melsan cannot cross. On the one hand the content of the documentary proposes an alternative to Western History but on the other hand this counter-official history, the partial history of Negritude, the significance of decolonization, of the Civil Rights movements, dictatorships (Haiti, Congo-Zaire) echoes remains “l'histoire officielle de la Martinique (certes mimétique à tout point de vue de l'idéologie occidentale (Glissant *Le discours antillais*, 238).”

Euzhan Palcy portrays Aimé Césaire as an emblematic literary, political, world-class figure of the African Diaspora, whose verb and actions are prophetic and whose stature elicits respectful comments from French intellectuals of all stripes but also from international figures. In this regard, Palcy and Thébia-Melsan appoints Césaire as a Caribbean hero to be recognized by others (the world cultural stage) since as Glissant defiantly remarked “Les héros d'autrui ne sont pas les nôtres, nos héros par force sont d'abord, ceux d'autrui” Glissant *Le discours antillais*, 235). They alternate interviews from a wide scope of artistic, political, and literary figures and include major figures (or their family members) from the African diaspora such as Maya Angelou to Juliana Lumumba (Patrice Lumumba's daughter) Lou Laurin Lam, (Wilfredo Lam's wife) with relevant archival footage.

The interviews place Césaire high in the Pantheon of thinkers, poet, and political figures. The tone of the three-part documentary is overwhelmingly laudatory. *Aimé Césaire, une voix pour l'histoire* is a prime example of what Edouard Glissant has recognized in *Le discours antillais* as a New World “dangerous longing” for history (152). The abundant use of archives lends the film an encyclopedic as well as an historical feel. Aimé Césaire essentially appears as the first stone in the edifice of Caribbean, African identities and beyond. Very few interviewees points out to Césaire's contradictions. In their article “When the Detour Leads Home: The Urgency of Memory and the

Liberation Imperative from Aimé Césaire to Frantz Fanon,” Cilas Kemedjio and R. H. Mitsch remark that: “The absence of a certain Caribbean intellectual world, for example Edouard Glissant or the writers of Créolité is striking (192).” In fact, Kemedjio deplores later that: “The notable absence of any contradictory discourse, however, deprives the film production of an opportunity to inscribe Césaire’s work in the Antillean debate, that is the contradiction, the paradoxes, political and cultural, that surrounds Post-departmentalization Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guyane”.

Conspicuously absent are comments about Césaire’s contradictory political and intellectual legacy from Raphaël Confiant. Confiant’s symbolical parricide of “Papa Césaire” with the controversial publication in 1993 of his book: *Aimé Césaire: une Traversée paradoxale du siècle*. Only Martinican historian Edouard Delepine and Guadeloupean novelist and playwright Maryse Condé, overtly acknowledge but then downplay their disagreement with Césaire’s policies as député. Maryse Condé, for instance justifies her embracing Césaire’s inconsistencies when she realized that the contradictions between his incendiary texts against French colonialism such as *Discours sur le colonialisme* and his goal to achieve economic equality with France through Departmentalization reflect the contradictions of most *Antillais*.

Euzhan Palcy’s documentary *Aimé Césaire: une voix pour l’histoire* nonetheless questions Western versions of History. Palcy focuses on Césaire’s exceptional career: his historical contribution on the world stage. The documentary exudes authority and elevates the Martinican poet, essayist, playwright, and politician to historical stature. The affirmation of Césaire as a Martinican towering figure is a means to contest the supremacy of French history and the writing of Martinican history through the film medium. However Palcy’s steering clear of internal political controversies regarding Césaire’s legacies speaks to another dimension of the historical film narratives written in the documentary form, in Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe: how the personal affects the political and vice-versa. This contributionist tradition partially erases polemics and may

distort, as Glissant has pointed: “Le continu apparent, c’est la périodicisation de l’histoire de France, la succession des gouverneurs, l’évidente simplicité des conflits de classe, les épisodes minutieusement étudiés par nos “historiens”, de nos révoltes sans cesse avortées (Glissant *Discours* 270).

Le passage du milieu: Reclaiming Modernity Through Abstract Storytelling

In *Le passage du milieu* Deslauriers breaks most of the tenets of the Classical Hollywood Style. Watching this film involves being confronted with a static plot, having no immediate understanding of the protagonist, seeing no identifiable protagonist, being denied a tight cause and effect chain of actions. The audience experiences no swift movement towards the resolution of a conflict. To further destabilize his audience, Deslauriers has several of his characters look at the camera as if to ask the audience to bear witness. The familiar viewing experience of identifying with one character is replaced with the burden of having to search throughout the film for an individual that carries the narrative forward. Anonymous African captives stare straight at the camera. They may not be the disembodied male narrator and yet could be him. Instead the spectator is invited to experience the middle leg of the transatlantic slave trade from the point of views of the African men, women, and children crammed the hold. He explained at the Sundance film festival: “Ce n’est pas un regard extérieur ou le point de vue du pont, d’un marin ou d’un capitaine. Au contraire l’idée était de traiter ces personnes-là comme des ombres, des silhouettes. L’idée, c’était de ne pas s’attacher à eux mais de s’attacher surtout aux captifs (Gatto and Polinacci).”

Unlike *Amistad*, *Le passage du milieu* is not a mainstream feature film but a *docufiction*, a fiction documentary. In “Entretien avec Guy Deslauriers: le points de vue des captifs,” a 1998 interview conducted with *Africultures* while he was still in the pre-production stage of *Le passage du milieu*, Guy

Deslauriers explained to Olivier Barlet how defining the film as a docu-fiction helped him overcome many of limitations:

Allier un récit documentaire à un récit fiction permet de renforcer la réalité de bon nombre de scènes et d'aller plus loin dans la dramatisation. Il existe de nombreux documents écrits mais très peu d'images: des gravures ne retranscrivant pas la totalité de la réalité puisqu'étant toujours le regard de l'Autre sur la cale. Il nous paraissait important de fixer les choses autrement: Le passage du milieu est un récit qui vient de la cale. C'est le récit omniscient d'un esclave et la reconstitution de scènes vues de la cale.

The story told is literally the journey of a slave ship and its cargo from Africa to the Americas. It is presented from the single point of view of the unidentified male slave who is the film's omniscient narrator: "And me just another black body in a sea of black despair." The cast includes unknown actors since only unknown actors can represent nameless Africans. In *Le passage du milieu*, conventional plot, dialogue, and characterization are conspicuously absent. Instead the audience encounters non-conventional cinematic language: an off-screen narrative voice, slow-motion effects, repetition, and overwhelmingly sorrowful non-diegetic music. The comfort of a straightforward multi-layered identification with a single character is denied to the spectator. Screenwriters Patrick Chamoiseau and Claude Chonville, director Guy Deslauriers, director of photography Jacques Boumendil, and editor Aïlo Auguste make a conscious effort to translate a pan-Caribbean aesthetics through abstract modes of storytelling.

Panoramic views of the ship sailing across the sea, barely lit scenes from within the hold of the ship, and flashbacks of serene daily life at an African village juxtaposed with the violence of capture function as plot elements that are not narrative-based. In *Le passage du milieu*, the plot

consists of seemingly disparate elements that are interspaced in the beginning, middle, and end of the ship's voyage. These elements in their abstractedness also present the voyage as a cultural process. Recurrent yet always ever changing wide-angle shots of the ship gliding across the ocean mark the passing of time and the voyage's progress but they also imbue the iconic image of the ship with a different meaning. Panoramic shots of the ship alternate with the captives' inhuman living conditions in the hold, their incremental understanding of what the voyage is about, the meeting of the cultural legacies of the crew and of the African captives and the nature of their interaction with the ship crew reconfigure the ship as visual concept. Editor Aïlo Auguste's insertion of abstract panoramic shots of the ship between brief more legible repetitive sequences posits the ship as the first island and as the original site of Creolization. This visual rendering of Creolization harkens back to the theories of Edouard Glissant in *Le discours antillais* and *Poétique de la relation*.

As Martinican intellectuals, speaking for and to the African diaspora, Guy Deslauriers, Patrick Chamoiseau and Claude Chonville characterize the middle-passage as the pivotal moment of pan-Caribbean History. In "Framing the 'Black' in Black Diasporic Cinema," his introduction to *Cinemas of the Black Diaspora: Diversity, Dependence, and oppositionality*, Michael T. Martin proposes a definition of what he calls the "black diaspora" that *Le passage du milieu* echoes: "the black diaspora exists over time and space, and is a historical formation of the capitalist world system. It is dynamic, plastic and transnational, intersecting First and Third World, across African, the Americas, and Asia to the metropolises of western Europe and North America. Migration and displacement, Social oppression and resistance are among its key features" (Martin 4). In order to be transcribed as cinematic discourse, and as a collective diasporic experience, the slave trade and the establishment of plantation societies in the New World can only be articulated by an omniscient and disembodied male voice by way of storytelling for Deslauriers, Chonville, and Chamoiseau.

Adopting storytelling as a mode of narration rather than the conventional hegemonic narrative of official History signals their rejection and marginalization of the Western canon, and the dissemination of an abstract Caribbean historical rewriting that is visually compelling, unsettling, and authoritative while emanating from the subaltern. This dissemination is facilitated because it is part of a larger discourse on the African diaspora. Ruth Simms Hamilton defines the African diaspora: “As a social formation, [it is] conceptualized as a global aggregate of actors and subpopulations, differentiated in a social and geographical space, yet exhibiting a commonality based on historical factors, conditioned by and within the world ordering system (18).” It is that discourse that was recognized selections at Sundance and the Toronto film festival, and an exhibition and a distribution deal via DVD with the premium cable channel HBO films.

Recovering the Voice of the African Captive: the Slave Ship Dance

Released in France on February 14, 2001, the film begins with a series of three brief white inter-titles against a black background. In *The Middle-Passage*, Guy Deslauriers’ English dubbed HBO film version of *Le passage du milieu* music and dance act both as narrative elements that propel the narrative and as theoretical cues. The first inter-title⁴² retraces the economic origins of the triangular slave trade while the second inter-title dwells on the human cost of the slave trade and locates the forced migration of African captives as a site of origin for the African Diaspora. The third inter-title, an unfinished sentence, introduces the Middle Passage as a theoretical manifest and as a route/root

⁴² “For nearly four hundred years, in order to exploit resources of the New World, Europe maintained a trade route between the Americas, Africa, and its own mercantile ports.” Inter-title 1
“The dark side of this triangular trade deported untold numbers of Africans to North America, the Caribbean, And South America. Millions died at sea.” Inter-title 2

to identity politics.⁴³ The explanations offered in the inter-titles provide a historical contextualization of the film title before the audience sees the opening sequence of the film. In the opening sequence of the film, the film title, *The Middle-Passage*,⁴⁴ appears in white letters against the rolling of dark waves seen from a large ship. The ship does not appear on the screen yet. Initially only sound, camera motion and position suggest the presence of the ship.

A high-angle point of view shot from the ship reveals the sea; the camera movement follows the rolling of the sea; the sound of the mast and the cracking sound of a large wooden structure swayed by the wind and the sea signal the presence of the ship. In the opening sequence, the sound of violin coupled with the light crash of waves introduces melancholy and the main musical theme as the film credits rolls. The musical theme sets the film's lyrical tone. They close with the epitaph "In memory of my father, Georges..." The heaviness of the opening sequence is counteracted by a considerable leap in time. The inter-titles have situated the opening sequence within the time period of the slave trade. The next sequence is set in the present day and features the arrival of a ten year old black child walking on a beach bordered by palm trees towards a postcard beautiful Caribbean blue sea. This reassuring scene is cut short by a disembodied and dignified "African" voice.⁴⁵

⁴³ "This route will forever haunt history
Under the name of..." Inter-title 3
The middle-Passage."

⁴⁴ Here I am using the English title in translation because I am quoting the voiceover from the DVD produced by HBO. Otherwise I am using the original French title *Le passage du milieu*.

⁴⁵ The child who looks out over this ocean cannot imagine the terror it holds. It is beyond him to understand what took place under these waters. No hurricane or mythological sea demon can compare to the dreadful fate visited upon the black skin and humanity. This bloody sea. [Close up on the face of the child staring at the sea many shades of blue]. When it comes time to teach our children [the child frowns slightly] about this malevolent age, we must remember the holocaust in its entirety. This will prove to be a difficult task [extreme close-up of the child's worried face, cut to the blue sea] many of us seek to forget or even deny the monumental genocide and the enslavement of millions. [The boy has now become a black silhouette framed by the blue sea and the white sand] For others, it may seem like some long forgotten past but for me it was only yesterday [sound of tools against shackles, cut to slow motion sepia-colored sequence showing legs of African captives in shackles].

Because the child stares at the sea and sees nothing that the African captive has described, the duty of the disembodied narrative voice is to inflict on him —that is to inflict on the uninformed audience—a reconstruction of the voyage in the hold: the middle-passage as a long agony. Chamoiseau’s and Deslauriers’ didactic purpose becomes evident once the child is understood as the pretext for a purported audience. Their goal is to recover a historical narrative that cannot be recovered. Their film echoes Derek Walcott’s marine recovery of Caribbean history in the poem “Sea is History”:

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
In that that gray vault. The sea. The sea
Has locked them up. The sea is History.

This recovery is apparent in the unusual title of the film: *Le passage du milieu*. As the Anglicism of the French title indicates, the construction of this historical narrative does not take place in a vacuum. The film directly inscribes itself in a Caribbean theoretical continuum. When asked about the title in a 1998 *Africultures* interview, Deslauriers replied: “Il vient du terme anglais *Middle Passage* qui désignait le deuxième temps du voyage triangulaire Europe-Afrique-Antilles-Europe. Les esclaves passent d’un continent à l’autre, en rupture définitive avec la terre des ancêtres, ce que certains auteurs antillais ont décrit comme la mort de l’Africain et la renaissance d’un être nouveau.” Deslaurier’s allusion to the death of the African captive on the New-World bound slaveship designates the vessel as the site where the process of creolization begins.

Part of the challenges of watching *Le passage du milieu* is also the non conventional use of multiple points of view and the inability for the viewer to physically identify the male narrative voice among the sea, or collective body, of African captives that untypically look directly at the camera. Trained by narrative conventions to identify with one protagonist, the spectator looks for the

narrator among the collective group of chained captives. Heard but not seen, the male narrative voice is a spectral presence that morphs into an omniscient narrator transported back to a village Senegambia, or in abstract panoramic establishing shots of the ship gliding across the sea. Guy Deslauriers's and Aïlo Auguste's, his editor, clever bait and switch scheme increases the discomfort of the spectator who is perpetually being lost and misled: uncertain and yet lulled by the rhythm of the slave ship and the absent yet authoritative historical narrative voice. They trap us in a monotonous cinematic experience that echoes the plight of those chained to the hold.

With *Le passage du milieu*, Deslauriers, Chonville, and Chamoiseau also take to task the French literary canon, particularly nineteenth century literary narratives about the slave trade. One such equivocal text is "*Tamango*," a short story published in 1829 by Prosper Mérimée. Considering that Guy Deslauriers studied and taught literature and that Caribbean novelist Patrick Chamoiseau co-wrote the screenplay with Claude Chonville deemed it necessary to speak back to the métropole. They replaced ambivalent Western literary constructions of *la traite* with an abstract and disorienting rumination on the slave trade.

In his article "The Strange Career of 'Tamango': From Prosper Mérimée's 1829 Novella to its 1958 adaptation," Raphaël Lambert examines what he calls "Mérimée's Ambivalent Plea for the Abolition of the Slave Trade" (190). He points that the novella's ambiguity lies in the fact that Mérimée's relies on a multiplicity of points of view "as if the narrator was trying to satisfy readers with opposite sensibilities (190)." Whether "*Tamango*" is anti or pro-slavery is not entirely clear. As Lambert points out: "Mérimée chose to publish *Tamango* in *Revue de Paris*, a new literary magazine that published noted abolitionists like Benjamin Constant and Victor Schoelcher, which vouches for Mérimée's sincerity about ending the slave trade (190)." Both protagonists in the novella, the enterprising but venal French slave trader Capitaine Ledoux, and Tamango, the eponymous strapping and unpredictable African warrior, are morally corrupt. Mérimée portrays Ledoux as

solely driven by profit and Tamango as someone who sells African men, women, and children and kills arbitrarily. He also asserts the superiority of French civilization by contrasting Ledoux's superior intellect and resourcefulness with Tamango's physical strength and endurance.

Twenty-five years after Saint-Domingue became Haiti, the unimaginable independence of Haiti still caused angst. The author of *Carmen* published a short story that ends with the bloody rebellion of African captives and their inability to govern themselves fourteen years after the *Traité de Paris*.⁴⁶ Under Tamango's leadership the captives rise up against the members of crew serving on the ship and brutally massacre every one of them only to be unable to control the vessel and die at sea of thirst and hunger. Tamango remains the sole survivor and yet he is now harmless as a drunkard in Jamaica.

Screenwriters Chonville and Chamoiseau chose to revisit a passage in "Tamango" that was particularly demeaning to the African captives: the excerpt about the slave ship dance. In the short story, the Capitaine Ledoux justifies the dance of African captives on the deck as an economically sound decision: "son bois d'ébène se maintenait sans avaries (190)." The daily exercise is a matter of keeping the human cargo in good physical shape. *Le passage du milieu* revisits Mérimée's ambiguous parable on the slave trade but the film espouses the perspective of the African captives without falling into the trap of heroic characterization. Like *la Recouvrance*, the ship that carries its cargo to the New World and witnesses already the process of creolization, *Le passage du milieu* is a recovery of the silenced voice of the captive, of the sea as history that is echoed in Edouard Glissant's quotations of Kamau's Brathwaite's "The Unity is Submarine" and "The Sea Is History," Derek Walcott's famous poem quoted in *Le discours antillais* (238 and 270) and *Poétique de la relation* (11-17). Unlike Mérimée's violent characterization, the African men and women packed in the hold are not

⁴⁶ Raphaël Lambert explains: "On the occasion of the Treaty of Paris (1815), restored Bourbon monarch Louis XVIII had been compelled to sign a treaty with England whereby France forswore slave-trading activities (190)."

responsible for the massacre of the ship's crew unable to steer the ship and by extension but would rather take their own life and jump ship.

Le passage du milieu as an Anti *Amistad*

Le passage du milieu proved a perfect fit for HBO 2002 Black History month programming. Deslauriers' and Chamoiseau's lyrical film matched the cable channel trend-setting reputation, as it subverts the Classical Narrative Cinema, the dominant narrative cinematic conventions. According to film scholars David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, these conventions call for a seamless narrative style achieved through characterization, verisimilitude, continuous editing, sound, and mise-en-scène with little if any narration. Guy Deslauriers' film *Le passage du milieu* the French-financed low-budget film (Euros 700, 000)⁴⁷ only marginally compares to Steven's Spielberg's star-driven, big-budget epic *Amistad* (with an estimated \$40.000.000 budget).⁴⁸ Yet, once this unusual film by a filmmaker of Martinican-descent hit the international film festival circuit, it was miraculously bought by HBO and adapted in English before it was shown on cable TV, albeit to a restricted audience on February 9, 2002 for Black History month, *Le passage du milieu* joined a number of significant historical narratives chronicling the African experience. One week earlier, HBO had also premiered, *Lumumba*, a fiction film by Haitian *diaspora* filmmaker Raoul Peck. By becoming *The Middle-Passage* under the impulse of HBO Films, *Le passage du milieu* was granted wider distribution (HBO Films) and visibility than most film narratives about and from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Haiti.

Hounsou: From Body on Display to Historical Voice

⁴⁷ According to Guy Deslauriers.

⁴⁸ Figures compiled and available on imdb.com.

Ironically, Djimon Hounsou, the actor who played, Cinque, the lead African character who instigated the African mutiny in the violent opening sequence of *Amistad*, lent his voice to the English narration of *Le passage du milieu*, *The Middle-Passage*. In many respects, the English adaptation of *The Middle Passage* may be read as a revision of Spielberg's *Amistad*. While *Amistad* was released in 1997 and *The Middle-Passage* in 2000, both recount slavery in its relation to history, whether that History spells with a capital H as in *Amistad* or takes the shape of storytelling in *Le passage du milieu*. In a personal interview, Walter Mosley who helped adapting the intertitles and the voiceover from *Le passage du milieu* into *The Middle Passage* stressed that Djimon Hounsou was passionate about his narrating the English version of *The Middle-Passage*.⁴⁹

After being the object of the Spielberg's gaze in *Amistad* (1997) (where he plays the leader of the African captives and besides "give us free" speaks a few lines in a non-identified African dialect) and being the object of Ridley Scott's gaze in *Gladiator* (2000), Hounsou ceases to be a commodity valued for his physical attributes in Deslauriers' and Mosley's adaptation of *Passage du milieu* in English. Instead, in *The Middle-Passage* the English-speaking version of *Passage du milieu*, Hounsou becomes an omniscient and anonymous historian of the slave trade. As a disembodied ghostlike figure, he endorses the role of the authoritative storyteller. From body on display, Hounsou becomes disembodied voice. Not only does he dis/embody capital H history by performing storytelling but as the surrogate voice of Deslauriers', Chonville's and Chamoiseau's didactic yet unconventional historical narrative, Hounsou challenges mainstream narratives about the African Diaspora.

⁴⁹ Chonville, Chamoiseau, and Deslauriers carefully selected the narrative voice for *Le passage du milieu*: Maka Kotto, a respected Cameroonian actor who was also cast in a supporting role in Raoul Peck's fiction film *Lumumba* is the narrator in the original French version of *Le passage du milieu*.

Le passage du milieu's unusual trajectory can be explained both by its successful integration into the circuit of film festivals attended by professionals in the TV and movie industry and its unconventional narrative style. First selected at the Toronto film festival in September 2000, then at Sundance in January 2001, the French-Caribbean film was noticed by African American producer Sam Martin at HBO Films. Coincidentally, Walter Mosley, who had already worked with HBO on the screen adaptation of his novel *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned*, attended a private screening of *Le passage du milieu*. He was immediately won over by “the tension between the language (poetic) and the images (stoic)” but thought that the translation done by a francophone translator “did not work” (Mosley, Personal Interview). Although he does not speak French fluently, Mosley noted that the voice over narration « did not have the same drama as the French» and offered to collaborate with the translator on the English version of the French text written by Claude Chonville and adapted into a screenplay by Patrick Chamoiseau.

That Patrick Chamoiseau's is well known in literary American academic circles as a prolific novelist, the recipient of France's highest literary prize, the Prix Goncourt, for his novel *Texaco* in 1992, and as co-author of the seminal essay *In Praise of Creoleness* only gave the project more *cachet*. The collaboration of accomplished novelists from the French and English speaking African diaspora involved in maintaining *Le passage du milieu*'s integrity without cinematic and within existing literary discourses contributed to lifting the film from its obscurity. The name of the slave ship in *The Middle-Passage* “la Recouvrance” ‘the Recovery’ is a reminder of Patrick Chamoiseau's and Guy Deslauriers' commitment to a historical endeavor: what they call the *devoir de mémoire*, as they take upon themselves the task to remember and to inscribe Martinican capital H history by rewriting historical narratives passed on by a voiceover narrator that is more than a *marqueur* or *marqueuse de parole*. And although both filmmakers engage in historical recovery, Deslauriers' (and screenwriter Chamoiseau's) recovery extends to appropriation. This is precisely how *The Middle-Passage*, especially

in its English version subverts a mainstream film like *Amistad*: by not even providing a Cinque as a point of reference to the audience, by not staging Cinque as an actor, as in a character within History, but by forcing into the audience not only the dredging experience of listening to a non-identified surrogate Cinque but also by having that nameless African captive propose his own abstract and theoretical rendition of the middle passage.

The idea for *The Middle-Passage*, originated both in the French 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the French West Indies (1848) in 1998 and in Chonville's, Chamoiseau's, and Deslauriers' refusal to let their history be told by outsiders. Chonville's, Chamoiseau's, and Deslauriers' commitment to produce a film that presents a Caribbean historical perspective of the slave trade is evident in their unusual title. While a title such as *Amistad* alludes to a straightforward historical event (a successful African mutiny aboard a Spanish slave ship in 1839, followed by two controversial trials in Connecticut), the original French title *Le passage du milieu* has little historical bearing to a French ear. This is because the phrase "Le passage du milieu" is not an idiomatic French phrase. It is obviously the French rendition of the English phrase the middle passage.

Unlike *La Amistad*, the literal name of a ship bestowed by a colonial power, the phrase "the middle-passage" is not concrete and straightforward but abstract. The abstract title alludes to in-between-ness and to the various processes of creolization that took place during the voyage. As a title *The Middle Passage* is a deliberate leap of language that draws attention to the conceptual idea of the slave-trade as it could have been formulated by the slaves themselves and it has theoretically been formulated their descendents throughout the Americas.

Anglophone and Opaque: Theorizing the Caribbean Diaspora in a Title

The film's title announces the film's exclusively Caribbean point of view on *la traite*. A choice that Deslauriers explained at the Sundance film festival where his film was selected in January 2001:

Au départ, le scénario consistait en un dialogue *off*, cette voix répondant à celle d'un capitaine. C'était les deux points de vue qui s'opposaient. Puis on a décidé de supprimer le point de vue du capitaine car c'est un point de vue qu'on retrouve dans beaucoup de travaux précédents sur le sujet, et on n'a gardé que le point de vue de la cale, du captif anonyme parlant au nom de tous.

Deslauriers and Chamoiseau's erasure of an imagined dialogue between the captain of a slaveship and the voice of an African captive is significant. Their erasure signals the political stakes that often inform French West Indian filmmaking practice. For authors and filmmakers whose identity is shaped both by a declining Caribbean culture, European and French political status, and an economy defined by French and European institutions, inhabiting the cultural landscape on their own terms by contesting and affirming their identity through a budding, fragmented, and marginal filmmaking practice is an act of political dissension. So is their choice of the French translation of the English phrase "middle-passage" to summarize the voyage of the African captives as a process of the "slave trade" (*la traite* in French).

Titles in French...

Even titles in French that seem transparent such as *Le passage du milieu* and *Biguine* require decoding. *Le passage du milieu* is the literal translation in French of The Middle-Passage and refers to the journey of African captives on slave trading ships across the Atlantic. This title draws on a wide spectrum of Caribbean theoretical frameworks and tropes: from the excavation of the Caribbean historical past from vault that is the sea Derek Walcott poem's the "Sea is History", in *The Star-Apple*

Kingdom, to the ship, the trope of modernity in Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-consciousness* and Edouard Glissant's Creolization process of transformation that already occurs on the ship en route to the Americas, as defined in *Caribbean Discourse*. As an English idiomatic phrase translated into French, the title *Le passage du milieu* also speaks back to V.S. Naipaul's comment on the degree of assimilation of Martinique in his *Middle-Passage: Impressions of Five Societies: British, French and Dutch-in the West Indies and South America*: "They are Black but they are Frenchmen. For Martinique is France, a legally constituted department of France, so assimilated and integrated that France, or what is widely supposed to be that country, is officially seldom mentioned by name. "M. Césaire est en Métropole," the Chef-de-cabinet said to me, as though M. Césaire had simply motored down to the country for a long week-end and hadn't flown 3,000 miles to Paris." (Naipaul 192-193) 1981 edition The French title in translation posits the film against French cultural assimilation and within black Atlantic discourses of affirmation and contestation.

...That Mirror a Caribbean Aesthetics

When director Guy Deslauriers, Claude Chonville and screenwriter Patrick Chamoiseau translate Naipaul's title into French, they are not merely questioning Martiniquan assimilation, they are invoking pan-Caribbean theories and translating onto the screen a Caribbean aesthetics. Their stake at claiming a distinctive historical past is also revealed by their choice of narrative device. A cross between a documentary and a fiction film, *Le passage du milieu* reads as an abstract film, without a plot or identifiable characters. Circular in structure, the film recreates an endless cross-Atlantic journey for the sake of teaching history to a present day ten-year Caribbean boy. Guided only by an anonymous masculine voice, the boy/spectator accompanies a collective body of African captives as they plunge in the hold of the slave-ship, an abyss of excrement and piss. Once decoded, films such as *The Middle-Passage* and *Biguine* attempt to erode French cultural assimilation by contributing

to a collective pan-American, and pan-African collective memory. *Biguine* is another film by Guy Deslauriers that revisits Edouard Glissant's theory of Creolization but this time through the birth of a musical genre that borrows element from several cultural traditions: *bèlè*, *tambou bèlè*, tinting, (triangle), *lanva*, and *Kavalè è danm* and Polish, Austrian polka and *mazurka*).

The choice of a non-idiomatic phrase *Le passage du milieu* for a French financed film represents the horrors of the middle-passage deliberately casts doubt on the ability of the French language to render the harrowing voyage of the slave. More importantly, the English-inflected title *Le passage du milieu* also casts doubt on the ability of French theory to be inclusive of French Caribbean (post) colonial theory. The métropole fails to hear and answer recriminations made by intellectuals from its former and current colonies. Parts of these recriminations revolve around the erasure, revision, and the rewriting of French colonial history and the acknowledgement of the African diaspora as a site of cultural and economic production.

In his seminal essay, "Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films", Teshome Gabriel identifies three phases in the genealogy of Third World filmmaking: the unqualified assimilation, the remembrance phase, and the combative phase. It is questionable whether Guy Deslauriers and Patrick Chamoiseau through their collaboration on films of historical nature and their concern for the *devoir de memoire* neatly fit into remembrance phase "category". However, Gabriel's attempt in identifying stylistic features of the remembrance phase, the use of space and landscape described as a form in indigeneisation by Gabriel stands out in Deslauriers and Chamoiseau's films: "the sense of a spatial orientation in cinema in the "Third World" arises out of the experience of an "endless" world of the large Third world Mass. This nostalgia for the vastness of nature projects itself into the film form resulting in long takes and long or wide shots. This is often done to constitute part of an overall symbolization of a Third World thematic orientation, i.e., the landscape depicted ceases to be

mere land or soil and acquires a phenomenal quality which integrates humans within the general drama of existence itself (*Cinemas of the Black Diaspora* 73).

While the grim *mise-en-scène* in *Le passage du milieu* may recall the experience in the hold as Edouard Glissant recounted it in *Poetics of Relation* (4-5), Deslauriers and Chamoiseau are less interested in telling a Caribbean story with characters that will figure high in the pantheon of Caribbean History than to inflict upon their viewers (the ghost, the memory of) an harrowing experience. This harrowing experience, taking viewers on the nauseating and agonizing voyage of the slaves in the ship hold, would be almost impossible to translate in its entirety, even more so faithfully if it wasn't for existing literary images of the middle passage. The anonymous male historical voice of *Le passage du milieu* revisits Derek Walcott's poem "The Sea is History," and brings a collective and human dimension to Walcott's blunt "the shit, the moaning:"

"We wallow in piss, in shit, in festering wounds. Soon the first epidemic is upon us [insert of light coming from above the hold; cut to a bucket filled with unsanitary water]. Was it dysentery? Scurvy? Yellow fever? Was it small pox? They all took their toll, ravaging our holes with pestilence, sending an untold numbers to a watering grave (14:00)."

Deslauriers and Chamoiseau's goals in *Le passage du milieu* is not so much to convey verisimilitude than to produce a film that is a vehicle of Caribbean theoretical identity. As its conceptual Anglophone title indicates *The Middle Passage* witnesses an abrupt moment of in-between, a delivery on sea between lands, the cultural leap of naked captive African migrant bodies. But if Chamoiseau, Deslauriers, and Auguste abandon the legible classic cinematic narrative style used in *Exil du Roi Béhanzín* for a 'self-proclaimed' "docufiction", if they deconstruct an historical trauma as an abstract rumination narrated by the voice of a faceless male slave, it is to propose a cinematic reading of the making of the Americas that begins with organic tropes of Caribbean Aesthetics.

Stylistically, *The Middle Passage* draws from an array of Caribbean theories and tropes that Ian Baucom notes in “Specters of the Atlantic” are shared across the French, English, and Spanish-speaking Caribbean (68).⁵⁰ Mamadiou Diouf remarked that unlike Aimé Césaire Glissant considers that Caribbean history begins with the slave trade not with Africa.⁵¹ Although it is no secret that Chamoiseau and Deslauriers are heavily influenced by the work of Edouard Glissant, they have connected Caribbean and African history in two of their fictions: *L’exil du roi Béhanzîn* and *Le passage du milieu*.

In their expansive analysis of the Martinican’s intelligentsia attempts at “appropriat[ing] and subvert[ing] central ideas associated with modernity,” anthropologists Richard and Sally Price identify the limits of Créolistes’ arguments. In “Shadowboxing in ‘The Mangrove,’” Price and Price denounce the ideological “insularity” present in Bernabé’s, Chamoiseau’s, and Confiant’s manifesto *Eloge de la Créolité*. According to them ‘the Créolistes’ lack a pan-Caribbean perspective, in any but a superficial programmatic sense, combined with a (French-inspired) notion of that one nation normally equals one culture, leads them to be genuinely intrigued when they discover that, in the French Antilles, things are different. The idea of multiple identities then becomes not the normal human or Caribbean) state of affairs but a phenomenon in need of explanation, and celebration (Price and Price, 11).”

Among all of Deslauriers and Chamoiseau’s collaborations on film, *The Middle-Passage* is the film that mostly belies the novelist’s and director’s tendency to solely focus on their native island of

⁵⁰ “For at the heart of this scene, at the dense nodal point of this scene of substitutions, reversal, abandonments, recoveries, losses, and gains at the absolute zero point of relational contact, is that image of the drowning human body, an image of the body less than as a contact zone, an image of the drowning human body impoverished and strangely rewarded by “exchange.” And if that metamorphic body functions for Glissant as an entirely genealogical body, as something that is at once the originary body in genealogy of creole identity and a body in insurrection against the disciplinary regimes that seek to produce I (whether as marketable “exchange value” or as the waste matter of cross-Atlantic imperial exchange), then, in this, Glissant is by no means alone. (Baucom “Specters of the Atlantic,” 68)

⁵¹ On September 26, 2008 at the Atlantic Studies conference at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Martinique and clearly embrace a Pan-Caribbean perspective. They situate the film in a tradition of African diasporic discourse drawing on the literary and theoretical imagery of the Caribbean. That cinematic transcription of theories is achieved through shot composition, juxtaposition of European and African musical legacies, voiceover narration, and use of African European based iconography that have become circulating symbols of the African Diaspora. Visual references to Glissant's own selective quoting of Caribbean theory abound in the film: from Derek Walcott's poem "The Sea Is History" to Kamau Brathwaite often coined line "The unity is submarine", not to mention V.S. Naipaul's modern travelogue of the same title. Most strikingly, under the double pen-ship of Deslauriers and Chamoiseau, *Le passage du milieu* proposes a cinematic language the visual and aural transcription of the Creolization process on screen. During the November 1994 panel "Société et littérature dans la Caraïbe aujourd'hui," Patrick Chamoiseau acknowledged Edouard Glissant's lasting influence on his work:

Je crois qu'il n'y a pratiquement aucun thème de mes romans ou *de ce que développe* (my emphasis) qui ne soit d'une certaine manière annoncé, aboré, expliqué par Edouard Glissant, à la fois dans son travail d'analyse, son travail poétique, son travail Romanesque et dans toutes les pistes qu'il a explorées. C'est donc peut-être la formidable capacité d'investigation aux Antilles qui me permet aujourd'hui d'avancer à l'abri du formidable projet littéraire d'Edouard Glissant. (Kemedjio, 216)

Deslauriers and his screenwriters Patrick Chamoiseau and Claude Chonville deliberately adopt a counter-discourse. This counter discourse formulates a Caribbean aesthetics inspired by visual images that quote Diasporic and New World symbols found in Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean theory. For instance *Le passage du milieu*, foregrounds the process of Creolization when it narrates and depicts the African captives' simultaneous loss of language and their creation of a new mother tongue within the historical space of the slave ship. Panoramic shots

of the ship in motion portray the ship as the first island. For Glissant, Creolization begins on the slave ship.

For Edouard Glissant and Paul Gilroy, the ship's voyage to the New World epitomizes modernity: "I have settled on the image of ships in motion between across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organising symbol for this enterprise and as my starting point" (Gilroy *Black Atlantic: Modernity or Double Consciousness*, 4). Throughout the film Deslauriers uses the ship both as a motif that rewrites Western historical narratives: what Fumagalli calls "North Atlantic modernity" (2). *Le passage du milieu* therefore claims the slave trade and the commodification of African bodies as one of the prerequisites to Europe's modernity: "Ships immediately focus attention on the the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone, records, and choirs (*The Black Atlantic: Modernity or Double Consciousness* Gilroy, 4)."

Deslauriers' and Chamoiseau's lyrical film confirmed the cable channel trendsetting status, as it subverts the Classical Narrative Cinema, the dominant cinematic code. According to film scholars David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, attributes of that code are: the foregrounding of a main character the viewer identifies with, desire as this person's primary motive, opposition to the main character's goal by a counterforce, and a climax followed by a resolution. These conventions calls for a seamless narrative style achieved through characterization, verisimilitude, continuous editing, and sound *mise-en-scène* with little if any narration.

Guy Deslauriers chose to work outside of the industry's paradigm. The viewer cannot identify single character with but a collective African captives' body in *Le passage du milieu*. As a spectator one sees and experiences what the captives see. Desire, as a primary motive is irrelevant in the *Le passage du milieu*. In his experiential rumination on the slave trade Deslauriers replaces

motive with Creolization, one of the theories of Caribbean modernity, and uses intertextual and self-aware cinematic language as formal attributes of modernity. Motivation is instead replaced by the voyage of the Ship, as the movie title indicates, and the process that begins on board. By deliberately choosing and translating an English idiom into French, Deslauriers and Chamoiseau chose not only to convey historical weight but also to summon existing Caribbean theories. Rather than using the French idioms “la traversée” namely the voyage or la “traite négrière: the slave trade in French to describe the slave at sea-experience, they opted for a literal translation of English opaque for strictly French speakers, further removing themselves from the French language.

In *Le passage du milieu* Edouard Glissant’s metaphor of the “Open Boat” in *Poetics of Relation* (5-9) simultaneously meets Derek Walcott’s poem “The Sea is History.” The transformation of the surviving captives into a new people, dancing to the sound of violin and violoncello yet defiantly hearing in the ancestral drums beating in their head a call to suicide points to Edouard Glissant’s theory of Creolization in *Caribbean Discourse* (33-34). Recurrent extreme long shots of the ship evoke Paul Gilroy’s metaphor of the ship: “a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion” in the *Black Atlantic* (4). The abstract theoretical language that the film adopts conveys Deslauriers’s and Chamoiseau’s pledge to inscribe in a pan-Caribbean aesthetic their commitment to legitimize French Caribbean cultural production (their commitment to *devoir de mémoire*). Theoretical abstraction is rendered by a total absence of dialogues and the everpresent narration of an anonymous male African captive. Thus Chamoiseau and Deslauriers transcribed into the screen compelling theoretical imagery from the Caribbean. This imagery proposes for Martinique an identity anchored in the Africas and the Americas, not in Europe.

Most historical film narratives about Martinique and Guadeloupe have come to embody an ideological break from the Métropole that serves as a substitute for political dissension. As explained in Chapter 4, “*Sé Grenn Diri Ka Plen Sak*, Darling Légitimus’ career and the Genealogy of

Francophone and Creolophone Caribbean Films,” political, economic and therefore cultural incorporation into the *giron* of the Motherland in 1946, at a time when most colonized countries actively sought independence from Western imperial states, was met in Martinique and Guadeloupe with political tension, armed resistance, repression from France, and intellectual dissension. Chapter 5 contends that affirmation and contestation of Francophone Creolophone identities is one of the few forms of political dissension left to the muted Martinican and Guadeloupean elite talking back to the colonial power.

Martinican and Guadeloupean historical narratives convey the political dissatisfaction of an elite rendered politically unthreatening by Departmentalization and reduced to investing the power of speech through theater literature and film. These forms of cultural production have essentially become cultural substitutes to political action. Reprisals from the French government against the violent political struggle that accompanied calls for independence in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s in Martinique and Guadeloupe and migration of Martinican and Guadeloupean youth to France to fill menial jobs put an end to outright struggle for political independence. Historical film narratives attempt to fulfill a central role in defining an ever shrinking and constantly shifting French Caribbean identity. This shifting Caribbean identity operates on the periphery and yet within the colonial cultural sphere of France.

The credibility of hegemonic nations on the world stage is generally justified by the construction of dominant historical narratives. Consequently, historical narratives carry significant political weight. Most importantly, for non-nations (French and European regions of Martinique and Guadeloupe) and nations existing on the periphery (Haiti), economically, discursively and culturally, historical film narratives are crucial narratives. In films like *Vivre libre ou mourir, 1802 l'Épopée guadeloupéenne* (Guadeloupe), *Aimé Césaire: une voix pour l'histoire* and *Le passage du milieu* (Martinique), *L'homme sur les quais* and *Art Naïf et répression* (Haiti), Intellectuals from the Francophone and

Creolophone Caribbean reclaiming their historical legacy on film seek to disseminate a distinctively non-Westernized interpretation of their past.

As sites of affirmation, and contestation these films propose complex portrayals. Categories, Caribbean, Pan African, Third-World, and Pan-African feminist, however, do not address one significant aspect that defines the aesthetics that permeates the works of these three filmmakers. Oral literature sometimes called Oraliture has long been identified as a preferred narrative device for non-Western cultures but if their treatment of official history is fused with storytelling, it is not solely because of the central role of storytelling in the Caribbean basin. Their treatment of official history is also fused with storytelling because elements of personal history have dictated both their embracing the film medium and their treatment of capital H history.

Both Euzhan Palcy's 1994 three-part documentary: *Aimé Césaire: une voix pour l'histoire* and Raoul Peck's 1991 documentary *Lumumba: la mort du prophète* take Caribbean roots/routes to propose African diasporic narratives through interviews of significant political figures of African-descent. For Creolophone and Francophone filmmakers Raoul Peck (Haitian Diaspora), Euzhan Palcy (Martinique), and Christian Lara (Guadeloupe) the intersection of official History and storytelling directly stems from their personal trajectory.

Palcy and Peck insert historical archival footage into personal and official historical narratives that explore decolonization and the importance of ideology. However, with *Aimé Césaire: une voix pour l'histoire* Palcy does not disclose to the same extent as Peck how her project originated in her personal trajectory and her friendship with Césaire. The connection between History and storytelling is evident in Peck's *L'homme sur les quais*: the personal and the political intersect because of his parents' necessary exile. *1802 l'épopée guadeloupéenne* recalls a crucial historical moment of rebellion against the reestablishment of slavery in the French Caribbean. Guadeloupean filmmaker

Christian Lara, the grandson and brother of prominent local historians, he revisits 1802 in three of his films: *Sucre amer*, *Vivre libre ou mourir*, *1802 l'épopée Guadeloupéenne*. Each film is constructed as a Western grand narrative, yet Lara draws a parallel between 1802 and the Haitian Revolution and therefore lay claim to a modernity that has its origins in the history of the New World.

History, Hearsay, Silence: Claiming a Caribbean Legacy of Violence in Camille Mauduech's *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe*

Returning to the seemingly familiar terrain of Joseph Zobel's novel *La Rue Cases-Nègres* and Euzhan Palcy's film *Rue Cases-Nègres*, Camille Mauduech's *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe* is unprecedented in scope and in meaning. The film is a powerful exercise in the recovery of Martinican history. The historical documentary revisits the September 6, 1948 unsolved and gruesome murder of a *béké*, Guy de Fabrique, in a sugar plantation in Northern Martinique, the arrest of 16 suspected sugar workers, and their ensuing trial in Bordeaux, France on August 19, 1951. The director's relentless investigation and careful reconstruction of that night is one of many aspects of the film. In Camille Mauduech's first historical narrative is first heard not seen. It begins as hearsay dramatically recounted and first reconstructed by the voices of women: an anonymous female voice and the narrative voiceover of the filmmaker's.

Mauduech does not shy away from the violence of the murder. The graphic description at the onset of the film emphasizes how unthinkable the murder of a *béké* at the hand of sugar cane workers is. To contextualize the murder of a *béké* by farmhands, Mauduech also dissects the inner workings of rural economies shaped harsh labor conditions in sugar cane plantations in the 1940s. She connects the murder of Guy de Fabrique to the rise of trade unionism and communism and the political activism of sugar cane workers farmhands who demand fair wages from their *béké* employers. Under the guise of historical reconstitution, the film explores in depth labor disputes

between unionized workers, class warfare within the plantation economy, racial tensions between *békés*, *nègres*, and *coulis* with a national trial in France, the *métropole*, as a backdrop. Fluid, rigorous, and yet challenging, the film deepens the viewers' understanding of the French Caribbean by offering insights into the complex racial and class dynamics between sugar cane workers, managers, and overseers.

Mauduech's use of documentary film to recover history is particularly relevant.

She reconstructs past events in ways that diminish the authority of written Western historical narratives and rewrites them in the form of Caribbean discourse, in the vein of Glissant's *le discours antillais*. Her film incorporates traditional elements such as contextualization and oral testimony but also the setbacks she encountered in shaping a coherent account: denials, fuzzy memory, and most importantly silence.

The director uses her own voice and presence on screen to unify the film's complex but unlike in documentaries produced for broadcast television, her use of voiceover is not meant to be authoritative. The constant presence of the director onscreen serves the function of drawing the viewer in. Following the non-linear narrative and multiple angles presented in the film is exacting on the audience. In fact it is only rewarding if one takes the film on its terms. Mauduech essentially shares with her audience part of the research and writing process of the Caribbean historian-documentarian: the challenges of piecing together past events, of painstakingly going through microfilms, of archiving in thick binders all the information she culled from a multiple sources and organized in a system that privileges the perspectives of several characters: with the few survivors who may or may not talk but were involved in an unthinkable act, in order to make this documentary.

This partial revealing and deconstructing compels the viewer to participate in the mapping of events, to make sense of every little detail then abandon them. But above all it highlights and

acknowledge the impossibility yet the significance of the task at hand. Despite the directors' emphasis on holes in the accounts, her return to the location, her listing the witness, her presenting a factual description, a basic account of that night that may explain what triggered the murder, and propose potential leads, this is not a whodunit. By her presence onscreen the directors sollicit the viewer like a member of the jury at the trial. She ask the spectator to accept that the story meanders. This is shown when she drives her driving all over Martinique in the hope writing righting a story that had been erased.

Restituting the voices and the silences of ordinary people is a form of affirmation and contestation whereby in the French Caribbean the cultural is highly political. History is made by ordinary people. Her goal is not impose a dominant perspective on the murder but to insists on the contradictory nature of historical narratives. She structures the film around the notion of multiple sides to the story. So the object of the documentary is not to get to the truth. In fact she relies on the assumption that documentaries are about truth telling to draw her audience in, create suspense, and generate interest in a nuanced and complex picture of Martinique in the late 1940s.

Her narrative technique allows the viewer to explore in depth the symbolism of the murder, the chronology, the motivation for the murder itself, the trial and its outcome. The film manages in its meandering fluidity to peel layers of information, present multiple narrative threads, to introduce new characters, and dimensions of race, classe, power and role within the plantation economy as a key to understand the complex underpinnings work and life on a Martinican plantation in the late 1940s. This overlapping loses and disorients the viewer before achieving a renewed clarity about the complexities of life in northern Martinican at the time.

Of particular interest is her use of hearsay: rather than unsubstantiated information, hearsay, *on-dit*, for Mauduech is the mark of an insider's version of history. Despite Mauduech's relentless research, questions, and attention to detail, her collecting incomplete testimonies, the last survivors

talk but they leave out crucial information. The interviews and the film posit the controversial idea that for Caribbean historical narratives to be compelling, they need not be written, contributionist (that is celebrate the mark left by great Caribbean men and women), and they need not follow a teleological arc. Au contraire Mauduech repurposes Glissant's discussion of capital H History versus storytelling by demonstrating that history in the Caribbean and in the case of *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe* is not only often deployed on the mode of storytelling, Mauduech solves what Edouard Glissant has called "les affres de l'écrit" (379), the pangs of writing (writing as coming from above, as a passion for the universal, as a form of alienation").

The documentary thus is not about veracity but about the filmmaker giving voices to ordinary men and women who have disrupted the Martinican historical narrative. The film's structure questions the notion of historical accuracy as an attainable or a desirable goal. Instead it validates storytelling as the preferred and inherent form of Caribbean historical narrative. To be predicated on the silence of ordinary men and women who make history, the French Caribbean historical narrative is to be viewed outside of Western parameters. They dictate the narrative to the filmmaker, whose function is to assemble and convey valuable gaps in the story and disseminate them.

Conclusion

Movies such as Arnold Antonin's *Art naïf et repression*, Raoul Peck's *L'homme sur les quais*, Euzhan Palcy's *Aimé Césaire: une voix pour l'histoire*, and Guy Deslauriers's *Le passage du milieu*, respond to imperialist and hegemonic discourses by rewriting Caribbean history from the perspective of Caribbean insiders who questions Western dominant historical narratives (see Chapter 5). For these filmmakers, having the authority to tell history (capital H history) is a claim of cultural

distinctiveness. It is a victory over political assimilation and ultimately a mitigated act of political dissent against the ways in which dichotomies distort and limit our understanding of Haiti and the French Caribbean. Camille Mauduech's film *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe* is a striking departure from conventional historical narrative. The extreme non-linearity of the film suggests that opacity is an essential dimension of Caribbean history. In the 21st century, certain filmmakers have, however, adopted a different kind of oppositional perspective. They question mainstream ideas about Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe by provocatively putting marginality into the center and by breathing new life into the notion of insider's perspective through rattling narratives of de-centering.

Historical films allow Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers to question western narratives through the reappropriation of the notion modernity. In fact how history is narrated, that is the model of historical storytelling chosen to render the Caribbean from the inside mirrors the quandary of French Caribbean identity that has enclosed Haiti in a familiar dichotomy, first black republic but poorest nation on the Western hemisphere, and that has puts French Caribbean Martinique and Guadeloupe in a cultural double-bind that is eminently political for its intellectual community. Directly in the footsteps of African, African-American, Caribbean poets, playwrights, and novelists, filmmakers from Guadeloupe, Haiti, and Martinique have produced historical films that long for the legitimacy of capital H History. The resulting works often fit into categories that speak to the marginality of their voices: Caribbean, Pan African, Third-World, and Pan-African.

Chapter 6

Diaspora, Displacement, and Alienation: Dystopia in Haitian and French Caribbean Migration Films

Despite their significant cultural, historical, and political differences, the appropriation of the film medium in Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique has been intrinsically linked to migration. In this chapter I examine eight films that cast a critical look at the immigration experience. Leaving one's birthplace involves experiencing or witnessing hardships and gaining a renewed sense of oneself. Spanning three decades, these films present stories where migration rhymes with diaspora, displacement, and alienation. In each of these films, directors more clearly delineate the contours of individual and collective transnational Haitian and French Caribbean identities by exploring directly or implicitly power—lost or gained—as part of the migratory experience. I selected these films because they cut across class and genre, resonate with different types of audiences, and present migration from a variety of angles.

In Richard S en ecal's 2002 popular low-budget Haitian romance *Barikad*, a teenage girl from a rural area leaves the backcountry to work for a wealthy Haitian family in the city. In a *batey*, a grieving young Haitian couple leaves *Dominicanie* for Ha iti in Claudio del Punta's 2007 drama *Ha iti ch erie*. In contrast, the director Raoul Peck, the child of an upper-middle class Haitian couple who escaped the Fran ois Duvalier in the 1960s and as high-ranking civil servants in a newly independent French-speaking West African country recounts the dramatic turn of that transition in his highly personal documentary *Lumumba: la mort du proph ete* (1992). In Julius-Am ed e Laou's drama *La vieille quimboiseuse et le majordome* (1987), Paris is the city of deception and lost dreams where the present and the past collide for a bickering elderly couple who left *les Antilles* in the 1930s. Combining memories and fantasy is the only way to assuage pain before departing, as the couple cast an unforgiving glance at their life *en m etropole*.

Likewise, temporal linearity is disrupted and historical events are merged in Med Hondo's 1978 *West Indies: les nègres marrons de la liberté*. The film is a reverse historical travelogue, a play within a film, and according to Hondo, a spectacular "tragi-comédie musicale" (Signaté 102). Staged on a caravel, Hondo's historical reconstruction of the slave trade draws a parallel between slavery as a profit-driven forced migration and the reverse migration of thousands of French Caribbean men and women to the *métropole* as a new form of slavery orchestrated by the Bureau pour le Développement des Migrations dans les Départements d'Outre Mer (BUMIDOM). A not so similar group of lower-class civil servants from Martinique and Guadeloupe untypically combine force to help deliver a wealthy fellow *compatriote* from her kidnappers in Pascal Légitimus's slapstick comedy *Antilles sur Seine* (2000).

If feelings of alienation and dislocation are conspicuously absent from *Antilles sur Seine*, the caricatural performances in the film's conceal a darker and bolder yet oblique message: only popular political consciousness and collective awareness of their key economic role in contemporary French society can free French Caribbean workers from their tedious lives. Finally in Jérôme Kanapa's 1978 psychosocial drama *En l'autre bord* and in Antoine Léonard-Maestrati's 2007 documentary *L'avenir est ailleurs* Guadeloupean and Martinican men and women who migrated to France experience an acute sense of loss that borders on feelings of alienation that are misunderstood and viewed as mental illness. As they encounter racial discrimination in the *mère patrie*, French citizens from *les départements d'Outre Mer* discover that they are perceived both as foreigners and immigrants.

The Haitian, Guadeloupean, and Martinican filmmaking practices roughly began in the 1960s and developed against a background of unprecedented emigration to the Caribbean, North America, and Europe. As a result, many earlier films have focused on migration theme, a topic that had already informed and shaped literary production in Haiti and the French Caribbean at the beginning of the twentieth century, when soldiers, would-be artists and a small number of students left their

island. Immediately after the Second World War and under the aegis of *député* and intellectual figure Aimé Césaire, the French colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe consolidated their non-nation political status. With the 1946 law of Departmentalization, they became French regions and departments and experienced deep economic transformations that called for emigration.

In his essential *French and West Indians: Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana Today*, Richard Burton underlines how migration to France redefined collective and individual French Caribbean identity:

The years 1958-1964 are without doubt the fulcrum of recent French West Indian history. They marked the transition, first, from the traditional agriculture-based economy of the past to the massively tertiarized, consumer-oriented economy of the contemporary DOM. In both Martinique and Guadeloupe—particularly the former—sugar production entered into precipitate decline to be replaced, effectively, by nothing. Unemployment correspondingly mounted to over 25 per cent, and as 'solved' by a policy of outmigration, encouraged, organized and financed by France, that Alain Anselin describes in Chapter 7. By the late 1960s the principal French West Indian export had become...French West Indians. As more and more metropolitans arrived in the DOM on short-term contracts and local birthrates began a sharp decline as the use of contraception spread, local politicians, notably Aimé Césaire in Martinique, began to speak balefully of the threat of 'genocide by substitution' that allegedly hung over the DOM. (5)

By using terms like “massively tertiarized, consumer-oriented economy,” Burton essentially argues that massive emigration to France accelerated the cultural and economic assimilation of the French Caribbean, considerably diminishing the cultural and economic foundations of a society built around the slavery based economy of the plantation. Part of the insular intelligentsia reacted

vehemently to this accelerated assimilation by venturing beyond the African-centered theory of Négritude to formulate distinctive theories of Caribbean identity such as Antillanité (and later, in the late 1980s Créolisation) and advocating armed political resistance. With literature and theater as stepping-stones, inspired by dissenting political voices, artists and intellectuals also embraced the film medium as an effective form of discourse at the same time as they were dispelling the myth of France as the benevolent motherland. Earlier documentaries about the increasingly assimilated French Caribbean islands capture with militancy the *zeitgeist* of post-Departmentalization: the collapse of the sugar cane economy, the closings of sugar cane factories, and the militant struggle for equal pay launched by trade unionists.

What had already begun to alter the foundations of the French Caribbean social fabric is heightened by the displacement of tens of thousands of men and women in their late teens and early twenties. In the 1970s, emigration to France and the vexations of life in the *métropole* become prominent themes in French Caribbean fiction films. Attuned to militant intellectual political discourse, involved in or inspired by wars of independence such as the Algerian War, playwrights, poets, and filmmakers, like French Caribbean students, mount highly politicized criticisms of French colonial repression and adopt a marked dystopian outlook on the migratory experience. Thus, 1970s films about emigration from Guadeloupe and Martinique often echo Edouard Glissant's interpretation of the condition of French Caribbean migrants in *Le discours antillais*: "L'émigré antillais en France est ambigu. Il mène la vie de l'émigré mais il a un statut de citoyen" (127). They reveal the contradictions and malaise inherent to negotiating a French Caribbean identity outside of Guadeloupe and Martinique.

Migration often connotes misfortunes, strokes of bad luck, and misery. Leaving one's birthplace, whether it means leaving the countryside for the city or one's island to live abroad, is recurrently associated with extreme adversity, compromise, or mental instability. When oppression takes place and racial or class discrimination is deployed, the aftermath usually involves alienation (sought or fought), various degrees of insanity, sacrifice, and even death.

During the post-war period of economic boom called *Les Trentes Glorieuses* (1945-1973), France underwent an acute shortage of unskilled workers and sought cheap labor from its colonies in the Caribbean and former colonies in West and North Africa. Inspired by the Sakay (an initiative from migrants from Réunion island settled in Madagascar) and later the Bureau de la Production Agricole after a visit to Reunion island in 1959, Michel Débré, (Garde des Sceaux and Ministre de la justice then interim Ministre de l'Education) then a senior official in the French government began to look at territories in the French Caribbean to fill menial positions. Martinican and Guadeloupean youth left their homeland *en masse* to find work in the métropole. After the artists and the middle-class students of the 1930s, they constituted a second wave to France and their departure considerably redefined collective and individual identity in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

The men and women born in Martinique and Guadeloupean who had emigrated to France in the 1920s and 1930s often belonged to a nascent black bourgeoisie (see Chapter Two). Many like Paulette Nardal and her sisters, Aimé Césaire, Hégésippe Légitimus, and Jean-Price Mars came to pursue their education, work in elite institutions or to become artists. Whether they stayed in France, returned to their nativeland, or travel back and forth, they became part of the black political elite and intelligentsia. Upon their arrival in the métropole, they often had viewed themselves as French citizens first. It is only through "Détour" in the streets of Paris, bals nègres, and literary salons where they exchanged ideas with their French West Africans and colored American Americans counterparts that they began to theorize their black identity in Afro-Diaporic terms. While they

encountered racial discrimination, foreign and French artists living in Paris embraced the African-American, West African, and Caribbean presence.

In the 1920s and 1930s the presence of black men and women in Paris contributed to a cultural and artistic renaissance, as explained earlier. African-American and Senegalese soldiers, *bourgeois* students of colors from the French colonies, and artists while not immune to discrimination, did not necessarily trigger outright hostility. Until the 1920s and 1930s the majority of immigrants who sought jobs in France had been mostly came from Europe. They were often escaping political conflict, religious and ethnic persecution in their neighboring countries. Foreign European immigrants who settled in France were initially employed in menial positions and discriminated against when they arrived in France, however, within a generation or two, they became invisible and assimilated into French society. In contrast, the black French citizens born in French Guiana, Martinique, and Guadeloupe who were recruited in the 1960s and 1970s to remedy a shortage in low-paid unskilled positions, existed in the French collective unconscious as part of colonial history. The color of their skin and cultural background marked them as Other. French citizens of European descent perceived them differently especially after the 1973 Oil Crisis ended full employment and a lasting economic depression ensued.

Emigration to the *Métropole* in Jérôme Kanapa's *En l'autre bord*: Assertiveness, Alienation, and West Indians as (French) Racialized Others

Dedicated to “ceux qui sont partis” (those who left) Jérôme Kanapa's *En l'autre bord* unfolds as a harrowing drama and the intimate and complex portrayal of a single woman from Martinique who lives in France with her three children. It is based on a scenario that Kanapa co-wrote with Catherine Zins, an editor and screenwriter at the onset of her career. *Toutes les Joséphines ne sont pas impératrices*, Kanapa's first and previous film had been a documentary depicting the daily life of another Martinican woman, Joséphine, a banana worker living with her six children in the rural area

of Morne Rouge in Northern Martinique. What *Toutes les Joséphines ne sont pas impératrices* and *En l'autre bord* have in common, is the desire to politicize the life of French Caribbean women. Both of Kanapa's early films have militant aspirations and use class, gender, and race to convey the difficulties of single motherhood and denounce migration as a myth.

Kanapa (b. 1946) belongs to a (loose) group of French filmmakers of European descent who, in their cinematic constructions of contemporary France, have, in various degrees, broadened the French national narrative by exploring migration, racialized identities, or the complexity of the colonial experience. Other filmmakers include François Migeat (*Le sang du flamboyant*, 1981), Claire Denis (*J'ai pas sommeil*, 1994, *35 Rhums*, 2009, and *White Material*, 2010), Mathieu Kassovitz (*Métisse*, 1993, *La haine*, 1995, *L'ordre et la morale*, 2011), and Coline Serreau (*Romuald et Juliette*, 1993). Kanapa did not pursue the respected indie and mainstream career of a Claire Denis, a Coline Serreau, or a Mathieu Kassovitz but the relevance of his militant 1978 migration film *En l'autre bord* captures the zeitgeist of the late 1970s both in the French Caribbean community in Martinique and in the métropole.

En l'autre bord opens up in media res with two sequences that establish the film's central themes: unemployment as the single push factor that leads young men like Fêtenat to leave Martinique for the French métropole (there are no pull factors, the film suggests). Fort-de-France, French West Indies, 1978: Fêtenat (Serge Boissard),⁵² an unskilled but highly motivated young Martinican father, is actively looking for a job in and around the docks of Fort-de-France. To no avail: his requests are invariably rebuffed. Kanapa's juxtaposes Fêtenat's slender silhouette against the loud and noisy activity in the Fort-de-France harbor where he is seeking work. The activity clues the audience in about the pointlessness of his effort, given the dearth of jobs available. Unable to be

⁵²Fêtenat is a typical if not often derided French Caribbean first name. A "calendar name," it the abbreviated inscription of Fête Nationale, the French national holiday on the 14th of July as such, it has an ironic reminder of the colonial ties that bind Martinique and France. As parents often used to choose the name of their children based on child's date of birth, they would chose if the birth occurred on the July 14th.

hired as a sugar cane worker, a fisherman (due to the increasing scarcity of fish), or to work on the dock, he has to consider leaving Martinique.

The director contrasts Fêtenat's tall lanky figure with the economic forces at play. Fêtenat's job search is interspersed with documentary style footage that shows the partial mechanization of the culture of sugar cane. In a subsequent brief scene, the young man is seen taking a break as he sits by the water. He watches ships entering and leaving the harbor while contemplating his own future. Discouraged, he finally relents and considers interviewing with the French-sponsored BUMIDOM. Fêtenat very reluctantly enters a Martinican division of the *Bureau pour le développement des Migrations Intéressant les Départements d'Outre-Mer* where he listens to the condescending prepared speech, "Le BUMIDOM ne s'adresse, bien sûr, qu'aux jeunes qui ont REELLEMENT [my emphasis] envie de travailler," of the Bureau's Martinican employee of the without uttering a single word. Kanapa stages the employee's monologue as a performance that brands the latter as a dishonest figure. The employee is willing to praise France because his own job in Martinique depends on sending fellow Martinicans to a certain future of exploitation in an unwelcoming country. Kanapa chooses to show the BUMIDOM as the dominating force of chain migration rather than to portray the other alternative means *antillais* used: a sibling already settled in France paid the boat (and later the plane ticket) for another sibling to come.

The overall impression left by the opening sequence of the film is that by the late 1970s, emigration to France is the least desirable solution. Leaving Martinique has lost its appeal for French Caribbean youth like Fêtenat. This matter is confirmed in the next sequence in the film. This sequence takes place "en l'autre bord," in France. By shooting both in the French working-class and immigrant *banlieues* of Aubervilliers and Rosny-sous-Bois, and in the urban and rural *communes* of Fort-de-France and Grand-Rivière in Martinique, the film gives dual introduction to French Caribbean emigration. The idea of "Martinique/Guadeloupe/here" and the "Hexagone/there"

construes the migratory experience as a dialectic that is reversed. *En l'autre bord* constructs this dialectic as an alienating process through two contradictory elements of the migration: the BUMIDOM and the French Caribbean migrant worker. After the meeting, Fêtenat mulls over his situation, the contractual offer, and the conditions the smug BUMIDOM employee laid.

Meanwhile in a large train station in the grim Parisian metropolitan region, Fêtenat's older sister, Dorothée Bancel (Toto Bissainthe) and her son, Tomy (Eric Achille) are walking fast against the flow of commuters. She is holding his hand and juggling with several bags as they rush to catch the train that will take them to Tomy's special needs school. Kanapa underlines the grueling nature of their commute to Tomy's special needs school through both Dorothée's hurried pace and Tomy's longing. As they sit in a car and wait for the train to leave the station, the boy looks through a window longingly at children his age playing on the train platform. He wishes he could attend the same school as his two sisters, near their low-income housing unit. Kanapa portrays life in the Paris *banlieue* as exacting and uninspiring. The cinematography, monotonous bluish and gray colors, conveys Dorothée and Tomy's dreary⁵³ routine to the audience. Fêtenat's frantic job search contextualizes his sister's departure.

Kanapa complicates his portrayal of the migration experience by a nuanced and intimate account of Dorothée's state of mind. Although the film's opening sequence introduces the issue of rising unemployment in Martinique through the eyes of Dorothée's younger brother, the film's primary focus is Dorothée's life seven years after she left Martinique for France. Dorothée's dedication to her children is apparent from the start but she is unemployed and is raising her

⁵³ The dispirited life of French Caribbean women *émigrées* had already been described five decades earlier in "En exil," a short text written by Paulette Nardal and published in 1929 in *La dépêche africaine*. "En exil" describes how dreary life appeared to an older French Caribbean woman who works in the city of lights: "Her workday over, poor Elisa went home, clutching her black woolen shawl that replaced the fur missing from her coat. Climbing up the windy Rue des écoles, all shiny with rain, she pondered, her heart wrenched: 'This land does not truly suit an old Negress already weighed down by age and sometimes enfeebled with rheumatism' (Sharpley-Whiting 116)."

children alone, a task she is finding more overwhelming in France than *au pays*.

The screenplay emphasizes the challenges she faces without depicting her as a passive woman. On that particular day, she announces to the director of Tomy's special needs school that she is satisfied neither with her son's progress nor with the subpar education that he is receiving. She is therefore planning to withdraw him from that school and instead register him to her neighborhood school. The conversation that ensues appears to be a reasonable exchange between two adults with diverging opinions: the head of the school reminds her that the treatment for dyslexia takes time, that Tomy tends to be late in class, and at times fights with his classmates. Dorothée retorts that he fights like all other children and adds that he is a black kid. At the mention of race, the head of the special needs schools states that "such problems" are unheard of and signals that the meeting is over.

At the special needs school, the doctor who heads the school complains about Tomy's attitude towards the other pupils. When Dorothy enquires to the director about her son's progress and expresses concern with the quality of the education Tomy is receiving, the principal softens but she decides to transfer him to a neighborhood school, he adamantly opposes Tomy's transfer. Dorothée refuses to back down and disregards his recommendations.

Dorothée's sense of justice, her self-assertiveness, and her desire to confront racial discrimination in the name of her children soon causes problems in other areas of her life and ultimately brings her demise. Her assertiveness provokes the dismay and hostility of neighbors, school personnel, and the super in her building who begin to see her as maladjusted. Acting on a tip from the principal of the special needs school that her son previously attended, the police arbitrarily decides on Dorothée's hospitalization.

As its title indicates, *En l'autre bord*, a literal translation of a common Creole phrase, *an lòt' bò a* (on the other side), takes place both in the land of origin, the Caribbean island of Martinique, and

France, the *métropole*, the country of colonial citizenship and of migration. In Creole (in Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe) *aller en l'autre bord, alé an lòt' bò a*, means crossing the water to live and settle in a foreign land. In Jérôme Kanapa's 1978 feature film, the phrase *en l'autre bord* signals a brutal rupture and implies both crossing geographical and cultural boundaries that question the French Caribbean citizen migrant's assumption of France as the motherland. It entails confronting the alienating forces of assimilation or economic disempowerment. Moving away from one's native land comes at a steep price: one of the consequences of crossing to the other side is also suffering from mental illness. The film examines the issue of alienation through the double lenses of depression and racial and gender discrimination.

The charisma of accomplished Haitian actress Toto Bissainthe infuses Dorothée's actions, presence, and words with a resolute assertiveness. In 1966, Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembene had employed Bissainthe's compelling voice for the character Diouana in his film *La noire de...* Bissainthe's charismatic and forceful voice functions very effectively as a stream of consciousness that contrasts Diouana's submissive behavior with her boiling internal revolt. Kanapa also uses all these elements to reveal Dorothée's character through her action and her reactions.

Kanapa revisits Dorothée's reactions to friendly and friendly behavior in several other scenes. One scene shows how she reacts to male interest. Since the film espouses her perspective and she does not regard herself as a sexual being but primarily as a mother, the camera never sexualizes Dorothée. The actress Toto Bissainthe is dressed conservatively: Dorothée often wears a scarf and when her natural unprocessed hair is out, it is held in a bun or cut short in a practical and no fuss hairstyle. This aspect of Kanapa's *mise-en-scène* characterizes her as a worried mother, struggling to keep her family together and with little time for entertainment and pleasure.⁵⁴ At her

⁵⁴ This simplicity can be read as practical or lend itself to another interpretation. Dorothée's hairstyle signals unusual confidence and pride in her Caribbean origins at a time when women of African descent with tightly coiled hair favored wigs, extension (thin and longer braids of synthetic hair) or straightened their with chemicals or the hot iron.

birthday in a restaurant, a much needed friend and family gathering, she dismisses the idea of finding a new partner with a wry: “Mais qui voudrait de moi avec mes trois enfants?” In a subsequent scene Dorothy, despite her dark clothes and her conservative appearance, is seen as a desirable woman.

Kanapa constructs this scene without dialogue: he shows Dorothee walking up the Boulevard Barbés Rochechouart across from the discount stores Tati. When a black man her age (Pierre Saintons) follows her silently but decidedly, she begins to walk stiffly. She resents the unwanted attention, indicated that she does not want to be seen. She seems bothered, angry, and hesitant and finally stops abruptly to show her disapproval at his following her and he leaves.

Her assertiveness is viewed as a confrontational by men and women who perceive her as Other. Dorothee’s incremental alienation is depicted as a matter of mutual misunderstanding without ever simplifying the interaction between his female protagonist, her children, and people she deals with everyday. In one of these scenes, it is implied through dialogue (“Ah, où est-ce qu’elle se croit celle-là!”) that Dorothee is perceived as not keeping her place, or as not behaving in a suitable manner for someone in her (subaltern) position. It is in a second scene that the audience understands that Dorothee protest and reactions may later be perceived as pathological.

Dorothee is seen preparing dinner and she decides to send Tomy to the building’s superintendent to get the mail. Tomy fails to greet the concierge, a French white woman about Dorothee’s age, and so the superintendant playfully refuses to hand Tomy the mail if he does not greet her. Kanapa uses this simple exchange as a starting point to begin to convey Dorothee’s dejection. When Tomy runs back to his mother he explains that the super refused to hand him the mail and Dorothee decides to confront the super. Kanapa plays this scene as a misunderstanding that reveals Dorothee’s extreme sensitivity to the way others judge her and treat her children. Her confrontation with the super escalates when the latter says about Tomy: “Il est simplement un peu mal élevé, vous ne trouvez pas?”(35) Dorothee is piqued and her reply: “Si vous avez quelque chose

contre les nègres, c'est votre problème (36),” indicates that she has taken the concierge’s remark as a insult that veers on racial slurs. Dorothy forcefully retrieves her letter arguing that since she is paying rent like everyone she is entitled to equal treatment.

Kanapa later uses the reaction of the head of the special needs school and of the concierge to imply that, coming from a working-class woman of color, this level assertiveness provokes more than resentment: it calls for retaliation. Kanapa depicts situations where Dorothée’s race, class, and gender conspire to make her assertiveness pathological to some of her French fellow citizens of European-descent. However, while racial, class, and gender prejudice partially explains her dramatic placement in a mental insitutionalization, it is also Dorothée’s own abruptness that leads to a series of misunderstandings that escalate into her forced hospitalization. Yet with the character of M. Blin (Raymond Bussières), Dorothée’s elderly, kind, and dependable neighbor, Kanapa also implies that what fuels Dorothée’s defensiveness is not completely irrational, leaving the audience with the unsettling ambiguity of human interactions and subjective interpretation.

Kanapa and Zins portray M. Blin, a retired French man who lives next door to Dorothée, as the only source of psychological support for her and her family. A grandfather figure to her children: Myriam, Mina, and Tomy, he dotes on them as if they were his own. He plays games outside with the children after school, teach them pottery, and gently scolds Tomy if he suspects that he is lying. Their presence breaks the monotony of his retirement. M. Blin’s sees Dorothée as a devoted mother and throughout the film his interactions with the Bancel family are a reminder that life in France is rarely about extended family. His presence also makes Dorothée’s isolation conspicuous (she uses his phone line to contact her family), underlines her distress (she confides to him about the scuffle with the super) and her overwhelming responsibilities (she relies on him to look after her children when she runs late). The character of M. Blin, therefore, brings nuance by showing that racial prejudice is not all pervasive in French society and that Dorothée is not mentally

ill. Raymond Bussièrès who imbues M. Blin with generosity was at the end of prolific career in French cinema.⁵⁵ A familiar face, he appeared in more than one hundred and sixty films, he projects kindness and safety. As M. Blin Raymond Bussièrès' strong Parisian accent and recognizable Frenchness lend a touch of authenticity to a French character who never questions Dorothée's Frenchness or sanity, unlike other French male and female figures in the film.

Her reactions in stressful situations indicate that a deep-seated feeling of anger permeates Dorothée's life. When a pair of scissors falls from her purse at Mina's school, the concierge at the middle school implies that her anger has to be contained. As a black French citizen, Dorothée is acutely aware of how skin color affects external perceptions of her and her family. This awareness as well the daily challenges she faces as an unemployed single mother foster a certain bitterness in her and propels her to assert herself in situations that she deems unfair. As a (subaltern) female colored subject, she is expected to comply and follow the recommendations of the head of the special needs school her son attends, to concede to the concierge that her son is rude, and to accept without notifying the school headmistress that a schoolteacher called her youngest daughter, Mina, "folle."

By confronting figures of authority and not complying, Dorothée does the unacceptable. Her transgressions: raising her voice, challenging the director of the special need's school by withdrawing her son from the school, demanding an explanation to the concierge of her low-income building, and requesting an immediate appointment with the director of Mina's school are met with dismay, hostility, and assumptions of craziness. Kanapa's and Zins's screenplay shows that Dorothée's responses are perceived as improprieties that will be punished at every turn. Although the stereotype of the angry black woman is not a familiar construction in the French collective unconscious, it is one identified that Kanapa and Zins identify as threatening. Mauritanian director

⁵⁵ Bussièrès had played mostly minor parts in critically acclaimed films such as Henri Georges-Clouzot's *L'assassin habite au 21* (1942) and *Quai des Orfèvres* (1947), and in Jacques Becker's *Casque d'Or* (1951).

Med Hondo who also directed militant films about immigration in 1970s agrees what is viewed as insubordination is sanctioned: “Car en France on n’aime que les nègres ou les Arabes soumis, dociles et silencieux” (Signaté 100). Dorothée’s forced institutionalization is a high point in the drama. The display of solidarity from other workers and *antillais* and the successful campaigning of Dorothy’s lawyer who convinces the district attorney to hasten her release from the hospital further politicize the ways in which French Caribbean women were broken by the emigration experience.

The film also marks a moment of reckoning for the French Caribbean filmmaking practice. For cultural and political commentators, as fragmented and marginal as it looked, a body of work began to emerge that recognized films made by white non-Caribbean filmmakers as long they presented an insider’s point of view about the lived experience of *Martiniquais* and *Guadeloupéens*. In 1978, the journalist from Martinique Tony Delsham responded positively to the release of *En l’autre bord* by declaring: “Le processus est désormais engagé. Le cinéma antillais existe. Qu’importe de savoir qui a donné le signal. Jérôme Kanapa avec: *En l’autre bord* ou Christian Lara avec *Coco Lafleur* ou encore Jean-Paul Césaire avec *Hors des jours étrangers...* (Delsham *En l’autre bord* 120).

Concurrently to these two films, Kanapa published a version of the screenplays *En l’autre bord* and *Toutes les Joséphines ne sont pas impératrices* with the French publishing house L’Harmattan. The volume features three contradictory film reviews of *En l’autre bord* gathered as a short ciné-dossier. One critique found the film mediocre and the plot preposterous: “...C’est à partir de là que naît, sous nos yeux, une caricature grotesque, une bouillie sans saveur, ni odeur, tout juste destinée à quelques esprits chagrins ou enfants débiles” (Bougon-Vauthier, 122). Another reviewer praised the film’s unpretentiousness and its refusal to depict Dorothée in stark black and white terms (Delmas, 118). The film effectively captures the angst in the life of a woman from the Départements d’Outre Mer (DOMs) after she has settled in Métropole and her brother’s fruitless attempts to find work and remain in Martinique.

Hailed as “un film à voir absolument” [“a must-see film”] by its detractors and admirers alike, *En l'autre bord* was selected and shown at five festivals. The film's trajectory typically reflects the marginality of works that draw the attention of film festival selection committee. By reason of lack of distribution, they are seen by few film festival attendees and usually remain peripheral. Between 1978 and 1979, *En l'autre bord* was shown in Cannes as an entry to the “Perspectives du cinéma français” programming, in Montréal at the *Conservatoire d'Art Cinématographique de Montréal*; in Namur, France, for the *Festival International du film d'Expression Française (F.i.F.E.F)*; at the *Festival Pan-Africain du film* in Carthage, and finally it was screened at the *Semaine du cinéma de l'émigration* in the working-class Parisian suburb of Bagnolet.

Like many militant cinematic efforts in the late 1970s *En l'autre bord's* currency was short-lived and did not extend beyond the film festival circuit. Although Kanapa's two films dealt very differently with comparable themes, *En l'autre bord* was inevitably compared to Med Hondo's *Soleil O* (1969): “la méthode de Kanapa rejoint celle de Med Hondo qui dans *Soleil O*—le meilleur film jusqu'à ce jour sur ce thème [le racisme ordinaire] (mais qui, il est vrai, le déborde—mettait en action les meilleurs acteurs noirs de Paris, tout en cherchant à trouver un ton documentaire (Delmas 118-119).” In *Soleil O* Hondo fuses *avant-garde* documentary style archival footage with an abstract experimental theatrical mise-en-scène to mount a searing criticism of French neo-colonialism in order to draw attention to the labor and housing conditions of black workers in France.

High unemployment rates in the Départements d'Outre Mer, the massive migration of unskilled French Caribbean youth to France, and their life there often as second-class citizens emerged as significant topics of discussion at a time when workers rights, economic crisis, and issues of migration collided in the French national discourse. After the Oil Crisis triggered the 1974 economic crisis that signaled the end of the period of French economic prosperity known as les Trentes Glorieuses, unqualified North African, West African, and French Caribbean migrants were

no longer desirable and in 1977 and 1978 the government of president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing took a series of decisions to curtail immigration and encourage migrants from the Maghreb and their family to leave France and return home. While French Caribbean migrants, as French citizens, were not directly targeted by these measures, Kanapa's 1978 film depicts in subtle ways the hostility directed at migrants who were not from Europe. Catherine Zins and Jérôme Kanapa *En l'autre bord* borrow from *realism* (emphasis on accurate description) to politicize⁵⁶ the issue of French Caribbean migration to the métropole. They tackle social issues that presented little interest to French administrations that had overseen the founding and closing the BUMIDOM: the sense of dislocation and alienation of the French Caribbean woman who had come to work and live in Paris and its *banlieue*. The themes of mental illness and alienation is revisited a decade later in Julius Amédée Laou's film *La vieille quimboiseuse et le majordome*.

***La vieille quimboiseuse et le majordome*: Mental Illness, Disjointed Re(e)(a)lities and Alienation: Filming the Fragmented Self**

Unlike most Haitian or French Caribbean filmmakers and playwrights from the first wave, Julius Amédée Laou did not have to leave Martinique, Guadeloupe, or Haiti to study, find work, or flee a dictatorship. Laou, born in 1950 in Paris of parents of Martinican-descent, studied architecture at the prestigious Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. While his films reflect his knowledge of architecture, space, texture, and juxtaposition, his earlier films focused on the malaise and isolation of *Antillais* who lived in Paris. Prior to his first feature *La vieille quimboiseuse et le majordome*, he honed his skills at directing with two short films: *Mémoires de brumes à Paris* (1985) about an unappreciated veteran of the Algerian War who wanders in the streets of Paris and *Solitaire à micro ouvert* (1983), a

⁵⁶ Kanapa clearly expressed his intention to use his film as a political statement: “Avant de commencer, il est nécessaire d'en finir avec une hypocrisie gouvernementale: parler de migrants, comme le font les textes officiels concernant les antillais en France—et non d'émigrés et d'immigrés, cela est une belle démonstration de l'effort auquel le colonialisme contraint le vocabulaire pour maintenir le mythe du ‘Français d'Amérique’ (Constant and Kanapa 197).”

film about a man who calls a French-Caribbean radio station after his brother was murdered. Both short movies received positive reviews and garnered prizes: *Solitaire à micro ouvert* was shown at the 41st Mostra in Venice in 1984: it received the Prix du court métrage and was bought by French broadcast channel Antenne 2 while France 3 bought *Mélodies de brumes à Paris*.

It is Laou's fascination with the first generation of Antillais, French black men and women of his parent's generation, who came to Paris in the 1930s and 1940s to study or become artists led him to make the film. Less than a decade after Med Hondo's *West Indies: les nègres marrons de la liberté* and Jérôme Kanapa's *En l'autre bord*, playwright and filmmaker Julius Amédée Laou chose to explore the theme of French Caribbean migration to France through the lenses of race, class differences, and old age filtered through disjointed reality in *La vieille quimboiseuse et le majordome*.

Laou had already taken a grim look at the early migration of *antillais* to Paris in his plays. In the play *Folie ordinaire d'une fille de Cham*, he had examined the issue of the forced hospitalization into a mental institution of a Caribbean woman (played by actress Jenny Alpha). Fresh from that success, Laou wrote the screenplay for *La vieille quimboiseuse et le majordome* and proceeded to direct it as a feature film. He cast seasoned French actors of Martinican-descent Jenny Alpha and Robert Liensol as Armand and Eugénie, the protagonists. Alpha (1912-2012) and Liensol (1922-2011) belonged to a small group of French black professional actors who came of age during the 1950s and had long last lasting careers in the margins of French cinema and theater. Alpha considers one of her collaborations with Laou as the highlight of her career.⁵⁷ Upon its release in 1987, *La vieille quimboiseuse et le majordome* was heavily promoted on Tropiques FM, the main French Caribbean radio station in the Parisian metropolitan area.

⁵⁷ “Ma plus grande satisfaction professionnelle et personnelle, je vous réponds tout de suite: *La folie ordinaire d'une fille de Cham* de Julius Amédée Laou! Interpréter la folie de cette femme noire entourée de blancs qui croit devenir blanche (comme le promet le curé qui l'a violée) a été très bouleversant. J'ai joué cette pièce en 1984 au théâtre de la Bastille (Louis-Régis).”

The film opens up with an old biguine “Manman la grève baré moin,” to which an elderly black couple is leisurely slow dancing while looking into each other’s eyes in an empty Parisian cabaret. Alexandre Stellio’s delivery and the lyrics of the song clash with the intimacy of the scene. The music evokes the popularity of *biguine* in the Paris of the 1920s and 1920s *bal nègres* in Montparnasse but the meaning of the song conjure up images of the struggle of sugar cane workers going on strike after they demanded a two-Franc raise from the *békés* and he refused. “Manman la grève baré moin” brings forth contradictory images of racial confrontation and class struggle as well as entertainment. It imbues the nostalgia of their youth with a hint of violence.

The couple in their seventies looks attractive: the man, Armand (Robert Liensol) is tall and elegant. He wears a Borsalino hat and his white beard although not neatly trim gives him an air of distinction. The woman, Eugénie (Jenny Alpha) is petite, tastefully dressed, and still beautiful. A melancholy tune accompanies the elderly man in the streets of Paris as he talks to his dogs and buys the newspaper. When the old man lights up a cigarette, a young white man stops behind him and stares at him. The old man seems to feel a foreign presence: he hears sounds of steps amplified and he is overcome by memories. His face looks stricken and he seems frightened.

Armand and Eugénie get into a taxi and ask the driver to take them anywhere and to only stop when the meter reached 300 francs. Armand asks the driver to drive them to La Madeleine. The taxi driver stares at them. Eugénie looks vulnerable and disheveled. She falls asleep in the cab. She wakes up and asks: “Où m’emennes-tu? At the Saint-Lazare station.” Tu te souviens Eugénie, est-ce que tu te souviens quand nous sommes arrivés en 1931. Nous étions si jeunes si naïfs, si amoureux, toi et moi. Tu t’en souviens?” The biguines of Léona Gabrielle, Ernest Léardée, and Stéllio that punctuate the film recalls better times for Eugénie et Armand, the Paris of the 1930s.

Eugénie and Armand are slowly walking in their neighborhood. Eugénie has trouble walking: she holds a cane and leans on him. He slows down his pace to accommodate her and leans

attentively towards her. Again Laou creates a jarring combination of image to sound. While they look like a loving old couple, Eugénie and Armand are having a world-class argument. A street merchant greets them but they ignore her. The viewer unconsciously registers that they are locked in their own world but fails to engage in suspension of disbelief. The director carefully calibrates the routine of the French Caribbean elderly couple with moments of They take the subway and then they sit on a bench. They walk through the Jardin du Luxembourg. Armand has just ran into his former boss and had to face the nature of the relationship his wife entertained with his boss: “Armand: Il m'a dit des choses qui m'ont fait mal.” Il a dit que tu as été la plus belle histoire de cul de sa vie.” We see the same recurrent brief scene of a disheveled Eugénie yelling “Armand!” The last minutes of the film show the scene of Eugénie’s wake with family and friends’ viewing of the corpse in the apartment.

Through the comments of the mourners, about the deceased Eugénie, the spectators understand that the series of disjointed scenes previously presented stand for the warped fantasy world in Eugénie’s unstable mind. Armand has been dead for years and Eugénie never recovered from her husband’s death. He had died twelve ago. He committed suicide and his wife found him laying in a pool of blood. Eugénie kept living as if he was still alive and he was still alive: she spoke to him outloud as if he were still there. Laou concludes the film with a desire to make a case for the uncanny and recognize Eugénie’s as a powerful *quimboisense*. Neighbors and friends state that often it almost felt as if Madame Eugénie was not by herself and that some of them people would play along and would even say: “ ‘Hello Monsieur Armand.’ She liked that. She loves her Armand. That was such a surprise.”

Historical Displacement: *West Indies: les nègres marrons de la liberté* or the BUMIDOM as Slave Trade

On a multilevel reconstructed slaveboat, a caravel, 17th century dignitaries of the French

court—on the deck—narrate the history of the New World from a Western perspective and plot slavery as profit-driven enterprise while—in the hold—French Caribbean men and women workers in 1970s (played by the same actors) France denounce their living conditions, dealings with institutions and their organized migration as a contemporary of slavery. Crossing genres (the musical, the historical drama), and art categories (theater, film) the Senegalese-Mauritanian director produced an ambitious show: a reverse historical travelogue.

Pompous and ominous music and the initials RF for *République Française* above a red and golden period chair set against wood paneling appear briefly at the beginning of the Med Hondo's film *West Indies: les nègres marrons de la liberté* (1979). However what looked like the setting for an austere and formal meeting is interrupted by a change in tone and location. Documentary-style archival footage shows various scenes of the plantation economy in a French Caribbean island: a panoramic view of tin roofs, banana bunches wrapped in blue plastic bags, a white man, possibly a former plantation owner shielded from the sunrays by a shed and engaged in a lively conversation, and wiry men and women cutting sugar cane in fields. The ominous and pompous music has been replaced by a musical score of furious traditional *gwo ka* drumming, as men cut and gather cane stalks and trucks carry the year's crop. A medium close-up of two black workers in straw hats with pleasant agrarian faces elicit interest in the worker's life while the image of a white man, possibly a plantation owner laughing as he tries to stand dismay. The absence of dialogue or ambient sound directs the audience's full attention to the images and increases the emotional response to the message they are sending. Although, elements in the footage (clothes, the blue plastic bags, partial mechanization, and trucks), the scene is eerily reminiscent of pre-abolition of slavery plantation life.

Hondo uses a musical bridge to return to the set of the formal meeting as he frames a white man in a suit with a smug smile on his face sitting in the RF (République Française) red and gold period chair with a map to his left that reads "Empire colonial français." An insert of the map of

the French empire is illustrated by a formal voice announcing: “Messieurs la séance est ouverte. A toutes fins utiles, je vous rappelle le programme. Le plan exige que ces minuscules petits peuples, ces microscopiques petites îles soient rayées de la map en tant que peuples, bien entendu.” A voice echoes off-screen, “Bien entendu.” The initial voice adds: “telle est la cible à cribler, messieurs.” The verb “cribler” characterizes the man as the aggressor. The meeting proceeds as the man and four other attendees, three men in a suit and a white woman in a red dress appear, framed within a single shot. One of these men, standing in the background is a tall bearded black man. They all listen to the spokesman of the French Republic intently as he draws their attention to the map: “Je n’ai pas terminé. Regardez ces îles, premières et dernières perles de notre diadème colonial.” Hondo signals a shift in perspective when a map of the Greater Antilles replaces the larger map of the French colonial empire. The insert that follows includes an unusual element: a war ship armed with canons, on the top right of the map. The voice continues its assessment: “Ce sont des bijoux d’un inestimable prix stratégique” and concludes by solemnly ordering: “Alors à vos postes, messieurs, et n’oubliez pas le plan.”

The presence of the war ship and canons within the map briefly registers as a symbol of political conflict and implies that a war is being waged. An audio bridge leads to the next sequence: the unpleasant sound of machinery and large-scale construction work signals yet another transition in location and theme. A palette of blue and grey colors dominates the screen. Bright red credits for the film list the actors and the film crew and locate this film in contemporary France. The unpleasant sound transition and contrast in color signal an important shift as the camera pans from the tabula rasa of the quasi emptied space of the construction site in the 1970s to the interior of a warehouse where stands a newly erected wooden structure: half of a monumental ship. The camera movements introduce the themes twin themes of destruction and construction.

The ship, both reminiscent of a caravel and a slaveship is nameless except for a large

signboard that reads “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” on one of the decks. The signboard echoes the RF initials (République Française) carved into the gold and red chair. The director deliberately breaks of one the tenets of the Hollywood Classical Narrative style when he discloses how and where the set for the film was built. This bending of the rules and the rapid succession of these three sequences literally mark *West Indies* as a film project motivated by dialectical rewriting: the deconstruction and reconstruction of the French Caribbean historical narrative. Med Hondo utilizes the semiotic value of the 15th-17th century ship, symbol of the European colonial enterprise and one of the primary engine of Western modernization, to revisit *Les négriers*, Daniel Boukman’s virulent play about the organized migration of French Caribbean youth to France. Like the war ship on the map of the Greater Antilles, and the spokesman for the République Française, Boukman and Hondo launch a political attack but their strategy is to expand choose the cultural stage as a battleground. They employ theater and film to disseminate their political views and to raise consciousness.

As the camera pans up and down to the inside of a boat, the set is shown in its entirety, the nature of the conflict alluded to in the map of the Greater Antilles is revealed: the battleground is an election. The mood is somber as a dissenting group of black men and women lit with candles and gathered next to a rock placed on the left of the screen ponder on the decision-making process. Signboards positioned on the left and right, the front and back of the stage present two radically opposed perspectives: “Bumidon: Négriers modernes,” “Autonomie = Dictature,” “Oui à la France! Non à l’indépendance,” and “Votez pour Justin, votre député.” A roll of drumming announces the arrival of an official: “Le président.” In reaction, “Voter Justin, c’est refuser l’aventure” and “La France mère patrie.” A different roll of drums is heard as the camera pans down. The antithetical slogans in this scene show departmentalization as a highly contested political status in the 1970s. Among an alliance of intellectuals and students, dissent is brewing against a political class symbolized by Justin that is seen as complacent.

From under the main deck, in the hold, the audience witnesses how women and men of color are debating the election in Creole:

Manmay la éleksion ka roulé an lè a. Sé pa mem la pen zot' voté. Sé pa ayen sa ké chanjé. "Voté, zot' pé mèm rivé an tè a." 'People, the elections are ongoing up there. Don't bother voting. Nothing will change. If you vote, you won't even make it on the ground.' A better-dressed man has a different discourse: "Pa di bétise, sacré isalope!" 'Stop your nonsense, Motherfucker!' Another man exclaims: "Ou sé an mantè, pé la! Sé pa la pen! Pa kouté missié!" 'Liar, shut up! It's not worth it! Don't listen to him!' Another encourages them: "An nou monté, an nou monté! Nou ka monté mèm!" 'Let's go up there, let's go up there! We are going up there!' "Yo bannou voté, fok nou voté" 'They *allow* us to vote, we must vote.'

A loud laugh arises from the hold and breaks the somber mood. A young man announces that voting will not change a thing and denounces the electoral process and French citizenship as a sham. In this first scene in the hold, the space reserved for human cargo appears as the space where the dissent of working-class is expressed and where the status quo is being challenged. Hondo explained to Ibrahim Signaté how the set and décor for the film marked his adaptation of the play into a film:

L'adaptation du livret de Boukman, qui a donné naissance au film, a-t-elle été libre ou au contraire êtes-vous resté fidèle au texte de base?

Med Hondo: Il fallait que je trouve des formes cinématographiques. L'idée du bateau par exemple est un symbole important. Je suis pour le symbolisme communicatif. J'ai fait construire ce bateau, qui est une caravelle négrière, dans une usine. (Signaté 100)

The camera pans up to the primary deck where the voting is taking place. Black and white voters are waiting in line. The ritual of voting is replicated here in all its French solemnity, each ballot cast is punctuated by the first and last name, occupation, and the assets of the latest voter, and

a clamorous “A voté.” However, mostly well to do and well-dressed people are waiting in line and participate in the process. “M. de la Pierre, planteur, 200 hectares de canne à sucre, a voté; M. Belleville, importateur de 500 tonnes de morue salée a voté; Mme Veuve Monsourire (Jenny Alpha), institutrice en retraite, grande croix de la légion d’honneur médaille d’or de l’enseignement publique, Office des palmes académiques, chevalier du mérite social a voté; Melle Flocon, pharmacienne, deux millions de chiffre d’affaire par an, a voté; Soeur Marie de Saint-Joseph de Cluny l’enfant Jésus, quarante ans passés au service de Dieux aux colonies, a voté.” The election is depicted as a simulacrum of democracy since solely money and position in political confer political power.

With these opening scenes, Med Hondo shows that the language of *West Indies* originates in theater. Not only do the sequences in the films transitions as in a play but the décor, a multileveled slaveship, offers the overlapping perspectives of several stages superimposed on one another. Finally many members of the large black cast were trained in theater companies such as La Compagnie des Griots. For instance, Justin the black candidate is played by the company’s founding director: Robert Liensol. Former Griot members such as the Haitian actress and performer Toto Bissainthe, Darling and Théo Légitimus, from Guadeloupe, and countless others are part of the cast. The A-list cast also includes future filmmakers such as a Haitian director Elsie Haas and theater director Gabriel Glissant.

This is emphasized when the camera pans down to the working-class inhabitants in the hold, greeting one another and arguing, an inscription that separates the hold from the next level reads in Creole: “Madinina Karukera: Péyi an nou.” Some wear clothing inspired by outfits worn in Francophone Africa: head wraps, and tights and simple clothes that were fashionable in the seventies. They are contemptuously commenting on the ball participants up on the primary bridge:

Gadé yo! Tout’ dan a yo koché kon chyen ki manjé diri. Yo dwèt ka di: bann’ Kouyon, nou ké kouyoné zot. Kon nou lé. Jou nou lé.” ‘Look at them! Their teeth

are as bad as the teeth of a dog eating rice. They must be thinking: you stupid people, we will take advantage of you. Just the way we want to. When we want to.'

The men and the women in the hold represent the politicized unemployed youth who because they were increasingly aware of their disenfranchisement, demanded social justice, and embraced left-wing politics. Hondo like Boukman implies the emigration to France was a way to quell growing political tensions. A young man whose face cannot be seen lurks in the shadows, hidden. The blade of his knife glistens and identifies him as one of the threatening elements of the group. They are the unskilled workers that the BUMIDOM targeted to fill menial jobs in France.

The narrative voices put into perspective the economic rationale for the slave trade but camera movements shifts the focus from the official history where the Western perspective dominates to the boldness of the silent slaves in whiteface as the latter use their body to emphasize their mocking gestures when they imitate their masters, ridiculing them. Here Hondo *mise-en-scène* become highly theatrical and recalls the confounding *mise en scène* of Jean Genet's *Les nègres*. The black pantomines with chalky whiteface listen closely to the court's dignitaries whose gestures they mock with emphasis. They look like specters in period costumes as they dance around the court's *éminence grise*. Dates, explanations, and economic remarks about the slave trade punctuate this official history: "Le commerce de bois d'ébène devient le fait principal du voyage aller-retour de France aux Antilles via l'Afrique." Ambiguous language alludes both to the slave trade and the BUMIDOM's commodification and exportation of men and women from French Guiana, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. L'Harmattan published *Les négriers* in late 1978 as part of its "théâtre antillais" series. A note from the playwright at the end indicated that play was written in Algeria between August 1968 and September 1969. It is therefore more likely that although Boukman's play echoed the phrase "génocide par substitution" Césaire coined in a speech the deputy at the French national assembly in February 1978 (Confiant 263), Boukman's play predates Césaire's influential phrase.

To mark the acceleration of the slave trade another date is inserted into the history lesson: “1674 Création de la Compagnie du Sénégal, organisme royal qui reçoit le monopole de la traite sur les côtes de Cap Vert au Cap de la Bonne Espérance. Le besoin des plantation insulaires ne cessent de grossir, grossir, grossir, (repetition)...” “En 1679 la Compagnie du Sénégal est recrée, 2000 esclaves par ans. Pendant huit ans.” The contrast between the decorum of the scene, the carefreeness of the dignitaries’ dance and the economic detachment is striking expressed in the number of slaves purchased per year. The dignitaries’s *mennet* is accompanied by mechanical smiles. They dances and turn around as a seventeenth century version of *député* Justin is listening to this official version of History. He is dressed in a uniform and is wearing a formal wig with white ringlets.

With the back and forth in time, Hondo casts modern day migration movement from the French Caribbean to the Métropole as a new form of slave trade where the seventeenth century mercantile interests, the representative of the Catholic church, and the courtesan are now modern day slave traders. However Hondo’s two-part title indicates that his interpretation of Boukman’s play *Les Négriers* differs from the original play. This is apparent in the ways in which the director and the playwright appropriate of the term BUMIDOM. While Daniel Boukman uses the term “dubidon” Med Hondo prefers the anagram “Mubidon.”

Hondo modifies other elements: while Boukman’s play is solely written in French, Creole is used in the film when Caribbean youth in the hold foment revolt. Hondo redefined *West Indies* as a “tragi-comédie musicale” (Signaté 102). The play is a nod to the musical *West Side Story* (Signaté 97) but at times recalls *Fame*. The director’s elaborate mise-en-scène combines entertainment with Boukman’s and his own political consciousness. Most of the dialogues in the film were lifted from the play. He confided that his adaptation of Daniel Boukman’s play *Les négriers* originated in his encounters with artists from the Francophone Caribbean and Haïti, their idea of Africa, and his

coming to terms with his feelings of alienation (Signaté 97-98).

“Gran Nèg Potoprinse e Fanm Dewò”*: Class Barriers in Richard Sénécal’s *Barikad

Sénécal is one of the few Haitian filmmakers directing low-budget films who is fluent in the film language. Trained as a cinematographer, he has worked as such for several successful low-budget Haitian films and directed numerous music videos. He often works with Haitian film producer Wilkenson Bruna and he owns the production facility Imagine Haiti. As most low-budget Haitian films, the digitally shot feature films he directed *Barikad* (2001), *I Love you Anne* (2003), *Cousine* (2006) recall soap operas. However, unlike the bulk of low-budget Haitian films, which suffer a wide range of technical deficiencies (poor sound quality, inadequate lighting, whimsical editing, etc...) his movies are professionally-made with well-written storylines. The story line consistently focuses on a female character and the films’ dramatic intensity seems to be primarily aimed at a female audience. In Sénécal films, impoverished female protagonists often exert the power of free choice.

Barikad begins in Anse Rouge, a small seaside village in northeastern Haiti. Odénie, an uneducated teenager, leaves the countryside for the city of Port-au-Prince to replace her aunt as a live in maid for the Palmiers, a wealthy black family. The film score underlines her departure with dramatic music that will be the film’s theme and is used throughout the film to underscore pregnant moments during Odénie’s stay with the Palmiers. She secretly falls for Thiery, the family teenage son. At first oblivious to her presence, he incrementally notices the statuesque maid and against social expectations *falls in love* her. With his mother is abroad, Thiery ponders the possibility of a serious relationship with Odénie and indirectly seeks his father’s approval. Lucid and yet bitten, Odénie attempts to keep her distance but as Thiery surrenders to his feelings, they grow increasingly closer. Alas, when their forbidden love comes out in the open the powerful ‘barricade’ of class

prejudice prevails. The synopsis for S en cal's film is very similar to the 1977 Haitian film *Olivia*, directed by Haitian director Bob Lemoine except for the ending (Antonin *Mat riel pour une histoire du cin ma ha tien*, 69).

With *Barikad*, Richard S en cal examines class difference through the familiar lens of the doomed love story. The film begins with Od nie's departure from the countryside to Port-au-Prince and as such also functions as migration narrative inscribed in the larger context of rural exodus. This element of the story appeals to the large section of the Haitian population that has roots in the countryside and is surviving in the city. Class differences are replicated in the use of language. To reflect the language of the Haitian impoverished majority, Creole is the language used throughout the film. French is only spoken between members of the upper middle class like the Palmiers and their children's friends but they, too, resort to Creole during emotional moments. The prevalence of Creole functions also a social marker. The female protagonist is uneducated: she cannot read and only expresses herself in Creole. Additionally, the use of English slang signals the influence of American culture among Haitian youth culture: Thiery and his best friend, Roody, wear American style clothes and play basketball. English words also betray how Haitian cultural identity is being reshaped by transnational flows: the popularity of African American culture (hip-hop, basketball, brandname streetwear) among the Haitian diaspora in North America and in Haiti.

S en cal's films thematically operate as refined feature-length soap operas. Dialogues and situations in *Barikad* are written to elicit a strong emotional response from the audience. The director is aware that, in the Caribbean, it is not unusual for spectators to address the screen, admonish evil characters, and warn would-be victims of impending harm. Other Haitian filmmakers specializing in low budget Haitian films dab in the action genre and aim their films at a male audience. In S en cal's films romance is usually one of the central elements of a plot where characters struggle with loyalty, sex work, and love as in *Cousines*, personal relationships as in *I Love you Anne*, or

class differences and love as in *Barikad*. His films also heavily borrow from the genre of melodramas yet in *Barikad* and *Cousines* disenfranchised young Haitian women know who they are and find ways to gain agency.

Sénécal knows his crowd enough to empathize with social injustices without venturing into cinéma vérité territory. Thus, Sénécal steers clear of the human rights issues associated with the living condition of *restaveks* and domestic servant work. The film shows none of the abuse associated with the conditions of share by housemaids and *restaveks*'⁵⁸ wage-less labor, long hours, rape by the men of the family, underfeeding, and beatings. He instead opts for romanticization and depicting a benigne environment suitable for a romantic drama. Although the film is replete with clichés about budding love: Odénie's arm brushes against Thiery's in the kitchen; Thiery really notices Odénie as she is shivering in a wet white tee-shirt during a day at the beach, the film's slow pace, the two main actors' performance, and the length of their courtship make for a convincing progression.

Sénécal introduces class differences as soon as Odénie meets Odette Palmier, the *maîtresse de maison*. He contrasts Odénie's simple attire, a tee-shirt dress, and her light luggage, a baluchon, with Madame Odette's jewelry and outfits, and her precise short crop hairstyle. In this scene, class boundaries indicate that regardless of sex and race, the power dynamic between the two women favor the older married, middle-class and educated woman. While both women are black and of similar complexion, Odénie's subdued answers to the stern instructions that her employer issues convey her submissiveness. Per her employer's instruction, she is to address the Palmiers as Madame Odette, Monsieur Palmier, Mademoiselle Sagine and Monsieur Thiery. Sénécal shows Madame Odette delivering the series of tasks Odénie has to undertake as they both stand outside the house as a way to imply that for Madame Odette, Odénie is solely allowed to enter the house to

⁵⁸ Restavèk is a term in Haitian Creole that designates a child from a poor family who is handed over to another often less poor family to provide "domestic help," in exchange for a better future. The vast majority of children are blatantly denied their rights to education, adequate nutrition, rest and recreation, according to the National coalition for Haitian Rights <http://www.nchr.org/hrp/restavek/definition2.htm>.

fulfill domestic chores. Odénie's value to Madame Odette resides in the new maid's ability to serve the women and men in the Palmiers household.

The film underlines Odénie's subaltern status through dialogue, as well as elements of *mise-en-scène* such as wardrobe. The young from the countryside is dressed modestly in clothes that underline her shapely physical attributes, a hint about the storyline. SÉNÉCAL finally lets the audience measure the sheer size of the Palmier's house against Odénie's toolshed size cramped quarters on the side of the house. The fact that compensation is never mentioned implies that Odénie's aunt may already have an arrangement with Odette Palmier or that Odénie is in no position to demand fair wages. Madame Odette embodies a black Haitian woman who has arrived, keenly aware of social hierarchy, and intent on preserving it. As the plot makes clear, Odénie and Thiéry's *rapprochement* can only take place because of Madame Odette's trip to the United States. SÉNÉCAL place Odette Palmier as an obstacle only to remove it and provide the audience with a quasi template of the Cinderella love story. In *Barikad* class differences trump racial solidarity.

The limitations and flaws of secondary characters allow SÉNÉCAL to showcase Odénie's qualities. Implicit comparisons between Odénie and the women in the Palmier household show Odénie in a more favorable light. To this effect, SÉNÉCAL assigns to Sagine (Jessica Géneus), Thiéry's younger sister the part of the spoiled and privileged teenager. Portraying Sagine as a one-dimensional character allows SÉNÉCAL to contrast Odénie's demanding domestic workload with Sagine's mindless conversations on the phone. These conversations reveal that Sagine is mostly preoccupied with going out and does not appreciate what she has since that she wished that one of her parents were American. In one telling scene, SÉNÉCAL frames an idle and selfish Sagine lying on a couch as Odénie puts clothes she has washed and ironed in the closet.

Odénie is at first invisible to the two Palmier teenagers. During their first encounter in the kitchen, Thiéry fails to notice Odénie but she is moonstruck as she refills his glass of water. His

sister only addresses the domestic servant in an irritated voice and to give her orders. Madame Odette's trip to the United States for health reasons, gives Sagine the opportunity to practice bossiness. Per her mother's instructions she keeps the maids in check. Additional scenes depicts Sagine as superficial and self-centered: she spends time putting on make-up and walking around her house in lingerie. A self-centered teenager, she remains indifferent when a radio station reports a story on child trafficking and in another scene, Sagine resents her brother because he refuses to accompany her to party she wants to attend. When the other "help," Sonia, becomes ill, Sagine wonders why Sonia does not simply see a doctor. S n cal hence reveals that as a privileged teen Sagine is out of touch with the realities of poor Haitians. Although she was born and raised in Haiti, she is unaware that many Haitians cannot afford three meals a day, never mind the cost of a doctor's visit. Sagine's best friend, Florence, is no different from Sagine.

Cast as a highly educated man preoccupied as much with news, nationalist politics, and the *quand dira-t-on*, Monsieur Palmier represents a caricature of the Haitian intellectual. His professed goal is to become the next Haitian president but how could Palmier run the country when he is unfit to run his household. Aloof or distracted and always buried in a book or in the newspaper, he remains harmless and useless: all theory and no action. S n cal portays Monsieur Palmier as a verbose and hollow figure, he appears to care about the plight of the Haitian majority while comfortably anchored in his position of privilege. When Thi ry brings him back a novel he had borrowed about a white South African man who braves racial barriers and marries a black woman, his father does not disapprove of the outcome of that relationship however he sides with his wife against Od nie when Odette Palmier exclaims: "Question de rang!" 'It's all about social status!'

By contrast, the screenplay endows the underdog female protagonist with positive traits. Hard-working, observant, and kind, Od nie is also honest she gives back to Thi ry the change she finds in his trousers when she does the laundry and willing to move to Port-au-Prince to help her

aunt although she would rather stay in with her family. We discover the sizable house as she is seen focused on accomplishing her tasks: dusting and cleaning, hand washing, and ironing. Sonia, the other maid, because she has been in Port-au-Prince longer is more pessimistic. When she realizes that Odénie also has a crush on Thiery she summarizes the situation: “It’s like looking at a nice piece of jewelry in a window display, you can’t have it but it doesn’t hurt to look.”

When Sonia feels sick and has a fever, Odénie asks Thiery for some pills, although the other servant warns her that: “ ‘they’ don’t care about ‘us.’” Lucid about the impossibility of their relationship, Odénie tells Thiery when he finally confesses his desire to face social barriers and be with her: “Map travay lakayou. Map travay avèou. Ou se moun lavil: gran nèg potoprinse, mwen mèm sé an dewò man sòti, an dewò man sòti.” She continues: if it doesn’t work who pays the price. They are too many people, on your side and on my side willing to put barricades. Silent during most of the film, actress Fabienne Colas convincingly emotes the social limitations and the depth of her character. Her voice carries the pride in humble origins as a poor woman from the country who has more of a sense of who she is than a spoiled teenager from Port-au-Prince. Unlike the other maid, Sonia, who as a foil for the protagonist is depicted as more ordinary, Odénie stands out as focused, kind, and smart despite her lack of education.

Still Sénécal refuses to portray Odénie and Sonia as naive country girls. In fact, he uses Sonia to briefly argue that like many oppressed people, young Haitian women find ways to resist subjection: Sonia deliberately slows down the work schedule Madame Odette subjects her to object to her working conditions. Thiery tells his best friend Roody that “Odénie sé an ti siwo.” As the protagonist in *Barikad*, Odénie drives the film’s migration narrative. The plot of *Barikad* implies that Odénie moves to the big city reluctantly: she confesses that she misses her family and decides to her return after her brief stay in Port-au-Prince is more bitter than sweet. Even though, her employers, the Palmiers, are not the richest, her arrival in Port-au-Prince acquaints her with the stark differences

in income prevalent in Haiti and the lifestyle of a well-to-do family. Odénie unlike the eponymous character in Bob Lemoine's *Olivia* turns down her prince charming.⁵⁹ Self-possessed and practical, Odénie symbolizes a “‘lakou-centered’ ‘family-centered’ Haiti (“Interview *I Love You Anne*, Director Richard Sénécal on Haitian Cinéma”) unmoved by the cruel lure and inequalities of urban life, and desirous of living with dignity. In a different place, at a different, and in a different, the story of Haitian migration is told from the perspective of the child of upper middle-class Haitian family in exile.

Violence, Trauma, Emigration: *Lumumba la mort du prophète* The Personal Is Historical and The Historical is Personal

Raoul Peck's 1992 *Lumumba: la mort du prophète* defies classifications: part historical account, part-autobiographical documentary, and part denunciation of the political machinations that took place during the transitional period of decolonization in West Africa, the film also reads as a migration narrative. Peck's re-presentation of the events that led to the independence of Congo (Kinshasa) from Belgium originates in his family's exile from Haiti under the François Duvalier dictatorship and their migration to West Africa. As educated French-speaking civil servants, they spent years in exile in the newly independent West African country. Thus, *Lumumba: la mort du prophète* holds significance because it equally draws attention to the tragic fate of the first Prime Minister of that independent nation, Patrice Lumumba, Cold War political and neo-colonial stakes. Peck's own mother proximity to the events is also significant.

The film had been mostly examined for its rewriting of the colonial History of Africa and particularly of the period of decolonization but rarely as the migration narrative of a section of the

⁵⁹ Sincerity and integrity, despite financial difficulties, is a recurring trait in Sénécal's heroines. In *Cousines*, one of the protagonists (Jessica Génés) rejects the handsome and well-off diaspora man (Jimmy Jean-Louis) who promises her a better life in the United States in favor a Haitian boyfriend her age (Jerry Lentz Rocher. In *Cousines* both female protagonists sell their body to men, one (Soledad Elizabeth Jean) willingly and the other to save the other. They are not judged for any of actions and both of them are portrayed in a positive light.

Haitian middle-class that it also is. Yet *Lumumba: la Mort du prophète* is also a Haitian migration narrative. Although it is never heard, the voice of Gisèle Peck, the filmmaker's mother, features prominently in the film. Her presence, what she saw, heard, and knew loom in the historical footage, the interviews, and the family home movies shot in Léopoldville. In *Lumumba: la mort du prophète*, his first opus on Patrice Lumumba, the personal becomes historical. Without her working as a secretary to the transitional government, Peck would not have had behind the scene access to the theater of history.

Gisèle Peck's is the liminal figure that allows Peck to recount a version of the decolonization of West Africa that has been erased in the same ways his parts his childhood have become fragmented. In *Lumumba: la mort du prophète* History is fused with personal storytelling. His parents' exile allows the filmmaker to explore the issue of diaspora in terms of political repression and class. *Lumumba: la mort du prophète* retraces a central moment in his childhood the forced departure of his family from Haiti, their arrival in Congo and the events that led Patrice Lumumba access to power and his murder. In Peck's documentaries and feature films political events, human rights issue, and violence intersect.

His filmography includes two films on first Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, a feature film about one film about a Haitian man facing the man who tortured him in Haiti under the Duvalier dictatorship (*Haitian Corner*, 1988), a documentary about the difficulties facing Haitian peasant battling soil erosion (*Haiti le silence des chiens*, 1994), a feature film about the Rwandan genocide (*Sometimes in April*), (*Chère Catherine*), and a film about the childhood memories of a eight year Haitian child whose family witnesses the rise of the Tonton Macoutes in a provincial town. Emigration from Haiti is part of the film's subplot, since the protagonist's parents flee the Duvalier dictatorships to Cuba and Venezuela (Raoul Peck's *L'homme sur les quais*, 1993).

In its first year, the movie garnered at least two awards: Best Film at the Fribourg

International Film Festival in 1992 and the OCIC award at the Festival d'Amiens in 1991. *Lumumba* the documentary fulfills different functions: first, it contextualizes the emergence of the Haitian Diaspora under the Duvalier dictatorship, as some of the Haitian middle-class begins to flee the country and settles as elite civil servants in the newly independent African states; second, it inserts the story of a Haitian family into the larger History of decolonization and reveals how Raoul Peck's mother had internal access to the political unfoldings between the Belgian authority and the Congolese budding state, and third it establishes the historicity of Lumumba as the tragic figure of Congolese resistance to colonialism, by showing archival footage of the time, and denouncing through interviews the neo-colonial intentions of the Belgian government. The director examines the ways in which the Belgian administration sets the independence of Congo for failure by ushering of an ill-prepared country into independence, co-opting Lumumba's opposition and allies, and amplifying Lumumba's Marxist ideas within the politically charged context of the Cold War.

Personal, historical, and militant, the film stands at various crossroads and is not a mere examination of African (post)-colonial history. Raoul Peck's two films about Lumumba are anchored in the making of the Haitian diaspora. The links between Lumumba and Haiti are not so far fetched. If with the feature film, Peck seems to be leaving the personal narrative mode behind and focus on the birth of the Congolese nation, he nevertheless rewrites History as a the personal account of a child of the Haitian diaspora whose middle-class family fled the Duvalier dictatorship.

Haiti's distinctive historical, political, and economic background paved the way for a filmmaking practice different from that of Martinique and Guadeloupe but as I develop in chapter 6 migration is central to each praxis. According to Michaëlle Lafontant-Médard, in the independent Caribbean nation formerly colonized by the French and occupied by the Americans for two decades (1915-1934), films telling the Haitian experience from the inside appear in the late 1950s during the Duvalier *père* dictatorship (*Ex-Iles* 81). The foci of these films oscillate between discourses of dissent

and compromise. The brutality of the repression that François and Jean-Claude Duvalier 1957-1971 and 1971-1986 political regimes reshaped the Haitian nation and defined the Haitian filmmaking practice when unprecedented emigration mostly to the Caribbean and North America produced the Haitian diaspora. With the Haitian nation dispersed, the film medium exists as one of many transnational flows. It plays the cultural role of bridging the *dedans* and *debors* divide, akin to what Arjun Appadurai calls “deritorialization” in *Modernity at Large*. Appadurai argues that: “deritorialization creates new markets for film companies, impresarios, and travel agencies, which thrive on the need of the relocated population for contact with its homeland (Appadurai *Modernity at Large* 49).”

Italian Neo Realism in Contemporary Hispaniola: Life in a *Batey*, Longing, and *Chéché Lavi* in Claudio’s del Punta *Haiti chérie*

Midway through the film *Haiti chérie*, Jean-Baptiste (Valentin Valdez), asks, Françoise, a young pregnant Haitian widow whether her child will be Haitian or Dominican. Françoise replies: “It does not matter right? We all live on the same island, right?” She then adds: “My child will be better in this house.” The question that Jean-Baptiste poses is informed by his own position as an un-documented Haitian migrant worker who had to flee with his wife a *batey* (a sugar cane plantation in the Dominican Republic). Jean-Baptiste is reluctant to return to Haiti but forced to do so after he beat up the Dominican man who tried to rape his wife, Magdaleine (Yeraini Cuevas).

We are in *el campo*: the lush and green Dominican countryside and the young Haitian woman who uttered these words is hiding her own ambivalence from Jean-Baptiste. The comfortable home she currently lives belongs to a middle-aged Dominican man, Sanchez. Later, though, she confides to Jean-Baptiste’s wife, Magdaleine that she is here as Sanchez’s servant. Although she works hard, he does not treat her well. She cannot bear his presence but she sleeps with him in the hope to

secure a better life for the child she carries. She explains that Sanchez thinks the baby is his but she hopes that Sanchez will accept them.

Françoise is too young to be a widow. While she is grieving her husband, she is also practical because she is pregnant. When Magdaleine asks her if she wants to stay with Sanchez, Françoise replies that all she wants is to be with her husband but her husband was murdered. The exchange between Magdaleine and Françoise foreshadows Magdaleine's own future. At the end of the film, in Haiti, on the other side of the island formerly known as Hispaniola, Magdaleine finds herself a young pregnant widow.

From a poetic and "dispassionate observation" (Giovacchini and Sklar 5) of the living conditions of Haitians in *bateyes*, the film essentially morphs into a travelogue within present-day Hispaniola, a place as harsh on the Haitian side as on the Dominican side of the border. The irony of the title is not lost on the audience. *Haïti chérie* is an unsparing title for a movie that begins with the funeral of a baby, includes with the death of his father at the border between Haiti and Santo Domingo, and ends with the promise of rebirth, as the lone mother as young angry pregnant widow cooks in a new pot by the sea. Del Punta ironically reprises the title of the song "Haïti chérie" to convey the longing of Haitians for their native land. Initially entitled, "Souvenir d'Haïti," "Haïti chérie" was composed in 1920 by Othello Bayard (Castera 15). It is the song of the Haitian diaspora, of those who went *chèbe la vi*, looking for life in *Dominicanie* and beyond:

Ayiti cheri pi bon peyi pase ou nanpwen

Fòk mwen te kite w pou mwen te kap konprann valè w

Fòk mwen te manke w pou m te kap apresye w

Pou m santi vreman tout sa ou te ye pou mwen.

'Haïti chérie, no country is as good as good as you

I had to leave you to understand your value

I had to miss you to appreciate you

To really feel what you mean to me.'

But in del Punta's film, Haiti is anything but the benevolent motherland. Towards the end of the film after the couple has safely crossed the border back, Magdeleine is unable to prevent Jean-Baptiste's senseless death at the hand of Haitian soldiers in an unwelcoming border town. The couple was lost and they had found themselves wandering in an unfriendly town, starving, and unable to find their way back to a country that is no longer home. Del Punta plays with his knowledge of the Western and implies that bordertowns are dangerous liminal spaces where law and order is dispensed arbitrarily and that transient strangers are easy potential victims. Jean-Baptiste and Magdeleine encounter a deranged woman whose laugh portends ill-fated events and a man who fulfills the part of a seer. He warns them with a semi cryptic message: the police kill people who act like they own other people's life.

The biblical names of the characters imbue the film with an obscure parable-like meaning that does not correspond to the different scriptures. Although at the very end of the film, Magdeleine is shown living by the sea—traditionally a symbol of rebirth and motherhood—pregnant with his child, it is not clear whether Jean-Baptiste is the precursor of Jesus, the Messiah. His prophecy that if they return home they meet a worse fate turns out to be true. Like his namesake, he is killed for speaking out: not for denouncing the incestuous marriage between King Herod and his niece but for protesting that when approached by Haitian guards in the bordertown seeking money although he and Magdeleine have not done anything wrong.

The name Magdeleine of course echoes the female disciple and friend of Jesus, Mary Magdelene. A social parable for the position of women, a witness to Jesus's crucifixion, and his resurrection, she is an ambivalent figure in the Western Catholic religion. Was she a prostitute, the companion of Jesus, an adulteress? In del Punta's film, Magdeleine is a young beautiful and

unhappy Haitian woman who grieves for the death of her baby and yearns to return to Haiti. Although it not clear whether is deliberate or unintentional, her presence onscreen is deeply eroticized. She is harassed both by Dominican men in positions of power in the batey and it seems that the director of photography, the director, and the camera desire her.

The actors who play Jean-Baptiste and Magdaleine, Valentin Valdes and Yeraini Cuevas, are undocumented Haitians workers who still live and work in *bateyes* in the Dominican Republic. In the tradition of Italian neorealism, the film was shot on locations and uses a large cast of non-professional actors and a small cast of professional actors. It has a documentary feel, and chronicles the difficult economic conditions of the working poor. Del Punta found the idea for the film while shooting a series of documentaries on the Caribbean (Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic) between 2003-2006. He decided to shoot *Haiti chérie* as a fiction film (Canal plus Claudio del Punta). A review of the film on the website espacio insular states that “Del Punta filmed Haiti Cherie - his fifth feature movie—between December 2005 and March 2006. Initially unable to gain a producer’s interest in the movie, he financed it entirely by himself by taking out a bank loan and shooting the film on digital video. The only person he took with him from Italy was the sound technician—the rest of the crew and cast he found locally on his arrival in the Dominican Republic.” The film was selected at several European film festivals and was awarded at the Locarno film festival.

In *Haiti chérie* the *batey* is depicted as a site of capitalist production that depends on the marginalization of Haitian migrant workers. The film begins with the funeral of Magdalena’s and Jean Baptiste’s baby who died of malnutrition. The young parents barely have the time to perform traditional rites for their son that the funeral is interrupted. It is the height of the sugar cane harvest and a Dominican overseer requires all able workers in the field. Ernesto, a Dominican doctor, buries the baby instead. Del Punta portrays Ernesto (Juan Carlos Campos) as a Che Guavara-like

charitable figure that tries to convince reluctant Haitian workers to organize and demand better wages.

Life in the *bateyes* is one of the missing migration narratives that connects present day Haiti with its neighbor, the Dominican Republic. The Haitian presence in neighboring Caribbean islands: from Cuba to Martinique and Guadeloupe, in Florida, Boston, and Montréal is established but the living conditions of men, women, and children living in Dominican sugar cane plantations remains largely underreported. The act of leaving Haiti or the countryside for the city is often fraught with unforeseen consequences for migrant workers who belong to the lowest rungs of society. Neo-realist films often “reveal contemporary social conditions” (Bordwell and Thompson 485).

Along with *Jean Gentil* (2011) directed by husband and wife team Laura Amelia Guzman and Israel Càrdenas and Bill Haney’s documentary *The Price of Sugar* (2007), *Haiti chérie* (2007) is one of the few recent films that look at the life of Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans in the Dominican Republic. Partially shot in a *batey*, a sugar cane plantation in the Dominican Republic, *Haiti chérie* chronicles the fate of a Haitian couple forced to leave their difficult life in the Dominican Republic for an even more precarious fate on the other side of the border in Haiti. Migration, leaving the countryside for the city and emigration, leaving Haiti for abroad, is in general the least desirable option and almost always chosen in the hope of finding a better life of *chèche lavi* (looking for life). In an attempt to raise awareness about the plight of Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic, foreign and Haitian filmmakers often adopt the perspective of the migrant to chronicle their struggle. This is reflected in the title of the films: a title such as *Jean Gentil* humanizes the eponymous characters by placing the marginal and virtuous eponymous character at the center of the narrative while a title such as *Haiti chérie* expresses the longing of one of the protagonists by reprising the title of song of the Haitian diaspora.

Haitie Chérie opens up with two sobering white on black inter-titles that inform its audience

about the plight of Haitian workers in sugar cane plantations in the Dominican Republic. These inter-titles frame as a human rights issue the unfortunate situation of an estimated one million Haitian workers living in the Dominican Republic. The audience then briefly sees a computer-generated map of the island formerly known as Hispaniola and Saint-Domingue. Intertitles and map give the misleading impression that *Haiti chérie* is a documentary and will present events that happened.

The map situates the plight of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic within the geographical borders of two nations sharing one island, without contextualizing these nations' historical tensions. As opposed to a 17th century map, the pixelated twenty-first century map is also a brief reminder that the narrative developed in the film is contemporary, regardless of the abuse, living conditions, and isolation of its protagonists. Director Claudio del Punta and first-time director of photography Karol Gonzalez Snochowski deliberately chose to use sepia tones to lend timelessness to the story of a young Haitian couple living in a batey. It emphasizes the deep, pensive, long-lasting sadness felt by Magdaleine, the film's protagonist and Haitian exiles of all ilk. The film's title directly quotes *Haiti chérie*, Othello Bayard's emblematic Haitian song whose lyrics and melody capture Haitians' nostalgia for their nativeland:

Ayiti chéri pi bon peyi pase ou nanpwen

Fòk mwen te kite w pou mwen te kap konprann valè w

Fòk mwen te manke w pou m te kap apresye w

Pou m santi vreman tout sa ou te ye pou mwen.

(“Haiti chérie, no country is as good as good as you

I had to leave you to understand your value

I had to miss you to appreciate you

To really feel what you mean to me.”)

Del Punta's uses Toto Bissainthe's wrenching rendition of Bayard's song as the film's musical theme, as well as several other songs of a critically acclaimed 1977 album: *Toto Bissainthe chante Haïti*. Bissainthe's voice and presence bring an additional subtext to the film. In a personal interview, her daughter, Milena Sandler, explained that her mother, Toto Bissainthe, an acclaimed Haitian actress, singer and performer, did not recognize the country she had left years before and never recovered from her chagrin. The photography in sepia tones bridges the gap between a remote historical past of servitude and the present conditions of Haitians *ka chèche lavi* (Creole for looking for life) in *Dominicanie*.

The living conditions of Haitian workers in the *batey* are as depicted in the not as much untenable as arbitrary. Magdalena and Jean-Baptiste live in a shack: they have a roof over their head, they eat seasoned boiled plantains, they wear decent clothes but the pay is low and irregular and baby formula is scarce. Their life is confined to the *batey*. After the baby's death Magdalena wants to return to Haiti but Jean-Baptiste fear what may awaits there. As transnational subjects, Haitian migrants living and working in the Dominican Republic are often caught between a rock an hard place.

But the scene of bathroom stop at the gas station seems to reverse the power dynamics in implicit ways. When Magdaleine and Jean-Baptiste enter the rest area their Haitian identity and their condition as stateless subjects marks them as subaltern in an unfamiliar environment. Although, they do not belong here, they barely hesitate. Jean-Baptiste silently looks around and waits for his wife to use the bathroom. Upon entering the bathroom, Magdaleine see a black woman cleaning the floor. It is not clear whether she is Haitian or Dominican. Del Punta diverts us from this question by seamlessly indicating that Magdalena is illiterate. She has entered the wrong bathroom. A paper sign with a super Mario-like figure reads *caballeros*.

Like Magdaleine, the young woman who is cleaning the bathroom is also black however her

complexion is much lighter than Magdaleine's. She is attractive: her head is round, her hair is short and natural; her demeanor is pleasant. Her plump body is contrasted with Magdaleine's lean figure. She wears gold hoop earrings, which indicates that she is better off than Magdalena. At first it is not clear whether she is addressing Magdaleine in Spanish or in Creole or whether she is Haitian or Dominican. Magdaleine listens but does not reply until the woman, who is Haitian like her, or perhaps Haitian-Dominican admits in Creole that she too cannot read and that Magdaleine should not be ashamed. She only learned how to differentiate the bathroom because she works here.

Both women are marked as black but the origin the lighter skinned woman is at first ambiguous. Del Punta implies that Haitian presence is large in the Dominican Republic and that lighter skinned Haitian fare slighter better although they occupy subaltern positions. Del Punta focuses the second part of this scene on Jean-Baptiste's encounter with another young woman and Magdaleine's lack of awareness of this young woman her age.

A young Dominican woman who entered the gas station with a rowdy group of friends is however. The woman is part of a group of two couples. As she walks to the refrigerated drinks area, she asks one of the men in the group not to be cheap with his money. When he asks why, she replies, with a suggestive movement of the hip, because they are about to get wild. She wears sunglasses, tight jeans, and a fashionable silver metallic belt. Her enthusiasm is exaggerated. She is almost performing Dominican femininity. One of the men in her party asks her to also get him a drink. He calls her *morena*, a term of endearment and, in this context, an insult since this is not her name but a description what she looks like. An insert of sugary carbonated drinks with à propos ironic brand names such as "Mon petit," "Presidente" beers implies that their relationship is predicated on the bartering of consumer goods against the implied promise of rewarding the man with sexual favors. A close-up of a bag of Dorito potato chips framed as they appear at someone's eye level implies that the woman views herself as a commodity.

This scene is striking because it comes after the dramatic scene when one of the young Dominican men who oversees the *batey* attempted to rape Magdaleine in broad daylight and forced Magdalena, Pierre, and Jean-Baptiste to leave in Ernesto's pick up truck after they beat him up. It also comes before Magdaleine meets Françoise. Magdaleine is the central character in the film, she is the only character who longs to return to Haiti and is willing to risk her life to do so.

Jean-Baptiste who has been waiting for Magdaleine to come out of the bathroom has witnessed the exchange but it is only after one of the drinks the woman grabbed falls on the floor that notices Jean-Baptiste. Del Punta uses the bottle to problematize the encounters between Haitians and Dominicans in contemporary Dominican Republic. Jean-Baptiste stoops to take the drink on the floor at the same time as she does. Their hands rest on opposite sides of the bottle. They do not touch but they stare at each other: it is hard to interpret what is going on in their mind. They are about the same age but live in separate worlds, chiefly separated by racial markers and a complicated history. They mark a pause: her steady look betrays no hostility; in fact it shows *interest*. She seems almost intrigued by the attractive Haitian man. Jean-Baptiste has a striking chiseled face, a dark brown complexion, and a short Afro hairstyle, wears a hip-hop style white shirt cut at the sleeves.

Director of photography Karol Gonzalez frames the next shot so that Magdaleine is seen in the background behind the group of Dominicans. Magdaleine is absentmindedly playing with her hair and she does not see the four Dominicans. Jean-Baptiste meets her and they walk confidently and quietly out the rest area. The young Dominican woman stares almost *longingly* at the tranquil darker-skinned Haitian couple leaving. She looks at Magdaleine who is wearing a simple long pink—the color of Erzulie—T-shirt. As one of the men is heard off-screen paying for the soft drinks, perhaps in an attempt to put some distance between herself and Jean-Baptiste (and what she felt earlier) perhaps because she resents Magdaleine's presence, the young Dominican woman says in

Spanish to no one in particular: “God, he really stank.” Except for her no one in her party has acknowledged or seen Jean-Baptiste and Magdeleine.

This sequence problematizes in an unusual way the question of Haitian transnational identity in the Dominican Republic. The Haitian couple is outside of the perimeter of the *batey* during the sugar cane season and has therefore crossed an unwritten border. Theirs entering the rest area of a gas station to use the bathroom is unusual as they do not have any money to purchase consumer goods, since the gas station does not accept *batey* money. Del Punta implicitly contrasts how differently Magdeleine and the Dominican woman at the gas station chose their partners. Although she has been shown having sex twice with two different Haitian men, her husband, Jean-Baptiste and Pierre, in this scene Magdeleine is not as sexualized. The director makes the point that although one woman is a Dominican citizen and the other an undocumented Haitian migrant worker, the Haitian woman is the subject and the Dominican woman is the object. In this scene the encounter between Haitians and Dominicans call into questions assumptions about race and agency within the island of Hispaniola. The construction of Haitian bodies as commodities is being questioned.

However, throughout the film and in an effort to raise awareness about the human rights issue in the *batey*, Del Punta consistently portrays Haitian workers as helpless. In the scene where a mulatto Dominican manager attempts to rape Magdalena in broad daylight, Pierre, who was nearby in a field, and Jean-Baptiste, who was returning from the field, intervene and beat the man up. Surprisingly other Haitian women who were at the river with Magdalena do not intervene and just stand there. Just like the figure Dominican doctor as a savior, this is inconsistent with the long history Haitian and Haitian Dominican organizations that defend and protect the right of women in the *bateyes*. Another striking element in the film is its deliberate or unintentional use of scopophilia. The way the camera lingers on Magdalena and her body may be interpreted as an aesthetic choice and as a way of calling attention to the beauty Haitian woman. Ascribing value to an exploited,

under-represented community is a common undertaking in Italian neo-realist cinema but the insistent presence of the camera also feels like prying even ogling.

Antilles sur Seine: French Caribbean Workers as the Fabric of “la troisième île”

The plot in the film *Antilles sur Seine* suggests that social status, education, and faith in the police force is of little or no help to a Guadeloupean black family looking for a missing family member. Instead it is the unexpected sense of solidarity shared by French Caribbean workers that eventually resolves the mystery surrounding the disappearance. On the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, a lavish party is thrown for Horace Sainte-Rose (Med Hondo), the black mayor of a township of Marie-Galante, a tiny island in the French Caribbean. Surrounded by his wife, Lucia, (Laure Moutoussamy) and his two sons, Manuel (Thierry Desroses), a doctor working and living in Paris, and Freddy (Edouard Montoute), a deejay, Horace Sainte-Rose seems to enjoy a carefree and privileged life but the pristine location of his district municipality has caught the eye of ruthless real estate developers Elizabeth and Mathias Sauveur (Hélène Vincent and Julien Maurel). The Sauveurs have been eyeing the superb coastal area in Saint-Rose’s district in the hope of developing it into a tourist destination but Horace Sainte-Rose has consistently refused to sell it to them.

Lucia (Laure Moutoussamy), Horace’s wife, mysteriously disappears from her hotel room during a business to trip Paris. The Sainte-Roses report her disappearance to the police. The two police officers, Commandant Herman (Chantal Lauby) and Inspecteur Henri (Pierre-Olivier Mornas) assigned to their case suspect a kidnapping. Despite her unorthodox methods, Commandant Herman (Chantal Lauby), a white single mother in her forties, starts to seriously investigate the case but soon her superior forbids her to pursue the case on the Minister of the Interior’s recommendation. As they confront Herman, the Sainte-Roses suspect a cover-up. They find unexpected help at a newsstand by the police station.

There is a vast underground network of *antillais* willing to help them find Lucia in the name of solidarity: the 800 000 low-paid civil servants that work in hospitals, at the post-office, for the phone and the gas and electricity companies, as parking agents, as bus and subway drivers, and as *motocrottes*. Thanks to them, Lucia is located in a house in the Parisian suburbs. Manuel Saint-Rose, a very thorough physician, saves Herman's young son when gets critically sick, she decides to help them solve the case. Horace's long time friend (Greg Germain), Trumel emerges as an accomplice to the Sauveurs. With Lucia Sainte-Rose out of harm's way, the Sainte-Rose family returns to Guadeloupe. Horace, Manuel, and Eddy feign compliance with the Saint-Sauveurs's scheme in order to exact revenge on them. In the film's final act, the Sainte-Roses manipulate the Sauveurs, who represent both the Caribbean *béké* plantocracy and the French establishment, into debasing themselves: by performing a faux, ridiculous, and caricatural voodoo ceremony. The Sainte-Roses have succeeded in turning the figure of the colonizer in its own caricature of Afro-Caribbean religion.

Despite its obvious message of French Caribbean unity and its reliance on comedy *Antilles sur Seine* remains a profoundly dystopian film. Among the eight migration narratives examined in this chapter *Antilles sur Seine* is the only film that seem to favorably portray the migration experience. The genre of the film, slapstick comedy, calls for light entertainment that veers towards crudeness (feces sprayed from a hose on an assailant), caricatures, and the unsavory. Paradoxically, *Antilles sur Seine* relies on the types of gags that the dignified black bourgeois Saint-Sauveur family would find distasteful. In *Antilles sur Seine* the criticism of the migratory experience of workers from Martinique and Guadeloupe is oblique. The message in Pascal Légitimus's film urging to find strength within a group of low-level workers who unite against the interest of a financial interest of a ruthless white minority is predicated on the very weakness of these workers. In reality the characterization of low-level French Caribbean workers implicitly denounces their meekness of affected to subaltern civil

servant jobs. *Antilles sur Seine* is set both in Marie-Galante, a small island that is part of the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe (*une dépendance*) and in Paris and its surroundings. As the urban area in France where most French Caribbean migrants looking for work settled in from the 1960s onwards, the Paris metropolitan region plays a critical role in the film. The movie portrays low-rank French Caribbean workers as a community that is capable of functioning as an entity in order to gain agency over mainstream French society. One of the shortcomings of the film is that this Caribbean unity that stems from working-class workers is deployed to help an upstanding Cosby show type of family. The Sainte-Rose patriarch is determined to protect pristine land in the French Caribbean against greedy speculators who want to turn it into an exclusive resort. What makes this comedy a dystopian film what this implies: the lesser-known characters' implied degree of resignation. The film is not about unskilled French Caribbean workers rebelling for their own sake or to improve their own working conditions. While their dismal working conditions is only acknowledged obliquely, it is only as what if: what if we sabotaged key elements of the government. Yet the discourses of solidarity and empowerment deployed in the film and Pascal Légitimus's own pedigree make *Antilles sur Seine* more than the one-dimensional comedy.

Pascal Légitimus happens to be the son of actor Théo Légitimus, the grandson of veteran actress Darling Légitimus, and the great grandson of Hégésippe Légitimus, a key black political figure in early 20th century Guadeloupean politics. If his grandmother, Darling Légitimus (née Mathilde Paruta) was born in Martinique, his grandfather, Victor- Etienne Légitimus was born in Guadeloupe, his father Théo Légitimus and himself were born and raised in Paris. He is also one of three comedians of the *überfamous*, at least in France, former comic trio Les Inconnus. Being black French royalty allowed Pascal Légitimus to direct an all-star cast of black Francophone actors, mainly of Martinican and Guadeloupean descent and to be produced by French director and screenwriter Claude Zidi, best known for French mainstream comedies such as *Les Sous-*

donés and *Les Ripoux*.

Of Armenian and Guadeloupean descent, L g t mus grew up in Paris amongst an artistic family involved with the artists of color who performed plays by black playwrights from the mid 1950s and French playwrights such as Jean Genet who redefined French theater and black actors. Established in France since the 1920s, the L g t muses played a central role within French Caribbean cultural production. They were part of the Black diaspora continuum in Paris, mingling with Francophone artists and students and African American artists from Jos phine Baker to Melvin van Peebles who come of age in Paris. They also performed in plays chronicling the African American experience. Darling and her son Th o L g t mus performed—along with Med Hondo—in one of Van Peebles Parisian plays, *La f te   Harlem*, during the African American director’s time in Paris. Melvin van Peebles’s cameo in *Antilles sur Seine* is a reminder of that diasporic relationship (Fabre 262-263). In fact despite its direct allusion to the French Caribbean presence in the capital, the intertextuality of the title *Antilles sur Seine* is a nod to previous films made in the 1950s and 1960s that account for the Afro-diasporic presence in Paris.

The title *Antilles sur Seine* references both the 1959 twenty-minute documentary *Afrique-sur-Seine* by Beninese and Senegalese director Paulin Soumanou Vieyra about African Francophone presence artists and students and two 1962 short films entitled *Harlem-sur-Seine*⁶⁰ about African American artist in Paris produced for the documentary series *Cinq colonnes   la une*. These two titles suggest the idea of a community and the theme of solidarity is central to *Antilles sur Seine*, as my synopsis of the film indicates. When the matriarch of the family (Laure Moutoussamy) of the family is kidnapped, the Sainte-Rose, an upper middle-class black family from Marie-Galante, Guadeloupe,

⁶⁰ The first of the two *Harlem-sur-Seine* short documentaries was directed by Jean-Christophe Averty, who staged the American play *The Green Pastures* as *Les verts paturages* for French television in 1964. Among the cast members were Med Hondo and actors from the Compagnie des Griots including Robert Liensol and Th o L g t mus. Th o L g t mus the father of Pascal L g t mus who directed *Antilles sur Seine* most likely knew about Paulin Soumanou Vieyra’s and Christophe Averty’s film.

receive help both from a cop (Chantal Lauby) and from the expansive network formed by French Caribbean workers in Paris and its suburb.

The first comment that comes to mind when watching Pascal Légitimus's film *Antilles sur Seine* (2000) is how much that film relies on familiar stereotypes about the French West Indian experience. On the popular French website Allociné, one anonymous reviewer with the moniker neofelis gave the film half a star out of five and summarized it in unsparing terms.⁶¹ For Pascal Légitimus, the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe are two generations removed. As a basis for his stereotyping, Légitimus uses his background as a humorist to create a composite construction of the French Caribbean experience that both the French tourist familiar with *les îles* and the French Caribbean migrant living in France will recognize. Like Jerry Lewis in the original 1963 film *Nutty Professor*, Légitimus directs and plays. Like Eddy Murphy in the 1996 *Nutty Professor*, Légitimus uses special effect make-up and bodysuits to impersonate several characters, white: Mme Dorval, an obsequiously friendly racist and suspicious white super (concierge), and black: a libidinous Caribbean grandfather, a disco-era black DJ, a recalcitrant employee at the post-office, and a taxi driver.

The director seemingly chose to entertain its audience rather than make a cerebral film. Yet Pascal Légitimus's first feature film is more ambitious than it seems and deserves to be subjected to multiple readings. There is more to this "*film tropicalisé*" than oversimplified depictions of a large group of family and friends partying to the sound of generic Zouk music while drinking rum and eating spicy and colorful Caribbean fare on the white beaches of Guadeloupe, as shown in the

⁶¹ "Film nul et sans aucun intérêt, gags bidons et situations grotesques. C'est un ramassis de clichés: on dirait une succession d'images d'épinals de la période coloniale. Rien que l'affiche du film en dit long... On a peine à croire que ce film, pardon plutôt ce navet est l'oeuvre d'une personne ayant des origines antillaises. De toute évidence P. Légitimus doit être un oncle Tom, un nègre de maison prêt à toutes les courbettes pour avoir une tribunes auprès de ses maîtres. Pour conclure je dirai que c'est un film "Ya bon banania" il manque plus que Joséphine Baker et sa ceinture de banane!" <http://www.allocine.fr/membreZ20120901154545773123215/critiques/?creview=133440316>

opening sequence of the film. Beyond the unusual portrayal of the director's intention is to focus attention on the ubiquitous presence later in the film of a whole generation of *antillais* working as civil servants in transportation, in hospitals, and at the post office in large French cities. Although it looks like it adopts a simplistic perspective, the film proposes an oppositional discourse.

Neither fish nor fowl, *Antilles sur Seine* is a hybrid farce that does not fit neatly into one genre: it is a comedy, a drama, and a cop movie all in one. While *Antilles sur Seine* relies on gross stereotypical representations of West Indian life in Paris that may be recognized both by Antillais themselves and a multicultural and French mainstream audience, it is also clear that the filmmaker's intention is to revisit and subvert these stereotypes. That subversion takes several forms but more importantly calls for a rejection of the French cultural repertoire and its often pretentiously highbrow, and to a few exception seldom racially diverse, critiques of the French bourgeoisie. The film borrows its slapstick humor, make-up tricks, and incarnation of several characters played by one actor (Pascal Légitimus himself) from lowbrow American comedies such as *The Nutty Professor* with Eddy Murphy. Like Bill Cosby with *The Cosby Show*, the director presents to a mainstream audience with unprecedented representations of the black upper middle-class. However unlike the perennially safe and prosperous Huxtable family, the Sainte Rose, black upper middle-class family in *Antilles sur Seine* depends on its working-class, unskilled, and usually invisible fellow country men and women to fight corruption, free the matriarch from her abductors and restore balance in their life.

Unless, they star in American films, sitcoms or series, successful and wealthy black families are absent from the French media landscape. Légitimus's criticism of the French Republican promise of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* remains implicit and non-confrontational throughout the film. It is buried under a varnish of benevolent caricatures, coarse situations and cringe-inducing comedy staged to be non-threatening to a mainstream French audience but at times offensive yet sympathetic and funny to a working-class French West Indian audience. For instance: in a

memorable a scene, Commandant Herman dons a blackface and dresses as a cleaning lady in order to retrieve/consult compromising documents at the Ministère de l'Intérieur, where her class, race, and subaltern position will not arouse suspicion were she to found snooping around.

Although her disguise as a black cleaning lady of Caribbean descent is not entirely convincing and in she is caught red-handed snooping, she manages to deflect suspicion by overperforming a distorted impersonation of French Caribbean-ness: adopting a French Caribbean accent where “r”s are replaced by “w”s. Her successfully performing blackness works as long as it corresponds to stereotypes of the black female Caribbean subaltern. This scene ironically implies that *Légitimus* does not seek to portray accurately how French West Indian bus drivers or nurses live their daily life. By depicting French West-Indian workers as a group of central yet invisible employees who are an integral part of countless state agencies, *Légitimus* pays an indirect homage to the presence of colored citizens, who with other *immigrés*, notably their African and North African counterparts, are generally maligned, and whose contribution to the economy of the French nation is seldom acknowledged in French mainstream media or in the French national discourse.

The comedy's underlying message of French Caribbean unity and solidarity, if narrow in scope (a joint effort to trace a disappearance of a *compatriote* —a fellow “country” women— and free the victim) rings like a wake-up call and opens the doors to a (n) awareness, self or greater, of the role and value of French Caribbean workers in French cities. After all since they occupy every lower strata of public service, they can easily disrupt key departments such as La Poste (the post-office), EDF-GDF (the French equivalent to ConEdison), hospitals (state-owned in France). *Légitimus*'s idea of tapping into the French Caribbean workforce is limited to solving a problem faced by an outstanding member of the French Caribbean community. *Antilles sur Seine* is not exactly a film that tries to invoke as a means of social advancement the highly charged modes of political pressure such as boycott used by African Americas during the civil rights movement. While the films picks up

about two decades where Med Hondo left with *West Indies: les nègres marrons de la liberté*, Légitimus's film is not nearly as militant and virulent in its denunciation of social injustices.

Immigration: “Pays Révé, Pays Réel,” “Detour,” Dispersal, and Alienation

In contrast to the sweet and soft-spoken voice of singer Fred Deshayes—from famed band Soft—the recollections and testimonies of ordinary men and women, prominent political figures, famous sport figures, actors of cultural life, and Caribbean youth born in France in Antoine Léonard-Maestreti 2006 documentary *L'avenir est ailleurs* are often harsh. The fruit of Léonard-Maestreti's collaboration with journalist from Guadeloupe Michel Reinette (who co-wrote the screenplay), *L'avenir est ailleurs* retraces the migration of men and women from the French-Caribbean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe to France mainly under the patronage of the Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les Département d'Outre-Mer (BUMIDOM) or *Bibidom* in Creole, an organization founded in 1962 by Michel Debré.

Reinette and Léonard-Maestreti use loosely compiled testimonies, reenactments, archival footage, and interviews to reflect on the displacement of French Caribbean workers who went to France to fill menial position in public transportation, homes, hospital, and at the post office some forty-five years ago. The picture that emerges is one disappointment, alienation, and sacrifice. In retrospect many interviewees see their departure as a necessary hardship but also reflect on what they consider a life of sacrifice. In the first third of the documentary film, Reinette and Léonard-Maestreti link *janbé dlo* ‘crossing the waters’ to meeting an untimely death, passing, and loss. The film begins at an airport in the Caribbean. but the plane is not associated with the carefreeness of tourism and leisure but the return of a corpse.

A man holding his straw hat in his hand is receiving his wife's coffin. She died in France where she overstayed while visiting her children. During her traditional wake, one of the *chanteurs de*

veillée mortuaire criticizes the *Bibidom* (BUMIDOM in Creole) as a machine of mass migration that crushed a great number of people. “Budidom té vwouyé tout’ moun an france pou yo té tchouyé yo.” He holds the French immigration organization responsible for demise and adds: “Bibidom tchouyé an patché moun.” The theme of death reappears several times in the film. Several migrants recall that the office of French Caribbean migration only provided, an *aller simple*, a one-way ticket to France. A former employee reveals that she would hide that she worked there for fear of retaliation.

The theme of death is never far when Léonard-Maestreti introduces the reasons behind French Caribbean emigration. Several factors contributed to Michel Debré’s plan to recruit Caribbean workers. Archival footage conveys very effectively pull and push factors: a shortage in France of unskilled workers and the extreme poverty in which the majority of people in the DOM-TOM lived in the 1960s. Former mayor of Pointe-à-Pitre, Henri Bangou, explains that parts of the city were slums. Dr. Pierre Alier, a noted Martinican figure and a friend of Aimé Césaire notes that typhoid and malaria afflicted many. Césaire himself points out that the economic crisis brought by the end of sugar cane industry was another contributing factor. This crisis had lasting consequences: the rural exodus of men and women living in the countryside and high unemployment.

Daniel Boukman (né Blérald), a playwright from Martinique who joined the fight in for the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) points to another consideration: political turmoil. Young unemployed *Martiniquais* and *Guadeloupéens*, inspired by historical events such as the 1959 Cuban revolution and the independence of Algeria, grew resentful of the local French authorities’ repression against sugar cane workers: they turned to activism. Boukman’s brief commentary, who had anticipated one of Césaire’s famed expressions, characterized this migration as a contemporary iteration of the slave trade in his play *Les négriers*, later adapted by Med Hondo as the film *West Indies: les nègres marrons de la liberté* the following year. The phrase that Césaire coined during his February

1978 discourse at *l'assemblée nationale* (Confiant 163), migration as a “génocide par substitution,” resonates throughout the film in various degrees in virtually all of the testimonies

In the third part of the film, Reinette and Léonard-Maestreti echo Yamina Benguigui’s documentary *Mémoires d’immigrés* (1997). They go back and forth between two retired couples: the working-class couple Melyons and the middle-class Clarenses who have returned *o péyi* ‘home.’ In France, they give voice to the French-born children of Caribbean migrants who often grew up in *banlieues* after focusing on the ways the parents look back at the life in France and why they left. Tongues untie and stories about housing discrimination are shared. The impression left by all these testimonies is the French Caribbean immigrant discovered in France that they were *immigrés* before *citoyens*.

Chapter 7

Talking Back: Marginalization and Difference in 21st Century Haitian and French Caribbean Films

Oppositional discourse abounds in films about Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe. Yet in an effort to legitimize a Caribbean cultural production relegated to the periphery, previous generations of filmmakers have often privileged exemplary characters and admirable historical figures. They often ignored, glossed over, and excluded marginalized characters. In contrast, the *raison d'être* behind a few significant film narratives about the Haitian, Guadeloupean, and Martinican experiences produced in the 21st century is not solely to join larger nations on the world cultural stage and legitimize the cultural, historical, and artistic legacies of the Haitian nation and the French Caribbean islands but to dwell in the margins. To foster a renewed dialogue about Haitian and French Caribbean identities directors born in the mid 1960s and early 1970s who directed films in the early 2000s reclaim marginalization. This chapter examines six films that focus on marginalization and difference: *Nèg Maron* (2005), *Tèt grènné* (2000), *La noiraude* (2005), and *Des hommes et des dieux* (2002) and *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* (2005) and *Haiti la fin des chimères* (2004). Filmmakers update Haitian and French Caribbean individual and collective identities by forcing the inclusion of a greater number of paradigms, demanding the acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of individuals within broader discursive Caribbean identities.

If the children of Dorotheé, the character of the single mother played by Toto Bissainthe in Jérôme Kanapa's film *En l'autre bord*, had made a film in their thirties or forties they may have made the feature films *Tèt grènné*, *Nèg maron*, the short *La noiraude*, the documentary *Des hommes et des dieux*. Second-generation filmmakers steeped in the Caribbean culture of their parents raised if not born in Western culture portray their parents' dreamed country or "pays rêvé" as a "péyi krazé," a crushed country. They point their lenses on the lived experience and dissenting voices of *négropolitaines*,

Caribbean youth, petites frappes ‘thugs,’ *chimères*, and gay men. These films are the works of a generation of filmmakers talking back to their parents as much as they are talking back to the North. They are ambivalent about contemporary Caribbean values and ideas. Far from the postcard Caribbean paradise favored by tourists, the individual sacrifice and model of meritocracy that enable José to honor and yet leave behind the plantation life of *La rue Cases-Nègres*, or the searing criticism of emigration and French neocolonialism in *West Indies: les nègres marrons de la liberté*, the films favor rebellious characters that live as thugs, a Parisian black women interrogating her cultural identity and struggling with an on and off relationship, flamboyant gay men living their outsider’s status in the open space of voodoo religion, brothers with American monikers of American hip hop stars drug lords reigning over slums as public and political enemies.

Chapter 7, “Talking Back: Marginalization and Difference in 21st Century Haitian and French Caribbean Films,” five recent French Caribbean and Haitian films that embrace difference and marginality as unsettling forms of cultural identity worthy of attention. This chapter looks at the ways in which second-generation Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers insist that marginality is part of contemporary Caribbean life. Embracing or rejecting the pitfalls of urban life, one’s sexual orientation, class, race, gender, and sexuality are markers of this marginality.

First, *Tèt grenné*, and *Nèg maron*, French filmmakers of Guadeloupean descent Christian Grandman and Jean-Claude Flamand-Barny focuses on disenfranchised characters engaged in illegal activity, who seek to improve their circumstances by leaving or plundering mainstream society. Secondly, *La noirette*, Fabienne and Véronique Kanor’s first short film, looks at French Caribbean cultural identity and the sense of (un) belonging of a second generation Parisian woman of Martinican descent; a quirky French black woman in her thirties examines the variegated facets of her identity, including the legacy her mother left her when it comes to her relationship with men. Thirdly in *Des Hommes et des dieux* Haitian filmmakers Rachel Magloire and Anne Lescot reveal how

gay Haitian men resist marginalization by intrinsically linking their sexual identity to key elements of Haitian religion Vodou in order to gain acceptance from Haitian society. Finally *Ghosts of Cité* by foreign filmmakers Asger Leth's and Milos Loncarevic's 2006 documentary examines the rivalry (and devotion) between two young brothers who are also drug lords in Haiti's largest shantytown who have adopted hip hop thug life as their cultural identity. Almost two decades later however, Palcy's and Zobel's treatment of Caribbean difference through the prism of the assumed egalitarian Frenchness of French West Indian identity is no longer desirable and has been replaced by instances of Caribbean distinctiveness embracing representations of Haitian and French Caribbean identities that come from the margins.

In one his seminal 1981 essays collected in *Le discours antillais* French Caribbean novelist, Edouard Glissant briefly reflects on the dilemma awaiting the French-born and French-raised children of French Caribbean migrants. Whether they are *néropolitain/e/s*, simply moved to France to study and returned to work in Guadeloupe, or both, second-generation filmmakers trouble formulations of contemporary Francophone Caribbean cultural identity by critiquing the values their parents held dear.

Le sort de la deuxième génération d'Antillais en France est encore plus inconfortable. Visiblement étrangers, les enfants de cette génération sont définitivement assimilés à la réalité française. En aucun cas ils ne pourraient vivre en Martinique ou en Guadeloupe, où la situation leur deviendrait vite insupportable, pour la raison qu'elle leur révèlerait leur "différence" d'avec un Français, sans les comprendre dans un Nous différencié (129).

Two decades later, two filmmakers of French Caribbean-descent from that second génération: Christian Grandman, and Jean-Claude Flamand-Barney have offered distinctive responses to Glissant's observations. They are respectfully speaking back to *Rue Cases-Nègres*' narrative of

social mobility and pride in Afro-Caribbean culture by insisting on telling the stories and narrating the dreams and despondency of *laissés pour compte*. Neither from here nor from there, French-Caribbean filmmakers born or raised in France resist simplistic labels. Often designated by the *mot-valise négropolitains*⁶² to distinguish them from their *antillais* parents and their West Indian counterparts that were born and raised in Martinique and Guadeloupe, *négropolitains* have to match and negotiate their black, *négro*, racial identity and appearance with their French cultural identity and their metropolitan experience. Their “Nous différencié” is declined on the mode of marginality.

The films *Tèt grenné* and *Nèg maron* are radical departures from previous French Caribbean movies. Instead of bridging the gap between searing social critique (*Toutes les Joséphine ne sont pas Impératrices*, *En l'autre bord*), historical narrative, and theater (*Soleil Ô*, *West Indies: les nègres marron de la liberté*), following the conventions of the Bildungsroman (*Rue Cases-Nègres*), or of the War/Combat film and contributionist historical film (*Sucre amer*, *Vivre libre ou Mourir*), Grandman and Flamand-Barny framed their social message as a deliberately dystopian perspective on contemporary Guadeloupean society. The affirmation of Caribbean culture, the lasting effects of French colonialism, Martinique and Guadeloupe as societies divided by their racial and class-based inequalities are revisited in ways that privilege social critique. Grandman, Brival, and de Sacy, on the one hand, and Flamand-Barny and Agat, on the other hand, replace the-grandchild-of-sugar-cane-workers-as-a-model-pupil, the heroic Delgrès, and the allegorical figure of the slave ship with modern-day maroons: small-time thugs (*petites frappes*) who break into villas, smoke weed, and wear baggy shorts, drunks, hookers, lunatics, and drifters.

Two decades after Euzhan Palcy, a new generation of male Caribbean directors Guadeloupe

⁶² *Négropolitain* designates a person of African descent who was (often but not always born) raised in France, the métropole, and thus is marked by French culture but whose parents are from the French-Caribbean (born and raised and moved to France to work and live in the '60s and '70s. Depending on where it is used, who uses it and how the person it defines their cultural identity, the noun *négropolitain* is merely descriptive or derogatory.

and screenwriters from Martinique (Roland Brival and Alain Agat)⁶³ contend that the narrative of social mobility so poignantly presented in *Rue Cases-Nègres* was unattainable for many of José's younger friends. It time instead to focus the lenses of directors from Guadeloupe on the daily hustle of disenfranchised men and women living in within the peripheries or urban communities, to the favor the cripplingly monotonous, or free atemporal stories of Caribbean men and women struggling in their own land. Protagonists in Grandman's and Flamand-Barny's films inhabit informal sectors of the economy and view middle-class bourgeois life with suspicion and as a form of alienation.

***Tèt grenné's* and *Nèg maron's* Dystopian Urban Guadeloupe: Sex Workers, Mad Women, and Thugs**

In *Tèt grenné* (dir. Christian Grandman, scr. Roland Brival, 2002) and *Nèg maron* (dir. Jean-Claude Flamand Berny, scr. Alain Agat, 2005) propose tropes of Caribbean Otherness that relegates the French presence to the *margins*. The inhabitants of Tèt Grenné enact their idea of a rural, self-sufficient Guadeloupe like “economic nationalists” (Hintjens 47). Grandman symbolizes their rejection of Western consumerism as the occupation of an abandoned plot of land, Tèt Grenné, an expression of their nationalist sentiment reminiscent of the he UPLG (*Union Populaire pour la Libération de la Guadeloupe*)⁶⁴ “nationalist strategy” (Hintjens 49). They are reimagining home and their community as a utopian site completely independent from the *métropole*.

Tèt grenné and *Nèg maron* propose marginalized yet liberating paradigms of French Caribbean

⁶³ The screenwriter Agnès de Sacy is also credited along with Christian Grandman and the novelist Roland Brival as a screenwriter for *Tèt grenné*.

⁶⁴Hintjens explains that:“The UPLG (*Union Populaire pour la Libération de la Guadeloupe*) envisages an independent economy as being based on food self-sufficiency through peasant production. Such ideas are inspired by the new farms set up on abandoned land on the leewards side of Guadeloupe and with the support of the pro-independence union the UTA (*Union des Travailleurs Agricoles*). Such faith in the peasantry seems particularly misplaced in territories where there is no pleasant tradition independent from the plantation system (49).

difference and reveal the tension that lies in the cultural and political contradictions of French (and now European) Caribbean identity by drawing on the contestatory film practice from the Caribbean archipelago at large: from Jamaica (*The Harder They Come*) to Brasil (*Quilombo*). For instance, the themes, narrative devices, and Creole title in two recent films from Guadeloupe propose tropes of Caribbean Otherness that relegates the French presence to the margins, and anchors these tropes not only to an existing literary and theoretical continuum but also to the current Caribbean and Latin-American urban reality and film language. The logos (complex dystopian urban communities) and discourses (cimarronaje) in the films *Tèt grenné* (dir. Christian Grandman, scr. Roland Brival and Agnès de Sacy, 2002) and *Nèg maron* (dir. Jean-Claude Flamand Barney, scr. Alain Agat, 2005) attempt to give voice to disenfranchised youth and echo racial, gender, and class strife.

Jean-Claude Flamand-Barney (b. 1965) and Christian Grandman (b.1969) are two French filmmakers of Guadeloupean-descent whose respective first feature film proposes dystopian film narratives about Guadeloupe. Their perspective differs from the generation of enduring filmmakers who started working in the 1980s such as Euzhan Palcy, Elsie Haas, Guy Deslauriers, and Raoul Peck. In the 1970s and 1980s several films were openly critical of Departmentalization and of the BUMIDOM (*Soleil Ô, West Indies, En l'autre bord, Toutes les Joséphines ne sont pas impératrices*), local political maneuvering (*Coco la fleur candidat*), and have relegated France to the margin, very few French Caribbean and Haitian feature films focused specifically on urban strife, petty crimes, and on poverty from the perspective of marginal characters.

Raised by a single mother in a *banlieue*, Jean-Claude Flamand Barney is a self-taught filmmaker. From humble background, Flamand-Barney came of age during the golden age of the French hip-hop era. Love of cinema and the self-discipline required to practice martial arts kept him in line. As a teenager, he befriended Mathieu Kassovitz, the son of film producer and filmmaker Peter Kassovitz. Kassovitz grew-up in an intellectual upper middle-class household, while Flamand-

Barny grew up between Guadeloupe and France in a *cité* (*in the projects*). Jean-Claude Flamand-Barny and Mathieu Kassovitz were both high school dropouts who aspired to become filmmakers. The movies theaters on the Champs Elysée were their training ground: Flamand-Barny and Mathieu Kassovitz were avid filmgoers and would often enter theaters through the back door. In his first short, *Putain de porte* (1994), Flamand-Barny explores racial and class barriers: young men from the projects try to crash a party in well-off neighborhood.⁶⁵ Their encounter will prove mutually decisive: without Flamand-Barny, Kassovitz could not have shot *La haine* and without Kassovitz, Flamand-Barny may not have found a producer for his first feature film.

Grandman had a different trajectory from Flamand-Barny. Born in 1969 in France Grandman regularly spent family vacations in Guadeloupe, the island of origin of his of parents. Over the years, his interest in the French Caribbean evolved and his understanding of the Guadeloupean way of life sharpened:

Je n'ai pas grandi aux Antilles, mais ma famille vient de là-bas, et j'y passais presque toutes mes vacances quand j'étais petit. Progressivement en vieillissant, j'y allais— toujours en vacances—mais avec un regard qui changeait. Je commençais à me raconter des histoires sur les gens que je voyais et puis je faisais aussi beaucoup de photos. Les personnages du film sont donc nés de ces photos et de ces récits imaginaires.

College educated as well as trained on the job, he studied art history, screenwriting and also dabbled in photography. From 1985 to 1989, he honed his skills as a filmmaker by working at different stages of film production.⁶⁶ In 1992, the year he received his master's degree in art history and cinema at Paris VIII (Vincennes-Saint-Denis), Grandman became one of the founding members

⁶⁵ <http://www.unifrance.org/film/13093/putain-de-porte>. August 30, 2009.

⁶⁶ <http://archives.arte.tv/fr/archive_221962.html>

of the film production company Lardux films. In 1999, the prestigious Fondation Hachette⁶⁷ awards him the *bourse scénariste TV*, a 75.000 F prize, for the screenplay of *Tèt grenné*. In 2003, he was awarded the prize for the best Caribbean film at the FESPACO film festival in Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. *Tèt grenné* also received the prix RFO Caraïbes on February 25, 2001. His first feature film *Tèt Grenné's* originally aired late at night on May 22, 2002 on the public service cultural television channel ARTE as part of its African diaspora series *Regards noirs* 'Black Gazes', a series of six films commissioned by Pierre Chevalier, the head of the fiction department for ARTE France at the time.

Creole Titles as Critiques of Middle-Class Values

One of the most obvious and immediate markers of distinctiveness from France is conveyed through the films titles. Creole Titles such as *Tèt grenné* and *Nèg maron* remain opaque to non-Créole speakers and to anyone not familiar with versions of *marronage* because they exclusively speak to the Creole speaker but leave the occasional tourist or the non-Creole speaker in the dark. They elevate Creole to a language and culture of reference push the film-text in the margins of French culture, even as they try to enter Relation. By proclaiming a Caribbean viewpoint in their film title, Grandman and Flamand-Barny question the centrality and cultural authority of France.

Titles in Creole such as *Tèt grenné* and *Nèg maron* do not solely designate the French audience as the outsider unable to decode Caribbean semantics, they also prod and confront the Creole speaker about The phrase *Tèt grenné* has negative connotations in Creole. Choosing the Creole title

⁶⁷ The Fondation Hachette now Fondation Jean-Luc Lagardère awards cultural grants to young talents. <<http://www.lagardere.com/centre-presse/communiqués-de-presse/communiqués-de-presse-122.html&idpress=2313>>

Tèt grenné (Nappy Head) is a bold and controversial move. The adjective *grenné* initially has a derogatory connotation. It simultaneously describes tightly coiled hair (*crépu* in French) and calls attention to the colonial assimilationist discourse that led to the designating of this hair texture as inferior and less desirable. Like the adjective nappy in English, the term *grenné* disapprovingly refers to matted, uncombed, non-straightened and black hair. It refers to the bush-like, untamed, and unpolished wilderness of “natural” “black” hair. It expresses prejudices against acceptable forms of Caribbean identity and a tendency to reject and devalue phenotypes such as hair texture associated with African identity. By using the Creole phrase *Tèt grenné* as a title Grandman and Brival subvert the original disparaging meaning of the phrase. They repurpose it as a contestatory formulation of French Caribbean identity, as a space of resistance worth celebrating.

Director Jean-Claude Flamand-Barney and screenwriter Alain Agat appropriate the phrase *Nèg maron* in a similar way. Echoing Patrick Chamoiseau’s essay “Les marrons de l’en-ville,” they put a contemporary spin on the pivotal figure of the maroon by depicting the lives of unemployed young black men as urban rebels. In a joint interview with Agat, Flamand Barney elaborated on the film’s social message, its critique of bourgeois middle-class and its political undertones:

Car ce sont les jeunes Guadeloupéens les vrais révolutionnaires. Ils vivent dans une réalité concrète, physique. Ils sont les laissés pour compte. Ils développent des microsociétés d’une façon intelligente, localement, y compris dans les ghettos. Ils créent une économie en créant leurs labels, leurs structures. Ils vivent en rupture avec le système économique et politique, conscients que l’exclusion reste la même, alors que les dirigeants sont toujours avides de pouvoir. 68

Screenwriter Alain Agat added that a film like *Nèg maron* long overdue and so was the acknowledgement of disenfranchised youth in contemporary French Caribbean society:

⁶⁸ Jean-Claude Flamand Barney and Alain Agat. Interview by Timothy Myrtil. 17 Jan. 2005. *Guadeloupe RFO*. March 2005. Web. 1 Apr. 2007.

Alain Agat: Pour moi, c'est dans le titre qu'apparaît l'allusion au Marronage. L'idée première était de raconter la Guadeloupe contemporaine et une histoire sur ses jeunes désœuvrés. L'aspect fictif prime. A travers une histoire par forcément originale, il fallait montrer comment vivent certains quartiers de la Guadeloupe et inclure la modernité dans le cinéma antillais.

The title *Nèg maron* had been a favorite for Mathieu Kassovitz, Flamand-Barny long time friend and the film's producer. Some filmgoers deemed the title deceitful. During production, a two part-title, *Nèg maron: et si le Soleil ne revenait pas?*, had been floating around on French Caribbean web portals. Leaks about the cast had generated buzz: the choice of actors designed to appeal to all segments of the Caribbean filmgoing market. Key roles were attributed to local Caribbean dancehall stars Amiral T (Josua), Didier Daly (Silex), French-based rapper Stomy Bugsy (Pedro), Kassav lead singer Jocelyn Beroard (Josua's mother), and to Caribbean theater regulars José and Joël Jernidien and French-based indie actor Alex Descas.

Whatever form of heroic historical past, the phrase *Nèg maron* may have evoked for its cross-generational audience of French Caribbean descent, the film's focus on the ups and downs in a friendship between two thugs smoking weeds and breaking into villas irked, displeased middle-aged filmgoers. Filmgoers hoping to see a historical narrative that celebrate organized black resistance in the hills of Guadeloupe were disappointed. Instead, they watched and were confronted with a middle-class nightmare: unemployed young black men who break into villas, speed on their motorcycle on roads, resist authority, and smoke weed while listening to bombastic reggae.

Those convinced that it was best not to portray unemployed black men who steal, smoke weed, and publicly disrespect elders objected to *Nèg maron*. Grandman and Flamand-Barny tackled difference within French Caribbean society. Difference is not only marked through the Creole titles of the films in French but also in the younger Guadeloupean filmmakers' uncompromising

treatment of themes such as disenfranchisement, alienation, cross-generational conflict, utopia, and dystopia. Their respective films, *Tèt grenné* and *Nèg maron*, focus on protagonists who are outsiders, misfits, and outlaws in their own *péyi* (land), Guadeloupe. Both Grandman and Flamand-Barny explore to what extent deviation from the norm is liberating.

Grandman for instance considers the gulf between assimilated and marginalized segments of French Caribbean population by marking assimilated characters as alienated outsiders driven by profit and out of touch with a Guadeloupean way of life outside of consumer society. Mme Marlène, the owner of the plot of land where *Tèt grenné* is situated sees Muriel, Roland, Teddy, and Sally as squatters who stand between her dream of owning and managing a supermarket and giving a her son—who studied in France—the enviable position of integrating the lucrative bourgeois merchant class. Grandman depicts the latter a deranged woman who tends to her Creole garden, an elderly unemployed drunkard, a teenager who cuts school and wants to support his single mother, an undocumented prostitute from Dominica as dreamers who dream of a better self-sufficient Guadeloupe.

***Tèt grenné*: Returning to the Land, Home as Utopia in the outskirts of the Dystopian Modern City**

Tèt grenné begins with Sally (CCH Pounder), a sex worker from the island of Dominica, demanding her unpaid wages from Tafo (Mostéfa Djadjam), her white pimp in the backroom of a café. After he refuses to pay her and tries to coax her into performing sex, she threatens him, steals a suitcase full of money, and runs away. Roland (Christian Joseph Mathurin), a drunkard in his seventies and a regular at Tafo's café, hears their scuffle and notices Sally's hurried exit. He follows Sally and offers to hide her at *Tèt grenné*, a secluded plot of land located on the outskirts of Pointe-à-Pitre that he and his makeshift family illegally occupy.

When she arrives, Sally finds a small self-reliant community that occupies two buses in ill repair: Teddy (Thérence Brouta), a sometimes runaway child who cuts school and plans to become a dealer to support his single mother, Muriel (Mbembo), Roland's "deranged" daughter who raises crabs, chickens and grows vegetables to be sold in the capital, and her lover, Richard (Alex Descas), a former docker and unemployed mechanic in his mid-thirties. Richard is Roland's adoptive son and makes a living playing the dice. He is a transient father figure for Teddy. The clever ten year old has become angry, restless and when he is not cutting class frequently hangs around Tèt Grènné. His family's eviction from a shack (*une case en tôle*) in a working-class and beloved neighborhood is imminent and Teddy strongly objects to their moving to alienating "cages à poules" 'chicken coops' subsidized housing.

The protagonists in the films are ragtag of denizens. Sally left two daughters of her own behind in Dominica and sells her body to provide a better future for them. Once at Tèt grènné, she grudgingly befriends Muriel after but the owner of Tèt Grènné, Mme Marlene, attempts to evict them again Muriel has another psychotic episode. Leaving Tèt Grènné or any incursion from modern city life threatens Muriel's mental stability. This is lost to her father, Roland who wants to send Muriel to France where he hopes she could be cured.

Roland drinks because he believes that he is paying for having fathered Muriel with a woman who was already married. Richard, Muriel's lover and Roland's quasi son has left his life as a former mechanic and worker on the docks behind. Teddy's world turns upside time when the working class neighborhood with traditional *cases en tôle créoles* where he grew up is demolished. He refuses to move with his mother and siblings in low-income subsidized housing: he begins to cut school and sell drugs. To maintain their fragile collective, Sally proposes that Richard repairs the buses and that they and open an itinerant restaurant that will serves Caribbean food made from ingredients they produce locally. However Roland's guilt and belief in the superiority of French care undoes their

community when he arranges for Muriel to be institutionalized in France. Urban sprawl and individual economic imperatives get the better of utopian communal projects.

In *Tèt grenné*, director Christian Grandman (from Guadeloupe) and screenwriters Roland Brival (from Martinique) and Agnès de Sacy (from France) cover the theme of migration in unprecedented ways. They frame migration from the perspective of denizens as a reverse movement from the city to rural pockets of utopian life situated within the urban periphery. Contrary to José, the model young pupil in Euzhan Palcy's *Rue Cases-Nègres* characters in *Tèt grenné* are marginal men, women, and a child who fail to adjust to the thwarting demands of the urban life. Their response to the dystopian, subsidized realities of life in the 21st century in a French Caribbean city is to occupy the buses in an abandoned lot on the outskirts of Pointe-à-Pitre.

Tèt Grenné is an alternative space on the outskirts of the large Guadeloupean city of Pointe-à-Pitre that offers balance and solace to its occupants. Its organic, unprocessed state offers to its inhabitants a return to subsistence economy and fosters a sense of community that they would not achieve if they lived in modern low income housing and pinned for all the trappings of consumer life. For them, rejecting confining aspects of city life means rejecting assimilation into the fold of French and European cultural and economic imperatives. In contrast living in the margins, however strenuously, holds the promise of independence.

Assimilated characters such as Roland and Mme Marlène function as traitors who compromise Tèt Grenné's utopian self-sufficiency to give in to the value system of the *métropole*. Both Sally and Richard scoff at Roland's beliefs that if Muriel crosses the ocean and goes to France for treatment she will be cured. Mme Marlène is an agent of French assimilation: her sole ambition is to turn Tèt Grenné into a supermarket. To ensure the future of her son, who studied in France, Mme Marlène chooses to support a dysfunctional economy where people mostly consume imported goods from France rather than support local agriculture. *Tèt grenné's* screenwriter and filmmaker,

Brival and Grandman, reference Edouard Glissant's idea of a "colonisation réussie" in *Le discours antillais*.

As the owner of the plot of land that Muriel, Roland, Richard, and Sally have turned into Tèt Grenné, Mme Marlène represents small black business owners who have embraced the importation of French and European goods as a means to attain wealth. Her acceptance of French economic values has made her outsider to her own culture: when Muriel threatened by Mme Marlene's intervention plunges her own hands into boiling water, Mme Marlene views Muriel's self-inflicted pain as a sign of witchcraft and crosses herself.

It is in fact Mme Marlène, as the future owner of a supermarket, who is a threat to Muriel. The trope of the supermarket as a catalyst for Muriel's mental breakdown is repeated throughout the film. Muriel is only functional in the nature-oriented, isolated, and self-sufficient world of *Tèt grenné*. There she can have visions of her deceased mother, speak to her and the crabs she rises. Muriel's behavior, her ability to leave or not feel her body, her connection to the living and non-living is not compatible with the unimaginative rationality of Guadeloupean modern city life. Mme Marlene feels Muriel uncorporeality and fears it.

When Sally suggests that they go and run errands at the supermarket near Pointe-à-Pitre, Muriel responds with the sad look of someone about to get in trouble. She warns Sally that she has been forbidden to go to the city. While she is highly functional in Tèt Grenné, in the city Muriel becomes unbearably uncomfortable and unstable in an urban setting. She takes off her clothes to liberate her body from the stranglehold of urban French Caribbean society. Among people parking their cars to purchase imported goods at the supermarket, her nakedness and unease mark her as mentally ill. Grandman implies that the alienation of urban life trigger Muriel's breakdowns.

The pervasiveness of capitalist consumption in the French Caribbean jars with the trope of the non-running buses repurposed as comfortable habitat by the residents of Tèt Grenné.

Grandman visually gives a home feel to *Tèt Grenné*. Surrounding earth tones and the buses' warm saturated colors (vivid green, yellow and red) transform the occupied plot of land into the welcoming, fertile, and organic site and imbues the film with poetic touches. The film's cinematography implicitly contrasts the fruit-bearing utopian periphery with the cold sterile supermarket selling overpriced goods imported from France. Madame Marlene with the absence of subsistence farming production in the French Caribbean. The abandoned buses, stuck and no longer moving forward, symbolize the island's non productivity and its thwarted economic development.

The director privileges the perspectives of marginal protagonists: a sex worker from Dominica looking for a better life, a young deranged woman, an elderly alcoholic man who is a loving father, a ten-year-old kid who starts dealing in the hope of supporting his single. Grandman and Brival depict Sally as an aundaunted migrant worker from an adjacent Caribbean island. She sells her body to provide a better education for her children and she confronts and fights with, Tafo, her pimp to retrieve the money she is owed. The actress CCH Pounder, best known for her roles in *Bagdad Café* and *The Shield* makes for an unusual choice as a prostitute from Dominica.

A dark skinned woman with dreadlocks and an appealing ordinary middle-aged body, Sally is not depicted as the ordinary kindhearted hooker. She is honest and purposeful, her decisions can be messy and risky but she looks after herself. To lessen the sexual tension between Richard and her, she simply sleeps with him. In *Tèt grenné* women who are sexual are not objectified. Their appeal resides in their marginal, off-kilter, or bold gestures.

As the film's title suggests, *Tèt grenné* celebrates the kind of (black) *rasin* (as in roots, natty, or afro) aesthetic and way of life that mainstream media overlooked and that Caribbean men and women of previous generations prompted by the desire to assimilate often devalued. Sally's complimenting Muriel on her barely processed hair: 'You have good hair,' like the reappropriation of the derogatory phrase show a sense of self that comes from reconnecting with one's land, rejecting the trappings of

consumer society, and formulating one's own standard of beauty. This is also evident in the ways Grandman invites its audience to reconsider what constitutes beauty.

The Guadeloupe of *Tèt grenné* does not appear as a place of racial in-between with light-skinned *chabin*, *milal*, *zindien* and *bata-zindien*, (person of mixed African and South-Asian descent). All four women in *Tèt grenné*: Sally, Muriel, Mme Marlène, and Teddy's mother, are dark skinned women and perhaps, except for Teddy's mother, none of them would be considered attractive by conventional standards of beauty, even in Caribbean communities. Director of photography Jean-Pierre Humeau uses lighting and colors that emphasize Muriel's and Sally's features and skin tones as well as medium close-ups that make spectators identify with them. This reversal is an aesthetic choice that aims at liberating the audience from pervasive notions such as colorism. Innocuously but effectively, the camera's focus on dark-skinned women and dark-skinned characters in general as protagonists ascribe value and meaning to their stories.

As part of this reversal, white characters stand for a modern version of the figure of the white overseer in *Tèt grenné*. As a drug dealer and pimp, Tafo is portrayed as a corrupting, venal, and emasculating presence. His name is associated with drudgery (*taf* is the slang for the grind in French). He is willing to exploit black women's bodies without fairly compensating for their work, to involve children such as Teddy in illegal activity (drug trade), and to introduce them to drugs in order to exert more control over them.

Contemporary Maroons: Disenfranchised French Caribbean Youth

Two decades after Euzhan Palcy's *Tèt grenné* and *Nèg maron* could not be further from existing representations of the French Caribbean. The Guadeloupe Christian Grandman and Jean-Claude Flamand-Barny construct in their respective first feature film belies stereotypical Creole catchphrases and the images of tropical farniente, zouk music, and sensuality that they conjure. "Sa

ka maché?” or *doudouiste* slogan such as “qu’est-ce tu bois doudou dis donc?” These have been used in 1980s television ads to sell the French soft drink have passed into mainstream French language are so widely used in France that they have become clichés.

Nèg maron was promoted online on French Caribbean portals at the preproduction stage: The film greatly benefited from viral promotion. With its reference to former slaves who had escaped the plantation, its Creole title alone generated interest on websites such as Bondamanjak.com and volcreole.com. Online postings showed mostly approval of the choice of actors, skepticism in the involvement of Mathieu Kassovitz, and high expectations. On the one hand, the highly symbolical value of the film title seemed to have captured the historical imagination of an audience divided about the relevance of history but looking for French Caribbean heroic figures. On the other hand, the cast comprised of confirmed black actors and artists of different generations appealed to different sections of the French Caribbean audience. The cast included stars of the local urban music scene Admiral T and Daly, stage and popular Caribbean theater actors and brothers Joël and José Jernidier. It also included artists with a large visibility in the French métropole: Kassav’s longtime lead female singer Jocelyne Béroard, French indie and Claire Denis regular Alex Descas, and Stomy Bugsy (originally from Cape Verde) former alumni of the rap group Minister Amer.

The film did unexpectedly well at at the French box office both in the hexagon and in the French Caribbean. Promoted as a contemporary Caribbean film that would rival Euzhan Palcy’s classic *Sugar Cane Alley*: the movie had been eagerly awaited in within the *communautés antillaises* in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and in the *métropole*. Although part of the cast had been leaked, few were prepared for a film on the raw social reality of two disfranchised young men, their friends, and family in contemporary Guadeloupe.

Best friends Silex (Didier Daly) and Josua (Admiral T), two young men from Pointe-à-Pitre in Guadeloupe, live the life of petty criminals. They break into villas, resell the loot, and reflect on

their marginal in society while smoking weed with their friends. Silex chase dreams of fast cars and lives alone in a wooden shack. Josua resides with his mother (Jocelyn Béroard) and his younger sisters in a working-class neighborhood. His estranged father, a former trade union leader (José Jernidier), has become a shadow of himself: he has taken to drinking after successfully the inhabitants of their working-class neighborhood against property developers and consequently he lost his job after.

One day, Josua and Silex reluctantly agree to pull another shady job for Marcus, the son of a *béké* who frequently scorns them. Their lives and friendship change when Marcus is found in his car shot in the head. To depict the urban dystopian dimensions of contemporary French Caribbean the director Jean-Claude Flamand-Barny and screenwriter Alain Agat drew from a genre that: “provides a powerful —and a transgressive— figure of identification for the ethnic, urban constituency” (Langford 140): the gangster film. Because “the gangster film typically stands in an at least implicitly critical relationship to the society it depicts” (Langford 139), it examines power relations in terms of self-alienation and self-assertation. Thus in the twenty years or so that separate *Rue Cases-Nègres* (1983) and *Nèg maron* (2005), it is not so much the influence of affirmation of Afro-Caribbean cultural production and the emergence of a Caribbean intelligentsia educated within colonial society that is one of the missing accounts.

***Nèg maron's* Urban Maroons: Thugs, Trade Union Leaders, and Dealers**

At the onset of the twenty-first century, an update the figure of the young Caribbean male figure was in order. Despite massive migration to France, a subsidized economy based on the European-model contemporary, French Caribbean society is largely unequal and divided economically. Unemployment remains high among young people and as the events of 2009 in

Guadeloupe and Martinique showed, so is the cost of living. With only a small middle-class of civil servants, a merchant class involved in tourism, import and export, a large section of the population is marginalized and no longer recognizes itself José's model trajectory. In Flamand-Barny and Agat's *Nèg maron*, Josua and Silex replace José, In an effort to acknowledge the reality of the Caribbean inner city. The narrative of upward mobility and migration to the métropole has become obsolete.

For Alain Agat and Jean-Claude Flamand-Barny, the face of Caribbean youth post-2000 needs not be Léopold who maroons by destroying the sugarcane factory ledger in *Rue Cases-Nègres* nor is he the classic figure of the Jamaica runaway slave who took refuge in the mountain. The contemporary maroon wears baggy jeans and has dreadlocks. He is somebody's nephew, brother, and son who deals drugs, looks discretely at your daughter or little sister's *derrière*, and breaks and enters your villa because it has a swimming pool. The contemporary maroon figure in the French Caribbean is a *petite frappe* whose survives is inscribed in the informal economy. Yet, he is the paradigmatic figure of oppression: he is the Caribbean other from within because his marginal status is also a refusal of assimilation.

Ni Chenn an pyé, Ni Chenn An Tèt: Nèg maron's Critique of Consumerism and Alienation

Flamand-barny and Agat borrow from the social drama genre, a genre that focuses on problems in society to depict a society where engaging in illegal activities is a way of life for uneducated young men. The passage from an agrarian economy to a small tertiary economy in the 1950s and 1960s has left disenfranchised young working-class men out of the twenty-first century workforce. They have, as a result, have created their own informal economy where racial and economic tensions and hierarchies remain. Arrogant and status-driven Marcus (François Levantal), the son of a *béké*, wants to use Josua and Silex to achieve his own ends. He involves them in his

shady dealings when he hires them to steal an important document from a family member. Silex's and Josua's working for hire for insufficient brings to mind the unfair treatment of sugar cane workers. Silex threatens Marcus with a gun when the latter attempts to treat them as his underlings. Their sense of rebellion is palpable, especially Silex's. Throughout the film *Flamand-Barny* and *Agat* portray Silex and Josua as what Patrick Chamoiseau has called les "marrons de l'en ville," and as urban modern day maroons.

Silex and a reluctant Josua are depicted as modern day maroons who raid the villas of the middle class, desecrate the home of the bourgeois other (Silex takes a dump in the bathroom), and steal from the plantation owner, the *béké*, on behalf of his son. The scene of their breaking into a middle-class home is crucial in understanding the thrust of the film. Judging the pool outside the villa, the white appliances, the exercise bike, and the golf club, the occupants of the house have disposable income. However the *mise-en-scène* does not merely emphasize class differences. It also stresses that to Silex and Josua the residents of the house are the figure of the other.⁶⁹ The residents of the house live in Guadeloupe as if they are living in the South of France. Their lifestyle is defined by the purchase of important consumer goods. Josua looks in disgust at Silex's who is barely sampling and yet throwing away the content of the fridge (a cold roasted chicken, a tiered chocolate cake, whipped cream, non-local beers, a Danone yoghurt). It is important to note that in a reversal of perspectives, Josua refers to French food as *manjé kochon* 'scraps given to pigs.'

His contemptuous comment suggests that he does not envy that type of lifestyle and that unlike Silex, who wants to drive Marcus's sports car, he is not influenced by advertising or sensitive to markers of social status. Josua despises what he sees as a sign of alienation, and longs for something else: "être libre de planter son arbre où il veut," to be seen and heard on his own terms,

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The villa is contrasted with the familiar interior of Josua's modest family home in a popular neighborhood and the *lakou* where Silex lives alone.

the way his father, a former trade union leader (José Jernidier), was before his ideals were crushed and he became a shadow of his former self. Flamand and Agat construct Josua's father as a former maroon, a former activist who defended the neighborhood against real estate interests.

Agat and Flamand-Barny delve into contemporary social issues and insist that the marginalization of French Caribbean youth is an essential feature of urban modern life. By focusing on the friendship of two *petites frappes* in urban Guadeloupe, they help redefine what the relevant narrative about the French Caribbean should be. Many parents dream of seeing their French Caribbean children become *de bons fonctionnaires* who enjoy job safety. *Nèg maron*'s focus on Josua and Silex existential angst suggests that *bons fonctionnaires* are out of touch with social reality. The segment of the population who is living comfortably behaves like compliant consumers who do not interrogate the racial and social inequalities in contemporary French Caribbean society.

In "*Nèg maron: Paradoxe criminel ou crime paradoxal?*" Patricia Donatien-Yssa has focused her analysis of the film on the social meaning of Marcus's murder. I want to consider that the film's protagonist is Josua. It is through Josua that the director and the screenwriter bring to the foreground an unsavory reality (petty crime, business of stolen goods, discouragement) ignored until then in French Caribbean films. They redefine the ways in which life in Guadeloupe as a French Caribbean with high standard of living can be viewed. Flamand-Barny and Agat speak from the margins and from their periphery emerges a different understanding of Guadeloupe. The cure, the film seems to suggest through the circular movement of the narrative, is to live like Siwo (Alex Descas), the terse, blue-collar, self-employed Caribbean man who lives simply with his cows and owns his land.

Hollywood-Style Drama vs. Messianic Figure and Chimera: Asger Leth's *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* and Charles Najman's *Haiti la fin des chimères*

Two documentaries shot in Haiti around the time of the bicentennial of Haitian Revolution: *Haiti: la fin des chimères* by French journalist Charles Najman's and *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* by Danish director Asger Leth share common traits. Both films were shot in the same locations and capture a critical moment. They explore the last days of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide as his position as leader of the nation is threatened by popular dissent and a coup d'état orchestrated by the opposition. The films even feature a few of the same characters. Both films are also male-centered narratives. However, the ways in which each filmmaker chose to tell their story could not have been more dramatically different.

The documentary focuses on the fall of 2Pac, Bily, and their entourage: underlings, lovers, and children. More than capturing the life of *chimères*, Leth builds a fictional narrative that entertains its viewers as opposed to documenting the everyday life of the inhabitants of Cité Soleil. Handheld camera, stylized lighting and shots that emphasize the two brothers's bodies recall hip-hop videos. When internationally known Haitian American Wyclef Jean declares: "Ain't no Hollywood movie they would live by it and they would die by it," the viewers may feel complicit in the mutual exploitation that takes place in the movie.

Reality meets fiction when 2Pac's and Bily's life as do or die gang leaders and aspiring hip-hop artists collide with performances for Loncarevic's camera. To achieve the suspense and accelerate the pace of the narrative, Leth and his editor used cross cutting editing techniques, going back and forth between the two brothers and the oppositions leaders gaining ground against Aristide. The brisk tempo of the film is emphasized by samples of Hip Hop beats by Haitian rapper Wyclef Jean.

For *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*, Asger Leth, the son of Jorgen Leth, a prolific and prominent Danish director, shaped (500) hundred of hours of footage into a gripping, unsettling, and polarizing documentary that has all the features of a gangster film. Susan Hayward describes the genre as follows in *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*: “the gangster film is highly stylized with its recurrent iconography of urban settings, clothes, cars, gun technology and violence (175).” Similarly Jim Smith in *Gangster films* (2004) cites “organized crime,” “denunciations of social problems,” “glorifications of a lifestyle choice,” and “tales of loveable rogues” as essential features of the gangster film. The brothers’ names reveal the growing influence of American culture. Leth is also channeling what Barry Langford calls the “African-American themed gangster (‘gangsta’) films of the early 1990s” (147).

Short of declaring that he borrows from that genre, Asger Leth instead evokes a brand of realism that has been a staple of documentary filmmaking by insisting that he: “wanted to do a documentary that felt like a feature film in the structure of it. I think you could push it even further. It’s a totally true story, there’s nothing written, but the way I tell the story with *cinéma vérité*, it’s a different kind of grammatic storytelling. I think that you can tell stories like that – I wanted to *prove* that you can (Dawson).” Because *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* is a not a fiction film but a documentary in which the main characters’ death is foretold in the title, the viewing experience is even more grueling and unsettling. Even more so because the gaze is unidirectional: the north has the power to look at the global south.

By invoking truth Leth aligns his film with one version of *cinéma vérité*. *Cinéma vérité* here is not the “Kino Pravda” practiced Dziva Vertov (“no actors, no decors, no script no acting”, but rather as Hayward sums it up having “ordinary people testify to their experience.” Others may argue that there is therefore a participatory dimension in the film that proposes an “alternative to hegemonic and institutionalized history by offering a plurality of histories told by non elites.”(77) Leth

explains: “because there were very important stories to tell. There have always been important stories to tell in Cité Soleil. In a sense, you could say that Cité Soleil has always been the thermometer for Haiti: you could feel and see and report exactly what the situation was in the country. You should always go to the worst places to check out the temperature (Dawson).” Unprecedented access is to Cité Soleil and to *chimères* such as 2Pac and Bily is one the draws of documentaries such as *Ghosts of Cité Soleil*. We are literally riding in 2Pac’s SUV.

Lélé, a French relief worker, is portrayed as a liminal character. She is both a sympathetic to the plight of the inhabitants of Cité Soleil and provides crucial medical care. She warns of the brothers the danger of relinquishing their weapons since Aristide who has disavowed them might be ousted and a crackdown might be imminent. She does not condone their life and yet partakes in it. Lélé is also a variant of the *femme fatale*, a dangerous woman associated with death. An insider outsider, connected well beyond Cité Soleil, she is also a seductress and temptress. Loved by one brother, she becomes the girlfriend of the other.

On the contrary Charles Najman’s documentary *Haiti la fin des chimères?* follows the leisurely pace of a broadcast television program. It alternates between using archival footage, pointed remarks by talking heads, interviews of people involved in real events, and b-roll (background footage of people and locations to establish mood and a sense of place). Although the filmmaker is not striving for balance or objectivity, these interventions convey a sense of authority as revelations after revelations hit the audience.

The film begins with Aristide’s ceremonial speech on January 1st 2004 (Haitian independence day). The leader of the Lavalas movement showcases his oratorical skills. He effortlessly alternates between French and Creole and he looks very presidential as he revisits powerful metaphors on the only successful black rebellion. His repetitions: “Bonne année! Bonne année! Bonne année” rouse the crowd. Through editing, he juxtaposes anti-Aristide demonstrations with the president’s

statement “*Ayiti sé manman libète.*” The statement, “Haiti is the mother of all freedom,” takes an ironic meaning as the film unfolds as a searing indictment of the president. Father William Smart, an influential priest, recalls Aristide’s religious affiliations, appeal, and initially, selfless work among the poor. (Messiah the promised deliverer of the Jewish nation in prophesied in the Hebrew bible).

Haiti: la fin des chimères? offers a stark look back at the legacy of 1804 described by Gary Victor as the victory of mulatto plantation owners, of a small number of black generals, and the beginning of a search for liberty for the black masses. Interviewees are mostly disenchanted. Only a current member of the Aristide government (Leslie Voltaire) and a *chimère* leader (Paul Raymond) defend Jean-Bertrand’s Aristide leadership by invoking 1991. In *Haiti: la fin des chimères?*, the emphasis is on the vagaries of Haitian history. The documentary makes a strong case for the danger of relying on heroic savior figures. Najman draws an unfavorable portrait of president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The noun *chimère* alludes to hopes dashed and to Aristide himself. The Chimera in Greek mythology is a fire breathing female monster with a lion head, a goat’s body, and a serpent’s tail.

The term also designates an illusion. One interviewee, Gérard Pierre-Charles contextualizes the rise of Aristide as a post Duvalier dictatorship phenomenon. After the departure of Baby Doc for France Haiti is a society a crises, where the search for democracy resumes. Aristide appears as a quasi-Messianic figure. The priest embodies youth, the dreams of a generation of Haitian intellectuals who came of age in the ‘60s and ‘70s and who after Duvalier rejected conservative neoliberalism, the army, businessmen, and embraced Aristide’s own brand of populism.

While the word *chimères* in Najman’s title is used in the plural, the young gang leaders it refers to are initially conspicuously absent from the film. For most of the documentary *chimères* are talked about and vilified but towards the end of the film Najman inserts a sequence in Creole with a group of *chimères* from Cité Soleil. Right before the end, the documentary shows an unnamed young

man in a red jersey from Cité Soleil. Although he is not identified as such he is Bily one of the five *chimères* gang leaders from Cité Soleil and one of the protagonists in Jorgen Leth's film. Despite their starkly different narrative style and genre: public interest documentary versus gangster film, it becomes evident that both films should be viewed together. The portrait of Aristide that emerges in Najman's *Haiti, la fin des chimères* is one where he is as much an outlaw as the young men from the slums of Port-au-Prince that he armed and instrumentalized to destabilize the opposition.

“*Mistè a Gatem:*”⁷⁰Deploying Ezili and Queering the Haitian Religious Experience in Anne Lescot's and Laurence Magloire's Film *Des hommes et des dieux*

Blondine is walking among the early crowd of street vendors at a vast outdoor market in Port-au-Prince. She is absorbed and busy, looking for a spot where she can settle her merchandise. Few men or women are paying attention to her. Her back is to a camera filming every of her gestures. Despite her white jeans, black T-shirt, and a white and navy cap worn backwards, Blondine's gender remains vaguely uncertain. She carries a grey tote bag on her shoulder and her hat barely hides a short bob of straightened hair. As the camera zooms in to a close-up that shows her carefully made-up face and neatly arched eyebrows, she states matter-of-factly: “*Si m pa ta kab santim ta viv jan ou wè m nan an Ayiti m'pito just pito mouri oubyen al viv Sen Domeng.*” (“If I can't be the way that I am in Haiti, I'd rather die or go live in the Dominican Republic.”)⁷¹

Blondine's demeanor is that of any street merchant eager to sit down and start his or her day. Later, while she dons the dress-like flowery apron most street vendors wear, customers and vendors notice the camera following her deliberate gestures and impeccable make-up and they begin to mock

⁷⁰ (“The *lwas* spoiled me”), as quoted from Blondine in *Des hommes et des dieux*. All subsequent Creole citations by interviewees are followed with the film's original English subtitles. I thank Emmanuel Joseph Duogène for transcribing the Creole.

⁷¹ The spelling of Haitian Creole does not include accent aigu. Therefore in this dissertation there are two kinds of Creole spellings: a Haitian spelling without accent aigu and a French Caribbean spelling with accent aigu.

her. Now that she is settled among the stalls at the spot where she sells snuff (tobacco), men and women stare at this man⁷² who looks like a woman and who does women's work. They hide their mouths, laugh, and point at her. Their reactions, though not excessively hostile, are often accompanied by the insult “*masis?*” (“faggot”). Despite such slurs, Blondine is able to make a living as a street merchant. A Vodou practitioner, she says she owes her safety to one of the *lwa* or *loas*, also called *Mistè* or *Mystères* (gods and goddesses of the Haitian pantheon).

In their groundbreaking documentary *Des hommes et des dieux*, (translated in English as *Of Men and Gods*) Diaspora⁷³ filmmakers Laurence Magloire and Anne Lescot follow a group of several openly gay, effeminate, and cross-dressing Haitian men who use the authority of Erzili, Ezili, or Erzulie, (one of the *lwas* or spirits of Vodou in the syncretic Afro-Caribbean religion practiced in Haiti) to legitimize their sexual identity. My essay examines how Magloire's and Lescot's documentary portrays working-class Haitian gay men's resistance to marginalization. By linking their sexual identity to key elements of Haitian religious and cultural identity, these men attempt to carve a safe space for themselves and gain acceptance from Haitian society at large. Primarily through interviews and footage of the daily life of six men in their twenties —Blondine, Innocente, Madsen, Jean-Marcel, Flanise, and Denis—, Magloire and Lescot document Vodou as practiced in Haiti and how it allows for a religious-based acceptance of alternative gender norms and same-sex love.

Born to an Italian mother and a Haitian father, Anne Lescot seldom mentions that she is also the granddaughter of Haitian president Elie Lescot who in an effort to “clear land for United

⁷² In this documentary, several gay men (Blondine, Innocente, and Flanise) have adopted female first names that reflect their own gender affiliation rather than their sex. In these introductory paragraphs, I deliberately use the personal pronoun “she” and the possessive adjective “her” in reference to Blondine to emphasize her gender construction.

⁷³ The use of the phrase “Diaspora filmmakers” paints an incomplete picture as several of the women filmmakers of Haitian descent who were raised, educated, and worked abroad (and as such, were once part of the Haitian Diaspora) have since returned to Haiti where they continue to shape cultural production and develop community-based activities. On the program for the 2004 New York edition of the Haiti on Screen film festival, co-organizers Guetty Felin and Michele Stephenson divided the festival's corpus of films into four main categories: “films from Haiti, Diaspora films, foreign films on Haiti, and Raoul Peck Retrospective.” These categories overlap and make a complex and changing picture that includes fixed considerations such as Haitian origin and place of birth and variables like foreign education, various places of residence, return or departure.

States rubber production”(14),⁷⁴ allied himself with the Haitian Catholic Church when the latter launched an anti-superstition campaign against Vodou religious practices that vilified the Haitian peasantry, destroyed sacred objects and temples, and persecuted practitioners. During the New York edition of the 2004 Haiti on Screen film festival, Anne Lescot explained that the idea for their 2002 documentary came when she lost her computer and with it years of anthropological research for her doctoral dissertation on Vodou and gender relationships. She had also been working in Haiti for the UNESCO on the Slave Route Project⁷⁵ and decided to turn her dissertation work into a documentary narrative. She teamed with another producer and filmmaker of Haitian descent, Laurence Magloire, with whom Lescot shot *Lwa Yo Voye Rele’m* (2001),⁷⁶ a six-minute poetic documentary. Together they founded, a Haitian film production company in 2001, Digital LM,⁷⁷ through which they self-distributed their documentary. *Des hommes et des dieux* was released in 2002 and was selected at film festivals around the world.

Although born in Port-au-Prince, co-director Laurence Magloire grew up primarily in Montréal, where she produced children’s television programs for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. She returned to Haiti in the late 1990s, at a time when Anne Lescot was conducting research.⁷⁸ Magloire is also the founder of Sinéma Anba Zetwal (Cinema under the stars), a free outdoor film festival that shows selected films throughout Haiti (Sinéma Anba Zetwal was one of the first popular cultural events scheduled in February 2010 after the devastating January 2010 earthquake). Laurence Magloire belongs to a generation of Diaspora Haitian women who have

⁷⁴ Joan Dayan, “Vodou, or the Voice of the Gods,” *Sacred Possessions, Santeria, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, eds. Margarite Fernandez Olmas and Lizbeth Paravisini-Gebert (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997) 14.

⁷⁵ A UNESCO program composed of an international scientific committee of specialists initiated in Benin in 1993 that calls to attention the historical roots of the slave trade and slavery, explores their repercussions, and fosters dialogue.

⁷⁶ “Lwa Yo Voye Rele’m,” *Africine.org*, eAfricine, n.d., Web, June 6, 2011.

⁷⁷ Digital LM has now morphed into a wider structure: Collectif 2004 Images, a non-profit organization based in Paris. Its website, collectif2004images.org, sells and distributes films about the Haitian experience and promotes cultural events (art exhibitions, talks, and publications) across the Haitian Diaspora and beyond.

⁷⁸ “Anne Lescot,” *Africine.org*, eAfricine, n.d., Web, May 1, 2010.

worked for others in film, television, and animation (mostly in Francophone Canada, New York, and sometimes in France) before they began making their own documentaries for television.⁷⁹

In her editing of the film, Laurence Magloire seamlessly weaves the sacred and the profane into an anthropological narrative, as the male protagonists define themselves as children of Ezili while they groom themselves or work at a hair salon. They are shown serving the *lwas* through ceremonies at the *onfò* (the hounfort or ceremonial dwelling) and speaking candidly about parenthood and family acceptance. Before they go on a pilgrimage to the Saint-Yves waterfall, the men discuss HIV, AIDS, and their own risky behavior (risky because they are visibly provocative in dress and in mannerisms—and sexually risky, as seen in a discussion about not wearing condoms) while they are seen dancing to Bachata and Compas music at a no-frills gay nightclub. This insistence on daily life, serving the spirits, and foregrounding one's sexual preference reveals a picture of the Haitian experience seldom depicted on the screen.

“*Ezili Dantò, i reklamem depi'm te tou piti,*” explains Innocente, another Haitian gay man whose daily life is portrayed in *Des hommes et des dieux* (2002 16:14). Such a statement, “Ezili Dantor claimed me since I was a child,” invokes a religious belief system where the boundaries between the sacred and the profane are loosely marked. To question the binary opposition between man and woman, Innocente summons a powerful agent in the pantheon of Vodou intermediary spirits. Lescot and

⁷⁹ In a personal interview during the Haiti-on-Screen film festival in New York in 2004, Laurence Magloire, her sister, Rachel Magloire, and Michèle Lemoine explained that one of the reasons many Haitian women filmmakers make documentaries is because these film narratives require less funds than feature-length fictions. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, this group of women filmmakers of Haitian descent included but was not limited to Rachel Magloire but also Michèle Lemoine in Port-au-Prince, Martine Chartrand in Montréal, Elsie Haas in Paris, and Michèle Stephenson in New York. The ways in which they have often given voice to marginalized subjects question preconceived ideas about what it is like to live in Haiti or to reflect on Haitian cultural, national, or individual identity from abroad. Although their films are sporadically selected at international and local film festivals, Haitian women filmmakers have remained in the margins of the Haitian filmmaking practice. Better-known men filmmakers such as pioneer militant documentarian Arnold Antonin and Raoul Peck whose filmography includes co-productions with Germany, France, the United States, and Haiti have made documentaries and feature films (in the case of Antonin low-budget Haitian fiction films and in the case of Raoul Peck films financed by prominent European institutions and American cable television channels). The experimental filmmaker Michelange Quay has so far made fiction films. Cheaper digital technology has facilitated the advent of low-budget filmmaking practice where men still make the majority of movies.

Magloire convey this crossing of boundaries first in the film's title, *Des hommes et des dieux*, and secondly in its subject matter: working-class Haitian men who walk a thin line between spiritual devotion and subversive appropriation, sincerity and survival, brazen response to homophobia and reverence to the *lwa*. Dayan remarks that: "Vodou, constantly redefined by the practitioners themselves, is further complicated by the finite and temporal predicaments of those who suffer. (1998: 90)" Blondine, the street merchant, explains that her response to insults hurled at her and every so often to being hit, is docility (*Des hommes et des dieux*).

Although the title of the documentary faintly resembles John Steinbeck's 1937 novel *Of Mice and Men* (translated as *Des souris et des hommes* in French), loneliness and powerlessness are nowhere to be found in this film. The conjunction "and" in the film title does not merely connect the Haitian men mounted by their Haitian gods; it stands for an intense coupling. As Joan Dayan argues in *Haiti, History, and the Gods*: "For Vodou practice does not deny the flesh but rather confers on sexuality a sense of exaltation that surpasses fleshly desire or sentimental satisfaction. The feeling of sacred enhancement, shared equally by men and women, has little to do with abstract belief or morality. The experience is purely corporeal: a surfeit of matter so extreme it becomes utterly mystical. (100)" This tangible feeling of exaltation is the result of known and shared ceremonial manifestations of Vodou divinities whose "pansexual identities," according to Randy Conner and David Hatfield Sparks, are often fluid and express homoeroticism (55-64). Ritualized encounters between Haitian gods or *lwa* and Vodou practitioners permit affirmations of same-sex desire.

Linking the multifaceted *lwa* Ezili to same-sex desire is not entirely unprecedented.⁸⁰ Joan Dayan, for instance, draws from a 1962 study by Emmanuel Paul, *Panorama du folklore haïtien*, to explain the following: "Erzulie allow(s) her devotees to experience either 'hetero or homosexual'

⁸⁰ See Karen Brown's *Mama Lola: a Vodou Priestress in Brooklyn*, (1991) and Elizabeth Mc Alister's *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and its Diaspora* (2002).

erotic ‘phantasms.’⁸¹ Dayan further paraphrases Paul’s understanding of how the authority of the sacred “can compensate for sexual repression...”(Dayan 1994: 27). Her characterization and readings of Ezili illustrate the various ways in which the *lwa* Ezili may appeal to same-sex loving men and women. In their film, Lescot and Magloire solely focus on men and although, they briefly insert one representation of this shifting *mistè*, they fail to describe Ezili’s characteristics, function, and symbolic meaning, a necessary step to understand her appeal to devotees.

Joan Dayan has mapped the complex underpinnings of the Haitian religious pantheon, its ceremonies, and songs. In the various nations of Haitian gods or *mystères*, called *lwa*, Ezili is a highly volatile spirit. At turn loving, demanding, and authoritative, she bears multiple names: “Grande Erzulie, Erzulie Toro (the Bull), Erzulie Fréda, Erzulie-gé-rouge, Erzulie Mapian (Louse), Erzulie-dos-bas (Low-Back), Erzulie Zandor, Erzulie Boum’ba, Erzulie-séverine-belle-femme, Erzulie-Dantor,” (Dayan 1997: 21) and can take the features of a dark-skinned slave woman, her mistress, or a mulatto in between. For Dayan, not only does Ezili straddle race, class, and Western and African religions but when she mounts her devotees she also rewrites sex, gender, desire, and Haitian narratives about power and identity. In “Erzulie: a Women’s History of Haiti,” Dayan depicts her as:

the goddess, spirit or loa of love, [that] tells a story of women’s lives that has not been told. A goddess was born on the soil of Haiti who has no precedent in Yorubaland or Dahomey. In her varying incarnations, her many faces, she bears the extremes of colonial history. Whether the pale and elegant Erzulie Fréda or the cold, savage Erzulie-Gé-Rouge, she dramatized a specific historiography of women’s experience in Haiti and throughout the Caribbean (6).

⁸¹ Joan Dayan, “Erzulie: a Women’s History of Haiti,” *Research in African Literatures* 25.2 (1994) 27.

The feminine traits and multiple of manifestations of Ezili also appeals to gay men devotees who identify and dress as women, and who wear make-up. Yet, what is it about this particular *lwa* that allows for more fluid and gendered identity?

The figure of Ezili may confer to the devotees she rides flexible and transformative identities. Ezili's place among other Haitian deities, her variable manifestations, and her feminine attributes appeal to practitioners of Vodou: specifically to men and women who question sex determination and heteronormativity. This demanding *lwa* redraws the boundaries between male and female. Most of the men interviewed in the film collapse these boundaries in their everyday life by wearing nail polish, feminine hairstyle or wigs, and several of them adopt female first names such as Blondine, Innocente, and Flanise. Lescot and Magloire show one interviewee occasionally putting on a dress and glitter to go partying. According to Dayan:

Unlike Western religions that depend upon dualisms such as matter and spirit, body and soul, for their perpetuation of power, Vodou unsettles and subverts such apparent oppositions. That subversion becomes most evident when we turn to the question of gender and distinction and color division. *Maîtresse* Erzulie-Freda, the *mulâtresse blanche*, is the lover of Ogoun, a very black god of war, often identified with *papa Dessalines*. But she also wears the rings of Damballah, the white-snake god of the sweet waters, and Agoué-Tarayo, the god of the sea who is figured as white. Though a woman, Erzulie vacillates between her attraction for the two sexes. She holds her servitor in between two irreconcilables: in between the supposedly antithetical constructions of masculinity and femininity. She is not androgynous, for she deliberately encases herself in the trappings of what has been constituted in a social world (especially for the Frenchified elites) as femininity. Erzulie thus goes

beyond false dichotomizing, as she prescribes and responds to multiple and apparently incoherent directives. (1994 6)

Thus, when Ezili rides her devotees, she interrupts what Judith Butler calls the “heterosexualization of desire” (23), relegates sex (the strict male and female binary), and manifests what Judith Butler has traced as gender: “because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with race, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (6). It is these “discursively constituted identities” Butler identifies that make possible the formulation of a Haitian syncretic religious narrative that is “neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” (Butler 9-10). Anchored in the ritualized practice of Vodou, Ezili’s interruption of biological sex is “gender as a multiple interpretation of sex” (Butler 9-10). It is Ezili’s unbounded loving yet whimsical dispositions, her deconstruction of the Haitian woman as one, as whole, or as half of a biological sex binary, that some Haitian gay men and women deploy and therefore substantiate. In *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Participations in African-inspired Traditions in the Americas*, Randy P. Conner and David Hatfield Sparks stipulate that if “Ezili is the patron of gay men” (58), several other Vodou divinities, Ayizan, Mawu-Lisa, Legba, and Gede (55-64), also manifest “gender and sexual complexities” (62). Interviewees in the film solely invoke the *lwa* Ezili but in its broadness the film title *Des hommes et des dieux* alludes to the multiple anthropomorphic incarnations and to the sexual and gendered (social and cultural) between-ness of several divinities in the Vodou pantheon.

As an authoritative spirit who is both the Virgin and Venus, she forbids or allows sexual activity: “Erzulie demands of her servitors abstention from sex on her sacred days. But Erzulie “marries” women as well as men. Everything *written* about Erzulie can be contradicted. She is, some will tell you, the loa of lust most often prayed to by prostitutes. A goddess served by the Haitian elite

or young virgins, Erzulie is sought after by those homosexual tendencies.” (Dayan 1994: 6-7) The directors of *Des hommes et des dieux* do not place the many manifestations of Ezili in context. Instead Lescot and Magloire let a few of their informants explain how they were able to gain wider social acceptance by serving her and invoking her name in public. The interviewees’ living conditions and colloquial use of Creole mark them as people of low income. The filmmakers do not dwell on “regional modalities” but they implicitly contrast how the men’s gender bending is received in different neighborhoods of a large city such as Port-au-Prince as opposed to small provincial towns— where several of the men are seen working at a hair salon —such as Cabaret and Source Matelas where the practice of Vodou is more entrenched and harassment appears less likely. Perhaps erroneously, the general feeling expressed in the film towards same-sex love is that serving and appropriating Ezili foster tolerance. Innocente, for instance, explains:

Mwen gen kò gason men mwen gen stil fi. Pwoblem ki vin jwen avek li pwoblèm ti pèp, m ret nan la mas. Mwen jwen pwoblem de sa, paske kotem rete a yon sot de moun ki pa klere. Yon sot de moun ki we ak sa.

(I have a man’s body and a woman’s style. My problem is that I live with the lower classes. Where I live people are not educated, they are not used to seeing people like me.)

While it is not clear whether Innocente implies that in upper or middle-class Haitian families, the stigma of ones’ sexual orientation is dealt with more sympathy, his concern with class suggests that for working-class gay Haitian men, employing the *lwa* Ezili as a justification for one’s sexual identity acts as a buffer that is difficult to refute in a society where the Catholic and Protestant faiths coexist with a widespread and dominant Vodou practice.

One of the film’s most compelling moments shows the various negotiations that can take place within a single family. Lescot and Magloire show Innocente smiling widely as both his parents

and his sister explain that out of respect for Ezili, they eventually accepted Innocente's sexual orientation. Innocente's father, a self-professed womanizer, admits that learning that his son, Innocente, was gay dealt him a blow until he was able to contextualize sexual preference and gendered identity through the service to the saints. Innocente's sister, however, describes how since he was a child, Innocente explored his feminine side. In a medium close-up, Magloire and Lescot focus on Innocente's mother as she explains that the explanation to same-sex love does not lie in Catholic faith, but in the *mistè* or *lwa* of Vodou for only the latter account for multiple combinations of desire: "Ever since I was a child I was told, it was not God that made people this way, it's a loa, Grande Erzulie, who makes people turn bad." Although Innocente's mother uses the word "*gate*," a term that means to spoil and to damage, she implies by her tranquil acceptance that while the character of her son has been "harmed", one does not contest Ezili's visits to one's children.

The words of Innocente's mother, "*Se grann Ezili ki gate moun nan, ki fè moun nan konsa*," indicate that the central role of Vodou practice in Haitian society, and the respect and service owed to the *lwas* allow a narrative about same-sex love to circulate. For Ezili troubles gender when she rides her devotees, even if the instability she requests coexists with a narrative of Catholic worship. In the same breath, Innocente's mother puts aside a Catholic or Protestant God and embraces the authority of the *lwas* with whom she aligns. In fact, she continues to transmit, despite her own initial reservations, the narrative of same-sex love possible within Vodou religious practice she was taught as a child.

Is Innocente's mother referring to her gay son who identifies as a woman or to popular beliefs about Ezili when she uses the term "*moun nan*" (people)? That choice of word may signal her own ambivalence about his sexual preference, appearance, and female first name. The use of "*moun nan*" can be interpreted, on the one hand, as expressing distance and relative acceptance vis-à-vis a son who challenges dichotomies about male and female sexual identity. Innocente's mother is

expressing ambivalence as she describes Innocente as “*gate*”. On the other hand, Innocente’s mother use of the words “*moun nan*” may simply refer to the widely accepted idea that Ezili can “damage” men. Most likely Innocente’s mother uses the words “*moun nan*” and “*gate*” in the same sentence to express conflicted feelings about Ezili’s power (or not) to mar men. This ploy, wielding a commonly held belief as a justification, removes the personal or controversial dimension from the discussion and sustains Ezili’s role in legitimizing gay men.

In their film, Lescot and Magloire focus primarily on the unifying forces that undergird Afro-Caribbean religious practices in Haiti. Besides conferring acceptance from family, legitimacy of one’s sexual identity, and protection, two of the men interviewed imply that Vodou in Haiti provides a sense of identity that transcends class. When asked what serving the *lwas* does for her, Innocente replies:

Sa vodou on fè pou mwen. Vodou an banm kontak. Li bann plis zanmi: li bann zanmi menm jan avek mwen epi li bonn zanmi moun serye. Moun ki pa stil menm jan avèm. Vodou bann enjenye pou zanmi. Li bann doktè pou zanmi. Li bann enfimye. Li bann doktè kom zanmi. Li nan vodou a ki zanmi mwen. Sa yo bann mwen se lwa yo ki toujou bann mwen l. Paske se lwa ki vodou a.

(It helps me meet interesting people. I make friends, friends who are like me, and also serious people, like engineers, lawyers, doctors, nurses, who serve the spirits.

The *lwas* give me everything I have. They are Vodou.) (*Des hommes et des dieux*)

Innocente’s desire to socialize beyond his working class roots is fulfilled thanks to his Vodou practice. Rather than describing spiritual fulfillment, the emphasis here is on the possibilities of striking unusual friendships and on the remarkable ways in which serving the *lwas* cuts across class and income groups. In the context of Haiti’s stark economic divisions, Innocente’s remark highlights the unlikelihood in any other context of men and women of widely different social backgrounds

engaging in a common activity. Observance of rituals and shared beliefs has a leveling or equalizing effect among practitioners.

Blondine sees other benefits to practicing Vodou: he credits serving Erzuli with being protected from taunting and physical harm, contradicting an earlier statement.

Mwen enmen lwa yo anpil. Yo pwotejem. M'pa pran kout roud. M'pa pran kout mò.
Yo pa tirem, yo pa bat mwen. M'op monte machin chak jou. Machin pa fè aksidan
avèm. Aprè bondye nan syel se yo menm. Lèm lakay mwen lè jou madi mwen limen
lamp dantò m. Lè jou jedi mwen limen lamp Freda. Lè samdi tou mwen limen lamp
dantò. Lè dimanch mwen pwopte kote mwen konn met lwa yo mwen fè frechè.
Voye Florida, Byennèt. Mwen fè lwa yo santi bon.

(I love the *lwas*. They protect me. No spells are put on me. No accident happens to
me. Nobody beats me. I use public cars everyday without any problems, ever. After
God, it's the *lwas*. On Tuesdays, I light a candle for Erzulie Dantor, on Thursdays to
Erzilie Freda, on Saturdays to Erzulie Dantor again. On Sundays, I clean-up and
perfume the altar so that the *lwas* smell good.) (*Des hommes et des dieux*)

Blondine explains that strict adherence to serving Ezili Dantò and Ezili Freda on their respective prescribed days and honoring all other roads on Sundays is rewarded by protection. If a Catholic god is invoked in passing as a chief source of faith, the blessings Ezili extends prevail. But Lescot and Magloire's gentle prodding make a few of the interviewees contradict themselves.

Jean-Marcel, for instance, after repeatedly invoking the forceful female *lwa* as a justification that some gay men use in order to live publicly and not feel threatened because of their sexual orientation has to revisit earlier statements. Once pressed by Magloire and Lescot, Jean-Marcel concedes: “*M'pa di se Dantò m'gatem paske mwen minm depim fèt mwen konsa.*” (I did not say it was Dantor (Ezili Dantor) because I was born this way.) Erol Josué, an artist and gay *oungan* (a male

priest in the Vodou religion) who lives and practices in Miami and New York, sees in Jean-Marcel's concession the strength and the limit of this strategy. The primary French-speaking commentator interviewed in the documentary, Erol Josué explains that when she rides the initiated, the spirit Ezili Dantò may manifest femininity in men and masculinity in women. For Josué, certain devotees insist that they have been called by Ezili and have deployed her as a fierce agent of same-sex desire in order to gain tacit support from their cultural community because of the shared religious heritage of Vodou. Essentially, as practitioners of the Haitian Afro-Caribbean religion, some Haitian gay men, such as the group of men in the documentary, strategically use Vodou to come out and legitimize their sexual preference.

A dissenting voice in the film is Fritzner, a *ougan* since 1980. Unlike the others (Blondine, Innocente, Madsen, Jean-Marcel, Flanise, and Denis), Fritzner, who is older and owns property in the popular neighborhood of Bel Air in Port-au-Prince, is not effeminate. Although Fritzner mentions sexual encounters with men, he draws a line between his sexual preference and his Vodou practice. He speaks dismissively of his male sexual partners as well as of women. Portrayed as more financially secure than the six other interviewees, he is also a father of four children and in his own words, he plays both the mother's and father's role. He strongly objects to invoking Ezili in order to justify and legitimize his sexual orientation. He views the rationale used by the group of Vodou practicing gay men that Lescot and Magloire interviewed as anathema.

Fritzner remains faithful and deferential to Ezili and he positions himself within distance of a respectful orthodoxy: "*Ezili, se madanm mwen,*" ("Ezili is my wife") and places his religious practice above his sexual preference and private life. Such outrage is a reminder that despite what the documentary shows—a close-knit circle of openly Haitian gay men who work in urban and rural

Haiti⁸² serve the *lwas*, and deploy the *lwa* Ezili as their protector—, generalizing this practice would be inaccurate, and to other gay men or *oungan* reprehensible. All six men are aware that when they reveal their sexual preference or dress as women they are walking a fine line between acceptance and retaliation within their immediate community. In February 2009, Maxence Denis, a prominent gay Haitian multimedia artist, DJ, and filmmaker, was assaulted and almost killed near Jacmel. It is not clear how his attackers knew he was gay: as a middle-class internationally known artist, he was an obvious target. His equipment was also damaged and it was later confirmed that the assault was homophobic in nature.⁸³ He now lives in Dakar, Senegal where a close family member of his also resides.

Magloire and Lescot salute the men's sincere survival strategies and their attempt at carving a safe space in a society where the presence of Western religions has also defined sex, gender, and desire in oppositional terms. In the documentary, the men use their serving the *lwa* Ezili as a shield when they are revealing their sexual preference. The danger they may encounter is mentioned in passing. Instead the interviewers spent time following the intricacies of the men's daily life.⁸⁴ The camera lingers on the latter as they share their perspectives on sexuality and relationships, AIDS and condom use, the sensuality of dancing on a night out, grooming, how their occupations as street vendors and hairdressers expose them or protect them from harassment, and what allowed their families to accept them. Footage of their participation in a Vodou ceremony and of a pilgrimage to sacred places such as the waterfall of Saint-Yves attests of the men's love of ritual and performance as well as Vodou's overreaching presence in Haitian society.

In the African Diaspora and in the larger Caribbean region, film plays an increasingly role in mapping out cultural journeys, and documenting the customs, arts, social institutions, difficulties and

⁸² Blondine is seen in Port-au-Prince, Innocente in Source Matelas and Madsen, Jean-Marcel, Flanise, and Denis seem to work and live in Cabaret City.

⁸³ Barbara Prezeau-Stephenson, "Agression sur Maxence Denis," *africamerica.org*, 5 July 2009, Web, April 10, 2010.

⁸⁴ I was told that Blondine, Innocente, Madsen, Jean-Marcel, Flanise, and Denis have since passed away.

achievements of nations and peoples. The leading role of movies in re-defining preconceived ideas is particularly relevant for Haiti, a country with complex historical, political, economic, and religious narratives that sometimes get lost in hasty and expedient phrases. Still widely constructed as the poorest country in the Western hemisphere and the first black republic, Haiti is hardly associated with cinema (as in high art) or a do-it-yourself film industry of low-budget digital films (filmmaking).⁸⁵ Yet “Movies are becoming Haiti’s most popular art form after music,” said veteran filmmaker Arnold Antonin, when he was the director and president of the Haitian Filmmakers Association in 2007 (Stevenson). In the same manner as Laurence Magloire’s and Anne Lescot’s *Des hommes et des dieux*, films about Haiti that take an insider’s perspective, whether they are from Haiti, made by Haitian Diaspora filmmakers or by foreigners, shed invaluable new light on facets of the Haitian nation within and without.

French, West Indian, *Néropolitaine*: Fabienne and Véronique Kanor’s *La noire* (2005)

In the bathroom mirror of a nightclub, hands vigorously shake a thick mass of hair worn in an Afro. The camera pans out to a thick dark mass dotted with white pearls, vigorously moving. The slow rhythm of a saccharine Zouk love song plays in the background. She winces and stares at herself in the mirror. Vulnerable, she hides behind a screen of urban fashionista sophistication, the thirty-something parses her French Caribbean identity. Marlene remains preoccupied with the questions of trust and faithfulness between (Caribbean) men and women. Fabienne and Véronique Kanor take to task male Creolist writers and French Caribbean filmmakers.

La noire revolves around Marlene (Danièle Francisque), a black Parisian woman of Guadeloupean origins who after an umpteenth breakup tries to win back her boyfriend (rapper and

⁸⁵ For other accounts on the evolution of the Haitian filmmaking practice, see Michaëlle Lafontant-Médard, “Cinema in Haiti: 1899 to 1982,” Arnold Antonin, “Cinema in Haiti,” *Small Axe* 12.3 (2003): 87-92.

singer Ménélik) through unorthodox ways. Fabienne and Véronique Kanor depict their female protagonist as uptight and wary of men, yet desirous of being in a long-term relationship. As Marlène asserts her independence from her mother (Firmine Richard), she manages to critically examine her racial identity:

Quand j'étais petite, je regardais à la télévision un dessin animé qui mettait en scène une vache. Elle avait toujours un problème cette vache par exemple: elle était traumatisée d'entendre dans un cours de musique qu'une blanche vaut deux noires. Cette vache s'appelait La noiraude. Elle me ressemblait, moi petite négrotte [néologisme] élevée dans un milieu complètement blanc tenue dans l'ignorance des racines, des contes, des légendes, de l'histoire nègre par des parents qui voulaient tellement s'intégrer et puis forcément j'ai grandi bancal. J'ai cherché dans le Tout-Monde mon reflet mais je n'ai trouvé que des morceaux épars. Il y a tant de façons d'être nègre: marron-rebel, nègre archaïque, assimilé, métis, intégré, désintégré, bounty, fonctionnaire, à la peau sauvée, black à blanche, défrisé, décoloré? Ou tout simplement noir [sound of gunshot]. Moi j'étais simplement trop aliénée pour être africaine, trop d'ici pour être de là-bas. TROP noire pour être de pure souche trop un peu de tout pour être tout à fait moi.

The literary reflexivity of Marlène's interior monologue mirrors the reflexivity of the original cartoon character *La noiraude*. In their version of *La noiraude* Fabienne and Véronique Kanor quote musical measurements to underline how the innocuous presence of race is part of a larger trend in the French media: the pathologization of blackness and its exclusion from cultural discourse. They reappropriate the cartoon character *La noiraude* and replace it with Marlène as a form counter-discourse. The protagonist is a French black woman who understands the black cartoon character's sense of outrage: "traumatisée d'entendre dans un cours de musique qu'une blanche vaut deux

noires.” Marlene explores her neurotic self and parses her own hyphenated French Caribbean identity. Repurposed, the title *La noiraude* serves as a trope and a critique of the lack of diversity in the French media. The title also emphasizes the ways in which the French Caribbean literary and filmmaking practices value male-dominated discourses.

Fabienne and Véronique Kanor first inscribe themselves in a French Caribbean cultural continuum that includes male predecessors such as Edouard Glissant’s theories (Tout-Monde). They model Marlene’s musings after the index-like inventory style of Aimé Césaire’s formulation of *négritude* in *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* but warn that neither theoreticians of French Caribbean identity offered valid responses. The rejection of venerable male forebears is indicated in the sound of the gunshot. It is time to kill the fathers of French Caribbean identity, to examine the latter from a female perspective, and from the viewpoint of Négropolitains’ (the black children of Caribbean-born men and women born or/and raised in France the *métropole*) afro-cosmopolitanism.

A filmmaker, an author, and a former journalist of Martinican-descent, Fabienne Kanor was born in 1970 in Orleans. She was raised in a family of West Indian civil servants eager to assimilate into French society: her mother held a job as a nurse’s aid and her father was employed by the Post Office. Kanor grew up with her parents and her two sisters in a housing project. Extremely shy, the Kanor sisters would socialize very little. Instead, they often remained in their bedroom and invented stories based on people they knew. By telling each other stories, they developed a strong bond. During Kanor’s childhood, *La noiraude*, a popular French cartoon named after a cow was one of the most popular programs for children on French television. The eponymous character in the series is a black cow that compulsively calls her veterinarian to complain about her existential problems. At school, the Kanor sisters were often the only black girls. Kanor’s childhood was also marked by a fascination with books. She was a regular the public library at an early age and took her education seriously.

Kanor studied French literature and socio-linguistics in Orléans and then in Tours. She later moved to Paris to pursue a series of postgraduate degrees. At the Université de Paris Nord 13 (Villetaneuse), “là où s’enseigne la littérature périphérique” (238), she studied first under the direction of Jacques Chevrier and then Romuald Fonkoua with whom she wrote her DEA thesis on “La Problématique de la Terre dans la Littérature Antillaise.” Finally, she specialized in communication, semiotics, and publishing. From the moment she finished her college degrees, Kanor has continued to work in different fields. A first job at a media and communication company left her unfulfilled and during this period she wrote a first novel that will never be published.⁸⁶ Fabienne Kanor then started a career as a journalist: juggling jobs for French radio stations (Radio Nova and Radio France Internationale), magazines (Nova Magazine), and television channels (La Cinquième, Paris Première, France 3 and CFI). She directed a series of documentaries for Canal France International that includes portraits of prolific women artists from the African diaspora, such as the Martinican actress Jenny Alpha, the Cape Verdian singer Cesaria Evora, and the Haitian storyteller Mimi Barthélémy.

Continents Noirs an imprint of Gallimard published her first novel *D’eaux douces* in 2004. The result of a relationship gone awry and a two-year stay in Saint-Louis, Senegal, *D’eaux douces* unravels as the brutal and raw first-person narrative of her protagonist Frida. A graduate student of Martinican-descent caught in an alienating quest for identity, Frida empowers herself when she murders her cheating boyfriend in cold blood. Shortly thereafter, in 2005, Kanor and her sister, Véronique, collaborate on an alternative film version of *D’eaux douces* entitled *La noirende*. *La noirende* is the first film in a series of a trilogy of *moyen-métrage* films, was self-financed and shot over thirteen days on a shoestring budget of 4500 euros.

⁸⁶ Kanor’s first novel was accidentally erased from her computer, personal interview.

By quoting the title of a popular French cartoon from the 1970s to embody the subjectivity of a racially conscious black Parisian woman of Guadeloupean-descent, the Kanor sisters question and expand the idea of what it means to be French. With *La noiraude*, Fabienne and Véronique Kanor introduce a black female perspective into the French media landscape. In such a manner, they threaten the stability of a French identity that contains the Other (black, female) with signs of difference (a whining black cow) associated with sub-qualities.⁸⁷ Therefore besides commonly designating: a black cow in the French countryside, or a woman of dark complexion, the proper noun “Noiraude” now also refers to Fabienne and Véronique Kanor’s short film, Marlene’s narrative, its browning of French cultural production.

Conclusion

While the generation of French Caribbean, Haitian, and foreign filmmakers born between the 1960s and 1970s has continued to use film to correct superficial representations of the archipelago, to disseminate Caribbean cultural identity, and to enter the world cultural stage, they have expressed dissent differently from their predecessors. Because first-generation filmmakers such as Euzhan Palcy, Guy Deslauriers, Christian Lara, Jérôme Kanapa, Elsie Haas and Raoul Peck have tended to produce historical and migration narratives, the second generation has been able to change its focus.

Filmmakers in their thirties and forties in the decade that follows 2000 have expanded the general understanding of Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique by introducing stories of marginalization into the cinematic landscape of these islands. They are essentially completing the picture their parents’ generation has started to draw by venturing into territory of ill repute.

⁸⁷ The suffixe ‘aud/e’ has a derogatory meaning in French to a word and denotes inferiority.

Grandman, Flamand Barny, and Leth are interested in exploring the limits of the modern Caribbean city and life in or around shantytowns. Unstable and inhospitable, Haiti as depicted in Asger Leth's *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* exist as a space where the resilience, rivalry, and devotion of Haitian brothers 2Pac and Bily are defeated by political strife, violence, marginality, and exclusion. For questioning the political and cultural assimilation of the French Caribbean requires urban narratives that do not necessarily call mean calling into question the pervasive dichotomy first of the black republic and poorest country on the Western hemisphere but calls for embracing or glorifying the margin. *Des Hommes et des dieux* takes to task hetero-normative French Caribbean paradigms and *La noirauté* interrogates innocuous French discourse about race.

Unlike a few of their predecessors, Christian Lara in Guadeloupe and Guy Deslauriers, and Euzhan Palcy in Martinique, Grandman and Flamand-Berny are not reconstructing a glorious historical past of resistance to French Colonialism (Lara's *Vivre Libre ou Mourir, 1802, L'épopée guadeloupéenne, Sucre amer* or Guy Deslauriers's *Aliker*); nor are they paying homage to an outstanding intellectual and political legacy, (*Aimé Césaire une voix pour l'histoire*). The themes of meritocracy in colonial Martinique (*Sugar Cane Alley*), of military participation to World War II have little bearing to them (*Parcours de Dissidents*). Instead their cinematic narratives of Caribbean difference rhyme with the urban alienation, disenfranchisement, and dystopia found in the banlieue's of the métropole. Their individual constructions of Haitian and French Caribbean marginalized subjects and subjects who defined themselves as different reject homogeneous categories that have helped define and distort the discourses around these respective collective identities.

Débrouya pa Péché: the Politics of Financing, Producing, Distributing, and Exhibiting Haitian and French Caribbean Films

Directors who make Haitian and French Caribbean films face both familiar and unique obstacles. Because their work explores France's imperial legacy, they generally encounter five major hurdles: 1) the marginalization of French colonial history, 2) financing and budget restrictions, 3) limited material and logistical resources, 4) education and training in Western cities, and last but not least, 5) insufficient and non-lucrative exhibition outlets and distribution deals. These barriers partially explain why after having been optimistically designated as cinema (Silou) Haitian and French Caribbean films have been regarded as emerging filmmaking practices (Cham). Samuel Nja Kwa's 2011 book *Minorités visibles, cinéma invisible: portraits du cinéma afro-français/Invisible Cinema Visible Minorities: Photographies of Afro French Cinema*, emphasizes through staged photographs of actors, filmmakers, and producers from francophone African diaspora—holding a clapboard bearing a message—their erasure from the French cultural landscape. The final chapter of my dissertation, “*Débrouya pa Péché: the Politics of Financing, Producing, Distributing, and Exhibiting Haitian and French Caribbean Films*,” concerns the production of such films. The five sections in this chapter look at each of these challenges and consider the strategies Haitian and French filmmakers use to circumvent or gain access to institutional resources in order to finance, distribute, exhibit, and secure exhibition deals for their films.

“*Débrouya pa péché*,” the first part of this chapter's title borrows from a Martinican Creole proverb that can be translated in English as “resourcefulness is no sin.” This precept captures the spirit of entrepreneurialism required of filmmakers who complete Haitian and French Caribbean movies. The ability or inability for Haitian and French Caribbean directors to get by has been a determining factor in the development of filmmaking practices in Haiti and in the French Caribbean.

Yet, despite the filmmakers' individual resourcefulness and access to occasional local and national governmental financial support, financial restrictions and uneven filmmaking practices have confined their cinematic efforts to the margins of cultural production. In the past, the high cost of film material, equipment, and financial models that allow film to flourish as a marginalized art form (cinema) or to develop as a consumer product (the commercial film industry) has long defined who could become of a filmmaker. Digital technology has considerably lessened the cost of making films but while film production has become ~~a~~ much cheaper but it is still a relatively expensive enterprise where distribution models long established endure, facilitate the circulation of mass-entertainment movies from which a few American and European companies continue to generate substantial profit.

In the case of countries or islands formerly colonized by the French, the high cost of producing film narratives has often inserted French cultural institutions into many of the filmmakers' modes of financing, except in Haiti. If Canadian and European funding is listed in the credits of the few Haitian documentary and fiction films occasionally selected at film festivals, most popular low-budget fiction films do not benefit from such opportunities. In the case of the Haitian filmmaking practice only the most visible directors such as Raoul Peck and Michelange Quay have consistently received funding from European cultural institutions.

The Haitian and French Caribbean filmmaking practices draw from drastically different models. Although a small number of emerging filmmakers from Martinique and Guadeloupe have deliberately chosen to make films without any institutional funding, the French Caribbean filmmaking practice is defined largely by funding awarded by French and cultural institutions. Most directors who regularly complete film projects about the French Caribbean experience were educated in France and aspire to follow European technical standards. On the contrary in Haiti, while a very small number of formally trained Haitian directors depend on Western institutions, to

finance, produce, exhibit, and distribute their films, the bulk of Haitian filmmakers who make low-budget films have relied on the recent developments of digital technology to circumvent financial barriers and make films without institutional funding. At the same time, a closer look at the politics of production reveals that to exist both incorporate, albeit in different degrees, elements of independent and guerilla filmmaking.⁸⁸

Thus, “*Débrouya*,” the Creole rendition of the French adjective “*débrouillard*,” refers to the ingenuity, inventiveness, and cunningness essential to overcome the initial budgetary and logistical hurdles that accumulate when completing a movie. The resourcefulness of Francophone Caribbean filmmakers is further tested when they seek exhibition and distribution deals. Very few producers champion Francophone film projects and when these films do get funding, it is insufficient. As a consequence, directors take longer to complete projects and once completed, they are generally viewed by the limited niche audience of film festivals or exceptionally late-night television audience. One of the chief barriers to producing, exhibiting, and distributing Haitian and French Caribbean films remains a resistance to the inclusion of colonial history in the national French narrative, despite an uproar over the marginalization of Francophone cultural texts in the European media landscape.

The Marginalization of French Colonial History

The primary obstacle to the development and the full realization of a Haitian and French Caribbean cinema (the production of movies as art or as an organized profit generating industry) remains the marginalization of Francophone discourses. As a heterogeneous corpus, Haitian and

⁸⁸ Among emerging directors to watch, the filmmaker Janluk Stanislas who hails both from Martinique and Guadeloupe and has so far worked with very little institutional money. In several personal interviews, he has referred to his own films as films *fap, fap* (Creole for low-budget and expeditious). The Haitian-born and Paris-based director Djinn Carrénard promoted his €150 first feature-film *Donoma*, as an extreme example of guerilla filmmaking.

French Caribbean films enter the French cultural arena as a cultural practice associated with the economic development of European empire: slavery, colonialism, and the ideological apparatus that rationalized racial inferiority. As explained in chapter 4 of this dissertation, the emergence of Francophone filmmaking practices in the 1960s was influenced by decolonization. The affirmation of distinctive Caribbean cultural and historical legacies and the contestation of eurocentrism are contentious in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as they question the foundation of national European identities. Acknowledgement of racialized ideologies, of the religious and cultural diversity of contemporary nations and non-nations, and the economic origins of the colonial enterprise, all expressions of difference that question the preferred path of assimilation, are gathered under the banner of *communautarisme* and viewed defensively.

The subject matter in these films usually overlaps with Francophone discourses and France's historical legacy of colonialism. The historiography of cinema itself shows a direct connection between the colonial enterprise and the beginnings of French cinema (Diawara, Ukadike, and Harrow). This historical legacy of colonialism is often relegated to the periphery of mainstream cultural discourse because it is at odds with the principle of the French nation as *une république une et indivisible*, one of the foundations of the French modern state. During the French Revolution the Jacobins replaced the sovereignty of the French king by the sovereignty of the French State and established a political tradition that precludes divisiveness. Such principles of unicity and indivisibility of the French nation applied to the people (*le peuple*) and also extended to French colonial territories in the five corners of the world (*dans les cinq parties du monde*). These tenets have been inscribed in different versions of the French constitution. Even if the principle of unity was withdrawn from the 1958 French constitution, it is more than ever part of the political discourse on French national identity.

The Orthodoxy of the Historical Idea of France

One of the most salient legacies of the republican principle of France as *a république une et indivisible* is that Francophone or anti-colonial discourses are viewed as a threat. A reluctance to revise orthodox ideas of the French nation, to interrogate France's colonial past, and to consider inclusiveness as a viable and forward cultural and economic policy affects the decision-making process at the top echelons of the economic and cultural institutions that finance films. What is at stake here is an idea of France's historical legacy that upholds European history as the only legitimate national identity narrative. This idea has remained relatively untouched, even after major post World War II political upheavals such as the decolonization process in South East Asia, West and North Africa which disputed that cohesive narrative. The production of Francophone films is especially intertwined with a French imperial past that conjures up slavery, colonialism, and decolonization. As implicit or explicit revisions of Euro-centric history, such films tend to be regarded as contestations of the Republican principle.

Films that relegate French national identity to the margins and bring into focus Caribbean identity speak to the different historical trajectories and concerns that distinguish Haiti from the French-speaking Caribbean. Former or current French territories in the Caribbean, with Haiti on the one hand, and Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guiana on the other hand, came to represent two extremes of the French colonial enterprise in the Caribbean. Inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution, the process of emancipation that began in Saint-Domingue in the late eighteenth century culminated in a successful and bloody slave revolt and the establishment of the independent republic of Haiti in 1804. Haiti's unprecedented insurrection not only impacted French economic development during the industrial revolution, but also disrupted the unity of the French republican imperial state.

The considerable debt Haiti incurred with France on account of the financial loss French planters and merchants suffered exemplifies that, more than losing face, Napoleon Bonaparte's army lost France's most profitable colony. A severe loss and a crushing French defeat, the Haitian revolution challenged theories about the superiority of white civilizations, theories indispensable to rationalize the slave trade and fuel the colonial enterprise. With the potential to inspire slaves in other colonies, Haiti represented a menace in the Western world.⁸⁹ Even with its ensuing economic difficulties and political instability, Haiti's bold rebellion inspired fear in Western nations that were developing economically through slave trade. Slave revolts were not the only sources of divisiveness, European powers in the Americas kept competing with each other to retrieve or expand territories in the Caribbean.

In Guadeloupe, for instance, both the French Revolution and the Haitian Revolution in *Saint-Domingue* inspired notable attempts at gaining emancipation from France in the late eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century (Oruno D. Lara 40-41). As a consequence, the historical period circa 1802 has become highly emblematic of Guadeloupe's narrative of resistance.⁹⁰ 1802, a landmark Guadeloupean slave revolt, is referenced in historian Oruno D. Lara's historiography of the Caribbean *De l'oubli à l'histoire, espaces et identité caraïbe*. In addition, this period is the subject of three films by his brother filmmaker Christian Lara (*Vivre libre et mourir, 1802: l'épopée guadeloupéenne*, and *Sucre amer*). Last but not least 1802 is the oblique but nonetheless crucial reference in Janluk Stanislas's afro-futurist short film *Trafik d'infos* (2005).

⁸⁹ In Haiti in August 1793 French commissioners Sonthonax and Polverel pronounced the abolition of slavery as a way to enroll freed black men in the French colonial army to fight the British. During this period of political ferment, Martinique was engaged in a conflict (1798-1801) with the United States. For Guadeloupean historian Oruno D. Lara, the roots of departmentalization can be traced back to that historical moment and the fear that another Haiti may occur: "Dans son discours du 17 Thermidor an III (4 août 1795), Boissy D'Anglas exposa les thèses de l'assimilation: "Rattachons les colonies à nous, ... par les liens d'un intérêt commun... que les colonies soient toujours françaises, au lieu d'être seulement américaines, qu'elles soient libres sans être indépendantes; qu'elles fassent partie de notre République indivisible et qu'elles soient surveillées et régies par les mêmes lois..."(Lara, 41)

Republican Ideal versus Identity Politics: *Communautarisme* and *Crispations Identitaires*

Intellectuals from *Régions Ultra-Périphériques* Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana have wrestled with their dual cultural French and Caribbean heritage (Glissant, Lara, and Condé). As French colonies in the Americas, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Martinique, adopted a political status to integrate into the *giron* of the métropole after World War II. By contrast and despite being constantly branded as the first black nation and the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere, the independent nation of Haiti forged its own, albeit tragic, narrative of collective cultural identity. Lower-class Haitian men and women who reside and work in Martinique and Guadeloupe are often treated like second-class citizens and designated as the Caribbean Other by the local population. Yet within French Caribbean intellectual circles, Haiti's historical legacy looms large. Intellectuals and artists of all stripes (historians, poets, novelists, playwrights, musicians, scholars, and filmmakers) have appropriated, contested, revisited, or rewritten earlier French Caribbean historical by way of Haiti. For instance France Zobda and Jean-Lou Monthieux, the founders of Eloa Productions, a film production company that produces made for television films and mini-series about the African diaspora for the public broadcast channels France Télévision, in 2011 completed a two-episode series on Toussaint Louverture. Directed by the Franco-Senegalese director Philippe Niang and boasting a cast of Haitian, French Caribbean, and French actors, *Toussaint Louverture* aired in prime time on broadcast television channel France 2 on February 14 and 15, 2012.

As narratives of affirmation and contestation, Francophone or Haitian and French Caribbean films also bring up the specter of difference and identity politics in the mainstream cultural landscape. In the political context of the *république une et indivisible*, partisans of the republican state view affirmations of religious, cultural, historical, and racial differences as open doors to *communautarisme* and *crispations identitaires*. The term *communautarisme* is perceived as

derogatory in French contemporary politics. It signals a reluctance to acknowledge, make visible, and include minorities. Because it is symptomatic of the desire of *communautés* (French minority groups) to be acknowledged, it is often revealed as a divisive American import that is irrelevant to the French historical and political experience. After the social turmoil of 2005, this stance has become the default position of left, center, and right leaning French political parties.

The Tension Between France as a Historically European Nation and Its Colonial Past

Cultural commissions such as the CNC generally approve a film project provided a French television channel agrees to coproduce it. Therefore a film cannot be completed without the dual support of a French television channel and the CNC. As a rule, television channels and commissions are usually reluctant to finance movies about France's imperial legacy. In a 2000 interview at the Sundance film festival where he was invited to present his film *Le passage du milieu*, an abstract rumination about the slave trade, filmmaker Guy Deslauriers explained that although that film project was initially developed with French broadcast television channel France 3, the station abandoned the project without notifying the production team. To the question "C'est le sujet qui inquiétait?" Deslauriers replies:

Oui, c'est le sujet. Par exemple, France 3 a développé le projet avec nous. Je suis donc parti aux Antilles travailler avec les auteurs et lorsqu'on est rentré à Paris avec le dossier de production, on a eu du mal à connaître leur réaction. Ils ont finalement dit oui. On a donc tout mis en route et un mois avant le tournage, il ne se passait toujours rien de leur côté et on a compris qu'ils ne produiraient pas le film avec nous. On a continué à les relancer, mais on n'a jamais eu le moindre courrier, ne serait-ce que pour nous dire non. Les autres chaînes avaient refusé tout de suite... Je crois que

c'était vraiment le sujet qui gênait et surtout le regard qu'on voulait porter sur cette histoire. (Gatto and Polinacci)

A film about the slave trade presented from the perspective of African captives, *Le passage du milieu* functions as an oppositional discourse that interrogates the current validity of the *liberté, égalité, fraternité* along racial lines. Narratives about racial and cultural difference that circulate within the French nation pose problems because they question the strength of *la France une et indivisible* and reveal tensions and fissures within the republican edifice. This is one of the primary reasons filmmakers who focus on Francophone history routinely meet resistance when they are seeking funding and co-production partners.

Regardless of recent acknowledgements of its colonial past, French political administrations continue to construct a national identity based on a French Republican model that rejects racial and religious differences, particularly but not exclusively from the Maghreb. Official claims of difference and acknowledgement of France's colonial past, such as *la loi Taubira du 21 mai 2001* that commemorates the abolition of slavery in the French Caribbean, are often described as examples of *repli sur soi*, racial and religious *crispations identitaires*, or instances of *communautarisme* that threaten the traditional consensus of a "France une et indivisible." In "Black...A Color? A Kaleidoscope!" her introduction to *Black France/France Noire: The History and Politics of Blackness* (2012), Taubira—who was appointed Minister of Justice under the government of socialist president François Hollande in 2012 after the latter anthology was published—asks and answers a series of questions that emphasize how race has been debated in contemporary French politics:

How to teach the world?

There is no "Black question." Neither in France nor elsewhere. There is the issue of stratagems invented by the status quo to forge, if not its legitimacy, at least its supremacy. (xi)

In French political discourse, racial and religious identity politics, when acknowledged, are often contrasted with nostalgic traditional incarnations of France. For instance, in his November 12, 2009 address known as “Discours sur l’identité nationale de la France,” French president Nicolas Sarkozy’s definition of French diversity eluded racial, religious, class-based difference in favor of a wistful and Eurocentric collective French identity (2).

1993-: The (French) Other as Protagonist in French Cinema

From 1993 on, a shift in French contemporary cinema occurred. Several films that represented contemporary France at international films festival abroad focused on (French) protagonists of foreign origins and were extremely well received. The CNC supported a handful of notable films that interrogate dated constructions of French national identity, emphasize diversity, and pertain to French colonialism. Post 1990s French cinema insists more freely on the tensions between interrogating France’s repressed colonial past, portraying contemporary French diversity, and maintaining the image of France as a historically European society. The international *succès d’estime* of films such as *La haine* (Best Director and Golden Palm at Cannes, 1995), *Caché* (Best Director and Golden Palm, 2005), and *Entre les murs* (Golden Palm Cannes, 2008), made by French or foreign (maybe just European) directors who draw attention to issues of immigration, race, class, and tensions within French society finally resonated with finance departments of cultural institutions. While they may deal with racial, class and religious based differences, films by French or European directors such as Mathieu Kassovitz, Michael Haneke, and Laurent Cantet, generally see their projects financed by cultural institutions and approved by CNC film commissions because their previous films generated profit at the box office or received critical acclaim. And while, for instance, in the 2000s several films by French directors of North African descent were funded by

television channels and the CNC, it was not always without controversy, as the political wrangles around Rachid Bouchared's 2010 film on the Algerian War *Hors-la-loi* attests.⁹¹

The tension between France as a historically European nation, its colonial past, and its current religious and cultural diversity has been more widely explored from the 1990s onwards. The quieter but equally important national recognition of minority voices such as Abdel Kechiche for his films *L'esquive* (Césars for Best Director, Best Film, and Best Writing, 2005) and *La graine et le mulet* (Césars for Best Director, Best Film, Best Writing, and Most Promising Actress, 2007), have alerted cinema divisions in French cultural institutions that there is a demand for a nuanced cinema that addresses issues of exclusion, diversity, and inclusiveness. On French television, a limited number of actors of African-descent such as Sonia Rolland (*Léa Parker* 2004-2006 on M6) and Alex Descas (*L'homme qui venait d'ailleurs* 2004 on France 2 and *Un flic* on France 2 2008-2010) have played lead roles in primetime French television series. Yet in general black characters are still relegated to stereotypical and minor parts.

During the 1990s several films screened at international film festivals laid the ground for increasing diversity on French television and in French movie theaters. Mathieu Kassovitz's 1993 comedy *Métisse* for instance. Although it was limited at the time to the *cinémas d'art et d'essai* theaters, *Métisse* paved the way and proved that it was possible to attain *succès d'estime* while embracing religious, cultural, and racial differences. But the television event in the late 1990s that helped reexamined the relationship between contemporary France and its colonial past was an epic documentary that chronicles the historical migration of North African male workers and their families to France: Yamina Benguigui's groundbreaking 1997 documentary *Mémoires d'immigrés*.

Mémoires d'immigrés was one of the most expensive and most significant French documentaries of the 1990s. Almost three hours long, the three-part film was financed by the CNC

⁹¹ Adi Yasmina et. Al. "Le film 'Hors-la-loi' de Rachid Bouchareb: les guerres de mémoires sont de retour, par Yasmina Adi, Didier Daeninckx..." *Le monde*. May 5 2010. Web.

and co-produced by the premium pay television channel Canal Plus where it was shown *before* it was released in theaters. Less than a decade after *l’Affaire du foulard*, a French-born female filmmaker of Algerian descent proposed to bridge the gap between the personal and the political by giving voice to a segment of the French population rarely included French historical narratives that included the Maghreb and the Algerian War. By juxtaposing testimonials of French politicians, middle-aged men and women from the Maghreb, and their French-born children, the director gave human depth and an economic and historical foundation to their presence in France at a time when signs of religious difference were equated with Islamic fundamentalism and the idea of *laïcité* (French secularism) was being used to conservatively redefine French national identity.

In July 1998, one year after *Mémoires d’immigrés*, the Vidéothèque de Paris (now known as the Forum des Images), the Cinéma du Palais, Champollion, Quartier Latin, and Le Latina art house theaters hosted “Racines Noires 98: Rencontres des cinémas du monde noir,” a major film festival devoted to films from the African diaspora. The festival commemorated the 150th anniversary of the April 27, 1848 French Abolition of Slavery by celebrating a diverse legacy of black cinemas that included films from the Americas. An unprecedented coalition made of prominent cultural television channels (TV5 and La Sept Arte), governmental agencies such as the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères) and the Ministry of Culture and Communication, INA (Institut National de l’Audiovisuel) the French television sound and image archive, and the CNC (Centre National de la Cinématographie) joined forces with the UNESCO Slave Route Project (Projet de l’UNESCO Route de l’Esclavage) to underwrite the event. The filmmaker Guy Deslauriers, who attended Racines noires and presented his first feature film there, *L’exil du roi Behanzin* (1995), explained in a personal interview that the focus of the festival film festival inspired him to direct a film on the slave trade *Le passage du milieu* (2000). As previously discussed, finding a television channel to co-produce the film proved elusive.

The unwillingness in television and film organizations to embrace inclusiveness and reflect the cultural diversity of contemporary France within the French media caused mounting discontent. On January 19, 2000, representatives of the coalition Collectif Égalité, actor Luc Saint Eloy from Guadeloupe and novelist Calixthe Beyala from Cameroon, abruptly interrupted the ceremony for the French academy awards (Césars) to raise awareness about the conspicuous absence of black actors in the French media. They also pushed for the adoption of quotas that would guarantee the inclusion of minorities in French film and TV productions. Hervé Bourges, director of the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel, refused to consider these measures on the grounds that they would violate the Republican principle upon which France is established.

The following year Christiane Taubira, a member of the French parliament from French Guiana, sponsored a law that recognizes slavery and the slave trade as crimes against humanity. (you already talked about this law) Voted on May 21, 2001, the loi Taubira has instituted May 10th as the French anniversary of the 1848 abolition of slavery. France's historical role as a slave trading power appeared again in French consciousness in 2004 with the precipitated departure of Haitian president Jean-François Aristide and the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of Haiti's independence in national and local events such as the Ecran d'Haïti film festival at the art house cinema Image d'Ailleurs. Depictions of the sheer cruelty of that island's plantation economy were suppressed for a long time. However in 2004, the year of the commemoration, historical accounts of France's former colonial relationship with Saint-Domingue, and of the defeat of the French army of Napoléon Bonaparte, and of the imposition of a considerable debt on the new republic of Haiti, marginally reinstated Haiti and the Haitian Revolution into France's historical past.

French Television after the 2005 Riots: Greater Diversity, Debates about France's Colonial Legacy, and Counter Political Discourse

Last but not least in the wake of nationwide social turmoil in the *banlieues* in 2005, the CNC in tandem with the Agence nationale pour la cohésion sociale et l'égalité des chances (Acsé) created a special commission designed to promote diversity in cinema and television:

Après les violences des banlieues de l'automne 2005, les pouvoirs publics, mesurant l'insuffisance de la représentation de la diversité de la société française à l'antenne, ont annoncé plusieurs mesures destinées à lutter contre les discriminations dans le secteur audiovisuel. C'est ainsi qu'est née la Commission *Images de la diversité*, qui a été installée, en mars 2007, par les Ministres en charge de la culture et de la communication, de la cohésion sociale et de la promotion de l'égalité des chances.⁹²

Funds from this commission made helped 128 new film projects and benefited experienced and emergent filmmakers from the Francophone Caribbean and beyond. Veteran director from Guadeloupe Christian Lara's secured money for his film *Le mystère Joséphin*. The Images la Diversité board also approved funding for first feature films such as Lucien Jean-Baptiste's comedy *La première étoile* (2009), Michelange Quay's *Mange ceci est mon corps* (2008), or shorts such as Gary Pierre Victor's *Négropolitains* (2009), as well as documentaries such as Barcha Bauer's *Les insurgés de Cayenne: le premier procès colonial à Nantes* (2009).

The 2005 riots also triggered noticeable changes in the most accessible of all medium in the French cultural landscape: television. I have already mentioned that Harry Roselmack, a French journalist from Martinique, replaced revered news anchor Patrick Poivre d'Arvor in the summer 2006 but the face of prime time French news had also tentatively become black and female. Audrey Pulvar, now a prominent French journalist and author from Martinique had worked her way up

⁹²“Images de la diversité: nouveaux projets.” *CNC et ACSE*. Juillet 2009. Web.

from a local television station in Martinique in 1995, to regional news anchor in the *métropole* for channels such as LCI, TV5, and France 3 in 2004. She hosted her own prime time newscast, *Audrey Pulvar Soir* from September 2005 to 2009.⁹³

Téléfilms or French made for television films were the next frontier. Following the riots France Télévision broadcast two historical mini-series that acknowledged France's historical legacy with slavery: *Tropiques Amers* and *Les mariées de L'isle-Bourbon*. France Télévisions and the Agence Nationale pour la Cohésion Sociale et l'Égalité des Chances (ACSE) have joined forces to implement a diversity mandate. France Zobda and Jean-Lou Monthieu, an experienced and enterprising French Caribbean couple from Martinique, created Eloa Productions a film production company that provides content with an emphasis on French multiculturalism and diversity (made for television films and mini-series about the African diaspora) to broadcast channel France Télévisions so that it can fulfill its mandate on French diversity.⁹⁴ Zobda, a former model, actress in film, television, and theater, and organizer of the film festival Cinamazonia in French Guiana is the company's executive producer (producteur délégué). She had long thought about how to position Francophone narratives so that they reach a larger public. In 1983 during an interview that included the director Christian Lara and the actor Robert Liensol, Zobda stated: "Il faudrait parler de la réceptivité du public. On raisonne comme si les films antillais ne concernaient que les Antillais (Tallon 243)."

No less proficient, Monthieux is a former production manager (directeur de production), line producer (producteur délégué) for institutional films shown at the Futuroscope. He also worked French commercial films such as Jean-Pierre Jeunet's film *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* and

⁹³ Bonal, Cordélia. "Du cran à l'écran." *Libération*. 22 October 2008. Web. Mar. 24 2012.

⁹⁴ Hersilie-Héloïse, Eric. "Je suis dans le cinéma depuis trente-deux ans." *France-Antilles Martinique*. May 27, 2011. Retrieved June 19, 2011. Web.

Frédéric Forestier's and Thomas Langmann's *Astérix aux jeux olympiques*.⁹⁵ By February 2012, ELOA Prod had produced three made for television for broadcast channels France Télévision: *Pas de toit sans moi* (shot in 2008), *Les amants de l'ombre* (shot in 2008), and *Fais danser la poussière* (shot in 2009), and one television two-part mini-series, *Toussaint Louverture* (shot in 2011). The latter project took seven year to complete.⁹⁶

President Nicolas Sarkozy was also forced to grapple with an unequal, multiracial, and multi-religious French society that could no longer afford to ignore its repressed colonial past. He is rumored to have asked spectators in the summer of 2006 to hold their breath when French private channel TF1 replaced prominent journalist Patrick Poivre d'Arvor by a black French journalist from Martinique: Harry Roselmack. For the first time ever, even for a few weeks, a black news anchorman presented the primetime newscast on the politically conservative channel. It was not entirely unprecedented for French journalists of Caribbean-descent to present newscasts: in the 1980s Michel Reinette (born in Guadeloupe) and more recently Audrey Pulvar in 2004-2009 (born in Martinique) had been the face of broadcast news reports on public regional channels FR3 and France 3.

Despite these token gestures, reconciling the idea of France as a European nation that embraces its cultural, religious, and racial diversity remains of the most difficult challenges of the twenty-first century. If the 2005 riots appear to have opened the French media landscape to minorities, the period that followed what French journalists call *les émeutes de 2005* also saw heightened conservative political discourse. In the wake of the 2008 economic crisis, prolonged debates about French national identity, inflaming political discourse, and high rates of

⁹⁵ CV_ELOA_PROD_2011.pdf. Retrieved on November 10, 2011. Web.

⁹⁶ After the broadcast of the second part of the mini-series, a debate moderated by French journalist Benoît Duquesne included former soccer player Lilian Thuram, members of the cast Jimmy Jean-Louis and Sonia Rolland, academic Françoise Vergès and Marcel Dorigny. As he introduced his guests, Duquesne stressed that Zobda the series Executive Producer worked on *Toussaint Louverture* for seven year and that it was a difficult project to complete. The debate took place at the Quai Branly, a newly constructed museum that hosted *Exhibition, l'invention du Sauvage*, a show about the popularity of human zoos in 19th century France endorsed by Lilian Thuram.

unemployment increased anti-immigrant sentiment, especially but not exclusively against immigrants from the Maghreb and their French-born children. With the 2012 French presidential election looming and greater visibility of the far-right, right wing French politicians threatened to take away the citizenship of criminals of. As a counter move, militant organizations such as Les indigènes de la république, le CRAN (Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires), and the collective Devoir de mémoire are asking for a greater acknowledgment and participation of racial minorities in France in the media and beyond. Such organizations encounter resistance from right, center, and left leaning political parties intent on following the French republican principles.⁹⁷

Following the publication with Bernard Fillaire of *Mes étoiles noires: de Lucy à Barack Obama*, retired French soccer player from Guadeloupe Lilian Thuram was invited to debate on race and France's legacy of colonialism in many a television shows. For instance, well-known journalists of French Caribbean origins (Martinique) Harry Roselmack and Audrey Pulvar have both expressed views on topics that stirred controversy. On November 7, 2011 in *Le grand Journal*, a live prime time television show broadcasted on cable channel Canal Plus, Roselmack challenged Henri Guaino, the author of the infamous *Discours de Dakar* read by Président Nicolas Sarkozy in July 2007.⁹⁸ A journalist in her own right, a radio host with France Inter and a commentator on the controversial Saturday show *On n'est pas couché*, Pulvar sharply examines, denounces and deconstructs the ideas and at times offensive positions of the guests.⁹⁹ Known for her confidence and precision, the black

⁹⁷ For more detailed analyses on the rise of identity politics in France see Jean-Baptiste Onana's *Sois nègre et tais-toi* and Géraldine Paès's and Stephen Smith's *Noirs et Français*.

⁹⁸ "Le grand journal: clash entre Roselmack et Guaino." November 7, 2011. Meltybuzz.fr. Web. Retrieved on March 24, 2012. <http://www.meltybuzz.fr/le-grand-journal-clash-entre-roselmack-et-actu83974.html>

⁹⁹ Pulvar and co-commentator Natacha Polony have replaced Eric Zemmour and Eric Nulleau in early September 2011. *On n'est pas couché* is deliberately controversial and Pulvar's role is the reverse of that of former chronicler Eric Zemmour whose remarks stirred anti-immigrant sentiment. The recipe for the new mise-en-scène is that the black female Other, a demoted prominent journalist whose subjectivity has been questioned because of personal life (her

French journalist cross-examines the guests of the show and holds them accountable for their riling language or lack of clarity (*langue de bois*).

Contemporary French political discourse mirrors the tension between reconciling decolonization, French foreign policies, cultural production, and the founding principles of the French republic. Like their Francophone counterparts, Haitian and French Caribbean films are often deemed irrelevant to a larger French public. In France the idea of a substantial corpus of Haitian and French Caribbean films is often met with skepticism and disbelief. With the exception of Euzhan Palcy's film adaptation *La Rue Cases-Nègres* the notion that film narratives about Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique have existed since the late 1960s is at odds with conventional beliefs in France that the Caribbean is a-cultural, or that France is the exclusive site of cultural production within the Francophone world. This skepticism stems from a marginalization of French colonial history and competing ideas about French national identity.

Francophone Film Narratives Deemed Irrelevant to a Larger Public

Despite recent acknowledgements of its colonial past, French political administrations continue to construct a national identity that reluctantly acknowledges racial and religious affirmations because they run counter to traditional incarnations of France. Although France 3 refused to coproduce or to broadcast Guy Deslauriers's film *Le passage du milieu* (2000),¹⁰⁰ its sister channel, France 2, did produce in 2006 a made for television mini-series on slavery: Jean-Claude Flamand-Barney's *Tropiques Amers*. Thanks to the involvement of militant members of the African Diaspora and partly as token gestures, the period that follows the 2005 riots and, the CNC and the

relationship with left-leaning politician Arnaud de Montebourg), exposes and condemns conservative French political discourse.

¹⁰⁰ Deslauriers's *Le passage du milieu* was mostly funded by the CNC and the Martinique Region (Conseil Régional).

France Télévisions consortium have financed several projects about the French Caribbean experience that focus on the slave trade or slavery. The two main sources of funding for cinema and television, the Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC) and France Télévisions (the conglomerate of French public television channels that include France 2, France 3, France 4, France 5, RFO, and France Ô) have pledged a commitment towards projects that promote diversity by either producing or financing a number of projects focusing on minorities.

If and when they are told why their project was rejected, veteran and debuting directors explain television stations claim that diversity and inclusiveness are hard to implement. When selecting projects for development, heads of division sometimes argue that they have to take into account viewers from rural areas. They insist that as younger viewers turn to online content and video games, the audience for French television has aged and that therefore spectators tend to be more conservative. Such viewers, they claim, will not identify with non-white Francophone protagonists that break existing stereotypes.¹⁰¹

French Caribbean filmmaker Euzhan Palcy recounted an anecdote that questioned these rationales during a panel discussion at the France Noire festival in Paris in May 2010: “Le public français n’est pas raciste, répond Euzhan Palcy, il aime les bons films. Ce sont les gens qui décident qui sont bornés.”¹⁰² She explained that when she pressed the former director of the French television channel TF1 about the limited presence and stereotypical portrayal of racial minorities in the French media landscape during a private a meeting, he distanced himself from the issue:

Une année, j’ai demandé une audience à Monsieur Mougeotte (ancien directeur de la chaîne française TF1). Je lui ai demandé pourquoi il achetait des séries américaines où l’on voit beaucoup d’acteurs noirs et latinos et pourquoi dès qu’il s’agit d’un

¹⁰¹ As the screenwriter Alain Agat (Martinique) recounted in a personal Skype interview on June 14, 2010.

¹⁰² Diao, Claire. “La présence noire dans le cinéma en France: retour sur la table ronde du festival France Noire.” *Africultures* 25 May, 2010.

programme français, il n'y a pas d'acteur de couleur. Il m'a répondu que c'était la faute des directeurs de casting.¹⁰³

When Mougeotte places the blame on casting directors, he betrays his reluctance as the head of a prominent television channel to acknowledge what Bourdieu calls: “une série de mécanismes qui font que la télévision exerce une forme particulièrement pernicieuse de violence symbolique (15-16).” Mougeotte reveals the limited ways in which broadcast French channels continue to restrict French national identity and reject the depiction of a France that has become multicultural. While the part played by casting directors in selecting or excluding non-white actors is significant, the latter is defined by the channel’s conservative editorial line. Etienne Mougeotte’s oblique response signals on his part a reluctance to bring the issues of race, class, and the portrayal of racial minorities in the media into the contested terrain of French national identity.

What filmmakers have had a hard time achieving, digital technology might reshape. Mougeotte’s resistance to change may be challenged by the modernization of private, broadcast, and cable television in France and the advent of digital television or Télévision Numérique Terrestre (TNT). Challenged by the afflux of programming offered by TNT, public French national channels have expanded into the larger umbrella of France Télévisions. This new *bouquet de chaînes* has included into its fold one channel whose programming comes from the French overseas territories. When in 2004, RFO (until then a separate national company) was integrated into France Télévisions (the broadcasting network of France Télévisions), it was renamed France Ô. The stepchild of all local Radio France Outremer (RFO) television stations, France Ô is a group of channels that broadcasts RFO programs from French Oversea departments and territories to audiences in France on the French public television network France Télévisions. The Ô in France Ô stands for *oultremer*

¹⁰³ Diao, Claire. “La présence noire dans le cinéma en France: retour sur la table ronde du festival France Noire.” *Africultures* 25 May, 2010.

(overseas) and although France Ô's core audience is television viewer from overseas department, it also caters to *métropolitains*, people who reside in France.¹⁰⁴

The arrival of France Ô in 2007 in the Paris metropolitan area and nationwide in 2010 has increased content from Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique, and Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. France Ô brings newscasts, sports shows, and cultural programming from the former Départements d'Outre Mer to television viewers in the hexagon. Select filmmakers whose documentaries have been selected by local *télépays* (local television channels) RFO (now Martinique and Guadeloupe Première) stations are great beneficiaries of France Ô because they can reach a wider audience. But since neither RFO nor France Ô has yet a cinema division that coproduces and supports French Caribbean fiction films, directors must still submit their projects to the CNC and the cinema division of France Télévisions and other channels to finance their films.

Films de brousse, Sidekicks, Cops, and the Voices of Black Characters

Even if the relative and unexpected success in the summer of 2011 of the controversial comedy on slavery *Case départ* seems to point otherwise, the marginalization of French Francophone film narrative continues. Directors of Haitian and French Caribbean films privately complain that they are bluntly and routinely encouraged to alter the nature, meaning, and scope of their work. In a personal interview, the French novelist and filmmaker of Martinican-descent Fabienne Kanor denounced such interventions as none too subtle encouragements to uphold a tradition of “films de brousse” ‘jungle movies’ or stereotypical films about the black experience.¹⁰⁵ This reference to “films de brousse” partially explains how the colonial legacy between France, Haiti, and the French

¹⁰⁴ Réseau Outremer 1ère officielle. Facebook.com. Retrieved on March 23, 2012.

¹⁰⁵ Fabienne Kanor. *Personal Interview*. August 9, 2007. Fort-de-France, Martinique.

Caribbean is usually masked by images of poverty, exoticism, and tourism shown in advertisements and television.

Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers who have approached producers and television channels find that film projects that do not feature scenic views with oversimplified West Indians characters and European protagonists are told that such films are hard to sell. For the most part, Caribbean locales are associated with tourism, tropical vacations or on the contrary extreme poverty and political instability, very rarely with cinema or film narratives. In the French popular imagination, Haiti often rhymes with extreme misery and violence. While a handful of filmmakers with insider narratives have succeeded in receiving funds and completing projects that were later screened at local and international film festivals and even on French television, most are still operating in the margins of the institutions that subsidize French and foreign cinema.

Despite its complex colonial past as an imperial power with territories in North and West Africa, South East Asia, and the Caribbean, the European nation of France continues to be primarily defined by its Republican ideals. Like their West African and North African counterparts, film narratives about Haiti and the French Caribbean are generally seen as irrelevant to a national French television audience. Consequently, when filmmakers are seeking financing for their project, potential co-producers such as heads of major French television channels with the CNC often reject film project proposals on the basis that they will alienate a large portion of the French viewing public.

In the collective French unconscious, Guadeloupe and Martinique have long existed as tropical vacation spots that promised *rhum, plages et cocotiers*. French Caribbean migration to France in the late 1960s and many a mixed marriage later, conventional images of *les Antilles* began to be revisited. Colorful, nurturing, and laid back Caribbean men and women that speak *petit nègre* were replaced by new archetypes of the French West Indian Other. For instance, the late 1980s saw the

most unlikely romantic comedy between a French CEO (Daniel Auteuil) and a black West Indian evening cleaning lady (Firmine Richard) in Coline Serreau's *Romuald et Juliette (Mama, There's a Man in Your Bed)*. The chechia-wearing *tirailleurs sénégalais* and silent chocolate beauties in cocoa, rum, or coffee ads and the black female domestic servants in films were supplanted by depictions of black migrants occupying subaltern occupations in France as nurse's aides, prostitutes and the male trifecta: thugs in projects, rookie cops, and informants.

These simplistic portrayals have been relatively challenged after 2005. In two French cop series that feature actors of African-descent as protagonists: laconic and principled police superintendent Schneider played by Alex Descas in France 2's mini-series *Un Flic*¹⁰⁶ (2008), and efficient, fierce, and yet friendly eponymous character *Léa Parker* (2004-2006 or 2003-2005), portrayed by Sonia Rolland, a former Miss France of Rwandan and French heritage, in a series produced by television channel M6. While these series do not have the cachet of the Canal Plus series *Mafiosa*, the presence of Descas and Rolland is a notable reversal in the French appropriation of the American police television dramas genre. In French procedurals or cop series such as *Navarro* (1989-2007) and *Julie Lescot* (1992-), the function of a police superintendent has been traditionally occupied by a white –initially male then female– protagonist (Roger Hanin and Véronique Genest) flanked with minority sidekicks that act as *faire-valoir*. The first black actor to crossover to a French television series was Greg Germain, an actor of Guadeloupien-descent who starred as a black doctor on night call in the Bernard Kouchner¹⁰⁷ penned series *Médecins de nuit* (1978-1984). Still Alex

¹⁰⁶ In a *Télérama* interview about *Un flic*, Descas discloses that although he was initially offered the role of Schneider, he refused the part because he was reluctant to play a cop and therefore be pigeonholed. After he saw the first episodes of the series and was approached again, he accepted the part and replaced actor Gaëtan Gondzot, in the role of Schneider in the second season of *Un flic*. In interviews both Gondzot (who is of Brazzaville Congolese-descent) and Descas (who is of Martinican-descent) stress that the part for Schneider, was not written for a black actor. This context fulfills one of the longtime wishes of black francophone actors such as Robert Liensol who already in the late 1950s as a co-founder of *La compagnie des griots* longed for color-blind roles for black performers. See Douhaire, Samuel. "Un flic, pour l'excellent Alex." *Télérama* 3113 (2009). Web.

¹⁰⁷ Kouchner used the pen name Bernard Gridaine see both the following: Chalaye, Sylvie. "Premier héros noir du petit écran: Germain." *Africultures* 27 (2000), 39 and the opening credits to the series *Médecins de nuit* on youtube.com.

Descas's and Sonia Rolland's arrival in primetime French series produced by private television channel TF1 is uncommon enough to notice.

Coincidentally as Germain's career on television started to wane and he focused on theater, Alex Descas's began with mostly one-dimensional black roles. Before *Un Flic*, Descas, a working French black actor with a career spanning more than two decades, was regularly featured in foreign and French auteur films (most notably in the films of Claire Denis.) Descas also appeared in made-for-TV French movies and in supporting roles in French Caribbean and Haitian films such as Christian Grandman's *Tèt grenné* and Jean-Claude Flamand-Barney's *Nèg maron* and the fiction film *Lumumba* directed by diaspora Haitian filmmaker Raoul Peck. His first lead in a French fiction film was in Denis's *35 Rhums* (2008). The actress Sonia Rolland was also cast in supporting roles in Raoul Peck's *Moloch tropical* (2009) and in France 2's mini-series *Toussaint Louverture* (shot in 2011).

The dictum *débrouya pa péché* mirrors the challenges filmmakers, screenwriters face when they solicit support at various stages of the filmmaking process. It also rings true for actors from the African diaspora who often wear different hats in order to sustain a career in the French media. For decades many black actors in France have been supplementing their episodic work in films, theater, and television series with the dubbing of black characters in American series and movies (Malonga *Africultures* 39). If the faces of black francophone actors were for a long time excluded from television screens, their voices —particularly Robert Liensol's and Med Hondo's— dubbed black characters in American series. Haitian and French Caribbean film projects are still seldom given full consideration by French media outlets. This marginalization of Francophone discourses limits Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers' access to various forms of support from key institutions and shapes the scope of the Haitian and French Caribbean filmmaking practices. As a result Haitian and French Caribbean films continue to exist in the margins of Western and Caribbean culture.

Affirmations of Caribbean Identities: Anchored in the Americas

Haitian and French Caribbean films are rarely profit-driven. Instead, they fulfill a contested and affirmative role for a Caribbean intellectual and artistic elite that sees in the film medium what it previously saw in literature, music, and theater: a means to affirm, formulate, and rewrite Caribbean cultural identities in order to wage meaningful political battles. Filmmaking is a way of claiming a variable degree of autonomy or independence through the shifting terrain of cultural productions. As argued in the second chapter of my dissertation, *Sé grenn' diri ka plen sak*, developing and disseminating one's cultural legacy has been the *raison d'être* of Haitian and French Caribbean intellectuals since the 1920s. From performance, essays, fiction and poetry in periodicals, to novels, theater and film, establishing Francophone and creolophone discourses has been the primary mode of inscribing Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique into larger national intellectual discourses. As Marie France Malonga explains: "La minorité s'inscrit dans une relation de pouvoir, elle subit une domination sociale et politique, qui commence par celle de ne pas avoir le contrôle de sa représentation, de son identité, construite par la société majoritaire. L'individu minoritaire cherche donc à être reconnu comme un citoyen à part entière" (Malonga *La télévision comme lieu de reconnaissance*).

The Haitian and French Caribbean filmmaking practices operate as sites of affirmation and contestation where films serve a double symbolical and political purpose. Because Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers often appropriate and rewrite history, culture, and, identity from an insider's perspective, the demarginalization of French colonial history positions Haitian and French Caribbean films as narratives that contest conventional depictions of the Caribbean. Their films are speaking against widespread characterizations of the Haitian and French Caribbean experiences but

they are also often disseminating and transcribing onto the screen the ideas and worldviews of fellow Caribbean intellectuals.

Financing and Budget Restrictions

The second biggest hurdle for filmmakers seeking to make a film about the Haitian or French Caribbean experience continues to be funding. More than almost four decades after what is considered to be first French Caribbean and Haitian films, respectively *Lorsque l'herbe* (Christian Lara, 1967) and *Mais moi je suis belle* (Jean Dominique, Emmanuel Lafontant, and Edouard Guilbaud, 1962), finding monies to finance a Haitian or French Caribbean film remains *un parcours de combattant*, a hassle, an arduous task. When applying for funds to finance their projects, Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers feel that they have very limited options. For Martinique and Guadeloupe and to a much lesser degree Haiti, ongoing economic, political, and cultural entanglements with their ex-colonial power shapes many dimensions in film production. Many filmmakers find themselves receiving piecemeal funding from different governmental and cultural agencies: chiefly the CNC, the Fonds Sud, film divisions of French Televisions channels to Guadeloupe's and Martinique's Conseil Régional and departmental bureau, the Ministère de l'Outremer. Professional film industry organizations such as the ANGOA, PROCIREP, and ACSÉ have contributed crucial additional money to Haitian and French Caribbean film projects such as short films by Véronique and Fabienne Kanor. Funding remains scarce and for films about Martinique and Guadeloupe is from France and Europe (CNC, Fonds Sud, Procirep & ANGOA and French television channels).

Recent CNC, Fonds Sud, and PROCIREP and ANGOA Funds allocated to Haitian and French Caribbean films

France, or rather the state-controlled structures that subsidize French and foreign cinema have long been a magnet for filmmakers all over the world. This is because in France unlike in the United States where cinema is primarily an industry regulated by private corporate interests or regulated by independent producers and filmmakers, cinema is government-sponsored. The French government partially underwrites film production through a central agency: the Centre National de la Cinématographie or CNC. Ubiquitous, the CNC was founded in France in 1946 as an antenna of the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication. It is a highly structured organization that derives its revenue from a percentage of movie ticket sales, television license fees, and television coproduction in exchange for broadcast rights. This revenue is collected to finance all aspects of film production. Four main categories of the filmmaking process dictate how the CNC allocates its funds: screenwriting (*scénario*), production, distribution, and exhibition (*exploitation*). As the premier French cinema organization: it also promotes and subsidizes French cinema and eligible foreign films. When eighty percent or more of the dialogue in the film is in French, the film is categorized as a hundred percent French. Filmmakers whose films narrate the French Caribbean experience are considered films d'initiative française.

The CNC is a crucial source of financing for any filmmakers with international pretensions translating the Haitian, Guadeloupean, and Martinican experience. The director Euzhan Palcy managed to shoot her first feature film *Rue Case Nègres*—still the best known French Caribbean film—because she received a grant from the French government. The grant was the prize for a competition for the best script.¹⁰⁸ Information culled from the Centre National de la

¹⁰⁸ Givanni, June. "Interview with Euzhan Palcy." *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, 290. See also in the updated version (December 2010) of the *College au cinéma* version of a dossier on *Rue Cases-Nègres*, (2-3): "Euzhan Palcy obtient pour le scénario adapté de *La Rue Cases-Nègres*, à l'unanimité du jury, l'avance sur recettes du Centre National de

Cinématographie et de l'Image Animée website, www.cnc.fr, indicates that only a handful of Haitian and French Caribbean films get a portion of their funding from the CNC. This funding generally remains insufficient and sporadic.

CNC funding is so crucial that experienced filmmakers sometimes alter their plot to increase their chances of obtaining a specific fund. In 2006 the French filmmaker Claire Denis added a subplot that takes place in Germany to her film *35 Rbums* to obtain the aide à la coproduction franco-allemande (€330.000 that is €200.000 from France and €130.000 from Germany).¹⁰⁹ To set a scene in Germany with dialogues in German, Denis used Diop's fluency in German as relevant background to the two protagonists' story. Fifteen years after *J'ai pas sommeil* (1994), her film about a gay serial killer from Guadeloupe and a Lithuanian aspiring actress, Denis returned to a French Caribbean theme. In *35 Rbums* (2008): she focuses on the quasi-matrimonial ties between a widowed French Caribbean father (Alex Descas) and his mixed-race daughter (Mati Diop).

Optioning and purchasing the rights to a literary work or an original screenplay for a film adaptation is one of the possible preliminary steps producers, screenwriters, and filmmakers consider. Research, documentation, and rewrites are all aspects of film development covered under the CNC *Aide au développement de projets de films longs métrages* fund. Because of budget restrictions and lack of professionalization only a few Haitian and French Caribbean directors are considered and only a couple of established and professionally trained directors have been awarded.

When it evaluates applications, the commission for the Aide au développement de projets de films de long-métrage takes into account a film production company's record in successfully

la Cinématographie. Néanmoins, le montage financier est difficile. Le projet séduit parce qu'on y voit un petit Français pauvre, Antillais et noir qui s'élève par sa persévérance et grâce à l'éducation dispensée par l'école républicaine. Mais le projet gêne car il rappelle que la République française a été esclavagiste, colonialiste, et que les Antillais en sont la mémoire vivante, les témoins et les victimes. La crainte de certains bailleurs de fonds est que le film provoque un sentiment de culpabilité de la part de ceux qui ne connaissent pas ou ne veulent pas connaître l'histoire de France.”

¹⁰⁹ [cnc.fr](http://www.cnc.fr). Aide à la coproduction franco-allemande: résultats des commissions 2006. <http://www.cnc.fr/web/fr/annee-2006>. Web. January 10, 2010.

developing film projects. This requirement privileges experienced filmmakers. For instance as part of its *Aide sélective*, the January 14, 2008 Aide au développement de projets de films de long-métrage commission awarded a total of €84.000 to seasoned Haitian filmmaker Raoul Peck for two separate projects: to develop with screenwriter Jean-René Lemoine a film project entitled *Chimères*. Peck was also cited as the author of the screenplay “Le Portail,” a feature film attached to Velvet Films, his film production company.¹¹⁰ Between 2004 and 2009, Peck was one of the rare Haitian filmmakers to receive that type of subsidy.

The professionalization of Haitian and French Caribbean films is evident with the increasing number of short films. As stepping-stones, short films can build a director’s résumé and launch their career, especially when they are screened at renowned film festivals. This is one of the strategies two French-born sisters of Martinican-descent, Fabienne and Véronique Kanor, utilized. To transition from their occupation as journalists and establish their new career, they decided to make a series of three short films. The self-taught filmmakers produced and financed their first short film, *La noiraude* (2005), for € 4.000 on high definition video. *La noiraude* is the portrayal of a thirty-something Parisian black woman parsing her love life and her identity as a French West Indian Parisian born and raised in the métropole, a *négroropolitaine*. The short film fared well at film festivals and was even broadcasted on France Télévisions, albeit late at night. In 2007, the CNC Aide à la production de films de courts métrages commission allocated €2.000 to Iloz production, the associated film production company based in Brittany where their second short, *C’est qui l’homme?* was shot. The €2.000 the CNC allotted to *C’est qui l’homme?* (initially entitled *Ce n’est qu’un homme: La noiraude II*) benefited from the CNC aide à la réécriture¹¹¹ for short films. A paltry sum, it is nevertheless a form recognition but the CNC commission for short films did not approve of the

¹¹⁰ Aide au développement de projet de films de long métrage. Résultat de la commission du 14 janvier 2008. < <http://www.cnc.fr/web/fr/14/01/2008>>

¹¹¹ Les Aides du CNC à la production de films de court-métrage en 2007. CNC courtsmetragesCM_CF_2_2008_V5.pdf. Page 3.

Kanors' rewrites and that project did not receive additional funding from the CNC.

As a consequence the short film *C'est qui l'Homme?* was financed with funds from several other commissions: the Région Bretagne fund, the Société des Producteurs de Cinéma et de Télévision (PROCIREP), the Agence Nationale de Gestion des Oeuvres Audiovisuelles (ANGOA), and the Agence Nationale pour la Cohésion and L'Égalité des Chances (ACSÉ) (formerly FASILD). Although *La noiraude* fared well at film festivals France Télévisions declined to broadcast their second short film (*C'est qui l'Homme?*). Both Fabienne and Véronique Kanor have learned from their setbacks and successes. They have since managed to complete separate projects with higher budgets but further constraints.

Fabienne Kanor, a rising novelist, has collaborated with Emmanuelle Bidou (daughter of esteemed French film producer Jacques Bidou) on *Janbé dlo* a documentary about French Caribbean migration. She has made personal or experimental projects such as a short about her feet *Mon pieds, mes pieds* (2008) and the documentary *Maris de nuit* (2011). Véronique Kanor has helmed *La femme qui passe* (2010), a short film on a middle-aged woman who befriends men in cemeteries and a documentary, *Ville rêvée, ville vécue* (2010) that explores a neighborhood in Fort-de-France through the eyes of their inhabitants.

The filmmaker Christian Grandman experienced comparable difficulties after his first feature film *Tèt grenné* (2000). In 2006, Grandman, a filmmaker of Guadeloupean descent, received the CNC aide à l'écriture au scénario for a synopsis and treatment written by French screenwriter Jean-Pol Fargeau for a film project entitled *Vagabond* that Grandman has yet to direct.¹¹² Between 2002 and 2009, the date for which the results for the commission is available on the CNC website, Grandman has been the lone filmmaker participating in the French Caribbean filmmaking practice to receive such form of financial support. Although Grandman was a laureate of the prestigious Hachette

¹¹² Results of the commission that met on October 10, 2006.
<<http://www.cnc.fr/Site/Template/T3.aspx?SELECTID=8z25&ID=490&t=2>>

foundation, his first film, *Tèt grenné*, was coproduced by the esteemed Franco-German cultural television channel Arte, fared well at film festivals, and was positively reviewed by film critics. Although Grandman's résumé posted on the website *Quelle belle histoire* lists a series of projects in progress, he has not been able to make a fiction film in nine years.

Notoriously difficult, the *métier* of filmmaker presents specific challenges for minority film professionals. Between their own projects, they often make a living by working long hours in television, on institutional documentary films, and on other filmmakers' projects if they want to log enough hours to keep their paid artist status as *intermittents du spectacle*. As for Christian Grandman, he finished *Urban ka*, in (2009) a made for television documentary on French Caribbean music but even after a propitious starting point, projects he has announced, *L'esprit de corps* (a fiction) and *La route des abolitions* (a documentary series), have yet to be completed, and this despite the creation of a special fund at the CNC for film narratives about the Département d'Outre-Mer.

A Landmark Fund?: The CNC Special Fund for Overseas Departments (Images de la diversité et Aide sélective pour les oeuvres cinématographiques d'outre-mer) 2000-

In 2000, the Centre National de la Cinématographie took steps to recognize the cultural distinctiveness of its overseas departments, including Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guiana. The creation of the fund was an implicit acknowledgement of distinctiveness of the Outremer departments and of the CNC own discriminating practices. A law passed on December 13, 2000 and modified on July 21, 2003, la loi d'orientation pour l'Outre-Mer, established special funds for cinematic works that present a cultural interest for overseas French departments. The conditions to be fulfilled in order to receive these funds were spelled out in a government decree on October 29, 2001 (modified on February 12, 2001). Feature films and shorts that are culturally relevant to Guadeloupe French Guiana, Martinique, Réunion, and Saint-Pierre and Miquelon are eligible for this

subsidy. However, films that were to be broadcasted on television first are not eligible. Additional criteria require that these works impart a better knowledge of these overseas locales, valorize them for a larger audience, and promote cultural expression. Last not but least, the training of residents from overseas departments in the film profession is another favorable factor in obtaining funding. It is aimed at answering recriminations from French Caribbean actors and filmmakers and they fear that it may not be permanent.

The CNC subsidy for film projects by directors from the department d'outre-mer has helped finance film projects both by established filmmakers and newcomers. Between the years 2002 and 2008, it has invested in thirty-one films: fourteen shorts (including one animation film) and seventeen feature-length films (at least two documentaries). Short films received between € 11.343 and € 30.000 and feature films received between €70.000 and €190.000. Established filmmakers or filmmakers affiliated with an established production company received the most money. For instance Guy Deslauriers (Kréol Productions) had received €100.000 in 2003 to finance his fiction film *Biguine*, but he was awarded €190.000 in 2006 for the film *Aliker*. Several notable films from lesser-known and first-time filmmakers have also benefited from this fund: Sylvaine Dampierre's first-person documentary *Le pays à l'envers* (2008), Dominique Duport's short *Anbafey* (2009), and Yann Chayia's short *Monsieur Etienne* (2005).

The only other film about the French Caribbean that received as much funding as Guy Deslauriers's *Aliker* is *Orpailleurs*, a fiction feature about the illegal gold trade in French Guiana produced in 2007 by Mat Films, Mathieu Kassovitz's film production company. Mat Films has also coproduced Jean-Claude Flamand-Barney's first feature film *Nèg maron* for which it had received €100.000 in Aide sélective pour les oeuvres cinématographiques d'outre-mer, the maximum allocated in 2002. Released in January 2005 in a large number of theaters and coproduced by France 2 Cinéma, *Nèg maron* did well in the French box office and consequently helped raised the profile of

Mat Films within the CNC. Kassovitz is an insider to the French cinema industry and a long-time friend of Jean-Claude Flamand-Barny who worked as the casting director on Kassovitz's film *La haine* (1995). A self-taught director, actor, and now producer, he is also the son of director and producer Peter Kassovitz .

Recognition abroad has helped Kréol Productions secure more funding from the CNC. Deslauriers's second feature film *Le passage du milieu* (2001) attracted notice in North America: it had been selected at the Toronto Film Festival and was bought, programmed, and distributed on DVD by premium American cable channel HBO Films. Still, while promoting the feature film *Aliker* in a 2007 interview, Deslauriers's screenwriter, the novelist Patrick Chamoiseau, insists that the funds that Kréol production have obtained from numerous French governmental cultural agencies are insufficient (Chamoiseau Bondamanjak).¹¹³ Besides financial support from the CNC, the Fonds Images de la diversité, the Agence Nationale pour la Cohésion Sociale et l'Égalité des Chances (ACSÉ), the Martinique Direction régionale des Affaires Culturelles (DRAC Martinique) and the Guyane and Guadeloupe Conseil Régional, Kréol Productions have also received help from eight different cities in Martinique and from local sponsors.

The role of sponsors in helping to increase the budget allocated to Haitian and French Caribbean films cannot be underestimated. Since they do not necessarily require product placement in the film, sponsors offer valuable services and demand very little in exchange. French Phone companies such as Orange provide free phones and service during principal photography, hotels may give discounts or free accommodation, and a flight company such as Air France may supply free return tickets or discounts. In exchange, they usually only require that their logo appears on the film's poster and in its official press release, as well as in the film's end credits.

The fund Images de la diversité was specifically created after the events of 2005 to address

¹¹³ Chamoiseau, Patrick. March 7, 2007. <<http://www.bondamanjak.com/martinique/28-a-la-une/2413-patrick-chamoiseau-parle-de-laffaire-aliker.html>>

discrimination in cinema, music, and television (*le secteur audiovisuel*).¹¹⁴ It was set up in 2007 and within two years supported 281 projects. French Caribbean film narratives that benefited from the support from ACSE as part as of the Images de la diversité in 2009 include documentaries such as Fédérico Nicotra's and Laurent Champonnois's *Un siècle de Jenny...* about the performer Jenny Alpha, Dani Kouyaté's *Souvenirs encombrants d'une femme de ménage*, Barcha Bauer's *Le premier procès colonial à Nantes*. Guy Jacques's made for television fiction film *Pas de toit sans moi*, Marc Barrat's *Orpailleur*, Gary Pierre Victor's short *Négropolitains*, Michelange Quay's fiction *Mange ceci est mon corps*, Christian Lara's *Le Mystère Joséphine* received financial support from the CNC as part of the Images de la diversité fund. Philippe Niang's *Les amants de l'ombre*, Lucien Jean-Baptiste *La première étoile*, Constant Gros-Dubois's fiction *Chez Rose*, Marie-José Alie's music television show *9 semaines et un jour* received funds from both from ACSE and the CNC.

Fonds Sud Cinéma Fund: Financing Cinemas from the Global South

With the exception of the lesser-known pioneer director Elsie Haas, the established Raoul Peck, and the Haitian-American filmmaker Michelange Quay, Haitian filmmakers rarely work in France. Although the latter two have been financed by the CNC, Haitian directors are not technically¹¹⁵ eligible for the Images de la diversité et Aide sélective pour les oeuvres cinématographiques d'outre-mer fund. They do however qualify for another significant fund. Created in 1984, the Fonds Sud Cinéma is administered through the *Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et Européennes*. As such, it operates as a cultural branch of French and European foreign affairs. The Fonds Sud allocates up to €152.000 to fiction, documentary, and animation film projects with a budget equal or inferior to €3.000 000 by filmmakers from the developing world. In order to apply

¹¹⁴ "Images de la diversité: nouveaux projets." *ACSE-CNC Diversité 2009*. July 2009. Web.

¹¹⁵ The Haitian *dyaspora* filmmaker Raoul Peck has been not limited by these constraints and has received funding from the CNC and from Fonds Sud.

for this fund, three main criteria need to be fulfilled: the film must be exhibited in France and abroad, French is required as one of the languages used in the film, and the film locations are limited to any of the countries eligible for Fonds Sud funding.

Eligible countries include nations in Central and Eastern Europe; in Asia (except for Korea, Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan); in the Near and Middle-East (not including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Brunei, Israel, and Qatar). Furthermore, countries in South America; the Indian Ocean; in the Caribbean, and in Africa (31 countries) may also apply. Filmmakers from close to seventy-four countries are allowed to apply. Because of the large number of foreign countries qualified to apply to Fonds Sud, competition remains steep.¹¹⁶ The Fonds Sud and the Agence de la Francophonie have been a significant source of financial support for North African and West African filmmakers. Directors who are Haitian nationals are qualified to apply for the Fonds Sud however, as French citizens filmmakers from Martinique, Guadeloupe, or French Guiana are not eligible.

Funds can be distributed to support one of four different stages in the filmmaking process: *Aide à la production cinéma* (up to €152.000), *Aide à la finition* (up to €30.000), *Aide à la réécriture* (between €7.000 and 12.000) and *Aide à la distribution*.¹¹⁷ Only one filmmaker who originates from the only French and Creole-speaking nation eligible has successfully applied to the fund. Between 1984 and 2000, the Haitian-born diaspora filmmaker Raoul Peck has received financial support from the Fonds Sud Cinéma¹¹⁸ and the CNC for several of his films: in 1988 for *Haitian Corner*, in 1993

¹¹⁶ Director from Martinique Guy Deslauriers has criticized existing modes financing in an interview with Tony Delsham.

¹¹⁷ According to CNC.org in December 2009.

¹¹⁸ In May 2011, it was announced that the Fonds Sud would be replaced with a new fund with a larger budget (Goodfellow).

for *L'homme sur les quais*,¹¹⁹ and in 2000 for *Lumumba* (Fonds Sud by country Haiti). The January 9, 2009 Fonds Sud commission also granted Peck €150.000 for a film project entitled *Chimères*. On its website the Fonds Suds Cinema boasts that it: “compte à son actif de nombreuses révélations reconnues par la critique internationale et récompensées par les festivals les plus prestigieux.”

Raoul Peck has established an unusual international career for a filmmaker of Caribbean-descent whose birthplace is always referred as the poorest-country-in-the-Western-hemisphere. A former economist, journalist, and photographer, he graduated in 1988 from the Academy of Film and Television in Berlin and funded his first films with German subsidies. His relationship with Franco-German cultural television channel Arte TV dates back to his first documentaries. Arte funded his 2009 feature film *Moloch Tropical*. His films are selected and favorably reviewed at renowned international film festivals and his professional training and extensive body of work makes him a *valeur sûre*. Between 2008-2010, Peck was the chairman of the Fonds sud commission, in 2010 he was named President of the French School of Cinema La Femis.

Peck has used his formal training to lessen financial barriers, to screen his films and hold retrospectives of his work at premium cultural venues in Europe, the United States, and beyond, and to methodically build a reputation as a militant director. This reputation has allowed him to build a career as an international filmmaker who worked from Germany, France but also in the United States and in Haiti. He has kept professional ties in Germany and close personal ties with Haiti where he was the Minister of Culture between 1995 and 1997 and where he directed the feature film *Moloch tropical* in 2009. He directed one film, *Sometimes in April* (2005), for premium American cable television channel HBO. In 2010, he was named director of the renowned Parisian film school La FEMIS.

¹¹⁹ [Diplomatie.gouv.fr. “L'homme sur les quais by Raoul Peck.” Web. January 11, 2012.](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/france-priorities/culture-media/cinema/cinematographic-cooperation/production-support-funding/films-benefiting-from-aid/film-list-by-country/haiti/l-homme-sur-les-quais-1088/)

Although Raoul Peck is not a household name in France, his recent television work has graced the television screens of many French families. His recent work, unrelated to Haiti or to the African diaspora, has effectively crossed over to the French mainstream. He directed two significant French mini-series, as a professional filmmaker: *L'affaire Villemin* (2006, France Télévisions), and in *L'école du pouvoir* (2008, Canal Plus). Known in France as l'affaire Gregory, after the first name of a child found dead in a French river in the mid-1980s, the Gregory murder case gripped most of France for more than a decade.¹²⁰ That a Haitian diaspora filmmaker adapted l'affaire Grégory for the television screen as *L'Affaire Villemin* demonstrates Peck's rising stature in the French media. France 3 produced the mini-series and broadcasted it in late October 2006. *L'Affaire Villemin* was later rebroadcasted on the Franco-German cultural channel Arte. Peck also directed *L'école du pouvoir* a two-part series coproduced by television channels Arte TV and Canal Plus.

L'école du pouvoir is a political drama that examines the *classe Voltaire* (the decade 1977-1986), a group of graduates from the prestigious Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA) that will become future prominent French politicians Ségolène Royal, François Hollande, and Dominique de Villepin. Despite an international reputation inside the film industry, Peck worked with a budget inferior to that of many filmmakers of European-descent for *Moloch tropical* (2009), a fiction film set in contemporary Haiti about the last days of a popular leader turned dictator. According to Malangrez He reportedly completed that film for \$ 600,000 (about €467.825 if €1 equals 1, 28264). Despite these limitations, Raoul Peck's ability to work in the international film industry, and get funded for documentaries and fiction films about the Haitian and African diaspora but also to direct French-themed television mini-series remains unusual. Very few filmmakers have managed to consistently direct Haitian or French Caribbean films and crossover to television while directing political projects

¹²⁰ Doubts about the perpetrator of the crime, its gruesome and controversial details, and the media frenzy the investigation generated make the Gregory murder case a French equivalent to the JonBenet Ramsey case in the United States.

unrelated to the African diaspora.

The Increasing Financial Role of French Television Channels...

To ensure the completion of their films, French, Haitian, and French Caribbean filmmakers must secure television channels as co-producers and as financial backers. Local French Caribbean television channels such as the former antennas Radio France Outremer (RFO) have historically still played a minimal role in the financing of films with a French-Caribbean theme. The French Caribbean radio and television media outlet Radio France Outremer (RFO) buys and produces documentaries on local Caribbean topics, however unlike French television broadcast channels based in the hexagon, it does not have a fund dedicated to the financing of fiction films. When an independently made and financed documentary, or *prêt à diffuser* (PAD), is particularly relevant to local concerns, RFO may buy it for a one time flat fee documentary of €4.000 that includes two or three additional re-broadcast.

Although this is below official rate, it is above what Haitian television channels offer. In Haiti, Haitian filmmakers cannot even request a nominal fee, however minimal this might be. Haitian television channels cannot afford to pay filmmakers whose films its shows. That is not the case in France or the United States, where directors like Euzhan Palcy, Raoul Peck, and Jean-Claude Flamand-Barny have helmed films financed by the CNC and filmed mini-series funded by the fiction division of broadcast or cable television. Associations that promote diversity such as the ACSE-Image de la diversité under the aegis of two ministers: the *Ministres en charge de la culture et de la communication, de la cohésion sociale et de la promotion de l'égalité des chances* also support French Caribbean film production.

In France major broadcast channels such as France Télévisions have two different departments that allocate funds to films: a cinema department and a made for television film

department. However, they rarely consider projects proposed by non-established directors as viable. Separate television French television channels are also involved in the financing of films. Broadcast (chaînes en clair) and cable channels (chaînes cryptées) contribute a substantial percentage (between 27 and 34 %) to the cost of production by pre-buying a film. The Centre National de la Cinématographie compiles figures on production patterns and refers to this practice as *préachat des chaînes*.

Television channels ensure that their financial endorsement is put to use by only committing to film projects already backed by major cinema organizations and cultural agencies. This presents an additional challenge for producers and filmmakers often deemed irrelevant to a larger audience. To be seriously considered by a television channel, at least half of the film's budget should be already covered. Filmmakers must have previously secured funding from sources as diverse as the CNC, the PROCIREP, and Direction Regionale des Affaires Culturelles (DRACs), the cultural agency affiliated with the region where the film is to be shot.¹²¹ Different channels can collaborate on producing a movie: this is called *accord en coproduction des chaînes*. Broadcast channels such as TF1, the France Télévision channels, and the Franco-German cultural channel Arte, as well as cable channels such as Canal Plus have therefore become key players in the professionalization of Haitian and French Caribbean film production.

The French television landscape has considerably changed since 2007. After 2000, French television channels such as Canal Plus and Arte TV have been behind several notable Haitian and French Caribbean film projects. Christian Grandman's developed *Tèt Grènné* (2001) thanks to a screenwriting grant from La Fondation Gan pour le Cinéma (Now Fondation Lagardère) but the screenplay was optioned and produced by Arte TV for its series on perspectives from the African diaspora, "Regards Noirs." Arte TV also coproduced Raoul Peck's 2009 film *Moloch tropical* in

¹²¹ Fabienne Kanor. *Personal Interview*. March 27, 2010. Salon du livre, Paris.

collaboration with the Fonds Sud Cinéma fund, an agency managed by the French and European Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Fabienne Kanor's and Emmanuelle Bidou's documentary on French Caribbean migration *Janbé Dlo* (2007) was coproduced by France 5 and Télésonne.

Although they must contend with a marginalization of Francophone discourses in the *hexagone*, directors who makes films about the French Caribbean and Haitian experience have repeatedly turned to France's various governmental agencies as sources of funding. French Caribbean filmmakers' desire to follow the high technical standards of the European film industry has made them dependent on financial support from the French Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC), French television channels and other French, and European governmental funds. Overall, Haitian filmmakers have relied on such funds to a lesser extent. In the early years of the Duvaliers dictatorship, many emigrated to North America and Canada and trained and worked there. Fewer settled in France and Europe. Moreover, unless they hold a French passport or are naturalized citizens, they are considered as foreigners. A filmmaker's nationality generally informs the type of financial aid for which they can apply. French nationals are eligible for a wide array of funds. Unlike foreign filmmakers, filmmakers from Martinique and Guadeloupe, as French citizens, are eligible for all of the CNC funding available to 100% French films.

Scarce and Intermittent Local Funding

The second most important source of financial support for filmmakers translating French Caribbean experience onto the screen is funding dispensed by the region. The Conseils Régionaux function as limited but nevertheless important local forms of government that reflect the politics of decentralization (Reno *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana Today* 36). As

one of its mandates is to support cultural production and preserve Martinican identity, this council attempts to support local film production. In Martinique, a local council, the *commission permanente*, where the director of the regions seats with elected officials, meets twice a month to deliberate on requests from professional organizations, community and cultural organizations, and educators.

Still filmmakers and screenwriters explain that because this regional commission deliberates on extremely different requests: from education, health, social services, to housing but also cultural events, the region's commitment to film projects is not guaranteed. Unlike in France where region and department are not synonymous, in French Overseas departments Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana and Reunion, the same geographical territory regroups both a region and a department. For some filmmakers, requests to Martinique's and Guadeloupe's Conseils Régionaux funding can be lifelines. They provide a much-needed complement to the crucial but often insufficient help from the CNC. For instance, Guy Deslauriers's Paris-based film production company (Kréol Production) the April 21, 2009 commission was awarded € 20.000 to pay for the English subtitles for the film *Aliker*.

French Decentralization: the role of *Conseils Régionaux* in Martinique and Guadeloupe in Financing Film Production

In 2009, in its effort to support cultural initiatives in Martinique, the Conseil Régional de la Martinique partially subsidized several French Caribbean film projects in development. From the point of view of filmmakers support from the Conseil Régional is crucial but infrequent and insufficient. Filmmakers and rare screenwriter such as Alain Agat compete for monies with other major cultural production operators and organizers of local events. Additionally, the political affiliations of local political administrations have been known to boost or hinder the development and support of local film production. For instance the independent political leanings of Alfred Marie-Jeanne, the former president of the Martinique region, have prevented the creation of a local

Martinican film commission solely dedicated to film and cinema. Marie-Jeanne opposed an affiliation with the CNC whereas Victorin Lurel, the president of the Guadeloupe region, supported the creation of a film commission regardless of the collaboration with the CNC, the French Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, and the Ministère de la culture et de la Communication.

On September 24, 2006, then Minister of Culture Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres signed the “Convention de développement cinématographique et audiovisuel entre l'Etat et la région Guadeloupe,” a special convention between the department and region of Guadeloupe and the French state, to develop cinema and filmmaking. The arrival of Serge Letchimy as the new president of the Region Martinique may change the climate for film production. Early in the summer 2010 within the local milieu of film professionals, rumors circulated that the French Minister of Culture and Communication Frédéric Mitterrand would support a Martinican film commission comparable to the Commission du film Guadeloupe. On the political spectrum, Letchimy defines himself as a proponent of political autonomy.

Fondation Konesans ak Libète (FOKAL) in Haiti, Centre Pétiyon Bolivar

The Haitian organization Fondation Connaissance et Liberté (FOKAL) was established thanks to the support of George Soros's Open Society Institute. Its roles are multiple: develop of network of small libraries in rural areas, organize debates, support Haitian artists, reinforce critical thinking and autonomy in children, and subsidize the education of exceptional disadvantaged students. Fokal has also subsidized Haitian documentaries. For instance it contributed funds for the Anne Lescot's and Laurence Magloire's film *Des hommes et des dieux* but also several documentaries directed by Arnold Antonin. Antonin also produced many of his documentaries about Haiti artists and ordinary through Centre Pétiyon Bolivar, a cultural center he founded in Port-au-Prince in 1986.

Despite the recurrent use of terms like “l’industrie cinématographique” to designate the Haitian filmmaking practice, before the earthquake, the manufacturing of films for the Haitian masses by generally untrained Haitian filmmakers, was being built from the ground up following an unregulated, informal, and independent Haitian model. In many regards, Haitian directors who make low-budget Haitian films are far more successful than their French Caribbean counterparts in delivering their film product to their intended audience. Unencumbered by Western technical film standards, they operate on diminutive budgets.

To raise additional money for their films, directors of low-budget Haitian fiction films sometimes resort, sometimes reluctantly to product placement. Richard Sénécal, whose two low budget films, *Barikad* (2002) and *Cousines* (2006), were successful disapprove of this practice. Professionally trained he was able to finance his first film thanks to a French and Haitian professional association.

The producer said that finding financing in the country is hard because most businesses always ask for something in return. The problem we found was that if they were going to give you \$1.000, \$2.000, they asked for publicity within the film, like showing their bank. These were things that in ‘Barikad’ would have ruined the story. We wanted it to stay very simple. So we looked to other sources,” said the first time director-producer. Sénécal said the cost of production, \$50.000 (U.S.), was partly financed through the Franco Haitian Television Support Group, which provides technical training to Haitian filmmakers. (Wardenburg-Ferdinand)

Despite the creation of the Association Haïtienne des Cinéastes, having an affiliation with a professional association that would finance their film is not a given for most Haitian filmmakers. Sénécal’s films even as they resemble feature-length telenovelas stand above the fray because they are competently made.

Private Support Les Films du Dorlis as *Producteur Exécutif*

Despite stronger incentives to establish film production companies in France and work with producers in the métropole, a handful of producers have set shop in the French Caribbean. For instance, the Martinique-based production company Les films du Dorlis owned by the José and Florette Hayot co-produced two films. Florette Hayot co-produced Camille Mauduech's 2005 short film *Pleine lune à Volga Plage* and Mauduech's first feature-length film, the 2008 documentary *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe*. Mentioned previously as one of the independent structures that fill a logistical and material void in Martinique, Les Films du Dorlis also produced four shorts for a campaign against drug awareness. Formerly involved in cultural production and a former filmmaker himself, José Hayot informally acts as a patron to young Caribbean filmmakers but before collaborating Camille Mauduech, Les films du Dorlis had not been primarily defined through its activities as financial backer and executive producer. Although the trend is toward professionalization in all lines of work, finding a local producer in the French Caribbean remains challenging.

Producing and Financing Within and Without the West

As the person who is responsible for the financial and managerial aspects of a film, the producer plays a key role in the making of a film. Little information circulates about film producers who work with Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers. In general producers who help finance Francophone films, Haitian and French Caribbean films are still very few. Several possible explanations may account for this fact: French producers seldom get involved with Haitian French Caribbean film projects or Haitian and French Caribbean directors are reluctant to discuss rejections and collaborations fraught with tensions and disappointment. Possibly because producers are hard

to find, filmmakers sometimes take on the role of producer, making financing, production, and distribution harder. A director like Guy Deslauriers, who has worked with a core team since his first feature film *L'exil du roi Béhanzín*, has consistently chosen his spouse, Yasmina Ho You Fat, as the executive producer (*productrice déléguée*) for his films.

For instance the French producer Jacques Bidou collaborated with directors Merzak Allouache (Algeria), Jean-Pierre Bekolo (Cameroon) and Raoul Peck (Haiti). JBA, his film production company produced four of Peck's films: *Chère Catherine* (1997), *Corps plongés* (1997), *Le profit et rien d'autre* (2001), and *Lumumba* (2000). Richard Magnien is another French producer of who has funded Francophone Caribbean films. Magnien, one of the executive producers (*producteur délégué*) at Mat Films, has been involved in the production of two major French Caribbean films: Guadeloupean director Jean-Claude Flamand-Barney's *Nèg maron* (2004) and French Guianese filmmaker Marc Barrat's *Orpailleurs* (2008).

Sophie Salbot, who produced with great difficulty Christian Grandman's first feature film, *Tèt grenné*, a film made for television (Arte), confided in a personal interview that she may not pursue that profession. Salbot has since been the executive producer of African documentaries and francophone feature films from Burkina Faso such as *Notre étrangère* (2009) and *Rêve de poussières* (2006). One of the few Francophone female producers, she remains relatively unknown but respected by Francophone directors: Raoul Peck recently thanked her for helping on his film *Moloch Tropical*. Film producers are attempting to integrate traditional mainstream media outlets such as broadcast television. Eloa Productions,¹²² a film production company created in the late 2000s by former Martinican model and actress France Zobda and producer for French and French Caribbean films (*producteur délégué*, *directeur de production*, and *producteur executif*) Jean-Lou Monthieux, is making foray into mainstream made-for-television films co-produced by French national French

¹²² Eloa Prod/Qui sommes-nous? Web. January 10, 2012. <<http://www.eloaprod.tv/qui-sommes-nous/>>

channels. Simon Njami's 2011 book of photographs, *Minorité visible cinéma invisible* suggests that Francophone actors, directors, and producers from the African diaspora are not integrated in the mainstream cultural landscape.

Haiti Strikes on its Own: Low Budget Films Shot on Digital Video and Sold as DVDs

As the Haitian filmmaking practice has mostly developed as a type of informal economy, without the support of the Haitian government, directors of low-budget Haitian films operate outside of European or American parameters. In a sense, the inability for aspiring filmmakers in Haiti to rely on governmental funding and support has liberated them from the yoke of Western technical standards. In an article entitled "Hollywood, Haitiwood? Haiti Film Industry thrives Despite Hard Times," Associated Press journalist Stevenson Jacobs, traces back the emergence of such films to digital technology: "The arrival of inexpensive digital video cameras and editing equipment opened the door to budding Haitian filmmakers, lowering production cost from hundreds of thousands of dollars or more to about \$40,000 - money that typically comes from private sponsors or local investors who receive a percentage of the film's earnings. (Jacobs)" The dialogues in these films are mostly in Creole and only educated or upper middle-class Haitian characters speak French. Creole, the principal language is increasingly mixed with English, reflecting the influence of American culture but also the participation of the Haitian American diaspora in this film practice. In fact low budget Haitian films are often subtitled in English for the North American Haitian American market.

This Americanization of Haitian cultural production is evident in the name of a websites such as movieslakay.com (movies from back home) and belfilms.com. [Movieslakay](http://Movieslakay.com) promotes new movies, publicizes premieres, and features interviews with filmmakers and actors: it closely

resembles the American website hulu.com and its lists of the five highest rated films recalls imdb.com. Such websites operate as a link between the audience at large and the directors, between consumers and film products, in a constant flux that French Caribbean film professionals have yet to develop. With the massive January 12, 2010 earthquake in Haiti, and the country in disarray, websites devoted to Haitian films have also served the purpose of linking the Haitian community at large with missing persons and paying homage to renowned young actors and TV-hosts such Florane Guerrier and Sarah Delince killed in the tragedy.

The significance of low-budget films is such in Haiti that an accomplished Haitian filmmaker like Raoul Peck reviewed his approach and pushed the boundaries between do-it-yourself production and subsidies received from French television cinema division and French and European cinema commissions. In his 2009 film *Moloch Tropical*, Peck has cast local popular Haitian actors (Jessica Géneus and Jimmy Jean-Louis) with an international cast of recognizable French actors of West African, North African, Haitian, and French Caribbean descent, (Sonia Rolland, Zinédine Soualem, Mireille Métellus, and Nicole Dogué). Underwritten both by cultural Franco-German Arte TV and the Centre National de la Cinématographie, this film was shot in Haiti at the Citadelle Henri, and produced for \$600,000 (Malengrez). That sum represents the equivalent of fifteen or more low-budget Haitian film. Yet from a Western perspective, it is a modest sum in comparison with the monies allocated by the Fonds Sud, the CNC, and Peck's previous feature films.

Working directors such as Euzhan Palcy, Guy Deslauriers, and Camille Mauduech (Martinique), Christian Lara and Jean-Claude Flamand-Barney (Guadeloupe), and Raoul Peck and Michelange Quay (Haiti) have been applying for and receiving funding from European and North American public and private sources. In order to regularly secure French governmental funding, they reside in France and their efforts have been rewarded to a degree. Making Haitian and French Caribbean films remains an arduous occupation, and showing and selling the film to various

audiences a challenge. Pioneer female Haitian diaspora filmmaker Elsie Haas has had to switch occupation. She makes a living as a journalist, even if she sporadically makes documentary films. In general documentaries are more susceptible to be completed and programmed than the fiction films Haas has long fought for. During the 2004 Haiti on Screen film festival in New York Haitian women filmmakers such as Rachel Magloire, Michel Lemoine, and Anne Lescot explained in a personal interview they made documentaries rather than fiction films for similar reasons.

Limited Logistical and Material Resources

The films of French, French Caribbean, and Haitian filmmakers translating the Caribbean experience onto the screen reflect to a certain extent economic and technological disparity. Partly due to cost, lack of professionalization and distribution, and a Eurocentric cultural landscape reluctant to include Francophone films, many filmmakers from the 1970s and 1980s did not succeed in making a second or third film. Nonetheless after one or two feature films and shorts, they have paved the way for the few professionally trained filmmakers who have been making films on 35 mm film and successfully integrated the international film festivals circuit.

Filmmakers who began their filmmaking career in the late 1980s learned from their forebears' setbacks and have managed to consistently finance but their films remain limited. Working directors such as Euzhan Palcy, Guy Deslauriers, and Camille Mauduech (Martinique), Christian Lara and Jean-Claude Flamand-Barny (Guadeloupe), and Raoul Peck and Michelange Quay (Haiti) have been applying for and receiving funding from European and North American public and private sources. In order to regularly secure French governmental funding, they reside in France and their efforts have been rewarded to a degree.

Making Haitian and French Caribbean films remains an arduous occupation, and showing and selling the film to various audiences. While their goal is to make narratives that depict the

French Antilles as historically and culturally anchored in the Americas and distinct from the French *métropole*, French Caribbean filmmakers often rely on French cultural institutions to finance films that counter French assumptions about Martinique and Guadeloupe. This reliance on Western funding highlights one of the contradictions Haitian and French Caribbean films appear to be in: as sites of cultural affirmations and contestations that critique and solicit support from the colonial power, they reflect the predicament of a French Caribbean identity. This ambivalence is most evident the necessity to reside in metropolitan France to attempt to construct a high-standard Parisian Caribbean cinema that does not exist on its own.

Despite a wide range of funds, films about Haiti and the French Caribbean still get funded with great difficulty by French and European governmental agencies (the Centre National de la Cinématographie, the Fonds Sud, French television channels, or local Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles or DRAC). Obtaining funding from the CNC and the Fonds Sud is just one hurdle among many to overcome. Without a French television as an exhibitor and as a co-producer, film projects cannot come to fruition. When they do obtain funding, Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers often have to work with smaller budgets. Once they have secured funding for their film projects from French and European cultural institutions Haitian, French Caribbean filmmakers shoot their films in the Caribbean or in Western metropolises. This third part of chapter six, “*Débrouya pa péché*,” examines the limited logistical and material conditions in which many filmmakers work to complete their films.

Existing Logistical and Material Resources

Shooting a film in Haiti and in the French Caribbean often means working with a minimal budget and achieving a delicate balance between two radically different film cultures. During production, the director and his and her crew necessarily bring a core group of technicians from or trained in Western countries. These technicians collaborate with Caribbean counterparts often hired for a smaller fee. In the French Caribbean, the reality of restricted film budgets coupled with high technical standards make each film an impossible bet. Despite the decreasing cost of film production, most projects begin as underfunded. High quality digital film cameras and editing software have considerably lessened overall production costs but making a film in the French Caribbean where employees earn trade union wages adds a financial burden for the production because it creates tension when overworked local crew members received due to the film budgetary constraints.

With their high production values: stunning photography, historical reenactments replete with period details, and cast of local celebrities and beyond, Guy Deslauriers's films encapsulate the aspirations and struggles of French Caribbean filmmakers in terms of logistical and material resources. Almost from his first fiction film on, *L'exil du roi Béhanzin* (1995), Deslauriers has maintained a core crew. He works with the novelist Patrick Chamoiseau (Martinique) as his screenwriter, Jacques Boumendil (Martinique) as director of photography, and the editor Aïlo Auguste (Haiti). If this stability has helped them establish an honorable filmography about the Martinican historical experience, logistics and material issues continue to plague the production of each of his films.

Filming With and Without the Commission du film in Guadeloupe

In an interview posted on March 7, 2007 on the French Caribbean web portal Bondamanjak during the shooting of Guy Deslauriers's film *Aliker*, the film's screenwriter, the novelist Patrick Chamoiseau discusses in three broad strokes how limited financial conditions have shaped the material production of French Caribbean films. The eloquence and length of this quotation convey the significance of this issue for Chamoiseau, who otherwise rarely talked about his contribution to the French Caribbean films.

Moi, ce que je dis souvent aux gens qui ne comprennent pas certaines difficultés que nous avons c'est que si Césaire avait dû attendre sur les subventions des institutions, attendre l'aide de techniciens, toutes espèces d'autres personnes que de lui-même on n'aurait pas eu *Le cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. La chance que j'ai moi, c'est que j'écris et donc moi je n'ai besoin de personne. J'écris tout seul mais le cinéma c'est un art collectif. Il y a un réalisateur mais il y a énormément des gens autour. Et [le cinéma] c'est quelque chose qui coûte excessivement cher. Et les gens, les politiques auxquels nous avons eu affaire, qui nous ont largement aidés pour *Aliker*, ne comprennent pas l'échelle budgétaire d'un film. C'est énorme, énorme, énorme... Sur un plateau, on a plus de cent personnes qu'il faut payer etc. Et nous, nous, le plus souvent nous n'avons pas les moyens de nos ambitions. C'est à dire que nous essayons toujours de faire des films avec ce que nous avons pu réunir. L'alternative est toujours douloureuse: est-ce qu'on fait avec ce qu'on a ou est-ce qu'on ne fait rien? On prend toujours le parti de faire avec ce qu'on a, en exposant aux gens voici les moyens dont nous disposons. Voici ce que nous pouvons faire ou pas. Est-ce vous êtes d'accord ou pas? Alors, beaucoup de gens acceptent, beaucoup de gens refusent mais c'est très difficile.

Chamoiseau frames budgetary restrictions and logistical barriers in terms of dependence, challenges,

and tensions. When he acknowledges yet bemoans local French Caribbean governmental agencies for their limited help, he implies that the quality of the films suffers and that without a dedicated local Martinican agency solely devoted to all professional aspects of cinema and filmmaking, completed film projects will continue to be lacking. Besides drawing attention to budgetary restrictions and logistical limitations, the novelist turned screenwriter indirectly calls into question the question of the validity the term cinema (a commercial profit-driven industry, art, or a national effort) as applied to the films for which he has written screenplays. Chamoiseau disputes the idea that there already is a *cinéma antillais*: his use of the future tense implies that what currently exists qualifies as a fragmented corpus of films, defined for these reasons as a filmmaking practice (Cham 1-43). Most importantly, he inserts in his tirade about French Caribbean films that *débronya pa péché* comes at a dear cost because resourcefulness has its limits.

Ce sera très très difficile pour nous d'avoir un cinéma véritablement antillais si on n'a pas vraiment des institutions qui prennent vraiment conscience de l'échelle budgétaire et des sacrifices qu'il faut mettre en œuvre pour avoir une industrie cinématographique. Parce qu'une industrie cinématographique, c'est de l'économie mais c'est aussi des emplois. C'est une infinité d'emplois pour des jeunes Martiniquais. Regardez le nombre de techniciens que nous sommes forcés de faire venir en sic [de] France. Ce sont des choses... La plupart des postes on ne les trouve pas ici [en Martinique] au niveau d'expertise que nous recherchons.¹²³

Chamoiseau emphasizes job creation and the need to locally support the professionalization of the next generation of French Caribbean men and women working in film. This emphasis morphs into a calculated argument: on the one hand he is attempting to get the attention of politicians and voters in Martinique. On the other hand, he is implying that as a form of cultural production film

¹²³ Chamoiseau, Patrick. "Chamoiseau/Aliker 4 Bondamanjak." *Dailymotion*. March 7 2007. Web. 14 May 2010. <<http://www.bondamanjak.com/martinique/28-a-la-une/2413-patrick-chamoiseau-parle-de-laffaire-aliker.html> >

narratives legitimize the cultural as political. Movies have become one of the most visible sites where the political battlegrounds of French Caribbean identity. To Chamoiseau, an avowed admirer of Edouard Glissant's theories, French Caribbean filmmaking is equally the promise to establishing the film trade as a valued art form, with its auteur films and *art house* cinema, and a powerful tool of self-representation that also enables small Caribbean nations or Caribbean non-nation to question and fight cultural hegemony.

Et moi je dis qu'il sera très difficile d'avoir un grand cinéma antillais, un grand cinéma qui ne soit pas purement occidental s'il n'y a pas une aide majeure. Je l'ai dit à Cannes lorsque j'étais au Jury de la Caméra d'or. J'ai dit que la grande urgence du Festival de Cannes, qui a une grande autorité sur l'ensemble du monde, ce sont les peuples sans cinéma. Si on prend la carte du monde et on regarde les grands silences, les grands trous, là où les peuples n'expriment pas leurs propres images, leurs manières de voir et de raconter. Là, on s'aperçoit qu'on a une sorte de monologue occidental terrifiant. Que nous ayons notre part, que nous ayons nos images, que nous ayons notre narration avec tous les sacrifices que cela suppose et cet esprit de sacrifice-là c'est celui que nous endurons aujourd'hui avec Guy Deslauriers.

Last but not least, his push for the development of permanent financial mechanisms and professional infrastructures in locales portrayed as cultural deserts represents for Chamoiseau the opportunity to enter the relation to stand alongside cultural behemoths on the world stage.

Insiders to the French Caribbean filmmaking believe that cost and logistical restrictions are just one of the many issues that afflict French Caribbean films. They insist on self-criticism as necessary dimension of local film culture and wonder if the oppositional role of the Haitian and French Caribbean filmmaking practice, and the insistence on the part of first generation filmmakers

on following Western approaches to cinema has not been preventing the development of a *sinéma bokay* (a local cinema), anchored in the Creole and Caribbean poetics. According to them on emphasis on historical Caribbean narratives should not come to the detriment of well-balanced scenarios, sufficient character development, and timely resolution. They deplore the histrionic acting of cast members and what they sometimes consider poor direction. Producing competing narratives with and against the West prevents French Caribbean filmmakers from accepting and designing their own working small-scale model. This radical acceptance of the saying “*débrouya pa péché*,” also speaks to Haitian filmmaker Arnold Antonin: “N’est-ce pas Julio Garcia Espinoza qui rêvait d’un cinéma imparfait qui ferait de ses propres limitations techniques la force et la raison de sa créativité? En fait, en Haïti, nous courons le risque de faire des pesanteurs matérielles de sévères limites à la créativité et à la recherche esthétique” (Antonin et Lorquet).

Film Production and Independent Contractors: Caribbean Video Diffusion Martinique (CVDM)

In Martinique and Guadeloupe, a few independent contractors fill the void the Martinican-based production company Les films du Dorlis had provided high-end local technical support to a limited number of films such as Pascal Légitimus’s film *Antilles sur Seine*. Les films du Dorlis was founded by José Hayot, a descendant of one of the most prominent and wealthy *béké* families in Martinique. His wife wife, Florette Camard-Hayot manages the film production company and had acted as a co-producer to a small number of French Caribbean short and feature films. The Hayots have been associated with film projects such as the 1999 *Thomas Crown Affair*, Jonathan Demme’s *The Truth about Charlie* and Guy Deslauriers’s *Le passage du milieu*. They have also coproduced films directed by Camille Mauduech.

Another private company based in Martinique, CVDM Production, managed by David

Donat and his brother, Laurent Donat, has played a significant role in local film production if not on a smaller scale. Like Les Films du Dorlis, CVDM Production helps film crews with onsite logistics such as the rental of equipments, and obtaining permits. CVDM has worked with the British filmmaker Isaac Julien on his documentary *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask* (1995) for segments shot in Martinique and with Guy Deslauriers's on earlier and recent films such as *La tragédie de la Mangrove* (2001) and *Biguine* (2004). Lesser-known filmmakers contact CVDM to strike deals with trained technicians who work for local television stations such as RFO. These technicians borrow their professional equipment and supplement their income by working under the table for a pre-established fee. Informal arrangements such as these in the French Caribbean seem a drop in the ocean compared to the ways in which Haitian directors make low-budget films.

Making Everything with Nothing, Haiti's Paltry Infrastructures yet Booming Film Practice

Nowhere is the resourcefulness advocated in the Creole saying "Débrouya pa péché" more germane than in the case of the Haitian films. In Haiti, financing and budget restrictions have given rise to do-it-yourself model that have enable low-budget films to flourish since to the advent of affordable digital technology. In Haiti and its diaspora, like elsewhere, filmmakers are generally mobile, educated middle-class men and women who construct documentary and fiction narratives that speak to Haitians in Haiti and beyond.

At first the fruit of a highly educated middle-class using costly 35 mm film, filmmaking has greatly expended. Recently, digital technology has lowered the cost of producing films, spurred a genre closer to the Bollywood and Nollywood models than the American independent film or the French film d'art et d'essai. Widely available and popular low-budget films fulfill a central role in Haiti but also for its diaspora. Arnold Antonin, who began his film career making political documentaries in exile in the 1970s, now makes low budget films. "Our cinema is embryonic, but

full of potential,” said Haitian filmmaker Arnold Antonin, 57. “Haitians don’t want to be invisible (Norton). They want to see themselves and their problems portrayed on the screen.” Low budget Haitian films function both as sites of cultural production and a transient site of national identity. In Haiti, movies speak to a multi-generational audience: from older and mostly illiterate Haitians already used to radio plays, to young men and women influenced by the Haitian-American and African American cultural identity of *dyasporas* (Haitians raised abroad). They circulate outside of Haiti to “dyasporas’, Haitians who live abroad whether they are in Miami, in Brooklyn, in Montréal, or in Boston; in Cuba, in Guadeloupe or in Martinique. Film narratives form a link between those who stayed and those who left, between the Haiti *du dedans* and *du dehors*, the Haiti within and without. “One of the principal shift in the global cultural order, created by cinema, television, and video technology (and the ways in which they frame and energize other, older media), has to do with (Appadurai *Modernity at Large*, 53).”

But in a country like Haiti where infrastructures are lacking, making a movie, even an *adequate* film remains a feat. Filmmakers must first and foremost take governmental support out of the equation and decide whether or not to turn to private backers for support. In 2007, a pioneer Haitian filmmaker explained that: “Today Haiti still does not have a national film commission to finance local production. But cameras have continued to roll, even after a bloody 2004 revolt that toppled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and plunged the country into tumult. Young, left to its own devices, and expanding, this film practice stands out as a prime example of “*débrouillardise*.” As previously explained, Haitian low-budget films began as VHS tapes and are by-products of the spread of analog video. Beginning in the early 2000s, the digital revolution enabled non-professional aspiring filmmakers to make movies with lighter equipment and for cheap.

The prevalent financial models that directors use resemble that of independent films. Filmmakers hire small crews, shoot with digital cameras and rely on editing software to keep a low

overhead. Additionally, filmmakers and actors sometimes forego payment to keep production costs to a minimum. Even with the use of low cost technology, post-production may be delayed by external circumstances. Such was the case for Arnold Antonin's first fiction film, *Pivouli et le Zenglendo*: "The self-financed movie cost about \$25,000, and the actors and technicians — as well as Antonin and Victor — were not paid. Though the film was shot in two weeks, it took three months to edit because of daily electrical outages." More often than not, funding originates from private sources such as local businesses that require product placement: "The problem we found was that if they were going to give you \$1,000, \$2,000, they asked for publicity within the film, like showing their bank. These were things that in 'Barikad' would have ruined the story. We wanted it to stay very simple. So we looked to other sources," said the first time director-producer."

Initially certain filmmakers feared that their audience would be limited by the general population lack of disposable income yet this has not been the case. In 2002, Richard Sénécal who directed several popular low-budget Haitian films, shared with a journalist for the Haitian Times what he saw as limitations to the boom of the low-budget films: "In the past two years, more Haitian films have been appearing on the screen. But the market is limited, Sénécal said. Haitian cinema doesn't have a market. In Haiti, we have about 100,000 people that can go to the movies (Wardenburg-Ferdinand)." Counter to Sénécal's expectations, Haiti did have a market. In 2007 a journalist with the Associated Press reporting on the phenomenon of low-budget films in Haiti observed that: "Haitians can't get enough, shelling out \$2.70 per ticket - about twice what most Haitians earn in a day - at decaying cineplexes in the capital or ramshackle theatres in the countryside (Jacobs)." In fact, the audience to low budget Haitian films has been steadily growing since the early 2000s. In the article "Hollywood, Haitiwood? Haiti's Film Industry Thrives Despite Hard Times," Haitian filmmaker and former director of the Association Haïtienne des cinéastes "[Arnold Antonin] estimates Haitian film production has risen 300 per cent in the last five years, including an explosion

in straight-to-DVD releases shot in Haitian immigrant communities in the U.S (Jacobs).”

However, Haitian filmmakers could not have anticipated that the popular success of their films and the same technology that prompted this boom would also undermine and limit profit. While a small number of legitimate copies of these films are sold in Haiti and in American metropolises with substantial Haitian communities, low-budget films circulate almost exclusively as bootleg DVD copies. Because it mainly operates within informal economies, the dominant model of distribution of low-budget Haitian films leaves out traditional distributors and favors street retailers and dealers illegally engaged in the large-scale duplication of DVDs. If in the earlier years directors of successful low-budget Haitian film may have recouped some of the initial investment (Jacobs) this is no longer the case.

Therefore while their films are being seen by as large audience, filmmakers and their investors are seeing little of the money invested. Even when low budget films were still being show in theaters in Port-au-Prince, theater distributors such as Elysée made more than the production: “Sénécal says there is a monopoly in Port-au-Prince cinema that he believes allows movie houses to take 50 percent of the box office money. Adding the cost of the distributor and the 10 percent that goes to the government, Sénécal is left with little revenue” (Wardenburg-Ferdinand). Because these types of films initially require little capital, these significant losses have not slowed down the production of low budget Haitian films.

When it comes to Haitian and French Caribbean films, showing resourcefulness requires budgeting and making careful financial and aesthetical choices. Financial dependence on Western cultural institutions such as the CNC, the Fonds Sud, or the Direction des Affaires Culturelles are all consequences of the high cost of filmmaking. Independence from such agencies, as in the case of low-budget Haitian films, both improves and limits the developments of films. Reliance of digital cameras by mostly non-professional filmmakers allows a great number of affordable films to be

produced and supplied to consumers. Low-cost digital filmmaking also limits profits as distribution operates outside of permissible channels and mirrors the country's economy reality and the disproportionate place of the informal economy in people's daily life.

Despite the availability of digital technology, some French Caribbean filmmakers continue to use film and refuse to adopt less onerous and high quality digital filmmaking. In Martinique and Guadeloupe, the French ideal of cinéma as septième art shot on high quality thirty-five millimeter print has retained its prestige. Audience there sees as reliable entertainment formulaic American and French commercial films.

Migrating to Western *métropoles* to Pursue Film Training

With their established film cultures, large western hubs have played and continue to have a pivotal role in the training of French and foreign filmmakers. When asked in the late 1980s why there were so few French Caribbean filmmakers, Sarah Maldoror, a filmmaker of French and Caribbean descent who contributed both to the African and French Caribbean filmmaking practices replied:

“Tout simplement parce que les études sont longues et chères. Je ne pense pas qu'il soit nécessaire de sortir d'une école pour faire du cinéma, la formation sur le tas est aussi bonne. Après tout Resnais et Godard, piliers de cinémathèque, ont appris la technique en travaillant comme assistants. Ce n'est pas possible en Guadeloupe ou en Martinique, et même en Afrique. Il faudrait une véritable production locale, au lieu de dépendre de la métropole.”

In this interview, Maldoror exposes a major stumbling block for filmmakers of Haitian, Guadeloupean, and Martinican descent. Even nowadays, many elect to train, live, and work in Western countries, in the hope of establishing themselves. Because they seek financial support from

institutions such as the CNC, Fonds Sud, and broadcast and public French television channels, most French Caribbean filmmakers and a small number of Haitian directors must generally move to Western *métropoles* to compete for funds allocated by these cultural organizations.

As a site of cross-pollination, the French métropole has always played a central role in the continuum of cultural productions from the African diaspora. Paris and its numerous cinemas d'art et d'essai, arthouse theaters, located in and around the student neighborhood known as the *quartier latin*, changed many a student's calling. The transition to filmmaking occurred in the late 1960s and was spearheaded in Paris, in Haiti, and the French Caribbean by a small group of intellectuals and artists who were determined to become experts in their fields and believed in nurturing cultural production in the Francophone African diaspora.

Formally trained Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers are almost invariably trained in the West. For those born in the Caribbean, this meant leaving behind their homeland in the hope of including them in film narratives. The few directors from Martinique and Guadeloupe who attended film schools in the late 1970s and early 1980s often did so in France. Euzhan Palcy from Martinique is a graduate of the renowned Parisian school Louis Lumière, and Christian Grandman specialized in art history, screenwriting, and directing at the university Paris VII Saint Denis.

Early Haitian intellectuals who embraced filmmaking often did so after studying in another field. Still a French-speaking Haitian elite in the 1960s, they gravitated towards universities and schools located in francophone countries before migrating to North America during the Jean-Claude Duvalier dictatorship. In Jonathan Demme's film *The Agronomist*, Haitian journalist Jean Dominique recounts how he liked to frequent art house theaters when he was a student in Paris. Upon his return he founded a cine club and participated in what is often considered the first Haitian film. The son of a former agronomist, Haitian diaspora filmmaker Raoul Peck graduated from the German Film and Television Academy in Berlin. With Michelange Quay, a Haitian American filmmaker

based in Paris who graduated from New York University film school, Peck is one of the few formally trained Haitian directors.

First generation filmmakers often began as high-school graduates that had moved to a France or a European métropole to pursue their education. Professionalization has been accelerating in the late 2000s. A new crop of directors such as Michelange Quay (Haiti, United States, and France), Janluk Stanislas and the Collective Cé Nou Mèm, and Caroline Jules (Guadeloupe), Camille Mauduech, Fabienne and Véronique Kanor, Alain Agat, and the collective Union des Nouveaux Cinéastes Caribéens, UNCC, (Martinique) want to push boundaries further. In private conversations, on blogs, and in interviews for local magazines, upcoming directors, editors, and screenwriters pay homage to their predecessors but also discuss the amateurism of earlier films. This is a generation fluent in Caribbean literature and theory and beyond usually also highly versed in film and media culture, or determined to be.

They sometimes embrace the film medium after having mastered other forms of writing or discourse. Because they aspire to reinvent the wheel, they look at films by first generation of Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers with a respectful yet critical eye: registering the pedestrian linearity of screenplays, the one-dimensionality of characters, and the awkward plot devices. They state that they are aiming for aesthetics choices that reflect a multifaceted Caribbean cultural legacy to contest French and American cultural hegemony and affirm a Caribbean identity that branches out to the rest of the world. Whether they attended film schools or learned on the job, they put an emphasis on training and actively seek professional workshops and residencies. Aware of the marginalization of Francophone discourses, they learn to wear several hats out of necessity and become technologically savvy to overcome budgetary restrictions and in an attempt to deliver quality film products regardless. A few of them have returned to their birthplace of country of origin and

have even elected to make and produce films on the scale of their respective island, without the West.

A great number of filmmakers who translate the Haitian and French Caribbean experience are often highly educated middle-class men and women trained in Western countries. They generally fall into three main categories: directors who attended film schools, filmmakers that have learned their craft on the job, a bit of both. Among the filmmakers trained on the job, several gravitated towards the film medium after pursuing a different professional career or graduating from a different field. Regardless of their training, only a small number of filmmakers succeeded in living of their craft. Despite initiatives to showcase and regroup the fragmented corpus in the late 1980s, many of the nascent filmmakers fell into oblivion and had to switch occupation.

If the majority of Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers have remained in the margins, a few directors have pushed doors and gain substantial ground: among others Euzhan Palcy and Guy Deslauriers (Martinique), Christian Lara and Jean-Claude Flamand-Barny, and Raoul Peck and Michelange Quay (Haiti) have all put Francophone films from the Caribbean on the map. This significant and yet mitigated accomplishment almost always required that these directors learn their craft in Europe or more recently the United States. As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, the director Euzhan Palcy left Martinique for Paris to pursue a major in literature major at the university La Sorbonne. She simultaneously enrolled and graduated from the prestigious Parisian film school Louis Lumière. It is in Paris that she befriended, Francois Truffaut's daughter, and Truffaut, as an early supporter of the film adaption of Joseph Zobel's novel *La Rue cases-nègres*, read drafts of her screenplay adaption and gave her feedback.

Palcy came in the footsteps of the militant French Caribbean filmmakers of the 1970s and early 1980s such as Christian Lara, Jacques Ferly, Jean-Paul Césaire, Gaby Glissant, Constant Gros-Dubois, and Benjamin Jules-Rosette (Silou). A few of these earlier filmmakers received their first

taste in directing in Martinique at workshops of the SERMAC and the CMAC. Moving to Paris to seek funding for their projects became the sine qua non to learning their craft and completing film projects. *Rue Cases-Nègres* became a training ground for another working French Caribbean filmmaker: Guy Deslauriers. The difficulties encountered during the six-month of principal photography in 1982 proved invaluable to him: and he decides to leave Martinique in order to begin a new career: “A ce moment-là j’étais enseignant à la Martinique, et évidemment je quitte tout pour venir à Paris (Gatto and Polinacci).” The italics here emphasize how for most filmmakers leaving the French-Caribbean for Paris constitutes a self-evident choice. Deslauriers, who studied literature and worked as a teacher in Martinique, traces back his interest in film to photography, and the use of an eight-millimeter camera during his teenage years. Before working as an assistant director with Euzhan Palcy, Deslauriers worked as an intern for several documentaries and co-directed a short, *Intermède*, with Max-Laurent Salvon. Following *Rue Cases-Nègres*, between 1982 and 1988, he interned on documentaries and film advertisements (Silou *Le cinéma dans les Antilles françaises* 83).

Like Guy Deslauriers, the director Jean-Claude Flamand Barny trained on the job. Flamand Barny was born in Paris but he was raised between Guadeloupe and the French *métropole*, he grew up in the periphery of Paris, the *banlieue*. There he experienced marginalization but escaped disenfranchisement by practicing sports, forging friendships across class and racial lines, and going with his friends to the movies sometimes entering through the back doors of theaters. Versed in martial arts, a pioneer in the French hip-hop movement, Flamand-Barny befriended in his teenage years Teddy Esposito, a young Italian who quickly moved to New York, and Mathieu Kassovitz, the son of two Polish Jew directors and producers. It is also through the back door that he entered the milieu of French cinema. He began directing in the 1990s and his first short films *Retour à la case*, *Putain de porte* (1994), and *Le contrat* (1997) soon received prizes. He acted and worked as an assistant director in Mathieu Kassovitz’s first feature film, *Métisse* (1992), and continued to hone his skills in

Jacques Audiard's *Un héros très discret* (1995). He was Kassovitz's casting director for the award-winning *La haine* (1995) and *Assassin(s)* (1996) and helped shape the films' narratives and tones. In 1996 Flamand Barny, Kassovitz, and Esposito reunited at the twentieth edition of the New York Film Festival for a screening of *La haine*. Before directing his first feature film, he shot advertisements for international and local French Caribbean brands and directed music videos for well-known *Zouk* artists and bands (Kassav', Jane Fostin, and Poetic Lovers), Reggae artists (Tonton David) and rappers (Doc Gynéco, Nèg Marrons).¹²⁴

Limited Exhibition and Distribution

This fifth and last part examines difficulties inherent to elusive exhibition and distribution. In this section of chapter six, I describe the different types of venues where selected audiences can watch French Caribbean and Haitian films. To have seen a Fabienne and Véronique Kanor (Martinique) short film, a Raoul Peck (Haiti) feature film, or a Christian Grandman (Guadeloupe) made for television movie usually requires being part of a selective club of filmgoers. Movie theaters rarely launch such a film: local and international film festivals fulfill that role instead. It is no wonder then that when funded by France and the European Union, these films are not screened at movie theaters such as UGC (Gaumont), Pathé, and their American affiliates.

In France, in the French Caribbean, as in numerous European countries, exhibition, the action of supplying the film product to movie theaters and other screening venues, often replicates the economic monopoly of American distribution companies. Because distribution works in hand in hand with exhibition, culturally relevant films excluded from the dominant distribution and exhibition circuits usually find their way, if they find their way at all, to a small number of art-house

¹²⁴ *Nèg maron* Press Release.

theaters. Following French Caribbean and institutionally-funded Haitian films often entails joining a restricted audience who seeks out sporadic screenings at art house theaters and museums, attend local and international film festivals, and monitoring the (late night) programming of inclusive cultural TV channels such as Arte or premium cable channels that earned cachet by taking risks. Only low-budget Haitian films escape the limitations put on theatrical exhibition and distribution. Available in the form of cheap bootlegged DVDs, they are ubiquitous in Haitian neighborhoods and easily reach their intended audience.

Generally, the exhibition and distribution of French Caribbean films mirror the patterns of foreign or independent films. A limited niche but loyal audience and positive reviews may warrant these films the recognition offered by *succès d'estime* but not necessarily as a steady source of financing from leading institutions. Well-reviewed films supported by a relentless filmmaker, producer, and distributor team enjoy a limited-run at a handful of art-house theaters. Sometimes they even have premieres or are screened at museums. Even in its incarnation as low-budget Haitian films, this filmmaking practice is still relatively costly and rarely profitable. Given that once completed they are generally ignored by distributors, the success and the viability of Haitian and French Caribbean films cannot be fairly measured in ticket sales (France), or gross box office (United States) figures. From a scholarly perspective, whether productions cost are recouped is not as relevant as the films cultural function and value.

Limited Run and Theatrical Exhibition in Parisian Art House Theaters (La Clef/Images d'Ailleurs, Les Sept Parnassiens, and L'Espace Saint-Michel)

In the Paris metropolitan area where a large number of French Caribbean families and a smaller number of Haitian émigrés reside, access to films from these locales is limited to a handful of art house movie theaters that exhibit foreign independent films. Overall, Haitian and French

Caribbean films, unlike foreign independent films and French auteur films are screened for a brief periods: one or two days at film festivals and one to two weeks if theatrically released. Within Paris, principally three *cinémas d'art et d'essai* have exhibited Haitian and French Caribbean films: La Clef/Image d'Ailleurs, Les Sept Parnassiens, and the Espace Saint-Michel. Beninese-Togolese director, actor, and playwright Sanvi Panou opened the theater La Clef/Image d'Ailleurs in 1990.¹²⁵ Located in the fifth arrondissement at 21, Rue de la Clef, a few steps from the subway station Censier d'Aubenton, the Parisian movie theater consistently screened films about the Haitian and French Caribbean experience during its two-decade years of activities.

Although it called itself “le premier espace cinéma black de Paris,” Images d'Ailleurs's mandate was to bring a diverse body of films from around the world to audiences. Its programming was not limited to films about the African diaspora however it filled a void in the Parisian cultural landscape as it continually showed foreign and francophone films for a modest price. La Clef often organized exhibitions and followed screenings by debates with filmmakers. On a weekly basis, Image d'Ailleurs screened fifteen to twenty films, gaining a solid reputation within the circle of art house theaters for exhibiting other and foreign cinemas. Weekly screenings often revolved around themes such as immigration, the voices of African women, or emerging voices in cinemas of the African diaspora and it featured special events such as the Etats Généraux du cinéma noir. In 2004, La Clef/Image d'Ailleurs celebrated the bicentennial of Haiti's independence by hosting Ecrans d'Haïti, the French edition of the 2004 Haitian film festival Haiti-on-Screen that had previously taken place

¹²⁵ Initially, Panou's goal was to create a venue that would exhibit Francophone West African films and he settled in La Clef, a two-screen movie theater that included a hundred-and-fifty-seat and an eighty-seat theaters. For two decades that is until it was forced to close in June 2009, Image d'Ailleurs functioned as a pivotal cultural space in Paris. Over the years, Panou extended programming to films from the African diaspora and but also films about or made by minorities. Furthermore Panou is no stranger to the many incarnations of *film antillais*. His brief career as an actor intersected with the emergence of French Caribbean films directed by filmmakers of European-descent: in the early 1980s, he played the part of René Dumas the black overseer who becomes the maroon Albon in François Migeat's film *Le Sang du flamboyant* (1981).

in New York.

Foreign independent films and French films that target an educated niche audience constitute the bulk of the programming at Les Sept Parnassiens, a seven-screen cinéma d'art et d'essai in the Montparnasse neighborhood in Paris. The art house theater Les Sept Parnassiens also rents its screens for cultural and social events such as Haitian and French Caribbean film festival and premières. For instance, in October 2003 at the occasion of the citywide event «Paris Capitale du cinéma d'Art et d'Essai», the movie house Les Sept Parnassiens showed six French Caribbean films—*Tèt grenné*, *Sucre amer*, *Le sang du flamboyant*, *Zouk, mariage et ouélélé*, *Antilles sur Seine*, and *Rue Cases-Nègres*—as part of “La semaine du cinéma des Antilles françaises.” Finally, the third art-house theater in Paris that intermittently screens Haitian and French Caribbean films is L'Espace Saint-Michel situated in the quartier latin, a neighborhood situated near the university La Sorbonne Paris I. The art house theater L'Espace Saint-Michel usually shows films directed by Guy Deslauriers (Martinique) and Christian Lara (Guadeloupe). Like Camille Mauduech, except for Jean-Claude Flamand-barny's *Nèg maron*, filmmakers such as Guy Deslauriers and Christian Lara, when their film are exhibited they are show for a short-time in arthouse theaters or during cultural events in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Haiti at cultural venues.

Exhibition and Distribution in Haiti: (Fokal) *Sinéma anba zetwal*, and the four Loisirs S.A. Theaters

By contrast in Haiti, exhibition and distribution are less limited than in the French Caribbean. This is because two models coexist: along with foreign and Haitian films that get theatrical exhibition and distribution, most Haitians who live in Haiti watch their own films outside of theaters. In “Le cinéma en Haïti” an article dated October, 2001, journalist, singer, and comic book artist Joël Lorquet and veteran Haitian filmmaker Arnold Antonin cautiously explained that

although the French Caribbean (Martinique) group Maxence Elysée had controlled the Haitian exhibition and distribution market for two decades, owned most of the theaters, and scheduled French and American films, it also screened Haitian films (Antonin *Cinema in Haiti* 88-89).

Dans les années 80, le groupe Maxence Elisée apparaît sur le marché haïtien du cinéma. Cette corporation antillaise a permis au public haïtien d'avoir accès aux films à succès réalisés en France et aux versions françaises des films américains. Aujourd'hui, ce groupe, devenu groupe "Loisirs S.A.," domine la distribution et l'exploitation du cinéma en Haïti et possède la plupart des salles de spectacle du pays, notamment les trois plus grandes, l'Impérial (5 salles), le Capitol (4 salles), le Rex Théâtre et le Paramount. C'est grâce à lui qu'on peut voir sur le grand écran actuellement les productions haïtiennes, fictions et documentaires aussi.

Although the cost of a movie ticket remains prohibitive for most Haitians, in the early 2000s Haitian films were extremely popular at Haitian movie theaters. With theater closings and easy access to bootleg DVDs sold in the streets for two US dollars, low budget Haitian films on DVD have been extremely popular. Before the destructive January 12, 2010 earthquake, Haitians would gather in the street and watched them from someone's television, VCR or DVD player.

Calls within the Haitian diaspora to raise the alarm and preserve the few remaining movie theaters in Haiti predate the earthquake. In April 2010, Frédrick Jean-Pierre explains in "Quel avenir pour le cinema Haïtien?" that: "Les plus grandes salles de cinéma en Haïti avaient fermé leurs portes bien avant le séisme du 12 janvier."¹²⁶ He adds that movie theaters such as the Rex Théâtre and the Capitol had been closed and that the Cinéma Impérial was being sold.

Christian Phéline explained in the *Catalogue du 1er forum du cinéma en Haïti et de l'audiovisuel en Haïti* that between 1980 and 1995 the number of screens significantly diminished in Haiti: "Le

¹²⁶ Jean-Pierre, Frédrick. "Quel avenir pour le cinema Haïtien?" *Collectif 2004 Images*. April, 7 2010. < http://www.collectif2004images.org/Quel-avenir-pour-le-cinema-haitien_a128.html>

nombre d'écrans serait passé de 41 à 14.” (13) He deplored that the local exhibition company, Capital S.A., partially financed by Elysé-owned Filmdis —the sole distribution and exhibitor in the French Caribbean and French Guiana— has the monopoly on distribution in Haiti (12-15). As a result of this monopoly the films exhibited in theater were mostly were dubbed American films and the few remaining independent exhibitors turned to Capital S.A. to obtain copies of films (Phéline 14). As an alternative venues at times, replaced theaters video projection became a popular way of screening movies (Phéline 15). This was the beginning of the transition from a formal to an informal economy.

In Haiti like in the French Caribbean, movie theaters are no longer where the majority watches films. Despite the use of terms like “l'industrie cinématographique” to designate the Haitian filmmaking practice, before the earthquake, that industry, the manufacturing of films by Haitians for the Haitian masses, was being built from the ground up following an unregulated, informal, and independent Haitian model. This lack of regulation has both helped and hindered Haitian filmmakers who make low-budget Haitian films. While digital technology allows for the manufacturing of a cheap product that Haitians readily consume, that same technology facilitates the illegal copying that robs filmmakers of valuable capital.

Without bootlegging, sales of DVDs in Haitian communities in Miami, New York, Boston, and Montréal would not have soared. Piracy enables wide exhibition and distribution but prevent profits for those who helm and finance the films. Questions of control and ownership are not resolved. While Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers that follow Western film standards have difficulties reaching a wide audience, filmmakers who make low-budget Haitian have a faithful audience but make little profit. On January 24, 2013 during a fundraiser in New York for Ciné Institute/Siné Lékol, the film school he founded in Jacmel, David Belle announced that he and the Association des cinéastes haïtiens were planning to meet and strike a deal with the people who are

orchestrating the piracy.

Non-profit organizations such as Sinéma anba Zetwal ‘Cinema under the stars’, a free outdoor film festival, have been showing carefully selected films about Haiti throughout the country since 2002. Laurence Magloire, a diaspora Haitian filmmaker who worked as a producer for Canadian television and who co-directed the documentary *Des hommes et des dieux* (2002) has returned to Haiti and founded the itinerant festival. With the help of engineer Eric Auguste, Magloire not only brings awareness of civic issues to the Haitian majority but also to make sure that Haitians see themselves on the screen:

“Dans ces films, nous nous voyons et chacun pourra dire: ‘M wè m.’ Cette mise à distance de soi permet à chacun de nous de se reconnaître et de réagir aux portraits. Ainsi, nous ne nous faisons, confrontés à nous-mêmes, qu’apprendre sur nous et sur Le monde. Notre souci est de choisir des films porteurs d’un message nous concernant. Nous choisissons des films produits par des Haïtiens aussi bien que ceux des étrangers.”

Sinéma Anba Zetwal was one of the first popular cultural events scheduled after the devastating February 2010 earthquake. Behind closed doors, Haitian and French filmmakers have criticized the group Elysée for being solely profit-driven, consolidating French and American cultural hegemony, and insufficiently supporting French Caribbean films distribution. While numerous Haitian and French Caribbean have been screened at Elysée theaters, lesser known filmmakers who approach the group say that the term laid in the contracts often puts them at an disadvantage, heightened by the group’s monopoly. Because Elysée does not redistribute a portion of its ticket sales, contrary to the French model in the *hexagone*, a local film fund has not been established. Filmmakers have also accused Elysée of excluding Haitian and French Caribbean films from the insular multiplex circuit. These films when they are screened in France are part of the *cinéma d’art et d’essai* circuit.

Fabienne Elysée, daughter of its founder, the late Maxence Elysée, now owns and heads the

Group Elysée. In 2008 during a meeting at the FEMI in Guadeloupe she replied to her detractors and defended the group's exhibition and distribution strategies. She shed light on why Elysée theaters rarely show independent films, solely exhibit a few French Caribbean films, and screen mostly commercial movies. She explained that the bulk of programming at Elysée-owned theaters remains American and French films because of the age of the spectators:

“les spectateurs ont surtout 15-35 ans, et privilégient les films américains où jouent des acteurs noirs avec qui ils peuvent s'identifier. Quand les films sont sous-titrés, ils quittent la salle! Même pour un film comme le Bollywood *Devdas* malgré son côté musical. *Biguine* de Guy Deslauriers a très bien marché, de même que *Antilles sur Seine* de Pascal Légitimus: il y a un besoin de ce type de films, mais il s'agit là de films plus antillais que caribéens. L'anglais et l'espagnol sont très mal parlés si bien que l'accès à ces cultures n'est pas donné et est un obstacle à des films qui ne seraient pas doublés. Les essais de distribution des films du Fespaco en vertu d'un accord passé avec le festival n'ont pas été des succès. Nous passons aussi systématiquement tous les films faits dans les îles, indique Fabienne Elysée, mais ce qui nous manque est l'apport des médias pour promouvoir ces événements. (Barlet *Quel marché?*)

Fabienne Elysée's justifications for her group distribution practices sound both relevant and contradictory. Seemingly sound, Elysée's argument that films screened in their original language with subtitles generally sell less tickets to French and Creole-speaking youth does not take into account an accrued interest in subtitled films stemming from a free online access.

The men and women in the age group that constitute the bulk of Fabienne Elysée's clientele have most likely downloaded American and foreign movies and television series online, danced to bachata and reggaeton music. They are heavily influenced by Caribbean, American, and French hip-hop, R&B, and Jamaican dancehall. They have certainly heard or listened to their parents' Haitian

koumba and Cuban and Puerto Rican record collection and as result are somewhat fluent in Spanish, English. As a result, watching subtitled movies is far less of an obstacle for fifteen-to-thirty-five audience than for their parents. Though Fabienne Elysée implies that a “film antillais” (French Caribbean narrative) draws larger crowds than a “caribéen,” or Caribbean film, she acknowledges the penchant in French Caribbean audiences for black protagonists but only in American films. In 2010, the Madiana movie theater located in the city of Schoelcher in Martinique was scheduled to show Lee Daniels’s African American independent film *Precious*. Although the trailer for the film appeared on the Madiana website was not shown at Madiana. *Precious* was instead screened twice at the Atrium to sold out audiences. Granted this is not an action packed film with Will Smith or Denzel Washington. Informed audiences had heard about the film and sought it out.

Several filmmakers describe Elysée as an exhibitor that emphasizes profitability and views its Haitian and French Caribbean audiences solely through that lens. They especially deplore Elysée’s lack of support for local production. Many filmmakers of Haitian and French Caribbean descent believe that the purchase and distribution practices of the group “Loisirs S.A.,” are stymieing local Caribbean film production. “Loisirs S.A.” has the monopoly in film distribution in Haiti, French Guiana, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. Both an exhibitor and a distributor (*diffuseur et exploitant*), Loisirs S.A. usually buy French and American blockbuster films in bulk and rotate the exhibition of these films throughout their theaters in Haiti and the French Caribbean.

Unlike French exhibitors, “Loisirs S.A.” is not subjected to the French *avance sur recette* rule (explain). As a result, it does not have to redistribute a portion of the profit of its ticket sales to a local agency devoted to the local production of French Caribbean films, therefore denying sorely needed financial resources to local filmmakers. A handful of French Caribbean filmmakers balk at having to set-up a production office on French soil in order to apply for funding. They believe in making films without the support of French governmental organizations. One of the requests

Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers have made is to be able, like their peers in the hexagon, to finance local Caribbean production through a portion of the ticket sales.

Camille Mauduech's critically acclaimed first documentary, *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe* can be looked as a rare case in point successful exhibition and distribution for a French Caribbean feature-length film. Mauduech generated a buzz by spreading well-orchestrated releases in French Caribbean movie theaters and French arthouse cinémas, film festivals and in alternative cultural spaces. Within a one-year period the film was released in cinemas in Martinique, Guadeloupe, France, and on a cable channel. The film premiered with much fanfare in Martinique on March 12, 2008 at the Loisirs S.A.-owned Madiana theater complex and it was subsequently theatrically released there on March 20, 2008. Its release in Guadeloupe began in the circuit d'art et d'essai at the Mois du film documentaire in Guadeloupe where it was first screened on November 8, 2008) and Martinique (Rencontres Cinéma Martinique 2008). It then "premiered" later at the Rex cineclub night theater in Guadeloupe on November 11, 2008. In early 2009 the film was shown twice (January 7, and 13) on French cable documentary channel Planète.

One year later the film was shown again at another Loisir S.A. theater, the d'Arbaud in Basse Terre as part of another thematic night. On April 22, 2009 more than one year after it premiered in Martinique, *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe* premiered in France in three arthouse theaters: one art-house theater in Paris (l'Espace Saint-Michel) and in two movie houses in nearby suburbs (Utopia de Saint-Ouen l'Aumône in Seine Saint-Denis and Studio 66 de Champigny sur Marne in Val-de-Marne). The following week on April 29, 2009, *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe* began its run at the Magic Cinéma de Bobigny and on May 6, 2009, at the Luxy theater in Ivry sur Seine.¹²⁷ The film was distributed by Cinéma Public Films and a DVD that would rival any film distributed through Criterion was

¹²⁷ Manterola, Elorri. "Sortie des 16 de Basse-Pointe de Camille Mauduech." April 22, 2009. <<http://www.artistikrezo.com/actualites/Cinema/sortie-du-documentaire-qls-16-de-basse-pointeq-de-camille-mauduech-le-22-avril.html>>

released.

Film culture is often seen as a Western Phenomenon. In France, cinéma can run the gamut between septième art and commercial cinema, imitate or American film industry. French Caribbean and Haitian filmmakers because they do not occupying a highly-regarded segment of a niche market, hardly benefit from a panoply of art houses, not even underground and often exist in the margins of international film festivals. Although Haitian and French Caribbean films have been selected at prominent film international festivals (the New York Film Festival, Berlin Film Festival Venice Film festival, Cannes, Sundance, the Toronto Film Festival, and the Tribeca Film festival). Despite distinctive categories, such film festivals have only one slot for a winner from the South. The few films that have trickled have had to compete for visibility with others works from filmmakers from the South.

Haitian and French Caribbean films remain in the margins of mainstream European film festivals. Already in the early 1980s, the filmmaker Christian Lara deplored that French Caribbean filmmakers were rarely, if ever, part of the main slate (Tallon 244).¹²⁸ Yet participation at these festivals gives Francophone filmmakers crucial visibility. In 1991 Raoul Peck's *L'homme sur les quais* was selected at Cannes as part of its Un Certain Regard programming. Less prestigious than the main slate but a nonetheless respected parallel slate, Un Certain Regard was started in 1978 by Gilles Jacob: it recognizes emerging talent and lesser-known directors. The selection of *L'homme sur les quais* at the Cannes film festival significantly raised the profile of its filmmaker: it secured Peck's position as a Haitian filmmaker of international caliber. As pointed out earlier in this dissertation, Raoul Peck is currently the most successful Haitian filmmaker.

¹²⁸ In an interview conducted by Brigitte Tallon that included actors Robert Liensol and France Zobda, Christian Lara criticized film festivals such as the FESPACO and the Festival du film de Carthage as respectively African and Arab film festival that exclude Caribbean filmmakers To Robert Liensol's: "Heureusement nous avons le festival de Cannes!" Lara responded: "Oui, en tant que spectateurs. Je vous disais tout à l'heure que nous avons constaté une ouverture à la télévision en 82, avec la programmation de de deux films antillais sur FR 3. Si un jour nous figurions dans la sélection officielle française du festival de Cannes, alors là oui, je dirais que quelque chose a change (Tallon 244)."

In 2010 Haitian-born and Paris-based Djinn Carrrenard saw his first film, *Donoma*, accepted in Cannes as part of the Association du Cinéma Indépendant pour sa Diffusion (ACID) selection. Every year the French association dedicated to the distribution of independent presents nine undistributed films at worldwide famous French festival. *Donoma*, a bold youth-centered inventive narrative, was shot on a \$200 (€ 150) budget and was bought by cultural French television Arte TV, after its ACID Cannes selection and selected at other film festivals such as the 2012 edition of New Directors/New Films in New York.

Located in the administrative city of Basse-Terre in Guadeloupe, L'Artchipel is mostly devoted to training, researching, and showcasing theater and dance but once in a while it includes a limited programation of Caribbean, French, and International films.¹²⁹ Similarly, the Centre des Arts et de la Culture de Pointe-à-Pitre in the other major city in Guadeloupe under the aegis of community organization such as Images en Bibliothèques, *Kaz a Jen* (Youth Community Program), Ciné Woulé has had a history of intermittent screenings of French Caribbean films and arthouse films.

Developing and Sustaining a Local Francophone and Creolophone Film Culture: Initiatives in Haiti and the French Caribbean

To counter what Chamoiseau has designated as the Western monologue of cinema, individuals and independent small organizations have in recent years spearheaded initiatives aimed at training the next generation of filmmakers, developing a local film culture, and supporting film education in Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique and beyond. These initiatives emphasize three areas of film education: establishing lasting structures to train future film professionals locally, introduce a larger audience to carefully chosen local and foreign independent films, and feature the short and

¹²⁹ Laul, Nathalie. "L'Artchipel en mille morceaux." *Mika Déchaîné* 23. n. d. Web.

feature-length film, documentaries and fictions of local emerging Caribbean filmmakers. In Martinique and Guadeloupe these local initiatives request support from the region and the local Direction des Affaires Culturelles (DRAC), the department, and the Conseil Régional. Like filmmakers most of these individual and community organizations often receive insufficient funding.

Local Film Training: CVD, IRCAV, and Siné Lékol, C Nou Menm, the GEREK

Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers and film professionals have long pondered over the necessity to develop local infrastructures for the development of Caribbean film. Already in 1962, Jean Dominique, Edouard Guilbaud, and Edouard Lafontant appeared along the collective name Union des Cinéastes Haïtiens in the credits for what is credited as the film Haitian film: *Mais moi je suis belle*. Since in Haiti filmmakers have not been able to rely on governmental support, in 2001 they founded their own federation for filmmakers making low-budget films: the Association Haïtienne des Cinéastes. Their goals are to: “unite Haitian filmmakers and consolidate the industry.”¹³⁰

Located in the southern Haitian city of Jacmel, Siné Lékol (cinema school in Creole) was created in 2008 by a former film festival organizer David Belle as an offshoot of the Jakmel film festival. As the first the first Haitian film school, Siné Lékol ‘Cine Institute’ aims at preparing young Haitian men and women in all aspects of filmmaking. The school became widely known after the January 12, 2010 earthquake. Despite the fact that the school suffered extensive damages, its surviving students were among the first to produce film coverage of the earthquake from Haiti.

¹³⁰ Association Haïtienne des Cinéastes. January 29, 2010. <http://ahchaiti.populus.org/>. Web.

Efforts at developing a local film culture have also been accompanied by a commitment to develop and increase film education in Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. To counter the large presence of blockbuster American and French films, and expose local audiences to a range of independent productions, non-profit organizations such as the itinerant associations Sinéma anba Zetwal or Cinema under the Stars (Haiti), and Ciné Woulé (Guadeloupe and Martinique) organize free outdoors screenings. Organizers operate on the premise that it is necessary to bring valuable films to the audience rather than waiting for the audience to come to these films. For Laurence Magloire, who established Sinéma anba Zetwal considers that: “La principale motivation de cette structure d’accompagnement consisterait en “la possibilité pour tous d’apprendre et de mieux se connaître au travers des films et vidéos d’auteurs indépendants, courts, moyens et longs métrages.”¹³¹

Jean-Marc Césaire, a film buff who began a comparable itinerant film festival in 1995, Ciné Woulé, in Guadeloupe believes in the motto: “Si tu ne vas pas au cinéma, le cinéma viendra à toi!” When possible, he privileges non-commercial cinema and focuses on bringing to Guadeloupe and at times in neighboring islands dependent of Guadeloupe such as La Désirade et Les Saintes “un autre cinéma,” often art house films. To develop film education, Césaire, a grandson of the late Aimé Césaire has deployed several strategies over the years: screenings in schools, yearly outdoors screenings in the summer, and filmed theater workshops. Occasionally Césaire programs films around a theme. In 2005, Ciné woulé screened films about the Caribbean experience two French and American films and three films or short from the French Caribbean Fabienne and Véronique Kanor’s *La noire*, Jean-Claude Flamand-Barney’s *Nèg maron* and Janluk Stanislas’s *Trafik d’infos*.

By showing distinctive Caribbean and foreign independent films, film festival programmers aim at developing a discerning taste in an audience already saturated with commercial films. In Martinique and Guadeloupe, French broadcast television had longed been the sole purveyor of films

on television. In the 1990s, the arrival of satellite television and Canal+ Antilles broadened the horizon of French Caribbean audiences. Now television viewers have access to films from a wide array of sources: besides the four broadcast channels: RFO Martinique or RFO Guadeloupe, Tempo RFO, Antilles Télévision (ATV), and KMT they can subscribe to Canal Plus and CanalSat Antilles and another umbrella of satellite television channels, Le Cable Numéricable. The majority of films programmed on these channels are second-rate and made for television reruns of French and American commercial films, if not the equivalent in television series and reality shows. Access to festival grade documentary and fiction films remains limited to a few channels such as Planète, Arte, and sometimes Canal +.

In addition to traveling film festivals such as Ciné Woulé Guadeloupe, Ciné Woulé Martinique, and Sinéma anba Zetwal in Haiti, the local film culture has grown thanks to cinematographic rendez-vous in permanent cultural spaces. These festivals play a pivotal role: they support the local Caribbean film culture and provide an alternative to the mainstream American and French films mostly shown in the commercial theaters owned by the Elisée family. In Haiti local initiatives such as Haiti Jacmel Film Festival, Sinéma anba Zetwal with the foundation Mwem screen films made by Haitians. Film festivals in Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique such as screenings at the Institut Français, the Jacmel film festival in Haiti, the Saint Barth film festival, Association pour des Rencontres Cinématographiques en Martinique, and the FEMI in Guadeloupe and Cinémazonia in French Guiana contribute to the local film culture.

Located in downtown Fort-de-France, the Atrium is one of the most frequented cultural venues in Martinique. It provides rehearsal space for local theater or dance groups and hosts shows, plays, and a cine club every Mondays. The Atrium also fulfills its mandate to screen independent films as well as less mainstream selection, the Quinzaine des réalisateurs, from one of the premier international festivals, the Cannes film festival. Emerging French Caribbean filmmakers can screen

their films there at no cost at Artchipel. Despite these actions, Haitian, Guadeloupean, and Martinican film aficionados deplore a lack of film criticism. Intermittent posts on blogs such as Tchok en Doc, Fey fè piti in Martinique, memos and minutes posted on websites such as C Nou Menm in Guadeloupe, and the Union des Cinéastes Haïtiens show how filmmakers have found ways to establish their web presence.

International Film Festivals in the US: Awakening to the Caribbean Diaspora

In the United States, film festival programmers in cities that have a significant black population, select at least one film entry that focuses on the African diaspora. In the Northeast, in cities where families of Caribbean descent have settled, Caribbean films—however paltry production from the Caribbean is— are sometimes included in the programming of such festivals. Mainstream festivals intent on raising their profile often seek filmmakers and actors with immediate name-recognition, while festivals curators that cater to minority audiences have learned to diversify their selection, thereby acknowledging that the African American experience is just one facet of the black experience. Thus in 1989, for its sixth edition the Black Cinema Festival, a festival devoted to films from the Caribbean basin that takes places in Boston, opened on April 11 with Raoul Peck's film *Haitian Corner* (1988), in an effort to attract as audience member of the Haitian community (Carr).

The Brooklyn Film Festival (BIFF), created in 1997, screened in 2006, a low budget Haitian film directed by Richard Sénécal, *Cousines* (2005). Selected films are listed on the festival website and *Cousines* is the only Haitian film selected at the (BIFF) between 1998 and 2006. Although these screenings are far and few in between they seem to be increasing, a couple of yearly events and the involvement of cultural institutions such as the Alliance Française in New York that had overlooked

films from the Haitian and French Caribbean communities as valid film work, are now slowly warming up to the Haitian and French Caribbean filmmaking practice.

The Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) cinema venue for instance screens Haitian film on Haitian Flag's Day (May 18). Additionally in association with the African Diaspora Film Festival (ADFF) may screen one Haitian film as part of its best of the African Diaspora Film Festival: in 2008, NYAFF, the other African Film Festival screened Arnold Antonin's low-budget feature film: *Le président a-t-il le SIDA?* (2006) and in 2009 *Jacques Roumain: Passion for a Country/La Passion d'un pays* by another Haitian director Mario Delatour.

The Sundance Film Festival emphasizes has emphasized American independent cinema, and very few Francophone films have been selected in the beginnings of the Sundance Institute Filmmakers/Directors Lab in 1981. At the 2001 edition of the Sundance film festival (18-28 January, 2001), Guy Deslauriers's film was only the selection from the French-speaking Caribbean. Although the festival included a world cinema category, *Le passage du milieu* was screened as part the "frontier" selection. It is probably the non conventional and non-narrative form Deslauriers employed to represent was cannot be represented: the second leg of the voyage from West Africa to the West Indies undertaken by slave ships from the perspective of the African captives that helped the film break such barriers. As one of the earliest Pan-African film festivals on the African continent, the FESPACO (Festival Panafricain de la Télévision et du Cinéma de Ouagadougou) focuses on African cinema. Its programming includes films from the African diasporan and Haitian and French Caribbean film. Guadeloupean filmmaker Christian Grandman received the Prize at the 2003 edition of the FESPACO.

After premiering at the Toronto Film Festival Raoul Peck's take on the last days of a Haitian dictatorship, *Moloch tropical* (2009), was screened at cultural institutions such as the in December 2009 at the Museum on Modern Art (MOMA) in New York, and the Forum des Images in Paris in

February 2010. Almost every year the African Diaspora Film Festival (ADFF), a post Thanksgiving rendez-vous and a New York staple, screens one or two movies, one short and one feature-length film, as part of its (French) Caribbean night. Janluk Stanislas's short *Trafik d'Infos* and Jean-Claude Flamand-Barny's film *Nèg maron* were part of the 2006 festival programming and Camille Mauduech's shorts *Pleine lune à Volga Plage* and first documentary *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe* were screened in 2009.

In 1996, Joshua Harrison and Ellen Lampert-Gréaux started the Saint Barth Film Festival/Cinéma Caraïbes in the English and French-speaking island of the same name in the hope of showcasing Caribbean cinema. At first tentative, their effort has morphed into an esteemed event where filmmakers from the Caribbean, interact with local schoolchildren, mingle with an audience of local inhabitants and tourists. Carefully selected Caribbean films with and international independent films screened in their language origin with French subtitles constitute the bulk of their programming. Initially small in scale, it has become one of the premier Pan-Caribbean film festivals. Both foreign and filmmakers from the Caribbean, established or emerging directors are invited to present their films and participate in panels with film professionals or film scholars.

Besides CVDM, small structures have been created in the hope of facilitating the professionalization, production, and promotion of the local film culture, a *sinéma bòkay* 'homemade film narratives.' They include the Union des Nouveaux Cinéastes Créoles (UNCC) and its Rude Bwoy Cake series, Alain Agat's and Christian Forêt's Fey' fè Piti, ARCM created in 2009 in Fort-de-France, Véronique Kanor's Iloz productions in Martinique. In Guadeloupe the now defunct artist collective C Nou Menm Dimitry Zendronis's and his production company were instrumental in the making of Janluk Stanislas, Afro-futurist: *Trafik d'infos*. Director and former Amina journalist Marie-Claude Pernelle and Patricia Montpierre who manage the AGPAG (Association pour le Développement du Cinéma d'Art et d'Essai en Guadeloupe) are pursuing similar goals. The non-

profit organization is seeking to: organize a hybrid network of theaters in Guadeloupe where Caribbean films can be exhibited and distributed, organize and promote the work of local filmmakers, existing structures, facilitate the creation of a local film catalog.

Because Haitian and French Caribbean films are often excluded from conventional distribution outlets, museums and other cultural institutions of higher learning have played a complementary role in bringing cachet and relative visibility to savvy directors. In France *le musée Dapper* is one the few museums that shows film about the African diaspora on a monthly basis. Similarly on the occasion of l'année de l'Outremer, the Cinémathèque Française, one of France premier repository of film, hosted the film festival Images des Outre-mer from December 14 to December 31, 2011. Whereas distribution for their films in Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haiti, and in France often elude Haitian and French Caribbean directors, a few have managed to screen one or two of their films at film festivals abroad. These exceptional screenings are far and few in between and bring together a selective educated audience. Mainstream festivals intent on raising their profile often seek filmmakers and actors with immediate name-recognition. But lesser known festivals curators that cater to minority audiences have learned to diversify their film selection, thereby acknowledging that the African American experience is just one facet of the black experience. Some international film festivals in the United States are slowly awakening to the Caribbean Diaspora.

Film festival programmers in cities with a significant black population generally select at least one film entry that focuses on the African diaspora. Haitian and French Caribbean films are sometimes included in the programming of festivals in northeastern America cities where families of Caribbean descent have settled. Thus in 1989, for its sixth edition the Boston Black Cinema Festival, a festival devoted to films from the Caribbean basin, opened on April 11 with Raoul Peck's film 1988 *Haitian Corner* (Carr). The Brooklyn Film Festival (BIFF), created in 1997, screened a low budget Haitian film directed by Richard Sénécal, *Cousines* (2005) in 2006. Both the city of Boston

and the borough of Brooklyn are home to a large Haitian population. These screenings, however, are far and few in between, though they seem to be increasing. According to the Brooklyn Film Festival website, *Cousines* is the only Haitian film selected at the (BIFF) between 1998 and 2006. In France, the Festival de cinéma de Douarnenez, a festival that has great following among the local population in Brittany has devoted two of its editions to French Caribbean cinema.

Haitians living in the United States, in Canada, or in France are more likely to see a low-budget Haitian movie than a film by a pioneer female Haitian filmmaker such as Elsie Haas, or by Haitian filmmakers such as Raoul Peck or Michelange Quay whose films received funding from the CNC and Fonds Sud and have been screened at Cannes, MOMA, and the Lincoln Center. Cultural institutions that had overlooked films from the Haitian and French Caribbean communities as valid film work, such as the Alliance Française in New York, are now slowly warming to the Haitian and French Caribbean filmmaking practice. For instance, the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) usually screens Haitian films on Haitian Flag's Day (May 18). Additionally, in association with the African Diaspora Film Festival (ADFF), BAM may screen one Haitian film as part of its best of the African Diaspora Film Festival: in 2008, ADFF screened Arnold Antonin's low budget feature film *Le président a-t-il le SIDA?* (2006) and in 2009 BAM showed the documentary *Jacques Roumain: la passion d'un pays* by the same director.

Despite the fact that New York has a small French Caribbean population, the African Diaspora Film Festival (ADFF) screens two movies generally one short and one feature-length film as part of its French Caribbean night. Films from Guadeloupe (Janluk Stanislas's *Trafik d'Infos*, Jean-Claude Flamand-Barny's film *Nèg maron*) and Martinique (Camille Mauduech's film and *Les 16 de Basse-Pointe*) were screened at the African Diaspora Film Festival (ADFF) in New York respectively in 2006 and 2009. Haitians in New York are not necessarily aware of film screenings by internationally known Haitian filmmakers when the latter are screened at Museums. After

premiering at the Toronto Film Festival Raoul Peck's take on the last days of a Haitian dictatorship, *Moloch tropical* (2009), was screened at cultural institutions such as in December 2009 at the Museum on Modern Art (MOMA) and the Lincoln Center in New York, and the Forum des Images in Paris in February 2010. Recently the Brooklyn-based organization has been focusing on bridging the gap between the art house, museum and film festival theaters audience, and bootleg DVD audience.

As previously discussed in Chapter 5, in rare occasions, foreign film festivals can give unprecedented visibility to a Haitian or French Caribbean film. Such was the case for Guy Deslauriers's film *Le passage du milieu* (2000). Selected at the Toronto Film Festival in September 2000 and shown at the Sundance film festival in January 2000 as part of the Frontier selection, the film caught the attention Sam Martin at HBO who was looking for innovative pan-African film narratives to program on HBO. Deslauriers's film on the slave trade fitted the bill. Under the supervision of African American novelist Walter Mosley, the film's narrative voice and inter titles were quickly adapted into English. Djimon Hounsou, a Francophone actor from Benin whose name had a familiar ring: he had just played the black warrior Juba in Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) and the African captive Cinque in Steven Spielberg's *Amistad* (1997). Hounsou replaced Francophone actor Maka Kotto as the film's anonymous narrative voice. *Le passage du milieu* debuted as *The Middle-Passage* on February 9, 2002 on HBO and was subsequently distributed on DVD by HBO Films. In addition as part of HBO's Black History Month campaign, the film was screened at universities (Texas Southern University, Clark University, Temple, etc) and museums in Atlanta, Chicago, Harlem, South Dallas, and Los Angeles throughout February 2002.¹³² Sam Martin also helped produce Raoul Peck's fiction film *Lumumba* and the latter debuted on the premium cable channel the following week on February 16, 2002.

¹³² See "HBO Commemorates Black History Month with 'Journey to Today' Campaign." <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/HBO+Commemorates+Black+History+Month+with+'Journey+to+Today'+Campaign.-a082011374> >July 6, 2010.

Haitian and French Caribbean films are often selected at film festivals that revolves around a pan-African theme such as the Festival Panafricain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou (FESPACO) in Burkina Faso, Vues d'Afrique in Montréal, Canada and Cinamazonia in French Guiana. Several Haitian and French Caribbean directors have been the recipients of the FESPACO Paul Robeson prize and many are regularly invited to participate in Montréal's francophone film festival Vues d'Afrique. Although the director Raoul Peck was a jury member at the 2012 Cannes festival, Haitian and French Caribbean are rarely selected in the main slate.

Exhibition on Haitian Television: Piracy, Free Screenings, and Foreign Hegemony

Given the lack of governmental structures and the minimal role the state plays in the daily life of Haitians, support for film production is non-existent. While Haitians films are not excluded from local television screens, broadcast comes at a price for the film's director. Filmmakers who wish to see their films broadcast on television must pay the local television channels, according to filmmaker Arnold Antonin (Antonin and Lorquet). In fact in a 2007 interview about the state of Haitian cinema, Antonin reports that Haitian televisions also engage in piracy: they screen Haitian films without authorization and without compensating the film's author(s) (Akoli). The dearth of Haitian films on television is compounded by the ubiquity of North American programming:

Le sort des Haïtiens qui veulent voir du cinéma sur le petit écran n'est pas réjouissant. Bien que le pays vive encore à l'heure de la radio (194 stations à travers le pays), beaucoup de nouvelles chaînes de télévisions (18 au total) ont fait leur apparition, soit 7 à la Capitale et 11 en province. La production locale étant inexistante, ces 'télévisions' ne font que relayer, soit directement ou en différé, des programmes captés, à partir d'antennes paraboliques, des chaînes américaines ou canadiennes, qui déversent fort souvent en anglais toutes sortes d'images en

provenance du premier monde. Quant à la télévision d'Etat elle n'a de pareille nulle part ailleurs pour son style et le genre de propagande qu'elle diffuse. (Antonin and Lorquet)

An Emerging DVD Market

If for many years very few Haitian and French Caribbean films were unavailable for purchase on video, the trend is slowly reversing. Since the American release by HBO Films Video of *Le passage du milieu* as *The Middle Passage* on DVD, Guy Deslauriers has released all of his subsequent films, *Biguine* (2003) and *Aliker* (2008) on DVD. However the road to DVD self-distribution is bumpier for some than for others. Veteran French Caribbean filmmaker Christian Lara has released two of his epic historical narrative about Guadeloupean resistance on VHS and DVD stores such as la FNAC and specialty bookstores that cater to the African diaspora in the French Caribbean and in France. However the filmmaker like Julius Amédé Laou whose *La vieille quimboiseuse et le majordome* (1987) was distributed on VHS tapes by K-Films has not released his subsequent film *Zouk mariage et ouélélé* (2002) on DVD.

In Paris, a small number of distribution companies have occupied the niche educational market of Third World, Francophone, and foreign of fictions films and/or documentaries. They initially sold a small selection of films on VHS tapes and now sells them on DVDs. Some hard to find film such as Rassoul Labuchin's film *Anita* have been available through la Médiathèque des Trois Mondes. Because of piracy, the Médiathèque des Trois Mondes extensive film library is now available via its website. It is one of the rare sellers that also gives access to films through Video on Demand (VoD) format. In 2000, l'Association des Trois Mondes published an encyclopedia of films from the African diaspora: *Les cinémas d'Afrique: dictionnaire*. The publication of a dictionary of

on cinemas from the Africa diaspora was part of an effort to integrate Francophone films into the larger canon of foreign films. The publication coincided with the emergence of a new terminology: obsolete phrases such as Third World were abandoned while new concepts such as global South were gaining currency.

Managed by Claude Gilaizeau and Barcha Bauer, the Paris-based film production company Les Productions de la Lanterne has a large catalogue of documentaries coproduced with television channels. Documentaries co-produced with Les Productions de la Lanterne focus on topics as diverse as art, history, society, and literature. They are broadcasted on television and are sold as DVDs through the company's website. Emerging French Caribbean filmmakers such as Jil Servant, Mariette Monpierre, and Fabienne Kanor directed documentaries for Les Films de la Lanterne. Documentaries produced by Les Films de la Lanterne fulfill pedagogical in a wide array of disciplines. Directors who have collaborated with this film production company privately complain about the paltry resources available to them during production. For instance Jill Servant's film *Paulette Nardal: la fierté d'être négresse* is a complement to Euzhan Palcy's better known three-part opus: *Aimé Césaire: une voix pour l'histoire* and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's examination of Caribbean women as pioneer theoreticians, *Negritude Women*. Both works contribute to the gendering of negritude and oCaribbean theory.

Headed by the filmmaker Anne Lescot, the Collectif 2004 Images sells online documentaries about the Haitian experiences via its website. The Collectif 2004 Images is an offshoot of Laurence Magloire's and Anne Lescot's film production company Digital LM. Not only is it the go to place for documentaries about Haiti by foreign and Haitian filmmakers but also a source of information for any cultural events and current issues in Haiti and within the diaspora. The Collective's catalogue includes documentaries on Haiti that have often been selected at international film festivals. The catalogue not only includes documentaries by Irene Lichtenstein, Mario Delatour, Rachel Magloire,

Maxence Denis, and Carl Lafontant but also Raoul Peck's earlier documentaries now on DVD and distributed by JBA Editions (Jacques Bidou Productions) via Les Films du Paradoxe. The collective's aim is to promote Haitian culture. Last but not least, the two Parisian publishing houses and bookstores located in the quartier latin, L'Harmattan and Présence Africaine, have also been selling films about the African Diaspora first on VHS tapes and now on DVD.

After Deslauriers and Lara, More Haitian and French Caribbean directors have released their films on DVD: Jean-Claude Flamand-Barney, Julie Mauduech, Michelange Quay and many other. The few Haitian and French Caribbean directors who have worked for French television see their films circulate as products that can easily be purchased. Such is the case for *Tropiques amers* Flamand-Barney's made for television drama about slavery produced by France Televisions and Raoul Peck's *L'affaire Villemin* (France 3, 2006) and *L'école du pouvoir* (Canal Plus, 2008), two mini-series with French mainstream themes. Except for his fiction film *Lumumba* (Zeitgeist Video, 2002), Peck's fiction films about the Haitian and African experience have not been available on DVD. California Newsreels sells his earlier documentary *Lumumba: la mort d'un prophète* (1991). Recent films with a Caribbean theme that did honourably at the French box office such as Lucien Jean-Baptiste's *La première Etoile* (2009) or Lionel Sketekee's *Case départ* (2011) are available on DVD.

Video on Demand (VOD) is another promising mode of exhibition: Euzhan Palcy's made for television two-part series *Les mariées de l'isle Bourbon* has been available on through France television's website. Palcy has respectively in 2006 and 2010 released in France and the French Caribbean a bilingual DVD package of two of her previous documentaries: *Aimé Césaire: une voix pour l'histoire* and *Parcours de dissidents*. However for many years, *Aimé Césaire: une voix pour l'histoire* had only been available for the North American market through California Newsreel as a videotape in NTSC format. This new trend signals that although film distribution is changing at a fast pace there seems to be a demand for films on DVD among older French Caribbean consumers. Since these

consumers have not yet gravitated towards Internet streaming, watch instantly services, and illegal downloading, they are buying French Caribbean films on DVD. After the death in 2008 of revered intellectual and political figure Aimé Césaire, the desire to own a piece of Caribbean history may drive the sale of *Aimé Césaire: une voix pour l'histoire*.

Before France Télévisions began to release DVD smaller Paris-based companies such as Les Productions de la Lanterne and La Médiathèque des Trois Mondes sold VHS tapes and later on DVDs of a few Haitian and French Caribbean films. Newcomers such as Latérite Productions and Digital LM are the result of filmmakers' efforts to own, self-distribute, and sell film products directly to the consumer thanks to the Internet or through specialized retailers such as the bookstores (and publishing houses) Présence Africaine, Harmattan, or the Librairie Antillaise. If a growing DVD market has slowly been emerging for French Caribbean films, it seems that filmmakers are still struggling to reach a larger and younger audience. The Digital Video Disc is obsolete and filmmakers and distributors have yet to follow a model that helps them sell mp4 files online on sites such as iTunes as through video on demand.

Thriving Within and Without the Diaspora: Haitian Bootleg DVDs

By contrast, it is the autonomous low-budget Haitian filmmaking practice that pioneered widespread and unregulated distribution of video in the late 1990s and subsequently of DVDs. Access to digital technology and a vibrant market for bootlegged copies in urban centers, and a strong demand for Haitian stories on film accelerated the emergence of a distinctive Haitian filmmaking practice in the early 2000s. For filmmakers unregulated distribution plays both as a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, limited production costs and strong demand guarantees low budget films. Télé Diaspora Inc is both a Haitian television channel and a video store that specializes

in the sale of low-budget Haitian films. Located in Boston, Massachusetts, where a large Haitian community resides, it has also played the role of financial backers for directors of low budget Haitian films. Initially Télédiaspora Inc would advance for instance \$20,000 towards the film budget, and in exchange would then sell the finished film in the store or online for \$20. With the availability of bootleg copies for as little as two films for \$5, this model is no longer profitable. Although this model has become less profitable in the late 2000s, Haitian filmmakers by circumventing the Western institutions using digital technology to develop and sustain local low-budget films have been reaching the diaspora one bootleg movie at a time.

Untapped Video on Demand (VOD), Digital Télévision Numérique Terrestre (TNT)

So far, Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers have had limited experience with alternative methods of distribution that involves cloud computing and video on demand. In 2010, most still consider traditional forms of return on investment, ticket and DVD sales, as sources of revenue. Yet television channels from large media conglomerate in Europe and the United States have expanded their modes of distributions to different platforms. Open source cloud computing, an Internet-based system of sharing resources, information, and software, for instance has emerged in 2009 as a new model of delivering data. This could help filmmakers deliver their film products without a distributor as an intermediary. A proprietary digital media application such as I-Tunes may not begin to sell Haitian and French Caribbean films online but this type of model could. This direct form of delivery is being used by broadcast television channels and Arte and not yet by Haitian and French Caribbean filmmakers. One of the questions is whether the advent of more television channels, the need for more content needed will translate as more inclusiveness.

Because of their limited entertainment value and perceived niche audience, Haitian and French Caribbean films, when they are screened, are exhibited in restricted ways and for very short

periods of time. While low-budget Haitian films are retailed within the informal economy of the Haitian diaspora and sold to its prospective audience by street vendors, Haitian and French Caribbean films made with institutional funds tend to circulate in film festivals, arthouse theaters, at handful museums in Paris and New York and cultural television channels, reaching a limited and informed niche audience. Lack of distribution and limited access to institutional funding have confined Haitian and French-Caribbean films to marginal cultural spaces in the French Caribbean, Europe, and in the world. In some regards, Haitian and French Caribbean films seem to exist on the cusp of American independent movies and foreign films. Two significant dimensions conjure up the independent label: multiple sources of funding and independent spirit (Levy 1-12). Haitian and French Caribbean films are often filmed on what, by many standards, is considered a shoestring budget; they generally lack commercial appeal; and filmmakers are motivated by the need for self-expression (affirmation of Caribbean identities) and a personal vision (contestation of Euro-centric images); the stories they tell revolve around a distinctive cultural and geographical Other: the Creole and French-speaking Caribbean. When successful films are screened at French arthouse theaters, they do not draw the same audience nor command the same regard as the foreign films they compete with in terms of exhibition. Arthouse theaters typically serve an audience of *cinéphiles* (film buffs) and film reviews in daily newspapers (essentially *Le monde*, *Le figaro*, and *Libération*) or weekly cultural magazines (*Télérama*) seldom praise the few Haitian and French Caribbean films that are theatrically released as critical successes. While percolating in the 1980s with the critical and financial success of *La Rue Cases-Nègres*, the idea of *cinéma antillais* or at least of a filmmaking practice in the Francophone Caribbean had not been revived until recently. Even if the term is often used in online articles, the notion of *cinéma antillais*, given the absence of a working local infrastructure is still contested, despite the favorable results of Jean-Claude Flamand-Barney's film *Nèg maron* in 2005. According to the Confédération Internationale des cinémas d'Art et d'essai (CICAE) in 2009 Paris

had 41 *cinémas d'art et d'essai* theaters and the Paris greater suburbs 101 arthouse movie theaters (among a total of about a thousand screens in France. Yet despite a high demographic concentration of French Caribbean families living in the outskirts of Paris, very few French art house theaters screened Haitian and French Caribbean films.

Conclusion

The Cultural as Political: Formulating Identities and contesting Western Stereotypes

Film, as a powerful form of social commentary, has played a central role in positing the de facto French colonies Martinique and Guadeloupe and the independent nation of Haiti as discrete sites of Caribbean intellectual ferment. Very few Haitian and French Caribbean films are widely known and affirming the cultural legacy of small locales through film narratives is one way of disseminating the significance of their distinctive narratives. The political stakes are different in French and European islands Martinique and Guadeloupe—where asserting one’s independence from French colonialism is asserting one’s Caribbean identity—than in independent nation Haiti where such action is irrelevant. In Martinique, and Guadeloupe Caribbean cultural production has significant individual and political resonances. In the decades that followed the 1946 departmentalization law that granted Guiana, Guadeloupe, and Martinique a double status as a French department and region, the islands’ status as colonies was maintained. In this context, insisting on one’s Caribbean cultural legacy also means resisting French assimilation. This resistance culminated in isolated terrorist acts against French interests in the late 1970s and early 1980s that ended an increasingly violent struggle for independence from France. It is after the French Caribbean political fight for independence was repressed and that the role of the film medium as a site of affirmation and contestation increased. In fact, cultural production such as filmmaking has partially replaced the political dissent of the early 1980s in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

On the contrary Haitian films tend to bridge the gap between the idea of Haiti and the Haitian diaspora. Exploring, contesting, and revisiting the idea of an unequal, politically, and demographically fragmented Haitian nation delineates the contours of collective, individual, and cultural Haitian identity. Several factors have informed the development of their respective

filmmaking practice: resistance to foreign influence, migration under the Duvalier dictatorships, and with the emergence of a Haitian diaspora, the fragmentation of its national identity. Documentary, art house, animation and low-budget films about the Haitian experience respond to a demand to construct a transnational identity from within and exterior to the country. Militant films may interrogate and denounce political inadequacies but they reconcile, confront, and represent various versions of life within Haiti and its diaspora. Low budget Haitian films link Haitians from Jacmel to Boston via Miami and Montréal despite emigration and dispersal.

By inscribing themselves in a scholarly continuum originated in the Americas, Guadeloupean and Martinican filmmakers attempt to separate the French component of their identity from the Caribbean part, disengaging themselves from Euro-centric perspectives. In the French Caribbean, films replace prevalent Western stereotypes about postcard representations of the French West Indies and assert a distinctive Caribbean identity. They challenge convenient dichotomies about Haiti, connect those who migrated with those who stayed, and interrogate the nature, scope and meaning of the Haitian nation. Historical narratives, especially but not exclusively, reconstitute authority to an embattled independent Caribbean nation like Haiti and to non-nations that view themselves as *péyi* 'homeland' like Martinique and Guadeloupe.

As discussed in previous chapters, films like Raoul Peck's *L'homme sur les quais* (Haiti), *Vivre libre ou mourir* (Guadeloupe), and *Le passage du milieu* (Martinique) attach fictional historical accounts to a Caribbean intellectual lineage. French filmmaker from Guadeloupe Christian Lara disputes clichés about an assimilated French Caribbean in *Vivre libre ou mourir* as he salutes the legacy left by his grandfather (Oruno Lara) and his brother (Oruno D. Lara) both historians of the Caribbean. When he chronicles the resistance in 1802 of Guadeloupean men and women led by the Colonel Delgrès fighting against General Richepanse's attempt to reinstate slavery, Christian Lara connects

Guadeloupe to the ideal of the French Revolution but also to the powerful symbolism of the Haitian Revolution.

Owning one's cultural discourse means partially contesting the hegemony of Western culture and claiming an equally valid cultural legacy in the Americas by emphasizing that the advent New World is a crucial component of modernity. This is why a distinctly abstract Caribbean aesthetic that refers to the work of Edouard Glissant, V.S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite emerges from Guy Deslauriers's *Le passage du milieu*. As examined in chapter five, the title of this French Caribbean film itself, a literal translation of the middle passage indicates a rejection of French terminology (*la traite*) and values (a repressed French colonial past and involvement of the slave trade).

Deslauriers's, Chonville's, and Chamoiseau's calculated use of an English phrase centrally places Caribbean discourse—literally, Glissant's *Discours antillais*. As a film title *Le passage du milieu*, a literal translation of the middle passage relegates French historical narratives to the margin. It denotes an affirmation of American historical accounts anchored in the Americas that validates a pan-Caribbean intellectual legacy. It is the effort, that simultaneously affirms and contests the narrative of each project deemed incompatible to the idea of France by the CNC or broadcast television channels. As a result of their marginalization, filmmakers translating the Haitian and French Caribbean compete for scarce funds. These financial and budgetary restrictions continue to shape filmmaking and confine it to the margins of French cinema but it needs not to.

The film production that is emerging from Haiti and the French Caribbean is at a crossroad. While digital technology has the potential to allow a greater number to tell stories—from an insider's perspective—through the film medium, independent filmmakers around the world are still looking for profitable distribution and exhibition models to sustain and develop the profession still has to be established. Between 1976 and 2011, the meaning and the scope of the Haitian and French

Caribbean filmmaking practices have evolved. The pioneers, the men and women who began directed films in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, who made the leap the theater, who were informed by literature and political activism and dreamed of entering the cultural world stage have seen tremendous political, and cultural, technological changes. Maurice Dubroca's 2012 documentary *Ça tourne en Outre-Mer* co-produced with France Ô suggests that the French Caribbean filmmaking is not longer in the shadows and is gaining in credibility.

The film production that is emerging from Haiti and the French Caribbean is at a crossroad. Is *Donoma*, the feature film reportedly made in Paris for €150 by the Haitian-born director Djinn Carrenard's a game changer? Is his extreme example of guerilla filmmaking is a point in case? A unique new film praxis exists in Haiti. Can Siné Lékol transform Jacmel into Jollywood, the Haitian Nollywood, as its founder David Belle predicts (Prince)? The director Rubidium Wu who featured newcomer Haitian actress Kettie Jean in the first season Season 1 of his webseries *The Silent City* summarizes in July 2012 the possibilities and challenges of merging low HD production with (viable) distribution solutions that would guarantee a return on investment for director, film crew and actors:

“Film production techniques have been getting cheaper for years but we lacked a funding or distribution model. Now, YouTube has emerged as a great distributor for independent content that is now building into a real force to be reckoned with. Now, Kickstarter and crowdfunding connects everything and truly democratizes film/TV/music at every level. We see *The Silent City* as the direct result of this new, totally online medium coming of age. High quality, crowdfunded, world-wide distributed, projects which are then promoted over the social media universe are the future of storytelling.” (*Silent City*)

For the majority of filmmakers who direct Haitian and French Caribbean films, making films is to exist, to go from being invisible to visible, from object to sujet, to change perceptions, and to enter

the world cultural and “to enter into Relation.”

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