

# **ON BEING WEST INDIAN IN POST-WAR METROPOLITAN FRANCE: PERSPECTIVES FROM FRENCH WEST INDIAN LITERATURE**

**by**

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*In memory of Gloria, Luddy, Dorcas and Harry*

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## Abstract

Most research into contemporary French West Indian literature focuses on writing that stresses the significance of the plantation and urban cultures of the islands in the early to mid-twentieth century or, more recently, on the desire of some writers to explore broader trans-national influences or environments. Despite the prominence of migration in post-war French West Indian history, however, less has been said about the engagement of French West Indian literature with migration to metropolitan France.

Although commentators have recently begun to discuss the work of a handful of writers in connection with migration to the *métropole*, this thesis offers a full-length analysis of the issue, bringing writers, texts and literary and cultural theories together with the cultural and sociological context of migration to metropolitan France. I comment on a variety of well-known authors and texts, while also presenting writers and writing that have frequently been neglected in other studies. I also consider the reasons for what I believe to be both the slow development of a literature of migration, as well as the low profile of this issue within Francophone literary studies.

Part One, 'French and West Indian: Historical and Sociological Contexts', considers the broad context of migration, reflecting on how that context impacts on the West Indians and their descendants in the *métropole*. Part Two, 'Theory and the French West Indian Diaspora', looks at colonisation, postcolonial criticism, and the current scholarship devoted to them, as these concern the issues of migration and identity in sociological and literary terms. Part Three, 'Patterns of Discourse: Reflections of the *Métropole*', takes recurrent themes that have appeared in the works of a variety of less well-known writers, including writers of West Indian origin born in the *métropole*. In Part Four, 'Siting the *Métropole*', I examine three successful yet very different writers and consider their contributions to the literature of migration, in the light of the reflections made and the patterns uncovered earlier in this thesis.

My conclusion unites the themes of inclusion and exclusion that this subject brings to the fore, and suggests potential literary and scholarly developments for the future.

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## Introduction

This thesis examines how French West Indian writers have responded or have failed to respond to the history of post-war migration from the French West Indies to metropolitan France, both in their literary work, and in the theoretical structures that undergird this work. I study the existing literature of migration to see how it explores the interaction between West Indian migrants themselves, and their relationship to the wider environment, and I also pay attention to the social and historical background to colonisation and to migration, because this is of ongoing relevance in shaping the literary environment. Issues of reception and readership are raised insofar as they have an impact on what is written, and on which writers and texts achieve the most exposure, marketability and success.

Focusing in particular on the social reality of West Indian migrants in mainland France over the past sixty years creates context, but also highlights gaps of representation. French West Indian writers cannot be dealt with as a homogenous group. It will become apparent that there is a difference of context and content between the works of the most prominent writers and those who are marginalised or unknown. The sense is that class has a subtle and largely unacknowledged impact upon French West Indian literature, inevitably to the detriment of less privileged writers. This has repercussions for a literature of mass migration, where mass generally corresponds to a working-class diaspora rather than to the peripatetic lifestyle of a middle-class, intellectual elite.

My contention is that migration to the *métropole* has been a problematic subject for French West Indian literature and that even when the subject is explored, it remains marginal. Metropolitan West Indians are routinely treated as though lost in a cultural limbo, both inauthentically ‘West Indian’ and inauthentically ‘French’. The ‘ongoing interstitality’ of French West Indian communities, who persist in defining themselves as ‘Martiniquan or Guadeloupean’<sup>1</sup> does not speak of an emotional investment in belonging

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<sup>1</sup> H. Adlai Murdoch, ‘Placing Pointe-à-Pitre in Paris: diaspora and Francophone Caribbean postcolonial identity’, *Journal of Romance Studies*, 5: 3 (Winter 2005), p. 108.

to the metropolitan sphere, despite - or because of - the automatic legal belonging created by departmentalisation in 1946. A French West Indian literature of migration has been slow to develop, and in order to explore why, it will be necessary to consider the contexts surrounding migration, in particular the role of departmentalisation and metropolitan ideas of universality in creating a cleavage between West Indian and metropolitan understandings of what it means to be French.

In order to explore these issues fully, this thesis considers relevant contributions from a wide variety of sources. It includes canonical writers such as Aimé Césaire, Franz Fanon, Edouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau and Maryse Condé, and also includes works by less well known contributors such as Bertène Juminer's *Les Bâtards* (1961) and Fabienne Kanor's *D'Eaux douces* (2004). (Fabienne Kanor is of Martiniquan parentage.) It also highlights much more obscure writers, such as the Guadeloupeans Michelle Gargar (*Le Clocher*, 1999), Frankito (*Pointe-à-Pitre – Paris*, 2000), Raymond Procés (*L'Habit de lumière*, 2000) and Arlette Minatchy-Bogat (*La Métisse caribéenne*, 2004), the Martiniquan Louison Cazal (*Le Clan des mutilés*, 1988) and Didier Mandin (*Banlieue Voltaire*, 2006), who was born in Paris to Guadeloupean parents. The inclusion of the novelist Daniel Picouly, the mixed-race, Paris-born grandson of a Martiniquan, represents a challenge, since Picouly's early life seems to have included little cultural connection with Martinique. However, he has increasingly been perceived as a man of colour, and in middle age he has drawn closer to his Martiniquan roots, spoken out against racism, and has been claimed by Martiniquans as one of their own. He belongs to the Martiniquan diaspora, and his life's work has not been entirely oblivious of this fact.

My research benefits from the contributions of a number of scholars who have begun to reflect on the literature of migration. Most have focused on the analysis of a small range of novels that have treated this subject. For example, Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996) appears to have attracted the most commentary in articles and chapters in books. and this thesis considers the contributions of Priscilla Maunier, Michel Laronde, Françoise Mugnier and H. Adlai Murdoch, among others, as well as a number of Pineau's interviewers who evidently see this novel as a representative text of the migration



experience.<sup>2</sup> However, commentators who have considered the lack of a fully-fledged literature of migration are far fewer; Madeleine Dobie's work has been very useful to me in this respect, while Mary Gallagher's exploration of French West Indian literature after 1950 has included helpful references to the representation of migration.<sup>3</sup>

When the French West Indies are referenced in this thesis it should be understood that I have in mind primarily the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe. As in so many other studies, the literature of French Guiana, although not completely ignored, will not play a prominent part here. Novels such as Jean-Charles Pamphile's *La Chaîne brisée* (2002) and Juminer's *Les Bâtards*, mentioned above, are discussed because they explore cultural and political issues that are shared with Martinique and Guadeloupe. However, although French Guiana partly shares the creolised culture of the French West Indian islands, its distinct history and cultural mixture lead to differences which render its full inclusion difficult. It is also important to note that although French Guiana lost a similar number of migrants as Martinique and Guadeloupe, it is characterised by immigration rather than by emigration to metropolitan France.<sup>4</sup> I shall not be focusing on differences between Martinique and Guadeloupe, since these do not seem to have a great bearing on the literature of migration. Although Martinique has produced more literary theorists than Guadeloupe, none of the three novelists discussed in Part 4 are viewed as theorists. It may seem in Part 2 that the theoretical approaches taken by some Martiniquan writers have hindered rather than assisted the development of a literature of migration, since these approaches often focus on recuperating a French West Indian cultural identity. On the other hand, it has been said that in Martinique the French 'built up among the inhabitants a loyalty to the mother country which is quite unique among Caribbean territories.'<sup>5</sup> Martinique has traditionally been seen as the most important of the three remaining French West Indian territories, although French Guiana is bigger and

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<sup>2</sup> *L'Exil selon Julia* is discussed in Chapter IV.3.

<sup>3</sup> I explore the contributions of these two commentators in Chapter II.3.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Aldrich and John Connell, *France's Overseas Frontier: Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 112.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Blanshard, *Democracy and Empire in the Caribbean* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1947), p. 251.

Guadeloupe more populous.<sup>6</sup> Martiniquans began to emigrate earlier and in greater numbers than Guadelopeans.<sup>7</sup> Once in the *métropole*, however, the distinctions between Martiniquans and Guadelopeans largely fade away.<sup>8</sup>

Terminology is a fraught matter in a discussion of the French Atlantic space, which only serves to reflect the artificial and complicated past and present of this region. ‘West Indian’, ‘Caribbean’, ‘Antillean’, ‘*antillais*’, ‘migration’, ‘diaspora’, ‘*négropolitain*’ and even ‘France’ become problematic in this context. Some use the term ‘Caribbean’ to refer to the whole region, while limiting ‘West Indian’ to the British Anglophone Caribbean only, and ‘Antillean’ to the Francophone Caribbean, or more specifically, Martinique and Guadeloupe.<sup>9</sup> I shall refer to the people under discussion in this thesis as ‘West Indians’ rather than as ‘Antilleans’. ‘Antillean’, although cognate with the French word *Antillais* locks the people of Martinique and Guadeloupe into a distinct Francophone world since its use is often restricted to these communities.<sup>10</sup> It serves to divide them from other people in neighbouring islands who share a closely connected history, culture and ethnicity. The term ‘Antillean’ is used in some but not in the majority of English-language commentaries, while ‘Caribbean’, derived from ‘Carib’ and referencing an early tribe of settlers in some of the islands, does not reflect the predominant ethnic mixtures today. ‘West Indies’, however, brazenly represents a geographical (mis)understanding imposed upon the region from the outside – a situation potentially more in keeping with the realities of contemporary Guadeloupe and

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Blanshard, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>7</sup> Claude-Valentin Marie, ‘Les Antillais en France: une nouvelle donne’, *Hommes et migrations*, 1237 (May-June 2002), p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> David Beriss, *Black Skins, French Voices: Caribbean Ethnicity and Activism in Urban France* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2004), p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> See for example, Angela Bruening, ‘Caribbean Connections: Comparing Modern Anglophone and Francophone Literature, 1950s – Present’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Stirling, 2006), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> In *Hommes et Migrations*, 1237 (May-June 2002), an edition devoted to *Diasporas caribbéens*, there is an article by Christine Chivallon, ‘Présence antillaise au Royaume-Uni’, pp. 62-69, that refers to West Indians in the UK as *les Antillais*, whereas Harry Goulbourne’s article ‘Familles caribbéennes en Grande-Bretagne’, pp. 70-81, refers to the same ethnic and social group of people exclusively as *Caribbéens*. The latter text is a translation from the English. Articles in French focusing on French West Indians alone tend to refer only to *les Antillais*.

Martinique. To refer to the ‘West Indies’ and ‘West Indian(s)’ hardly imposes upon a self-determining Francophone people a foreign terminology; it does, however, unite those islands with the experience of the whole region as a place of subjection to foreign strategies. It therefore seems appropriate to use this term.<sup>11</sup>

I have also tried to avoid using ‘France’ (without quotation marks) to signify ‘metropolitan France’, since this usage, although commonplace, is politically inaccurate, and stands at the very heart of the problem facing French West Indians; it serves to deny them their place as ‘authentic’ Frenchmen and women, either in the West Indies or in Europe. I shall instead refer to the *métropole*, to metropolitan or mainland France, or occasionally ‘France’ (within quotation marks) to distinguish this territory from the West Indies.

‘*Néropolitain*’ is a key term in this thesis. It was first coined by the Cameroonian musician Manu Dibango in the 1980s to refer to African immigrants in metropolitan France.<sup>12</sup> In the West Indian context, its meaning has been fluid. François Durpaire says that ‘*néropolitain*’ refers to a child born in the *métropole* to West Indian emigrants, while another term, ‘*nézagonal*’, refers to the migrants themselves.<sup>13</sup> However, both terms have been used to refer to people born in the *métropole*, and both have had a somewhat pejorative flavour.<sup>14</sup> A young character in a recent novel by the Martiniquan author Tony Delsham explains that ‘*néropolitain*’ was originally a negative label for migrants who saw themselves as better than the West Indians who had remained on the islands, but it had become an acceptable term for their children born in metropolitan France, and far preferable to ‘*nézagonal*’.<sup>15</sup> I use the term ‘*néropolitain*’ here, without negativity, in this more recent sense.

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<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, there are respected works in the field which have used the terms ‘West Indies’ and ‘West Indian’ in a French context. In this thesis, the most obvious examples are in the title and essay contributions of *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana Today*, ed. by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno (London: Macmillan, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Manu Dibango and Danielle Rouard, *Trois Kilos de café* ([1989] Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1995), p. 239.

<sup>13</sup> François Durpaire, *France blanche, colère noire* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacobs, 2006), p. 130.

<sup>14</sup> See the poem ‘Michelle’, quoted in Chapter III.3.

<sup>15</sup> Tony Delsham, *Paris, il faut que tu saches....* (Schœlcher: Martinique Editions, 2007), p. 38.

While I occasionally refer to ‘diasporic’ cultures and identities, and use the terms ‘migration’ and ‘diaspora’ interchangeably, it should be said that the notion of a ‘West Indian diaspora’ is not uncontested within the Francophone context. Christine Chivallon remarks that in French sociological texts the term ‘diaspora’ is rarely used to refer to the movement of French West Indians, since it is predicated upon a cohesive and secure cultural identity, which, as we shall see, does not truly match the French West Indian context.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, Chivallon remarks that within the sphere of British scholarship ideas about ‘diaspora’ are influenced by postmodernism and postcolonialism, which are more amenable to porous and elastic cultural identities.<sup>17</sup> These concepts have not directly influenced French West Indian writing or thinking, but since French West Indian theory has in recent decades attempted to address ideas about unstable identities, it seems appropriate to refer to French West Indians in the *métropole* as a ‘diaspora’.

Finally, I accept that it may be somewhat unorthodox to include literature of migration and second and third generation literature in the same study. French writing by North African migrants and the writing of a second and third generation of Frenchmen and women of North African descent are now generally studied and theorised separately in Francophone studies. However, the distinctions between different generations of diasporic West Indians are blurred by circulatory migration and, perhaps more fundamentally, by Edouard Glissant’s concept of French West Indian culture as foundationally composite or hybrid.<sup>18</sup> Migrant and *négropolitain* writing are therefore drawn into a complex relationship. This invites us to include *négropolitain* writing, to appreciate the difficulties it faces, and to tease out how it emulates or distinguishes itself from French West Indian writing of migration more broadly.

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<sup>16</sup> Christine Chivallon, ‘De quelques préconstruits de la notion de diaspora à partir de l’exemple antillais’, *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, 13:1 (1997), p. 152.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>18</sup> For Glissant’s ideas on ‘atavistic’ cultures, which create a ‘myth of genesis’ around their origins, and ‘composite’ cultures, which are obliged to build their identity upon the foundations of mixity and hybridity, see Andrea Schwieger Hiepkö, ‘Creolization as a Poetics of Culture: Edouard Glissant’s “Archipelagic Thinking”’, in *A Pepper-pot of Cultures: Aspects of Creolization in the Caribbean*, ed. by Gordon Collier and Ulrich Fleischmann (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 239-240.

## Part 1

### French and West Indian: Historical and Sociological Contexts

#### Chapter I.1 The *Mission Civilisatrice* and Departmentalisation<sup>1</sup>

The term '*mission civilisatrice*' was born in 'France' in the Age of Enlightenment, an age which began to develop the idea of 'France' as '[l]a "Grande Nation" [qui] avait reçu un double mandat éducatif et révolutionnaire: elle devait libérer les peuples et propager les Lumières. Dès lors il fut entendu que la France avait mission d'éclairer la marche des peuples vers le progrès, "d'éveiller à la civilisation les populations attardées"'.<sup>2</sup> It received fresh impetus from 1870 onwards, as the French empire was being enlarged, and French commentators and politicians of the Third Republic self-consciously sought to 'reconcile its aggressive imperialism with its republican ideals' and developed 'certain fundamental assumptions about the superiority of French culture and the perfectibility of humankind.'<sup>3</sup>

By that time, the French West Indian colonies had faded from view; the apogee of the *mission civilisatrice* as a discourse was reached after the West Indian territories had been eclipsed by other colonial interests. The term now brings to mind attitudes towards the second French colonial empire of Northern, Western and Central Africa and Indochina, rather than the agenda pursued in the *vieilles colonies* of the New World. Nevertheless, the ideological origins of the *mission civilisatrice* – and attempts to reconcile colonial pragmatism with high ideals - go much further back in the West Indies than the nineteenth century, and they established the conditions that culminated in departmentalisation and hence to large-scale migration to metropolitan France. This chapter attempts to trace those connections chronologically, from the founding and settling of Guadeloupe and Martinique up until departmentalisation, stopping to look

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<sup>1</sup> According to Alice L. Conklin the earliest usage of the word civilisation is unknown: *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Charles-Robert Ageron, *France coloniale ou parti colonial?* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978), p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Alice L. Conklin, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

more closely at the education system which eventually became a key factor in the process, and stimulated the earliest examples of a literature of migration. It sets the scene for the following chapters which will focus closely on post-war French West Indian writers and the ambiguities that have preoccupied French West Indian literature of migration.

The first French settlers arrived in Guadeloupe and Martinique in 1635, a possibility facilitated by the creation of the *Compagnie des Iles d'Amérique*, a body initially composed of a group of French aristocrats to whom the ownership of the French West Indian colonies was conceded by the French crown, by order of Cardinal Richelieu.<sup>4</sup> The *Compagnie* set the scene for two important aspects of life in the French West Indies for centuries to come. Firstly, the white plantation owners or *grands békés* remained monarchist long after the French Revolution of 1789, acquiring a long-lasting reputation for hostility to the values of the French Republic. Secondly, Catholicism was understood to be the faith of the new colonies, and the prospect of Christianising Africans was proposed by Louis XIII in 1642 as the supreme reason for authorising his subjects to engage in the slave trade.<sup>5</sup> In 1664 the Governor General of the French West Indies decreed that all slaves were to be given instruction in the Catholic faith.<sup>6</sup> In the short term, Catholicism served to bind settlers and their initially fairly small numbers of slaves to each other, since the scarcity of white women arriving in the islands meant that relationships between (free) white men and enslaved African (and also initially Amerindian women), and then mixed-race women, was frequent. In such cases concubinage was discouraged in favour of marriage, and all children born as a consequence were free.<sup>7</sup>

Catholicism thereby served as a mediating factor in the evolving French self-identification with what were perceived to be universal cultural and ethical values while

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<sup>4</sup> Frédéric Regent, *La France et ses esclaves: de la colonisation aux abolitions (1620-1848)* (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 2007), pp. 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

also ensuring that miscegenation would become a strong feature of French West Indian life.<sup>8</sup> French West Indians have remained overwhelmingly Catholic, and within French West Indian literature of migration the nominal Catholicism of migrants to the *métropole* is assumed. However, Catholicism is not a prominent element in French West Indian writing generally, probably because it is perceived to be aligned with the forces of conservatism, high bourgeois culture and alienation from the African self.<sup>9</sup>

It is unsurprising that the realities of slavery pushed notions of Catholic morality into the background. The Code Noir of 1685, the first formal attempt by the French state to impose legal control upon the French West Indian colonies, upheld the prior dominance of the Catholic Church, and marriage and freedom were still linked. Concubinage ('cette lutte de la vertu contre le vice') was no longer to be punished, but those of mixed race born outside marriage would now retain the (slave) status of their mothers.<sup>10</sup> While the manumission of pure blooded Africans, especially males, was made difficult, the early drive to free mixed-race children meant that 'the French West Indies laid the foundation for a three-category system of racial classification in which, generally speaking pigmentation and status corresponded closely.'<sup>11</sup> The divisions between white, brown and black established themselves irreversibly as increasing numbers of African slaves and the expansion of plantation slavery encouraged a change in attitudes towards people of colour. From the early demands of the 1630s that mixed-race couples marry, there developed the diametrically opposed view that such racial misalliances deserved only censure.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the 1700s the rights of free people of colour were gradually

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<sup>8</sup> Gabrielle Parker, "'Francophonie'" and "universalité": evolution of two notions conjoined', in *Francophone and Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (London: Arnold, 2003), p. 96.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Maryse Condé, *Le Cœur à rire et à pleurer: contes vrais de mon enfance* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1999), pp. 73-79.

<sup>10</sup> Arlette Gautier, 'Sous l'esclavage, le patriarcat', *Nouvelles questions féministes*, 9/10 (Spring 1985), p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> George M. Fredrickson, 'Mulattoes and *métis*: Attitudes toward miscegenation in the United States and France since the seventeenth century', *International Social Science Journal*, 57: 183 (March 2005), pp. 105-106.

<sup>12</sup> Frédéric Regent, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199.

reduced, including limiting their right to wear certain clothing, and their eligibility for particular professions and trades. Their freedom to gather together publicly in groups was removed, and mixed-race children born illegitimately were no longer allowed to bear their white fathers' surnames.<sup>13</sup> Such regulations were clearly not designed to promote assimilation or any kind of *mission civilisatrice* upon the islands.

By the late eighteenth century, the royalist, colonialist and Bonapartist view was that the colonies possessed an autonomous identity, separate from that of the *mère-patrie*.<sup>14</sup> Hence in the minds of the *grands békés*, the assimilation of free and especially of enslaved people of colour was not desirable. As the revolutionary era progressed the *grands békés* became increasingly determined to preserve the hierarchy in their slave colony and to discourage interference from outside. In addition, in their struggle for equality and determination, West Indian people of colour had to face not only the conservative forces on their islands, but also the contradictory and ambiguous responses of the Republic itself. The new Republic was unable to take a consistent line towards the West Indian colonies. The period between 1791 and 1871 was one of relative political instability as 'France' moved from Republics to Empires and back again, first abolishing slavery in her colonies in 1794 and reinstating it in 1802. Helen Hintjens remarks that 'French colonial policy in the Caribbean swung from promising the moon to failing to deliver even the basic necessities of life for the "labouring masses". [...] The Jacobin ideology even viewed slavery as beneficial since it was the first step towards equality, liberty and fraternity within the French Republic.'<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, it was not easy to reconcile the liberal ideas of equality and freedom promoted by the French Revolution, and the Enlightenment with the realities of slavery and economic exploitation in the West Indies. Inconsistency was a feature of ideological and political life after 1789.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193-195. These discriminatory laws were introduced at different times in different places.

<sup>14</sup> Richard D. E. Burton, *La famille coloniale: La Martinique et la mère patrie: 1789-1992* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1994), p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> Helen Hintjens, 'France in the Caribbean', in *Europe and the Caribbean*, ed. by Paul Sutton (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1991), p. 39. The transatlantic slave trade and slavery were often justified by their European supporters as the means by which Africans would gain access to civilisation and progress.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.



This inconsistency remained the hallmark of metropolitan attitudes towards French West Indians, and consequently towards their presence in the *métropole* until recently, as this thesis will show. Nevertheless, ‘[o]ver the course of the nineteenth century, the idea of the Republic became associated, in the view of many Antilleans, with the end of the domination of the planters and the end of slavery. The expectation that France and republican ideals held the key to liberation was reinforced with the end of slavery in 1848.’<sup>17</sup> This means that for French West Indians liberation implies a close, not a distant relationship with the *mère-patrie*, and repression is experienced as a class struggle between the three social and ethnic groups, not as something imposed from outside.<sup>18</sup>

The definitive abolition of slavery in 1848 only served to increase this sense of indebtedness to the *mère-patrie*, a loyalty which has routinely idolised Victor Schœlcher, who was the most effective French politician in the struggle for abolition, and also a keen supporter of cultural and political integration for the French West Indies.<sup>19</sup> To this day slavery, ironically, can be defined by the Republican act of abolition.<sup>20</sup> It is easy to see how the ‘culte de Schœlcher’<sup>21</sup> contributes towards the image of ‘France’ as (adoptive) mother, father, protector and victor all in one, thereby reducing the black West Indian to the position of a dependent woman or child, always ‘en posture de suppliant ou de recipient, jamais de protagoniste ou d’inventeur et d’artisan de sa propre destinée.’<sup>22</sup>

One of the ways in which metropolitan France sought to bind the still valuable West

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<sup>17</sup> David Beriss, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> Richard D. E. Burton, *La famille coloniale*, p. 31.

<sup>19</sup> Oruno D. Lara, *De l’oubli à l’histoire: Espace et Identité Caraïbes, Guadeloupe, Guyane, Haïti, Martinique* (Paris: Editions Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998), pp. 214-215.

<sup>20</sup> It is ironic that the West Indian Frédéric Regent – or more likely his metropolitan publishers - chose as the cover of his book *La France et ses esclaves* (see above) a famous painting of the French declaration of the abolition of slavery (*L’abolition de l’esclavage dans les colonies française, 1840*, by François Auguste Biard), with Schœlcher standing proudly to attention alongside the Tricolore, flanked by other erect Europeans, and surrounded by grateful, prone slaves. Before the book is opened, therefore, the horrors of slavery are subordinated to the ‘happy ending’ of abolition, orchestrated by a generous Republic.

<sup>21</sup> Richard D. E. Burton, *La famille coloniale*, p. 67.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Indian colonies to itself was by increasing the representation of West Indians of colour in organisms of the state; so during the French Revolution, black generals were numerous in the French army, moreso than today.<sup>23</sup> At that time, it was stated that Guadeloupe was ‘une partie intégrante de la France’, and in 1781 free men of colour were given the right of representation in the French National Assembly.<sup>24</sup> Once the revolutionary and abolitionist struggles were past, almost one hundred years later, the Third Republic introduced democratic reforms which propelled the free bourgeoisie of colour onto the political stage, again increasing their commitment to the *métropole*.<sup>25</sup> The sending of elected deputies of colour to the French parliament served to bind local politics to the French parties, and made the locals aware of the political situation developing in Europe, so that, for example, when communism and socialism rose in importance in the *mère-patrie* Martinique followed suit. The parties and the trade unions of the *métropole* were replicated in the islands. The *grands békés* remained politically conservative, and increasingly tended to leave politics to the black and light-skinned bourgeoisie.<sup>26</sup>

Direct representation in the French Parliament meant that almost all aspects of French West Indian public life were affected, and ‘French culture, including its system of education, would be extended to the overseas territories, together with the right to French citizenship.’<sup>27</sup> From 1870

[l]e recrutement sur place d’une grande partie du personnel des services publics propose aux Antillais un nouveau créneau professionnel, rapidement investi par la bourgeoisie de couleur. L’élargissement du recrutement des agents de l’État permet ainsi la naissance d’une nouvelle facette dans la composition de la bourgeoisie de couleur et favorise le rattachement et l’adhésion de ce nouveau

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<sup>23</sup> Patrick Weil, the director of research at the CNRS, cit. François Durpaire, *Enseignement de l’histoire et diversité culturelle: ‘Nos ancêtres ne sont pas les Gaulois’* (Paris: Hachette Education, 2002), p. 122.

<sup>24</sup> Josette Fallope, ‘La politique d’assimilation et ses résistances’, in *La Guadeloupe, 1875-1914: Les soubresauts d’une société pluri-éthnique, ou les ambiguïtés de l’assimilation*, ed. by Henriette Levillain, (Paris: Editions Autrement, 1994), p. 34.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>26</sup> Richard D. E. Burton, *La famille coloniale*, p. 91.

<sup>27</sup> Sir Harold Mitchell, *Caribbean Patterns: A political and economic study of the contemporary Caribbean* (Edinburgh and London: W. & R. Chambers Ltd., 1967), p. 239.

personnel politique à l'État français.<sup>28</sup>

Such was the respect that began to be accorded to *les fonctionnaires*, public sector workers, that up to the present time this sector has retained its allure, thanks to the social stability and status that it symbolises.<sup>29</sup> It is a frequent feature in French West Indian literature of migration.

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The expansion of the public sector towards the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century could not have occurred without the development of the education system, which supplied this sector with the qualified candidates it needed. Since the education system is so important to the culture and self-identity of these islands, and has been a huge presence in French West Indian literature, it is to education that we now turn.

Despite the intentions of the Third Republic (1870-1914) to create a free, obligatory and secular education service, financial constraints after 1848 meant that the principal benefactors were the bourgeoisie of colour, whose education was often fee-paying, and provided by the Catholic Church.<sup>30</sup> In the case of Martinique, those who wanted to obtain a secondary education had to be able to live in or travel to the capital, Fort-de-France. Public transport to these schools from the rural areas was inadequate and the cost of boarding was too expensive for rural peasant families. Therefore, the majority of Martinique's secondary school students were from Fort-de France itself, even though at that time the town contained only one-fourth of the island's school-age children. The children of agricultural and manual labourers, the majority of the population, were already inherently disadvantaged, since their domestic situation often made quiet study difficult. Thus the educational and cultural exclusion of one generation was often

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<sup>28</sup> Josette Fallope, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

replicated in the next.<sup>31</sup>

The French West Indian education system was therefore a tool best manipulated by those already closely aligned with its values. Even when it began to bring advancement to young people from disadvantaged homes, it did so by deliberately refashioning them after a pattern which would distance them from their own surroundings, and from both the African and the creole part of themselves. The French West Indian obsession with the French language is a perfect symbol of this alienating outcome of the *école laïque* and of its role as a propagator of Republican, elite values. Dating back to the 1880s, the underside of this obsession was the ongoing demonisation of the Creole language, ‘le dénigrement, symétrique, du créole associé désormais aux champs de canne, au bitaco inculte, à la sauvagerie, en un mot à la négraille.’<sup>32</sup>

Burton goes on to describe how

l'école est donc une institution ambivalente au plus haut degré. Aux fils de famille bourgeoise elle confère le pouvoir linguistique dont ils se serviront à la fois pour rivaliser avec l'ethnoclasse béké, pour poursuivre le projet assimilationniste et, surtout à partir de la tribune politique, pour en imposer aux Noirs créolophones. A une petite minorité d'enfants noirs, les forts en thème, les gangreks assortis de l'avenir, elle promet une ascension vertigineuse hors du monde du commandeur, du gèreur et des petites bandes, mais aux prix d'une coupure radicale avec l'univers de la mère et avec sa langue à elle, le créole: Marianne ne supporte pas des figures maternelles concurrentes.<sup>33</sup>

The price to be paid for this attempt at alchemy and for the longing to win the approval of a jealous Mother France is the stuff of Francophone postcolonial literature. Since the early 1990s it has revealed itself most obviously through the surge in Francophone autobiographical writing on childhood, and most particularly in the French West Indian

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<sup>31</sup> David Lowenthal, *West Indian Societies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 119-120.

<sup>32</sup> Richard D. E. Burton, *La famille coloniale*, p. 109.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

context.<sup>34</sup> Exploring a West Indian childhood inevitably requires interrogating the role of the educational establishment in its *mission civilisatrice* among West Indian children, and attempting to show how it swallows up West Indian particularities in exchange for social advancement and access to Frenchness.

Two autobiographical novels by the Martiniquan writer Joseph Zobel (1915-2006) reflect the issues surrounding the local education system in the period just up to and after World War II. In *La Rue Case-Nègres* (1950) the country boy José breaks free from low educational expectations and from a life of plantation work, and enters a prestigious secondary school in Fort-de-France. It soon becomes apparent that this transition will take its toll upon him emotionally, socially and culturally: ‘[J]e suis le seul de mon espèce.’<sup>35</sup> José finds himself alone in a world of middle-class children, whilst his largely absent mother, Délia, works hard as a maid and a washerwoman to pay his school fees, proving that upward mobility came at an emotional, cultural and social and financial cost.

After the *baccalauréat*, there was only one possible destination for the truly ambitious: an academic qualification from metropolitan France, and preferably from Paris. Until the development of the Université des Antilles et de la Guyane in the 1970s and early 1980s crossing the Atlantic was the only way of obtaining a university degree – and would naturally increase the process of cultural assimilation. Most West Indians living in metropolitan France until the 1950s were either students or professional public sector workers such as teachers, lawyers, doctors or members of the military.<sup>36</sup> It is therefore no surprise that the student migrant experience is richly described in many literary texts. Joseph Zobel’s novel *La Fête à Paris* (1953), later re-edited and entitled *Quand la neige aura fondu* (1979), follows the life of José from his existence as a resilient working class schoolboy in *La Rue Case-Nègres* to that of a young migrant student in Paris, a trajectory interrupted by the hiatus of war.

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<sup>34</sup> Maeve McCusker, ‘Small Worlds: Constructions of Childhood in Contemporary Postcolonial Autobiography’, *Romance Studies*, 24: 1 (November 2006), p. 207.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Zobel, *La Rue Cases-Nègres* (Paris: Éditions Jean Froissart, 1950), p. 223.

<sup>36</sup> Joyce Edmond-Smith, ‘West Indian Workers in France I’, *New Community*, 1: 5 (Autumn 1972), p. 447.

The novel is especially interesting in its depiction of a young West Indian's identification with the *métropole* at a particular historical moment, the period immediately after World War II; when José arrives in France for the first time and sees the desolation wrought by the war he is barely able to contain his tears. He is a young man apparently without racial complexes. The ease with which he negotiates metropolitan life renders him liable to be treated as an *assimilé* in the eyes of a white fellow student, '[qui] s'obstinait à ne pas admettre que José puisse prendre fait et cause pour des Africains, lui qui était de Martinique, "vielle colonie française" [...], lui que la colonisation avait déjà définitivement arraché à la barbarie. D'où son entêtement à voir en José une création des blancs, [...] accessible à la confiance des blancs grâce aux bienfaits de la colonisation.'<sup>37</sup>

José's trajectory mirrors the plight of many French West Indian intellectuals. Like the French Guianese negritude poet Léon-Gontran Damas (1912 – 1978) who arrived in Paris to study in the 1920s, José is more interested in his personal reading and cultural exploration than his official course of study, and like Damas, José is thrilled to meet students from around the world, particularly Africans.<sup>38</sup> Paris gave young men such as these the chance to make international friendships for the first time. José is not a lost soul; once he finds his feet, Paris represents nothing less than freedom and self-determination. His apparently uncomplicated relationship with a former member of the French Resistance, Marthe, could be interpreted as a sign of his successful insertion into a battered and bruised but still proud and virtuous France, with Marthe's post-war suffering reflecting the quiet virtue of her people. (There are no former collaborators in this novel; there is no attempt here to undermine Republican values.) Although not wealthy, Marthe is a genuine French heroine, and by representing her lack of frivolity and superficiality Zobel defies the more commonplace stereotype of the West Indian immigrant who settles for a white partner of low intelligence and social standing. José decides to remain with Marthe in Paris, rather than returning to his island (now a *DOM*) that he clearly sees as a haven of small-mindedness and racial division.

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<sup>37</sup> Joseph Zobel, *Quand la neige aura fondu* (Paris: Editions Caribbéennes, 1979), p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> Keith Q. Warner, *Critical Perspectives on Léon-Gontran Damas* (Washington D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1988), pp. 50-51.

Education has undoubtedly provided one instrument through which the French West Indies might be gathered more firmly within the *mission civilisatrice*, on the islands themselves and also in the context of student migration to mainland France. In the twentieth century, another – and evidently connected - reality has also provided striking examples of West Indian loyalty and adhesion to the ideological frameworks of the French *métropole*: the arena of war. Since World War II concluded with departmentalisation, the impact of this war in particular is highly pertinent to this stage of our reflection.

Alongside José, the French Guianese medical students in Bertène Juminer's novel *Les Bâtards* (1961), to be discussed later in this thesis, represent examples of how the two world wars disrupted the education of many young West Indians, postponing their chance to study in the *mère-patrie*. These wars provided opportunities for French West Indians to express their loyalty to the *mère-patrie* as soldiers, granting some of them an experience of migration to mainland France impossible for other Martiniquans. In World War I 'Martinique gladly accepted French conscription and sent 40,000 men to French battlefronts.'<sup>39</sup> Over 2000 Martiniquans fought in the French army in World War II.<sup>40</sup> Despite this disparity in favour of World War I, World War II has been more frequently represented in West Indian literature, probably because this was a war in which the islands themselves played a dramatic part, and not 'merely' in the migratory context of the exportation of West Indian soldiers to Europe. Françoise Ega's novel about World War II, *L'Alizé ne soufflait plus: Antan Robè* (2000), is devoted on the one hand to the young Martiniquan men sent to Europe to fight for the motherland, and on the other to the struggles and domestic dramas of the people they had to leave behind in a working class district of Fort-de-France. With an implied critique by Ega of French military leadership, the young protagonist and ex-office clerk Telliam and his friends in Paris spend most of their time waiting to meet the enemy, drinking and bonding with each other. As for José less than a decade later, Paris becomes a site for cross-cultural rapprochement, only this time the connection develops between the black Martiniquans and a young *béké*, Duvineau, '[qui] rougit la première fois qu'un Antillais d'un autre

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<sup>39</sup> Paul Blanshard, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

<sup>40</sup> Richard D. E. Burton, *La famille coloniale*, p. 148.

épiderme que le sien l'interpella familièrement, plusieurs siècles de traditions se trouvaient ainsi pulvérisés.<sup>41</sup> War in the name of 'France' becomes, paradoxically, a means through which the civilising influence may work upon the passionate racial divisions of the islanders – even though the seeds of those divisions were themselves sown by 'the French', centuries earlier.

The main historical focus during this era is on the wartime experiences of the West Indian territories themselves, and on the reactions of many West Indians towards the reality of militant dictatorship. The defeat of metropolitan France meant that the French West Indies have the distinction of being 'the only territories in the hemisphere which have come even temporarily under the control of a Nazi-dominated power.'<sup>42</sup> From 1940 to 1943 the French West Indian colonies were governed from Martinique by the Pétainiste French Admiral Georges Robert (or 'Robè'). Various groups for various reasons expressed approval of the new regime. Some local leaders, such as Guadeloupe's black deputy Gratien Candace and Henry Lémery, a 'mulatto' from Martinique, who was Vichy's first colonial minister, were diligent supporters of Pétainism.<sup>43</sup> The (black) Martiniquan doctor Bertrand Mauville in Raphaël Confiant's novel *Le Nègre et l'amiral* is seduced by the appeal of Vichyism.<sup>44</sup> Some veterans of World War I were attracted by the fact that Pétain was one of their number. The Vichy trilogy of *Travail, Patrie, Famille* replaced *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, and the administration sought to appeal to the strong Catholic sensibilities of many West Indians by creating youth, education and paramilitary movements that blurred the distinction between church and state.<sup>45</sup> Measures were undertaken that appealed to the most conservative elements in society, which of course comprised the *grands békés*, who had never been at ease with republican ideals of equality for black and white.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Françoise Ega, *L'Alizé ne soufflait plus (Antan Robè)* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 2000), pp. 153-154.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Blanshard, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

<sup>43</sup> Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe and Indochina, 1940-1944*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 117.

<sup>44</sup> Raphaël Confiant, *Le Nègre et l'amiral* ([1988] Paris: Editions Grasset, 1993), pp. 170-171.

<sup>45</sup> Fitzroy André Baptiste, *War, Cooperation, and Conflict: The European Possessions in the Caribbean, 1939-1945* (New York, Westwood and London: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 197.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.



As a means of integrating the West Indies into a greater French vision, the Vichy regime presented undeniable difficulties. Despite the economic and political problems of the inter-war years, and despite high levels of religiosity, most French West Indians were fundamentally committed to Republican ideals of freedom and equality. West Indians who had chosen to fight for those ideals in the *mère-patrie* from 1938 to 1940 would be disinclined to approve of a system which brazenly demoted them. Fitztoy A. Baptiste asserts that for French West Indian black people ‘socialized into the “race-free,” assimilationist ideology of French colonialism, the image and the experience of harsh superimposition by the white or nearly white Vichy Commission in the French Caribbean had a traumatic, metaphysical effect.’<sup>47</sup> There was a tension between encouraging loyalty to the repressive, anti-Republican regime and removing the freedoms that had inspired loyalty towards mainland France; this tension was inescapable for administrators during the war. And the perception born in World War I that ‘France embodied civilization in the face of German barbarism now seemed more pertinent than ever to Guadeloupeans made all too aware of Hitler’s perception of blacks. ... [T]his late Third Republican campaign aimed at educating Guadeloupeans about the evils of Hitlerian racism would later haunt Vichy officials.’<sup>48</sup>

Various acts of defiance, from defacing *pétainiste* posters, or sailing away to St Lucia and onwards to mainland France and North Africa, or the production of critical articles and essays can be seen as an extension of the well-practised resistance of a formerly enslaved people. The Vichy regime just about tolerated the dissident voices of the intellectual schoolteachers René Ménénil and the Césaires since, as a character in Daniel Maximin’s novel *L’Isolé soleil* (1981) says of the authorities, ‘[s]i on les touche, leurs élèves exploseront. Autant pour l’occupant tolérer qu’ils fabriquent des bacheliers surréalistes garantis, en attendant que ce dangereux bouillon de culture foyalais puisse bientôt – dès la fin du blocus allié -, se disperser dans les lointaines Sorbonne de la mère-patrie.’<sup>49</sup> It is paradoxical that here migration was seen not as a privilege but as a punishment, a way of

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>48</sup> Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, p. 85.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Maximin, *L’Isolé soleil* ([1981] Paris: Editions du Seuil, Paris, 2001), p. 192.

restricting the impact of intelligent, outspoken young people to the intellectual hothouse of the *métropole*, where their radical theories would be more tolerable and presumably, more easily controlled.

Four to five thousand Martiniquan and Guadeloupean dissidents aged between 16 and 22 became migrants between 1940 and 1943, joining General de Gaulle's Free French Forces, sailing under dangerous conditions to neighbouring islands such as Dominica and St Lucia and training in North America or in Great Britain.<sup>50</sup> This experience of migration involved travelling to the United States or the United Kingdom, rather than the *métropole*, but nevertheless, it highlights the ambiguity surrounding assimilation and loyalty, in the French West Indian context. In *La Vie scélérate* (1987) Maryse Condé briefly depicts two young members of a successful black Guadeloupean family, Serge and René Louis, who face the two options available to young men at the time. Serge chooses to become a pacifist and ignore what he sees as the white man's war, which suggests less love of peace or assent to pro-Vichy rhetoric than nascent anti-Europeanism and anti-assimilationism. René, disgusted by the metropolitan 'esprit de capitulation' is seduced by a group called Pro Patria and runs away to Dominica from where he hopes to reach England and to join de Gaulle.<sup>51</sup> In Gisèle Pineau's *La Grande drive des esprits* (1993), also set in Guadeloupe, the young men who try to join the Free French movement do so from a desire to prove their masculinity, and gain respect, dignity and glory, in a society where the possibilities of achieving these are few. Their belief in the cause feels secondary, and even the pity evoked by the defeat of the *mère-patrie*, while occasioning expressions of loyalty, suggests something less than unadulterated admiration for the seat of colonial power: 'La Mère-Patrie appelait tous ses enfants. Pauvre mère meurtrie, toujours si bonne pour la colonie.'<sup>52</sup>

The deep ambiguities created by the Vichy regime were not lost on the new regime that took power after the war. Far from seeking to assimilate the experiences of French West

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<sup>50</sup> Eric T. Jennings, 'La dissidence aux Antilles (1940-1943)', *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 68 (October-December 2000), p. 60.

<sup>51</sup> Maryse Condé, *La Vie scélérate* (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1987), p. 119.

<sup>52</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *La Grande Drive des esprits* ([1993] Paris: Le Serpent à Plumes, 1999), p. 134.

Indian dissidents into the broader narrative of the French Resistance, the Republic did not appear entirely convinced of their loyalty. They did not fit the profile of the Resistance that the authorities wished to promote, and any similarities between West Indian dissidents and members of the metropolitan French Resistance were not to be emphasised.<sup>53</sup> Yet, as Richard D. E. Burton remarks, any secessionist feeling in the French West Indies at the end of World War II would have been slight since

il ne s'est agi à la Martinique d'un quelconque 'nationalisme' ou 'indépendantisme' visant à trancher les liens qui liaient la colonie à sa Métropole. Séparée de la Mère-Patrie, la Martinique ne souhaitait que se raccrocher à elle: sous-alimentée et exsangue, elle réclamait la mamelle nourricière de Marianne et, au nom de l'assimilation intégrale, cherchait à se perdre pour mieux renaître dans le sein de la République.<sup>54</sup>

Many former dissenters were among the political leaders who demanded departmentalisation and promoted it as the fruit of the dissidence movement of 1942-1943.<sup>55</sup> The increasing strength of the Communist Party in Martinique just before and just after the war was a force for more assimilation, not less, encouraged by the successes of the Communist Party in the *métropole* from 1943-1946.<sup>56</sup> A black Communist in *L'Isolé soleil* suggests that '[I]l'assimilation sera le plus court chemin vers la révolution. Les paysans nègres deviendront prolétaires universels. Les petits-bourgeois voteront communiste. La race s'effacera devant la classe. Ce sera la fin des régimes d'exception.'<sup>57</sup> Departmentalisation, demanded by West Indian representatives in the National Assembly and passed into law in March of 1946 was desirable because it would bring the French West Indies into the same legal framework as the *métropole*, break the economic power of the *békés*, and lead to government aid that would raise local living standards to match those in Europe.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Eric T. Jennings, 'La dissidence aux Antilles', pp. 70-71.

<sup>54</sup> Richard D. E. Burton, *La famille coloniale*, p. 156.

<sup>55</sup> Eric T. Jennings, 'La dissidence aux Antilles', p. 71.

<sup>56</sup> The involvement of Aimé Césaire, who became the Communist mayor of Fort-de-France and the deputy to the French National Assembly for Martinique in 1945, will be explored in Chapter II.1.

<sup>57</sup> Daniel Maximin, *L'Isolé soleil*, p. 241.

<sup>58</sup> David Beriss, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

Yet, a white French schoolteacher at the beginning of *Quand la neige aura fondu* bemoans the ignorance of the Ministry of the Colonies in relation to Martinique at the end of World War II, when one might suppose that the movement towards departmentalisation would have generated a greater awareness among the French political (and intellectual) classes of the French West Indies.<sup>59</sup> In fact, the brevity and equanimity with which the dawning of departmentalisation was greeted by the Parisian press implied a certain curious indifference towards the West Indies.<sup>60</sup> The truth was that these territories, although they represented the potentially strategic French presence in the Americas, were at the bottom of the French empire, were taken for granted by the *métropole*, and were merely ‘picturesque survivals of French world power, isolated geographically from Europe and culturally from the Western Hemisphere.’<sup>61</sup> Another commentator is even more brutally dismissive: ‘Once the richest overseas possessions in the world, the islands plummeted to the position of economic liabilities within the memory of a living man. Their retention in the French Empire was the result of a curious combination of sentimentalism and a proclivity for map colouring.’<sup>62</sup>

The trajectory of colonisation in Martinique and Guadeloupe between 1635 and 1946 yielded a tight but profoundly complex bond between France in its European incarnation and France as perceived in its West Indian form which, as we have seen, was considered to be both France and *not* France throughout this time. It is this conflict between difference and sameness, belonging and unbelonging, which informs the post-departmentalisation experience of migration, and the literature that accompanies it.

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<sup>59</sup> Joseph Zobel, *Quand la neige aura fondu*, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> Marc Tardieu, *Les Antillais à Paris: D’hier à aujourd’hui*, (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 2005), pp. 99-101.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Blanshard, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

<sup>62</sup> Melvin H. Jackson, ‘The Economy of the French Caribbean’ in *The Caribbean: British, Dutch, French, United States*, ed. by A. Curtis Wilgus ([1958] Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1963), pp. 106-107.

## Chapter I.2      The *BUMIDOM* Era

The aftermath of departmentalisation was disillusionment. Alongside positive outcomes such as an increase in life expectancy and a decrease in infant mortality rates, resulting from metropolitan investment in healthcare, the realities of under-development and marginalisation intensified.<sup>1</sup> Economically, and therefore sociologically, the islands were unable to arrest decline. Describing the situation barely fifteen years later, Claude Valentin-Marie says, ‘L’économie de plantation se meurt.’<sup>2</sup> According to V. S. Naipaul, Martinique was producing only sugar, rum and bananas, and was not permitted to use her own coconuts to produce coconut oil. Moreover, centralisation meant that Martiniquan rum first had to be shipped to Paris before it could be re-exported to North or South America, thereby reducing its profitability.<sup>3</sup> Attempts to create diversification in the economy proved inadequate, which was a catastrophe considering that the population on both islands shot up; Martinique and Guadeloupe grew by a third, so that between 1954 and 1967 the population of the former jumped from 239,100 to 320,000 and of the latter, from 239,000 to 312,700.<sup>4</sup> Alongside unemployment and underemployment, however, was the ongoing expansion of the public sector, which provided high salaries, stability and pensions, far outstripping what the private sector could offer. The apparent wealth of the French islands has generally been attributed to the high living standards experienced by those employed in this sector.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, to the dismay of many black West Indians in the post-war period, finance and big business largely remained either under the control of metropolitan interests, or in the hands of a small but powerful remnant of the *grands békés*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joyce Edmond-Smith, ‘West Indian Workers in France I’, p. 445.

<sup>2</sup> Claude Valentin-Marie, ‘Les Antillais en France’, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Colonial Societies* ([1962] London: Picador, 2001), p. 207.

<sup>4</sup> François Doumenge and Yves Monnier, *Les Antilles françaises* ([1989] Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> Joyce Edmond-Smith, ‘West Indian Workers in France I’, p. 446.

<sup>6</sup> Claude Valentin-Marie, ‘Les Antillais en France’, p. 26, and Joyce Edmond-Smith, ‘West Indian Workers in France I’, p. 445.

By the 1960s these factors had led to recurrent civil disturbance and strikes in both Guadeloupe and Martinique, and it was in this context that the *Bureau pour le Développement des Migrations Intéressant les Départements d’Outre-Mer*<sup>7</sup> or *BUMIDOM*, was created in October 1961 as a government quango under the responsibility of the Minister of Overseas Departments and the Minister of Finance. *BUMIDOM* sought to manage migration from the French *départements* to the mainland until 1982, when it was replaced by the *The Agence Nationale pour l’Insertion et la Promotion des Travailleurs d’Outre-Mer (ANT)*. This organisation focused on the integration of West Indians into metropolitan life, rather than encouraging further migration.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst the above provides some explanation of the most obvious economic factors which might have propelled many French West Indians to seek a better life elsewhere it is the role of the French state in creating a pull towards the metropolitan mainland that is distinctive in the West Indian context. Metropolitan France sought to encourage and facilitate the migration of West Indians to the *métropole*.<sup>9</sup> For example, in an interview with Alain Anselin a migrant called Yvelise recalls how in 1966 she heard a radio announcement in which *BUMIDOM* called for hospital workers with or without qualifications. Her father had already paid for his other daughter to leave for France, and he arranged for Yvelise to take up the *BUMIDOM* offer.<sup>10</sup> The *métropole* faced two major challenges, one of a rising need for manpower in the post-war period, particularly

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<sup>7</sup> In some texts it is referred to as the *Bureau pour les migrations intéressant les Départements d’outre-mer*, e.g. Claude Valentin-Marie, ‘Les Antillais en France’, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> Unlike *BUMIDOM* this organisation has no symbolic presence in the literature of migration.

<sup>9</sup> The British economy suffered from a shortage of labour in some sectors during the postwar era, and the British government did sometimes actively recruit workers from the Commonwealth. However, according to Gary P. Freeman, in Britain ‘the prevailing view has been that the country is overcrowded, chronically threatened by unemployment, and embarked on a long-term decline in its economic fortunes’ whilst ‘[i]n the early years of the [French] Fourth Republic there was significant support for an activist policy of permanent immigration.’ The French authorities also feared demographic decline. See Gary P. Freeman, ‘Caribbean Migration to Britain and France: From Assimilation to Selection’, in *The Caribbean Exodus*, ed. by Barry B. Levine (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), pp. 188-189.

<sup>10</sup> Alain Anselin, *L’Emigration antillaise en France: La troisième île* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1990), p. 45.

in the public sector, and one of repopulation. 'La guerre laisse la France exsangue. L'économie est à reconstruire alors que la diminution de la population française est d'environ 1 million de personnes. L'immigration est donc une nécessité évidente sur laquelle tout le monde s'accorde.'<sup>11</sup> With the increase in immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe it was only between 1956 and 1965 that the levels of immigration began to increase to levels considered satisfactory by the French government. The Algerian war slowed down migration from Algeria, whilst the end of the war in 1962 led to an enormous influx of military personnel and repatriated French citizens making the period of 1946-65 one of flux.<sup>12</sup> Working class migration from the West Indies was only one element in the great demographic change in French society from the 1950s onwards.

Speaking of the French West Indies, Stephanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden remark that '[m]igration was, from the outset, intended to be permanent: family migration or reunification was assisted and the resulting migrant population in France was much more balanced in terms of sex structure, for example, than other contemporaneous movements.'<sup>13</sup> The importance of women in the general movement of French West Indians to the *métropole*, in terms of the numbers they represented, their presence in the workforce, and as mothers, is remarked upon as distinctive in a number of sources, not least by Anselin, who remarks that, with *BUMIDOM* managing the movement of nearly 33,000 West Indians of which 55.6% were women: 'La féminisation spontanée du mouvement migratoire nourrit la réalisation de ces objectives démographiques assignée à l'émigration par le Plan dès l'origine. Mais c'est bien l'action du Bumidom qui s'avère déterminante, même si la totalité du mouvement ne peut lui être imputée.'<sup>14</sup>

This was also a youthful migration, with almost 60 % of West Indians in mainland France

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<sup>11</sup> Guy Le Moigne and André Lebon, *L'Immigration en France* ([1986] Paris, Presses Universitaire de France, 1999), p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Stéphanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden, 'Questions of Emigration, Circulation and Return: Mobility between the French Caribbean and France', *International Journal of Population Geography*, 2 (1996), p. 37.

<sup>14</sup> Alain Anselin, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

under the age of 24 in 1975.<sup>15</sup> Considerable numbers of children and teenagers travelled to the French mainland, often separately from parents, who had already settled there – a traumatic scenario much used in the literature of migration.<sup>16</sup> On considering the high level of fertility of this migrant group alongside the effects of the efficient birth control campaign in the islands throughout the *BUMIDOM* period it is not hard to agree with Anselin that in the politics of migration the intention was essentially to ‘déplacer tout simplement la natalité antillaise de la Caraïbe vers la France.’<sup>17</sup> Between the early 1960s and 1982 the French government sought to kill two birds with one stone, easing the demographic and social problems in the *DOM* and recruiting for unfilled posts in the growing French economy by promoting migration, ultimately facilitating the movement of 31,931 workers from the French islands to the mainland between 1964 and 1973.<sup>18</sup> *BUMIDOM* placed would-be migrants into one of several categories, and to those who satisfied its selection procedures it offered the funds, either fully or partially depending on which category they belonged to, for travelling to the *métropole*.<sup>19</sup> Between 1962 and 1975 over 2 million jobs were created in France, a period that coincided with the heaviest period of immigration in the history of post-war France.<sup>20</sup>

It should be apparent that the sociological profile of the average West Indian migrant to France was to change significantly from this time onwards. Alain Anselin has encapsulated the context in this way:

En vingt ans, de 1962 à 1982, la population antillaise en France a quintuplé. Les classes moyennes y ont progressé moins vite, [... et] leur poids dans la

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<sup>15</sup> Colin Brock, ‘The West Indian Dimension of Western Europe’, in *The Caribbean in Europe: Aspects of the West Indian Experience in Britain, France and the Netherlands*, ed. by Colin Brock (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1986), p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Children who travelled separately were known as ‘enfants paquets’.

<sup>17</sup> Alain Anselin, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

<sup>18</sup> Stéphanie Condon, ‘L’accès au logement: Filières et blocages. Le cas des Antillais en France et en Grande Bretagne’, *Groupe d’études de Démographie appliqué* (June 1993) Chapter 3 <http://www2.cdu.urbanisme.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/cdu/DATAS/DOCS/OUVR10/chap3.htm> [accessed 4 May, 2011] (‘Le contexte de la politique migratoire de la France’)

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 3 (‘Le contexte de la politique migratoire de la France’)

<sup>20</sup> Alain Anselin, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.



communauté diminuait presque de moitié. Employés (la plupart peu qualifiés), ouvriers et personnels de service voyaient leur nombre multiplié par 8, et leur importance passer des deux tiers des actifs de la communauté à plus des trois quarts.<sup>21</sup>

The large majority of migrants were no longer middle-class functionaries from the West Indian elite, but were essentially working class.

Although French West Indian literature does not ignore the economic reasons for migration from the region, it tends not to focus them. Usually more intimate reasons are prioritised in this fiction, especially in fiction by more prominent writers. The oppressive and suffocating nature of the West Indian family and of ‘small island’ life are placed in contrast with the hoped-for liberation offered by the metropolitan experience. Gisèle Pineau and Marie Abraham in their collection of essays, poems and interviews, *Femmes des Antilles*, have given a voice to Julétane, who left Martinique in 1964 thanks to *BUMIDOM*, and who was quite prepared to praise the organisation despite the criticism of others because ‘il faut savoir que le BUMIDOM a sauvé plus qu’une, qui auraient mal tourné si elles étaient restées au pays, assises dans la case de leur manman, à attendre quoi? de trouver un homme et tomber enceinte.’<sup>22</sup> In Laure Moutoussamy’s novel *Une Etoile en dérive* (2004) her working class heroine Nella goes to Paris ‘en terre inconnue mais qualifiée de “Mère Patrie” dont tous espéraient, qu’elle fournirait la “manne salvatrice”’ to satisfy her mother’s desire for progress rather than her own.<sup>23</sup> In another novel about a young woman who migrates alone, it is again an ambitious working mother who longs to see her daughter leave to find something new and ‘better’ in Paris. Why? ‘Connaître, t’amuser, vivre, voir, respirer, faire dièse quoi!’<sup>24</sup> In several novels young women leave the islands following the embarrassment of unmarried pregnancy. Romantic disappointments and unhappy relationships with the mother figure are, as this thesis will show, often indicated in the decision to depart, for example in novels such as Jean-Charles Pamphile’s *La Chaîne brisée* (2002) and in Michèle Lacrosil’s *Cajou*

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>22</sup> Gisèle Pineau and Marie Abraham, *Femmes des Antilles: Traces et voix. Cent cinquante ans après l’abolition de l’esclavage* (Paris: Editions Stock, 1998), p. 112.

<sup>23</sup> Laure Moutoussamy, *Une Etoile en dérive* (Guyane: Ibis Rouge Editions, 2004), p. 69.

<sup>24</sup> Michelle Gargar, *Le Clocher* (Petit-Bourg, Guadeloupe: Ibis Rouge Editions, 1999), p. 21.

(1961); in the latter novel, the Guadeloupean heroine flees from an abusive husband. These are novels about young women, who as we have seen were numerically prominent among the migrants; male protagonists are not normally shown to leave the West Indies over the same kinds of relationship problems, although family life is still envisioned as a factor. As we shall see, in Tony Delsham's novel *Xavier: Le drame d'un émigré antillais* (1981) abuse by a stepfather and the lack of employment opportunities both contribute to the main character, Xavier, deciding to leave Martinique. The importance of both factors is indicated in an interview given to Alain Anselin by a nineteen-year-old man who left Martinique in 1958: 'L'économie n'offrait pas de travail. La famille était trop fermée, trop répressive.'<sup>25</sup>

However, in the context of French West Indian literature *BUMIDOM* serves as a symbol whose appearance in a text tends to augur a range of negative attitudes, conditions and historical circumstances. *BUMIDOM* eventually acquired a bad reputation among potential migrants. In Tony Delsham's *Xavier: Le drame d'un émigré Antillais* (1981) the young protagonist who will eventually decide to leave Martinique, remarks: 'Mais on dit que le bumidom c'est pas bon, que tous ceux qui partent avec finissent mal.'<sup>26</sup> This could be because *BUMIDOM* was unable to meet the huge demands and expectations placed upon it, particularly with regard to providing adequate housing, and because it was no doubt an easy target when reality led to disappointment about career prospects, lifestyle and social integration, and it was often criticised for promising what it could not deliver.<sup>27</sup> *BUMIDOM* sought to disperse the migrants around the provinces, but living and working in Paris was what had attracted many of them to leave the islands in the first place: 'Paris était la ville où tout était possible, la ville qui symbolisait la réussite sociale.'<sup>28</sup> Joyce Edmond-Smith writing in 1972-3 suggests that 80% of people from the

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<sup>25</sup> Alain Anselin, *op.cit.*, p. 16 .

<sup>26</sup> Tony Delsham, *Xavier, Le drame d'un émigré Antillais* (Schœlcher: Martinique Editions, 1981), p 89.

<sup>27</sup> Joyce Edmond-Smith, 'West Indian Workers in France I', p. 449.

<sup>28</sup> Stéphanie Condon, 'L'accès au logement: Filières et blocages', Chapter 6, [www.urbanisme.equipement.gouv.fr/cdu/datas/docs/ouvr10.htm/chap6.htm](http://www.urbanisme.equipement.gouv.fr/cdu/datas/docs/ouvr10.htm/chap6.htm) ('Rôle de l'Etat dans l'accueil et le logement des migrants antillais')

*DOM* were in the greater Paris area.<sup>29</sup> The housing crisis was more acute in Paris than elsewhere, and *BUMIDOM* was in a position to offer accommodation to very few of the West Indian migrants who sought its help. Lodgings were often in poor condition, and overpopulation was commonplace. Stéphanie Condon points out that in the 1950s and 1960s ‘Le monde des Antillais arrivé en métropole à cette époque était celui des meublés, soit en hôtel, soit en chambre isolée. [...] En ce qui concerne les Antillais, on parle de changements fréquents de chambre, d’absence de tout confort, d’interdiction de faire sa cuisine, d’impossibilité de recevoir des amis. Les nouveaux venus ont vécu un choc.’<sup>30</sup> In *Une Etoile en dérive* (2004) the protagonist, Nella, falls victim to the stresses and consequences of this overcrowding when she is sent to live in a small flat with a relative in Paris. The joyful welcome fades, and gradually, Nella begins to be treated like a maid. When she is thrown out after an argument two years after arriving she has nowhere to go for assistance but to the flat of a male acquaintance, who rapes her. It is only due to a white colleague at her workplace that she finally finds somewhere else to live – which is a reminder of the importance of having connections in a marketplace where there is high demand and short supply.

State-owned housing for West Indian migrants was often unavailable, but in addition, many West Indian households would have been ineligible for council housing because they did not earn enough; in 1969 the minimum monthly salary required was between 1000F and 1250F. Only 17% of West Indians fell into this category. Furthermore, despite the fact that the settlement of families was one of the goals of the French government, there were simply too few properties for large families.<sup>31</sup> The wait for a suitable property could be long and uncertain, and there was little element of choice. The properties offered were in various locations, often on distant housing estates far from workplaces, meaning that the West Indian ‘community’ became more dispersed over

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<sup>29</sup> Joyce Edmond-Smith, ‘West Indian Workers II’, *New Community*, 2: 1 (1972-3), p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> Stéphanie Condon, ‘L’accès au logement: Filières et blocages’, Chapter 6  
<http://www2.cdu.urbanisme.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/cdu/DATAS/DOCS/OUVR10/chap6.htm>  
(‘L’arrivée en métropole dans les années cinquante et soixante’)

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 6, (‘L’accès au logement social: le rôle de l’Etat et des employeurs’; ‘Rôle de l’Etat dans l’accueil et le logement des migrants antillais’)

time, with fewer living in central Paris. Nella uses distance from her workplace as a convenient excuse for her family as to why she has left her cousin's flat.

The difficulty of finding appropriate housing for families partly explains why West Indian fiction focuses overwhelmingly on the problematic experience of living in Paris. In *L'Autre bord* (1998) by the Martiniquan Simonne Henry-Valmore a character comments that '[à] Paris et périphérie, on vit comme des rats dans des placards. Petit pays, je t'aime beaucoup, tes cases sont immenses et au restaurant, on ne mange pas dans l'assiette du voisin.'<sup>32</sup> The trajectory of Mme Esmondas, a single Guadeloupean woman in Maryse Condé's *Desirada* (1997) is from a tiny unheated maid's room in Paris in the 1960s to a council flat in the *banlieues*. Then, migrants were vulnerable to the whims and prejudices of landlords in the private sector, an experience implied rather than explained in most French West Indian fiction. Until the law of July 1972 discrimination against black tenants was legal, although covert racism survived this law.<sup>33</sup> From temporary housing in central Paris West Indians eventually moved to the north-east quarter of the city; in the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> *arrondissements* and in the neighbouring suburban departments of Seine-Saint-Denis and Val-de-Marne.

In Françoise Ega's novel *Lettres à une noire* (1978) the narrator, a woman employed as a maid in Marseille, imagines *BUMIDOM* (disguised here as 'Zubidom') positively, hoping it will be able to assist the considerable numbers of West Indian maids, many of whom were being exploited as domestic workers in the *métropole*, having left home independently of government assistance.<sup>34</sup> Whilst the autobiographical *Lettres à une noire* is written in epistolary form, depicting events supposedly as they happen, at quite an early stage in *BUMIDOM*'s existence, other texts, as fictional memoirs and family histories, self consciously present *BUMIDOM* with the benefit of hindsight, in the knowledge that several years on West Indian commentators and migrants have severely criticised the organisation on several levels.

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<sup>32</sup> Simonne Henry-Valmore, *L'Autre bord* (Châteauneuf-le-Rouge: Editions Vents d'ailleurs, 1998), p. 17.

'Petit pays/ je t'aime beaucoup' is a quotation from Cesária Evora's song *Petit pays*.

<sup>33</sup> Joyce Edmond-Smith, 'West Indian Workers II', p. 76.

<sup>34</sup> Françoise Ega, *Lettres à une noire* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1978), p. 135.

The *BUMIDOM* era seems to have provided a particular niche for West Indian women as domestic workers. In 1970 *BUMIDOM* offered the following placements at two of its training centres: ‘domestic service – 200; hospital auxiliaries – 104; service industries – 66; office workers – 9; industrial workers to be trained on the job – 81.’<sup>35</sup> There are a very small number of memoirs by migrant West Indian domestic workers. One example is by Thérèse Bernis, *Parise: Souvenirs encombrants de la Guadeloupe* (1997). In this text, Parise/Thérèse becomes a cleaner for an African family in Paris. In Alain Anselin’s book about West Indian migrants Jo, a black taxi driver, confirms that the cachet of employing West Indian domestics remained undiminished until long after that era.<sup>36</sup> Otherwise, there seems to be little research into the reasons for this apparently huge metropolitan demand for French West Indian maids and cleaners.<sup>37</sup> Within French West Indian women’s literature that catalogues working class life the experience of the domestic worker does appear occasionally, if only marginally. *Lettres à une noire* is surely the best known example to place the experiences of these women at its core.

Figures from the census of 1989 show that in comparison with immigrant groups such as the Sub-Saharan and North Africans, only a small percentage of West Indians were employed in hard, physical labour. So, while the unfilled, poorly paid jobs in many European countries were generally in the private sector, migrants to the *métropole* from the *DOM* tended to fill the equivalent jobs in the public sector.<sup>38</sup> They were directed towards these jobs because they were French nationals.<sup>39</sup> Nella’s cousin in Laure Moutoussamy’s *Une Etoile en dérive* works her way up from the post of nursing auxiliary to nurse. West Indians also became closely identified with the metropolitan police force, which according to the literature of migration made them somewhat suspect in the eyes of other West Indians. In *Le Gang des Antillais* (1985) Loïc Léry’s autobiographical novel

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<sup>35</sup> J. P. Merimée, *Les Travailleurs Antillais en France – Aspects économiques*, (thesis for the Diplôme d’Etudes supérieures de Science Economique, Paris, 1971), p. 96, cit. Joyce Edmond-Smith, ‘West Indian Workers II’, p. 78.

<sup>36</sup> Alain Anselin, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>37</sup> West Indian migrants from the British colonies in the Windrush era do not seem to have been required for domestic work.

<sup>38</sup> Laure Moutoussamy, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

about an attempted post office robbery, the previous, law-abiding career of Martiniquan-born Jimmy as a hospital worker is dismissed in a couple of sentences; the dramatic force of the novel is the robbery itself and in the trauma of Jimmy's incarceration. Jimmy is naturally unimpressed to be interrogated by a white police superintendent, flanked by three 'moutons antillais'.<sup>40</sup> With the passage of time and the increase in migration throughout the 1960s and 1970s more and more French West Indians were to be found in manufacturing industry.<sup>41</sup> These positions are less frequently explored in fiction.

*Lettres à une noire* additionally serves to unite pre-*BUMIDOM* and *BUMIDOM* working class migration, reminding us that despite the literary, critical and militant focus on the role of this organisation, working-class migration could and did take place outside state control as well as within it. In fact, despite its significance in French West Indian cultural memory, over half of all migrants during the *BUMIDOM* era did not make use of its services to reach the *métropole*.<sup>42</sup> Simone and André Schwartz-Bart's novel *Un Plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (1967) features the reminiscences of an elderly working class black woman in Paris in the early 1950s, focusing on the reality of the migration of less well-educated groups prior to *BUMIDOM*. A number of other texts similarly depict the context of migration in this slightly earlier era. Because of their shared sociological perspective they too could reasonably be classed as '*BUMIDOM* writing'.

The *BUMIDOM* era potentially offers much literary inspiration, then, because it represents a time of great change and tension, along with the attendant psychological traumas. These occur not so much because of racism, poor housing and low status employment in and of themselves, but because West Indians, as French citizens, had high expectations of their reception as French citizens, and of a smooth insertion into metropolitan society. It is axiomatic that the West Indian claim to Frenchness seems less

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<sup>40</sup> Loïc Léry, *Le Gang des Antillais* (Paris: Editions Désormeaux, 1985), p. 104.

<sup>41</sup> Colin Brock, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> According to 'Problemes d'adaptation des migrants originaires des DOM en France métropolitain', a study carried out on behalf of *BUMIDOM* in 1967, the majority of migrants had not, in fact, been assisted to move to the *métropole*, or upon their arrival. See Joyce Edmond-Smith, 'West Indian workers in France I', p. 449.

certain on metropolitan soil, and this became a more widespread phenomenon once mass migration became normal. However, West Indians cannot simply be categorised in the same way as other immigrants. Colin Brock strikingly describes them as ‘North-West Europeans, as opposed to the predominantly Mediterranean origin immigrants. Yet their distinctiveness of colour and race tends to make them a particular focus of prejudice and discrimination on the part of the white majority.’<sup>43</sup> The psychological cleavages are further illuminated in the light of French West Indian expectations. At this time West Indians were paying more than metropolitan Frenchmen for housing, and were spending more on day to day living than other immigrant groups. Algerian and Portuguese workers were willing to live in shanty towns and remit up to 40 % of their salary to their families back home. The difference is that West Indians had expected to live as ‘respectably’ as metropolitan Frenchmen and women.<sup>44</sup> In Daniel Radford’s autobiographical novel about a childhood in Paris, *Le Maître-Pièce* (1993), the protagonist refers to his Guadeloupean parents who, in the 1960s or 70s, having won six times their income on the lottery, spend the money on an expensive television, one of the earliest models. This unnecessary purchase occurs in the face of a pressing need for more practical items, such as food and the children’s shoes, which the family purchases from the cheapest sources. For the narrator’s parents: ‘chaque signe extérieur de richesse nous rapprocheait du Blanc, nous faisait plus blancs encore.’<sup>45</sup> West Indians had to do whatever they could to create an aura of success, especially in the face of a society that did not particularly want to accept them as French. Joyce Edmond-Smith notes that ‘the attitudes which he encounters in France often force the DOM immigrant into a position of confusion and ambiguity. Realising that he is not accepted he finds it hard to come to terms with French society which on the one hand insists on his ‘Frenchness’ and, on the other, rejects him because of his colour.’<sup>46</sup>

This confusion and ambiguity worked against *communautariste* strength. West Indians

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<sup>43</sup> Colin Brock, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Joyce Edmond-Smith, ‘West Indian Workers in France II’, p. 75.

<sup>45</sup> Daniel Radford, *Le Maître-Pièce* (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 1993), p. 97.

<sup>46</sup> Joyce Edmond-Smith, ‘West Indian Workers in France III’, *New Community*, 2: 3 (1973), p. 312.

kept their distance from other immigrants ('C'est le prix à payer pour s'intégrer'<sup>47</sup>) yet did not come together as West Indians either, for the same reason. François Raveau denied the existence of a West Indian ghetto in Paris.<sup>48</sup> West Indians have never been a majority ethnic group, or close to being so, in any given area. The concept of a West Indian 'ghetto' does not appear in the French West Indian literature of migration.<sup>49</sup> Rather, working class West Indians during the *BUMIDOM* era are routinely depicted as culturally, socially and racially isolated from one another, in contrast to the student novels in which the young people concerned mix with other West Indians and people of other ethnic backgrounds. In *Le Maître-Pièce*, we learn that in the 1960s, with regard to fellow West Indians of colour, the young Daniel's parents 'avaient mis des années à nous apprendre à nous éviter, à ne pas nous saluer, à nous fuir, à opérer à notre rencontre une ségrégation'.<sup>50</sup> Research suggests that West Indian tenants in Paris were perceived as troublesome, noisy, and had too many out-of-control children. As a result of such prejudices some sought to minimise social contact with other West Indians, a response which could only exacerbate their isolation.<sup>51</sup>

Political involvement among West Indians in the *métropole* has in the past been seen as the preserve of the elite, in other words students and the liberal middle classes – the working class West Indian migrant is not generally seen as a political animal. This attitude is often reflected in French West Indian literature, which focuses on the left-wing activism of students but generally bypasses the political involvement of other West

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<sup>47</sup> Alain Anselin, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>48</sup> François Raveau, 'Martiniquais and Guadeloupéens in France: patterns of adaptation of the first and second generations', Paper presented to the International Conference: Legacies of West Indian Slavery, University of Hull (26-30 July 1983), cit. Colin Brock, *op. cit.*, p.7.

<sup>49</sup> Bodies such as the *PTT* provided housing in tower blocks for their employees, many of whom were *Domiens*. Condon says that following the deterioration of these properties they were sometimes referred to as 'ghettos'. Stéphanie Condon, 'L'accès au logement: Filières et blocages', Chapter 7 <http://www2.cdu.urbanisme.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/cdu/DATAS/DOCS/OUVR10/chap7.htm> ('L'identification d'un problème : le regroupement résidentiel des Antillais. La France')

<sup>50</sup> Daniel Radford, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>51</sup> Stéphanie Condon, 'L'accès au logement: Filières et blocages', Chapter 7 ('La France : le mouvement anti-ghetto, la recherche de la mixité et de nouveaux blocages dans l'accès au logement')



Indians. In both Maryse Condé's *La Vie scélérate* and in Tony Delsham's *Xavier: Le drame d'un émigré antillais*, two novels that mention the riots of 1968, the main West Indian characters caught up in the action are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time; neither actually wants to protest, and certainly not about metropolitan matters. It is not surprising to discover that the immigration agenda of different groups of West Indians was not monolithic during the *BUMIDOM* era. West Indian students and intellectuals in the *métropole* at this time focused on influencing the political direction of the West Indian islands and their future relationship with France. A variety of political groupings and organisations, often growing out of the political divisions in Martinique and Guadeloupe, developed with the aim of promoting various forms of political autonomy or outright independence for the overseas departments. This was not relevant to working class 'economic' migrants. David, a Martiniquan joiner interviewed by Anselin was fascinated by the West Indian militants and intellectuals he befriended in France at the beginning of the 1960s, but realised that their concerns were different from those of his working class West Indian colleagues: 'en ce temps-là, les ouvriers antillais ne suivaient pas les discours des intellectuels, les mots employés par les étudiants étaient trop loin des champs de canne et des chaînes de chez Renault.'<sup>52</sup> However, in *Le Clan des mutilés* the Martiniquan protagonist, Sidiki, who works for Renault in the 1970s, is a union representative. 'Leader syndicaliste à la Régie, il était la voix, le porte parole, la conscience, l'âme de ce monde ouvrier qui avait vu la forge, la soudure, ce travail de brute qui était la plaie du prolétariat d'autrefois.'<sup>53</sup> He is fiercely committed to his colleagues, a multi-ethnic group of men, and his experience is a sign that in the later stages of the *BUMIDOM* era the 'rapport des Antillais avec la France a consisté en une forte mobilisation syndicale.'<sup>54</sup>

Paradoxically, whilst 'immigrant spokesmen' in Britain were seeking to condemn official efforts to limit immigration and encourage repatriation, their equivalents on the other side of the Channel sought to castigate the French government for *promoting* migration from

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<sup>52</sup> Alain Anselin, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>53</sup> Louison Cazal, *Le Clan des mutilés* (Schœlcher: Editions Carrère, 1988), p. 38.

<sup>54</sup> Michel Giraud, 'Racisme colonial, réaction identitaire et égalité citoyenne: les leçons des expériences migratoires antillaises et guyanaïses', *Hommes et migrations*, 1237 (May-June 2002), p. 50.

the West Indies, for exploiting West Indian workers through *BUMIDOM* and so seeking to dampen the ‘possibility of a social revolution’ in the islands.<sup>55</sup> It is out of this ideological rejection of *BUMIDOM* that the well-known accusations of reverse slavery emerge. For example, Simonne Henry-Valmore’s *L’Autre bord* (1998) highlights *BUMIDOM* in the context of a metropolitan French society which in 1975 is in economic crisis and has turned against im/migrants. Meanwhile, back in the West Indies, political troublemakers are threatened with expulsion to that very society. The student protagonist cries: ‘Les mêmes mots pour dire les mêmes choses. Déportation. Traite silencieuse. Expatriation. Tenez-vous bien dans votre île, sinon, dehors! Le Bureau d’émigration vous a à l’œil.’<sup>56</sup> Here, *BUMIDOM* indicates the precarious existence of the West Indian both in the *métropole*, where he or she may be seen as an unwelcome immigrant like any other, and in the *DOM*, where to engage in troublesome behaviour is to invite deportation. Envisioning migration to the *métropole* via *BUMIDOM* as a new slave trade is most famously sustained in Daniel Boukman’s play *Les Négriers* (1978). Here, French authorities are seen to be regulating the movement of bodies to and from the *métropole* according to the purely capitalist requirements of supply and demand. Voices such as Boukman’s were more concerned to see migrants returned to the potentially autonomous/independent islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, than to assist with their integration into mainstream French society.

A wide range of research has now developed with regard to the issue of migration from Guadeloupe and Martinique into mainland France in this period. However, the number of studies undertaken in this area is dwarfed by the vast amount of material that has been produced on the migration and settlement of West Indians from the then colonies to Great Britain.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, novelists have devoted a fairly limited amount of attention to this period and its category of working class migrants; the discourse of *BUMIDOM* as a twentieth century slave trade is perhaps no coincidence here. Yet the brief textual references speak volumes. There arises, as we shall see, the suspicion that in literary

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<sup>55</sup> Joyce Edmond-Smith, ‘West Indian Workers in France III’, pp. 309-310.

<sup>56</sup> Simonne Henry-Valmore, *L’Autre bord*, p. 45.

<sup>57</sup> Christine Chivallon, ‘De quelques préconstruits de la notion de diaspora à partir de l’exemple antillais’, p. 150.

terms *BUMIDOM* belongs to a place and a set of circumstances that are not at the top of these writers' list of priorities. We can already see that emigration during this era had an ambiguous quality, in which a variety of motives were at play, politically, economically, culturally and psychologically, and that these have been depicted unevenly in fiction. This ambiguity is explored throughout this thesis, and in the next chapter I consider one reality that has heavily influenced the lives of many writers from the region, and consequently their fictional representations of *BUMIDOM* and of migration in general: circulatory migration.

### Chapter I.3            Circulation, Assimilation and Alienation

Circulatory migration appears frequently in French West Indian literature. It has a more obvious presence than *BUMIDOM*, because the experience of circulatory migration affects all classes and groups of West Indians in the *métropole*. The fictional worlds of writers such as Maryse Condé, Gisèle Pineau and Aimé Césaire, to be discussed in later chapters, are peopled with characters that are constantly on the move. The West Indian condition is depicted by intellectuals, poets and novelists as a fractured reality that compels movement, and references an elsewhere as a place to be longed for, physically, culturally or emotionally, but not necessarily to be reached. Here, I will explore how a wide variety of experiences of circulation are reflected in the texts of various writers, and highlight any significant gaps in representation. Whilst permanent settlement in the *métropole* is largely depicted as difficult if often inevitable, with metropolitan France frequently depicted as a place from which one needs or ought to escape, return to the islands is also shown to be challenging on a number of levels: hence the assimilation and alienation of the title of this section.

‘On n’émigre plus, on circule.’<sup>1</sup> Alain Anselin coined this phrase that epitomizes the French West Indian condition. The ease of travel brought about in 1946 by departmentalisation, along with the encouragement of large scale migration from the islands to the *métropole* in the following decades, has meant that one West Indian out of every four born in the French West Indies has now established a home in the *métropole*.<sup>2</sup> This has led to an increasing number of people of West Indian origin born in mainland France. These people, along with their children and all other metropolitan Frenchmen and women, have the right to travel, live and work legally throughout the *métropole* and in the *DOM*. It is this simplicity and fluidity that has led to an interrogation of what ‘home’ really means, and established the relationship between the West Indies and ‘France’.

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<sup>1</sup> Alain Anselin, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

<sup>2</sup> Claude-Valentin Marie, ‘Les Antillais en France’, p. 27.

In the West Indian context, terms such as ‘circulation’ and ‘return’ must be applied loosely. Return implies a certain permanency while circulation implies movement, but these two concepts seem to have blended into one broad phenomenon that encapsulates a range of expectations and experiences. Sociologists and other commentators have sought to categorize different types of returnees. Claude-Valentin Marie focuses on four main types: young, qualified people; less qualified migrants who have experienced professional failure; young people who enjoy a stable life neither in the *métropole* nor in the *DOM* and are constantly buffeted between the two; and finally, retirees.<sup>3</sup> Stéphanie Condon and Philip Ogden separate the migratory movement into at least seven or eight categories. They leave to one side the privileged migrants, the ‘political, artistic and intellectual elites’ who move between the *métropole* and the islands, in order to highlight the other groups in more detail: the national service conscripts who were encouraged to work in mainland France after their period of service, the public sector workers who were able to obtain a transfer to return to the West Indies after a period living in the *métropole*, retirees, those people willing to leave stable jobs in the *métropole* in order to return home to the West Indies for family or other reasons, students, and finally children, some of whom are sent back during their childhood, some of whom return as adults. And there are, more broadly, those for whom circulation implies primarily the constant journeying back and forth to visit family and friends.<sup>4</sup>

Many novelists, themselves former students in the *métropole*, depict the newly returned student/intellectual returnee. This is so common that one might reasonably refer to the existence of the West Indian student novel as a distinct category within French West Indian literature. In the student novel, the young man (or occasionally, woman) arrives in the *métropole*, learns more about himself and his place in the world, maybe travels further afield, usually before preparing to return to the West Indies as a changed individual. Césaire’s poem *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, begun in 1939, is the archetypical example. Other novels that fit into this model include Bertène Juminer’s *Les Bâtards* (1961), Henry-Valmore’s *L’Autre bord* (1998) and *Pointe-à-Pitre – Paris* (2000) by the young author Frankito (whose choice of pen name remains unexplained,

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<sup>3</sup> Claude-Valentin Marie, ‘Le cinquième DOM: mythe et réalités’, *Pouvoirs*, 113 (2005), pp. 176-177.

<sup>4</sup> Stéphanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

to my knowledge). Juminer's text, conceived under the influence of negritude, tells the story of a group of Guyanese students, young middle class men of Afro-European origin, a pre-*BUMIDOM* elite, determined to amuse themselves in the French provinces, to play at politics and love until it is time to face the real world. What awaits those who return to their underdeveloped, backward colony is a lack of professional freedom, intellectual stimulation, dynamism or racial equality. According to Césaire, who wrote the preface, *Les Bâtards* was the first novel of its kind to pose this problem, to encapsulate the tragedy of young people trained and educated in the *mère-patrie* for the benefit of a liberal, advanced society, who then find themselves transferred to 'une société livrée à l'ivresse bureaucratique de quelques tyranneaux omnipotents, un pays où, sournois, le colonialisme comprime toute velléité d'indépendance individuelle, une terre où la règle est de conformisme et de silence.' The consequence of this situation is a 'circulation des élites', a constant buffeting back and forth of young people who cannot find their place.<sup>5</sup> In the novel, one student, Chambord, returns to serve in French Guiana but finds himself the innocent victim of administrative in-fighting, and cannot effect any real change in his country, or to see the possibility of any change under the prevailing system: 'le pays souffrait dans son âme et dans sa chair d'un abandon et d'une misère implacables; des intellectuels locaux, désireux d'y remédier, se heurtaient à l'hostilité de l'administration; ils n'avaient qu'une alternative: se soumettre en participant à l'asphyxie de leur peuple, ou bien se démettre en fuyant les leurs. Beaucoup optaient pour la fuite.'<sup>6</sup> Flight is the obvious option for returnees of all kinds who find that the lack of employment opportunities or an inability to adapt to a less flexible culture leave them unable to make a home in the place of their birth.

Another character, Cambier, remarks on the distinction between 'France' and the New World: 'Du temps de la traite des Noirs, le seul fait pour un esclave de toucher le sol de France le rendait libre, en faisant un homme libre. L'Histoire se prolongeait donc, à l'insu des hommes, avec une ironie complaisante en faveur de l'antithèse: le retour des Antillais dans leur pays d'origine les ramenait aux préjugés.'<sup>7</sup> This perspective

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<sup>5</sup> Aime Césaire, 'Préface', in Bertène Juminer, *Les Bâtards* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1961), pp. 7-8.

<sup>6</sup> Bertène Juminer, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

contradicts the understanding of the *métropole* as the site of oppression, racism and loss of self, instead reflecting those characteristics back onto the West Indies. In Zobel's *Quand la neige aura fondu*, and in comments made by some West Indian interviewees, 'going home' is complicated by the implied fear of returning to a more prejudiced society. These feelings hark back to a time when to be a black man or woman in Europe was to be privileged, afforded a moderate degree of protection, if only because it set the harshness of the plantation at a distance and sometimes offered opportunities for advancement.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst Chambord's attempt to offer himself to Guiana is initially unsuccessful, his skills as a doctor in the 1950s will enable him to find work anywhere in the Francophone world. But for the manual worker whose professional existence was made precarious during the *crise* of the 1970s, failure in the French West Indies was a much more serious prospect. It was as a result of the *crise* and changing demands for labour that migration from the *DOM* slowed down. Yet the West Indian region itself was also suffering from a lack of opportunities. There are few texts that really focus on the economic and cultural difficulties that working-class West Indian return migrants faced during that time. Louison Cazal's *Le Clan des mutilés* (1988) is therefore an important text, falling into the second of Marie's categories, and presenting an experience of profound and distressing failure in this milieu. We witness the downfall of Sidiki Cabrera, the migrant who finds himself redundant and unemployable during the French economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s. He sinks into alcoholism and decides to return to Martinique, leaving his family behind, but discovers only stagnation and despair in the village of his birth. He has no choice but to return to Paris. The novel depicts with passionate clarity the sense of betrayal, loneliness and anguish of a country in crisis and a migrant population left stranded on a sea of shattered dreams, caught between two equally hopeless worlds. It is openly an indictment of French economic policy in the *DOM* and the ineffectual political climate in the islands themselves. Alice's story is an example of this. A villager who joins the welcoming throng at Sidiki's return, she is a poor but charming woman in her thirties with ten children; her husband has left to find work (perhaps in the *métropole*) but

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<sup>8</sup> See Shelby T. McCloy, 'Negroes and Mulattoes in Eighteenth-Century France', *The Journal of Negro History*, 30: 3 (July 1945).

has not been heard from since. Echoing comments made in *Les Bâtards* over twenty-five years earlier she says: ‘Et l’on parle de démocratie, de régionalisation, d’autodétermination, mais aucun de ces politiciens véreux ne parlent de revendications. Il faut que les jeunes de chez nous accèdent aux postes les plus élevés à une époque où certains nous considèrent comme des incapables.’<sup>9</sup> This refers to one regularly criticised, long-term effect of departmentalisation: the rising number of metropolitan French employees, principally civil servants, arriving in the *DOM*. According to Marie, of the 48,000 jobs created in the *DOM* in the 1990s 22,000 went to the native inhabitants of these territories, and 23,800 to incomers from metropolitan Frenchmen and women, the remainder going to incomers from the other *DOM* and a small number of foreigners. Whilst the figure of 23,800 includes returnees, it seems that returnees too must compete with metropolitan workers.<sup>10</sup>

This sense of disappointment with the country Sidiki had assumed he belonged to is reflected in a conversation he has with another character, Vierga, a West Indian drinking partner, *gauchiste*, and poverty-stricken artist, who expresses the same sense of disillusionment: ‘Voilà comment l’exil se passe pour nous disait Vierga. On nous a menti. L’assimilation, le conditionnement s’apprend dès la petite école. Ils nous ont tous eu [sic].’<sup>11</sup> The sociologist Michel Giraud sees this sense of disappointment in the *métropole* as a considerable feature in the decline of migration from the islands, and consequently of attempts to leave. Metropolitan France becomes a detestable place when it fails to live up to its duty to make real the equality of citizenship as promised by departmentalisation. Although several novels highlight the sense of expectation brought about by migration, the very high rates and all-pervasive nature of migration, along with the return of *Domiens* seeking to withdraw from the struggle with discrimination and exclusion, have served to damage the myth of the *mère-patrie*.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Louison Cazal, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Claude-Valentin Marie, ‘Le cinquième DOM’, p. 178.

<sup>11</sup> Louison Cazal, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Giraud, ‘Revendication identitaire et “cadre national”’, *Pouvoirs*, 113 (2005), p. 101.



Sidiki returns to his parents' fishing village, Fond-Masque, where there is little work to be found. The novel culminates in a fateful fishing trip involving Sidiki, his father Mimile and an elderly, ailing fisherman, Ben. Fishing, chosen as a last resort by Sidiki, is depicted as cruel and unforgiving. The malign power of the sea symbolises the tragedy of the novel, and the inability of the *mutilés*, the disaffected and disregarded, to find their place: 'La mer est un drôle d'endroit Sidiki fit le vieux. Combien de fois j'ai traîné dans ce désert. C'est comme une prison. On sent peser sur soi la solitude et la peur de ne pas s'en sortir.'<sup>13</sup> The sea becomes Ben's tomb when the men lose their bearings in their small fishing boat, go adrift in the burning midday heat, and are caught up in a sudden cyclone which sends them drifting for several days. The cruelty of the sea, site of departure and return, is a trope found in other examples of West Indian literature. In *Le Maître-Pièce* (1993), the narrator informs us that '[d]ans l'imaginaire antillais, la mer n'a guère de place que par la peur instinctive qu'elle inspire, peur héritée de la déportation imposée par la traite, et dont il suffit de contempler le plan d'un bateau négrier pour se faire une idée.'<sup>14</sup> In these texts the sea cannot be depicted without also bringing to mind, openly or implicitly, the slave trade, and the claustrophobic imagery of the slave hold, whilst also prefiguring the endless and inevitable wandering of the diasporic Africans of the West Indies.<sup>15</sup>

The tragedy, which nearly kills Sidiki, leads him to the decision to return to his family and his suburban flat in Mitry near Paris: 'Pourquoi était-il revenu ici, ou rien n'était possible?'<sup>16</sup> This choice is inevitable. The villagers have all been witnesses to the phenomenon of circulation, and the end of success and advancement, the expected paybacks of emigration only a decade or so earlier. They agree that 'Fond-Masqué avait bien changé. Maintenant les gens venaient et partaient. On ne se reconnaissait plus, on ne savait plus qui était qui? Ils revenaient aussi pauvres qu'ils étaient parti [sic].'<sup>17</sup> This remark brings to mind comments made by elderly West Indian would-be returnees

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<sup>13</sup> Louison Cazal, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Radford, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Edouard Glissant's *Ormerod* (2003) reverses this trope. Reclaiming the West Indian space is one of the goals of his work. See Chapter II.2.

<sup>16</sup> Louison Cazal, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

interviewed by Condon and Ogden that community life in the West Indies was no longer how they remembered it. Often seeking a warmth and generosity that urban life in Paris and other metropolitan cities had made impossible, they returned to the West Indies to find an alienating rise in urbanisation and consumerism, while expecting their islands to have held onto a version of the community spirit that they remember in an idealised form from their childhood. West Indian returnees often expect time to stand still for them.<sup>18</sup>

One of the key texts of migration to compare and contrast conflicting experiences of French West Indian return migration is *L'Autre qui danse* (1989), which presents quite a different milieu to that of *Le Clan des mutilés*. This novel by Suzanne Dracius (formerly Dracius-Pinalie) contrasts two circulating migrants, the Martiniquan sisters Rehvana and Matildana. The former fails culturally and psychologically to integrate on either side of the Atlantic while the latter is a successful, qualified, well-adjusted returnee. These middle class women have been sent by their parents to complete their education in the *métropole*, in the conventional fashion. But Rehvana finds it impossible to reconcile her heritage as a West Indian woman of both European and African ancestry. She chooses to reject Europeanness in favour of an increasingly desperate and inevitably unsuccessful search for a kind of black 'authenticity'. She develops a deep alienation from the Parisian society in which she lives, and is driven to reject it, along with her studies, and the loving concern of her sister, to join an Afrocentric terrorist group of rebellious West Indian youths, 'Ebonis-Fils d'Aga', becoming involved in terrorism and agreeing to live with ritualistic violence and physical abuse. She leaves her compassionate but blandly assimilated *négropolitain* lover, Jérémie, despite falling pregnant by him, choosing instead to move back to Martinique to live in poverty with Eric, a man who abuses and otherwise ignores her. Finally, abandoned by Eric, she returns to Paris, where she gives up her struggle for an identity, and starves herself and her child to death.

The novel's relevance to the theme of circulation takes the concept beyond a mere physical displacement. It is the internal displacement above all that could conceivably lead a character like Rehvana to arrive in any part of the world that seems to offer, from a

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<sup>18</sup> Stéphanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

distance, the promise of this essentialising black ‘truth’ that she seeks. Although few failed circulatory migrants will desperately and self-destructively seek a black authenticity in the sense that Rehvana does, in its articulation of a search for a static identity in a world of instability, where roots morph into routes, and where home is either in several places at once, or nowhere, *L’Autre qui danse* is highly relevant. It pushes to the forefront the problems of a growing number of *Domiens* who have a stable home neither in the *DOM* nor in the *métropole*: ‘Plongées dans un long processus de marginalisation, ils côtoient en permanence les mondes de la délinquance (drogue, prostitution, vol). Leurs problèmes et les risques qu’ils encourent sont conjointement présents aux deux pôles de la chaîne migratoire: en *métropole* et aux Antilles.’<sup>19</sup> Whilst Rehvana is connected to this kind of deviancy by association rather than by conviction, through her relationship with the Fils d’Agar, and possibly through her shady and violent boyfriend Eric, there can be no argument as to her gradual, self-inflicted marginalisation.

Rehvana’s response to Martinique on her return recalls less a homecoming than a tourist’s first discovery of the exotic. ‘Tout un sabbat de croyances anciennes mal digérées et reconquises dans une ferveur volontaire a trouvé asile dans l’esprit délirant de la jeune Foyalaise de Paris’.<sup>20</sup> In her rejection of all signs of modernity, including basic labour saving devices, and in her desire to drag herself and her surroundings into the past, she is sowing the seeds, again, of her own alienation. She is merely exoticising what she claims, erroneously, to be her own culture; her search in the *métropole* and then in Martinique for identity and authenticity can be seen as a sham because it takes no account of ‘the ambivalence of the departmental experience [...] founded upon an expedient extension of the colonial encounter, a rehearsal of old hierarchies of dominance, exclusion and dependence’, and she forgets that ‘the assumptions that undergird such searches tend to be grounded in the fabric of metropolitan patterns of alienation.’<sup>21</sup> In other words, creoleness/*créolité*, the post-colonial condition and departmentalisation in

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<sup>19</sup> Claude-Valentin Marie, ‘Les Antillais en France’, p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie, *L’Autre qui danse* (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1989), p. 99.

<sup>21</sup> H. Adlai Murdoch, *Creole Identity in the French Caribbean Novel* (Gainesville, Tallahassee, Tampa, Boca Raton, Pensacola, Orlando, Miami, Jacksonville and Ft Myers: University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 161-162.

particular all challenge any notions of authenticity, a concept that is more a creation of metropolitan fantasy than anything genuinely reflective of reality.

Rehvana's response to her island home, whilst self-consciously perceived to be a sign of her own belonging, also recalls Daniel Radford's novel *Le Maître-Pièce*, in which the protagonist, his namesake, comments on the general tendency among French West Indians in the *métropole* and in the islands to exoticise their roots. He speaks of this habit as a sign not of rootedness but the opposite, as a kind of distancing from the West Indies, an attempt to portray their adherence to a 'white', metropolitan culture: 'Pour se blanchir, l'Antillais parle de son pays comme un touriste, et quand il réside en France, ne subsistent généralement que le boudin, les acras, le bonda-manjac [un piment rouge], le punch et quelque-phrases créoles'.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, in Pointe-à-Pitre, locals in dry regions wear t-shirts promoting 'Guadeloupe, île aux belles eaux.'<sup>23</sup> This is seen by as a sign of dispossession, an implication that the West Indian is merely a visitor among his own people and his own culture.

*L'Autre qui danse* ultimately highlights the danger of what Marie calls *l'intégrisme culturel*, against which he offsets the cultural impact of those famous circulatory migrants, the small number of West Indian students and intellectuals who spearheaded the negritude movement in Paris between the two wars. In his analysis these people were not only spectators but participants in the creation of culture, and he calls on West Indians on both sides of the Atlantic to bear in mind that 'l'identité n'est pas un état mais une construction et qu'elle n'a de chance de se préserver qu'à raison de sa perpétuelle récréation. [...] Être Antillais n'est pas une simple donnée de naissance ni d'origine, c'est un projet.'<sup>24</sup> In opposition to this kind of fluidity Rehvana is a victim of a 'binary colonialist essentialism of racial typing',<sup>25</sup> or an extreme embodiment of what some see as a problem that may afflict supposedly highly assimilated, 'Frenchified' West Indians

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<sup>22</sup> Daniel Radford, *op. cit.*, p. 135. This tendency has also been noted in sociological texts, e.g. in Richard Price and Sally Price, 'Shadowboxing in the Mangrove', *Cultural Anthropology*, 12: 1 (February 1997), pp. 13-14.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Radford, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>24</sup> Claude-Valentin Marie, 'Les Antillais en France', p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> H. Adlai Murdoch, *Creole Identity*, p. 189.

as well as those who seek an authentic black identity. Rehvana is someone who suffers from ‘le rêve de l’impossible retour à des sources qui n’existent plus’,<sup>26</sup> which is an unwillingness to admit that identities today are now social, transnational and socio-professional, and no longer simply or even primarily ancestral.

Matildana, however, is one of Condon and Ogden’s intellectual returnees, at ease in her skin, well-qualified, unproblematically living her duality in both the *métropole* and in Fort-de-France, teaching and writing about the Creole language and culture because ‘rien d’humain, quelle que soit sa couleur, fût-ce blanc, noir, jaune ou tricolore, rien d’humain lui est étranger.’<sup>27</sup> For the successful sister, assimilation, if it means anything at all, does not mean a loss of self, but an assertion of liberation from fixed perceptions of identity on both sides of the Atlantic. The novel’s title, focusing as it does on Matildana rather than on the novel’s principal character, Rehvana, draws us back to an optimism that Rehvana’s sorry story struggles against. Paradoxically H. Adlai Murdoch sees the uniting factor here as one of difference; whilst for Rehvana her difference from both European and West Indian France is ‘intrinsically negative and oppositional, and leads to the fragmentation of her identity’, her sister ‘inscribes herself as an icon of her own culture’s multiple possibilities.’<sup>28</sup> The title and the novel are sites where on the one hand the fruitful possibilities of *créolité* and cultural complexity are played out, and on the other, where the dangers of rejecting that complexity as ‘negative, oppositional, generating a condition of fragmentation which is re-presented through the tensions of a narrative of displacement’.<sup>29</sup>

In sociological terms, this novel would seem to reflect a point expressed by Marie, that as more West Indian migrants desire to return, it becomes more difficult to do this successfully.<sup>30</sup> The most highly qualified returnees are the most successful, which makes

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<sup>26</sup> Gaston Kelman, *Au-delà du Noir et du Blanc* ([2005] Paris: Max Milo Editions, 2007), p. 157.

<sup>27</sup> Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie, *op. cit.* p. 325.

<sup>28</sup> H. Adlai Murdoch, ‘Negotiating the Metropole: Patterns of Exile and Cultural Survival in Pineau and Dracius-Pinalie’, in *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*, ed. by Susan Ireland and Patrice J. Proulx (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. 134-135.

<sup>29</sup> H. Adlai Murdoch, *Creole Identity*, p. 171.

<sup>30</sup> Claude-Valentin Marie, ‘Le cinquième DOM’, p. 175.

it unsurprising that Matildana's experience is more positive than Rehvana's - although Dracius, in an interview that poetically affirms the liberating virtues of a creole sensibility that she depicts in Matildana, is silent on the financial and educational advantages from which this character benefits.<sup>31</sup> Nomadism of the kind celebrated in novels such as *L'Autre qui danse* is lived more easily by intellectual elites than by those who fail to acquire the necessary education or the psychological preparedness for an insecure post-colonial reality. The novel does not really seek to interrogate these wider economic and educational realities, although it is admirably frank in depicting an experience of irredeemably negative nomadism.

A striking example of circular migration among public service workers occurs in Michelle Gargar's *Le Clocher* (1999), a text that focuses on the desire to obtain a transfer to the West Indies after just a few years' 'service' in the *métropole*. Radical groups such as the *Association Générale des Etudiants Guadeloupéens* accused the French administration of 'trapping the Caribbean migrants' by promising that they could return within five years after a training period.<sup>32</sup> However, the hope of *mutation* remains an impossible dream for the majority of migrants when one takes into account the long-standing problems of unemployment and underdevelopment in the French West Indies, and the fact that metropolitan West Indians must compete with European Frenchmen and women for these jobs in the *DOM*. There remains on the one hand a dream of returning home, and on the other, the realisation that this is unlikely to happen. There is bitter disappointment among some West Indians who feel that they have been little more than 'prisonniers. Pris au piège. [...] aventure formidable annoncée se révèle finalement un déracinement qui engage souvent pour des générations, un déracinement tel qu'ils n'en avaient pas connu depuis deux siècles au moins, depuis les ancêtres arrachés à l'Afrique et déportés sur les îles.'<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Jean-Pierre Piriou, 'Entrevue avec Suzanne Dracius', *The French Review*, 76: 6 (May 2003), pp. 1216-1224.

<sup>32</sup> Stéphanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden, *op. cit.* p. 43.

<sup>33</sup> Marc Tardieu, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

In *Le Clocher* a Guadeloupean woman, Solita, the child of a struggling single mother, studies hard to better herself, but is reluctant to leave the West Indies. By this stage, the idea of Paris as the city of dreams seems to have faded, which suggests that the key events of the novel do not take place during the high tide of the *BUMIDOM* era, but towards its decline in the 1980s. This is a transitional stage between the *mythe du départ*, sustained by Solita's mother and encouraged by *BUMIDOM*, and the darker view of migration that Solita herself holds. Solita analyses the difference in their views:

Paris, ville symbole de la réussite, de tous les espoirs; de ceux qui savent marcher, s'habiller, parler. Réalité de ceux qui survivent en funambules, rampent en cherchant la bonne station sous terre, un mouchoir nostalgique jetable collée sur le nez, écaillent, de leurs semelles affamées, l'antichambre austère et réprobatrice du bureau d'Action Sociale. Les cartes postales ne représentent jamais la vraie banlieue.<sup>34</sup>

Solita appears not to have realised that she is 'condemned' to exile as soon as she embarks upon teacher training, because the French state is at liberty to send her wherever it wishes once she has qualified. Her academic success merely sets in train the tragedy of the novel: 'Enfin la nouvelle arriva. Succès à l'examen. Succès total du piège fatidique. Elle avait cliqué sur la nasse.'<sup>35</sup> Her earlier loyalty to her West Indian home contributes cruelly to her terrible fate, for if she had chosen to follow her mother's advice she would have experienced Paris as a single woman. In the event, she begins her teacher training after her marriage, leaving her respectable husband and young son in St. Martin when she is sent to the *métropole*.<sup>36</sup> Despite her hopes and her struggles with a hostile bureaucracy, she fails in every attempt to be transferred. From a placement in Paris, she is sent to a (fictional) narrow-minded, small town, Ulle-lès-Saler, where her exile is rendered even more painful, due to the racism and insensitivity she faces from landlords, colleagues, pupils and parents. Her life becomes one of constant circulation, flying back

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<sup>34</sup> Michelle Gargar, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>36</sup> When this novel was written St Martin, the Francophone half of St. Martin/St Maartens was a French commune that formed part of Guadeloupe. However, in 2003 the people of St. Martin voted in favour of secession from Guadeloupe in order to become not a *DOM* but a *COM*: a *Collectivité d'Outre-mer*. (This is a lesser administrative division than a *DOM*). This came into effect in 2007. I have not discovered any other novel that brings together St. Martin and migration to the *métropole*.

and forth between Saint-Martin and Paris. She struggles *à l'improviste* to raise a growing family in unforeseen circumstances, far from family support or friendship networks, until her husband insists on joining her several years into her exile, and a supposedly short term arrangement becomes permanent – as is often the case in the lives of migrants. This turn of events hastens the family's descent into self-destruction, prefigured at the beginning of the novel, as they seek to adjust to circumstances for which they are all totally unprepared.

*Le Clocher* is an angry, denunciatory novel that does not spare the patronising attitudes of metropolitan Frenchmen and women, the heartlessness of a French bureaucracy that is indifferent to the separation of families, and also, implicitly, to the failure of departmentalisation to create any kind of economic or cultural parity between 'France' and the *DOM*. The custom of sending civil servants from the *métropole* to the islands is seen as a means of depriving local people of local jobs, and feminism represents a trap instead of self-determination. Solita is a driven woman who consents to spend several years apart from her husband, despite the pain it causes her, because of a desire for career advancement, and for professional and financial independence from her husband José - but her trust in the French state is not repaid. Her husband's offer of a job in his shop is anathema, an insult to her independence and her self-image: 'Femme-tronc derrière la caisse enregistreuse, le derrière toujours plus large que le tabouret, le rouge à lèvres mastiquant un sourire au garde-à-vous. Réduire le champ de la communication, une fois rentrés le soir à la maison; aucune découverte personnelle, pas la moindre anecdote inédite. L'overdose de vie commune.'<sup>37</sup>

The conflict between her search for liberation and the depersonalisation she experiences as a result of that search is the sad irony at the heart of the novel. Whether the novel is critical of her search, or is merely critical of the French state that has made liberation difficult to achieve, is not an entirely easy question to answer. Female ambition as ruinous is a thread that runs through Western literature and culture: 'The ambitious

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<sup>37</sup> Michelle Gargar, *op. cit.*, p. 132.



woman is never rewarded.’<sup>38</sup> When Solita begins to blame herself for her family’s problems the narrator does not indicate disapproval.

There are many characters in West Indian fiction who return as ex-students, as we have seen, but fewer experienced returnees. The professionally successful returnees depicted in this literature are largely public sector intellectuals, examples of which we see in the texts explored above, or in a work such as Jacqueline Manicom’s *Mon Examen de blanc* (1972), which details the alienation of a Guadeloupean anaesthetist, Madévie. This is one of the few novels in which the neuroses and problems of return and the consequent cultural disjuncture are explored at the very heart of the text. Manicom’s focus is not simply on the dynamics of colour but also on gender and political repression. For her, the answer to these problems is to be found in political revolt, as well as in feminism.<sup>39</sup> In *Le Maître-Pièce* (1988), the young *négropolitain* Daniel, born in the early 1950s and therefore an observer of the push and pull impact of migration upon the *métropole* and Guadeloupe, observes the difficulties of his family’s life in Paris and asks himself in several places why they left Guadeloupe when they were neither unhappy in their work, nor poor or nor oppressed in their community. ‘Pourquoi maman Âa, papa Roro, mes tantes, mon père et ma mère, avaient-ils fui la corne d’abondance, pour se nicher dans ce guêpier? La mère patrie était-elle si belle et foisannante qu’elle exigeait en retour le sacrifice impitoyable de nos vies?’<sup>40</sup> Mary Gallagher sees this incomprehension, the longing to understand this mystery, as the driving force behind the whole novel and the effort of retrieving memories that it encapsulates.<sup>41</sup> It also reveals a close connection with and an acute awareness of the world on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean that seems somehow to undermine the West Indian assimilationism that his parents, Eric and

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<sup>38</sup> Mariella Frostrup, ‘Tough at the top: Applied to a woman, ambition is a dirty word – it means selfish, ruthless, bitchy. But why, asks one who admits she wants more?’ *The Guardian: G2* (14 May 2001), p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> See Elizabeth Wilson, “‘Le voyage et l’espace clos’ – Island and Journey as Metaphor: Aspects of Women’s Experience in the Works of Francophone Novelists’, in *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature*, ed. by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 1990), p. 53.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Radford, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>41</sup> Mary Gallagher, *Soundings in French Caribbean Writing since 1950: The Shock of Space and Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 216-217.

Jane, represent in this novel. As we have seen, his parents are keen to keep a West Indian cultural sensibility at a distance; but the consequences of departmentalisation and the ease and desirability of circulation sabotage their efforts. The ties between *métropole* and *DOM*, the fantasy that is Paris, the ease of travel and the family's insularity all combine to make Guadeloupe impossible to forget in Paris and Paris impossible to forget in Guadeloupe. The constant movement back and forth of various members of the extended family during the 1950s, 1960s and thereafter and the fact that they only ever seem to be on the fringes of Parisian society, eternal tourists, only emphasizes this inability to forget the past, and to be dissolved into metropolitan society.

We finally discover that early in the 1950s Daniel's father left his banking job in Guadeloupe, and his mother, her participation in her parent's grocery business, due to the jealous and controlling attitude of his maternal grandmother, *maman Âa*, providing yet another example where family discord rather than want was the reason for migration, and also explaining their problems in returning: '[C]'était à cause d'elle qu'ils étaient partis pour la France, qu'ils avaient déserté et que jamais tous les billets, toutes les vacances sucrées comme les fruits de l'île ne recolleraient les morceaux de la famille. D'autant que *maman Âa* avait toujours fait cavalier seul, elle commandait depuis trop longtemps pour partager. Elle régnait sur des zombies, mais elle régnait.'<sup>42</sup> There is a close yet difficult relationship between *maman Âa* and her daughter Jane, recalling the work of the psychologist Jean Galap, who affirms that the mother-daughter relationship influences both the choice of migration and the decision to return or otherwise:

Ce n'est d'ailleurs pas la moindre des motivations au départ du domicile familial, pour échapper à l'objet maternel tout puissant quand bien même, une fois partie, elles sont en manque et regrette son absence. L'attraction est si forte qu'elle peut se manifester de plusieurs manières. Soit un retour, notamment en cas de maternité, accompagné ou non du conjoint, dans une totale soumission à la loi maternelle, soit [...] de reculer indéfiniment des vacances pourtant tant désirées au pays.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Daniel Radford, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

<sup>43</sup> Jean Galap, 'La santé mentale des Antillais de France: une problématique d'école', *Migrations Santé*, 96/97 (1998), pp. 74-75.

In this novel, the mother's supreme power is expressed in her reluctance to hand the business over to the daughters who have worked there all their lives, thereby linking the fraught dynamics of family relationships and the difficulty that returnees have in running successful businesses in the West Indies. Whilst Alain Anselin focuses on returnees who attempt to found businesses of their own, here an attempt to return to Guadeloupe for good in the early 1970s fails due to an ageing woman's unwillingness to hand over the reins to her more dynamic children. The grocery goes into decline, and a successful take-over becomes impossible.

Maman Âa and her husband Papa Roro, who follow their daughters to the *métropole*, are not retirees who return after spending their working lives largely in Europe and then expect to be rewarded by a life of ease on their island. Their sojourn in Paris has been fairly brief, and on their return to Martinique they reflect that Paris has little more to offer them beyond a pretty fantasy and an empty myth. In the end, however, the story of this elderly couple represents the unsatisfactory and ambiguous nature of circulatory migration, where one moment in 1983 Maman Âa joyfully mimics Josephine Baker's love of Paris, 'J'ai deux amours, mon pays et Paris...', and the next, 'Je ne retournerai plus jamais à Paris, je suis bien ici.'<sup>44</sup>

A different but equally distinctive story of an elderly returnee appears in *L'Autre bord*. An older West Indian, Geoffroy, is a postman who joins the students' circle in a café. His arrival in Paris predates *BUMIDOM*; he is a Communist activist, and an example of an agitator forcibly removed from the French West Indies for stirring up trouble. On returning to Guadeloupe he writes back to Paris to inform his young friends that he hopes to help 'les immigrés de retour' by starting an organisation for 'ceux qui ont pris du fer dans L'Autre bord et qui continuent d'en prendre au pays, ceux à qui on fait payer le prix de l'absence en les désignant sous le nom de négropolitain.'<sup>45</sup> Geoffroy is a rare fictional representative of a working class West Indian militant and successful returnee who from the 1960s onwards sought not to help West Indian migrants to integrate into metropolitan life, 'or force their acceptance by the French Government, but rather to insist on the

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<sup>44</sup> Daniel Radford, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

<sup>45</sup> Simonne Henry-Valmore, *L'Autre bord*, p. 168.

necessity to be sent home “where they belong” in the context of a new national identity, and in the context of an economy which, freed from French economic colonialism, would be able to provide employment for them.<sup>46</sup> The ‘new national identity’ that these activists had in mind involved a new political status for the islands: either independence or autonomy, depending on the intentions of the political group in question.<sup>47</sup> No doubt, part of their work involved returning to the islands and potentially trying to create a society which would be able to receive the returnees that they hoped were to follow.

There are contemporary novels that briefly sketch out more representative elderly characters’ intentions of returning. Frankito’s *Pointe-à-Pitre – Paris* (2000) and Didier Mandin’s *Boulevard Voltaire* (2006), both novels which focus rather more on the young than the old, highlight the dreams of elderly if not quite retired parents, particularly of elderly fathers, to return to the West Indies to build homes there or to be buried. In *Pointe-à-Pitre – Paris* Tonton Georges, who rents a flat in a suburb of Paris in the 1990s, has already built a small house in Guadeloupe, but just like Solita in *Le Clocher*, has not been offered a transfer from his job at the post office despite a wait of ten years, so cannot leave. In *Boulevard Voltaire* Monsieur Opiiron is in a better position as a home owner in an up-and-coming suburb, but must still play a waiting game. Dolorès Pourette, an anthropologist, notes that the desire to be buried in the West Indies is a common one amongst Guadeloupeans in the *métropole*. She explains the ‘refus d’être inhumé “dans le froid” de la métropole’ which is a reflection of the perceived coldness of white metropolitan French people, the desire to be buried close to one’s ancestors, in a spiritual as well as a physical sense, and the longing to end in the land of one’s birth.<sup>48</sup> Other commentators confirm that a consideration for land and property is an important one for elderly would-be returnees. One of their concerns is to return in a style that indicates that they have been successful in the *métropole*, which is especially important since living standards in the islands have themselves improved.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Joyce Edmond-Smith, ‘West Indian Workers in France III’, p. 310.

<sup>47</sup> In Alain Anselin, *op. cit.*, p. 21, one interviewee refers to a militant friend who spent hours discussing the potential independence of Martinique.

<sup>48</sup> Dolorès Pourette, ‘Pourquoi les migrants guadeloupéens veulent-ils être inhumés dans leur île?’, *Hommes et migrations*, 1237 (May-June, 2002), pp. 56-57.

<sup>49</sup> Stéphanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden, *op. cit.* p. 46.

Chapter I.2 notes how departure often represented personal liberation and opportunity. This could also make the prospect of returning to a more chauvinistic society less appealing. Researchers note that women may hide this fear behind concerns about how their metropolitan children will adapt to a new environment, or about leaving adult children behind.<sup>50</sup> Concern about her teenaged children's future is voiced by Sidiki's wife Yolaine in *Le Clan des mutilés* (1988) when Sidiki suggests that a return to Martinique might be necessary.<sup>51</sup> However, Yolaine's reluctance is not discussed further in the novel, and her deeper feelings about a possible future in the West Indies (such as whether she herself could find employment there) are unexplored. A fear of *machisme* is rarely discussed in French West Indian fiction, although this may be read into the few novels in which the islands are criticised, generally by female characters, as backward, full of jealousy, sorcery, and gossip. Return is easier for single people, yet unmarried women are particularly reliant upon remaining family ties as a factor in facilitating their return. The novel *Une Etoile en derive* (2004) gives some insights into the difficulties that face female migrants, and the conflicting pressures and impulses that influence whether or not they should return.

Circulation contributes to alienation by contributing to the weakening sense of “home” and “away”. As a result there is also a doubling of these sites of affiliation that blurs fixed notions of identity and erases the distinction between positionality and place.<sup>52</sup> This condition can be liberating, but it can also be paralysing. Marie talks of the frustrations of West Indians on both sides of the Atlantic whose questions are now:

En quelle ‘terre’ plonger aujourd’hui ses racines? Quoi espérer encore du pays natal? Comment, à sa perte, substituer une nouvelle manière d’être ensemble? Comment penser les formes d’un rassemblement adaptées à l’âpreté nouvelle du monde? Comment penser un projet d’avenir qui ne distingue pas irrémédiablement ici de là-bas? Seul est indubitable le fait qu’il n’y a plus d’émigrations pour sauver de l’échec de la migration.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>51</sup> Louison Cazal, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>52</sup> H. Adlai Murdoch, ‘Negotiating the Metropole’, p. 131.

<sup>53</sup> Claude-Valentin Marie, ‘Les Antillais en France’, p. 34.

The narrator of the novel *L'Autre bord* talks of ‘Les allers jamais simples... les retours manqués... les exils forcés... les naufrages, la fuite, le départ qu’on retarde jusqu’au jour du retour d’âge...’<sup>54</sup> She is referring to ‘les déracinés’ of all kinds, but no less to West Indian migrants like herself for whom circulation of one kind or another, for one reason or another, remains the default position, the reality that both defies and exemplifies the post-colonial status that encapsulates the French West Indian condition.

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<sup>54</sup> Simonne Henry-Valmore, *L'Autre bord*, p. 16.

## **Part 2**

### **Theory and the French West Indian Diaspora**

In Chapter 1 of Part 1 I argued that the developing relationship between the French West Indian possessions and the entity that possessed them was of a loyal colonial devotee towards a Motherland. While the nature of slavery, freedom, and political absorption changed over the centuries, the effect was to create a citizenry which felt invested in the French story at multiple levels.

In the second and third chapters I introduced some twentieth and early twenty-first century French West Indian novels that explore the intensity and the nature of this bond, especially within the context of migration. The complexities and paradoxes that will become recurrent issues throughout this thesis were first discussed here.

Part 2 moves on to consider how the most prominent of French West Indian literary and cultural theorists, and also contemporary scholars of Francophone postcolonial literature, have worked with or overlooked issues of French West Indian migration and identity in literary contexts. As I explore the work and ideas of Césaire, Fanon, Glissant and the *créoliste* writers in particular I show how the historical and social context of Part 1 overlaps with the concerns of these writers. By reflecting on other scholars I will be able to show how and why the literature of migration represents a challenge not only to French West Indian theorists, but also to scholars.

## Chapter II.1 Césaire and Fanon before the *Troisième Ile*

How have these two highly influential theorists of blackness contributed to issues of displacement and migration with specific reference to the Caribbean diaspora in metropolitan France? Did either of them feel that this was an issue worthy of their attention, or was it of only minor importance on the list of problems that the ‘black race’ needed to tackle? Césaire and Fanon knew each other initially as teacher and pupil, and it will be of interest to consider how they as migrants pursued their theories of place both in their writing and also in their own lives. For many West Indian Indian intellectuals of the inter-war period onwards theory must be seen as firmly if problematically entwined with their own lived experience. Césaire and Fanon’s work, as well as the contributions of their immediate forerunners and fellow travellers grew most certainly out of the personal, even as they eventually proclaimed to be focused on the universal. Both men were created intellectually and emotionally by their experiences of migration to metropolitan France.

Both Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) and Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) left Martinique for the *mère-patrie* to embark upon their higher education. Césaire departed in 1931 at the age of 18, armed with a *baccalauréat* and a scholarship, aiming ultimately to be accepted at the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, and Fanon in 1946 at the age of 21, a decorated war veteran who had already served in Europe. He too possessed the essential *baccalauréat* plus the offer of free tuition and a small maintenance grant. On arrival, therefore, they both represented a privileged elite; mass migration still seemed a long way away, and the myth of the *mère-patrie* was still powerful. Césaire and Fanon were both in France for about eight years each (including Fanon’s period in active military service), with Césaire returning to Martinique with his new wife, Suzanne, also a champion of negritude, in 1939. Neither Césaire nor Fanon fits into the category of long-term economic migrant on metropolitan soil, and in this they represent the majority of other writers and thinkers of West Indian origin rather than the more numerically significant West Indian migrants who would arrive from the mid-1950s onwards. Their relatively short stay in metropolitan France should suggest that for both men any interest in the



West Indian diaspora and metropolitan life was fairly brief and intense, although they would sporadically return to the subject later in their lives.

The *métropole* seemed to serve as a kind of crucible in which the basis of their theoretical position was hammered out. It provided the intellectual stimuli by way of access to libraries and bookshops and brought them into contact with new strands of radical European thought. It also enabled them to meet students and thinkers as well as ordinary Frenchmen and women on an everyday basis. Once they had processed this transformatory material they had met with in mainland France, its urban cosmopolitanism became much less important in their work and their thinking generally. This was especially true for Césaire, whose involvement in the creation of negritude initially required his presence in Paris. For this reason, our focus here is on Césaire's most famous work, the poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939,1947,1956), which was written as a direct result of his contact with the *métropole* and which therefore has more obvious relevance to the migrant experience. His earlier writings, though written in Paris, were not focused on this. His later writings as well as his earlier essays and articles, through drawing on Western myth and literary allusion, are nevertheless largely uninterested in Western realities, and often deal with conflicts in semi-mythical Caribbean or African landscapes, often in a real or imagined historical setting. Indeed, A. James Arnold talks of 'Césaire's apparent inability to treat directly the social and political dilemma of blacks in a white-dominated society,'<sup>1</sup> a comment which surely applies to Césaire's relative silence on the condition of West Indians in the *métropole*. Fanon gained intellectually and culturally from the time he spent in Europe, but despite his friendship with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, and the ongoing importance of Paris as a centre for meetings and the publication of his books, he grew ever more distant from issues that affected the life of the city.

Both men were born into families of black petit bourgeois civil servants who placed a high value upon education. Fanon's family was evidently more well-to-do than Césaire's thanks to his mother's income as a successful businesswoman, but both were well aware

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<sup>1</sup> A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude: The Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire* (London: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 270.

of the failings of their island, over 10 years apart. Césaire's *Cahier* was to describe the capital city, Fort-de-France as

une vieille vie menteusement souriante, ses lèvres ouvertes d'angoisses désaffectées; une vieille misère pourrissant sous le soleil, silencieusement; un vieux silence crevant de pustules tièdes [... C']ette ville plate – étalée, trébuchée de son bon sens, inerte, essoufflée sous son fardeau géométrique de croix éternellement recommençante, indocile à son sort, muette, contrariée de toutes façons, incapable de croître selon le suc de cette terre, embarrassée, rognée, réduite, en rupture de faune et de flore.<sup>2</sup>

Césaire goes on to talk of the commonplace of poverty, hunger, disease and untreated physical debilitation. Frantz Fanon, on reading this found it a magnanimous description, although he agreed it hardly presented a romanticised image of the town.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to an awareness of the suffering around them both Césaire and Fanon as intelligent and self-confident young men were also faced with the cultural and societal limitations of life in Martinique. For all these reasons the urge to leave the island was almost as strong as the pull of Paris. Césaire admitted that he detested Martinique as a young man, and was eager to leave behind the class and racial snobberies of the bourgeoisie.<sup>4</sup> David Macey claims that the *Cahier* overstates the degree of poverty experienced by Césaire's family.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, degrading living conditions for the poor, alongside a narrowness of thought were seemingly inescapable factors in Martiniquan society. Similarly, in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) Fanon asserts that '[l]e Noir, prisonnier dans son île, perdu dans un atmosphere sans le moindre débouché, ressent comme une trouée d'air cet appel de l'Europe.'<sup>6</sup> Fanon, like Césaire, was no exception.

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<sup>2</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land/Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, bilingual edition, trans. by Mireille Roselle and Annie Pritchard ([1956, 1983, 1995] Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1995), pp. 72.

<sup>3</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, ([1952] Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1995), p. 17. Hereafter, this text will be referred to as *PNMB*.

<sup>4</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai. Entretiens avec Françoise Vergès* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 2005), p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Life* (London: Granta Books, 2000), p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 16.

As years went by the two men in different circumstances began to see the connection between the apparent degradation of their island and the ineffectiveness of the *mère-patrie* in helping to develop a viable economy as well as fostering racial unity in Martinique. This connection would only gradually be questioned and challenged.

The notion of Paris as a haven for black people gained particular currency during the interwar period. This period famously saw the rise of primitivism, an interest in African art and the arrival of the Jazz Age along with the well-documented migration of a black (and white) American intellectual elite to Paris including Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Augusta Savage, Josephine Baker and James Baldwin to name but a few, most of whom attested to the acceptance they had received in ‘France’ as opposed to the discrimination they had received in America. All these figures, in the words of Christiane Makward, ‘ont conforté les Français dans cette image d’une France au-dessus de tout racisme.’<sup>7</sup>

It is a view reflected somewhat implicitly at the end of Mayotte Capécia’s two rather similar novels about World War II, *Je suis martiniquaise* (1948) and *La Négrresse blanche* (1950), where the heroine feels that in France she will escape from the racial strife of her island. Like Capécia herself the heroines of these novels leave their island after World War II with this rather than economic advancement, in mind.<sup>8</sup> The contrast between the apparently egalitarian nature of the metropolitan French and the seemingly regressive and pre-revolutionary attitudes of their white cousins in the colonies mentioned in Chapter I.1 has been highlighted in numerous places. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting sees Césaire as sharing the view that ‘the *békés* are persons with no veritable country, no feeling of belonging, no concept of patriotism or of *la République*

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<sup>7</sup> Christiane P. Makward, *Mayotte Capécia, ou l’Aliénation selon Fanon* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1999), p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Mayotte Capécia, *I Am a Martiniquan Woman & The White Negress: Two Novellettes*, trad. by Beatrice Stith Clarke (Pueblo, Colorado: Passeggiata Press, 1998). Frantz Fanon’s interest in Mayotte Capécia has created much commentary around these two texts. However, they are no longer in print in French. It is telling that they are now much more easily available in this American translation, from which all references in this thesis will be taken.

*française*.<sup>9</sup> These, after all, were the ones who barely two decades after Césaire's arrival in Paris betrayed the French Revolution and turned so easily to Maréchal Pétain and to the oppressive Vichy regime during World War II. Long before the war a black French Guyanese who had been schooled in France, René Maran, civil servant and author of *Batouala: véritable roman nègre* (1921) was another who saw 'the conduct of French colonial administrators as the proverbial chink in France's egalitarian armour. The idealist Maran insisted that the species of Frenchmen in French Equatorial Africa were wholly different from those in France.'<sup>10</sup> This view seemed to be confirmed, on the surface, by the fact that, whilst the literary judges in Paris awarded his novel the Goncourt Prize in Africa his employers, horrified at his exposé of their methods and attitudes, removed him from his post.

This view of Paris as a tolerant, welcoming and culturally and ethnically diverse city was boosted by the Martiniquan sisters, Paulette, Jane and Andrée Nardal, who started a 'transracial, ethnically diverse, and gender-inclusive' salon in Clamart in 1931, and encouraged explorations around 'humanism, literature, art, *actualités* and the future of the Negro race.'<sup>11</sup> The only salon of its type, it generated *La Revue du monde noir* (1931-1932), a journal dedicated to literary, social and cultural issues. Yet the presence and contributions of black American intellectuals, though enriching, was possible because they intrigued white society too: 'The American New Negro represented for the French a detour not only from the ennui of whiteness but also from Francophone black *métropolitains* and *indigènes* in Africa and the West Indies',<sup>12</sup> namely a detour from the colonials whom they had attempted to turn into carbon copies of themselves. Josephine Baker consciously 'represented the spontaneity, innocence, and naturalness lost to this civilizing and civilized French nation because of its obsession with modern techniques.'<sup>13</sup> Metropolitan French people similarly expected exoticism from West Indians. Jane Nardal's short story 'Pantins exotiques' refers to a young black female student in Paris

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<sup>9</sup> T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 100.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

who feels guilty at having to admit to her own sober, petit bourgeois origins rather than feeding metropolitan fantasies and illusions about childlike, joyful ‘indigènes.’<sup>14</sup>

This exoticising glare clashed with the middle class student’s education and upbringing, which had strained to convince him that if only he absorbed the language, mores and education of the French he could be the equal of any white Frenchman. That the metropolitan French sometimes laughed to see a black man in European dress would have disoriented more than a few people from this background.<sup>15</sup> Negrophilia, ironically, became a kind of essentialising racism that grew out of a profound indifference towards black realities. The French thirst for black culture – preferably, we have seen, of the American kind - between the wars has been seen as a symptom of a war-ravaged, morally exhausted civilisation seeking to lose itself for a while. This attention was deemed suspect by some black intellectuals at this time. The Exposition Coloniale held at the Bois de Vincennes in Paris from May to November of 1931 perpetuated unwelcome stereotypes. Théodore, a Guadeloupean student in Marie-Claude Pernelle’s historical novel *Emprises de conscience* is appalled less by the vigour of the exhibition’s semi-naked African dancers than by their juxtaposition alongside fully clothed, giggling European spectators:

[L]’Exposition me passionne et me révolte à la fois comme cette soirée vaudou où les contorsions à quatre pattes d’une grosse noire rasée avec une ceinture de plumes vertes m’ont donné envie de vomir. Tout devait être sauvage, permettre de libérer l’instinct. Et les personnes pour qui le sauvage est unique expression même du nègre étaient réconfortées.<sup>16</sup>

Césaire did not approve either. He did not accuse all Europeans of such a base and selfish relationship with *l’art nègre*, but he was disgusted by what he saw as the desire of white France to see the black man as an exotic toy:

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<sup>14</sup> Jane Nardal, ‘Pantins exotiques’, *La Dépêche africaine* (15 October 1928), p. 2, cit., T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>15</sup> Henri Bergson, ‘Nos enquêtes’, *La Revue du monde noir* 2 (1 October 1931), cit. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>16</sup> Marie-Claude Pernelle, *Emprises de conscience* (Matoury: Ibis Rouge Editions, 2005), p. 225.

Ou bien tout simplement comme on nous aime!  
Obscènes gaiement, très doudous de jazz sur leur excès d'ennui.  
Je sais le tracking, le Lindy-hop et les claquettes.  
Pour les bonnes bouches la sourdine de nos pointes enrobées de  
oua-oua. Attendez...  
Tout est dans l'ordre. Mon bon ange broute du néon. J'avale des  
baguettes. Ma dignité se vautre dans les dégobillements...<sup>17</sup>

Long before Frantz Fanon wrote *PNMB* to highlight the issue, the shock was that the black student was not, as he had imagined, an equal and a brother. For some the trauma of this discovery led to disaster. Maximin's character Siméa in the novel *L'Isolé soleil* refers to the well-guarded secret of the high suicide rate among colonials in Paris: 'Quelques morceaux de bois d'ébène flottent sur la Seine ayant rêvé de devenir ange ou crocodile' due to their despair at not becoming 'white' as quickly as they expected in this city of dreams.<sup>18</sup> She refers to a magazine for West Indian students that remarks how '[I]'étudiant noir semble le type "assimilé". Mais l'est-il vraiment? Il porte veste, pantalon et cravate, oeuvres de Blancs. Il parle le langage de Blancs. Il passe sa vie dans de milieux blancs. Mais il reste nègre. Nul ne s'en étonnera, car un morceau de bois, dit le bambara, a beau rester dix ans sous l'eau, il ne devient pas crocodile.'<sup>19</sup> *L'Isolé soleil* outlines the strategies for resistance and coping arrived at by these students, be they suicide, mimicry/mockery, politicisation or by plunging headlong into a serious reaffirmation of black cultural worth.

The black students who arrived in Paris between 1928 and 1940 found themselves in the midst of unparalleled intellectual and political ferment in which 'Mesure, Raison, Progrès, Vérité absolue, tous les piliers sur lesquels s'étaient édifiés les siècles précédents perdaient majuscule, assaillis bientôt par une vague prodigieuse qui libérait l'esprit et la sensibilité de toute entrave. Ce mouvement se traduisait de la façon la plus spectaculaire dans le surréalisme.'<sup>20</sup> Lilyan Kesteloot goes on to note that in politics bourgeois economic ideals were coming under attack from both Marxism, which grew in strength in

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<sup>17</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*, p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Maxim, *L'Isolé soleil*, p. 126.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>20</sup> Lilyan Kesteloot, *Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature* (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1975), p. 20.

France thanks to the economic crisis of the 1930s, and fascism, generally arm-in-arm with racism, which began to alarm young black students who saw fascism as a personal threat. What then did it mean to be French, and amongst all the competing ideologies and ways of thinking who or what should serve as a model? A number of possibilities presented themselves, and the desire to develop bonds of unity among the colonised peoples was one response.

By the time Césaire arrived in Paris West Indian students and intellectuals had already begun to write about their new awareness of colonial realities and inequality among nations and to assess the Parisian political class. These journals self-consciously addressed a non-white elite, but their focus was rarely on the practicalities of everyday life for ‘colonials’ in the *métropole*; they dealt with the need to challenge militant political assimilationism (in *La Dépêche Africaine*) or to encourage a discourse of cultural cooperation, and renewed creativity and pride among the black diaspora around the world (in *La Revue du monde noir*). However, the varied realities of West Indian experience in Paris did sometimes break through. In ‘Actions de Grace’ Paulette describes the relief and joy of a West Indian woman when the French winter gives way to spring and ultimately to summer, and she may revel in the light and put away her heavy overcoat.<sup>21</sup> ‘En Exil’ is a short story about an elderly black housekeeper who suffers terribly in the Parisian winter (in an early example of what was to become standard ‘first generation’ literary imagery of Paris and its alienating weather), faces mild racism on her way to work, and daydreams of a highly Africanised Martinique, devoid of bourgeois race politics and social climbing.<sup>22</sup> The final issue of *La Revue du monde noir* published in April 1932 presents ‘The Awakening of Race Consciousness among Black Students’ an account which by implication suggests the importance of Paris in the development of race pride among French West Indians, a pride stimulated by Parisian journals such as her own, studies of African culture and African American writers pursued at Parisian universities, and of the contribution of a writer such as Maran, someone who happened to

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<sup>21</sup> Paulette Nardal (‘Actions de grâce’, *La Dépêche africaine*, 30 May 1929, p. 3), ‘Acts of Grace’, trans. by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>22</sup> Paulette Nardal (‘En Exil’, *La Dépêche africaine*, 15 December 1929, p. 6), ‘In Exile’, trans. by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *op. cit.*, p. 116-118.

have been recognised by the Parisian literary elite.<sup>23</sup> The Nardals recognised a black female experience of Paris that differed from the male one.

The *Revue* was soon to be replaced by the more politically minded *Légitime Défense*. Although the majority of the young contributors to this journal themselves belonged to the West Indian bourgeoisie, they were, much like the writers of the *Revue*, bitterly critical of it. The editors of this journal were themselves, as Kesteloot remarks, financially supported by the very people whom they sought to attack, and in their strident denigration of the servile and self-denying mimicry of conventional European cultural and moral standards they ran the risk of losing this support.<sup>24</sup> There is a certain irony in the keenness of a privileged group to dismiss the source of their privilege, without which their protest would be nigh impossible (a situation with echoes in the contemporary French West Indian literary context, as we shall see). Their very presence in metropolitan France, which allowed them the freedom (up to a point – censorship ensured the journal did not survive the first issue) and the opportunity to seek alternative ways of being and thinking, was in part due to the compliance of previous generations with the French model of assimilation. And it may be said that in championing the replacement of traditional forms of lyrical expression, Christianity and bourgeois convention with surrealism and communism respectively, this generation of rebellious youths were replacing one set of European values with another. G. R. Coulthard finds that beyond Césaire there is little sign that among the French West Indian poets influenced by this new sense of racial pride there is much that marks their ‘style or manner’ as strikingly African or un-European.<sup>25</sup> In a novel by Raphaël Confiant an imaginary wartime discussion takes place between the surrealist champion of Césaire, André Breton, and a mysterious, fictional Martiniquan called Monsieur Dalmeida, the latter criticising Césaire on the same grounds:

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<sup>23</sup> Paulette Nardal (‘L’Eveil de la conscience de race chez les étudiants noirs’, *La Revue du monde noir*, 5 April 1932, pp. 25-31), ‘The Awakening of Race Consciousness among Black Students’, trans. by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *op. cit.*, p. 119-124.

<sup>24</sup> Lilyan Kesteloot, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>25</sup> G. R. Coulthard, ‘The French West Indian Background of “Négritude”’, *Caribbean Quarterly*, 7: 3 (December 1961), p. 136.



Même Césaire et les autres sont embrigadés dans la théorie surréaliste qui est d'extraction purement européenne si je ne m'abuse. La seule chose qui différencie Césaire de Thaly c'est que le premier s'est montré supérieur au maître blanc, tandis que le second lui a été inférieur.<sup>26</sup>

Similar comments are made by others in both works of literary criticism and fiction and not only in reference to surrealism, but in relation to Césaire's sources for the crafting of negritude in general. It was in Paris, the seat of empire, that he became aware of and enthusiastic about Africa and Afro-Cuban, Haitian and African-American literature; moreover, such awareness often relied on works by white European ethnologists and philosophers. We might see the flowering of West Indian black self-consciousness as a European phenomenon, an example of the virtues of migration, or of the process of fertilisation that takes place when the West Indian (and other people) brings his or her own ambiguous sense of cultural identity to the seat of European learning and high art. The potential paradox of this situation does not seem to have been discussed (or at least went unrecorded) by most of those involved. The French Guianese Léon-Gontran Damas, childhood classmate of Césaire's and intellectual soulmate alongside Senghor in Paris, was a slight exception to this rule. A light-skinned poet and student from a wealthier family than Césaire's, his parents cut off his funding in displeasure at his extracurricular activities, and he therefore had to take a variety of unskilled manual jobs in Paris to support himself. This led to a more brutal and more varied experience of immigrant life in the metropolis; he knew what it was to be treated as a 'blanchi', a black man in a tuxedo, but also to be mocked and despised by white French people when he was reduced to wearing rags.<sup>27</sup>

In 1935 Césaire finally entered the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*. His living conditions were precarious; like many a migrant before and since he had to make his home in a hotel, an experience that served to increase his sense of exile and unbelonging. His isolation was exacerbated by the stress his exams had caused him, and he is said to have withdrawn from an active social life into a solitary phase, marked by spiritual and poetic

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<sup>26</sup> Raphaël Confiant, *Le Nègre et l'amiral*, p. 130. Thaly was a West Indian poet who slightly preceded Césaire.

<sup>27</sup> Léon-Gontran Damas, *Pigments* (Paris: Editions Guy Lévi Mano, 1937), cit. Lilyan Kesteloot, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-133.

crisis. It is common to see this time of silence as the gestation period of the *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Commentators refer to the destroyed poetry of 1934-35, and his summer holiday in Martinique in 1936, to which he brought a newly critical eye, and to his visit to Yugoslavia where, catching sight of the island of Martinska, he was reminded that his own island was always present, and that exile was illusory.<sup>28</sup> One of his white contemporaries at the *ENS* bestowed upon him the Ethiopian term *ras* at a time when the *ras* Haile Selassie of Ethiopia was very much in the news. A. James Arnold imagines Césaire would have been a little flattered, especially since by this time he had already embarked upon an 'imaginary identification with noble Africans' that would later be expressed in his poetry.<sup>29</sup> But it also gives a small insight into how Césaire was seen and treated by the young white men in his educational milieu, an insight often strangely missing in the repetition of stories about his friendships with various black intellectuals in Paris. Although the two great (white) French intellectuals of the age, Breton and Sartre, famously championed Césaire's work,<sup>30</sup> one is led to ask how well Césaire was more broadly integrated into the white indigenous student (and intellectual) community during his years in Paris.

It is not necessary here to present the progression of Césairean negritude throughout the *Cahier*, or through his subsequent work. However, it is worth considering how negritude, via the creative, angry language of the *Cahier*, offers an example of how a transformation from the negative to the positive might apply to the diasporic experience. The poem is more interested in the idea of leaving Europe behind than in depicting migrant life, but unlike later works by Césaire there is evidence in the *Cahier* that the conditions of life for black people in the *métropole* and not merely in the colonies have to an extent influenced his understanding of negritude. The poem may start with a spurt of hatred for the misery of colonial Martinique, but in refocusing his bile onto the culpable white world, he uses the symbol of one of the West Indies' most famous exiles and

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<sup>28</sup> Mireille Rosello, 'Introduction: Cultural and Political Context', in Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*, p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

unwilling migrant, the Haitian hero Toussaint Louverture, imprisoned in the snowy Jura and condemned to a death that is 'white' in more ways than one:

Ce qui est à moi aussi: une petite cellule dans le Jura,  
une petite cellule, la neige la double de barreaux blancs  
la neige est un geôlier blanc qui monte la garde devant une prison

Ce qui est à moi  
c'est un homme seul emprisonné de blanc  
c'est un homme seul qui défie les cris blancs de la mort blanche  
(TOUSSAINT, TOUSSAINT, LOUVERTURE)  
c'est un homme seul qui fascine l'épervier blanc de la mort blanche  
c'est un homme seul dans la mer inféconde de sable blanc.<sup>31</sup>

The poet reclaims black suffering and lowliness, and in one passage relates the contemporary story of an unsightly, ragged black man on a tram: 'Et l'ensemble faisait parfaitement un nègre hideux, un nègre grognon, un nègre mélancolique, un nègre affalé, ses mains réunies en prière sur un bâton noueux. Un nègre enseveli dans une vieille veste élimée. Un nègre comique et laid et des femmes derrière moi ricanait en le regardant.'<sup>32</sup> Fanon later described Césaire's cowardly reaction to this needy character as the inevitable consequence of the young man needing to impress his intellectual acceptability upon his white friends.<sup>33</sup> Paris is not described openly in the poem, despite the fact that it is evidently with Paris (representing metropolitan France) that the island is compared: 'Ecoutez le monde blanc/ horriblement las de son effort immense/ ses articulations rebelles craquer sous les étoiles dures/ ses raidures d'acier bleu transperçant la chair mystique.'<sup>34</sup> Yet since 'the subject matter [of the *Cahier*] is blackness in a white world'<sup>35</sup> it may be said that wherever this pitiable negro may physically be, he is always an outsider in the 'white world', since the benefactors of mankind, white warriors, castrators, slave-drivers and missionaries (to use Césaire's imagery) have striven, in Martinique and elsewhere, to create a world in their own image. This created world includes the smiling, compliant *doudous* of the islands, and giggling women, black or

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<sup>31</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*, p. 90.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>33</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 156.

<sup>34</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*, p. 114.

<sup>35</sup> A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, p. 168.

white, who have learnt to mock black suffering. Taking Arnold's critique to its logical conclusion, all of Césaire's work might be considered in the same vein; where Caliban, an enslaved African in *Une Tempête* (1969), rebels against a slave-owning Prospero, he might equally be a victimised black housemaid in Paris, or a low-level Guadeloupean *fonctionnaire*, struggling to manage with his family in a tiny flat in the suburbs. The distinction of time, place or person does not need to be made, because they are all oppressed or undervalued people.

One of the paradoxes of negritude which bears a direct relationship to the experience of migration is that it is sometimes seen as locking 'black culture' and 'white culture' alike into a certain essentialism. This shoehorning of blackness into one mould can also lead to a uniform treatment of assimilation that downgrades issues of class, culture and context.<sup>36</sup> It assumes that only the West Indian who is sufficiently assimilated and alienated to have studied in Europe can genuinely become personally aware of negritude. After all, although lyrical negritude often served to praise simplicity and a longing to return to nature, which in the *Cahier* means returning to the 'native land', escaping from the poisoning influences of 'white culture', the discourse of negritude has been found to be at heart an elitist one; it asserts that the poet is the one who must take the lead as the spokesman for his people: 'cette foule si étrangement bavarde et muette [...] cette foule désolée sous le soleil, ne participant à rien qui s'exprime.'<sup>37</sup> It is the poet who says: 'Ma bouche sera la bouche des malheurs qui n'ont point de bouche, ma voix, la liberté de celles qui s'affaissent au cachot du désespoir.'<sup>38</sup>

Negritudiste work may exclude the 'chattering and dumb' crowds by its complexity. Césaire refers to Caribbean flora and fauna which would be known to many West Indian readers, but he also invents vocabulary of his own, and uses a range of highly specialised words that would require explanation even to academic readers. The orality of his work is noted, yet it is unclear whether the concept of performance poetry, well-known among Anglophone West Indian and among Black British poets, impinged upon the

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<sup>36</sup> Alain Blérard, *Négritude et politique aux Antilles* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1981), pp. 60-61.

<sup>37</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*, p. 74.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

consciousness of Césaire as a means of reaching out to a wider West Indian (as opposed to an international) audience. According to Chris Bongie, Césaire's bestseller status in Martinique is largely due to his position on school reading lists.<sup>39</sup> He was brought up in a French-speaking rather than a Creole-speaking home, and did not use Creole in his work.<sup>40</sup> Whilst this might be to the advantage of a *négropolitain* constituency, on its own it does not make Césaire into a writer who speaks to, and not simply about, the West Indian people. Can such poetry speak to the working class or rural Martiniquan who has never, in fact, left the island to study, or even to the next two or three generations of migrants who themselves sought to return to their 'native land' after many years of labour, rather than intellectually vigorous self-discovery, in the *métropole*?

Césaire later denied that his theoretical underpinnings contained any racist essentialism, claiming that negritude from his perspective was not biological or political ideology, but was about literature and a personal ethic.<sup>41</sup> In taking this line, however, Césaire moved further away from Martiniquan realities, for if negritude is limited to a literary position and personal outlook can it be sturdy enough to unite a people? It did not break down shadist barriers in Martinique.<sup>42</sup> This reduction of negritude to a literary exercise may explain how Césaire, who became the mayor of Fort-de-France in 1946, could argue for Martinique to become a fully integrated part of 'France' rather than an independent state.<sup>43</sup> Césaire's *Parti progressiste martiniquais (PPM)*, created in 1958, has been criticised for its hollow demands for autonomy and its economic illiteracy, which,

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<sup>39</sup> Chris Bongie, 'Exiles on Main Stream: Valuing the Popularity of Postcolonial Literature', *Postmodern Culture*, 14: 1 (September 2003)

[http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/journals/postmodern\\_culture/v014/14.1bongie.html](http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/journals/postmodern_culture/v014/14.1bongie.html)

[accessed 13 June 2011] (fn. 5). He obtained this information from Gilles Alexandre, a bookshop owner and cultural figure in Martinique.

<sup>40</sup> Judith Holland Sarnecki, 'Mastering the Masters: Aimé Césaire's Creolization of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*,' *The French Review*, 74: 2 (2000), pp. 276-277, 285 (fn. 1).

<sup>41</sup> Lilyan Kesteloot and Barthélemy Kotchy, *Aimé Césaire: L'Homme et l'œuvre* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1973), cit. Femi Ojo-Ade, 'Caribbean Negritude and Africa: Aspects of Black Dilemma', in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, Volume III: Cross-Cultural Studies, ed. by A. James Arnold (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997), p. 364.

<sup>42</sup> Jean-Claude Guillebaud, *Les Confettis de l'empire* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1976), p. 236.

<sup>43</sup> Alain Blérard, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

Raphaël Confiant claims, resulted in its support for emigration via *BUMIDOM*.<sup>44</sup> However, by the late 1970s Césaire famously began to criticise a ‘génocide par substitution’,<sup>45</sup> bemoaning ‘l’hémorragie des forces vives du pays [... et] l’expatriation forcée d’une jeunesse sans perspectives.’<sup>46</sup>

It is clear that Césaire saw very little in common between the young migrants of the 1960s and 1970s and either his younger self, or the young elite whom he prepared for metropolitan French universities in his work as a schoolteacher between 1939 and 1945. He does not appear to have addressed either the migrants or would-be migrants themselves or to speak directly on their behalf in his poetry or drama (or his politics). To return to the observations made by A. James Arnold, in Césaire’s work realistic portrayals of Caribbean problems ended with the *Cahier*. However, Arnold makes some relevant points in his reading of the elegiac poems to be found in *Ferrements* (1960). In these historical poems, he says, ‘Césaire adopts a position of retrenchment in the face of a neo-colonialist system so firmly established in the overseas departments of France – the Départements d’Outre Mer, including Martinique – that their abolition through revolution cannot even be envisaged.’<sup>47</sup> The utopian promise of revolution is there but always deferred, the appearance of a free, healthy society delayed because, for him,

the revolutionary leap into an uncertain future having once been put aside, the only solution Césaire sees for the contradiction between the marvellous vision of childhood and the ugliness of the real world, a contradiction that is to be negated, avoided, or masked, is the poetic flight to an altitude where the two begin to blend harmoniously.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Raphaël Confiant, *Aimé Césaire: Une traversée paradoxale du siècle* (Paris: Editions Stock, 1993), pp. 249-250.

<sup>45</sup> For example, in a speech given at the National Assembly, February 1978, cit. Raphaël Confiant, *Aimé Césaire*, p. 253.

<sup>46</sup> Césaire made these comments in 1979. See Henri Descamps, *La politique aux Antilles françaises de 1946 à nos jours* (Paris: LGDJ, 1981), cit. Fred Constant, ‘La politique française de l’immigration antillaise de 1946 à 1987’, *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, 3: 3 (1987), p. 19.

<sup>47</sup> A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, p. 273.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

In the context of the ‘exiled’ West Indian, then, the best we can say for Césaire is that the struggle of the migrant, of the would-be migrant and of the returner, belong to this category of the ugly real world, best served psychologically and poetically by this retreat into the past even as Césaire, in his political mode, was concerned about the one fifth of French West Indians deserting the region for Europe.

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Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) was also to find that revolution in the French West Indies was barely to be envisaged, although his response was very different. Whilst it is possible that Césaire has, in an elegiac and abstract way, aimed for the return of his people to their native land, Fanon left the West Indians behind altogether, turned to political activism on another continent to become the twentieth century’s ‘most famous spokesman of Third Worldism which held that the future of socialism – or even of the world – was no longer in the hands of the proletariat of the industrialised world but in those of the dispossessed wretched of the earth’.<sup>49</sup> Fanon is one of the first men to attempt fearlessly to analyse race politics in a colonial context. His most famous writings include *PNMB* (1952), which includes a mixture of, among other elements, psychoanalysis and autobiography along with some literary criticism, and *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961), which shows how his interest in the oppressed broadened to include colonised people around the globe. He also made contributions to his revolutionary journal *El Moudjahid*, gathered into a collection called *Pour la révolution africaine* in 1964. It is thanks to *PNMB* that Fanon became the best-known inheritor of the mantle of negritude, despite his shifting relationship to it. Thereafter the focus of his attention moved away from the conditioning of French West Indians, so although the French West Indian ‘crisis’ does feature occasionally in *Pour la révolution africaine* it makes sense here to focus chiefly to *PNMB*, with some reference to *Pour la révolution africaine*.

From the perspective of this thesis, the details of Fanon’s role as a spokesman for the Algerian National Liberation Front before and during the Algerian War with France are not obviously pertinent. And yet, it is this distinctive championing of an initially alien

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<sup>49</sup> David Macey, *op. cit.*, p.6.

revolutionary cause, not his attitude towards the West Indies, that has made Fanon a figure of interest in the field of Anglophone postcolonial theory; his position in the debate about (post)colonialism in the West Indian context is completely missing from a recent edition of the *Wasafiri* journal which is devoted purely to him.<sup>50</sup> Fanon's cultural presence in both Martinique and in metropolitan France remains slight,<sup>51</sup> while in Anglophone thought he has often been divorced from his context and treated as a 'theorist in vacuo', due to a tendency 'to privilege all thought that apparently promotes hybrid identities and interstitial spaces [...and] to marginalize questions of historical and geographical particularity in postcolonial thought.'<sup>52</sup> This is despite Fanon's comment in *PNMB* that his observations about black/white relations in that text are valid only for 'les Antilles.'<sup>53</sup> Nicholas Harrison remarks on the difficulties faced by those who do attempt to place Fanon within a historical and geographical framework. Having cited Fanon himself, who has said that '[l]a densité de l'Histoire ne détermine aucun de mes actes'<sup>54</sup> and whose writing oscillates between open recognition of his situatedness to claims of objectivity, Harrison concludes that for the purposes of critical discourse the attempt to situate Fanon's thought in biography is irrelevant. He thus joins those for whom Fanon's 'West Indianness' is of no importance.<sup>55</sup>

Albert Memmi, the Tunisian writer and psychologist who knew Fanon when the latter was living in Tunis and working as editor of *El Moudjahid* and psychiatrist at a local hospital, does not share this view. Considering Memmi's professional interests it is perhaps unsurprising that his article 'La vie impossible de Frantz Fanon' openly proposes that the development of Fanon or any writer can be explained by the fact that

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<sup>50</sup> Frantz Fanon Special Issue, *Wasafiri*, No. 44 (Spring 2005).

<sup>51</sup> David Macey, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>52</sup> J. Michael Dash, 'Postcolonial thought and the French Caribbean', in *Francophone and Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, p. 232.

<sup>53</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>55</sup> Nicholas Harrison, 'Positioning Fanon', *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory*, 21 (1998), p. 57.



quel que fût le génie de l'auteur, le succès dépend davantage encore de l'insertion de cette œuvre dans le réel humain de son aptitude à le modifier. Mais toute œuvre est aussi la réponse d'un homme aux problèmes posés à lui par le monde et par son monde intérieur: comment ne porterait-elle pas à tout instant la marque plus ou moins secrète de cet homme, et la passion qui le meut, d'où elle tire sa force et ses fragilités?<sup>56</sup>

Memmi's view is convincing in relation to Fanon, who had believed in the French Republican ideal more than most. Heeding De Gaulle's appeal to defend the Empire, he joined the Free French in 1943, despite opposition from his family and a less than patriotic teacher, Joseph Henri, who had said that white men killed each other it was a blessing for blacks – much to the teenage Fanon's disgust.<sup>57</sup> Fanon was first taught by Césaire in 1941, and was impressed to find that '[p]our la première fois, on verra un professeur de lycée donc apparemment un homme digne, simplement dire à la société antillaise, "qu'il est beau et bon d'être nègre".'<sup>58</sup> This too caused a scandal. When the Vichy regime was ousted from Martinique before he was able to leave the West Indies he then made a further attempt to serve the *mère-patrie* and enlisted the following year in a light infantry battalion to fight in Europe alongside the Free French and the Allies. He was convinced that his personal freedom and the freedom of Martinique and metropolitan France were tightly bound together, and that colour was irrelevant in the struggle (in an early indication of the universalism that was to become his guiding light). Memmi believes it is this early, passionate identification with mainland France 'qui explique, en partie au moins, la violence du mouvement inverse chez Fanon. Plus ample est le mouvement du pendule, plus douloureux est le déchirement.'<sup>59</sup> Fanon left no formal written account of his departure from Martinique and was later reluctant to talk about his wartime experiences, but we know that it was as a result of this first experience of life in the Mediterranean context that his disillusionment with the 'ideal' began to grow. His unit spent three months in Morocco. It was here that Fanon discovered the inter-ethnic tensions amongst West Indians, North Africans and black Africans that cracked the sense

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<sup>56</sup> Albert Memmi, 'La vie impossible de Frantz Fanon', *Esprit*, 406 (September 1971), p. 268.

<sup>57</sup> David Macey, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>58</sup> Frantz Fanon, 'Antillais et Africains', *Pour la révolution africaine* (Paris: Editions François Maspero, 1964), p. 31. The articles in *Pour la révolution africaine* were originally published separately between 1955 and 1961.

<sup>59</sup> Albert Memmi, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

of unity carried across the ocean. In this French protectorate privileged Europeans lived apart from the devalorised, poverty-stricken Muslim majority, and official divisions created between the troops on racial lines made it clear to Fanon and his friends that the army they 'had hoped would free Europe and the world from fascism and racism was in fact structured around an ethnic hierarchy, with white Europeans at the top and North Africans at the bottom'.<sup>60</sup>

Once in mainland France the crack widened. There was a continuing ambiguity in the position of West Indians in the racial hierarchy. *PNMB* relates the now well-documented alienation of the West Indian who sees himself, and who is seen by the European and the black West Indian as more *évolué* than the black African, closer to the white European in his identity.<sup>61</sup> No doubt referring to his own experience, Fanon relates the West Indian's surprise in finding that, in the army, there is some confusion over who he really is: '[D]'un côté les Européens, vieilles colonies ou originaires, de l'autre les tirailleurs.' He is no longer clear whether he is a black 'native' (generally Senegalese) or a *toubab* (European). It does seem to him, however, that black troops are obliged to take the brunt of the fighting, being sent into battle first.<sup>62</sup> There is also the feeling that the West Indian troops once in Europe are forgotten about. Fanon's experiences with French civilians were mixed. According to his brother Joby, Fanon made friends in the Jura after being wounded and hospitalised in November 1945, and following the liberation of France, when Fanon's battalion was moved to an area near Rouen he and his comrades were warmly welcomed into the home of a local white councillor. On the other hand, in letters written to his parents at that time and quoted by David Macey he regrets rushing to defend the *mère-patrie*, and blames foolish politicians for encouraging Martiniquan loyalty to an outmoded ideal. Interestingly, he also refers to the folly of fighting for the peasants of eastern France who had seemed unwilling to struggle for their own freedom and were not grateful to their liberators.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, whilst the American GIs were fêted and well provisioned during the liberation festivities in Toulon the West Indian soldiers

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<sup>60</sup> David Macey, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>61</sup> See Susan Price, 'Michel Leiris, French Anthropology, and a Side Trip to the Antilles', pp. 28-29.

<sup>62</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 20.

<sup>63</sup> David Macey, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

were not quite so welcome, and Fanon recalls that European women would often fearfully spurn them when asked to dance.<sup>64</sup> The disillusionment, then, continued to the end of the war.

On his return to Martinique, however, and once he had finished his secondary education he was entitled to a scholarship to pursue a university degree, which would mean returning to Europe. The alternatives of working in the local state sector or of doing administrative work in Africa did not appeal. Yet Fanon, like Césaire, was keen to leave Martinique. His identification with metropolitan France, if now less passionate, seems to have continued, and it is his identification with Martinique that seems to have been more complicated at this point. He had seen the privations and humiliations of the Vichy regime, and realised that once concealed discrimination was displayed for all to see.<sup>65</sup>

*PNMB* does not focus on the privileged *béké* class, however. It is focused firmly on the condition and attitudes of the black bourgeois class in Martinique. Because of the personal experience that informs it, it is a rich text for gaining an insight into the psychology of middle class migration from the French West Indies to the *métropole*, for when Fanon wrote this book, it was principally this class who were able to travel to Europe. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that this book focuses on their particular experiences, whilst only occasionally referring to less privileged groups. When Fanon says that ‘[l]e jeune Antillais est un Français appelé à tout instant à vivre avec des compatriots blancs’ he is referring to this social group.<sup>66</sup>

The alienation from self and from the other is perfectly expressed, from Fanon’s perspective, in the behaviour of the potential traveller, the traveller abroad and the returnee. Fanon has plenty of examples to illuminate these ‘stages’, and describes a variety of behaviours, some of which seem quite comical until subjected to his diagnostic gaze. His examples apparently derive from popular culture and folklore, as well as his own personal experiences, wide reading and research. Of the first stage he says of the

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<sup>64</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 127.

<sup>65</sup> Frantz Fanon, ‘Antillais et Africains’, pp. 32-33.

<sup>66</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 121.

individual concerned that ‘on sent, à l’allure presque aérienne de sa démarche, que des forces nouvelles se sont mises en branle. Quand il rencontre un ami ou un camarade, ce n’est plus le large geste huméral qui l’annonce: discrètement, notre “futur” s’incline.’<sup>67</sup> The people in his social circle look at him and treat him differently. Of the next stage Fanon learns from a friend that once in metropolitan France the black man immediately seeks the services of a white prostitute because ‘[d]ans ces seins blancs que mes mains ubiquitaires caressent, c’est la civilisation et la dignité blanches que je fais miennes.’<sup>68</sup> In order to speak ‘le français de France’, West Indians would seek to alter their Martiniquan accent, overanxious in particular to roll their ‘r’s in the French fashion, and as a result making ridiculous errors. Next they would no doubt begin quoting Montesquieu or Claudel, writers whom they have studied for this purpose only, since ‘par compte de ces auteurs, ils comptent faire oublier leur noirceur.’<sup>69</sup> The returning West Indian logically needs or is expected to announce his or her difference. ‘Folklore’ provides the story of an upwardly mobile son of peasant who on returning to the island forgets the name of an agricultural tool. Others have decided that they will speak no Creole; they may cast a newly critical eye over their old friends, with whom they will be expected to hold court. Their friends, for their part, will expect to be satisfied that the returnee has genuinely been remade, perfected in his journey towards Europeanness, and has indeed experienced the *métropole* in the accepted fashion: ‘On ne pardonne pas, à celui qui affiche une supériorité, de faillir au devoir. Qu’il dise, par exemple: “Il ne m’a pas été donné de voir en France des gendarmes à chevaux”, et le voilà perdu. Il ne lui reste qu’une alternative: se débarrasser de son parisianisme ou mourir au pilori.’<sup>70</sup>

Fanon’s focus on the bourgeoisie is problematic for some commentators, especially since he does not seem to be quite aware of it himself, referring to ‘le Noir’ and ‘l’Antillais’ generically, without reference to class. John McCulloch remarks that in Fanon’s thesis, although

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[t]he seeds of trauma are widespread in as far as primary education and western cultural artefacts are disseminated throughout the black community [...] the eruption of trauma in adulthood, that is, the shattering of the white mask is confined to the *évolué* class. [...] In *Masks* Fanon's examples are almost always drawn from his European experience, and the pathologies of affect he describes usually concern the *évolué* class.<sup>71</sup>

McCulloch notes with some dismay that here 'we have the psychology of a specific class, the urban petty bourgeoisie, presented as the experience of all Antilleans. The petty bourgeois are the universal class of Fanon's first work.'<sup>72</sup> This focus could explain why some politically-minded commentators have sidelined in favour of his later work, which speaks more fundamentally of the oppressed masses.

The *évolué* in Europe will come face to face with a rich array of racist stereotyping. For example, there is the habit of addressing black men in 'petit-nègre', which is frighteningly meant to 'enfermer le Noir, c'est perpétuer une situation conflictuelle où le Blanc infeste le Noir de corps étrangers extrêmement toxiques.'<sup>73</sup> There is the white Frenchman, whose attempts to be friendly compound Fanon's anxieties: "Voyez-vous, monsieur, je suis l'un des plus négrophiles de Lyon". L'évidence était là, implacable. Ma noirceur était là, dense et indiscutable. Et elle me tourmentait, elle me pourchassait, m'inquiétait, m'exaspérait.'<sup>74</sup> Memmi firmly places this information in the realms of the autobiographical, in the lived experience of Fanon: 'même alors, la discrimination, les multiples petites agressions qui en résultent tous les jours, sur les trottoirs de Paris ou de Lyon, il les considère de l'intérieur d'une même nation, dont il fait partie de droit et d'affirmation. Il est un Français de peau noire, en butte aux erreurs, sottises et méchancetés de ses concitoyens de peau blanche.'<sup>75</sup>

Fanon had arrived in Paris in the summer of 1945 hoping to study dentistry, but quickly decided to study in Lyon instead. He told his brother that there were too many black

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<sup>71</sup> John McCulloch, *Black Soul, White Artefact: Fanon's Clinical Psychology and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 70.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>73</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 28.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>75</sup> Albert Memmi, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

people in Paris.<sup>76</sup> Was he too an ‘aliéné’ on his arrival, or was he influenced by his dislike of West Indian negativity? *PNMB* suggests that while some West Indian students tended towards the former, others, having been deceived in their expectations, would withdraw into a Creole-speaking, introspective ‘*umwelt* Martiniquais.’<sup>77</sup> Fanon was his own man, and was obviously unlikely to limit himself in this way, but this does hint at his future estrangement from the West Indies, long before writing *PNMB*. He experienced a degree of isolation in Lyon, although he made both black and white friends among the student community, remarking that at least on campus he could avoid suspicion as a black man of learning.<sup>78</sup> Fanon was also a focused reader during his time in Lyon and ‘was reading philosophy and psychology in order to find the theoretical tools to analyse his lived experience, and fiction, poetry and drama to illustrate it.’<sup>79</sup> It was also at this point that amongst his wide reading Fanon developed a fondness for Césaire’s *Cahier*.

Fanon’s treatment (and non-treatment) of women in *PNMB* has been a subject for enquiry for some time. Arguments focus on his marginalising of women, on his use of terms such as ‘le Noir’, ‘l’Antillais’ which, Gwen Bergner remarks, refer not to humankind in general but to actual men – in particular students, prospective partners of white women in Paris, and so on.<sup>80</sup> However, his approach to the woman of colour sheds further light on his perception of the traveller/migrant. The arguments centre on his attitude towards the Martiniquan novelist Mayotte Capécia and her two autobiographical heroines. A ‘mulatress’ from a working-class background, Fanon did not appreciate the way in which she – or rather her wartime heroines, for Fanon makes no distinction – deals with the problematic of *métissage*. The heroines of both novels, light-skinned women, named Mayotte in the former and Isaure in the latter, are independent, hardworking and ambitious. Both valorise their European and devalue their African heritage. Both struggle with an unsatisfied desire for wholesome relationships with white men, whether

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<sup>76</sup> Marcel Manville, *Les Antilles sans fard* (Paris: Editions L’Harmattan, 1992), p. 242, cit. David Macey, *op. cit.* p. 118.

<sup>77</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 29.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>79</sup> David Macey, *op. cit.* p. 127.

<sup>80</sup> Gwen Bergner, ‘Who Is That Masked Woman? Or, The Role of Gender in Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*’, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 110: 1 (January 1995), p.76.

*békés*, metropolitan soldiers, sailors or pilots. Black men are not to be trusted, yet white men only bring pain. Mayotte's lover is unattractive, and although he treats her well for a time, he makes it clear that he will not remain with her for ever. This is a fruitless and clichéd kind of relationship, as Mayotte knows, for the white serviceman in such cases always leaves and marries a respectable white woman in metropolitan France. He leaves her to raise their child alone. Nevertheless, she says, 'All I know is that he had blue eyes, blond hair, a pale complexion and I loved him.'<sup>81</sup> In *La Nègresse blanche*, Isaure has a low opinion of the blacks who grow 'insolent', as she puts it, towards the end of the war and afterwards, as they talk of revolution. She acquires a *béké* husband but the relationship is doomed, and he is killed by a politically motivated mob of blacks. This new world has no place for her. 'But would she find a country where she could finally escape the curse of being neither black nor white?'<sup>82</sup>

Fanon disapproves of Capécia/Mayotte/Isaure's over-valorising of white culture, sense of inferiority and longing for a white spouse, though alarm bells should start ringing as he uses her texts to illuminate female Martiniquan sensibilities in general with comments such as 'il faut blanchir la race; cela, toutes les Martiniquaises le savent, le disent, le répètent. [...] Il s'agit de ne pas sombrer de nouveau dans la négraille, et toute Antillaise s'efforcera dans ses flirts ou dans ses liaisons, de choisir le moins noir.'<sup>83</sup> Feminist commentators have tried to reclaim Capécia's work to an extent, and to highlight how '[t]hrough for Fanon colonial identity forms out of the mirroring relation between white men and black men, this process is played out through the bodies of black women. In other words, women (both black and white) mediate between black and white men, enabling the differentiation of masculine subject positions according to race.'<sup>84</sup> However, it is also interesting to consider what unites Fanon to Capécia and to her two fictitious heroines: all four chose to leave for Paris despite their knowledge, gained from wartime experiences, of the failings of Europeans. All pursued (at least for a time) the ideal of the *mère-patrie* as home of the universal values of liberty, equality and fraternity;

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<sup>81</sup> Mayotte Capécia, *I am a Martinican Woman*, p. 118.

<sup>82</sup> Mayotte Capécia, *The White Negress*, p. 255.

<sup>83</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 38.

<sup>84</sup> Gwen Bergner, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

all disapproved of the racial complexes of the West Indies more than they feared what might have greeted them in metropolitan France.

In seeking a fictional black male character against whom to compare the black females Mayotte and Isaure Fanon looks at only Jean Veneuse, an intellectual and thoroughly assimilated black character in *Un Homme pareil aux autres* (1947) a novel by René Maran (1887-1960), born in Martinique to Guianese parents. Jean has grown up mainly in metropolitan France and is unhappily in love with a white, bourgeois, metropolitan woman. Like most of Fanon's male examples he represents the black middle class elite, having been educated largely in a metropolitan boarding school. The sympathy afforded to Jean, an administrator in colonial Africa, is in stark contrast to Fanon's disapproval of Capécia/Mayotte/Isaure. Fanon sees Jean as virtually free of the complexes of race and gender, as someone who is simply subject to a certain mode of neurotic behaviour:

'[N]ous disons que Jean Veneuse ne représente pas une expérience des rapports noir-blanc, mais une certaine façon pour un névrosé, accidentellement noir, de se comporter.'<sup>85</sup> It would seem, then, that the white mask is more perceptible in the woman of colour than in a man. Gwen Bergner puts this different treatment down to the validity of the characters' claim to whiteness. For Fanon, working class women like Capécia's heroines can aspire to an unattainable whiteness speciously, only by aligning themselves with white men, whilst Veneuse has internalised his white identity through intellectual assimilation and class ties and his alienation is forced on him by whites who refuse to accept this identity.<sup>86</sup> This intellectual assimilation is valid because he has lived for so long in metropolitan France, which is not the case for Capécia's heroines.

In returning to the connection between *PNMB* and Fanon's own experiences of the *métropole* we need to pursue for a moment his attitude towards women beyond fictional examples. Even as he analysed the alienation of the black *évolué* who seeks to possess or even take revenge on whiteness by sleeping with or marrying a white woman in metropolitan France Fanon was pursuing a relationship with a very young white woman, Josie, who was to become his wife in 1952. He had already fathered a child by a white

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<sup>85</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 64.

<sup>86</sup> Gwen Bergner, *op. cit.*, p. 84.



medical student as a result of a brief affair. Yet despite his critique of black women's choices, by the end of *PNMB* he makes it clear that he refuses to be bound by racial restrictions on whom one should or should not marry: 'Ce n'est pas le monde noir qui me dicte ma conduite.'<sup>87</sup> The number of black students at the Faculty of Medicine in Lyon during Fanon's time was apparently tiny, and they were all male. It is probable that Fanon met very few young black women in Lyon. However, we know that for Fanon, 'black women's attempts to inhabit a whiteness that Fanon consistently defines in masculine terms becomes mimicry, a feminine masquerade both of race and gender' that even education, wealth and good breeding cannot overcome.<sup>88</sup> The few black women who appear in *PNMB*, whether students in metropolitan France or single mothers in Martinique, are depicted purely in this light (and in describing the urgency with which Martiniquan men pursued white partners there is no discussion of what this might have meant for their countrywomen in the *métropole*). Naturally, this makes them seem very unappealing as marriage partners. The conclusion we must draw is that, given his particular understanding and experience of Martiniquan women, it is unlikely that he could have brought himself to marry one, even if any had been available. It is also interesting that although the text records his research into the attitudes of white women towards black men, black men towards white women and black women towards white women, all in some detail, he seems content with barely a sentence to declare that 'les Blancs n'épousent pas une femme noire.'<sup>89</sup> Neither does he concern himself with relationships between black women and white women, although his own sister, Gabrielle, to whom he was apparently close, was studying in France at the same time as himself, and could perhaps have provided him with information on this subject.<sup>90</sup> It must be admitted that Fanon is far more negative (or more dismissive) of black women, than towards any other racial or gender category in this text. Had he been aware of, and interested in the Nardal sisters and their pre-war, pre-Césairean pursuit of race consciousness and female self-determination he might have realised that issues pertaining

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<sup>87</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 184.

<sup>88</sup> Gwen Bergner, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>89</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 39.

<sup>90</sup> David Macey, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

to educated black women in mainland France were more complicated than simply dreaming of impossible white husbands.<sup>91</sup>

The influence of negritude upon Fanon is relevant to the extent that his struggle was to liberate the man of colour: ‘Nous ne tendons à rien de moins qu’à libérer l’homme de couleur de lui-même.’<sup>92</sup> Fanon then moves towards the affirmation that ‘je ne dois m’attacher à faire revivre une civilisation nègre injustement méconnue. Je ne me fais l’homme d’aucun passé. Je ne veux pas chanter le passé aux dépens de mon présent et de mon avenir.’<sup>93</sup> Here, he highlights the universalism that would take him away from negritude; the struggles of the West Indies ceased to be his ideological focus within a year of the book’s publication. Just before sitting his medical exams 1953 he visited Martinique for the last time before his new career in psychiatry took him to Algeria, where a post had become available. In 1956 he was to leave his post in the face of rising political strife and personal turmoil at the professional implications of colonial brutality, and by 1957 he was a militant in the National Liberation Front. In 1952 he could write of his Algerian patients in the third person: ‘Tous ces hommes qui nous font peur’ and ‘tous ces hommes en face de nous.’<sup>94</sup> Yet by 1957 he was referring to them in the first person plural. Never again would he refer to West Indians in this way.

This recoiling seems to have been a gradual process, and even in 1953 he had been willing to work either in Martinique (which, he found, still had no jobs, despite several years as a French Department) or in the *métropole*. When he went to Algeria it would have been difficult to foretell that this country would become the centre of his existence. But when he did at last reject ‘France’, Memmi remarks that it was ‘avec toute la passion dont était capable ce tempérament de feu. Il lui faudra dorénavant combattre ce premier amour, l’arracher de lui-même, avec d’autant plus de douloureuse violence qu’il y avait cru, qu’il l’avait intériorisé. Il lui faudra combattre la France pour combattre cet aspect de lui-même’. As for the West Indies, ‘l’identification à la patrie algérienne aura

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<sup>91</sup> T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *op. cit.*, p.77.

<sup>92</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 6.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>94</sup> Frantz Fanon, ‘Le “syndrome nord-africain”’, *Pour la révolution africaine*, p. 13.

remplacé, chez Fanon, une impossible identification à la patrie martiniquaise.<sup>95</sup> Fanon seems to have decided that the answer to his own problem was not to be found in the French West Indies – he could not have led them in revolt for they were unready for it, unlike certain other oppressed peoples of colour, and therefore he would not have found the psychological outlet he needed in West Indian politics. Therefore, Memmi has suggested, it was really the West Indies that betrayed Fanon rather than the other way round.<sup>96</sup>

For a long time Fanon had believed in the French ideal of the universal, and seemingly remained bound to it even as it failed to live up to his expectations. He had studied the ‘black question’, but had found that although Martinique in the 1950s had, to a degree, moved on from its blind worship of the European it had still failed seriously to question its quasi colonial relationship with ‘France’; and having latched onto biological/literary negritude it now seemed that, in words dripping with cynicism, ‘l’Antillais, après la grande erreur blanche, soit en train de vivre maintenant dans le grand mirage noir.’<sup>97</sup> None of this served his desire for action, conviction and change.

As his militant stance took form he developed a highly critical attitude towards the possibility of change in the French West Indies. The economic and political situation of the French islands remained unsatisfactory after departmentalisation, and a disturbance took place in Martinique in 1959, leading to the deaths of several islanders at the hands of the national constabulary army corps (*CRS*). In his article ‘Le sang coule aux Antilles sous domination française’ he presents the view that military violence could lead the West Indians to demand independence<sup>98</sup> but Fanon’s private discussions with Bertène Juminer and Simone de Beauvoir suggest that these deaths would lead to an outburst of anger and symbolic protest amongst the people, but soon all would be forgotten, rather

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<sup>95</sup> Albert Memmi, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>97</sup> Frantz Fanon, ‘Antillais et Africains’, *Pour la révolution africaine*, p. 36.

<sup>98</sup> Frantz Fanon, ‘Le sang coule aux Antilles sous domination française’, *Pour la révolution africaine*, pp. 194-195.

like an erotic dream.<sup>99</sup> Although he would have liked to be proved wrong, he felt that no revolutionary impulse would be triggered, and despite approving of the West Indian movement for independence that developed from the 1960s onwards in no sense did he become part of it. In his 'Lettre à la jeunesse africaine', he urges the youth of the West Indies as well as Africa to rise up and sound the death knell for French colonialism.<sup>100</sup> However, the focus for this article is chiefly on the liberty of North Africa in general – and Algeria in particular. Any benefit to the West Indians themselves is incidental.

Unsurprisingly, the lot of the West Indian migrant/traveller in the *métropole* ceased to be an issue for Fanon. Where Fanon does, on one occasion, comment on the racial conditions for black people in France it is to highlight the sickness of racism at the heart of a colonial power. His article 'Fureur raciste en France' highlights a run of racist incidents in mainland France, including a daytime attack on an African writer and his white female companion in the Latin Quarter - known for its multiethnic student population – where no one came to his aid and no one was ever caught. He also mentions an outburst of fascist sloganeering during an American film about civil rights shown in Paris. For Fanon, these were not unrepresentative incidents, but the consequences of a psychologically damaging French education system and of decades of colonial domination.<sup>101</sup> He was not calling for greater understanding, for improvements in race relations, or for social reform in the *métropole*, but for West Indians - and indeed all politically conscious French people - to withdraw from a rotting society.

There are two explanations for Fanon's rejection of his homeland. The most obviously acceptable one in the discourse of postcolonialism is that Fanon chose exile and self-invention rather than the bind of his racial origins and an essentialist view of authenticity. Consequently, some postcolonial theorists see his trajectory as an example of 'a performative cosmopolitanism that anticipates the contemporary moment of

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<sup>99</sup> Bertène Juminer, *Hommages à Frantz Fanon* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1962), cit. Albert Memmi, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

<sup>100</sup> Frantz Fanon, 'Lettre à la jeunesse africaine', *Pour la révolution africaine*, p. 140.

<sup>101</sup> Frantz Fanon, 'Fureur raciste en France', *Pour la révolution africaine*, p. 192.

postidentity.<sup>102</sup> Then there are those for whom Fanon represents the notion of compulsion and lack. bell hooks considers the silences and the excluded of *PNMB*, that hover over the valorising Other, the white metropolitan male:

To think about who is the absent figure that is being gazed at takes us back to [...] the relationship to the white male, to the longing for the sense of the white male as representing the only meaningful father towards whom one looks for recognition. Fanon cannot get to himself without going back in some way through the body of the father, the black father, who is equally a disappeared person within the narrative. So it is not wholly a question of the disappearance of the female. In some ways, it is a disappearance of the question of home.<sup>103</sup>

There is a sense in which Fanon's driven nature and denunciatory stance are mirrored in the tone of Césaire's *Cahier*, if not necessarily in its politics; while Césaire's poem savagely mocks the myths and the reality of black subordinacy and white power, Fanon, as we have seen, angrily lost patience with Martiniquan timidity and her aborted revolutions, and turned his back decisively on the French Republic. Neither man prioritised the French West Indian diaspora. However, while Césaire returned to his native land and eventually became part of the 'system', Fanon has retained his status as a committed revolutionary who generated a radical new identity for himself beyond the limits of ethnicity. Among French West Indian writers and theorists, it is Césaire rather than Fanon who attracts the greatest attention with regards to French West Indian identity formation, but it is Fanon's potential as a representative of how the people of the French West Indian diaspora have – or might – assume new identities and create new destinies for themselves that remains to be explored by theorists and writers of fiction.

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<sup>102</sup> Ross Posnock, 'How It Feels to Be a Problem: Du Bois, Fanon, and the "Impossible Life" of the Black Intellectual', *Critical Inquiry*, 23 (Winter 1997), p. 325.

<sup>103</sup> This comment was made by bell hooks in 'Dialogue', a discussion between Lola Young, bell hooks, Gilane Tawadros, Martina Attille, Mark Latamie, Homi K. Bhabha and Françoise Vergès in *The Fact of Blackness; Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, ed. by Alan Read (London: Bay Press, 1996), p. 105.

## Chapter II.2      *Antillanité* and *Créolité*: Any Place for the Diaspora?

In this chapter I interrogate how the concepts of *antillanité* and *créolité* as understood by commentators and theorists have been used and developed in their theoretical texts, comments and novels to engage with the reality of French West Indian migration to mainland France.

Commentators routinely discuss the major proponent of *antillanité*, Edouard Glissant (1928-2011) and of *créolité*, Patrick Chamoiseau (b. 1953), Raphaël Confiant (b. 1951) and Jean Bernabé (b. 1942), in terms of their position on the political, historical and indeed psychological status of the *DOM*, and also, increasingly, globalisation. However, the connection between French West Indian migration to the *métropole* and French West Indian literary theory tends to receive little attention. This silence is a fairly major gap, especially since contemporary French West Indian literature is largely read through the prism of these prominent post-négritude writers and theorists. Anglophone scholars have contributed towards this silence. Chris Bongie notes that *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (1992), J. Michael Dash's English (USA) translation of Glissant's first significant theoretical work, *Le Discours antillais*, is clearly designed to appeal to non-West Indian audiences in that it excludes those sections focused particularly on Martinique – and therefore, on Martiniquan migration - whilst keeping those 'arguments of most "universal" application.'<sup>1</sup> It might be thought that a reflection on French West Indian migration would resonate with those Anglophone readers who also live in diasporic communities; and in the American academy postcolonial literary studies is known to focus with particular interest on diasporic writing.<sup>2</sup> Yet Dash's decision to exclude a section entitled 'Emigrés, enfants d'émigrés'<sup>3</sup> from the translation suggests that a widespread focus on hybridity and nomadism within the scholarship of Anglophone postcolonial literary studies does not necessarily indicate an interest in engaging with this

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 458 (fn. 39), with reference to Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, ed. and trans. by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter III.2.

<sup>3</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981), pp. 74-77.

topic on a ‘universal’ level. It should also be noted that Glissant’s vast oeuvre has not been widely translated into English, despite his status as the foremost literary and cultural theorist of the French West Indies at the present time. Anjali Prabhu notes that Glissant’s work has been absorbed and championed by postcolonial theory only tentatively, despite the fact that it has largely been his theoretical texts rather than his novels that have been translated.<sup>4</sup>

The nomenclature chosen by these writers colludes, if not intentionally, with this critical silence; Glissant’s *antillanité*, and the *créolité* claimed more consistently by Confiant and Chamoiseau,<sup>5</sup> and even a term such as creolisation, all bring to mind notions of a certain fixity of place, namely a *West Indian* place. Although these men have over the years increasingly expanded their thinking to encompass or challenge the realities of globalisation, it is apparent that for many commentators it is their attachment to place that represents their most obvious and strikingly creative and theoretical inspiration and contribution. Many commentators agree that place is of prime importance in both contexts. Richard L. W. Clarke asserts that ‘*Antillanité*, in contrast to Negritude’s emphasis on the persistence of African cultural forms in the Caribbean, sought to stress the fabrication of a specifically Caribbean and, as such, creolised form of cultural identity. The emphasis in so doing was upon the articulation of a complex and hybrid Antillean specificity, as opposed to merely trying to trace the persistence of certain African residues.’<sup>6</sup> Debra L. Anderson remarks that *antillanité*, a term first used by Edouard Glissant in 1957, has always been understood by him as ‘deeply rooted in the *vécu antillais* – the reality of the Caribbean lived experience. The fact that the Caribbean community has embraced the word *Antillanité* and that it has become part of the current lexicon is an indicator of its importance to the Caribbean community.’<sup>7</sup> She also notes the

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<sup>4</sup> Anjali Prabhu, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects* (Albany: State University of New York, 2007), p. 105.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Bernabé, a specialist in the Creole language, is the least well-known of the three major *créolistes*, probably because he did not begin to write novels until relatively recently.

<sup>6</sup> Richard L. W. Clarke, ‘Root versus Rhizome: An “Epistemological Break” in Francophone Caribbean Thought’, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 9: 1 (April 2000), p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Debra L. Anderson, *Decolonizing the Text: Glissantian Readings in Caribbean and African-American Literatures* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 28.

connection between *antillanité* and ‘Caribbean culture, landscape, and importantly, history.’<sup>8</sup> Chris Bongie is critical of the assertions of a creole ‘foundationalist policy of identity’ that relies upon a West Indian geography and shared cultural practices.<sup>9</sup> Daniel Delas in turn emphasises the importance of place in *antillanité* and *créolité*:

Le premier terme correspond à l’idée simple que c’est la réalité antillaise, sa culture, sa géographie, ses traditions, sa langue que l’écrivain doit explorer et fait vivre, avec le double objectif d’en montrer la valeur et ainsi de désaliéner l’Antillais à partir des Antilles réelles et non d’une France ou d’une Afrique mythiques. Le second terme résulte d’un approfondissement et d’une extension du premier: cette réalité antillaise doit être perçue dans sa dimension propre, c’est-à-dire créole, métisse, ouverte aux brassages de l’histoire, vivante au carrefour des langues et des cultures; cette représentation du monde créole est celle que partagent tous les peuples de la Caraïbe, tous les peuples où existent des langues créoles, et sans doute de plus en plus, le monde entier.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst this ‘sans doute de plus en plus, le monde entier’ supposes, as we have seen, an outward looking and all-encompassing possibility for *créolité*, it is pitched at the end of a list that might be seen to prioritise an identitarian perspective on the world. In the *créolistes*’ primary theoretical text, *Eloge de la créolité* (1989), *créolité* is described at one point as ‘l’agrégat interactionnel ou transactionnel, des éléments culturels caraïbes, européens, africains, asiatiques, et levantins, que le joug de l’Histoire a réunis sur le même sol.’<sup>11</sup> This suggests that place – alongside the synthesis itself - is the uniting element here, even though they seek to transcend the permanency of space. The foundational importance of place is emphasised by the fact that the masters of *antillanité* and *créolité* all share the distinction of being Martiniquan. This is an emphasis upon an identity rooted in the West Indies, and indeed, it is relatively rare for their novels to

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles*, p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Delas, *Littératures des Caraïbes de langue française* (Paris: Editions Nathan Université, 1999), p. 70-71.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la créolité/In Praise of Creoleness*, bilingual edition, trans. by M. B. Teleb-Khyar, ([1989] Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1997), p. 26.



explore the West Indies outside of Martinique.<sup>12</sup> This must inherently complicate the inclusion of the French West Indian metropolitan experience. It requires a focus on a different set of criteria, on a world that exists outside a Martiniquan landscape and language (Creole), and within a different combination of traditions and cultural practices – whilst at the same time existing alongside them, whether easily or uneasily, in the migrant’s cultural imaginary.

The writers discussed in this chapter have, probably more than any others, been dogged by references to what Sally Price, with reference specifically to French West Indian researchers and writers, refers to as

the unavoidable influence of Western training on those members of a non-Western society depicting the fabric of their own culture. In order to be taken seriously as analysts of their own society, Antilleans are required to learn the ropes for satisfying an audience brought up on a cultural system directed by a particularly centralized authority structure, where ‘norms and forms’ are more rigidly policed than in many other parts of the world.<sup>13</sup>

Mary Gallagher asserts that the reality of writing in French, publishing in Paris, receiving metropolitan literary awards and relying largely on a metropolitan readership has created the tendency for Martiniquan writers to create ‘an overarching, tentacular poetics, that is, a pan-Caribbean (or even global) programme of culture’ which ‘represents perhaps an effort to pre-empt accusations of a sell-out.’<sup>14</sup> The usefulness of these ‘overarching, tentacular poetics’ to the diaspora in the overdetermined *métropole*, as distinct from their global application, will be explored in this chapter.

The physical presence of these thinkers on metropolitan soil at key points during their intellectual formation is clearly relevant here. They all live in an environment of normalised circulation, and have written about the ambivalent yet magnetic appear of

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Aldrich, ‘From *Francité* to *Créolité*: French West Indian literature comes home’, in *Writing across Worlds: Literature and Migration*, ed. by Russel King, John Connell, Paul White (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 116.

<sup>13</sup> Sally Price, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Gallagher, *Soundings*, p. 20.

‘France’. Mary Gallagher says of *Soleil de la conscience* (1956), one of Glissant’s first book-length texts, that it makes us aware of the ‘ambivalence of the Metropolitan compulsion: for Glissant, Europe (or France) is not just an addiction, but a virus.’<sup>15</sup> More than in any other of his later theoretical texts Glissant focuses here on metropolitan France as the physical Other. Geography becomes the indicator of this strangeness he feels, a strangeness that defines who the writer truly is. The otherness is highlighted by the snow, a staple indicator of strangeness and alienation in French West Indian fiction, which the critic Romuald-Blaise Fonkoua, suggests ‘fournit à Edouard Glissant le prétexte pour montrer sa relation inconfortable à la notion de l’espace. Plutôt qu’un espace d’aventures et d’expérience d’écriture comme pour le voyageur à l’envers savant et le voyageur à l’envers pittoresque, l’espace de l’Ailleurs est un lieu unique d’expérience de l’identité et de l’altérité mêlées.’<sup>16</sup> Here we have an example of the importance of place to the proto-*antillaniste*, Glissant, for whom Paris is captivating to the extent that it is different from and reflective of Martinique. Gallagher reminds us that the French word ‘glace’ can have two meanings, both mirror and ice, so that

the Martinican looking upon Paris sees both the other extreme of his own reality, solid cold (*glace*), and also the reflection of this own insularity in the mirror (*glace*) held up to him by the city [of Paris]. Hence France, and Paris in particular doubly helps Glissant to deepen his consciousness of his own doubleness. On the one hand it reflects him because it is similar; on the other hand, it shows him what he is not because it is radically different.<sup>17</sup>

Fonkoua similarly says that

[p]our Glissant, Paris est une ville particulière qui permet en même temps le déracinement et l’enracinement du voyageur antillais. Elle est une ville autre qui présente toutefois la particularité d’être une ville du même. Le voyageur à l’envers ne peut être qu’un voyageur philosophe qui découvre ainsi, à travers le

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>16</sup> Romuald-Blaise Fonkoua, ‘L’Espace du “voyager à l’envers”’, in *Littératures postcoloniales et représentations de l’ailleurs: Afrique, Caraïbe, Canada*, ed. by Jean Bessière and Jean-Marc Moura (Paris: Conférences du séminaire de littérature comparée de l’Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1999), p. 105.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Gallagher, *Soundings*, p. 210.

voyage, tout à la fois, l'éloignement et le rapprochement des espaces 'nouveau' et 'ancien', celui du 'pays d'origine' et celui du 'port d'attache'.<sup>18</sup>

However, there is a problem with Glissant's representation of Paris as site of philosophical self-discovery, attachment and difference: 'Edouard Glissant ne semble s'intéresser ni au pays de son séjour, la France métropolitaine, ni à la réalité de sa ville d'adoption, Paris, ni aux habitudes de ses habitants. [...] L'espace européen n'a d'intérêt pour lui que dans la mesure où il lui permet de se révéler à lui-même. La description de la vie quotidienne est essentielle réflexion sur le moi.'<sup>19</sup> Glissant is not inspired to focus on the poor conditions of the West Indians or others who are lodging alongside him. He does not dwell on friendships or experiences with French people or anyone else. In *Soleil de la conscience* there is a lack of curiosity about the realities of life in the *métropole*. This makes it difficult to claim that the text is genuinely about diaspora, even though it might be argued that on a reflective level Glissant in this text represents a kind of migrant everyman. It is difficult to attempt to force a text with such introspective purposes into a representative mould.

The nature of this text also reinforces the impression that within French West Indian - and particularly a Martiniquan - literature, the writer is less a fellow traveller, than a figure of authority. The theorists discussed here have taken this role upon themselves with gusto, assuming a role in 'which the author symbolically reclaims, names, and returns to the community the cultural past and identity of which it has been deprived.'<sup>20</sup> This approach is related to the infamously programmatic nature of Martiniquan writing, which Chris Bongie has highlighted as the tendency to order Martiniquans about and to offer 'authoritative, ideological imperatives.'<sup>21</sup> In a context where the social, cultural and educational realities for most metropolitan West Indians have diverged significantly from those of the most prestigious West Indian spokesmen this stance may not serve to draw the writer closer to 'his people', but to pull him away from them.

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<sup>18</sup> Romuald-Blaise Fonkoua, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>20</sup> Debra L. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles*, p. 143.

*Le Discours antillais* is the only theoretical text Glissant has produced that focuses on the French West Indian diaspora in depth. Undoubtedly, the perspective it presents is unforgiving towards the metropolitan French West Indian community. Key to understanding Glissant's disapproval of migration in the Martiniquan context in *Le Discours* is his concept of *Le Détour*. *Le Détour* reveals the essence of what he sees as the basic problem of the African diaspora of the West Indies:

Le Détour est le recours ultime d'une population dont la domination par un Autre est occultée: il faut aller chercher ailleurs le principe de domination, qui n'est pas évident dans le pays même: parce que le mode de domination (qui n'est pas l'exploitation seulement, qui n'est pas la misère seulement, qui n'est pas le sous-développement seulement, mais bien l'éradication globale de l'entité économique) n'est pas directement visible. Le Détour est la parallaxe de cette recherche.<sup>22</sup>

*Le Détour* represents a turning away from the true source of domination, which is concealed, in an abortive attempt to find a solution in something – or somewhere – else. There are ways in which people indulge in *Le Détour* without leaving the islands themselves, but emigration is a particularly attractive option in this alienated context. Migration is even linked to the oft-mentioned sterile culture of consumption in Martinique, in which the Martiniquan is apparently unsettled by the endless stream of ships and planes that bring the foreign goods that he so desires. According to Glissant the individual spends so much effort fearing the lack of these goods, and awaiting their arrival that he no longer perceives his country around him and cannot even imagine it. Hence, he leaves.<sup>23</sup> However, when the population concerned is already without a sense of self, hurrying to leave the islands will, in the long run, lead only to greater disillusionment and unhappiness:

L'une des manifestations les plus spectaculaires de cette nécessité du Détour pour une communauté ainsi menacée, nous la trouvons en toute logique dans le mouvement d'émigration des populations antillaises vers la France (dont on a assez dit qu'il constituait, encouragé par les pouvoirs publics, une traite à rebours) et dans les retentissements psychiques qu'il déclenche. C'est en France le plus souvent que les Antillais émigrés se découvrent différents, prennent conscience de

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<sup>22</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, p. 32.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

leur antillanité; conscience d'autant plus dramatique et insupportable que l'individu ainsi envahi par le sentiment de son identité ne pourra quand même pas réussir la réinsertion dans son milieu d'origine (il trouvera la situation intolérable ses compatriotes irresponsables; on le trouvera assimilé, devenu blanc de manières, etc.) et qu'il repartira. Extraordinaire vécu du Détour. Voici bien une illustration de l'occultation, en Martinique même, de l'aliénation: il faut aller la chercher *ailleurs* pour en prendre conscience. L'individu entre alors dans l'univers taraudant, non de la conscience malheureuse mais, bel et bien, de la conscience torturée.<sup>24</sup>

So it seems that despite the fruitful self-awareness that Glissant embarked upon in Paris as a young man, and that he records in *Soleil de la conscience*, he does not apparently believe that his fellow Martiniquans are generally enriched by their experience of life in metropolitan France. There is no hint in *Le Discours antillais* that such migration can have any true benefit; the opposite is the case. The consequences of *Le Détour* are purely negative and highlighted firstly by the fact that the migration was authored and encouraged by the French state, thereby implicating the French state in a new stage of alienation for French West Indians. This nomadism is therefore tainted from its very inception. Even worse, while the *métropole* only emphasises the individual's sense of alienation, it makes him unfit to return and to transform West Indian society, which is Glissant's ultimate goal during the writing of this text. In *Le Discours* migration is seen as one cog in the larger wheel of the assimilatory project of the French state, whose agenda is to create a basic dependency and servitude within the islands, in order to inculcate in the population the expectation that anything of value must come from outside. The drive to export the population to mainland France is but one aspect of the assimilatory impulse that eventually gathered an internal momentum after years of external encouragement.<sup>25</sup>

Later on, in 'Emigrés, enfants d'émigrés', Glissant continues with the theme of the *métropole* as site of both assimilation and alienation. He refers to the ambiguous position of West Indian migrants as both émigrés and citizens, as feeling French but being the victims of racism, the shock of being confused with Algerians.<sup>26</sup> What is notable is the

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

way in which Glissant connects the mass migration with what he refers to as ‘le baroque antillais’. This seems to refer to a dependency upon the French language and Frenchness which are overwhelmingly burdensome in Martinique more by their absence than their presence. Glissant sees Creole as ‘une langue de compromis’, somehow representative of an inauthenticity which only flight to ‘France’ can truly eradicate. Those who seek to protest against the dominance of Frenchness do so by flaunting their attachment to the Creole language and folklore, either in Martinique itself, or in the *métropole*, where it degenerates into empty reactionary posturing, a sign of ‘la flamboyance d’un vide’.<sup>27</sup>

There are at least fifteen years between the *Discours* (which brings together a range of texts first published at various times) and *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (1995). This work makes fewer direct references to migration, but it notes that alienation is evident among West Indians in the *métropole* who claim a Carib ancestry to escape from their Africanness and to avoid the shame they feel in the face of colonial cultural pressure.<sup>28</sup> However, Glissant states at this later date that the ambiguity, disillusionment, and struggle against assimilation are in decline amongst the metropolitan French West Indian community. In their place are found on the one hand, an indulgent fondness for the island of origin and its heritage, cultural exchanges and visits home. On the other, a proletarian internationalism, a gradual loss of West Indian distinctiveness, and a banalisation of the experience of being a West Indian migrant, which leads no longer to ‘le lent émouvant exotisme du transatlantique mais la précipitation et la bousculade du Boeing quotidien.’<sup>29</sup> This is an early reference to the reality of an era of easy circulation that contaminates the Atlantic on both sides.

There is a double message here regarding the usefulness of metropolitan West Indians in the struggle to develop a true sense of self in the *DOM*. *Le Discours antillais* represents an identitarian *antillaniste* discourse that incorporates the positive and inevitable involvement of metropolitan French West Indians, to the extent that it identifies the source of the malaise that they share with West Indians at home. Despite the divisions

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>28</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers* ([1995] Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1996), p. 61.

<sup>29</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, p. 76.

created by their exile in the *métropole*, Glissant implies that the West Indians of the *métropole* are united with their Martiniquan and Guadeloupean relatives in their unhappiness, confined to poor quality employment, the sullen, silent victims of a simmering racism, yet atomised, devoid of any sense of solidarity. Their subalternhood in the West Indies would appear to set into greater relief the injustice felt by West Indians in the *métropole* at the increasing number of white metropolitan Frenchmen and women working in the *DOM*, and enjoying a privileged status. Whether at home or abroad, then, French West Indians appeared to be facing cultural genocide.<sup>30</sup>

Glissant also claims that independence for Martinique would benefit Martiniquan families living on both sides of the Atlantic. It would free the migrants and their descendants and enable them to assert Europe as their home without the crippling and unachievable desire to disappear into a certain fantasy of Frenchness.<sup>31</sup> The downside to this ‘unity’ is that it implies a clear distinction between diaspora and island community, even as it sees a common cause for them to share. During the era of *Le Discours* at least, this distinction seemed to be non-negotiable, and Glissant did not see the *négropolitains* in any sense as part of the West Indian struggle. For him, the second and third generations as well as long-term migrants are lost to the West Indies and to West Indian issues. French West Indians, he argues, are the product of colonial assimilation, entering easily into mixed marriages, raising children who are ‘voués à disparaître dans le “corps français”.’ Moreover

[l]e 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 révélerait leur ‘différence’ d’avec un Français sans les comprendre dans un Nous différencié.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 172-173.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 75.

Glissant hints at but does not seek to pursue the dilemma for those second and third generation *négropolitains* who yearn to create a new sense of identity in a land that seems reluctant to allow them to perform freely.

Establishing the relevance of Glissant's theoretical formulations in his later, more complex texts is a greater challenge. Christine Chivallon argues that in contrast to *Le Discours antillais*, in *Poétique de la relation* (1990) diaspora is no longer part of a 'thèse de l'aliénation'; there is no need to 'raisonner sur le monde antillais par référence à l'unité, et par conséquent en termes de manque et d'absence d'unité' since binary oppositions and identities based on hierarchy and linearity are no longer valid.<sup>33</sup> *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (1995, 1996) develops these ideas further; *créolisation* 'exige que les éléments hétérogènes mis en relation "s'intervalorisent", c'est-à-dire qu'il n'y ait pas de dégradation ou de diminution de 'l'être, soit de l'intérieur, soit de l'extérieur, dans ce contact et dans ce mélange. [... L]a créolisation c'est le métissage avec une valeur ajoutée qui est l'imprévisibilité'<sup>34</sup> and insists that 'nous ne changerons rien à la situation des peuples du monde si nous ne changeons pas [...] l'idée que l'identité doit être une racine unique, fixe et intolérante.'<sup>35</sup> Glissant develops the idea of *Relation* as a way of being in contact with the Other: '[C]e qui devient important n'est pas tellement un prétendu absolu de chaque racine mais le mode, la manière dont elle entre en contact avec d'autres racines: La Relation,'<sup>36</sup> and *Tout-monde*: '[L]a totalité du monde telle qu'elle existe dans son réel et telle qu'elle existe dans notre désir.'<sup>37</sup> J. Michael Dash explains another Glissantian term from this period, noting that 'Martinique's experience of modernity as ever-intensifying contact with the encroachment of a universalizing culture is seen as an extreme instance of a larger global connection. This Glissant describes as the contemporary *chaos-monde*.'<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Christine Chivallon, 'De quelques préconstruits de la notion de diaspora à partir de l'exemple antillais', pp. 155-156.

<sup>34</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, p. 18-19.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>38</sup> J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), p. 155.



These notions of confusion, mixity, permanent change, and so on, might seem highly relevant to the French West Indian presence in the *métropole*, and some commentators do see the development of Francophone literatures of migration in Glissantian terms.<sup>39</sup>

However, this perspective is undermined by the foundational problems, discussed above, that Glissant sees as inherent in the project of French West Indian migration to the *métropole*.<sup>40</sup> If Glissant believes that the ingredients of genuine diaspora are missing in this context, and that cultural genocide rather than cultural exchange is what metropolitan French West Indians face then it is hard to suppose that the largely positive projections of the above texts be said to be entirely relevant. If, as Curdella Forbes says, Glissant's theoretical work focuses on 'the eruption of Caribbean poetics onto the world stage under pressure of global change, the *in-stress* and *out-reach* of a movement towards the communality of peoples'<sup>41</sup> it is ironic that West Indian migrants, who are such an obvious representation of what has been projected onto the 'world stage' have so often been sidelined in his work, reinforcing the irony that 'Glissant's easy if problematic globality is the result of Martinique's political experience as a Department (of France).'<sup>42</sup>

Glissant's status as 'perhaps the first major French West Indian thinker to break away from the obsession with origins and rootedness'<sup>43</sup> is surely undermined by this tension, whilst at the same time illuminating it.

Bongie also reminds us that Glissant has been 'tagged with the reputation of being a difficult writer whose emphasis on style (the frequent rupturing of traditional syntax, the insistent creolizing of standard French, the baroque convolution of personal and historical

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<sup>39</sup> Michel Laronde, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>40</sup> It is also telling that Glissant does not mention French West Indian migration in either *Poétique de la Relation* or in *Introduction à une poétique du divers*.

<sup>41</sup> Curdella Forbes, 'The End of Nationalism? Performing the Question in Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island* and Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 11: 1 (November 2002), p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> Richard D. E. Burton, 'The idea of difference in contemporary French West Indian thought: Négritude, Antillanité, Créolité', in *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana Today*, p. 148.

narratives, and so on) at times seemed intrusively to conflict with the readability – and hence for some readers, political efficacy – of his novels’.<sup>44</sup> In 1992 Glissant said he was ‘the “prefacer” of a literature that has yet to come into existence, arguing that the colonial condition of the Antilles, and the subaltern condition of the Caribbean as a whole, gravitates against the very act of an *informed* reading of his work in the present.’<sup>45</sup> We are reminded that ‘les lecteurs d’ici sont futurs’.<sup>46</sup> Forbes asserts that Glissant’s work exists within the discourse of postmodernism, a reality made evident by the difficult nature of his work, stating that ‘(t)he best reading, in postmodern thought, is the reading that recognizes its own limitations, its inability to definitively read anything, whether written text or social text (culture). Unreadability is not a sign of confusion but a sign that reality is not rational, linear or transparent.’<sup>47</sup> This may be so, but the real danger is that this type of approach will simply leave behind the mass of West Indians (migrants or otherwise) altogether, yet again bypassing them, rather as Fanon did, and chastising them for never living up to the revolutionary ideals of the French West Indian intelligentsia.

A more positive role in terms of Glissant’s relationship with the metropolitan West Indian community arose as a result of his connection with the recently founded *Centre national pour la mémoire des esclavages et de leurs abolitions*. Glissant’s earlier activism, namely his participation in the struggle for the independence of Martinique, which was to earn him the status of a political dissident and exile, was unlikely to have engaged the interest of West Indian migrants in general. The issue of the transatlantic slave trade, however, and its commemoration and representation within the framework of both the French and West Indian imaginary, naturally interests West Indians on both sides of the ocean. The commemoration in 1998 of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the French empire set in motion a course of reflection and discussion which

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<sup>44</sup> Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles*, p. 141.

<sup>45</sup> Diva Dimato, ‘Edouard Glissant et le manifeste *Eloge de la Créolité*’, in *Horizons d’Edouard Glissant: Actes du colloque de Pau*, ed. by Yves-Alain Favres and Antonio Ferreira de Brito, (Biarritz, 1992), p. 253, cit. Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles*, p. 141.

<sup>46</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Malemort* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975), p. 231.

<sup>47</sup> Curdella Forbes, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

culminated in the ‘Loi Taubira’ of 2001. This law formally confirmed the slave trade as a crime against humanity, with 10<sup>th</sup> May adopted as the official date for the commemoration of abolition. In 2006 Glissant was asked by President Jacques Chirac to do the foundational work upon which the *Centre national* would be built, and Glissant’s *Mémoires des esclavages* (2007) was the result of these reflections. No less a person than the then-Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin, provided the preface, describing this text as the beginning of a new era of reconciliation, understanding and reflection, a process in which Glissant would participate by defining the contours of the *Centre national*.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, de Villepin notes that the work

ne s’adresse seulement aux descendants des victimes de l’esclavage mais bien tous les Français. Le rôle du Centre national qui sera installé à Paris sera de rapprocher les histoires, de combler l’ignorance qui peut exister de part et d’autre pour jeter les bases d’une véritable mémoire partagée. C’est indispensable si nous voulons construire une France de la diversité unie et rassemblée autour de ses valeurs republicaines.<sup>49</sup>

This implies that de Villepin envisages this work of reflection as a task for a diverse metropolitan context (as opposed to the *DOM*), and a place where the descendants of slaves (i.e. the West Indian community in the *métropole*) and others need to unite in thinking about the inheritance and the challenges of the transatlantic slave trade. Glissant has said that the Centre will be ‘ce que les descendants des esclaves et les descendants des esclavagistes en feront ensemble, ils cessent dès lors d’être des descendants de quoi qu’il soit, ils deviennent acteurs lucides de leur présent, pour la raison, ou le lieu-commun, qu’ils entrent ensemble dans le monde, notre monde.’<sup>50</sup>

Chris Bongie has scrutinised the administrative context in which this book was written, asking whether Glissant’s ‘complicity with the system’ betrays his earlier, more critical political agenda, or rather, ‘subversively transforms what what in the hands of another, lesser figure might be nothing more than functional prose and bureaucratic proposals.’

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<sup>48</sup> Dominique de Villepin, ‘Preface’, in Edouard Glissant, *Mémoires des esclavages* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2007), p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Mémoires des esclavages*, p. 138.

Bongie decides to take the nuanced ‘middling approach’, suggesting that compromise is inevitable even while progress is being made towards a ‘new poetics and politics’.<sup>51</sup> It is instructive to note that even if *Mémoires des Esclavages* represents a compromise, it focuses on the metropolitan ‘descendants des victimes de l’esclavage’ to a greater extent than many of Glissant’s previous theoretical (and in Bongie’s view, more politically critical) texts, and so it is a welcome addition to his oeuvre. In *Mémoires des Esclavages* he refers to the subordinate work allotted to all ‘ouvriers immigrés’ from 1950 onwards, North African, Portuguese or West Indian alike, who became synonymous with the ‘specialist’ subaltern roles they were given, likening them to the slaves of the plantations who were deemed the ‘specialists’ in the fields.<sup>52</sup> The awkward status of history and geography in French schools is discussed in the context of a nation of people who are seemingly uninspired by these subjects and therefore not alert to the transformative possibilities they may present (‘la connaissance de soi, peut-elle s’enseigner?’). Glissant finds that many Frenchmen and women respond to their history without understanding it, dislike Arabs and black people without quite knowing why, and remaining largely ignorant of their colonialist history.<sup>53</sup> He depicts an indifference towards and ignorance of the slave trade, which he finds hides a deep-seated racism. Slavery is

si loin de la maison, du jardin, de l’épicerie familière, du café du dimanche matin, et d’où vient le café, il n’y avait pas encore de télévision, l’inculture était profonde, vous ne pouvez pas demander qu’on vive toute la journée avec ceci our cela d’il y a si longtemps (mais essayez quand même, aujourd’hui, si vous êtes antillais, de louer un logis acceptable n’importe où dans Paris, vous verrez l’ennui).<sup>54</sup>

As for the Martiniquans and Guadeloupeans themselves, they are said to be ambiguous about their slave past, troubled by it, being people who (and here Glissant uses a ‘nous’, which is telling) mostly love ‘France’, but who appear to be mostly indifferent to white

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<sup>51</sup> Chris Bongie, *Friends and Enemies: The Scribal Politics of Post/Colonial Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 365.

<sup>52</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Mémoires des esclavages*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.128.

French people.<sup>55</sup> This is sobering material, and resolutely anchored in a metropolitan reality.

It is in the last chapter, 'La mémoire délivrée', that Glissant offers his greatest focus on the West Indian diaspora. His reflections here aim to outline how the Centre will help to recuperate the damaged tribal memory of various diasporic communities ('peuples du Tout-monde'). West Indians are one such group whose memory is troubled:

Beaucoup de peuples du Tout-monde connaissent, avec des variantes infinies, la même situation de délaissement ou de tassement de la mémoire collective, les Antillais et les Réunionnais francophones la vivent d'une manière plus compliquée encore, à partir d'une émigration généralisée dans la culture française et d'une émigration physique en France, massive pour les premiers, qui semble leur avoir posé davantage de problèmes que l'émigration des Antillais anglophones au Royaume-Uni n'en a suscité chez les Jamaïcains ou les Trinidiens, par ailleurs et il est vrai indépendants.<sup>56</sup>

The analysis here that Anglophone West Indians have a better experience of migration and settlement in Europe than Francophone West Indians, precisely because their investment in Britishness is less than the Francophone migrants' investment in Frenchness, seems to contradict Glissant's statement in *Le Discours antillais* that the West Indian diaspora in the UK exists in a far more strife-ridden context than its French equivalent.<sup>57</sup> However, maybe for Glissant both reflections are simultaneously true, because the struggle for selfhood in the French migratory context is seen to be hampered and undermined by departementalisation, whilst conflict in the British context is possible yet also transformatory precisely because it occurs in a context of self-determination.

Glissant then highlights the conflicts between the West Indians who have remained in Martinique and Guadeloupe and those in the *métropole*:

[C]eux qui sont restés auront tendance à penser que les émigrés ont cessé d'être antillais, ceux qui sont installés en France finiront par croire, du moins les plus

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.128

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>57</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, p. 75.

actifs, qui'ils représentent la vraie différence, à partir de quoi ils ne se définiront plus tellement comme antillais, mais comme immigrés, discriminés, nègres, descendants d'esclaves, ou peut-être panafricains. Ils rejoindront de plus en plus les autres émigrés, ou chercheront d'autres lieux-communs à partager. Ce sont là autant de créolisations qui ne se disent pas. La musique échangée, la protestation, la tentative de peser sur la vie politique française sont leurs armes.<sup>58</sup>

This is one of the rare occasions when Glissant openly includes West Indian migrants in his theoretical discussion of creolisation, but it does prompt a question about why these West Indian migrant creolisations have gone unspoken, and largely unexplored.

However, Glissant does expect the metropolitan authorities to recognise unambiguously the French colonial role in the slave trade, and to accept the consequences of that history for the *Domiens* and their descendants in the *métropole*: '[L]es originaires des Antilles et de l'océan Indien ne sauraient se satisfaire d'une mémoire passive des esclavages, qui ne s'accompagnerait pas d'un exercice plein de leurs présences dans les sociétés qu'ils fréquentent. L'intégration, où qu'on vive, ne vient pas de ce qu'on est rendu conforme à un modèle préétablie, mais de ce qu'on entre dans la liberté des transformations possibles d'une nation.'<sup>59</sup>

The diasporic reality is not always absent from Glissant's novels, however. *La Lézarde*, an early novel that brought him to the attention of the world and won him the Prix Renaudot in 1958 is about a group of young Martiniquan revolutionaries in the early post-war era, and is an example of how 'the Metropolitan connection is often viewed as a problematic of emigration rather than immigration,'<sup>60</sup> which is to say that the reasons for departure are more immediate and compelling than the reasons for arrival. One of the main characters in *La Lézarde*, Mathieu, a kind of autobiographical figure, separates from his young wife at the end of the text and leaves his island for the *métropole*, and the group disintegrates. Although read as a largely optimistic novel about the potential for transformation in the French West Indies, Bongie sees this ending as a premonition of 'the growing pessimism that characterizes Glissant's next two novels as they attempt to articulate the relation between writings and action in a Martinique that he was

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<sup>58</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Mémoires des esclavages*, p. 170.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 170-171.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Gallagher, *Soundings*, p. 215.

increasingly coming to view and lament'.<sup>61</sup> In a subsequent novel, *La Case du commandeur* (1981), which revisits some of the same characters, Thaël, one of the activists, in turn leaves for the *métropole*, leaving his friend Mycéa to insist that her island is worth more than abandonment. For her, the loss of identity and the stultifying nostalgia that accompany migration nullify any other benefits.<sup>62</sup> Bongie contends that the Glissant of *La Lézarde* in 1958 was a modernist, an *engagé*, who gradually moved, over the course of his writing career, towards a more postmodern position, 'displacing the political concerns of earlier and more visibly committed novels'<sup>63</sup> in the face of a neo-colonial, globalised reality which challenged the radicalism and nationalism of his youth.

However, it is a much later novel, *Tout-monde* (1993) that seemingly turns its back on traditional understandings of alienation in order to present the problematic of *négropolitain* identity in the light of Glissant's thinking on Relation and creolisation. Again Glissant uses characters from *La Lézarde*, including Mathieu Béluse who goes to study in the *métropole* in 1946. Glissant's representations of the French West Indian community through Mathieu are full of his trademark irony. Mathieu, who is now a keen cyclist visiting Italy muses: 'Ce "goût" pour l'Italie était surprenant chez un "insulaire" (ah ! – la théorie si commode des "îles !" – Mais il n'y avait pas à dire, Mathieu se sentait à l'aise dans ce cliché) – et d'ailleurs, qui s'en souciait alors ? On était là bien en avant du mouvement du monde.'<sup>64</sup> As with his other novels, in fact, Glissant allows the text to reflect the preoccupations that we see elsewhere in his work: for example, Mathieu outlines thoughts that he shares with Glissant on *errance*, and *Tout-monde*:

L'ERRANCE. – C'est cela même qui nous permet de nous fixer. De quitter ces leçons de choses qui nous sommes si enclins à semoncer, d'abdiquer ce ton de sentence où nous compassons nos doutes, - moi tout le premier ! – et de dériver enfin. Dériver à quoi ? A la fixité du mouvement du Tout-monde. [...]

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<sup>61</sup> Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles*, p. 148.

<sup>62</sup> Edouard Glissant, *La Case du commandeur* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981), pp. 189-190.

<sup>63</sup> Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles*, p. 139.

<sup>64</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Tout-monde*, ([1993] Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1995), p. 35.

La pensée de l'errance débloque l'imaginaire, elle nous projette hors de cette grotte en prison où nous étions enfermés, qui est la cale ou la caye de la soi-disant unicité!<sup>65</sup>

The text is also unusual in offering various descriptive histories on West Indian life in the *métropole*: a brothel on the rue Blondel that had been turned into accommodation for overseas and West Indian students,<sup>66</sup> and the later years of mass migration from the *DOM*: 'Les Antillais commençaient de peupler les banlieues des villes de France, il y avait d'énormes groupes de HLM qui leur étaient pour ainsi dire réservés, les rues Blondel s'étaient étendues aux Cités universitaires, d'Antony et d'ailleurs, et partout ces Antillais avaient rencontré les Portugais, les Africains, les Arabes.'<sup>67</sup> Matthieu and an old Martiniquan friend go on to talk about the *banlieues*, about the early tendency to mock the *négropolitains*, who seemed locked in between two identities, and for whom easy circulation only exacerbated the problem; unhelpfully, 'integration' is encouraged by national leaders yet is undermined by racism among the 'Français de souche'. The only solution for the *banlieues*, Mathieu decides, is for the young to accept the realities of a new type of existence, because

ils sont, ceux-la qui naviguent ainsi entre deux impossibles, véritablement le sel de la diversité du monde. Il n'est pas besoin d'intégration, pas plus que de ségrégation, pour vivre ensemble dans le monde et manger tous les mangers du monde dans un pays.<sup>68</sup>

Later in the text, racial differences among these young people are judged to be less and less important. There are relatively few depictions of female migrants, who remain background figures if they are present at all. Although *Ormerod* (2003) highlights revolutionary Martiniquan female figures, contemporary female French West Indians in *Tout-monde* are reduced to an alienated yet supposedly representative mother who sends her light-skinned daughter to study in the USA with the words:

Ecoute, ma fille, tu es blanche, personne ne dirait que tu es une négresse, alors si tu rencontres là-bas quelqu'un de bien, mais qui aurait des idées un peu racistes,

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 324-325.



tu sais, on ne peut pas dire que ce n'est pas leur coutume, écoute, ce n'est peut-être pas de leur faute, n'hésite pas, ne dis pas que je suis une Martiniquaise noire, ne tiens pas compe de moi, tue peux oublier de mentionner ta mère, tu dis que je suis morte, c'est ton bonheur qui importe.<sup>69</sup>

This lack of reference to the experiences and challenges of real migrant women (who, after all, were the majority of migrants) reinforces the impression that migrants, particularly from the era of mass migration, are on the fringes of Glissant's work.

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The term *créolité* first appeared in May 1988, when the manifesto that was to become *Eloge de la créolité* (published in book form in 1989), was presented to the public at the Festival Caraïbe in Seine-Saint-Denis. *Eloge de la créolité* has undoubtedly remained the key critical text of *créolité*. A translation into English followed the original in 1990, and the bilingual French/English edition that is now the most widely available version of the text appeared in 1993. This suggests that there was already a growing Anglophone interest in and readership of French West Indian theory and literature. Although the chief *créolistes* are highly prolific and successful as novelists, none of their other work has received as much attention as the *Eloge*, possibly with the exception of Patrick Chamoiseau's novel *Texaco* (1992).

The *créolistes*' choice of this northern suburb Paris, once considered to have a relatively large population of West Indian inhabitants, indicates the importance of diaspora to *créolité*. It has been asserted that *créolité* is a discourse tailor-made for the diaspora; in *Black Skins, French Voices* the linguist Pierre Pinalie in conversation with David Beriss states that *créolité* 'pointed to the cultural creativity of the Caribbean diaspora communities in France, as well as the United States and the United Kingdom. By escaping the racial and geographic boundaries imposed by earlier Caribbean identities, *créolité* would make better sense of the experiences of Antilleans in both the Caribbean and France.'<sup>70</sup> Beriss's account of the reception of *créolité* among West Indian migrants

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 480.

<sup>70</sup> David Beriss, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

goes on to make reference to Chamoiseau and Confiant's attendance at a fundraising event to support a West Indian radio station in Paris in 1989. According to his account, the gathered crowd responded positively to what these writers had to say about their new perspective on West Indian identity. West Indians found that *créolité*, as presented by Chamoiseau and Confiant,

with its emphasis on the creation of something new out of European and African roots, seemed inspiring and legitimizing. It provided them with ideological tools to make sense of their distinctiveness within French society. They were not like other immigrant groups, defined by a culture of origin easily distinguished from that of France, but they were not simply French either. Rather than struggle to create a new kind of national identity, *créolité* promoted the idea that Antillean identities were a new and cutting-edge form of identity, something that went beyond French and immigrant identities. Ways of thinking about identity proposed by French leaders were obsolete in this view.<sup>71</sup>

In this analysis, *créolité* becomes a metaphor or a model for a new kind of identity formation that is not adequately defined by national borders, and therefore has something particularly valuable to say to migrants, including West Indian migrants, in the *métropole*.

This positive gloss is challenged by Chamoiseau and Confiant themselves. Apparently the *créolistes* did not engage entirely successfully with that early crowd in Seine-Saint-Denis. In their conversation with Lucien Taylor, Chamoiseau and Confiant talk of the atmosphere of consternation and boredom that greeted their explanations, the general disapproval at their use of the word 'creole', and the suspicion that their ultimate goal was somehow to undermine the hard-won recognition of the Africanness of West Indian culture and heritage.<sup>72</sup> Marc Brudzinski asserts that the message is for an Antillean audience and that 'given the authors' diagnosis that Antilleans bear a sort of "double consciousness" by virtue of their acceptance of the French values into which they have been educated, the speech must appeal also to the French part of their audience, and is

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>72</sup> Lucien Taylor, 'Créolité Bites: A Conversation with Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant and Jean Bernabé', *Transition*, 74 (1997), p. 133.

therefore very potentially comprehensible to non-Creole French as well.<sup>73</sup> Yet it would seem that this ‘double consciousness’ only awkwardly includes those who are both ‘Antillean’ and non-creole. Brudzinski sees *créolité* ‘as being located “inside” or “under” a superficial Frenchness’ or that ‘the true nature of Creoleness is buried underneath a false cover of Frenchness from under which it must be rescued.’<sup>74</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that metropolitan France only appears sporadically in works produced by the prominent *créolistes*.

In addition to the initial poor reception of *créolité* among West Indian migrants, there are voices which, unlike Pinalie and Beriss, question the commitment of the *créolistes* to the diaspora. In the first footnote of her essay ‘Invisible Exodus: The Cultural Effacement of Antillean Migration’ Madeleine Dobie asserts that although *Eloge de la créolité* was launched in Paris at an event for West Indian migrants ‘[t]he *créolistes*’ chief objective [...] has been to reclaim and promulgate a cultural and linguistic heritage that evolved in the Caribbean, rather than to celebrate “creolization” in metropolitan France in the wake of migration.’<sup>75</sup> She also reminds us that although

the *créolité* “movement[”...] is often mentioned in the same breath as other discourses relating to hybridity, mestizaje/métissage, and hyphenated and transnational identities, *créolité* differs from these discourses to the extent that it has a strong regionalist dimension, and foregrounds authentic cultural traditions such as folklore and oral transmission, albeit traditions acknowledged to have arisen from cultural mixing.<sup>76</sup>

This representation of *créolité* as primarily a historically-minded movement is shared by Daniel Delas, as we have seen, but other commentators view it similarly. Maeve McCusker proposes that one of the *créolistes*’ chief concerns is to recuperate lost memory, particularly the loss associated with the decline of the plantation system around the middle of the twentieth century. She states that this era, which is seen as inevitably

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<sup>73</sup> Marc Brudzinski, ‘Intériorité and Opacité: locations of Creole culture’, *Sargasso*, 1 (2003-2004), pp. 6-7.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>75</sup> Madeleine Dobie, ‘Invisible Exodus: The Cultural Effacement of Antillean Migration’, *Diaspora*, 13: 2/3 (2004), p. 177 (fn. 1).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

connected to the switch to departmentalisation in 1946, is seen ‘as one of cultural and economic stifling by the metropole, and of passive dependence on the part of the Antillean population [...] From this perspective, a particularly strong nostalgia inflects the presentation of the early decades of the twentieth century, the twilight era of Creole culture.’ The result is the *créolité* movement’s ‘confused temporality, an ambivalent mix of projection and retrospection, of prophetic proclamation and nostalgic regret.’<sup>77</sup> This mixed impression does not necessarily arise from one particular text, but describes a vision that emerges from *créoliste* writing taken as a whole, including autobiography and novels, which rarely attempt to engage the modern world, and theory. Whilst the authors of the *Eloge* refuse all attempts to qualify their literature as ‘littérature afro-antillaise, negro-antillaise, franco-antillaise, antillaise d’expression française, Francophone des Antilles’<sup>78</sup> and refuse to discuss the etymology of the word *créolité* prior to their own usage,<sup>79</sup> their focus as novelists falls squarely on the Caribbean/American space. Although they state that ‘[l]e monde va en état de créolité’<sup>80</sup> and that ‘[d’]e plus en plus il émergera une nouvelle humanité créole: toute la complexité de la Créolité’<sup>81</sup> *Eloge* makes no mention of the reality of West Indian migration.

The nostalgic focus of *créolité* as a literary movement must have implications for its relevance to the French West Indian diaspora. Maeve McCusker remarks that a potential contemporary readership on the islands might be alienated by this writing that seeks determinedly to catalogue the ‘*mémoire vraie*’ rather than turn to more contemporary concerns.<sup>82</sup> According to Lucien Taylor, a considerable portion of Confiant’s readers are Martiniquans in the *métropole*. This speaks to the reality of a circulatory population that

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<sup>77</sup> Maeve McCusker, *Patrick Chamoiseau: Recovering Memory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 11.

<sup>78</sup> Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>82</sup> Maeve McCusker, *Patrick Chamoiseau*, p. 12.

is nevertheless aware of losing its Martiniquanness.<sup>83</sup> However, there may be limits to Confiant's appeal to this group. He admits that it is difficult for him to create a literary world situated after 1960.<sup>84</sup> He also says he felt old at the age of twenty because the plantation culture that had existed for 300 years came to an abrupt end when he was in his late teens.<sup>85</sup> As a result: 'Tout mon imaginaire est lié à ce monde disparu dans lequel j'ai vécu pendant mes quinze premières années.'<sup>86</sup> Moreover, he claims that his attempts to write about the contemporary environment have a distinct outcome: '[J]e ne pourrais jamais traiter cette société moderne, sauf sur un mode dérisoire – comme je l'ai fait pour les petits livres que j'ai écrit pour les éditions Mille et une Nuits.'<sup>87</sup>

These 'petits livres' are *Bassin des ouragans* (1994), *La Savane des pétrifications* (1995) and *La Baignoire de Joséphine* (1997). Although these contemporary stories make some reference to migration neither Confiant nor his publishers chose to place the focus firmly on the metropolitan space. This decision is made obvious from the title of the volume in which they were reissued: *La Trilogie Tropica* (1997). Confiant's derisory approach to the contemporary context is also apparent in *La dernière java de Mama Josépha* (1999), a *polar* set in Paris, and described by reviewers as 'a carnivalesque parody of the genre.'<sup>88</sup> *Black is Black* (2008), whose contemporary protagonist is occasionally shown in the *métropole* as well as in Martinique, leaves a similar impression. It is apparent that Confiant is unable to see the *métropole* today as a setting for fiction that may be both

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<sup>83</sup> Lucien Taylor, 'Mediating Martinique: The "Paradoxical Trajectory" of Raphaël Confiant', in *Cultural Producers in Perilous States: Editing Events, Documenting Change*, ed. by George E. Marcus (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 312.

<sup>84</sup> Sarah Netter, 'Interview: Raphaël Confiant: "Je suis pour une mondialisation créole"', *Antilla*, 1164 (12 October 2005), p. 15.

<sup>85</sup> Paola Ghinelli in conversation with Confiant, in Paola Ghinelli, *Archipels littéraires: Chamoiseau, Condé, Confiant, Brival, Maximin, Laferrière, Pineau, Dalember, Agnant* (Montreal: Mémoire d'encrier, 2005), p. 54.

<sup>86</sup> Isabelle Constant, 'Entretien avec Raphaël Confiant', *The French Review*, 81: 1 (October 2007), p. 139.

<sup>87</sup> Paola Ghinelli in conversation with Confiant, in Paola Ghinelli, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>88</sup> Richard Price and Sally Price, 'Bookshelf 1999', *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, 74: 1/2 (2000), p. 120,

<http://www.kitlv-journals.nl/index.php/nwig/article/view/3493/4254> [accessed 6 May 2011]

‘serious’ and popular. Among his vast oeuvre, these few texts are rarely taken seriously or studied in depth by commentators.<sup>89</sup>

It is unsurprising that Confiant doubts the relevance of the migrant West Indians and their descendants to the French West Indian question. In an undated article written for the *Pati Kominis pour lendepandans eh Sosyalizm* (a Martiniquan pro-independence political party created in 1984) Confiant makes a clear distinction between Martiniquans on the islands and the Martiniquan diaspora in metropolitan France, and he criticises proponents of Martiniquan sovereignty who attempt to see both groups as constituting ‘le peuple martiniquais’.<sup>90</sup> Of the migrant West Indians, whether students or workers, he says that they constitute a part of ‘le peuple martiniquais’ only if they live

avec l’objectif constant de retourner vivre au pays, qui ne se sentent pas français culturellement, à tel point qu’ils parlent plus créole dans le métro parisien que dans les bus de Fort-de-France, qui militent dans des associations culturelles souverainistes ou crypto-souverainistes, qui guettent sur Internet le moindre billet d’avion de dernière minute à 200 euros, bradé par Air France ou Corsair, pour rentrer passer ne serait-ce qu’un week-end en Martinique et en Guadeloupe et qui surtout n’abandonnent jamais l’espoir d’être muté au pays ou d’y rentrer pour monter leur propre entreprise.<sup>91</sup>

As for those he describes as ‘Français d’origine antillaise’, which may include migrants and also their descendants, these are to be categorised as largely lost to the West Indies, and are people

qui ont fait souche en France, une concession au cimetière aussi, et dont les enfants et petits-enfants (eh oui, on en est déjà à la 4e génération!), sont culturellement parlant des Français à part entière, quand bien même ils subissent

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<sup>89</sup> One notable exception to this is Emily Apter, ‘CNN Creole: Trademark Literacy and global language travel’, *Sites: The Journal of Twentieth-Century/Contemporary French Studies revue d’études françaises*, 5: 1 (2001).

<sup>90</sup> Raphaël Confiant, ‘Un peu d’esprit cartésien ne ferait pas mal à certains...’, *Pati Kominis pour Lendépandans ek Sosyalizm*, [www.pkls.org/pajteks/tekskonfyen.htm](http://www.pkls.org/pajteks/tekskonfyen.htm) [accessed 8 May 2011]

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

le délit de faciés et le racisme à cause d'une fraction des Français qui leur denie toute francité (sauf quand ils sont footballeurs en équipe de France).<sup>92</sup>

It is apparent that he does not expect the descendants of French West Indian migrants to have anything to do with the Martiniquan struggle for self-determination. Indeed, any attempt to include them only serves to delay that potentiality. His reason for asserting this is that whilst 'les Noirs français' are struggling to obtain a maximum level of integration into metropolitan society (including the elimination of racism in that society), what 'le peuple martiniquais' require is a minimum of integration. The two groups therefore have conflicting goals: 'Il faut choisir: français ou antillais.' Like Glissant, Confiant choses to compare the situation of the *négropolitain* Frenchmen and women to that of the Black Briton, reaching similar conclusions about strife and identity. For Confiant, the strife Black Britons have to deal with is greater, although they face less confusion because

ils sont anglais, point barre. Ils se battent, avec raison pour obtenir les mêmes postes, les mêmes salaires, les mêmes logements etc... que les Anglais blancs. Et surtout ils ne cherchent pas à intervenir dans la vie politique de la Jamaïque, de Barbade, ou de Sainte-Lucie. De même, les politiciens jamaïcains, barbadiens ou saint-luciens se gardent bien de dicter leur conduite aux Noirs anglais. Mais, en fait, si la situation est si claire et nette pour les Noirs anglais et si confuse pour les Noirs français, c'est tout simplement parce que les pays d'origine des premiers sont indépendents depuis longtemps alors que ceux de derniers sont encore des colonies déguisées sous l'appellation de "départements d'Outre-mer".<sup>93</sup>

Confiant asserts that 'à tout moment un Noir français peut décider de ne plus être français et de retrouver la culture et le pays de son grand-père.'<sup>94</sup> Whilst you are free to choose your identity, however, you are still obliged to be locked into one prism or another. Attempting to redefine what identity means, choosing to be a West Indian in a way that is not necessarily defined by people such as Confiant, is clearly unacceptable. There is a paradoxical lack of fluidity, of creolisation going on here, with choice implying exclusion as well as inclusion.

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

For Confiant the theory of *créolité* is on the one hand an esthetic and therefore temporary, and on the other political and still current:

[N]ous sommes dans un mouvement de réappropriation du français, de repositionnement et de valorisation du créole qui va peut-être arriver à son terme parce que le créole commence à avoir droit de cité. En revanche, je ne pense pas que la signification politique de la créolité soit dépassée. Car la créolité est une théorie de l'identité multiple. Or, nous sommes dans la phase ascendante de la mondialisation qui met en contact de manière brutale tous les peuples, toutes les cultures, toutes les langues du monde.<sup>95</sup>

This explanation is illuminating. Clearly, from an aesthetic (or literary) point of view, *créolité* as a phenomenon of Martiniquan/French West Indian origin was designed to assist a 'right' focus on the *métissage* of the West Indies. This has to some extent occurred; the Creole language is now taught in schools, for example, and *créoliste* writing is capturing a world that was already dead by the time it had been committed to paper. Politically and theoretically however, *créolité* focuses on the *métissage* of the world, and is still valid. If this is the case, we might well ask which kind of *créolité* is the most useful in terms of the West Indian diaspora. The second would seem to be the more pertinent, with its notions of an 'identité multiple', but again, this connection between diaspora and political *créolité* is disturbed by the tendency of a politicised *créolité* to sidestep the *métropole* in its leap to encapsulate the whole world.

Raphaël Confiant recently expressed his disappointment with the French West Indian migrant population for its reluctance to support a fellow *créoliste* writer, and for its lack of progress in the *métropole*.<sup>96</sup> Almost ten years previously, he was more generous towards the migrant community – although not towards diasporic intellectuals:

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<sup>95</sup> Sarah Netter, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>96</sup> During a conversation that occurred following a talk given at the Maison Française d'Oxford on 3 May 2006 Confiant expressed his concern at the low number of metropolitan West Indians queuing to attend a book signing with Patrick Chamoiseau compared with the larger numbers of North Africans queuing up to meet the Algerian writer Tahar Ben Jelloun at the same event, suggesting that West Indian migrants are not supportive of West Indian writers. Confiant also asserted the lack of material progress of the West Indian migrant community. Indeed, he reckoned that succeeding generations were doing worse than their parents.



[T]ogether with MODEMAS [Mouvement des Démocrates et des Ecologistes pour une Martinique Souveraine], we were the first to integrate Antillean emigration into the national combat, with our concept of the metanation. We said that the Antillean nation is not necessarily situated in the Antillean territories; it's also wherever there are Antilleans. But it seems to me there's a kind of diasporic discourse being developed by Antillean intellectuals in the United States, Canada, and France. I call them deserters of development. People leave to make a career for themselves where it pays well. They're living in greenback country, spouting off this diasporic discourse, and still trying to give us lessons. But we've stayed the course, remained in the country....<sup>97</sup>

In this interview he goes on to distinguish North American universities from French ones in respect of this predominant 'diasporic discourse', but it is clear that West Indian intellectuals in the *métropole* are not exempt from his disapproval. That Confiant then has to be prompted by his interviewer Taylor to admit that he is a returnee, rather than someone who has straightforwardly 'stayed and struggled' is telling. It implies that the time spent studying and working in the *métropole* is downgraded in Confiant's mind, because it does not quite fit in with his political and cultural agenda.

This distancing immediately challenges and confuses his earlier statement about the importance of integrating 'Antillean emigration into the national combat'. In his interview with Isabelle Constant in October 2007 Confiant stated that politically his views had changed, independence had become a practically impossible goal, and that even a measure of autonomy would take a long time to achieve. Confiant, like Glissant, has been committed to an independent Martinique in the past, but now feels that an arrangement rather like the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, a self-governing unincorporated territory of the United States, would be a more realistic goal.<sup>98</sup> Ten years previously Confiant openly admitted to having wavered on a number of cultural and political issues.<sup>99</sup> However, he does not seem to have changed his views on writing about Martiniquans (either in the *DOM* or in the *métropole*) in contemporary settings, and it is noticeable that the novels he has written of this type have been published by smaller publishing houses than his other texts, and are less easy to locate.

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<sup>97</sup> Lucien Taylor, 'Créolité Bites', p. 151.

<sup>98</sup> Isabelle Constant, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>99</sup> Lucien Taylor, 'Mediating Martinique', p. 328.

Patrick Chamoiseau (who has restated his commitment to an independent Martinique<sup>100</sup>), is seen as a highbrow writer, in contrast to the more middlebrow Confiant.<sup>101</sup> That Chamoiseau won the Prix Goncourt for the novel *Texaco* in 1992 is said to exemplify the irony of the ‘officialized difference’ of writing that speaks out against the inexorable Frenchification of Martinique, whilst also being consecrated and absorbed by it.<sup>102</sup> This sense of struggle is reinforced by his autobiographical works as well as fiction like *Texaco* that cries out against the destruction of authentic creole values and culture. Chamoiseau’s novel *Solibo Magnifique* (1988) suggests that a Martiniquan returning home from the *métropole* is caught between two ways of thinking. Evariste Pilon, the inspector in charge of investigating Solibo’s death, is in favour of Creole being taught at school, but is taken aback when his children actually speak it; he admires Césaire but has not read any of his work; he is a man who

commémore la libération des esclaves par eux-mêmes et frétille aux messes schoelcherienne du dieu libérateur, [...] cultive un sanglot sur l’Indépendance, un battement de cœur sur l’Autonomie, tout le reste sur la Départementalisation, final, vit comme nous tous, à deux vitesses, sans trop savoir d’il faut freiner dans le morne ou accélérer dans la descente.<sup>103</sup>

The autobiographical *Ecrire en pays dominé* (1997), a text in which the dominance of Frenchness is challenged by reflections that occur within the diasporic context itself, is a reflection on how both Martinique and metropolitan France created the context in which Chamoiseau became a writer. He talks of his youthful reading, and juvenilia that he set in all manner of locations, from Paris and New York to African jungles, desert islands and steppes - but not Martinique - and of imaginary heroes that never looked like himself. He had to go the *métropole* before beginning to explore issues surrounding his

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<sup>100</sup> Patrick Chamoiseau expressed his commitment to this goal during a conference entitled ‘La Martinique, le souvenir’ held at the Université Paris 12-Val de Marne on 10 December 2008.

<sup>101</sup> Maeve McCusker, *Patrick Chamoiseau*, p. 155.

<sup>102</sup> Richard D. E. Burton, ‘The French West Indies à l’heure de l’Europe: an overview’ in *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana Today*, p. 14.

<sup>103</sup> Patrick Chamoiseau, *Solibo Magnifique* ([1988] Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1991), pp. 118-119.

own identity in relation to his life and writing.<sup>104</sup> Of course, this inscribes him in a French West Indian literary tradition. Like his forebears he found that being in the *métropole* brought him closer to home and sharpened his creativity:

L'étrangeté française (ses saisons, ses neiges, ses rythmes de banlieues, ses transports souterrains de cent mille solitudes) me renvoyait presque nu à moi-même. Loin du confort natal, on est forcé de se nommer en soi-même, de se nommer aux autres. Je réactivais de petites traditions autour du rhum et du manger, du goût-antilles dans le poisson, du débat des épices. Je faisais fête d'une igname ou d'une eau de coco, d'une amplification musicale. Je vivais dans l'anticipation d'un retour régénérant.... Une marée de pays-natal submergeait ma mémoire.<sup>105</sup>

The pull of the island and of the past is also apparent in the section which could be seen as the most relevant to the question of diaspora. Chamoiseau depicts his employment as an educator at a prison in Fleury-Mérogis, with the purpose of trying to encourage the prisoners to take up reading. When a Martiniquan inmate receives a copy of Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour du pays natal* in the post the two develop a close connection: 'Le Cahier, lui dis-je, est un ton, une force, un vouloir flamboyant qui peuple le silence des êtres dominés. Je lui promis qu'il y serait sensible. Cela se produisit.'<sup>106</sup> This serious young man, Loïc Léry, becomes Chamoiseau's protégé, and they both embark on an exploration of West Indian and African American literature. With Chamoiseau's encouragement and assistance the inmate writes *Le Gang des Antillais*, an autobiographical novel about Léry's life as a child migrant, his academic and professional failure, and his entry into a life of crime, brought to a halt when he is finally imprisoned for helping to rob a post office.

This young inmate's redemption is an uplifting and affirmative story. Yet its inclusion only highlights the lack of reference to the migrant community in the text as a whole. At no other point in the text, which covers the author's ten years in the *métropole*, does Chamoiseau talk about engaging with any other metropolitan West Indians. Although we are told that he found the novel a publisher in the West Indies, nothing is said about

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<sup>104</sup> Patrick Chamoiseau, *Ecrire en pays dominé* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1997), p. 44.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

the success or otherwise of *Le Gang des Antillais*, nor does he mention any other emerging *négropolitain* or migrant writing.<sup>107</sup> In one particularly Glissantian section he asserts the transformative qualities of *créolité* and the fluidity of creolisation: ‘L’Autre me change et je le change. [...]. Et cette relation à l’Autre m’ouvre en cascades d’infinies relations à tous les Autres, une multiplication qui fonde l’unité et la force de chaque individu: Créolisation! Créolité!’ Yet it is only in a footnote that Chamoiseau makes any connection between these concepts and the West Indian diaspora – and then only to remark upon the incomplete nature of creolisation among the ethnic minority communities in the context of the *banlieue*. Here, he sees a certain ‘stérilisation de sa créativité’, apparent ‘chez les Beurs ou chez les Antillais de la seconde génération, dans ces bandes créolisées des banlieues françaises, au cur désespérant des urbanismes industriels [...]’. La Créolisation est aujourd’hui le grand défi des mégapoles urbaines: organiser une mise-en-commun de diversités humaines qui ne tiennent pas à renoncer à ce qu’elles sont.<sup>108</sup> These ‘bandes créolisées’ are not what Chamoiseau has in mind when he talks about ‘the Other who changes me and I who change the Other’. Yet it has been said occasionally elsewhere that identity in the *banlieues* has to a degree moved on from an obsession with racial or national origins. With reference to language, Glissant has mentioned ‘les créoles des banlieues métissées’.<sup>109</sup> Racial discord between young French inhabitants of the *banlieues* is refuted by, among other things, the multicultural nature of French hip-hop, and by the frequent bypassing of West Indian/black African/north African distinctions in the case of gang membership.<sup>110</sup> Chamoiseau, more so than Glissant, evidently perceives a lack of ‘creativity’ and the prevalent ‘disarray’ of the *banlieues* that makes these places problematic for authentic creolisation to occur.

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<sup>107</sup> *Le Gang des Antillais* has a preface by Marcel Manville (1922-1998), a Martiniquan lawyer and Communist with a concern for West Indians in the *métropole*, but neither he nor Léry acknowledges the influence of Chamoiseau, who was not yet famous in 1985.

<sup>108</sup> Patrick Chamoiseau, *Ecrire en pays dominé*, pp. 202-203 (fn. 1).

<sup>109</sup> Edouard Glissant, ‘La créolisation du monde est irréversible’, *Ouvertures Géographique, Religieuse, Ethnique, Sociale* (14 May 2005) [http://lesogres.org/article.php3?id\\_article=389](http://lesogres.org/article.php3?id_article=389) [accessed 9 May 2011]

<sup>110</sup> Tony Delsham, ‘Patrick Karam: Les Antillais subissent la loi des bandes maghrébines plus puissantes...’, *Antilla*, 1169 (16 November 2005), p. 18.

Whilst activists and theorists have been working for the distinctiveness of the islands to be accepted and championed, the increasing Europeanisation/Frenchification of the islands has grown apace. The discourse of difference has been absorbed by the French state, as part of ‘the French socialist government’s regionalizing policies in the early 1980s.’<sup>111</sup> Metropolitan critics hail *créoliste* novels for their ‘enrichment of French via creole.’ As a result of this recuperation there is no chance, Burton states, of true marronage anymore. On the islands, it is impossible to escape the system or to resist it. The mangroves have gone, Creole is becoming a classroom language rather than a living one, concrete and TV are everywhere, no one wants independence and ‘the modern maroon must henceforth play out a complex and ironic oppositional game.’<sup>112</sup> This is a game that bypasses and indeed disregards the French West Indian diaspora, to the extent that the French West Indian migrant is seen to represent neither the (would-be) maroon, nor the (neo-)colonial powers of oppression or subversion whose approving voices echo through the prizes and accolades proffered by the metropolitan intelligentsia. The *créolistes* are well aware of the ironic game they play, and of the possibility that ‘the French literary establishment may well try to appropriate our literature as an exotic element of their own national literature. We’ve managed to avoid being recuperated, thus far, because we’ve refused to make concessions to French publishers.’<sup>113</sup> These concessions principally relate to the refusal to include straightforward glossaries for the creole words in their novels. Lucien Taylor, pushing the point that nevertheless, Confiant and Chamoiseau’s novels have been accused by some commentators of exoticism, asserts: ‘You’re hardly afraid to flaunt images that are overdetermined by French readers. Do you think that’s why so many people have claimed that you’re producing an unthreatening, postmodern literature, fabricated according to the dictates of white Parisians?’<sup>114</sup> Neither Chamoiseau nor Confiant expresses any sympathy for this reading of their work.

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<sup>111</sup> Richard D. E. Burton, ‘The idea of difference in contemporary French West Indian thought’, pp. 158-159.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>113</sup> Lucien Taylor, ‘*Créolité Bites*’, pp. 147-148.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 148 -149.

Ultimately, both the *créolistes* and Glissant have a number of problems to face as far as the West Indian diaspora is concerned. To Robert Aldrich's question whether *créolité* might be able to capture the realities of migrants and *négropolitains*,<sup>115</sup> a positive answer would seem doubtful. *Créolité* as a West Indian project of cultural recuperation is, as we have seen, unlikely to speak to or for West Indian migrants who have goals other than the rebuilding of a West Indian sensibility on the islands themselves. Yet although Confiant asserts that as a literary movement, *créolité* has already had a long time in the limelight,<sup>116</sup> it does not seem as though the small number of younger writers rising up behind them are necessarily eager to leave the label or the content of *créolité* behind, especially since it is a proven literary and commercial 'brand'. And if there remains a core of migrant French West Indians who remain fascinated by their creole ancestry then there may be a willing readership for this literature for some time to come.

Despite Confiant's attempts to make clear distinctions between 'le peuple martiniquais' and 'French' West Indians, ostensibly from a fear of creole culture (which is West Indian) assimilating into the Same (which is French), Burton asserts that it is not possible 'to draw a clear distinction between autochthonous, resident Martinicans and Guadeloupeans and so-called *négropolitains* or *zoreils noirs*, the 400,000 French West Indians living in metropolitan France (one-third of them actually born there) who regularly revisit family and friends in the DOM, bringing with them French attitudes, French lifestyles and increasingly, French accents.' They circulate, 'their endless to-and-fro movement across the Atlantic and back further eroding already fragile images of self, deconstructing the opposition of "here" and "there", and causing the distinction of Different and Same on which so much West Indian thought is based to collapse on the crowded concourses of Le Raizet, Le Lamentin and Orly/Charles de Gaulle.'<sup>117</sup>

In 1995 Burton stated that it was the cultural impact of colonisation, rather than the physical impact of migration, that was of note in the French West Indian context.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Robert Aldrich, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>116</sup> Sarah Netter, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>117</sup> Richard D. E. Burton, 'The idea of difference in contemporary French West Indian thought', p. 161.

<sup>118</sup> Richard D. E. Burton, 'The French West Indies à l'heure de l'Europe: an overview', p. 5.

Whilst novels such as *Tout-monde* and *Ormerod* may modify this analysis, my contention is not, in any case, that Glissant or the *créolistes* are indifferent to migration, but rather that migration to mainland France specifically is demoted in their theoretical formulations and consequently their novels. If all French West Indian literature is an example of cultural *errance*, as Robert Aldrich claims, and if French West Indians are ‘emigrants’ whether in the islands or elsewhere, there is a sense in which global post-modern nomadism, circulatory migration and unstable cultural and national allegiances are old news for these writers.<sup>119</sup> This would explain why there has been little inclination among the writers discussed here to focus on physical *errance*. Confiant rejects the criticism that his novels should look beyond small communities in Martinique, and asserts that a writer’s power ‘tient à sa capacité d’universaliser son particulier.’<sup>120</sup> Chamoiseau questions the validity of the ‘diaspora concept’, stating that ‘the term “Diaspora” corresponds to an older identity system based on territories and bloodlines’<sup>121</sup> and that ‘there aren’t any diasporas because the diverse, the “other” is already there – everywhere. So, what you have are emanations, networks and presences. [...] The old concept of exile will no longer exist.’<sup>122</sup> Whether we look at Confiant’s cautious attitude towards the Martiniquan diaspora, or Chamoiseau’s more openly Glissantian rejection of absolutes, closed territories and monolithic cultural affiliations, the outcome is similar, since for all three men the *métropole* is distanced, theoretically reduced in importance.<sup>123</sup> This situation is made more complex by the fact that while Confiant and Chamoiseau aim to recuperate Martiniquan memory and self-awareness for the benefit of Martiniquans, they are aware that their works are read and studied principally by non-West Indians.<sup>124</sup> Glissant’s difficult writings, as we have seen, create a barrier for West Indian readers, yet

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<sup>119</sup> Robert Aldrich, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>120</sup> Paola Ghinelli in conversation with Confiant, in Paola Ghinelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>121</sup> Janice Morgan, ‘Re-Imagining Diversity and Connection in the Chaos World: An Interview with Patrick Chamoiseau’, *Callaloo*, 31: 2 (Spring 2008), pp. 448.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 449.

<sup>123</sup> Chamoiseau refers to Glissant’s terms and ideas throughout his interview with Janice Morgan, and she highlights the link between these two authors in her introduction on page 445.

<sup>124</sup> See Paola Ghinelli in conversation with Chamoiseau and Confiant, in Paola Ghinelli, *op. cit.*, p. 28 and p. 63 respectively. Chamoiseau and Confiant say here that they write principally for Martiniquans, although Confiant appears more open to his worldwide readership.

much of his work also exists as a way of recapturing a fleeting Martiniquan reality, and at least in theory, for the benefit of Martiniquans.

Ultimately, the life and work of these three theorists over many years suggests that circulatory lifestyles are viewed with a profound ambiguity. Migration and circulation speak to the phenomena of overlapping, morphing identities that they find exciting. However, these phenomena can also be seen as vehicles for the destruction of creole life and culture, undermining the history and heritage that these theorists hold to be so valuable.



## Chapter II.3      **Current Scholarship: Tracking the *Black in Black, Blanc, Beur***

This chapter will highlight the small but growing body of critical work that has begun to reflect on French West Indian migration to the metropole as a distinct experience that deserves to be reflected in French West Indian literature. It will also take account of what some commentators have said about the readership of French West Indian writing.

The text that most thoroughly highlights the foundational issues of French West Indian literature in relation to migration to metropolitan France is Mary Gallagher's book *Soundings in French Caribbean Writing since 1950: The Shock of Space and Time* (2002), and will be explored in some depth here. It was the first text to alert me to the limitations of much of the commentary on modern French West Indian literature which

for many readers and critics begins and ends with the world of three or four writers, all of whom are identified with (or against) certain cultural movements, programmes, or manifestos. Furthermore, [...] specific theories of Caribbean culture create certain exclusions, polarizing writers into partisans and dissenters, and they also encourage critical derelictions (not just the neglect of writing per se, but also the dismissal of writers who do not seem to engage with particular theories or with any).<sup>1</sup>

By including in her analysis writers who have received relatively little critical attention elsewhere, for example Vincent Placolty and Daniel Radford, Gallagher's text seeks in no small way to rectify this dereliction. More pertinently, her request that commentators 'identify the criteria that ensure that certain types of writing capture the imagination of a wide and admiring readership and others do not' has been almost a clarion call in my study of French West Indian literature of migration.<sup>2</sup>

Gallagher suggests that the specifically French West Indian tendency 'to repatriate and legitimize a literary project by strategically reinforcing it with a discourse of cultural differentiation and resistance', by means of a number of superseding theories of cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Gallagher, *Soundings*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9

difference (negritude, *antillané* and *créolité*) could be seen as a defense mechanism that works in opposition to the reality of a literature that is published, read and reviewed largely in the *métropole*.<sup>3</sup> In French West Indian literary discourse, life within metropolitan France, even in novels which are ostensibly devoted to this subject, is marginalised in comparison to the importance given to representations of the need to recall and repair unfinished business within the West Indies. If French West Indian novelists must struggle against the dominance of the metropolitan centre it is hardly surprising that a writer such as Daniel Maximin does not focus his writing on the *métropole*, even though he has lived there for many years. Therefore, as Gallagher states, a novel such as Maximin's *Soufrières* (1987) depicts Paris as a home from home for itinerant artists and intellectuals, important as a place where they can interact with other (ex)colonials, but rejected as a more permanent home.<sup>4</sup>

Gallagher's claim that French West Indian literature largely addresses the drama of emigration rather than immigration<sup>5</sup> became apparent to me as I began to explore the texts covered in this thesis. The characters in these novels routinely experience a push out of the islands that is more compelling than the pull towards the *métropole*, despite the so-called myth of Paris, and of *BUMIDOM*. Gallagher claims that projection outwards is intrinsically linked to the political status of the French West Indies, a fact that casts its shadow over the representation of emigration in novels such as Glissant's *La Case du commandeur* (1981), Daniel Radford's *Le Maître-Pièce* (1993), Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996) or Ernest Pépin's *Tambour-Babel* (1996), and bursts through angrily in Daniel Boukman's polemical play *Les Négriers* (1978), which represents *BUMIDOM* as a twentieth-century reinvention of the slave trade. *Le Maître-Pièce* and *L'Exil selon Julia* among others texts also pursue the theme of alienation by representing the migrant as a cultural outsider.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215. See Chapter II.2.

The assertion of the importance of memory in French West Indian writing proves to bear a high degree of relevance to the literature of migration.<sup>6</sup> In fact, one might expect the literature of migration to be more in thrall to memory than the literature that remains fixed in the West Indian space, since the literature of migration must highlight the additional challenge of ‘repeated displacement’ that represents a fracture in the transmission of memory.<sup>7</sup> Not only must this literature represent the trauma and amnesia of the Middle Passage, but it also needs to represent the more immediate fracture produced by the removal to Europe. Displacement is the focus of attention elsewhere in her account, drawing attention to the fact that alternatives to plantation life in the post-slavery era were not in the maroon communities of popular legend or in return to a mythologised Africa, but in urbanisation, education and ultimately emigration to France. Yet escape from the plantation becomes ‘inscribed in an ineluctable chain of estrangement.’<sup>8</sup> This is also apparent in the experience of José in *La Rue Cases-Nègres* (1950) and *Quand la neige aura fondu* (1979). José can no longer contemplate any kind of return to the West Indies, let alone retain any connection with his grandmother’s life on the plantation.

*Soundings in French Caribbean Writing since 1950: The Shock of Space and Time* is the only critical text know to me that highlights the shifting emphases in post-war French West Indian literature of migration. Gallagher remarks that the literary appeal of the negritude movement was already in decline in the 1950s and that although ‘Césaire’s *Cahier* had articulated a dramatic return to the “pays natal” from Metropolitan distance, writing from the 1950s onwards often focuses instead on the relation to Metropolitan France.’<sup>9</sup> This shift is reasonably put down to departmentalisation and the rise of West Indian migration to France. However, Gallagher then goes on to note a worsening experience of the *métropole* as depicted in literary texts. Her thesis is that from the 1960s to the 1970s metropolitan France was presented as an unremittingly alienating environment: ‘Zobel’s cultural appreciation and Glissant’s epistemological fascination

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

are swept away in the 1960s by a groundswell of resentment, incommunicability and ambivalence.’<sup>10</sup> This is the case for many of the later novels discussed in this thesis; their protagonists are often troubled people who are not seekers after knowledge or cultural awareness. Furthermore, Gallagher sees the appearance of a counter-pole developing from the 1970s into the 1980s in the form of Africa, drawing writers’ attention away from the *métropole* (although, of course, in much of this writing, Africa is discovered via Paris). The novels of the period, depicting the metropolitan migration experience, such as those by Vincent Placol, Michèle Lacrosil, Miriam Warner-Vieyra and Suzanne Dracius, are seen to ‘represent the Metropolitan-Caribbean relation as vitiated and unviable, and the outcomes of madness, incarceration, death or suicide are common.’<sup>11</sup>

From the 1970s onwards she notes that there has been an undermining, or a gradual decentring of the *métropole* in French West Indian fiction. Instead there is ‘an ongoing “relativizing” relation with the Metropolitan *imaginaire*, and with Metropolitan thinking and writing [...which] must be seen in terms of the pledge made by the movements of *antillanité* and *créolité* to privilege the local Caribbean context and the landscapes of Creole culture respectively.’<sup>12</sup> She indicates that other writers (those in effect who are outside the *antillanité/créolité* circle, and, I would add, those who *do* write about migration but from a different social and theoretical perspective) are often excluded from metropolitan recognition because ‘[i]n practical, institutional terms, the most prominent French Caribbean writing is overdetermined by the French connection.’<sup>13</sup> This is to say that literary success relies upon writers meeting the expectations of Parisian publishers and critics. It is paradoxical that the most prominent writers, those most driven by theoretical formulations such as *créolité* and not those who are largely ignored by the publishing and institutional mainstream, are the ones who silently collude with neo-colonialism and metropolitan mirroring, their ‘poetics of place and ironic de-hierarchization’ notwithstanding.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately Gallagher does not attempt to reflect

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 223-224.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

further on the kinds of texts that have been excluded, nor does she expand on her restricted use of the term *négropolitain* with reference to French West Indian writing of migration by writers of West Indian descent.

Finally, Gallagher asserts that in the second half of the twentieth century, French West Indian writing has been less interested in the notion of return to the West Indies than in the phenomenon of circulation. Moreover, the circulation in question is often located within the 'New World' space of the Americas.<sup>15</sup> This means that again the *métropole* is marginalised in French West Indian writing, a reality also reflected in the appeal of the North American academy to French West Indian writers. Several, of whom Edouard Glissant and Maryse Condé are the most obvious, have found greater opportunities for living and working in the United States than in metropolitan France. This is clearly a sign that on the one hand there is a relative lack of interest in Francophone 'post-colonial' writing in French universities, and on the other, that there is a burgeoning interest in Francophone writing and theory in the American academy. The conclusion we might reasonably draw is that such a situation is unlikely to encourage any significant focusing on the French metropolitan space.

Chris Bongie's article 'Exiles on Main Stream: Valuing the Popularity of Postcolonial Literature', does not discuss the literature of migration specifically, but pursues issues of reception in a way that seems pertinent to this literature. He notes that unlike cultural studies (represented in the text by the critic Stuart Hall), postcolonial studies (represented by the critic Françoise Lionnet) is not primarily focused on revalorising populist culture and unseating the elitist claims of high culture.<sup>16</sup> His interrogation of postcolonial studies in general leads him to accuse this field as variously Eurocentric, value affirming/modernist, suspicious in the presence of populist writing and ambiguous in the face of a writer's popularity. Despite the apparent desire of postcolonial thought to

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>16</sup> See Chris Bongie, 'Exiles on Main Stream' (paras 64-67 and 29-34). This text focuses on the very different kinds of reception afforded to Maryse Condé and to Tony Delsham respectively.

question traditional canon-forming structures and hierarchy, Francophone postcolonial texts and writers only achieve wider success to the extent that they are first deemed by mainstream French publishers to possess a ‘certain quality’ and take a politically denunciatory stance. Whilst postcolonial studies, then, seeks to champion marginalised, ‘authentic’ writing by and about ‘the ‘people’, it will only do so if the above conditions are met; meanwhile, the issue of an ‘inauthentic’ popularity of a mass appeal arising from bestselling author status (among a Western readership), is largely ignored by postcolonial studies.<sup>17</sup> This situation, explored in the chapters on Maryse Condé and Tony Delsham, has clear implications for the literature of migration, because it highlights the difficulties faced by writers who do not fit easily into the framework of expectation created by Western publishers and commentators. This cleavage not only divides one writer from another, but may also create a divide within the oeuvre of a single writer, as we have seen in the case of Raphaël Confiant, whose foray into writing contemporary stories, sometimes (partly) set in the *métropole*, seems like a diversion from his true calling as a writer.<sup>18</sup>

There are commentators who helpfully focus on migration in a broader sense. Michel Laronde’s article ‘Displaced Discourses: Post(-)coloniality, Francophone Space and the Literature(s) of Immigration in France’ seeks to establish Arabo-French (a step on from *beur*) literature and Afro-French literature as distinctive literatures of migration that challenge the hegemony of French Literature.<sup>19</sup> However, he also finds a place for *négropolitain* and French West Indian literature within a discussion of the ‘different mentalities’ of Francophone Postcolonial literatures. Of particular interest are Laronde’s literatures of ‘postcontact’ (the quotation marks are his), and literatures of immigration. The literatures of ‘postcontact’ are defined as the literatures (such as in the case of the *DOM*) which ‘maintain a dialectics of “parallelism” with French national literature, since

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* The two categories do not seem to be entirely mutually exclusive, however, which leads to a certain critical tension in terms of crossover writing.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter II.2.

<sup>19</sup> Michel Laronde, ‘Displaced Discourses: Post(-)coloniality, Francophone Space and the Literature(s) of Immigration in France’ in *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies*, ed. by H. Adlai Murdoch and Anne Donadey (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), pp. 180-181.

they belong to a postcolonial mentality while maintaining neocolonial institutional ties with France.’ The literatures of immigration exist in a state of ‘interpenetration’; they are on the inside of French literature, in some ways resembling ‘postcontact’ literatures, whilst in terms of a residual cultural influence they also share a similarity with the new national literatures that have arisen and remain based in the former colonies.<sup>20</sup> Laronde highlights this situation of literary and cultural *doubling* in terms such as ‘*interpenetration, intersection, and parallelism*’, which suggest the ongoing interactions between the cultural and linguistic mentalities that interact within Francophone literature. He looks at the relationship between the literatures of exile and the literatures of immigration, seeing the former as sometimes preceding the latter, but his examples from *négropolitain* literature all present instances where a double discourse of exile and immigration exist in the same text. Gisèle Pineau’s *L’Exil selon Julia* (1996) and *Un Papillon dans la cité* (1992) are seen to represent both tendencies, and stand between the literatures of ‘postcontact’ and those of immigration.<sup>21</sup> This point could well lead to a discussion about the continuing relevance of interstices in metropolitan French West Indian literature, and an attempt to understand whether ‘postcontact’ and immigration literatures are destined to remain wedded together in the metropolitan West Indian context, and whether this could compromise any attempts by *négropolitain* West Indian writers to challenge the hegemony of French Literature from the inside.

The difficulty in defining exile, particularly in the context of circular migration, is discussed further in Mireille Rosello’s text, *Littérature et identité créole aux Antilles* (1992). Referring especially to the works of Aimé Césaire, Maryse Condé and Edouard Glissant, Rosello says ‘[I]’exil ici n’a pas encore de définition satisfaisante, il n’est pas résolu par un “retour” au “pays”. Les textes qui “viennent” des îles et qui y “retournent” sont malades non pas de l’Exil mais d’une série d’exils, ils souffrent d’un départ et d’un retour impossibles, ils sont marqués par l’ambiguïté d’une éternelle conduite de “détour”.’<sup>22</sup> Such texts portray island life as alienation, with Martinique and Guadeloupe

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>22</sup> Mireille Rosello, *Littérature et identité créole aux Antilles* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1992), p. 93.

as silent spaces that offer nothing of value. Assimilated returnees or *négropolitains* discover that:

[I]l n'y a pas d'origine. Le concept d'exil semble difficile à forger. L'endroit d'où l'exil pourrait être défini a été totalement anéanti par la situation coloniale. Littéralement le pays natal a été effacé [...] Ce n'est que plus tard, *rétrospectivement*, que les intellectuels antillais peuvent redécouvrir une 'patrie' en représentant le peuple des Antilles comme déjà exilé: arraché à l'Afrique et à lui-même.<sup>23</sup>

Here, the essential rootlessness of the West Indian experience is considered to be a staple of French West Indian writing, quite apart from whether or not migration to the *métropole* is represented in the literary text.

Rosello's analysis barely hints at the difficulty of trying to insert the dramatic discourse of exile into the more prosaic discourse of mass migration. However, when Alain Blérard refers to the petit bourgeois assumptions of negritudism<sup>24</sup> and highlights the negritude poet's lofty sense of his own destiny and duty ('Armé de la magie du Verbe le poète doit éclairer le peuple de sa lucidité et lui indiquer la voie du renouveau historique. [...] Aussi, le poète parlera au nom de ceux qui ne possèdent pas le Verbe'<sup>25</sup>) he also provides a useful description of later generations of French West Indian writers, and also to critics and scholars who still expect an elite to speak on behalf of 'le peuple'.

One commentator who also implies that West Indian writers should take on this representative role is María Cristina Rodríguez. Her survey of exile in the novels of female West Indian writers looks at the work of Maryse Condé, Gisèle Pineau and Myriam Warner-Vieyra in particular and takes them as representative of how the experiences of West Indian female migrants are presented in the French context. Towards the end of her book she asserts that '[t]he Caribbean women writers in this study share a special concern for women migrants from the franco-, hispano- and anglophone

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>24</sup> Alain Blérard, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.



Caribbean who relocate for specific or indefinite periods in metropolises.<sup>26</sup> Through her brief study of novels such as Maryse Condé's *Hérémakhonon* (1976) and Myriam Warner Vierya's *Juletane* (1982) she proposes that in some cases prior class distinctions and complications are flattened out somewhat in a metropolitan context that fails to take even educated and middle class black women's professional skills and ambitions seriously.<sup>27</sup> Whilst slight, her incursion into the question of class is notable in the context of the scholarship on French West Indian writing. Furthermore, there is a feminist sensibility here that is not apparent in most critical writing on this subject. She notes that these fictional characters

enter this new space with notions of an imaginary, almost magical, place that offers possibilities unforeseen in their Caribbean society. Once in the metropolitan center, they discover they are voiceless and invisible, only recognized as disposable workers located at the margin/border. Living elsewhere, in New York or Paris, becomes a process of growth and adaption, surrounded by strangers and social tension, where different usually means inferior, sex object, possession, or exotic woman. They, in turn, become overly assertive and aggressive so as to survive and progress in a hostile environment.<sup>28</sup>

Whilst Rodríguez later goes on to discuss further the ways in which French West Indians are disadvantaged in the *métropole* the description she gives in her conclusion of migration and the metropolitan centre is essentially a positive one. The metropolitan city is a place of opportunity where

women find places – however temporary or peripheral – to study, work, dwell, extend, or rupture links to a homeland that one might one day return to. It is the place where women can construct new lives and re-create the best of both worlds: the warmth, care, familiarity, language, and history that shaped and defined home, on the one hand, with the opportunity to be well-paid for the housework performed for free or sub-human wages back home, get training to apply for other jobs, go to night school, make housing and employment decisions on their own, on the other. Even though some of these women characters never chose to leave

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<sup>26</sup> María Cristina Rodríguez, *What Women Lose: Exile and the Construction of Imaginary Homelands in Novels by Caribbean Writers* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), p. 166.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

their islands but were forced by economic or family reasons, they quickly adapt to new locations and attempt to start new lives.<sup>29</sup>

In making the case that women writers have depicted the positive consequences of migration and circulation Rodríguez charts new territory in a landscape dominated by commentators who routinely focus on more negative interpretations of literary contexts.<sup>30</sup>

She continues to accentuate the positive by asserting that the flexibility of the metropolitan centre offers women freedom as well as the chance to reaffirm cultural difference even in the face of discrimination and adaptability problems:

[T]hese women achieve in the metropole what would be almost impossible to do on the nation island or DOM. They take advantage of the openings created by the centre (the dominant culture) to dissolve any potential conflict. The centre allows them to move in the assigned spaces, which also means that the centre stretches so that it can continue to control and segment the population by maintaining cultural difference.<sup>31</sup>

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My choice of the above critical texts is based upon their usefulness in helping to make distinctions between French metropolitan West Indian literature of migration and French West Indian literature *tout court* (or between a variety of literatures of migration), but it is also my contention in this thesis that much critical writing does not seriously attempt to do this on a sustained level. A helpful contribution has however been made by Madeleine Dobie, whose article ‘Invisible Exodus: The Cultural Effacement of Antillean Migration’ (2004) argues that ‘[t]he deficit of accounts of migration and migrants from the Antilles has, for the most part, gone unnoticed by scholars of literature and film.’<sup>32</sup> By simply highlighting this gap Dobie’s article, which I came to fairly late, served to

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.166.

<sup>30</sup> For example, see the chapter entitled ‘Self-Loathing, Self-Sacrifice: Michele Lacrosil’s *Cajou* and Myriam Warner-Vieyra’s *Juletane*’, in Valerie Orlando, *Of Suffocated Hearts and Tortured Souls: Seeking Subjecthood through Madness in Francophone Women’s Writing of Africa and the Caribbean* (Lanham, Boulder and New York: Lexington Books, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> María Cristina Rodríguez, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>32</sup> Madeleine Dobie, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

corroborate ideas I had been developing for some time. However, while it refers to a number of sociological sources, novels and concepts that I had begun to explore prior to discovering her article, what is particularly instructive is the way in which she compares French West Indian cultural and critical treatment of migration with their equivalents in both French and British societies. She does so all the better to illuminate the ways in which French West Indian creativity in and about the *métropole* is disadvantaged and problematised.

For example, although the title of this chapter refers to the optimistic forging of a new rainbow nation in metropolitan France, where people of West Indian descent are fully involved in national cultural life, this situation does not appear to be closely aligned to the image projected in French West Indian literature. Dobie notes that '[p]eople from other non-European backgrounds - West Africans, Asians, Antilleans – sometimes figure in novels and films about beurs, particularly when these depict life in the underprivileged suburbs that encircle France's major cities, but they are generally secondary characters.'<sup>33</sup> There appears as yet to be little critical writing that seeks to compare and contrast *black* (or more specifically West Indian or *négropolitain*), *beur*, or indeed *blanc* literature of migration, and even less that explores how writing from migrant West Indian sources interrogates the status of this metropolitan West Indian community in a multicultural, metropolitan context.

Christiane Albert's *L'Immigration dans le roman francophone contemporain* (2005) is an example of this disjointedness. Albert's analysis fails to consider the problem of trying to fit metropolitan French West Indians into a normative definition of 'immigrants'. She registers the existence of a generalised literature that may include different elements: 'Ces écritures dont le déploiement ne cessa depuis de prendre de l'ampleur, prennent racine dans un phénomène de mixité, d'entre-deux identitaire et social et introduisent du métissage et de l'hybridation, de l'étrangeté qui brisent donc désormais le mythe de la homogénéité de la société de la culture française.'<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>34</sup> Christiane Albert, *L'Immigration dans le roman francophone contemporain* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 2005), p. 197.

She also outlines the options that may be available to migrant writers, including, potentially, writers of West Indian origin. Firstly, they may claim assimilation into the body of 'French literature', based upon a perception of their place within the French tradition of universalism. Secondly, they may choose to become the spokesmen or women of their particular ethnic communities, running the risk, however, of essentialising and ghettoising those communities for the enjoyment of a dominant publishing industry and a curious white readership. Thirdly, they may decide to take possession of their pluriculturality ('assumer leur position pluriculturelle'), their position within the interstices of metropolitan society, and their multiple identities. Fourthly, there is the option that they refuse all notions of national belonging, claiming that their status as writers takes precedence over any kind of ethno-national allegiance.<sup>35</sup>

However, Christiane Albert does not address the challenges that these categories and descriptions present to French West Indian writing. For example, she fails to address how circulatory migration might influence these four categories. Her conclusion makes not a single reference to novelists of West Indian origin. This absence suggests that for her, this is not 'true' immigrant writing, because, of course, these writers are not foreigners but French citizens.

Although the above examples show that commentators have been exploring Francophone literatures of migration for some time, it should also be apparent that there remains work to be done on isolating the issues that are particular to the production of French West Indian literature in the context of migration.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

## Part 3

### **Patters of Discourse: Reflections of the *Métropole***

Part 2 looked at French West Indian theory, and the works of scholars who have looked at migration in a literary context. Part 3 moves on from Francophone ideas to consider some aspects of Anglophone postcolonial theory, and how well they apply in the case of the French West Indies. French West Indian literature is increasingly explored through the lens of postcolonial literary studies, but the connection between this scholarship and French West Indian literature of migration is rarely pursued at length. Bongie and Gallagher's reservations in relation to the academic reception of French West Indian literature mirror similar criticisms presented in the Anglophone context; for example, Stephen Slemon's comments about the growing investment in 'an academic star system of astonishing proportions' within institutional Anglophone post-colonial studies reflect the concerns of both Gallagher and Bongie in their contemplation of the Francophone voices that are heard and those that are largely ignored.<sup>1</sup> The interaction of these studies with the negatives of disillusionment and the potential positives of hybridity will be explored here. I also consider the problematics of reception, the possible commodification of French West Indian literature. The challenges facing the development of a *négropolitain* writing of a younger generation of black writers in the *métropole* are also considered from a postcolonial perspective in Chapter III.3.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Slemon, 'The Scramble for Post-colonialism' in *De-Scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and Textuality*, ed. by Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 31.

### Chapter III.1 Displacement and Acclimatisation

Conflict, so would-be novelists are told, is an essential ingredient in storytelling. Without it, there can be little chance of publication, much less best-sellerdom, and no chance of inspiring a broad, popular potential readership. The extent to which French West Indian novelists must seek to stimulate conflict in their texts is no less urgent than for other writers, and their task is energised at its very core by the condition of French West Indians as an alienated and dominated people. However, in addition to the demand for conflict is the expectation that the postcolonial writer should take a denunciatory political stance, providing a strong critique of (neo)-colonialism or of discrimination and racism.<sup>2</sup>

What does this imperative mean for French West Indian writers whose work eschews racial and political conflict, but rather replaces those with more universal, general themes? What does it mean for genre writing, for example, if French West Indian writers ‘are strongly discouraged from writing in less overtly political-allegorical genres like detective fiction, romance novels, and science fiction’?<sup>3</sup> This chapter focuses on four writers, and on particular texts that largely retreat from denunciation. These texts choose instead to present the migratory process of displacement as a process of acclimatisation, of successful insertion and integration. The question to be asked is, why has such an approach been chosen, and how do such writers fare when they pursue their literary ambitions outside the frameworks encouraged by mainstream metropolitan publishers and critics?

Two of these novelists have been mentioned earlier in this thesis. Bertène Juminer (1927-2003) has had the highest critical reputation, and is also famous within the context of French West Indian literature – although the contemporary writer Daniel Picouly (b. 1948) will be better known to a general metropolitan readership. Juminer, a Guianese doctor, wrote five novels, of which his first autobiographical one, *Les Bâtards* (1961), mentioned earlier is an appropriate text to consider here, since it has been claimed that

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<sup>2</sup> This has been pointed out by Chris Bongie, ‘Exiles on Main Stream’, (para. 11)

<sup>3</sup> Roberto Strongman, ‘On the Question of Caribbean National Allegories’, *Sargasso*, 1 (2007-2008), p. 27.

this is one of his least revolutionary or independantist pieces of work.<sup>4</sup> The title itself refers to the cultural, national and racial ‘illegitimacy’ of the characters in this novel, a self-styled *Cercle anticolonialiste* of Guianese medical students in the *métropole* in the early post-war era, who are all consumed, to one extent or another, by the colonialist problematic. One character, Chambord, imagines making the following pronouncement to his friends:

Nous sommes des bâtards issus d’un mâle gaulois et d’une fille africaine exilée par lui au bord de l’Amazone. En postulant jusqu’aux limites notre extraction européenne, nous découvrons notre position d’êtres culturellement nés de mère inconnue; et notre option culturelle même nous fait constater une autre tare: nous sommes historiquement des anonymes ou des renégats. En définitive, nous voici doublement dépersonnalisés: au titre de la Culture comme à celui de l’Histoire! Mais l’Afrique matriarcale et puissante subsiste en nous, en dépit des vicissitudes et des humiliations subies. La Guyane, notre mère – la fille-mère – nous attend pour nous légitimer, pour nous sauver!<sup>5</sup>

Chambord convinces himself of the need to return to French Guiana in order to ‘[s]’insensibiliser au fluide métropolitain. Refuser l’abandon, sans discussion ni examen. Se réhabiliter en choisissant la Guyane, passionnellement, aveuglément.’<sup>6</sup> Yet, for all of this passion, most of the novel is not devoted to examining the colonial trauma as it impinges on the realities of new migrants in metropolitan society. Although the status of the *bâtards* as West Indians is reflected on throughout the novel, this has little practical application to the young students’ lives in Europe. Indeed, as a ship returns members of the group back to Guiana at one point in the book, a remark is made by a black doctor who joins them that prejudice and racism are historic factors that distinguish the West Indies from Europe, and that even on the long journey across the ocean, the attitudes of white travellers and staff would change for the worse the closer they got to the Americas. Even the West Indian traveller would change; the mulatto who in the *mère-patrie* had

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<sup>4</sup> Jack Corzani, ‘Antilles-Guyane’, in *Littératures Francophones, Volume II. Les Amériques: Haïti, Antilles-Guyane, Québec*, ed. by Jack Corzani, Léon-François Hoffman and Marie-Lyne Piccione (Paris: Editions Belin, 1998), p. 143.

<sup>5</sup> Bertène Juminer, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

claimed to be black would return to assume his place in the racially stratified West Indian society, perhaps almost unconscious of his change in behaviour and attitudes.<sup>7</sup>

All this presents a conservative and paradoxical implication, namely that the *métropole* is where radical anti-colonialism flourishes at its finest, not the West Indies. Jack Corzani describes the novel as ‘un ouvrage nettement négritudiste’<sup>8</sup> which would suggest that in at least some respects it should be acknowledged as a *roman engagé*. The irony is that *Les Bâtards* is also a fine example of a text in which displacement to the French *métropole* becomes an exercise in acclimatisation, since, apart from talking about anticolonialism, the other focus in the book is mutual sexual attraction between black men and white women. All the black Guianese male students who represent the novel’s main characters are gradually paired off with white women. What is notable, as E. S. Miller remarks, is that ‘this arrangement is assumed to be quite natural, and the question of any unusual special attraction is not raised.’<sup>9</sup> None of the young men’s prospective new relations are disconcerted by the racial origins of their future sons-in-law. Indeed, they are welcoming, despite one elderly aunt’s insinuations that she will save her (presumably discriminatory) comments for later if her niece’s fiancé, Segaye, understands French. This attitude fails to impress the rest of her family. Segaye brushes the incident off, and his reflection, ‘n’en avait-il pas entendu de pires au Foyer?’<sup>10</sup> suggests that whilst he has experienced some racism in the *métropole* there is little to show that it has dented his positive attitude towards metropolitan life.

E. S. Miller’s introduction to her essay on Juminer and on the African American writer Eldridge Cleaver notes a connection between their approach on inter-racial relationships and Fanon’s, asserting that ‘[t]hey both explain the phenomenon as the result of social factors, both analyzing their own society in accord with Fanon’s view of the colonial

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144-145.

<sup>8</sup> Jack Corzani, *op.cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>9</sup> E. S. Miller, ‘Cleaver and Juminer: Black Man and White Woman’, *Black American Literature Forum*, 11: 1 (Spring 1977), p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Bertène Juminer, *op cit.*, p. 87.



world.’<sup>11</sup> However, for this novel, since there is very little critique or analysis of the nature of these relationships, it is hard to see how Fanon applies here. Segaye is overjoyed at his first sexual experiences with a white woman. Yet he reflects that he has nothing in common with a post-abolition slave who sleeps with a white woman in order to prove to himself that he has gone up in the world.<sup>12</sup> His comments both recall and deny *PNMB* in which Fanon talks about how marriage to a white person at that time was a priority among some black West Indians for whom it represented access to equality with this ‘race illustre’. In addition, Fanon remarks on how among West Indian migrants of his era, ‘le souci était de coucher avec une Blanche. A peine au Havre, ils se dirigent vers les maisons closes. Une fois accompli ce rite d’initiation à l’“authentique” virilité, ils prennent le train pour Paris.’<sup>13</sup> Miller notes that ‘[t]he point for Segaye is not that his mistress is white, but that he has a mistress at all.’<sup>14</sup>

The situation is not as innocent as it might seem. At the hostel there are several young black female students who have no interest in flirting, or engaging in affairs – unlike their male counterparts. The narrator tells us that these young women are unattractive, mostly, one of the young men decides, because beautiful West Indian girls would be enticed into motherhood early, and would therefore lose out on the chance to study overseas. Furthermore, he says, ‘Nous serions de beaux salauds si nous cherchions à les séduire. Notre rôle est plutôt de les protéger! [...] Et puis, il est possible que’elles flirtent en cachette.’<sup>15</sup> This short interior monologue, which is the only time that black women appear in this story at all, suggests that there might after all be a subconscious acclimatisation to a metropolitan ideal of ethnic beauty and superiority in the minds of these West Indian students, either male, female, or both, in this early post-war era of student migration. Miller wonders if these black women ‘deliberately made themselves unattractive to the black male students.’<sup>16</sup> After all, Fanon himself asserted that the

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<sup>11</sup> E. S. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> Bertène Juminer, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> Franz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> E. S. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 25 (fn. 5).

<sup>15</sup> Bertène Juminer, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>16</sup> E. S. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

female West Indian students he had come across in the *métropole*, future teachers and therefore future corrupters of West Indian youth, had in many cases decided that they were certainly not going to marry black men.<sup>17</sup> Yet the dismissal of black women by both Fanon and by Juminer's young *bâtards* (and even by Miller) seems unfair in the light of the realities, highlighted by women who had actually studied in the *mère-patrie* in the pre-war period. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's research has highlighted the perspective of the Martiniquan intellectual Paulette Nardal and the ambiguities of black West Indian women in the *métropole* at that time. Any burgeoning racial consciousness among these women had to negotiate

the curious situation of black male privilege and black female circumscription in matters of race, sex, and class. Unlike their black and mixed-race counterparts in France, who successfully threw themselves, as Nardal remarks, into the pursuit of French women, educated women of colour were isolated, ignored by fellow Antilleans and unable to be fully accepted into French culture and by French men other than on certain defined interracial terms. [...] Nardal uses the word *friend* in her interview with [Eslanda Goode] Robeson to describe the parameter of French male-Antillean female relationships; but she further states that many of the French women pursued by men of color were from a lower socioeconomic class, and that Antillean women, much more sensitive to issues of class, according to Nardal, were less willing to interact with white men who were not of their class, and race prevented many educated French men from interacting with serious intentions with Antillean women.<sup>18</sup>

Although the class distinctions between the Guianese students and their various girlfriends are not made clear in *Les Bâtards*, it is apparent, as we have already noted, that French Guiana was, at that time, a highly stratified society in which colour and class were intertwined; metropolitan France meanwhile is depicted as the site of liberation, including most obviously, sexual liberation. For Nardal, fellow West Indian men are like friends to the black women students and for Cambier they are like brothers to these same students. Yet in either case, the unspoken implication of this novel is that female West Indian students in the era prior to mass migration were somehow a breed apart from their

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<sup>17</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> Eslanda Goode Robeson, 'Black Paris', *Challenge* (June 1936), p. 9, cit. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

b rothers and male classmates, and that their emotional and social assimilation into metropolitan society was certainly less straightforward than it was for their menfolk.

In *L'Habit de lumière* (2000) by Raymond Procès the focus is on just one interracial relationship which takes place over twenty years later than the couplings depicted in *Les Bâtards*. As with the relationships in *Les Bâtards*, the relationship here appears to be troubled less by racism than by other factors, although racism certainly makes an appearance. A young West Indian, Noël Soliman, whose has lived with his parents in a Parisian suburb since childhood, drops out of his *classe de Terminale* at the end of the 1970s and takes a trip to Guadeloupe, where a mystical way out of his various problems presents itself. Produced by the small publisher New Legend, which seems to specialise in mystery fiction, this novel belongs in the category of early twenty-first century West Indian novels which perceive return to the West Indies as redeeming.<sup>19</sup>

As a minor coming-of-age novel with some autobiographical elements,<sup>20</sup> and written by a little known writer, *L'Habit de lumière* is interesting because at first sight, it presents an unusual mixture of conventions, strategies and attitudes. Noël's family setting seems to eschew all kinds of racial assertiveness, and his everyday life in Paris does not involve claiming an openly 'black' identity. His family is, as is often the case in fiction about the French West Indian immigrant experience, the only black family to appear in the novel. The reluctance to tackle migrant experience on a wider canvas may possibly be an indication of the lack of confidence or technical skill on the part of some writers, or it may, as in the case of Daniel Radford's *Le Maître-Pièce* (1993), be a deliberate reflection of the partly self-imposed social and cultural isolation and invisibility cultivated by some parts of the West Indian migrant community. In either case, it is surprising that in the late 1970s Noël should be so culturally and racially isolated in a suburb north of Paris. While he reflects on his vivid memories of Guadeloupe, and his childhood happiness there, the novel creates no sense initially that that heritage and identity will, or necessarily should, be lived out in the *métropole*. Noël's identity as a Guadeloupean does

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<sup>19</sup> Gisèle Pineau's work is the most obvious example of this. See Chapter IV.3.

<sup>20</sup> 'Raymond Procès en quelques dates' (2007) <http://raymond-proces.publibook.com/bio.php>, [accessed 9 May 2011]

not initially involve or require any public acknowledgement, nor any enhancement from interaction with other West Indians. The only challenge to this silence occurs in his geography class when his teacher, a Mlle Mangin, decides to talk to the students about the *métissage* that exists within the *Antilles*, using Noël as an example. This is an experience that is clearly not only inspiring and affirming to Noël, but rare to the whole class:

Contraints à l'évidence, tous les yeux dévisagèrent Noël. Celui-ci demeura impertuable. Son regard ne se détachait de Mlle Mangin. Elle lui apparassait tout autre. Il était étonné de la violence subite que manifestait ce petit corps difforme. Comment, lui, si différent du commun des mortels, s'était-il laissé berné par l'apparence? Aujourd'hui une nouvelle Mlle Mangin naissait devant ses yeux. Une belle femme pleine de générosité. Une femme qui donnait aux choses importantes la place qu'elles méritaient.<sup>21</sup>

This turn of events is sparked off by Noël's reponse to his teacher's question about his origins. '[J]e suis né à la Guadeloupe. Je suis moi-même le produit de divers mélanges puisque j'ai des grands-parents d'origine bretonne.'<sup>22</sup> Noël does not mention his African ancestry at all, presumably because he feels that to focus on his Breton parentage will bring him closer to the identity of his classmates. Yet their uncomprehending laughter suggests this attempt to curry favour perhaps misses the mark; one might ask whether Noël's stress on a mixed-race creole identity and his silence on his African heritage makes him in fact less, not more able to take his place in metropolitan society. Why, in fact, does Noël have to wait for his teacher to sanction his West Indian parentage to make it mentionable?

Colour crops up at certain key points at early stages in the novel; the above episode is the first occasion, although the subject is hinted at rather than broached directly. However, where we might expect it to appear, often it does not. Cindy, with whom Noël immediately falls in love, is first mentioned on page seventeen, but despite his further growing acquaintance with her over the following pages her 'whiteness' is not mentioned at all, although we discover on page twenty-two that she has long chestnut hair. The

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<sup>21</sup> Raymond Procès, *L'Habit de lumière* (Paris: New Legend Editions, 2000), p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

reason for the absence of discussion on this subject becomes clear when their story develops further and although the context does not make this clear, it may be that class rather than colour is the barrier to their mutual happiness: ‘Comment une fille de ta classe consent-elle à s’afficher avec un type de ma qualité?’<sup>23</sup> Cindy herself makes no mention of race in her response.

According to David Beriss this silence shows that the ‘division of the world according to cultures rather than races has long been evident in French social science and corresponds in many ways with the management of cultural diversity of France. Countries colonized by France were the objects of study, providing an ideological counter to the type of society that was being created in France at the turn of the century.’<sup>24</sup> This distinction is highlighted by Cindy’s questioning of Noël when he takes her to visit the zoo; their conversation is almost entirely a dissection of West Indian culture as distinct from French culture; there is no sense that the two cultures are connected at all, nor that Noël, who has spent most of his life in Paris, might be balancing any kind of French/West Indian/Parisian hybrid identity. He is defined as a West Indian rather than as a black man, even though he largely holds his West Indian identity at a distance from his public persona. Cindy does view him here in racial terms, noting: ‘Vous êtes un peuple très superstitieux? C’est surtout visible au cinéma, le rôle du sorcier est presque toujours joué par un noir.’ Noël does not back away from what some would see as improper racial stereotyping - quite the opposite. Referring to the village of his birth he declares: ‘Il existe un côté mystique qui colle à la peau de l’homme noir. Il était habituel dans le village de Fougère de parler de phénomènes ou d’êtres surnaturels à la tombée de la nuit.’ And should we suppose that he attributes these beliefs to others, he asserts that ‘la nuit effrayante renferme pour moi tout un cortège de morts vivants et autres bizarreries. Les *Soucounans* ou *volants* sont des êtres capables de se transformer en boule de feu et de s’attaquer aux hommes pour leur sucer leur sang [sic].’<sup>25</sup> This passage also highlights

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71. However, this comment may be a euphemistic reference to race.

<sup>24</sup> David Beriss, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> Raymond Procès, *op. cit.*, p. 76. The *soucounan* (‘soucouyant’ in English) is a figure from West Indian folklore. It has the power to change its shape, and it creeps into homes through tiny gaps, where it sucks the blood (or the ‘life-blood’) of sleeping humans. See Giselle Anatol, ‘Transforming the Skin-Shedding

another cleavage between Noël's West Indian and European self. When he leaves school to look for a job in order to contribute to the family finances following his father's redundancy, his mother asserts that God will reward him. This comment offends him and he responds: 'Allons, maman, ne mêlons pas Dieu à tout cela. Sur terre, le mieux est d'essayer de se tirer d'affaire soi-même.'<sup>26</sup> Although this might be taken as an assertive example of a rationalistic French atheism, adopted by an assimilated young man who has left behind his mother's traditional Catholic beliefs behind, it does not take long for a rather less 'Parisian' cosmology to become apparent in Noël's thinking. Indeed, this first appears early on in the text, where Noël imagines a supernatural reason for the bleakness of his romantic prospect: 'Il en venait à penser qu'une malédiction s'acharnait sur lui.'<sup>27</sup>

The literalism of this kind of statement becomes apparent. Although it is never quite established how fully Noël has reconciled these two world views within himself, Noël's involvement in, and personal acceptance of, a world of magical-supernatural forces gradually become more frequent. In Paris Noël has a sense of being watched or followed by indefinable apparitions. Once he arrives in Guadeloupe, the text becomes a full-blown piece of *créoliste* magic realism, in which, among other astonishing occurrences, he stands face to face with a 'Zombie', and is contacted from beyond the grave by his recently departed 'père spirituel', Douard, who leaves him with a mysterious casket containing an unfinished manuscript. On his return to Paris, further supernatural apparitions come to alert him to his prophetic destiny and his magic powers: After a psychic struggle with what appear to be demonic forces, he is told: 'Tu es le véritable héritier, élu par le maître de la connaissance. Tu es désormais maître de ton destin! Prends garde aux esprits du mal car ils viendront troubler ton existence.'<sup>28</sup> The last quarter of the novel sees Noël receive a visit from five holograms, including his mentor Douard and from Louis Delgrès, Victor Schœlcher, Frantz Fanon and Saint-Jean Perse, whose job it is to instruct Noël in West Indian history and cultural awareness. Martin

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Soucouyant: Using Folklore to Reclaim Female Agency in Caribbean Literature', *Small Axe*, 7 (March 2000), pp. 44-45.

<sup>26</sup> Raymond Procès, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

Luther King also makes an appearance, in order to urge Noël to make use of his special powers and to ‘poursuivre l’oeuvre de purification. Tu dois instruire les hommes de la véritable nature des sentiments qu’il faut pour instaurer une meilleure entente entre les races.’<sup>29</sup>

Noël’s success represents the fulfillment of a number of goals, all of which apparently serve the purposes of acclimatisation in the context of the Republican French state. The reluctance of colour to speak of itself in Noël’s life leads to a tension which eventually explodes in the text. In so doing, it reveals the ways in which it *can* be used within that society as ‘one term in a complex ideology defining belonging and foreignness in France that focuses primarily on culture. For instance, racism in France is not principally defined by attention to color or by the deployment of racial stereotypes (although it can be). Instead, racism is understood primarily as an incorrect or unjust invocation of culture.’<sup>30</sup> It becomes clear that this is what occurs in this novel. References to West Indian culture, no matter how exoticising, are accepted by Noël, whereas the one character whose ‘invocation of culture’ seems both unjust and highly racialised suffers as a result. Fred, Cindy’s well-heeled childhood friend turns out to have designs upon her. His attempts to discourage Noël’s interest in Cindy are flecked with racially abusive terminology such as ‘[s]ale nègre!’<sup>31</sup>, and ‘[u]n jour je lui ferai entendre raison à ce sale noir présomptueux’<sup>32</sup>, and most curiously, ‘[c]ette race ne mérite en aucune façon d’être traitée avec les mêmes égards qu’un homme de notre rang’<sup>33</sup>, a declaration which somehow seeks to combine both race and class as equally problematic aspects of Noël’s profile. Noël himself is taught by his various spirit mentors to valorise his cultural inheritance (an inclusion which brings the text closer to the mainstream of contemporary French West Indian literature); he completes an unfinished manuscript given to him by the spirit guides, a text designed to tell the (white) world about black history and culture. The result is a bestseller called *Les Raisons de la couleur*. Along with his success in

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>30</sup> David Beriss, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> Raymond Procès, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

athletics this leads to his inclusion and acceptance within metropolitan society, class barriers are broken down and his successful interracial relationship becomes a symbol of a harmonised *métropole*, and even a symbol of unity in the world at large. There appears to be no irony in any of this.

It seems that Procès has been influenced by other French West Indian writers, and is aware of the positive commercial and critical reception that the *créolistes* have enjoyed. He has chosen to pursue an exoticising path with this novel, perhaps calculating that this might be an advantageous decision to take. The way in which Noël's happiness is reliant upon a deeper reconciliation with his Guadeloupean heritage also recalls Gisèle Pineau's migration writing. Understood this way, the metatext here also represents an unspoken desire to reflect the success of the fictional book that is depicted within its pages. Such an outcome is unlikely, not least because, unlike the fictitious 'éditions Le Populaire, une maison mondialement connue'<sup>34</sup> New Legend is not a mainstream Parisian publisher. To date, New Legend, a publisher of West Indian fiction in the *métropole*, appears to have no website, and its publications are difficult to locate. Although Procès, who is a member of the Société des Poètes Français, has since moved on to another publisher, *L'Habit de lumière* (along with earlier works) is already out of print. This first novel is not of sufficient literary merit to draw its author into the exclusive *créoliste* orbit; but it does highlight some of the realities of life in the *mère-patrie* and asserts that it can provide the West Indian with an adequate home if he is willing to make the necessary adjustments: 'Vivre à Paris ou dans la banlieue parisienne, ce n'est qu'une question d'adaption.'<sup>35</sup>

Arlette Minatchy-Bogat's novel, *La Métisse caribéenne* (2004), is notable as one of the few novels to explore the experiences of the French West Indian *dougl*a community in the *métropole*.<sup>36</sup> This novel is also interesting as a rags-to-riches story; I have not found

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>36</sup> This term refers to those who are completely or partially descended from the Indian indentured labourers, who arrived in the West Indies from the 1850s onwards. It is also used adjectivally to refer to cultural and social experience and production. See Parvati Raghuram, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, Brij Maharaj, Dave Sangha, eds, *Tracing an Indian Diaspora: Contexts, Memories, Representations* (Delhi: Sage Publications



any others while exploring the French West Indian literature of migration. Louisiane, a Guadeloupean, is conceived following the rape of her mother, an Indian, by a black man. Although her mother Rita finally finds happiness with an honorable black man, she and her children are never truly welcomed among either Indian or black Guadeloupeans. When Louisiane is taken to Paris as a teenaged nanny, she is discovered by model scouts Monsieur and Madame De La Corte, whose protégée she becomes. Gossip meets the news back in her village, where ‘[c]ertains disaient que Louisiane avait préféré rester à Paris pour se vendre sur les trottoirs. Tandis que la communauté indienne pensait plutôt qu’elle s’était enfuie sitôt arrivée dans cette grande ville, avec un amant.’<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, she settles into an apartment in Nice, and her trajectory from this point on is upwards.

The first half of the novel is split into very short, titled chapters. Chapter headings such as: *Louisiane à Nice*, *Louisiane réalise son voeu*, *Louisiane styliste*, *Louisiane intégrée à Nice*, *Le succès* give the reader the impression that from the moment Louisiane finds herself left behind in the *métropole* she moves steadily onwards. Her advancement from fashion model to famous fashion designer is swift, and although she initially suffers from the jealousy of her fellow models, her problems all seem to be dealt with painlessly, due to her personal drive and decisiveness. ‘Elle s’entêtait à penser qu’être noire dans un milieu de Blancs pourrait être néfaste pour sa carrière. S’arrêter à cet obstacle, c’était faire preuve de couardise. Elle décida donc de progresser et de travailler sans se soucier des médisances de ses collègues.’<sup>38</sup> Her brothers eventually migrate from Guadeloupe, move in with her and begin working for the same company, and they too suffer some discrimination from their colleagues on the shop floor. This behaviour is conveniently eliminated following a speech by M. De La Corte, so that ‘[a]u bout de trois mois, il

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Pvt. Ltd., 2008), p. 429-431. Studies of French West Indian literature and culture have begun to focus on ‘dougularisation’: Brinda Mehta, *Notions of Identity, Diaspora, and Gender in Caribbean Women's Writing*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) mentions Arlette Minatchy-Bogat (b. 1945), who is herself of part African and Indian ancestry. Throughout the West Indies the descendants of Indian indentured labourers have often been referred to as *coolies*.

<sup>37</sup> Arlette Minatchy-Bogat, *La Métisse caribéenne* (Guyane: Ibis Rouge Editions, 2004), p. 60.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

régnaît dans l'atelier d'emballage une ambiance fraternelle, et ceux qui avaient ouvert la plaie au début, pansèrent les cicatrices. Ils se sentaient ridicules.<sup>39</sup>

Interracial relationships play a key role throughout the novel, and none of them are without problems. The heroine's marriage to Jean Lionel, a rich young white man from an excellent family, begins traumatically due to his father's racially-motivated rejection of her, but the success of the couple's business ventures, the birth of twins who resemble their estranged grandfather, and a later spiritual crisis which unites the grandparents with their grandchildren against the generation in the middle force racism into the past. Finally, Jean Lionel's (white) father and Louisiane's (Indian-Guadeloupean) mother, both now widowed, fall in love and marry, thus removing the final obstacle to racial harmony in the novel.

This text could be read as an affirmation that success and personal fulfillment are possible for West Indians in metropolitan France. It might also, less inspirationally, hint at the conflict between racial disgust and sexual desire.<sup>40</sup> After all, Louisiane is a fashion model and therefore already an icon of beauty when her colleagues look askance at her; their speedy capitulation occurs in the context of racial antagonism which becomes attraction. Her father-in-law moves, admittedly over some years, from fearing racial difference, to admiring her mother's curves and her colourful dress sense. There may also be an unspoken reflection here of the different expectations and experiences of the Indian minority community in the French West Indies, and in the *métropole*. There are no discussions about *negritude*, *créolité* or race, and no references to *BUMIDOM* or to mass migration. Again, one wonders whether these discourses are perceived to be irrelevant to a character who grows up perceiving Indianness as challenged by blackness, whilst struggles to assert an identity against dominant *European* cultural values are noticeably absent. In this novel, reaching healing with people of African descent is the greater struggle, although by the end, all three ethnic groups have found unity.

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter III.2.

In no sense does Louisiane become ‘representative’ of any kind of West Indian experience of migration. She briefly becomes ‘la Perle noire’ of the Parisian catwalk,<sup>41</sup> but apart from one or two other characters mentioned very briefly she is isolated from any metropolitan West Indian context, and she appears to be isolated from the wider economic and political issues both on her island and in the *métropole*. Her later success as a businesswoman and the emphasis on her beauty mark her out as highly unusual among West Indian migrants, but this rarity is never explored in the text. The only other significant migrant presence in the novel is Louisiane’s friend Mme De La Corte, who is from Réunion – and who may therefore also be of (partially) Indian origin, although this is never addressed. Ultimately, this novel, which does not lack literary value, presents the metropolitan sphere and the West Indian/migrant sphere as almost entirely unconnected with each other; they are two separate worlds, and more strikingly so than any of the other novels in this chapter, possibly more so than another of the other texts under consideration in this thesis.

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The life and professional trajectory of the novelist Daniel Picouly (b. 1948) highlight issues of reception and the ways in which ancestral as opposed to personal displacement and acclimatisation may have led to particular subject matter and ideas being *excluded* from his work. Picouly’s black grandfather arrived in metropolitan France from Martinique in 1914 to fight in World War I, and remained there to marry and found a family with a white Frenchwoman. His son Roger, Daniel Picouly’s father, was born in Tarbes and married Paulette, a white widow, several years his senior. Picouly himself was born in 1948 in Seine-Saint-Denis, and eventually became a schoolteacher. His early novels were thrillers, the first appearing in 1992, but his breakthrough novel was *Le Champ de personne* (1995), the autobiographical tale of his suburban childhood in the 1950s.

Despite his literary success of over ten years’ standing, Picouly is normally ignored in studies of French West Indian writing, despite the fact that ‘[a]près *Le Champ de*

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<sup>41</sup>Arlette Minatchy-Bogat, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

*personne*, on le présente dans l’Héxagone et, plus encore, dans les Caraïbes comme un “écrivain d’origine martiniquaise”.<sup>42</sup> One journalist has described Roger Picouly as ‘antillais’.<sup>43</sup> An academic, Pascale de Souza, has even more erroneously asserted that Picouly ‘was born and raised in Guadeloupe but now lives in France.’<sup>44</sup> This invents for Picouly an entirely different identitarian dynamic and discourse; belonging to the third generation, born to a European mother and without cultural reinforcement from his Martiniquan relatives, Picouly may well engage with new ways of being a ‘Caribbean writer’ of the ‘diaspora’, as de Souza envisages, but this will have nothing to do with the context of geography and upbringing in which she has placed him. It is a strange mistake to make because although Picouly’s public persona has been increasingly creolised since the appearance of *Le Champ de personne*, this autobiographical novel makes hardly any connections with the West Indies. It contains few of the characteristics normally expected of a French West Indian novel. It has been described in one journal as

[a] work that has had a great popular appeal without belonging to any ‘école’ [...] Taking place in a single day, the novel evokes the innumerable fantasies and frustrations of a young boy whose universe scarcely extends beyond his sorry *banlieue parisienne*. The recreation of a child’s fascination with the big (cars), the luxurious (clothes), the inaccessible (girls) is one aspect of the book’s appeal. So too are the portraits of the boy’s parents: a father who neglects buying his medicine in order to have more money for the family, and a mother who presides with kindness and patience over a brood of twelve. Although some of the characters are worthy of Dickens (notably a ragpicker who must have taken Scrooge as a role model), the ambiance is resolutely French. Daniel Picouly describes the world that Robert Doisneau photographed.<sup>45</sup>

This surely problematises the attempts made in the *métropole* and in the West Indies to creolise this novel; the front cover of the paperback edition includes a striking, primitive-

<sup>42</sup> Géraldine Faes and Stephen Smith, *Noir et français!* (Paris: Editions du Panama, 2006), pp. 287-288.

<sup>43</sup> Bernard Magnier, ‘Daniel Picouly, *Le Champ de personne*, Editions Flammarion, 1995 – Martinique/France’, *Coopération-Education-Culture*, [http://www.cec-ong.be/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=124](http://www.cec-ong.be/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=124) [accessed, 15 June 2011]

<sup>44</sup> Pascale de Souza, ‘Guadeloupean Literature: Multiple Versions of *Créolité*’, in *Francophone Post-colonial Cultures: Critical Essays*, ed. by Kamal Salhi (Lanham, Boulder, New York and Oxford: Lexington Books, 2003), p. 187.

<sup>45</sup> William Cloonan and Jean-Philippe Postel, ‘Literary Agents and the Novel in 1996’, *The French Review*, 70: 6 (1997) pp. 803-804.

inspired painting of a large figure who is clearly meant to represent an 'African', as are some of the smaller figures underneath. Indeed, with reference to *Le Champ de personne*, Picouly is described as 'l'un des tous premiers écrivains français à nous avoir présenté un personnage noir sur la couverture d'un livre.'<sup>46</sup> An irony, perhaps, for a novel that supposedly describes the world of Robert Doisneau. Picouly's later autobiographical novels have not been much preoccupied with creolisation either.

Picouly himself has made the point that in the *métropole* he was seen as a success story: 'A cette époque, j'étais la preuve que le système républicain fonctionnait.'<sup>47</sup> Yet, meanwhile, a parallel and paradoxical movement was also transforming him into a 'West Indian'. His invitation to and 'adoption' by the West Indies seemingly occurred as a direct result of his literary absorption into the metropolitan bloodstream, despite the fact that he is 'un quarteron qui ne parle pas le créole et qui est seulement allé aux Antilles, pour la première fois, à l'âge de 45 ans.'<sup>48</sup> He was claimed by West Indians, in his opinion, because of 'ce désir incroyable des Antillais de se trouver des images de réussite.'<sup>49</sup> In this context, Picouly does indeed become a representative example of West Indian literary endeavour, which routinely requires that texts are first recognised in the *métropole* before they can be accepted and valorised on the islands.

Picouly has been a reluctant and ambiguous symbol of racial success and acclimatisation. As a mixed-race writer, he does not wish to emphasise a West Indian identity over and above his European heritage: 'Quand je suis allé à la Martinique, certains m'ont présenté comme un "écrivain martiniquais". Je leur ai répondu: "Et ma mère ? Qu'est-ce que vous faites de ma mère?" Je ne peux pas cautionner une exclusion reposant sur la couleur de la peau, quelle qu'elle soit.'<sup>50</sup> As a son of the Republic, he disapproves of what he sees as a

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<sup>46</sup> Sandrine Martinez, 'Portrait: Daniel Picouly, Le métissage au Cœur', *Mots-clés: portrait, littérature, métissage, parcours de vie*, [http://www.alterites.com/cache/center\\_portrait/id\\_1313.php](http://www.alterites.com/cache/center_portrait/id_1313.php) [accessed 22 May 2006]

<sup>47</sup> Sandrine Martinez, *op. cit.*

<sup>48</sup> Géraldine Faes and Stephen Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 287. (However, according to the above interview with Sandrine Martinez his first visit occurred in 1996 when he was 48 years old).

<sup>49</sup> Géraldine Faes and Stephen Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

<sup>50</sup> Le Club de l'Actualité Littéraire, 'Le Club reçoit Daniel Picouly: Interview' (4 April 2001)

contemporary 'repli communautaire'<sup>51</sup> and cautions against the adoption of government policies or language that might focus on a 'communauté noire' that does not exist.<sup>52</sup> And again, class and race are seen to be intertwined, with a reluctance to focus on race as the predominant factor: 'Ce sont les autres qui vous découvrent. J'ai découvert ma couleur quand on me l'a reprochée. Et que j'étais de la classe ouvrière quand j'ai fréquenté des bourgeois.'<sup>53</sup> Picouly is disinclined to highlight racial tensions in his books:

[J]e n'échapperai jamais à la couleur de ma peau: il m'est déjà arrivé de me faire traiter de "bougnoles" par un ivrogne. Mais, pour moi, c'est une affaire de regard extérieur. Des quatre enfants que mes parents ont eus ensemble, je suis le seul à avoir le teint foncé et les yeux marron. Mon frère Serge a la peau blanche 'comme une provocation' (pour reprendre l'expression de ma mère), les cheveux blonds et les yeux bleus. Pour nous, ça n'avait strictement aucune importance.<sup>54</sup>

However, Picouly's success has also served to awaken him to the problems of discrimination for West Indians in metropolitan France. Having become a judge for the Réseau France Outre-mer literary prize and also a broadcaster on cultural television programmes such as *Café Picouly* on France 5 he was dismayed to find that a colleague viewed him as a token black face, proof that the world of broadcasting had jumped on board the politically correct and newsworthy bandwagon of positive discrimination.<sup>55</sup> Picouly does not see himself as particularly representative of black Frenchmen<sup>56</sup> but he has been discouraged by the lack of interest shown in adapting *Le Champ de personne* for television or the big screen, judging that 'ce que l'on accepte en littérature, on ne l'accepte pas sur l'écran. C'est d'une immense hypocrisie.'<sup>57</sup> This appears to be a reference to the relative paucity of black actors on metropolitan television screens, in contrast to the appeal of black writing from the *DOM*. The writer Pierre Assouline has drawn attention to a criticism that Picouly chose to make not in the *métropole*, but in

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<http://www.grandlivredumois.com/static/actu/rencontres/picouly.htm#haut> [accessed 22 May 2006]

<sup>51</sup> Sandrine Martinez, *op. cit.*

<sup>52</sup> Géraldine Faes and Stephen Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

<sup>53</sup> Sandrine Martinez, *op. cit.*

<sup>54</sup> Le Club de l'Actualité Littéraire, *op. cit.*

<sup>55</sup> Géraldine Faes and Stephen Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>57</sup> Sandrine Martinez, *op. cit.*

Mauritius, where in an interview with *Le Mauricien* in May of 2006 he declared that the lack of black members in the *Académie Française* was an example of exclusion:

Aujourd'hui, la culture française est à ce point si peu irriguée qu'on n'a aucun représentant de la littérature caribéenne ou autre à l'Académie française. C'est une obscénité, et pourtant cela se perpétue sans dommage. Il n'y a pas un seul juré de couleur dans les grands prix littéraires. Quand j'ai envie de provoquer, je dis que comme on est dans une société au mérite, ça veut dire que les noirs sont des cons. Pas foutus d'être jurés, pas foutus d'être à l'Académie française, c'est ça que vous voulez dire ? Ils sont nuls puisqu'ils ne sont pas là, sinon, s'ils étaient bons, ils y seraient! On vous écoute, on proteste et on baisse la tête.<sup>58</sup>

Although Picouly is best known for his (auto)biographical texts in which race plays only a low-key part, two earlier novels, *Tête de nègre* (1998) and *L'Enfant léopard* (1999) both draw explicitly from 'The Harlem Cycle' of novels published in Paris by the African American writer Chester Himes (1909-1984).<sup>59</sup> Françoise Cevaër notes that Picouly has explicitly retained some of Himes' main characters and themes, but whereas Himes, exiled in Paris, recreated a fictional Harlem depicting the marginalisation of black people in America Picouly highlights the condition of black migrants in a French context, questioning notions of belonging, and giving voice 'to a bitter political review of the situation of Blacks in France.'<sup>60</sup>

In these two historical detective stories set in eighteenth-century Paris, Picouly recreates Ha[ar]lem as a Parisian black ghetto, in which the chaos of the criminal underworld combines with the Reign of Terror and with the aristocracy to create fertile territory for two black detectives. The historical setting allows Picouly to deal with migration in connection with slavery and the slave trade, as well as the experiences of free people of

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<sup>58</sup> Dominique Bellier, Interview with Daniel Picouly: 'Ils croyaient que je racontais un monde heureux sur le mode de la nostalgie...', *Le Mauricien* (29 May 2006), p. 6, cit. Pierre Assouline, 'Picouly accuse l'Académie Française', *La république des livres: le blog de Pierre Assouline* (30 May 2006) [http://passouline.blog.lemonde.fr/2006/05/30/2006\\_05\\_picouly\\_accuse/](http://passouline.blog.lemonde.fr/2006/05/30/2006_05_picouly_accuse/) [accessed 9 May 2011]

<sup>59</sup> This cycle of nine novels featuring two of America's first two fictional black detectives, Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones, was written between the 1950s and the 1970s. These two characters also appear in Picouly's two detective novels set in the eighteenth century.

<sup>60</sup> Françoise Cevaër, 'Rumpus in Harlem-Sur-Seine: Francophone Crime Fiction Hosting Chester Himes', *The International Journal of the Humanities*, 5: 12 (2008), p. 79.

colour. Bearing in mind that metropolitan France was home to 4000 black slaves and free black people during the French Revolution, Cévaër asserts that Picouly ‘demystifies the republican dream’ and that *Tête de nègre* and *L’Enfant léopard* ‘offer a disturbing criticism of official History, which preferred to make much of the memory of an egalitarian society and of a national monolithic identity as the basis of the French Revolution.’<sup>61</sup> In this way, these two novels, ostensibly about a period and a historical event that might seem unimportant to the lives of most West Indians in the *métropole* today, insert themselves into a more contemporary debate about the ambivalent connection between the French Revolution, West Indian history, and the French state. During the bicentennial celebrations of 1989 the official silence concerning West Indian heroes such as Toussaint L’ouverture and Louis Delgrès was noted by David Beriss and others.<sup>62</sup> (Despite this, when asked about Himes’ influence on his work Picouly again expressed his ambivalence towards racial agendas, distancing himself from radical black agendas, and claiming that ‘[c]e n’est pas tant le fait qu’il avait la peau noire qui m’attirait que cet imaginaire que tout le monde pouvait partager, même avec des héros noirs.’<sup>63</sup>)

The texts discussed here are all very different, yet they all hint at the truth behind the assertion that West Indian and ‘French’ culture are distinct, representing ‘deux histoires, des histoires “pures” sans contact, l’une avec l’autre.’<sup>64</sup> They suggest that assimilation and acclimatisation offer a fairly smooth insertion into French society, so long as West Indian culture is understood to be distinct from ‘French’ culture. *Tête de nègre* and *L’Enfant léopard* may appear to challenge this view, but the detective heroes of Picouly’s novels are at the service of the French aristocracy and so are to some extent part of the system, whilst the inhabitants of his stylised eighteenth century black metropolitan ghettos exist *outside* ‘French’ society. Moreover, Picouly and his alter ego in his autobiographical novels are third generation *négro-politains* for whom ‘West Indian’ culture represents virgin territory, rather than a site that can be used to craft a new way of

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>62</sup> David Beriss, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>63</sup> Sandrine Martinez, *op. cit.*

<sup>64</sup> François Durpaire, *France blanche, colère noire*, p. 112.



being 'French'. In none of these novels is the challenge of seeking to 'fit in' truly addressed, which is namely that 'l'assimilation se fait du dominé au dominant, de la culture dominée à la culture dominante. Presque jamais dans le sens inverse.'<sup>65</sup> What is reflected is a simple desire to be accepted and valorised within French metropolitan society, rather than to become a transformative element in that society. The ubiquity of interracial relationships in these texts could therefore be read as a means of achieving absorption rather than as any kind of challenge.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Albert Memmi, *op. cit.*, pp. 252-253.

<sup>66</sup> Sandrine Martinez, *op. cit.* In this interview Picouly openly admits that as a result of his parents' relationship he is fascinated by culturally and racially mixed unions.

## Chapter III.2 Dissilusionment and Hybridity

This chapter reflects upon a range of French West Indian writers who have grappled with the issues of disillusionment and hybridity as key elements within a literature of migration. It also considers how hybridity as a theoretical concept developed within the Anglophone field of postcolonial literary studies might be relevant to this literature, and how it might become meaningful in the French context. Finally, there is the question of whether theories of hybridity and the reality of disillusionment with the migration experience can be reconciled in explorations of the French West Indian experience of migration.

The word hybridity began life in a scientific context, as a signifier of biological degeneration. In moving the term from a biological to a cultural discourse Nikos Papastergiadis asserts that '[t]he hybrid has often been positioned within or beside modern theories of human origin and social development, mostly appearing as the moral marker of contamination, failure or regression.'<sup>1</sup> It shares a history with 'colonial and white supremacist ideologies' and 'nineteenth-century discourses of scientific racism.'<sup>2</sup> This is relevant to a reading of the West Indies, for while the supposed barrenness of mixed-race people in the colonies was increasingly hard to sustain as their numbers visibly grew, theories about the general physical degeneration of mixed-race populations fitted the paradigm well. The irony is that the colonial project that developed in tandem with these ideologies stimulated the racially degenerate 'hybridity' that colonists and the contemporary European commentators so feared; instead of 'alterity, exclusivity and purity', there arose what Papastergiadis refers to as 'a parallel ideology of conquest through sexual penetration', which worked alongside a policy of distanciation.<sup>3</sup> These parallel perspectives created a fluctuating attitude towards racial mixture.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Tracing the hybridity in theory', in *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, ed. by Phina Werber and Tariq Modood (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1997), p. 257.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>4</sup> See George M. Fredrickson, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

In terms of the migration experience and the literature of migration, attitudes towards racially mixed romantic unions are obviously of high importance; Fanon, as we have seen, saw the drive for white or light-skinned partners as a particularly female issue. Several female novelists writing about the decades following departmentalisation have also explored relationships between mixed-race women and white men, generally depicting these relationships as difficult, indeed traumatising. Kathleen Balutansky says that female protagonists in these novels are usually riven by their ‘white genes’ on the one hand, and their black ones on the other. A white partner and an attraction to Europe complicate these women’s dilemma, but do not fundamentally change its nature.<sup>5</sup> This situation is illuminated in Jacqueline Manicom’s novel *Mon Examen de blanc* (1972). As a child in Guadeloupe, the protagonist, Madévie, longs to be white and blond like her playmate next door, rather than a ‘mulatress’ with Indian origins. Consequently, when she leaves to study in Paris it is unsurprising that she decides that only a white Frenchman should deflower her. Her young bourgeois lover, Xavier, like generations of European men before him, desires her as an exotic object. When Madévie falls pregnant, he offers to marry her and legitimise the child, then to divorce her once the baby has been born. Rejecting this offer, she has an abortion and returns to the West Indies to work as a doctor among the poor. She gradually develops a critique of French values and begins to challenge the realities of departmentalism – against which she sets her youthful experience of alienation, both at home and in her failed relationship with Xavier in Paris. In novels such as this, and in the works of Mayotte Capécia,<sup>6</sup> it is the struggle for a distinct *identity* in a complex racial and gendered environment that is uppermost, not any attempt to engage with hybridisation. Here, ‘hybridity’ through love is an exercise in continued alienation.

We might read these novels as representing hybridity-as-degeneration. So in Myriam Warner-Vieyra’s *Le Quimboiseur l’avait dit* (1980), which is set in the early 1950s, the

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<sup>5</sup> Kathleen Balutansky, ‘Anglophone and Francophone Fiction by Caribbean Women: Redefining “Female Identity”’, in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, Volume III: Cross-Cultural Studies, ed. by A. James Arnold, p. 269.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter II.1 above.

arrival of West Indians into the metropolitan space leads to perversion, violence, and psychological harm. Zetou is another example of a young girl raised to think about colour - 'Chez nous, on parlait souvent de la couleur' - with a light-skinned mother who never cuddled her younger son, because he was too dark-skinned for her liking.<sup>7</sup> When her mother leaves her husband and goes to Paris with her white lover, later sending for her daughter Zetou, the child finds her French dream dissolving around her, as she is mentally, physically and sexually exploited by her mother and stepfather. She is soon committed to a mental hospital. In this novel, hybridity represents a blending of *two* negative entities, and Gallagher remarks that '[i]f France as M/Other seems hostile, non-mirroring, and non-nurturing, it is betrayal by her literal, Caribbean mother that in fact destroys Zetou. This Caribbean mother, having rejected the Caribbean for Europe, and what she regards as the stigma of blackness for whiteness, effectively sells her own daughter body and soul.'<sup>8</sup>

There are also some (less well-known) male writers for whom the migration experience also connects hybridity with degeneration. In Vincent Placolý's novel *La Vie et la mort de Marcel Gonstran* (1971) Gonstran, a poor labourer who knows very little about the outside world, leaves Martinique for Paris in the 1950s or early 1960s, finds a job on a production line, and has his two failed unions with Frenchwomen. His first somewhat Fanonian marriage is to Eleanora, whose blondness Gonstran adores; but Eleanora is revealed to be a prostitute. The son born of this 'doomed union'<sup>9</sup> has a seriously debilitating form of Down's syndrome. The relationship deteriorates between the two adults, and eventually the child is sent away to an institution, where he dies after months of suffering. Gonstran's next relationship is marred by regret: 'Pourquoi ne t'ai-je pas connue dans notre pays, où les femmes [...] sont pures comme du cristal?'<sup>10</sup> In these

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<sup>7</sup> Myriam Warner-Vieryra, *Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1980), p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Gallagher, *Soundings*, p. 213.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>10</sup> Vincent Placolý, *La Vie et la mort de Marcel Gonstran* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1971), p. 109, cit. Mary Gallagher, *Soundings*, p. 213.

unions, there is an ‘implied negative construction of Europe as tainted or debased’, no place for a black man to die, as a disappointed Gonstran does.<sup>11</sup>

Another text that takes a similarly pessimistic view of the *métropole* appeared in 2002 although tellingly, the story itself is set in the 1960s and 1970s. *La Chaîne brisée* was written by the Guianese writer Jean-Charles Pamphile, who has received no critical attention thus far. On the back cover of this novel, we are told that teenage Marie-Laure abandons her husband and two children ‘pour vivre son idylle...en France.’<sup>12</sup> In a pattern not unusual in French West Indian literature of migration, the mother (Marie-Laure) is alienated from her daughter (Alice), first physically and then psychologically when this daughter later arrives to join her. The outcome, in terms of Alice’s early adulthood, is not good. A disruptive domestic situation and what appears to be emotional neglect result in a physical sickness. Her adult life is marred by misfortune, including sexual abuse, drugdealing, incarceration, and even enforced prostitution in Germany.<sup>13</sup> The couple who traffick her with a false promise of a respectable job consists of a mulatress and a white man, thereby tapping once again into exoticised notions of mixity, desire and moral degeneration, particularly with reference to the implied moral depravity of the exotic mulatress. There are several mixed-race sexual and romantic encounters in the text and all of them are poisonous. Alice’s eventual moral and spiritual renewal owes nothing to ‘France’.

In this context, where Europe is ‘tainted or debased’, hybridity is a poisoned chalice that cannot be said to have any relationship with what Andrew Smith sees as the somewhat overused, banalised term in the USA and Great Britain where it has become a kind of cheerful pseudo-theoretical catchword, ‘a synonym for diversity and multiculturalism.’<sup>14</sup> Robert J. Young says that hybridity ‘[makes] difference into sameness, and sameness into

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Charles Pamphile, *La Chaîne brisée* (Paris: New Legend Editions, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> According to Raphaël Confiant (*Aimé Césaire*, p. 254) the trafficking of French West Indian and Guianese women to Germany for this purpose did occur.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Smith, ‘Migrancy, hybridity and postcolonial literary studies’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. by Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 251.

difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer different.’<sup>15</sup> However, it may also be representative of *negative* forces, and ‘it has been, and can be, invoked to imply contrafusion and disjunction (or even separate development) as well as fusion and assimilation.’<sup>16</sup> This idea of hybridity would seem to speak more closely to the contexts often presented by West Indian writers, especially those who write about working class communities. However, if contemporary thinking about hybridity is largely dominated by the view that it should be welcomed, and that its role is to reclaim as positive that which was once feared and denigrated,<sup>17</sup> the truth is that this perspective may work in an Anglophone postcolonial theoretical model of diaspora, but it does not seem to apply to literary representations of mass migration from the *DOM*. The essentialism that some commentators suspect hovers around in the hinterland of hybridity in its various incarnations,<sup>18</sup> makes little sense in the context of the *Domiens*, since they are already a hybridised people upon arrival in the *métropole*, are already citizens, already French, whilst nevertheless carrying with them an unofficial cultural and racial distinctiveness. It could be argued that assertions about a metropolitan experience of mixity, separateness, unity, purity and blending can have little currency in this context.

There may be particular reasons why the academy has not focused extensively on hybridity and migration in the West Indian context. African and West Indian mixity have not been valued in the same way that the assumed purity and originality of other cultures have been. Eva Paulino Bueno claims that at some point in history, Western culture began to perceive Africans, and in turn their descendants in the Americas, as representative of an impure, unoriginal and somehow lesser culture. In contrast, the civilisations of Asia, the Middle East and the Americas came to be valued more highly, and their cultures viewed as purer and nobler. She notes, for example, that the myth of

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<sup>15</sup> Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Nikos Papastergiadis, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

<sup>18</sup> Isabel Hovering, ‘Gardening in the Jungles of Post-Coloniality: Representing Multiculturalism and Hybridity’, in *Bridges Across Chasms: Towards a Transcultural Future in Caribbean Literature*, ed. by Bénédicte Ledent (Liège: University of Liège, 2004), p. 213.

the ‘noble savage’ did not include Africans.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note, therefore, that postcolonial studies remain dominated by an Eastern (or a simple East/West binary) focus, especially when compared to ‘hybrid’ West Indian culture.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, Benita Parry notes that although ‘diaspora’ rather than settled indigenous communities has come to dominate the postcolonial discussion as a whole, the diasporic experience of less privileged travellers (such as those who entered mainland France from the West Indies in the *BUMIDOM* era and beyond) is often sidelined. Priority of place is given instead to

a new kind of cosmopolitanism [which] is certainly relevant to émigré writers, artists, academics, intellectuals, and professionals; but it can entail forgetfulness about that other, economically enforced dispersal of the poor from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean – the vast numbers of contract workers, casual labourers, or domestic servants in Europe, North America and the Gulf States.<sup>21</sup>

Thirdly, West Indian literary studies routinely prioritise the West Indies but not the diaspora. Timothy Chin regrets that Shalini Puri has limited ‘the Caribbean’ to Area Studies in her book *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity* (2004). Puri’s desire to prioritise ‘areas of the globe other than the metropolitan cities of the United States, France and Britain’<sup>22</sup> recalls what Mary Gallagher has said about French West Indian writers and their theoretical rejection of the overdetermined *métropole*.<sup>23</sup> Yet, as Chin goes on to say, removing migration from the discussion almost completely, when migration has been of such great significance to the region, is surprising; he makes reference to Stuart Hall’s insistence that the diaspora is essential in considering issues of West Indian identity and culture, and that the stories of

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<sup>19</sup> Eva Paulino Bueno, ‘Race, Gender, and the Politics of Reception of Latin American Testimonies’, in *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women*, ed. by Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000), pp. 125-126.

<sup>20</sup> Shalini Puri, *The Caribbean Post-Colonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism and Cultural Hybridity* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Benita Parry, ‘The institutionalization of postcolonial studies’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. by Neil Lazarus, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> Shalini Puri, *op. cit.*, p. 41, cit. Timothy Chin, ‘Transnationalism, Diaspora, Politics and *The Caribbean Postcolonial*’, *Small Axe*, 1 (February 2006), p. 192.

<sup>23</sup> See Chapters II.2 and II.3.

West Indians in Europe or in North America are still Caribbean stories.<sup>24</sup> He rightly challenges Puri's assumption that to focus on migration out of the Caribbean is by definition to 'reinscribe an unreconstructed Eurocentrism or Western metropolitan dominance.'<sup>25</sup> This reluctance to deal with (mass) migration from the West Indies hints at a certain fearfulness, or even hypocrisy, for if the *métropole* lies at the heart of the very process of production and dissemination, as is routinely the case, ignoring the realities of migration cannot subvert metropolitan dominance. The *métropole* will probably remain dominant whether it is ignored or not.

It remains true that 'the literature produced and rewarded with recognition in this charged political environment has been more attentive to local history, politics, and society than to the experience of migration and the construction of diasporic identities.'<sup>26</sup> This silence is compounded by a gap within studies of the literatures of migration in mainland France, where the focus tends to fall almost always on North or West African experiences of immigration rather than the migration of *Domiens*. French West Indian migrants are treated as neither true immigrants, nor true Frenchmen; they hold an 'intermediate functional position' within metropolitan French society, representing a kind of passive hybridity without transformational power.<sup>27</sup>

The reality of poor or abortive experiences of hybridity in French West Indian literature of migration exists alongside a weakened sense of community cohesion. Gallagher sees Françoise Ega's *Lettres à une noire* as recording 'an experience of menial labour, exploitation, and racism in Metropolitan France, while celebrating the lifeline provided by expatriate society and solidarity'.<sup>28</sup> However, despite the hybridity implicit in a text

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<sup>24</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Thinking Diaspora: Home Thoughts From Abroad', *Small Axe*, 6 (September 1999), p. 1, cit. Timothy Chin, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>25</sup> Timothy Chin, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>26</sup> Madeleine Dobie, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>27</sup> Colin Brock, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Gallagher, *Soundings*, p. 207.



penned by a black Martiniquan migrant to a black Brazilian woman,<sup>29</sup> the environment depicted in the novel does not convince the reader of any genuine West Indian community solidarity. Group solidarity is an important step in creating hybridisation instead of mere absorption, yet although Maméga, the novel's protagonist, shares lighthearted moments of friendship with other women, there are also signs that hybridisation will be difficult to achieve, for reasons that could be described as political in origin. There is only a fragile sense of a West Indian 'community'. Maméga finds that too many of her fellow West Indians are eager to forget their origins, to the extent that she prefers to socialise with Corsicans, who are more relaxed and united. Her critique is that 'les Antillais vivent beaucoup plus difficilement entre eux, en Europe ou ailleurs, que n'importe quelle autre communauté étrangère.'<sup>30</sup> This sense of West Indian disunity and lack of self-awareness is, indeed, scattered throughout the novel and clearly represents a tendency that Ega herself found deeply troubling. It is perhaps not surprising that this novel has not given rise to

a genre, inspiring other works that explore migration and the growth of a transplanted community in the *métropole*. Instead, it stands virtually alone – one of very few works of fiction to depict the experience of Antilleans in France and perhaps the only novel that addresses the disconnect between the sphere of culture in which Caribbean writers have historically moved and the service sector and world of domestic labor within which most Caribbean migrants operate.<sup>31</sup>

Whether this book ever truly reached the kind of readership that might have found it empowering is hard to say. However, there are (probably unconscious) echoes of this novel in a much more recent ghostwritten autobiography of an elderly black woman whose story brings to life an experience of migration and a troubled existence of domestic servitude and hardship: Thérèse Bernis' book, *Parise: Souvenirs encombrants de la Guadeloupe* (1997), written with help from her basic skills tutor, Catherine Vigor, brings to the fore a harsh reality which has even less to say about hybridity, because

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<sup>29</sup> The *noire* of the title is a Brazilian woman who was probably inspired by the real character of Carolina Maria de Jesus (1915-1977), the inhabitant of a favela in São Paulo. Carolina became famous as a result of writing a bestselling diary that was published in 1960 and widely translated.

<sup>30</sup> Françoise Ega, *Lettres à une noire*, p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> Madeleine Dobie, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

Parise is invisible. This ‘misery memoir’ has little to say about cultural exchange from a position of equality, and although Parise develops connections with a West African family, her long term relationship with a decorated African soldier becomes abusive. As an isolated and oppressed woman with no cultural or familial support network, there is little chance of fruitful cultural exchange between Parise and the surrounding society. Unsurprisingly, ghostwritten work is practically excluded from the sphere of French West Indian literature.<sup>32</sup>

Ultimately, hybridity as experienced in the texts discussed here, and elsewhere in this thesis, is primarily lived as an experience of disillusionment with the realities of migration. Ega’s alter ego says ironically that

il y a beaucoup de filles que l’‘on fait venir’ à Marseille. Elles laissent les îles pour une destinée meilleure. Je les vois, et c’est toujours la même chose, elles sont achetées presque pour un certain temps. Ces dames font comme toutes leurs compagnes aisées, elles ont une bonne antillaise plus souple et plus isolée que la bonne espagnole d’antan. [...] Mon mari a rouspété: j’aurai dû rester chez moi. ‘Pourquoi aller grossir les rangs de ce bétail humain?’ dit-il.<sup>33</sup>

There is no doubt here that for Ega, the arrival of so many young women is not an opportunity for them, a chance for them to explore new possibilities for their lives; their arrival is nothing short of a tragedy.

Mariotte, the elderly West Indian woman in Simone and André Schwarz-Bart’s novel *Un Plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (1967) is defined by her isolation, bereft of cultural and emotional support or recognition. Her arrival in a nursing home provides the authors with an unusual setting for their novel, but we can clearly see that despite Mariotte’s enforced proximity to white people who are in the same predicament as herself, there is no rapprochement, no real community that might make up for her past invisibility. Kathleen Gyssels concludes that ‘[a]lors qu’elle croyait que la veillesse effacerait la

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<sup>32</sup> However, in 2008 the story of Parise was also presented as a documentary entitled *Souvenirs encombrants d’une femme de ménage*, directed by Dani Kouyaté and produced by Les Productions de la Lanterne.

<sup>33</sup> Françoise Ega, *Lettres à une noire*, op. cit., p. 13.

différence entre elle et les autres pensionnaires, tous blancs, la dégénérescence tant physique que psychique, intensifie le mépris et la peur de l'Autre. [...] Mariotte conclut qu'une femme de couleur est toujours inférieure, que ce soit à l'homme blanc ou à la femme blanche.<sup>34</sup>

As we have seen, French West Indians are rarely depicted in literature (or in sociology), as living in a ghetto situation. To some, this is a good thing, because Republican values are suspicious of *communautarisme*. Robert Grossmann and François Miclo claim that

[s]elon les communautaristes, la société française est constituée d'une juxtaposition de minorités hétérogènes, dont la société devrait reconnaître l'existence. Il y aurait des minorités maghrébine, alsacienne, gay, jeunes, corse, etc., qui vivraient leur vie propres les unes à côté des autres, sans jamais se rencontrer, ni se parler, ni même éprouver d'influences réciproques. C'est la logique exacte du ghetto, où chacun est enfermé dans l'identité de son group ethnique ou social, sans jamais pouvoir en sortir ni même être complètement soi-même.<sup>35</sup>

They go on to insist that 'les communautés ne jouent aucun rôle d'intermédiaire social. Elles s'édifient contre la société et contre l'Etat. Le propre de ces communautés est, d'ailleurs, de prétendre regrouper les victimes de la société, de l'Etat, de l'histoire, voire des trois.'<sup>36</sup> Mutual support and encouragement in a community context could easily be mistaken for isolationism from this perspective.

The tendency for French West Indians writers to look always to the West Indies for nourishment whilst at the same time metropolitan West Indians are failing to nurture each other culturally and spiritually would seem to be an unfortunate paradox, although in fact the two situations feed off each other. Dobie makes the point that it is not just the metropolitan gaze which has failed to see France's West Indians on the mainland, but

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<sup>34</sup> Kathleen Gyssels, "Capitale de la douleur": Paris dans *L'Isolé soleil* et *Un Plat de porc aux bananes vertes*, *The French Review*, 73: 6 (May 2000), p. 1089.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Grossmann and François Miclo, *La République minoritaire: Contre le communautarisme* (Paris: Editions Michalon, 2002), pp. 129-130.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

Domiens themselves have also generally adopted a geocultural approach to identity, marking a clear line of demarcation between Caribbean and metropolitan cultural traditions. [...] Presented with an idea of national culture to which they are required to conform, yet which effectively excludes them, Antilleans have responded by a parallel affirmation of their own heritage as a tradition, like ‘French culture’, rooted in territory and history.<sup>37</sup>

Assimilationism and focusing on cultural or literal escape to the West Indies appear to be two sides of the same coin; neither, however, will naturally foster positive hybridised/hybridising values. Andrew Smith’s characterisation of an ‘idealized liberal view’ whereby ‘this *hybridization* occurs on a level ground of equality, mutual respect, and open-mindedness – a vision whose selectivity seems obvious as soon as we hold it up against the harsher material and institutional realities of social life’ implies that a positive view of hybridity is impossible.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps the task of negotiating this double-edged role is a subject better suited to new writers of the *négropolitain* generation, to whom I shall turn in the next chapter, rather than to now elderly migrants, or, indeed to intellectuals based in Martinique or New York, and whose endorsement of literary post-national options<sup>39</sup> are often (although not solely) dominated by agendas that have little resonance for much of the West Indian community in the *métropole*. Currently, however, popular French West Indian literature of migration, a literature which catalogues and proclaims a more negative hybridity, laying bare the disillusionments of metropolitan silence and discrimination, cannot belong to a group of writers who are constrained by the requirements of either a western elite, nor, as a paradoxical reaction to that, a West Indian topography. This is why popular writers are so important; it is also a reason to hope that their marginalisation (be it by critics, publishers, readers or scholars on either side of the Atlantic) along with the marginalisation of the people whose lives they interrogate, will cease to be synonymous with their invisibility.

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<sup>37</sup> Madeleine Dobie, *op. cit.* p. 165.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

<sup>39</sup> Shalini Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, p. 36, cit. Marc Brudzinski, ‘Localizing Hybridity: Shalini Puri’s *The Caribbean Postcolonial*’, *Small Axe*, 19 (February 2006), p. 209.

### Chapter III.3 Where are the *Négropolitains*?

In this chapter I aim to explore how *négropolitain* issues are dealt with by young writers from French West Indies, but also to focus on the literary production of *négropolitain* writers themselves. I am particularly interested in the apparent underdevelopment of *négropolitain* fiction as well as the lack of critical interest in this absence.

The poem *Michelle* makes it clear that there is a difference between the *négropolitain* and West Indians in the *DOM*:

Je suis née en France.  
Je suis ce qu'on appelle une *négropolitaine*.  
Une nègzaonale perdue dans l'hexagone.  
Une bounty dehors  
Blanche dedans.  
Voilà comment on me voit.<sup>1</sup>

The antagonism raised here is reflected in a number of novels. Metropolitan West Indians are also accused of arriving in the islands with superior attitudes and little desire to understand the people around them, as one character complains in *Pointe-à-Pitre – Paris*.<sup>2</sup> Most French West Indian writers agree that to be Guadeloupean or Martiniquan in the French West Indies is somehow different from being a French West Indian in mainland France. What is highlighted less often by authors born in the West Indies is that the *négropolitain* experience is a distinct one again. Yet it seems reasonable that distinctions in terms of the literary production of these groups should be made. The major question is, then, why are there so few authors of West Indian origin who were born or raised in France? Pineau herself, born in Paris in 1956, said in an interview published in 2002 that she was the only West Indian writer to be born in mainland France, and that she was waiting for other *négropolitain* writing to emerge.<sup>3</sup> Two years later she was still hoping to come across some young talent, which remained very thin on

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<sup>1</sup> Gisèle Pineau and Marie Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Frankito, *Pointe-à-Pitre – Paris* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, Paris, 2000), p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> Biringanine Ndagano, 'Gisèle Pineau: Au nom du passé', in *Ecritures caraiïbes*, ed. by Georges Voisset and Marc Gontard (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002), pp. 160-161.

the ground.<sup>4</sup> It might be wondered why this should be so, when writing by various French West Indian authors has often achieved such worldwide acclaim and attracted critical attention. If there is a lack of talent coming through in the *métropole* what has resulted in this situation, and what makes *négroplittain* writers successful?

In contrast to the paucity of *négroplittain* voices *beur* literature has been developing over several decades, and quite distinctly from North African literature written in French. Faïza Guène's bestseller *Kiffe kiffe demain* (2004) seems to have escaped from the ghetto of much ethnic minority writing in France and into public consciousness, receiving high praise in *The Guardian* following the appearance of a translation into English.<sup>5</sup> The reviewer John Henley exuberantly declares *Kiffe kiffe demain* to be the French *White Teeth* (2000), thereby envisioning the very young Faïza Guène as a kind of updated Gallic Zadie Smith. Although Smith is a London-born writer of mixed black West Indian and white English parentage and Guène, a young Frenchwoman born to parents originally from North Africa, these ethnic and national differences are in Henley's eyes apparently outweighed by a similarity of multicultural, sub/urban lived experience transformed by a sparkling literary skill. And yet, whilst it is exciting that all kinds of creative boundaries are being erased in globalised perceptions of mixed communities it is also worth asking why Smith's French 'equivalent' is not, like herself, of West Indian descent. Indeed, would a West Indian equivalent even be possible? In *L'Isolé soleil*, amidst its highbrow synthesis of negritude and various other black cultures of resistance in Europe and the Americas, Daniel Maximin inserts a passage that seeks to bring together contemporary West Indian working class cultures of London and Paris, while also humorously offering Europeans advice on how to foster good community relations with their new neighbours:

Peuple blanc de Londres et de Paris, accorde ta confiance à ces Antillais qui sont les cochers de tes autobus et les filles de salles de tes hôpitaux. Préserve de ton

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<sup>4</sup> Nadège Veldwacher, 'An Interview with Gisèle Pineau', *Research in African Literatures*, 35: 1 (Spring 2004), p. 185.

<sup>5</sup> John Henley, 'Suburban Jungles' call of the wild sets new cultural trend for French youth: How the *banlieue* has reinvented itself as an inspiration for artistic achievement', *The Guardian* (Saturday, 30 July 2005), p. 17.

fond de racisme en feignant de saluer leur courtoisie, et d'apprécier le rythme de leurs reggae, leurs biguines, leurs cadence-rampas et leurs calypsos. Ne mêle pas trop ta police aux bals du ghetto de Brixton, aux folies du carnaval de Notting Hill, aux surboums antillaises des HLM de Sarcelles. [...] Ferme tes oreilles à leurs musiques trop colorées, ton nez à leurs odeurs de sueur et de plats pimentés et tes yeux à leurs regards, ou bien déménage plus loin, ou éparpille-les en petits cuillers de lentilles dans la vaste grisaille des banlieues. Mais ce ne te sera pas facile de réussir cette fois la colonisation douce et heureuse de ces nouvelles îles des Antilles que tu as voulu créer toi-même pour ton profit à Londres et à Paris.<sup>6</sup>

This passage projects the *banlieue* as a site of vibrant, sensuous multiculturalism. The reality is that whilst North Africans are often more economically disadvantaged than West Indians in the *métropole*, the latter are disadvantaged because they lack an equivalent level of social recognition. It is even felt that people of North African descent will achieve greater integration, whilst black French people will remain marginal.<sup>7</sup> The reasons that make this likely may also create a context that could stall the development of a *littérature négropolitaine*, as opposed to a *littérature antillaise*, that can reflect the variety, flavour and subversive qualities of West Indian and multicultural life in metropolitan France.

The traditional dilemma faced by West Indians in metropolitan France been described as a choice between 'Africanness' and 'Frenchness', in which Frenchness represents civilisation and absorption into the French cultural mainstream. The sociologist Robin Cohen proposes two possible outcomes if the 'French way' is chosen. The more positive outcome will prevail should 'the French live up to the revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity' whilst the more negative would result should the choice of assimilation turn out to be an mirage in which the

French Antilleans in continental France would become a liminal people, no longer able to express their distinctive ethnic identity or recover a sense of 'home' [...and] would experience a crisis of meaning, where institutions, values and

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Maximin, *L'Isolé soleil*, p. 100.

<sup>7</sup> Maryse Condé, 'Are the Black British Setting the Example?', trans. by Richard Philcox, *Black Renaissance/Renaissance noire*, 2: 3 (2000), cit., Madeleine Dobie, *op. cit.*, p. 157. (Dobie gives the publication date of this volume as 1999 but this is incorrect.)

norms dissolve and collapse. Their *communitas* would be reduced to a parody of the old ways and would be incapable of reconstituting itself in the new setting.<sup>8</sup>

Cohen goes on say that in the struggle between Frenchness and Africanness in the psyche of French West Indians in the *métropole* Africanness loses to quite a considerable extent. He claims that in general West Indians in the *métropole* retain less sense of an African cultural heritage than West Indians elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> For him, this heritage means ‘cultural retentions or affirmations of an African identity’, ‘literal or symbolic interest in “return”,’ ‘cultural artefacts, products and expressions that show shared concerns and cross-influences between Africa, the Caribbean and the destination countries’, and finally, ‘indications that ordinary Caribbean peoples abroad – in their attitudes, migration patterns and social conduct – behave in ways consistent with the idea of cultural diaspora.’<sup>10</sup>

The lack of such ‘cross-influences’, translates into what Michel Giraud refers to as ‘le recul de l’assimilationisme traditionnel des originaires des Dom,’<sup>11</sup> a characteristic glimpsed in many novels of migration. At its most disturbing, *Pointe-à-Pitre - Paris* includes the vignette of an elderly war veteran, a proud mulatto from the *vieilles colonies*, who is verbally then physically abused by some white skinheads on the metro, yet flinches from the aid of the novel’s black protagonist with the words ‘Ne me touche pas, sale Nègre!’<sup>12</sup> Hated by whites, hating blacks, he represents an extreme example of the psychological damage caused to an adult migrant by a desired but unattained assimilation, a man for whom colonialisation has served principally to nurture a kind of self-loathing.

This parental drive towards assimilation as it impacts upon the *négropolitain* generation is a subject that is depicted in *Pointe-à-Pitre – Paris*. The text provides examples of the

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<sup>8</sup> Robin Cohen, ‘Cultural Diaspora: The Caribbean Case’, in *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*, ed. by Mary Chamberlain (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 26-27.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Giraud, ‘Racisme colonial, réaction identitaire et égalité citoyenne’, p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> Frankito, *op. cit.*, p. 153.



three identitarian choices available to young *négropolitains*, as defined by the psychologist Jean Galap: assimilation, *antillanité* or ‘la revendication black’.<sup>13</sup> The search for *une identité black* is described by Gaston Kelman as indicative of some young people’s alienation and disenchantment both from ‘French’ society and from their West Indians parents’ assimilationism. Kelman sees the only references of these young people – principally young men – to be their skin colour, which to them is the reason for their victimhood, and their territory, that is, their district or quarter, together with a sense of ‘une internationale black dont ils savent que les membres sont rejetés dans tous les pays ou ils sont en minorité, et même parfois en majorité’ and a focus on the USA, ‘le paradis de la blackitude.’<sup>14</sup>

In *Pointe-à-Pitre – Paris* this *identité black* is explored in some depth. One of its manifestations is in the form of Rastafarianism. Rastafarianism appears only rarely in French West Indian literature. It seems to represent a resistance to European cultural and political domination, and to French West Indian conformity or assimilation. It does not serve to reclaim or to subvert codes of Frenchness or to generate renegade but fruitful notions of hybridity.<sup>15</sup> So when Frankito portrays an imperious and somewhat crazed young black man of West Indian origin who strides into an African record store in Paris and berates its owner for not stocking the ‘African’ albums of the Jamaican reggae band *Burning Spear*,<sup>16</sup> this is a vision of a disengaged youth for whom multiculturalism has provided little knowledge of self or of any real historical awareness of Africa. Alienation in this case does not feed creativity, but simply drives a further wedge between the individual and the wider society.

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<sup>13</sup> Jean Galap, ‘Stratégies indentaires des Antillais en milieu interculturel’, *Migrations Santé*, 115/116 (2003), p. 131.

<sup>14</sup> Gaston Kelman, *Je suis noir et je n’aime pas le manioc* (Paris: Max Milo Editions, 2003), p. 106.

<sup>15</sup> Rastafarianism appears briefly in novels such as Jean-Charles Pamphile’s *La Chaîne brisée* and Gisèle Pineau’s *L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux*, and other Afro-centric movements appear in Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie’s *L’Autre qui danse* and in Maryse Condé’s *Desirada*. These popular Afro-centric movements are depicted as negative, superficial attempts to understand history and to find an identity.

<sup>16</sup> Frankito, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

More often, an *identité black* takes an American inflection. When the student protagonist, Frédéric, goes to meet his *négropolitain* cousin Eddy in Les Halles in Paris, he meets a gang of “Blacks” de l’émigration – Antillais et Africains de seconde génération – avec leurs casquettes X, leurs sweat-shirts Chicago Bulls, leurs larges jeans hip-hop et leur L.A. Gear montantes délassés’.<sup>17</sup> By labelling these men as ‘Antillais et Africains de seconde génération’, Frankito is clearly presenting them to us as recognisable social ‘types’. Their attitudes and experiences are set in relief by Frédéric, the novel’s Guadeloupean student protagonist. Eddy is a disobedient son, whilst Frédéric shows his elders respect. Eddy is uninterested in studying, while Frédéric is heading towards his professional ambitions. Eddy faces racism and has a criminal record that has pushed him further away from respectable employment and society. And Eddy also despises the French West Indies, where he feels unwelcome, all of which suggests that the young *négropolitain* is at a disadvantage when compared to his cousin from Guadeloupe. In contrast to the novel’s discussions about black and West Indian identities, the decision of Eddy’s brother, Gérard, in favour of assimilation, is mentioned only briefly in the text.

In displaying to the world the ruses, contradictions and cruelties involved in pursuing assimilation and acceptance in mainland France young writers of West Indian origin could be seen as practicing filial disobedience. If the West Indian novel reveals ‘family secrets’, perhaps such treachery is more palatable to nomadic writers whose families live far away. It is perhaps pertinent that neither Radford nor Pineau’s parents have remained in the *métropole*. The educational context could also prove discouraging for this kind of reflection. The historian and teacher François Durpaire refers to research that suggests that many primary schools are unaware of the ethnic origins of their black pupils. Despite the French discourse of equality the lack of statistics or interest has possibly generated the sense that these are simply children from an unidentified and irrelevant elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Durpaire proposes that a more unifying approach would be to affirm that ‘[l]’histoire de France doit être l’histoire de tous les Français. C’est l’histoire telle qu’elle est enseigné aujourd’hui qui est parfois ressentie comme l’histoire d’un seul

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>18</sup> François Durpaire, *Enseignement de l’histoire et diversité culturelle*, p. 40.

groupe.’<sup>19</sup> In the meantime, there is a reluctance to engage sensitively with the reality of multiculturalism, both in school and in the wider society.

The literary environment may also create difficulties. Michel Giraud suggests that the success of the *créolistes* has created a standard by which all other West Indian - and presumably *négropolitain* writers are - judged.<sup>20</sup> However, as suggested in Chapter II.2 the *créoliste* model appears to be an unsuitable one for *négropolitain* writing, if that writing aims to reflect a diverse metropolitan reality. Yet it is writing like this that French publishers and critics clearly expect to receive from ‘West Indian’ writers, and there seems to be little desire for *négropolitain* authors to offer something different from those born in the West Indies.

The most successful new *négropolitain* writer of the century so far, Fabienne Kanor,<sup>21</sup> born in Orléans to Martiniquan parents in 1970, has admitted that as a student she began to read the early work of Chamoiseau and Confiant, but did not see her own position reflected in *créolité*, and found that these writers’ later work was too historical for her liking.<sup>22</sup> She does not appear to have been recognised by the most prominent *créolistes* as an heir, for despite the successful release of her first book by a mainstream publisher in 2004, Raphaël Confiant appears either not to have heard of her, or else he does not consider her to be ‘West Indian’, as he did not mention her in an interview in 2006 when he stated that only two new West Indian authors in their thirties had appeared on the scene to take over from his generation.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>20</sup> Michel Giraud, ‘Apprivoiser le réel’, in *Guadeloupe: Temps incertain*, ed. by M. Abraham and D. Maraguès (Paris: Editions Autrement, 2001), pp. 233-234.

<sup>21</sup> In a private discussion at the University of Birmingham on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2010 Maryse Condé agreed that Fabienne Kanor was the best known such writer.

<sup>22</sup> Eloïse Fagard, ‘Fabienne Kanor : “Ma communauté, c’est celle de mes personnages.”’

Son troisième roman, *Les chiens ne font pas des chats*, est paru’, *Afrik.com* (Saturday 14 June 2008) <http://www.afrik.com/article14498.html> [accessed 5 July 2010]

<sup>23</sup> Louise Hardwick, ‘Du français-banane au créole-dragon: entretien avec Raphaël Confiant’, *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 9: 2 (2006), p. 260. The two authors in question are Audrey Pulvar and Alfred Alexandre. Both were born in Martinique.

A journalist and film director as well as a novelist, Kanor has published four novels (and other writings) to date, of which the first, *D'Eaux douces* (2004) is the principal text to deal with the experience of being born and raised in the *métropole*. In many respects, *D'Eaux douces* deals with the issues of alienation and trauma which have already been outlined here in earlier texts: Frida, the protagonist, is a university student and the daughter of Martiniquan immigrants, low-grade *fonctionnaires* who are satisfied to have carved out a life for themselves in the *métropole*. For them, assimilation represents a life of silence ('Il ne faut pas se faire remarquer'<sup>24</sup>) and, as Frida says, of anxiety and self-effacement: 'Je suis née chez des sédentaires qui vivent d'angoisses et de prières. Des gens avec des rêves sous vide, une mémoire en consigne, qui ont fait confire leur vie de peur de manquer d'air.'<sup>25</sup> Their fear of blackness goes along with an unrequited longing for their island. For Frida, this results in a fascination for black history and the pursuit of a disastrous relationship with a black man who is deeply unfaithful to her. Although this novel is superficially about a contemporary love affair gone terribly wrong, it is inescapably focused on the slave trade as a taboo subject, and therefore an obsession for Frida. The mental breakdown that occurs as her search for identity collapses inevitably brings to mind the many earlier West Indian novels that have taken the trope of female madness as a symbol of a double alienation.

Despite Kanor's concern about novels that are too historical, her novels are impregnated with a historical sensibility; her following novel, *Humus* (2006), is about the slave trade, without the intermediary of a *négropolitain* setting. Is it easier for a West Indian/*négropolitain* writer to achieve success with novels that draw from an obviously historical source? In *D'Eaux douces* Frida's gradual transformation from curious student to a wandering 'zombie en sursis'<sup>26</sup> may conveniently meet one of the criteria given by Benita Parry as desirable for any postcolonial novel which hopes to attract scholarly acclaim; that it should be written in the magic realist rather than the realist mode. The other criterion, as we have seen, is that the diasporic focus should incline towards

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<sup>24</sup> Fabienne Kanor, *D'Eaux douces* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2004), p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Véronique Larose, 'Fabienne Kanor – Identité d'une Féminité noire. Son roman *D'Eaux douces* (2004)', *Potomitan*, <http://www.potomitan.info/atelier/pawol/kanor.php> (Part 7.1) [accessed 5 July 2010]

nomadic intellectualism.<sup>27</sup> On this point, Frida may also be an attractive character, for she and her lover are great travellers in their search for identity.

Though *D'Eaux douces* may meet the approved criteria, however, other kinds of *négropolitain* text may not. Didier Mandin, a Parisian born to Guadeloupean parents, published *Banlieue Voltaire*, his first novel, in 2006 at the age of 28. Although this text too follows the trajectory of a *négropolitain*, Ludo, who as a graduate of a *grande école* is just as well educated as Frida, the presentation and potential reception of this text seem very different. This book was published by Editions Desnel, a fairly new Martiniquan publisher that obviously lacks the prestige and gravitas of Gallimard. The text makes no gestures towards magic realism, and despite the unemployment that Ludo has to endure and the text's ironic critique of republican values and of the ongoing West Indian quest for an acceptable identity, the story is at heart a positive one. Ludo lives in a Parisian *banlieue* and has a lively multicultural (although not 'French') network of friends. The text is littered with references to global popular culture. Above all, Ludo believes in the American dream, and the USA is where he eventually finds his niche, a trajectory which is perhaps not sufficiently critical of the USA for an elite metropolitan readership. The novel moves along swiftly, but appears to have no literary 'postcolonial' pretensions; in *D'Eaux douces* the main characters try to engage seriously with Martiniquan theories such as *négritude* and *créolité*, while in *Banlieue Voltaire*, these are largely dismissed as inadequate and irrelevant. American popular culture is more appealing. This novel's goals, and probably its expected readership, appear to be different, and it has not attracted the same level of critical interest.

Some expressions of *négropolitain* literature may be rejected by mainstream French publishers; it may itself reject stylistic and theoretical innovation and fall irredeemably into the lowbrow; it may avoid the modes and themes that currently preoccupy critics and scholars in the field; it may, like much youth culture, be apolitical. In such circumstances it will undoubtedly experience great difficulty in developing out of the literary ghetto. And if the paucity of *négropolitain* literature has largely gone unnoticed, it could be because of the assumption that such a literature is hardly likely to meet the requirements

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<sup>27</sup> Benita Parry, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

outlined by commentators such as Benita Parry, and discussed above, and therefore would not be of great interest.

It is possible that some voices in the French publishing industry would like to see something different. In 1999 Raphaël Sorin, a literary director at the prestigious publisher Flammarion, encouraged young black writers to create ‘a kind of literary rap’. However, the fact that Sorin’s interest seems to be principally a linguistic one is problematic. What he really wants, according to Scott Steedman of the now defunct *Paris Voice*, is the revival of French as an exciting literary language, of which he sees the work of Patrick Chamoiseau as an encouraging example.<sup>28</sup> Yet, as we have seen, *créoliste* writing speaks ambiguously at best to black Frenchmen and women. Is there a danger that in prioritising a ‘jazzing up’ of the French language, this new writing will become another exercise in the othering of ethnic minority experience in the *métropole*, to the advantage of the French language but otherwise steering clear of that truly controversial subject: the transformation and subversion of French culture and society as a whole?

The development of a vibrant *négropolitain* fiction in mainland France will be difficult. As we have seen, both metropolitan West Indians and the wider society have served to discourage and silence those stories that fail to reflect what both groups wish to see in themselves and in each other. On the one hand there is a retreat into comforting memories of *le pays*, almost as a way of blocking out the difficulties of life in Europe, and on the other, a society that would willingly celebrate *la culture black* yet not quite see that culture as a pervasive and complicated part of itself. Then there is the world beyond *Francophonie* that looks inside with interest but fails to notice the gaps. None of these circumstances suggest that a literary renaissance is likely: but what could stimulate *négropolitain* writing is the fact that *la question noire* seems to be of rising interest in French public discourse. More and more works of non-fiction are now asking what it means to be black in the *métropole* today. It could be this ongoing debate, as it begins to

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<sup>28</sup> Scott Steedman, ‘French fiction gets wired: Writers with attitude go global’, *Paris Voice* (September 1999) <http://parisvoice.com/99/sept/html/books.cfm> [accessed 27 December, 2005]

tackle the complexities and problems of the second and third generation in particular, that will galvanize tentative young writers and take *négropolitain* French writing beyond the deadening forces of complicity and exclusion that have stunted its growth so far.

## **Part 4**

### **Three Writers: Siting the *Métropole***

Part 4 takes into consideration not only the ideas and theories discussed in Part 3 but also addresses the themes that have run throughout this thesis by focussing on three prolific and important writers of French West Indian descent.

Maryse Condé, Tony Delsham and Gisèle Pineau have been chosen for their status as well-known writers, each with a different reputation, literary and ideological position, and situation in life. Condé, based between Guadeloupe and New York, with excursions to Paris, has the strongest international profile, and has the greatest literary and academic presence. Delsham is a Martiniquan journalist as well as a self-published writer, whose fame and prodigious output has not necessarily won him critical or scholarly interest. Pineau was born and lives in Paris, but her work always responds to the call of her parental home.

None of these three is known as a theorist, although they have all been exercised by the same issues that have challenged the French West Indian theorists discussed in this thesis.



## Chapter IV.1 Maryse Condé: The Unprivileged *Métropole*

From her earliest novels in the 1970s onwards the writing of Maryse Condé (b. 1937) has been highly amenable to critical analysis due to her focus on postcolonial themes such as *errance*, exile and fluid identities. It has been said that '[t]he cross-cultural motion and cross-cultural composition of Condé's novels' have given rise to connections that go 'insistently beyond the local, elaborating an ever more diverse lexicon as her settings and characters continue to criss cross the globe.'<sup>1</sup> Here, the aim is to highlight Condé's treatment of the *métropole* as an object of West Indian desire, and to explore where amidst the many readings of global connections and errance the migrant experience of the *métropole* fits in. Reflecting on these questions will lead us to consider whether or not there is any justification in referring to the 'unprivileged *métropole*' in respect of Maryse Condé's work.

The texts to be considered here are principally *Hérémakhonon* (1976), *La Vie scélérate* (1987), *Desirada* (1997) and more briefly, *Les Belles Ténébreuses* (2008). These novels span over thirty years of writing and developing, and reflect Condé's fascination for the impulsive search for identity and her belief in the fruitlessness of seeking any absolute racial and geographical definition. In this she is distinguishable from Raphaël Confiant, who has said that '[l'écrivain antillais] est obligé d'écrire par rapport à une demande sociale. La littérature antillaise existera le jour où l'écrivain ne se sent pas obligé d'écrire sur les Antilles et de parler de la question identitaire, historique, de l'esclavage, etc.'<sup>2</sup> He implies that we are not yet living in such era. Condé, in contrast, has said when interviewed that in the past there was a literary engagement which has now diminished, 'un "nous" collectif, c'est-à-dire un "je" qui en fait était "nous" etc. Les mêmes thèmes, retour à l'Afrique, conscience d'appartenir à une race opprimée.... Au fur et à mesure, ces thèmes sont devenus beaucoup plus diffus.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dawn Fulton, *Signs of Dissent: Maryse Condé and Postcolonial Criticism* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Louise Hardwick, 'Du français-banane au créole-dragon', p. 263.

<sup>3</sup> Louise Hardwick, 'J'ai toujours été une personne un peu à part: questions à Maryse Condé', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 9: 1 (2006), p. 115.

However, in terms of her own work, it has often seemed as though Condé has always challenged this ‘nous’ in her fiction, and the very title of this interview, entitled ‘J’ai toujours été une personne un peu à part’, suggests that that is the case. Condé’s career as a novelist began not with her journey towards an African identity, but after she had already begun to challenge the very validity of such a journey. Having been married to and divorced from a Guinean actor, and having worked in Africa, Condé was already a critic of negritude by 1973, three years before the publication of *Hérémakhonon* (1976), and later talked about the disillusionment that negritude had created in African Americans and West Indians such as herself, who had been led to believe that Africa would be their *patrie*.<sup>4</sup> Although Condé wrote successfully about Malian history in *Ségou* (1984, 1985), she has never written from a *negritudiste* perspective.

Born into the black, urban, well-educated *fonctionnaire* class of Guadeloupean society Condé was (and remains) a circular migrant, who spent regular short periods in Paris throughout her childhood, until a longer residency was required from the age of 16 onwards as she completed her formal education in literature and foreign languages. This time in her early life is explored in her memoir, *Le Cœur à rire et à pleurer: contes vrais de mon enfance* (1999), a text impregnated with ironic accounts of her parents’ longing for ‘France’. We are told that World War II represented the most sombre period of their lives, not because they resented Nazism in itself, but because they were deprived of their regular trips to ‘la mère patrie et Paris, la Ville Lumière qui seule donnait de l’éclat à leur existence.’<sup>5</sup> For Maryse, these visits to Paris seem to have become banal and unedifying, the city grey and enclosed and its inhabitants ignorant and patronising. ‘J’étais de moins en moins persuadée que Paris est la capitale de l’univers.’<sup>6</sup> She seems to have grown more appreciative of the city when she returned there for her studies in her mid-teens,

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Marie-Clothilde Jacquey and Monique Hugon, ‘L’Afrique, un continent difficile: Entretien avec Maryse Condé’, *Notre Librairie*, 74 (1984), p. 22, cit. Jeannie Suk, *Postcolonial Paradoxes in French Caribbean Writing: Césaire, Glissant, Condé* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 87.

<sup>5</sup> Maryse Condé, *Le Cœur à rire et à pleurer*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

claiming that living there was liberating, and that as a student she loved the city.<sup>7</sup> However, despite these changing perspectives on Paris and its centrality in her personal and political development, the *métropole* is not generally the focus of her novels. In fact, when Condé was questioned by Françoise Pfaff in the 1990s about her unattractive portraits of Paris she claimed to be unable to recall a book of hers that described the city.<sup>8</sup> This in itself should be a sign that Paris in particular and the *métropole* in general are not sites of special interest for her.

*Hérémakhonon* is the one text she spontaneously mentions to Pfaff in connection with the metropolitan space; Conde states that she speaks only vaguely of Paris in that text, and that the city itself is hardly relevant.<sup>9</sup> This is because *Hérémakhonon* finds fertile ground not in exploring what Paris means to the West Indian protagonist, Véronica, but in the complex nature of the relationship between Véronica and West Africa. Commentators see the novel as a parable ‘of an Africa that ultimately cannot be mother to the diaspora, of the return to Africa as a misdirected search for home’.<sup>10</sup> What happens in Paris, therefore, is not of primary importance. Yet it might be said that the *métropole* is very present, albeit in the background. A cynical, educated, alienated Guadeloupean woman, Véronica travels from Paris to Africa as a teacher, asserting from the start that ‘[l]’Afrique se fait beaucoup depuis peu. On écrit des masses à son sujet, des Européens et d’autres. On voit s’ouvrir des centres d’Artisanat Rive gauche. Des blondes se teignent les lèvres au henné et on achète des piments et des okras rue Mouffetard.’<sup>11</sup> This introduction firmly positions Paris as a consumer of African culture, which brings to mind what Celia Britton has described as the hungry metropolitan absorption of West Indian culture.<sup>12</sup> The *métropole* will accept blackness only if it may first exoticise it.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Françoise Pfaff, *Entretiens avec Maryse Condé* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1993), p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Jeannie Suk, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>11</sup> Maryse Condé, *Hérémakhonon* (Paris: Union Generale d’Editions, 1976), p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Celia Britton, ‘Eating their words: the consumption of French Caribbean literature’, *ASCALF Yearbook*, 1 (1996), p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Yvan Gastaut, ‘Les effets positifs de la “culture black” sur l’image du Noir en France’, *Migrations Santé*, 7: 42 (November-December 1995), p. 70.

The introduction to the novel also positions Paris as a site of departure, and as the pivot around which everything revolves. Véronica leaves a white boyfriend, Jean-Michel, behind in Paris. Despite her infidelity, he is the only person to whom she sends letters, and it is to him that she returns. Perhaps this is a reflection of her relationship with Africa; it is merely a ‘flirtation’. Despite her education and her knowledge of international black writing, Veronica has no interest in understanding the contemporary realities of West Africa in the 1970s – no awareness of political ideologies, no knowledge of the native languages in her host county. But if Africa is not home, neither is the island of her birth, Guadeloupe, a place of petty jealousies and racial obsessions. ‘Home is Paris.’<sup>14</sup>

Yet apart from her relationship with Jean-Michel there is a gap between Véronica and Paris in almost all of the novel’s representations of the city. Commentators have written about Véronica’s sense of *décalage* from the real world around her, about the ‘soap bubble’ in which she isolates herself whilst she is in Africa where she has chosen to live - but Paris is also kept at a distance.<sup>15</sup> She refuses to tell her students about Paris, and in her mind’s eye, she imagines the Paris that her students would experience as entirely different from hers. Theirs would not be the Paris of an educated, assimilated West Indian woman like herself, but the Paris of the African street cleaners. She thinks back in appreciation of the African street cleaner who once looked at her and her white lover without judgement when she was in Paris: ‘L’un d’eux balaie la rue de l’Université et nous regarde matin après matin. Moi et mon Blanc. Pas de mépris dans son regard et c’est pourtant celui qui me hante.’<sup>16</sup> The importance of this man’s tolerant gaze is a sign, however, that although Paris is Véronica’s home, it is not a trouble-free zone for her. Race memorably rears its head in a description of the Caribbean Festival at the Château

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<sup>14</sup> Vèvè Clark, ‘Developing Diaspora Literacy: Allusion in Maryse Condé’s *Heremakhonon*’, in *Out of the Kumbula: Caribbean Women and Literature*, ed. by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, p. 313.

<sup>15</sup> Dawn Fulton, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Maryse Condé, *Héremakhonon*, p. 51.

de Vincennes where creole insults and worse are hurled at her by a group of militant West Indians, for walking hand in hand with a white man.<sup>17</sup>

*Hérémakhonon* was not well received in the *métropole*. *Ségou* was written with greater hopes of appealing to the reader, duly becoming a bestseller.<sup>18</sup> In an article about changing metropolitan attitudes towards black people Philippe Dewitte refers to ‘le complexe de culpabilité d’une partie des intellectuels français’ in relation to colonialism.<sup>19</sup> This complex, prevalent when the novel was published, may have made *Hérémakhonon* unacceptable as a novel about decolonisation because it refuses to address any sense of guilt. Moreover, if ‘exotic’ writing meets the expectations of metropolitan readers more easily in a historical context, then *Ségou* clearly meets those expectations better than a novel that offers an unromantic portrait of the postcolonial experience through the eyes of a cynical, unattractive main character.<sup>20</sup>

*La Vie scélérate* (1987) and *Desirada* (1997) expand on what Condé began in *Hérémakhonon*, challenging received notions of fixed identities or racio-cultural essences. They too prioritise sites other than the French metropolitan world. The United States plays an important role in both these novels, and New York, where Condé has lived and taught for many years is prominent in *Desirada*. In an interview with Marie-Agnès Sourieau she says, ‘ce qu’il y a de passionnant au sujet de New York c’est qu’elle est faite d’une série de mondes juxtaposés.’<sup>21</sup> The same interview encapsulates the attraction of New York’s unbridled multi-ethnicity and its half a million West Indians, describing it as a place of ‘renouvellement créatif’, with no privileging of race, language or cultural specificity. So *La Vie scélérate* and *Desirada* both present juxtaposed worlds, with the nomadism for which Condé’s characters have become famous playing an

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>18</sup> A comment made by Maryse Condé during a talk given at the University of Birmingham on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2010. *Hérémakhonon* was re-published under a new title in 1988.

<sup>19</sup> Philippe Dewitte, ‘Regards blancs et colères noires’, *Hommes et Migrations*, 1132 (May 1990), p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Emily Apter, ‘Crossover Texts/Creole Tongues: A Conversation with Maryse Condé’, *Public Culture*, 13: 1 (Winter 2001), p. 91.

<sup>21</sup> Marie-Agnès Sourieau, ‘Entretien avec Maryse Condé: de l’identité culturelle’, *The French Review*, 72: 6 (May 1999), p. 1092.

important part. Dominique Licops sees both novels as presenting ‘le portrait de personages pris dans le tourbillon des migrations qui ont marqué l’histoire des Antillais.’<sup>22</sup> Her article proposes that *La Vie scélérate* in particular focuses on the discourse of diaspora, while *Desirada* is more specifically a novel of migration proper. Thus, *La Vie scélérate* follows recent West Indian history through the lives of various members of the Louis family who voyage throughout cities in North and South America, metropolitan France and the West Indies seeking work, betterment and a sense of common identity as black people. *Desirada*, meanwhile, has several characters moving away from city environments in their largely fruitless search for home. It is interesting to note that whereas *La Vie scélérate* has a larger number of central male characters *Desirada* features more female characters.

Told through a series of family histories presented by various members of the Louis family, *La Vie scélérate* starts with Albert, an authoritarian self-made businessman of the early twentieth century, who imposes his understanding of Garveyite black consciousness, acquired while working in Panama, on to his whole family. His less imposing son Jacob travels to America and returns with an African-American historical perspective. Both developments are problematic for the family, but their inclusion in the story confirm Condé’s ongoing interest in the difficult and ultimately limiting nature of the discourse of ‘black identity’ politics and of the negative affects of the resultant black racism in Guadeloupe. However, the most relevant aspect of the novel to this thesis is the Louis family’s neglect of its metropolitan branch, principally in the form of two other members of the Louis clan, Bert, Thécia and their descendants, based in Angers and Paris.

The reader is left with the overwhelming impression that the metropolitan French town or city is a place of despair and bleakness. Paris is not a city of light, the place of joyous freedom that Condé herself enjoyed, but a reflection of patriarchal oppression. Angers is no better. Bert’s experience in Angers belongs to the 1920s and it sets the tone for all further contact between members of the Louis family and the *métropole*. Although he is

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<sup>22</sup> Dominique Licops, ‘Experiences diasporiques et migratoires des villes dans *La Vie scélérate* et *Desirada* de Maryse Condé’, *Nottingham French Studies*, 39: 1 (Spring 2000), p. 110.

set on a medical career, Bert is forced into a technology college in Angers by his father. In this, Condé turns the tables on the more usual story of an upwardly mobile West Indian family, eager to send their children to the *métropole* to obtain entry to the most prestigious careers. Bert's disastrous experiences in the *métropole* are related in just a few pages, but the picture they paint is striking. In Angers experiences of racism are followed by a friendship with a local student. However, Bert's lacklustre affair with Marie, a white factory worker, leads conclusively to his downfall: a pregnancy and a shot-gun marriage bring to a definitive end all chances of happiness. The birth of a son, Bébert, is followed by Bert's suicide.

Bébert, who reaches manhood in metropolitan France after the war, is in his turn a tragic figure. He is neither at home in Angers ('Imaginez cela! De mémoire d'homme, on n'avait connu qu'un seul nègre à Angers, et il a fallu que sa mère se fasse faire un enfant de lui!'<sup>23</sup>) nor is he accepted by his father's family in Guadeloupe. Whilst he moves to Paris and is welcomed among a community of West Indian musicians like himself, acquiring a West Indian father figure along the way, this is not enough. He is destroyed because he harbours a desire for a settled Guadeloupean identity: 'Tu ne sais pas le mal qu'on a à ne pas connaître la terre d'où on vient!'<sup>24</sup> However, such a longing is invalid in Condé's novels, and the self destruction that results when Bébert fails to dominate this desire is inevitable, and we might see the rum he drinks and the suburban train under whose wheels he commits suicide as representing the two poles of his identity, with the rum as a symbol of the West Indies, and the train depicting his abortive experience of urban European life.<sup>25</sup>

Bébert's white mother and her family are almost completely erased from the story. The text reflects ambivalence about the white parents of 'black' children, and there is little sense of a positive *métissage*. Both Bert and Bébert impregnate white women casually, in a manner which undermines any meaningful concept of cultural exchange. The narrator, Claude Elaïse ('Coco') Louis, who represents the fourth generation, and is the

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<sup>23</sup> Maryse Condé, *La Vie scélérate*, p. 172.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>25</sup> Dominique Licops, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

illegitimate Paris-born daughter of Thécla, hints at the French West Indian stereotype of the ‘loose’ white women who often pursue relationships with black Frenchmen, referring to them as ‘des femmes [...] de petite naissance et de peu d’instruction.’<sup>26</sup> As we have seen, these women are not strangers to French West Indian fiction, and they often represent negative rather than positive readings of the French metropolitan space. In this novel they are briefly sketched as the bitter single mothers of confused children, children identified as black yet with no way of accessing their ‘blackness’, and no interest in asserting their neglected ‘whiteness’. The one working class white man who appears in this novel fares little better. Young Aurélia, fathered and abandoned by Bébert, is raised by her white mother Lucette and a stepfather, Monsieur Paoli, dismissed as ‘un Corse, ouvrier spécialisé chez Peugeot qui, selon l’expression bien connue, traita-l’enfant-comme-sa-fille.’<sup>27</sup> (Paoli is not evil, but is merely unimportant, and in fact, white men are often ineffectual and incomplete in this literature.) A child of the Parisian *banlieues* in the 1960s, the schoolgirl Aurélie tires of listening to her mother’s stories of Bébert’s own abandonment and the bleakness of her own family home and the racism that she in turn experiences. It is this absence of family identity that leads her to this perspective: ‘Alors, il me restait les rêves! Et ceux-ci me donnaient l’envie féroce de tourner le dos à l’H.L.M. familiale. [...] Car pour les fuir, [mes parents,] pour les fuir, pour ne pas les entendre, ne pas les voir, je travaillais, je travaillais.’<sup>28</sup>

Professionally speaking, Paris allows Bébert to achieve more than his intelligent but frustrated father. Through Bébert it might be possible to see Condé’s post-war Paris as a place not of tragedy but of opportunity. Born in the *métropole* into a less repressive family environment than would have been the case in the West Indies Bébert, after all, is able to escape family expectations, and find congenial work as a musician in a city that is willing to showcase his great talents. He receives an offer to study music at a prestigious conservatoire, and he also has offers of work abroad, where he too could embark on a fruitful Condean nomadic identity. But his enslavement to the idea of an exclusive West

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<sup>26</sup> Maryse Condé, *La Vie scélérate*, p. 181.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.



Indian identity prevents him from developing as a person, and his exit from the story, via suicide, is inevitable.

Thécla's departure from Guadeloupe at the dawn of the 1960s rolls into one two staple situations of West Indian migrant fiction: the precocious West Indian middle-class student, sent to mainland France to study for a degree, and the unmarried pregnant woman (or single mother). For Condé, family problems are not merely a plot device, but they also serve to make the larger social problems harder to bear, thereby complicating the dream of 'home'. Thécla's relentless but privileged wanderings through Paris, London, New York and Kingston (Jamaica), which reflect the liberated role more often applied to characters in white European middle class fiction, are symptomatic of a deep-seated pain that a mother's love, money, education, sex, religious and political ideology and marriage cannot assuage, much less a brief return to her native land. Thécla, like her relatives, experiences the European space as unappealing, and while her white, bourgeois husband, Pierre Levasseur, is attentive, he fares no better than the other white spouses and (surrogate) parents in the text, since they are all inadequately equipped for dealing with the problems of identity that face them in their relationships with members of the Louis family. The novel's white characters feel more like 'types' than carefully drawn individuals, and they all play a similar role in the text. Condé is not interested here in what people on the 'other side' are like, but rather in how, for the black and mixed-race characters 'les espaces urbains sont pratiqués en relation au lieu de l'origine commune. Cette relation se fait selon diverses modalités qui déterminera si la ville est viable pour le personnage en question: île interdite, île inconnaissable, île rêvée.'<sup>29</sup> White characters are a part of this urban context, but are paradoxically marginal to how it is experienced.

Condé partly returns to the metropolitan setting in *Desirada*. The novel is built around Marie-Noëlle, who is born in Guadeloupe in the 1950s when her mother Reynalda is only fifteen. Reynalda quickly flees to Paris, and Marie-Noëlle, like many other young West Indians is eventually obliged to leave Guadeloupe to join her new family, a mother whom she does not remember, a new half-brother, and a West Indian step-father called Ludovic.

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<sup>29</sup> Dominique Licops, *op. cit.* p. 119.

Failing to bond with Reynalda, who is secretive and distant, Marie-Noëlle marries a black British musician and moves to America while still a teenager. After his untimely death she returns to the *métropole* and to Guadeloupe to look for answers about her past. Her time in the *métropole* represents an interlude of approximately nine years in her life, and when the novel ends, she is in her early thirties.

There are frequent experiences of migration in the novel, but the motivations, experiences and consequences of migration to metropolitan France are dealt with ambivalently.

Marie-Noëlle's reflections on the problem of belonging nowhere are encapsulated in the experience of a *négropolitain* taxi driver in Paris who has always longed for Guadeloupe, yet feels uneasy on his first and only visit: 'Son univers à lui, c'étaient les banlieues tristes, les stades, les terrains de foot. Il ne s'était jamais senti à son aise [en Guadeloupe]. Il était de trop partout. [...] Il n'avait retrouvé son souffle familial qu'à son retour à Paris. Et pourtant, il ne se prenait pas pour un Français.'<sup>30</sup> Her response is to reflect on the shared humanity of people such as the taxi-driver and herself who belong nowhere, who are 'beyond any geographical or ethnic specificity' and who are part of no 'particular place or established social group.'<sup>31</sup>

Paris is not, therefore, a privileged space, either thematically or in terms of the attention it receives in the text. Marie-Noëlle's life takes her between metropolitan France, the West Indies and North America; she lives amongst various immigrant communities and ethnic minorities both in the *métropole* and in North America, and estimates that her own mother was the result of a secret mixed-race sexual encounter in Guadeloupe. Despite the presence of the *métropole* in the text, this is not a sign that any kind of cohesive 'French' identity is a significant component in the identity of the characters in the novel. Celia Britton makes the point that the opposition at the heart of this novel is not

between the Caribbean on the one hand and Europe and North America on the other. That is, it is not between one geographically based culture and another, but between 'respectable', homogeneous, rooted communities anywhere in the world,

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<sup>30</sup> Maryse Condé, *Desirada* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1997), p. 244.

<sup>31</sup> Celia Britton, *The Sense of Community in French Caribbean Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 135.

and that formed by the people who are excluded from them [...] all they have in common is their marginal situation and the emotions it generates.<sup>32</sup>

When Marie-Noëlle returns to Paris as an adult, remembering how frightened she felt as a little child, she identifies with a range of little girls of *all* nationalities. ‘Elle la retrouvait partout, cette petite fille. [...] Dans cette petite Indienne, cette petite Chinoise, cette petite Américaine aux longs cheveux blonds. Ce qui compte, c’est la détresse.’<sup>33</sup>

Underprivileged communities in metropolitan France are not distinguished from underprivileged communities in the United States, and Britton remarks that whether in Paris, Nice or Boston with her husband Marie-Noëlle mixes with similar kinds of people.<sup>34</sup> This indifference to the specificities of place goes hand in hand with a sense of loneliness that is a feature of her early life in the *métropole*: ‘L’été, en colonies de vacances sur de tristes bords de mer. Pas de camarades.’<sup>35</sup> When she does make friends in the *métropole* (‘une bande de jeunes chômeurs, arabes, antillais, turcs, en tout cas métèques comme elles-mêmes, sans famille fixe’<sup>36</sup>) they are heterogeneous, and undefined by place. Mixity is the unifying element in all of her social contexts, and therefore she does not prioritise any particular place as ‘home’.<sup>37</sup> There are, however, very few white French (or American) characters in any of these scenarios.

In the 1970s Marie-Noëlle is not depicted as a victim of racism, and she is not the only black child in the school. Savigny-sur-Orge, the housing estate where she lives, is multicultural. There is an affirmation of unity among the many West Indian and Réunionnais residents, and there are shared carnivals and festivals, in a community that would once have been described approvingly by English multiculturalists as ‘vibrant’. And yet the West Indians do not mix with the Africans in their community: ‘C’était des gens d’autre race qui d’ailleurs faisaient pas ménage ensemble.’<sup>38</sup> Here we have a hint of

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>33</sup> Maryse Condé, *Desirada*, p. 238.

<sup>34</sup> Celia Britton, *The Sense of Community*, p. 136.

<sup>35</sup> Maryse Condé, *Desirada*, p. 42.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>37</sup> Celia Britton, *The Sense of Community*, p. 142.

<sup>38</sup> Maryse Condé, *Desirada*, p. 37.

the problematic relationship between Africans and West Indians documented by Fanon, and many others since. Conversely, this is the 1970s, the era of Black Power, Rastafarianism, the beginning of a revalorisation of black hero figures for the consumption of black people across the diaspora, figures such as Marcus Garvey and Bob Marley, and any number of political and cultural icons (although the Martiniquan Fanon is conspicuous by his absence, as he is in *La Vie scélérate*, despite the presence in this novel of several politicised characters). Ludovic and Reynalda have bought into the notion of an essentialised black unity which in their case is lived via a religio-political organisation called Muntu. Their attachment to a mystical idea of Africa, clearly a bad sign in a Condean literary context, is only partially balanced out by their work with disadvantaged people in their community, and it is also suspect because they are guilty of ignoring the needs of their own children while focusing on generalised black suffering. Muntu is also of interest because it illustrates, if only sketchily, an element of West Indian culture which tends to escape many novels written about the *métropole*: black spirituality.

There is only one character for whom migration is shown as a simple binary movement between Guadeloupe and metropolitan France, and this is Reynalda. It is in her story rather than Marie-Noëlle's that Paris is invested with some meaning in traditionally diasporic terms. When she first arrives in Paris she is but a 'petite silhouette furtive dans la foule.'<sup>39</sup> Eventually, Paris becomes a land of opportunity and renewal; from unhappy professional and personal beginnings she achieves her professional potential, and is fêted and admired as a spokeswoman on sociological issues. While Marie-Noëlle's academic success seems to occur in spite of herself, Reynalda comes across as a more determined character. 'Reynalda, tellement travailleuse, tellement intelligente, qui à la force du poignet était devenue une personnalité dans Paris'<sup>40</sup> who in the 1980s enjoys an ascent from an 'HLM de banlieue' to 'un immeuble flambant neuf du treizième arrondissement,'<sup>41</sup> reflects a reality that approximates more closely to the experiences of West Indian women's lives in the *métropole*. Her strong work ethic mirrors that of West

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<sup>39</sup> Maryse Condé, *Desirada*, p. 166.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99

Indian women ‘installées en métropole qui, à la forte tradition d’activité féminine aux Antilles, ajoutent le motif même de leur émigration: trouver un emploi. Un impératif que renforce – à l’inverse des indées reçues – la présence d’enfants.’<sup>42</sup> Moreover she does not yearn for a Guadeloupean identity that she has no right to seek: ‘La Guadeloupe, Dieu merci, c’était fini. Elle n’y remettrait plus les pieds. Quand je lui rappelais sa maman, Nina, et son grand âge solitaire, elle ne me répondit même pas.’<sup>43</sup> Rather, she is a woman after Condé’s own heart, because ‘elle te prouve que le passé, même le plus douloureux, finit par mourir et que la passion réalise les ambitions qui semblent aux autres les plus extravagantes.’<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, although Reynalda’s career is built on highlighting race relations and women’s issues, there is a sense that she may be merely a token black woman whose image can be used as proof of the existence of a colour-blind, non-sexist meritocracy. Her work may feed the self-satisfaction of an indifferent metropolitan bureaucracy whilst at the same time doing little to address the wider problems of disadvantaged women in the suburbs:

Elle s’occupait toujours de femmes des milieux qu’on appelle déshérités. La seule différence, à présent, elle réalisait des enquêtes et rédigeait des rapports pour le compte du ministère de la Population. À quoi servaient ces enquêtes et ces rapports? À rien. Sinon à donner bonne conscience aux responsables qui subventionnaient ces recherches.<sup>45</sup>

Condé continues her critique of the superficial engagement with the problems of minorities on a more personal level. The Duparc family who initially employ Reynalda in their home bear some resemblance to the family of Pierre Levasseur in *La Vie scélérate*, and are the only white French family to appear. Solidly bourgeois, altruistic Catholics, they are ill-equipped to deal with Reynalda’s problems, and in this too they equate to the stereotypical white characters in *La Vie scélérate*. Not only are these people likened to colonial slave masters but there is even a possibility that a relative of theirs, the

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<sup>42</sup> Claude-Valentin Marie, ‘Les Antillais en France’, pp. 27-28.

<sup>43</sup> Maryse Condé, *Desirada*, p. 271.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

bishop of Guadeloupe, who may or may not have dispatched Reynalda to Paris, could be Marie-Noëlle's father, reinforcing the impression given in the Guadeloupean sections of the novel that relationships between black and white are indeed characterised by domination and oppression, sexual and otherwise.

*BUMIDOM* appears briefly in *La Vie scélérate*, in a melodramatic scene where an elderly woman bemoans the loss of her sons, who have deserted her for the *métropole*.<sup>46</sup> In *Desirada* Marie-Noëlle claims that Reynalda was brought to Paris by *BUMIDOM*, although this is denied by her mother's former employers, the Duparcs.<sup>47</sup> However, several chapters earlier Marie-Noëlle dates her mother's arrival in France to the late 1950s which would be too soon for *BUMIDOM*.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps this confusion is a way for the author to illuminate Marie-Noëlle's wider indifference to Guadeloupe and her ignorance of the island's recent history.

The third most distinctive 'West Indian' experience of metropolitan life is embodied by Marie-Noëlle's half-brother, Garvey. Garvey tells his sister that he and four friends, 'deux Maghrébins, un Turc et un Béninois', united by common experiences and untroubled by inter-ethnic rivalry, plan to travel the world, including 'la Caraïbe, silo où tant de races s'étaient fécondées avant de partir ensemercer le monde. Qu'elle ne s'y trompe pas! Il ne s'agissait surtout pas de'une sempiternelle-quête-de-l'identité. Il était un Européen. Un Antillais de l'immigration. Il n'y avait en lui ni nostalgie d'un temps longtemps mythifié, ni d'un beau pays natal à reconquérir.'<sup>49</sup> He identifies easily with the European, Caribbean and American (i.e. global) influences around him (for example, using Americanisms such as 'turf' and 'beat'), but has no specific focus on Guadeloupe, nor on Africa despite his African friends and the influence of Muntu. For him Paris has become '[la] capitale de la couleur, Paris des Deuxièmes Générations, des négropolitains, des harkis et des beurs.'<sup>50</sup> The text implies that for his generation of *négropolitains*

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<sup>46</sup> Maryse Condé, *La Vie scélérate*, p. 243.

<sup>47</sup> Maryse Condé, *Desirada*, pp. 249-250.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

neither Africa nor Guadeloupe holds any kind of privileged quasi-mythical or political status. With his unashamed reclamation of hybridity Garvey is perhaps closer to the Condean ideal than Marie-Noëlle. Nevertheless, life in Paris is a negative experience for him too, for he is expelled from school and becomes a petty criminal. He eventually decides to work for his father, who has professional and personal difficulties of his own. Unlike his sister and mother, it is not apparent that a glittering career awaits Garvey. Condé says that she spurns the stereotype of the West Indian woman who virtuously carries the burdens of her society;<sup>51</sup> yet in both *Desirada* and *La Vie scélérate* the female characters who initially appear traumatised and powerless are also shown to be much stronger and more resilient than their male counterparts, and they negotiate the complexities of hybridity and the perils of French city life more successfully.

Whether a more recent novel by Condé, *Les Belles Ténébreuses* (2008), suggests a greater engagement with the *métropole* in the future is also worthy of consideration, and brings us back to the issue of marketability first introduced with *Hérémakhonon*. Chris Bongie has commented on the complex relationship between the middlebrow and highbrow elements in Condé's work and readership, particularly with reference to her reception in the American academy.<sup>52</sup> Condé has been ambivalent about her status as a bestselling writer. Despite claiming to be uninterested in translations of her work she is sensitive about those that reveal an insufficient knowledge of the cultural context. Her husband and translator Richard Philcox has commented that his translations are 'market-driven', to which her slightly anxious response has been 'it really means only in this narrow sense of maximizing clarity and accessibility.'<sup>53</sup> She has appeared more resigned than enthusiastic that her French editors 'ont accepté le créole à condition qu'il y ait des notes, des footnotes, et puis des glossaires, ce qui à mon avis alourdit le texte, mais

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<sup>51</sup> Marie-Agnès Sourieau, 'Entretien avec Maryse Condé', p. 1097.

<sup>52</sup> Chris Bongie, 'Exiles on Main Stream' (Section II: (Ab)errant Revisionism: Maryse Condé and the Middlebrow Postcolonial, paras 21-53)

<sup>53</sup> Emily Apter, 'Crossover Texts/Creole Tongues', pp. 92-93.

comme ils ont insisté qu'il fallait que les lecteurs français comprennent, je n'ai rien pu faire.'<sup>54</sup>

However, upon the publication of *Les Belles Ténébreuses*, the only one of her novels to feature a native Parisian *négropolitain* as its main character, a youth called Kassem, she stated that the contemporary novelist faced increasing competition for the attention of her readers, including the fears of terrorism and what was to be the historic upcoming American presidential elections. To tempt readers in this environment it was therefore necessary to change to a more cinematic style of writing, with less introspection, fewer monologues and more direct participation from the narrator; authors could no longer model themselves on Proust. She claimed that in *Les Belles Ténébreuses* she had tried to assimilate these new principles.<sup>55</sup> However, at least one reviewer sees a considerable continuity between the style of previous novels by Condé and *Les Belles Ténébreuses* and has stated that 'il y a le style résolument moderne, voire classique de Maryse Condé qui rélie en voix-off, de manière subtile, moqueuse, légère, les petites anecdotes pour le personnage de Kassem'.<sup>56</sup> However, while in *Desirada* and *La Vie scélérate* the narration is in the hands of the protagonists' various descendants, in *Les Belles Ténébreuses* there is only a single, anonymous if ironic narrator. Moreover, this text does not attempt the complexities of the family saga format, is firmly focused on the present, and is mainly concerned with Kassem and his devious and controlling employer and mentor, Dr. Ramzi An-Nawaï, a slightly cartoonish, postcolonial version of the 'mad scientist' character of popular Western culture. As such it is a less challenging read than those previous novels.

Kassem's indecisiveness and tragicomic inability to take control of his life or to break away from Ramzi and his schemes lead to the aimless wandering that becomes a cynical perversion of the recognisable Condean paradigm of freely chosen nomadism. Yet the

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<sup>54</sup> Louise Hardwick, 'J'ai toujours été une personne un peu à part', p. 113.

<sup>55</sup> These comments were made by Maryse Condé during a talk given in public at the Berlin International Festival of Literature on 24 September 2008.

<sup>56</sup> Marion Geiger, 'Condé, Maryse. *Les Belles Ténébreuses*. Paris: Mercure de France, 2008. ISBN: 978-2-7152-2832-0. Pp. 293. 18 €.', *The French Review*, 82: 5 (April 2009), p. 1095.



Condean complexities of identity are also apparent in his story. Kassem, born in a Parisian suburb, is part Guadeloupean and part Romanian, and is often mistaken for a North African Muslim. Therefore, ‘il est rejeté de toute part et n’a pas la possibilité de revendiquer une identité ethnique ou nationale “simple”, prête à porter.’<sup>57</sup> Kassem spends barely one third of the novel in the *métropole*, drifting across metropolitan France, Africa and New York. References to terrorism and to the challenges of claiming or rejecting an Islamic identity make the novel ‘résolument “post 11 septembre”’,<sup>58</sup> yet the presence of these highly contemporary phenomena only reinforces Condé’s previous personal and literary attempts to avoid categorisation and essentialist labels for herself and her characters. Considering Maryse Condé’s tendency to marginalise the importance of the *métropole* even in the novels where it supposedly plays a significant role, it is likely that it will be Kassem’s experience as a rootless character rather than as a hybridising presence in contemporary metropolitan France that will be of most interest to readers and scholars.

What *Les Belles Ténébreuses* and previous works show is that Condé is willing to reflect on the metropolitan experience from the perspective of West Indians when ‘l’existence est une expression de va-et-vient entre leur île d’origine et non seulement la France, mais aussi les pays d’Europe susceptibles de leur offrir du travail.’<sup>59</sup> Indeed, not only Europe, but the whole world. Yet ‘Condé’s talent for dismantling myths, averting expectations, and provoking discomfort’<sup>60</sup> has not been employed in tackling the story of migration to the *métropole* specifically. She has herself criticised other French West Indian authors for their unwillingness to tackle the complex modern reality of emigration, immigration and circular migration in the French West Indian context, but she has not herself focused on the reality of the binary of the island/*métropole* dynamic.<sup>61</sup> Despite claiming that ‘in

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1094.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1094.

<sup>59</sup> Maryse Condé, ‘Chercher nos vérités’, in *Penser la créolité*, ed. by Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1995), p. 308.

<sup>60</sup> Dawn Fulton, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> Maryse Condé, ‘Chercher nos vérités’, p. 308. Although, as indicated earlier in this chapter, Condé’s biographical work *Le Cœur à rire et à pleurer* (1999) does explore her childhood experiences of the tension between the *métropole* and Guadeloupe.

France I immersed myself in the Guadeloupean and Martiniquan society'<sup>62</sup> Condé had previously admitted to having met few West Indian men since leaving Guadeloupe, which may partly explain why her male characters in the novels explored here often interact ineffectively with the metropolitan environment.<sup>63</sup> More generally, the paucity of references to mass migration in her work may reflect the reality that Condé had little if any contact with working class West Indian migrants when she lived in the *métropole* as a young woman. When these experiences appear, as in the story of *Desirada's* Mme Esmondas, a Guadeloupean medium who moves to Savigny-sur-Orge in the 1960s, their presence is fleeting; we never truly meet 'les Antillaises [qui] aiment avoir la bague au doigt et leur photographie en robe Pronuptia dans un album'<sup>64</sup> nor the disaffected black youths and violated women known to Reynalda's family. Condé has made her own position clear: 'Il est important de quitter le lieu où l'on a des racines, notion que je n'aime pas du tout parce qu'elle est, pour moi, symbole d'immobilisme. Je crois qu'il faut constamment bouger.'<sup>65</sup> Consequently, her protagonists are frequently travelling women and men like herself who are seeking experience and knowledge and find themselves in situations of cultural *métissage*, while existing at some distance physically and socially from the 'dominant' culture; but more humble representations of the migrant community tend not to exist at the core of her novels, so there is the sense that the day-to-day grind, disappointments, small consolations, victories and hurts of ordinary working people, migrants and their families, are not really a part of Condé's literary project, even though European, and specifically metropolitan French cities, are seen profoundly as places of alienation.

The expectations of her readership may also place limitations on what Condé chooses to write in the future. Condé's novels are published and reviewed in Paris yet while Condé is beholden to the demands of a broad metropolitan readership as mediated by her

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<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth Nunez, 'Maryse Condé: grand dame of Caribbean literature. Interview', *The Unesco Courier* (November 2000), p. 48, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121198e.pdf#121222> [accessed 13 June 2011]

<sup>63</sup> Françoise Pfaff, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>64</sup> Maryse Condé, *Desirada*, p. 274.

<sup>65</sup> Marie-Agnès Sourieau, 'Entretien avec Maryse Condé', p. 1091.

publishers her work is taken more seriously in the United States.<sup>66</sup> If neither readership is interested in a focus on metropolitan West Indian issues as opposed to more globalised or more exoticised settings, then there will be little reason for Condé to turn her attentions in this direction. Condé says she has not found it easy to obtain readers in Guadeloupe or Martinique.<sup>67</sup> However, she openly admits that French West Indians in the *métropole* are also reluctant readers.<sup>68</sup> The exception are the young *négropolitains* who attend her specialist university courses, yet she describes these readers as ‘ces jeunes nostalgiques’,<sup>69</sup> which contains the criticism that they are more interested in a literature that recaptures the past than in engaging with challenging work about the present.

There is an added complexity to Condé’s interest in metropolitan issues, since in 2004 an official *Comité pour la mémoire de l’esclavage* was instituted in France, and she accepted the post of president.<sup>70</sup> The committee’s role has been to recuperate the slave trade and slavery as subjects fit for commemoration, discussion and reflection in France and to develop a series of political, educational and cultural measures to make this a reality. What is particularly interesting in the light of this chapter is that Condé has admitted to heading this project as a way of overcoming her distance from black metropolitans: ‘[J]’aurais pu dire non très facilement. J’ai accepté en me disant que pour une fois, j’allais peut-être rendre service aux communautés noires dont je suis un peu coupée parce que j’habite aux Etats-Unis et en Guadeloupe.’<sup>71</sup> In response to a question about ‘les revendications des noirs en France’ she says that as well as breaking the silence surrounding slavery, the work of the Comité is to ‘faire que demain, tout le monde se rende compte qu’il y a des communautés qui ont eu des problèmes, qui ont des choses à offrir et qui doivent avoir leur mot à dire sur la manière dont l’univers est géré.’<sup>72</sup> She is clearly distinguishing between herself and the perceived needs of others, despite also

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<sup>66</sup> Hortense Nouvian, Interview, ‘Maryse Condé: “Pour moi, bien sur que la communauté noire existe”’, *Cité black*, 51 (Monday 25 April 2005), p. 21.

<sup>67</sup> Christ Bongie, ‘Exiles on Main Stream’, (fn. 20).

<sup>68</sup> Maryse Condé, ‘Chercher nos vérités’, p. 306.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>70</sup> In 2009 this became the *Comité pour la mémoire et l’histoire de l’esclavage*.

<sup>71</sup> Hortense Nouvian, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

insisting that '[i]l n'y pas divorce entre nous [les membres du Comité] et le reste de la communauté. Nous sommes simplement une émanation de la communauté.'<sup>73</sup>

There is an ambiguity at work here, but judging from the lack of focus on the *métropole* in her writings, her first comment seems to be the most relevant. If the experiences of ordinary metropolitan West Indians remain unprivileged in her writing it could be due to the lack of a physical, social and cultural connection between herself and other members of the 'community'. Condé discovered in Africa that 'race, in fact, is not the essential factor. What is important is culture.'<sup>74</sup> However culture also separates her from many metropolitan West Indians, just as it separates her from the popular *créole* culture claimed by some other French West Indian authors.<sup>75</sup> Her view that 'dans le siècle de globalisation où nous vivons, chacun à sa façon de vivre son antillanité, il n'y a pas une manière unique'<sup>76</sup> trumps a *créoliste* agenda that prioritises the West Indian space as the defining way of of being West Indian. However, it clearly presents challenges for the positioning of the *métropole* in her work.

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth Nunez, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>75</sup> Louise Hardwick, 'J'ai toujours été une personne un peu à part', p. 114.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

## Chapter IV.2 Tony Delsham: The Unprivileged Writer

Two striking things may be said about the Martiniquan, André Petricien, better known as Tony Delsham (b. 1946). Firstly, he is the most widely read French West Indian writer in the region. His status as Martinique's bestselling novelist is apparently 'common knowledge on the island',<sup>1</sup> and he is well aware of his popularity.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, his success has occurred entirely outside the metropolitan literary scene, independent of its publishers, critics, readers and academic commentators alike. The title of this chapter refers to the second of these facts, namely the lack of attention that Delsham has received outside the French West Indies, and the way in which he has been totally eclipsed by other more prominent Martiniquan writers. Unlike them, Delsham has never benefited from an advantageous relationship with a metropolitan publisher, since he has published all of his novels himself since 1972, when he established his own publishing company, Editions M.G.G. (Martinique Guadeloupe Guyane), now Martinique Editions. Delsham is a perfect example of how

[l]a littérature antillaise existe, en métropole, essentiellement à travers les œuvres de quelques auteurs en particulier – publiés notamment dans de prestigieuses maisons d'édition – qui progressivement parviennent à conquérir, à séduire le lectorat métropolitain qui commence à connaître et à reconnaître certains d'entre eux. Or, la littérature antillaise ne se limite pas aux seules éditions métropolitaines; un autre champ, presque inconnu du public métropolitain, existe bien, en effet, outre-mer.<sup>3</sup>

Delsham's literary trajectory has been no fluke. As the author of around thirty novels his fiction exists within a framework of engagement that also includes his editorship of the

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Bongie, 'Exiles on Main Stream' (fn. 5). Bongie adds that any thorough analysis of Delsham's popularity would need to be backed up by statistical research.

<sup>2</sup> Estelle Maleski, 'Entretien avec Tony Delsham', in *Le Monde caraïbe: Echanges transatlantiques et horizons post-coloniaux*, ed. by Christian Lerat, Séminaires et actes du Colloque international, Bordeaux, 7-8 December 2001 (Pessac, Gironde: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2003), p. 243.

<sup>3</sup> Estelle Maleski, 'Panique aux Antilles de Tony Delsham et *Solibo Magnifique* de Patrick Chamoiseau, entre Fort-de-France et Paris', in *Entre deux rives, trois continents, Mélanges offerts à Jack Corzani à l'initiative du CELFA*, ed. by Dominique Chancé et Dominique Deblaine (Pessac, Gironde: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2004), p. 211.

French West Indian current affairs magazine *Antilla* and a wider journalistic commitment to Martiniquan issues. His awareness of the issues came into being on his return to the island in 1970 after seven years of studying and working in the *métropole*. His dismay at the condition of Martinique has been described by an *internaute* thus: '[I]l retrouve une île dont les productions radiophoniques sont d'une médiocrité criante sans réelle innovation, ni même touche locale. La Martinique était alors dans une période où la culture locale avait du mal à s'imposer et où les compétences n'étaient pas encore mises en oeuvre pour la développer.'<sup>4</sup> Delsham says he embarked upon publishing because although there were successful bookshops in Martinique at the time, there was nothing in them that was Martiniquan.<sup>5</sup> It was in this barren cultural and media environment that Delsham, who had already worked in journalism and publishing in the *métropole*, embarked upon his long-term engagement with Martiniquan journalism, initially by launching a weekly current affairs magazine in 1972, *Martinique Hebdo*. From cartoons, chosen because Delsham felt they could reach the greatest number of people, he moved to novels that have been noted for their documentary – if not their literary - quality.

Lorsque je décidai de me lancer dans le roman, les buts et objectifs étaient le même: repérer et officialiser l'environnement immédiate, capter l'atmosphère martiniquaise, la saveur martiniquaise, à la fois dans la forme et dans le fond, traduire tout cela par des mots et par des phrases simples accessibles au plus grand nombre. Voilà expliqués ces choix: bande dessinée, roman-photo, roman policier.<sup>6</sup>

What this introduction should suggest is that Delsham offers a fruitful opportunity to think about the interplay between fact and fiction, populism and activism, issues of readership and scholarship, as well as the possible range of strategies employed by French West Indian writers. His unique position in the world of French West Indian writing will be considered from the perspective of his engagement with diasporic issues, focusing on his relationship with the *créolistes*, his literary project as a self-defined man of the people, and issues of reception. I shall talk about two novels in particular, *Xavier*:

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<sup>4</sup> 'Hodebar Vanessa gladys', *France-Jeunes.net* (27 July 2007)

<http://www2.france-jeunes.net/lire-tony-delsham-23822.htm> [accessed 9 May 2011]

<sup>5</sup> Estelle Maleski, 'Entretien avec Tony Delsham', p. 241.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

*Le drame d'un émigré Antillais* (1981) and *Négropolitains et Euro-blacks*, (2000), which until very recently have represented Delsham's most relevant fictional commentaries on migration to the *métropole*. I shall also make some reference to *Tracée sans Horizon* (1985), and a much more recent text, *Paris, il faut que tu saches....* (2007).

By talking about Delsham's 'regard de *chroniqueur-auteur* sur la Martinique' and his '*écriture de l'Immersion*' Véronique Larose brings to the fore a common approach towards Delsham's fiction.<sup>7</sup> In addition, by stressing the Martiniquanness of his gaze ('une implication littéraire forte, débordante, bouillonnante: les thématiques de Tony DELSHAM tracent les différents contours martiniquais')<sup>8</sup> she is also projecting the theme, promoted by Delsham and others, of his role not merely as a storyteller, but the documentarist of Martinique: 'Il s'agit de *rendre* à une époque sa couleur d'authenticité. Un projet digne du Naturalisme de Zola, de ce perfectionnisme du détail.'<sup>9</sup> It is unsurprising that his two novels of migration should be influenced by the documentary imperative. The titles have an air of reportage; *Xavier: Le drame d'un émigré Antillais* (1981) evokes the migration experiences of the *BUMIDOM* era in which it was written, whilst *Négropolitains et Euro-blacks* (2000) deals with the difficulties of the second generation. The blurb on the back cover of both books takes a firmly sociological perspective, making no mention of their literary value, other than that *Xavier* is '[un r]oman poignant qui arrache des larmes.' Marc Tardieu even takes exception to a commonplace formula that appears in the paratext of *Xavier*: "‘‘Toute ressemblance avec des personnes vivantes ou ayant existé serait pure coïncidence’’, précise-t-on au début du livre, selon la formule consacrée. Mais *Xavier: Le drame d'un émigré Antillais*, roman de Tony Delsham, publié pour la première fois au début des années 1980, en dit peut-être plus que bien des témoignages prosaïques.'<sup>10</sup> Such a comment makes it clear where he thinks the value of Delsham's work lies.

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<sup>7</sup> Véronique Larose, 'Tony Delsham: Chroniques de la Martinique', *Potomitan* (5 January 2008), <http://www.potomitan.info/atelier/pawol/delsham.php> (Part 2) [accessed 9 May 2010]

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* (Part 2). The capitalisation is in the original text.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* (Part 2.2)

<sup>10</sup> Marc Tardieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-154.

From the start, this ‘témoignage’, makes little attempt at subtlety. The novel is structured as the testimony of a killer awaiting execution, the object of a social worker’s encouragement and a prison guard’s disgust, and the traumatic outcome is presented at the beginning of the text, with the backstory given in flashback. Xavier is a weary, battered chronicler who accepts his social worker’s exhortations to tell the world the truth. (‘Tu dois laisser un message, les autres doivent savoir. Ne t’étiens pas comme un vulgaire assassin anonyme.’<sup>11</sup>) To show how far he has fallen he talks about the enormous build-up in his youth towards idealising the *mère-patrie*, and his almost obsessive desire for stories of loyalty and self-sacrifice on her behalf:

Un émigré, moi, fils d’un département qui, depuis des siècles, chante les louanges de la mère-patrie! Moi qui ai écouté, le cœur gonflé de fierté, les récits d’anciens combattants ayant défié l’océan déchaînée afin de se rendre à la Dominique, île anglaise voisine, avant de rejoindre l’Angleterre et de s’enrôler dans l’armée du général de Gaulle? J’avais communié à la ferveur de ces hommes mutilés, de leur courage pour libérer le sol sacré que des sauvages d’Allemagne avaient osé envahir.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, he agrees to carry out the task, to speak out and to inform: ‘Peut-être devrais-je dire à nos aînés que la mère-patrie tant vantée, tant chérie, n’est plus qu’une vieille matrone acariâtre qui vivote sur les cendres de sa grandeur passée.’<sup>13</sup> So from the start we know that we are to embark on a story that will catalogue pain, distress and disappointment as an authentic record of wrongdoing and victimisation, delivered by the sufferer himself. This begins soon enough with Xavier’s childhood story, which in its basic outline recalls scenes in other French West Indian novels and memories; we have poverty, a strong mother figure and a young protagonist who is depicted as industrious and particularly good at French (ideally placed for assimilation in later life.) However, the arrival of an abusive new stepfather and a malicious step-sister takes the narrative on a downward turn from which there is no escape.

Although he sees himself as politically aware, Xavier is an undereducated, disempowered young man, a drifter who frequents tourist spots and glamorous hangouts where he is

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<sup>11</sup> Tony Delsham, *Xavier*, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.



introduced to the possibility of another life. There is a tentative friendship with a local group of well-travelled, cynical and drug-addicted bourgeois youth; then, thanks to the attentions of a rich Canadian woman, Margaret, he takes a lucrative dip in the waters of sex tourism (a subject avoided in Martiniquan fiction, despite the island's historical appeal to Canadian sex tourists<sup>14</sup>). As a result, he acquires the money to buy his ticket and to escape, thus touching on the impact of globalisation on migration, as opposed to a simple *métropole*-West Indies pattern of repulsion and attraction.

Delsham ensures that Xavier does not come across as a *naïf*; doubts are sown in his (and the reader's) mind as to the desirability of Paris as a destination for Martiniquans. *BUMIDOM* is dismissed since Xavier understands that it serves Martiniquan migrants badly, and he manages to uncover a tale of discrimination and humiliation from underneath the bragging and self-promotion of a swaggering returnee. Both men conclude, however, that as an intelligent youngster Xavier will escape the worst of French West Indian migration. Larose sees the young protagonist here in a determinedly positive mode: 'Un espoir se dessine dans ce sombre horizon: partir pour Paris. Comme les héros balzaciens, Xavier croit pouvoir lancer un défi: "*Paris à nous deux*".'<sup>15</sup>

Yet French West Indian literary tradition and the remit of 'le drame' dictate that Xavier must suffer in such circumstances. His stroke of luck with Margaret is described by Larose as 'sésame, en apparence social [qui] sera carcéral', damaging his future happiness.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, Xavier receives a brutal awakening on his arrival, when he walks into the demonstrations of May 1968, and is promptly arrested. The inclusion of this scenario provides Delsham with an opportunity to anchor the story in a more defined space than simply 'the *BUMIDOM* years', to insert another West Indian character who can represent the migrant as student, as politically astute, engaged with 'mainstream'

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<sup>14</sup> According to Glissant (*Le Discours Antillais*, p. 301, fn. 18) Air Canada was known in Martinique as 'Air Coucoune'. French-Canadian women were the first to popularise the West Indies as a destination for sex tourism. See Jeff Heinrich, 'Sex Tourism in Full Bloom' *Ottawa Citizen* (8 January 2007), <http://www.canada.com/ottawacitizen/story.html?id=2bdb148d-66df-4f8a-918f-ffe59d617b90&k=17066> [accessed 9 May 2011]

<sup>15</sup> Véronique Larose, 'Tony Delsham', (Part 4)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, (Part 4)

post-war French history, and also to provide Xavier with the beginnings of an awareness which will lead him away from the self image of an emigrant who loyally sings the praises of the motherland.

In Chapter XIV we brusquely jump forward by several years, and Xavier's fortunes have changed. He is now an educated man, and a successful *fonctionnaire* who then finds work with a publisher, to whom Xavier suggests that 'un département littérature en direction des pays francophones notamment des départements d'outre-mer est à creuser. C'est sont des régions qui n'ont encore rien dit du formidable choc des races et des cultures qui s'est produit chez eux. Je sens un potentiel à exploiter....'<sup>17</sup> It would seem that '[I]es convictions littéraires de Tony DELSHAM se superposent à celles de son héros.'<sup>18</sup> But the drama continues, and Xavier's attempts to bounce back from the personal traumas and miscarriages of justice inflicted upon him and his loved ones by metropolitan racism are eventually flattened out of existence, until what appears to be a nervous breakdown leads to the crime alluded to at the beginning of the novel.

Despite the unemployment and social unrest of the 1950s and 1960s in the French West Indies, it is fairly unusual for a French West Indian novelist to focus on the dynamic of migration as something propelled principally by poverty and joblessness in the way that Delsham does here. Xavier's presence in the *métropole* is not due to *BUMIDOM*, which he consciously avoids, since '[d]es histoires peu flatteuses se propageaient et on disait que ceux qui acceptaient l'aide de cet organisme se retrouvaient soit dans la prostitution, soit occupant les emplois subalternes et délaissés par les Français.'<sup>19</sup> Yet both Tardieu and Larose think of this as essentially a *BUMIDOM* novel, because of Xavier's social status and the era in question. In addition, when Xavier's initial attempts to find work in the private sector fail, a fellow West Indian advises him to look instead to the state.<sup>20</sup> This advice reflects the fact that most West Indians were employed by the state and were

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<sup>17</sup> Tony Delsham, *Xavier*, p. 176.

<sup>18</sup> Véronique Larose, 'Tony Delsham', (Part 4)

<sup>19</sup> Tony Delsham, *Xavier*, p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

consequently protected from the worst of French racism on the job market, and also, to an extent, from the downturn in the economy.

Whilst the novel might be seen as a savage indictment of French racism in the 1960s and 1970s, and Xavier's experience can certainly be described as a tragedy ('Son drame connaît un dénouement meurtrier. Tragédie d'un Incompris....'<sup>21</sup>) on closer inspection the text brings to light the advantages that life in the *métropole* offers. Educational opportunities are opened up to Xavier. His younger half-brother, Luc, follows him to the *métropole* and becomes a doctor. Luc suggests that Xavier's tragedy was to have been victimised by a brutal step-father (a state of affairs which the novel does not attempt to lay at the feet of 'colonialism').<sup>22</sup> Xavier's young wife Nicole, the light-skinned daughter of a professional, well-heeled Martiniquan family based in the *métropole*, is mostly cushioned from the issues that face Xavier, due to the advantages of her class. So are his neuroses stimulated by the racism he meets in Paris but initially set in place by the neglect and abuse of his childhood? There are hints that Delsham wants us to think so: 'Xavier semblait décidé à ne plus accepter de brimade. Il exigeait que son entrée dans la vie d'adulte s'accompagne du respect auquel il estimait avoir droit, il voulait d'une véritable revanche sur ce passé ponctué de déveines ou jamais sa bouche ne s'était ouverte pour dire: "Je veux".'<sup>23</sup> His response to overt racism on another occasion provides him with a psychological and physical release that hidden racism never offered:

Il se rendait compte qu'en réalité il avait attendu une occasion comme celle-là. Une situation nette ou enfin un blanc l'insultait sans hypocrisie. Un mépris direct loin de la condescendance fuyante de ces agents immobiliers qui l'accueillaient, sourire aux lèvres, mais refusant systématiquement la moindre adresse, la moindre visite d'un appartement. Le racisme, toile invisible contre laquelle il se heurtait depuis trois ans, avait enfin un visage. Son poing partit à toute volée.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Véronique Larose, 'Tony Delsham', (Part 4)

<sup>22</sup> Tony Delsham, *Xavier*, p. 228.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

The injustices of metropolitan life are mediated through the poverty, abuse, oppression and misinformation that find their roots in colonialism, making them even more painful to deal with.

Xavier's lack of appropriate psychological and educational tools could easily lead to problems for a young migrant with his profile. Whilst a smaller elite group would benefit from the myth of France, undertake their rites of passage and emerge with greater chances for educational and professional promotion, the less privileged who arrived in such numbers in the 1960s possessed a 'niveau de formation plus faible, origine souvent rurale, appareil psychologique moins sophistiqué en termes de moyens d'élaboration des conflits, et surtout davantage porteurs du pôle de la culture créole domestique.'<sup>25</sup> What might, then, have been a chance for Xavier to travel along the path of assimilation in the motherland was destined to lead to disillusionment.

*Négropolitains et Euro-blacks* (2000) is similarly read for its value as an authentic representation of genuine social phenomena. The pivotal character Robert, the Parisian son of working class Martiniquan migrants, expresses what are by now fairly well-researched perspectives on the tensions between West Indians on the islands and those in the *métropole*, in particular the *Négropolitains* and *Euro-blacks* of the title. So, for Tardieu, Robert represents young people who feel

un sentiment d'étrangeté dans leur propre famille, ne se reconnaissent pas toujours dans les cousins de là-bas. C'est ce qu'exprime Tony Delsham dans son roman récent *Négropolitains et Euro-blacks*. Robert, psychiatre d'origine antillaise qui vit à Paris, n'est pas accueilli par la tante Eva avec la chaleur spontanée prédite par ses parents. 'Entre tante Eva et moi le courant ne passait pas, je me heurtais à une attitude réservée juste polie et j'avais l'impression que seul le fait d'être le fils de son frère l'empêchait d'être désagréable à mon endroit.'<sup>26</sup>

Robert begins to sketch the identitarian predicament of the second generation from the very first chapter ; he is sardonic, self-aware, and obliged to take note of all the ways in

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<sup>25</sup> Jean Galap, 'Strategies indentitaires des Antillais en milieu interculturel', p. 123.

<sup>26</sup> Marc Tardieu, *op. cit.*, p. 180. The enclosed quotation is from Tony Delsham, *Négropolitains et Euro-blacks* (Schœlcher: Editions M.G.G., 2000), p. 41.

which his holiday in Martinique is widening the chasm that exists between himself and the Martiniquans, noting, for example, that it is now no longer the Martiniquan who is ‘le déraciné d’Afrique, l’aliéné, le décervelé ayant anonné dans les écoles primaires “nos ancêtres les Gaulois”, mais bien nous autres les Euro-blacks non natifs natals, disent-ils.’<sup>27</sup>

The Martiniquan is assertive and self-assured while the *négropolitain* is confused and uncertain. Furthermore, the arrival of *négropolitain* holidaymakers threatens to upset the delicate balance that facilitates Martiniquan society, because they are not in thrall to the foundational myths and unspoken prejudices of that community:

Alors békés et nègres sont méfiants vis-à-vis de nous, noirs à l’extérieur et blancs à l’intérieur, disent-ils. Le béké nous reproche un pragmatisme arrogant qui perturbe des siècles d’un konba djole interne aux règles non écrites, mais où chaque acteur sait jusqu’où il peut aller trop loin dans une gesticulation complice et orchestrée.

Le nègre, lui, nous reproche de vouloir imposer des méthodes de travail et des conceptions du dialogue social ayant cours à Paris, et frédonne ‘Peau noire et masque blanc’ à notre passage.<sup>28</sup>

The *négropolitain* here is an outsider to West Indian history, just like the migrant: ‘D’ici et d’ailleurs, étranger ici et là-bas, toujours dans une altérité, une différence décrétée. Ambiguïté des grands voyages à travers l’Histoire. On ne part jamais entièrement, on ne revient jamais tout à fait.’<sup>29</sup>

However, Robert’s dilemma is not the only one to concern Delsham in this ‘documentary-novel’, which has been described by Richard Price and Sally Price as ‘a stylistically heavy-handed but sociologically astute analysis of several contemporary

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<sup>27</sup> Tony Delsham, *Négropolitains et Euro-blacks* (Schœlcher: Editions M.G.G., 2000), p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Marc Tardieu, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

Martinique [sic] "types," on the island and in the metropole.<sup>30</sup> In terms of migrating West Indians, these types include Robert's parents, proud to be accepted by 'French' society as *fonctionnaires*, even at the humblest level, yet distraught at changes in Martiniquan society on their return; a younger generation of circulatory migrants, partly educated in Paris, but obsessed with asserting their creole roots and quick to claim racism; Martiniquan women both rich and poor who for various social and cultural reasons reject black men as husbands; and Robert's clients in general, largely West Indians tainted and scarred by the pernicious results of shadism and a persistent belief in the influence of black magic. There are heated arguments about West Indian authenticity in which little is resolved, but participants achieve psychological release by vigorously expressing their feelings about the racism and discrimination that faces them everyday in the *métropole*.

Mental illness, which is even more pronounced in *Négropolitains et Euro-blacks* than in *Xavier*, surrounds the psychiatrist Robert in his surgery. It also begins to affect him and his female companions. He begins to absorb his patients' complexes and to develop schizophrenic tendencies. Following the diagnosis of a colleague he says:

[J]'ai commencé par douter de mon identité, à douter de moi au moment même où ce terme négropolitain est apparu dans le vocabulaire des Antillais. Avant, le regard de l'autre ne me gênait pas, il était défi que je relevais avec fierté et insolence, fort de ces terres lointaines qui avaient vu naître mes ancêtres. Hélas, mes propres frères avaient délimité des frontières, mes propres frères m'avaient enfermé dans un concept, ils m'avaient en quelque sorte rejeté, ils m'avaient signifié que je n'étais plus des leurs, que j'étais un blanc à la peau noire.<sup>31</sup>

Robert's realisation that he is excluded from both a metropolitan and a Martiniquan identity leads to a 'véritable crise intérieure qui frise la schizophrénie identitaire!'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Richard Price and Sally Price, 'Bookshelf 2000', *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, 75: 1/2 (2001), p. 102, <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl/index.php/nwig/article/viewFile/3479/4240> [accessed 15 June 2011]

<sup>31</sup> Tony Delsham, *Négropolitains*, p. 183.

<sup>32</sup> Véronique Larose, 'Tony Delsham', (Part 2.1)

The phenomena represented by these various metropolitan ‘types’ have been increasingly documented by researchers in the *métropole*. According to Hélène Migerel and Simonne Henry-Valmore there is little doubt that a belief in magic, whether passive or active, has survived the journey across the Atlantic.<sup>33</sup> There has also been exploration into the specific mental health issues of metropolitan West Indians,<sup>34</sup> and of the psychological, economic and cultural difficulties experienced by people of West Indian origin who make return visits to the *DOM*. Delsham does not shy away from depicting the burdens laid on the migrants and their descendants by their own people. Robert’s critique of the word *négropolitains* is aimed squarely at West Indians on the islands, since it is used by them only to divide and to exclude. Delsham’s world view as expressed in these novels is that the union of metropolitan discrimination and the psychological hangovers of colonialism in Martiniquan life have together produced the toxic brew that damages metropolitan West Indians; these two novels by Delsham are together the perfect example of how, in Madeleine Dobie’s words, ‘Antillean migration is associated with an identity crisis bordering on pathology.’<sup>35</sup> Mental disorder is frequently assigned to female protagonists in West Indian fiction, but in Delsham’s novels it is often male migrants who struggle to achieve a healthy transition to metropolitan life. Instead, he often ‘sets off hyper-contemporary, neurotic male characters against more successfully modernizing women.’<sup>36</sup> In this he is closer to female writers such as Gisèle Pineau and Maryse Condé than to the male *créolistes*, whose lack of focus on such women has stimulated much discussion.<sup>37</sup> Delsham’s

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<sup>33</sup> See Hélène Migerel, *La migration des zombies: survivance de la magie antillaise en France* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1987), and Simonne Henry-Valmore, *Dieux en exil: voyage dans la magie antillaise* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1988).

<sup>34</sup> See Jean Galap, ‘La santé mentale des Antillais de France’ and Michel Giraud, ‘Le malheur d’être partis’, *Esprit*, 332 (February 2007), pp. 54-55.

<sup>35</sup> Madeleine Dobie, ‘Invisible Exodus’, p. 172. This is reminiscent of Glissant’s analysis of migration in *Le Discours antillais*. See Chapter II.2.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Price and Sally Price, ‘Turning coo-coo: Review Articles’, *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, 70: 1/2 (1996), p. 118,

<http://www.kitlv-journals.nl/index.php/nwig/article/viewFile/3439/4200> [accessed 13 June 2011]

<sup>37</sup> Richard Price and Sally Price, ‘Shadowboxing in the Mangrove’, pp. 16-19.

engagement here is obviously more helpful in depicting a migratory environment dominated by women.

Although Delsham sees himself as a chronicler of raw and authentic West Indian complexes it should be apparent that his writing is more than mere reportage. His non-fiction and his interviews suggest that the critiques of West Indian culture enunciated by characters such as Xavier and Robert are not far removed from Delsham's own position, as we shall see. The perception by critics that Delsham's novels offer up '[u]n regard lucide, et lourd d'amertume, face aux revers d'une modernité - essentiellement touristique et d'une départementalisation inadaptées'<sup>38</sup> and that 'Delsham évolue dans le domaine du roman populaire, avec cette volonté de se faire provocateur tout en tenant un propos quelque peu démagogique'<sup>39</sup> recognises an intention to critique the contexts and cultural hinterland in which West Indians operate, be they in the *métropole* or in the islands. This mixture of qualities is integral to Delsham's distinctiveness, and they distinguish Delsham from other Martiniquan writers, in particular those with whom he is most commonly compared - his contemporaries the *créolistes*.

The intersection between Delsham and the *créolité* movement is complex. Both Chamoiseau and Confiant have worked with Delsham in the past; when Delsham launched his comic book in 1972 Chamoiseau was the artistic director,<sup>40</sup> and one of the founding members of *Antilla*, the weekly magazine of which Delsham has been the chief editor since 1988, was Raphaël Confiant. Chamoiseau and Delsham in particular seem to have been fairly close at one stage. Apart from the obvious interchange of ideas that such contact would have allowed, Delsham is commonly understood to occupy a position somewhat ambiguously on the fringes of *créolité*. Jack Corzani describes him as 'proche des auteurs de la Créolité.'<sup>41</sup> Nathalie Schon places him among 'des auteurs

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<sup>38</sup> Véronique Larose, 'Tony Delsham' (Part 2.1)

<sup>39</sup> Estelle Maleski, '*Panique aux Antilles*', p. 216.

<sup>40</sup> Nathalie Schon, 'Stratégies créoles. Etude comparée des littératures martiniquaise et guadeloupéenne', *Glottopol: Revue de sociolinguistique en ligne*, 3 (January 2004), p. 134 (fn. 3)

[http://www.uniroouen.fr/dyalang/glottopol/telecharger/numero\\_3/gp1311schon.pdf](http://www.uniroouen.fr/dyalang/glottopol/telecharger/numero_3/gp1311schon.pdf) [accessed 12 May 2011]

<sup>41</sup> Jack Corzani, 'Antilles-Guyane', *op. cit.*, p. 168.



créolisants,<sup>42</sup> and Priscilla Maunier asserts that *créolité* ‘reflects the world that [writers such as] Pineau, Delsham and Gauvin have experienced and portrayed in their writings.’<sup>43</sup> In addition, Bongie says that *Antilla*, ‘while certainly the slickest of magazines put out in Martinique, has a decided ideological perspective, which it loosely shares with the *créolistes*.’<sup>44</sup> Both Delsham and Patrick Chamoiseau have in their work shared a concern to highlight ‘la misère du petit peuple entraînant un exode inévitable de la jeunesse vers la métropole à l’assaut des piliers de la société métropolitaine’, and to represent the French West Indian people via its popular culture.<sup>45</sup>

Probably because of these shared basic interests, Delsham attempts to be generous in many of the statements he makes on *créolité* and the *créolistes*. He says that ‘[l]a Créolité, nouvelle contribution à notre avancée, mais qui ne saurait exister sans la Négritude, est lecture moderne de la réalité du terrain.’<sup>46</sup> In *Gueule de journaliste* (1998), an essay that outlines his position with considerable frankness, he says ‘[i]l ne fait pas de doute que, l’Antillanité (un temps) suivie de la Créolisation de Edouard Glissant et la Créolité de Patrick Chamoiseau sont bien plus proches de la vérité martiniquaise que ne le fut jamais la Négritude.’<sup>47</sup> He insists that Martiniquan critics are envious of the widespread success of the *créolistes*, especially since these critics, equally exercised by the Martiniquan problem, ‘étaient déjà arrivés aux conclusions énoncées et médiatisées de si tonitruante manière par les circuits occidentaux. Ces premiers-là n’eurent pas le bonheur (ou l’intuition) de chapeauter leurs conclusions ou leurs suggestions par le vocable choc, par le syntagme qui fait mouche.’<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Nathalie Schon, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>43</sup> Priscilla Maunier, ‘Odyssey of a double consciousness: commonalities and disjunctions in contemporary French Caribbean and Réunionese novels’, *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 8: 2 (2005), p. 168.

<sup>44</sup> Chris Bongie, ‘A Street named Bissette: Nostalgia, Memory, and the *Cent-Cinquantenaire* of the Abolition of Slavery in Martinique (1848-1998)’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100: 1 (Winter 2001), p. 246.

<sup>45</sup> Estelle Maleski, ‘*Panique aux Antilles*’, p. 212.

<sup>46</sup> Henri Pied, ‘Interview avec Tony Delsham’, *Ile en île* (17 September 2004)

[http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ile.en.ile/paroles/delsham\\_entretien.html#credits](http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ile.en.ile/paroles/delsham_entretien.html#credits) [accessed 12 May 2011]

<sup>47</sup> Tony Delsham, *Gueule de journaliste* (Schœlcher: Editions M. G. G.), 1998, p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

Delsham's statements of support are tinged with reservations, however. There is an element of faint praise in suggesting that the *créolistes* are playing a role, or that they are particularly attuned to 'les circuits occidentaux', that they are skilled at 'le vocable choc' and 'le syntagme qui fait mouche'. *Créolité* may offer a 'lecture moderne de la réalité du terrain', but is this really sufficient, considering that Delsham considers his own engagement to go far beyond a 'lecture'? Delsham appears to have increasingly distanced himself from the *créolistes*, heightening the intensity of his critique towards the *créolité* movement.<sup>49</sup> Delsham's further statements suggest that the *créolistes*' efforts, though impressive, are ultimately inadequate: '[I]l n'y a pas créolité à la Martinique, il y a phagocytose accélérée, mais bon, la créolité est fille de Césaire'<sup>50</sup> and: '[O]n ne peut rejeter des notions qui affirment la nécessité de s'accepter soi afin d'accepter l'autre. Cela dit, on peut néanmoins demander si dans le Lieu Martinique il n'y a pas créolisation... avortée, tandis que la créolité, telle que définie par Patrick Chamoiseau lui-même, semble s'être sabordée le jour premier de la promulgation de la loi d'Assimilation.'<sup>51</sup>

Now we begin to see how Delsham's stance on *créolité* and on Martiniquan society might tie in with the issue of migration to the *métropole*. From his perspective, delayed creolisation, departmentalisation, and creeping and officialised assimilation are all elements that contribute to the unhealthy state of race relations in Martinique, and are consequently influential in terms of migration. There is a persistent economic discrepancy between the *békés* and black Martiniquans on the island – a discrepancy that now adds the privileged status of white metropolitains to the list. Furthermore, in Delsham's estimation, the increased frequency of intermarriage represents a 'blanchiment de la race noire'<sup>52</sup> rather than a true movement towards *créolité*. The reality in which almost a million French West Indians and Guianese live in the *métropole* whilst more and more white Frenchmen and women live in the French West Indies, is processed as merely

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<sup>49</sup> Jack Corzani, 'Antilles-Guyane', p. 168.

<sup>50</sup> Henri Pied, *op. cit.*

<sup>51</sup> Tony Delsham, *Gueule de journaliste*, p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

the obvious working out of the state of affairs in Martinique: ‘La mosaïque Martinique serait donc en réalité une mosaïque Franco-Martiniquaise dans laquelle Franco opère avec l’efficacité d’un enzyme glouton qui bouffe allègrement l’intériorité au profit de l’extériorité.’<sup>53</sup> The existence of increasing numbers of Martiniquans on metropolitan soil is seen as disadvantageous, an engineered means of nullifying any attempt to create an authentic diversity in Martinique. In his unhappiness with migration Delsham is united with the *créolistes*.

The issue of who speaks to and for whom serves to divide Delsham from the *créolistes*, and introduces the matter of literary strategy. His crusading position should be clear; his goal is to address the people who have been left aside by the intellectual elite and the discourse of the political classes.<sup>54</sup> However, when asked about Patrick Chamoiseau, Delsham’s assessment is that ‘Patrick a sans doute une gestion pratique et réaliste de sa carrière littéraire aussi bien à la Martinique que sur la scène internationale. Cela suppose des stratégies.’<sup>55</sup> In other words, external factors were ultimately more important in Chamoiseau’s journey than his work for his people. However, it is interesting to note that Delsham’s publishing company, Editions M.G.G., was the first to receive the manuscript for Chamoiseau’s debut novel, *Chronique des sept misères* (1986). Although recognising its value, Delsham felt it was not right for his company, and advised him to take it to a publisher in the *métropole*. According to Delsham the manuscript was then ridiculed by the Paris-based Editions Caribbéennes before Gallimard took it up and published it successfully, leading to the brutal claim that ‘[a]yant plu à l’élite intellectuelle française le corollaire immédiat aux Antilles fut l’acceptation servile, le produit étant estampillé par papa blanc.’<sup>56</sup> This highlights the conservatism of metropolitan West Indian thinking, along with the reality that the French West Indian for whom writing is to be a ‘career’ must become a circulatory immigrant almost by default.

The *créolistes*’ strategy, as Delsham sees it, involves an inherent degree of dishonesty. ‘En page 14 de l’*Eloge* n’est-il pas écrit: “La littérature antillaise n’existe pas encore”.

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>54</sup> Estelle Maleski, ‘*Panique aux Antilles*’, p. 217.

<sup>55</sup> Henri Pied, *op. cit.*

<sup>56</sup> Tony Delsham, *Gueule de journaliste*, p. 58.

Peut-être était-il nécessaire de nier l'existant, condition pour mieux affirmer être celui qui propose. Je crois, pour ma part, avoir posé le problème dans mon sixième roman, *Tracée sans Horizon*.<sup>57</sup> The statement that 'West Indian literature does not yet exist', which might be either characterised as an example of intellectual elitism or accepted as a painful but truthful commentary on cultural alienation, is reduced here to an expression of pure pragmatism, a reflection of the *créolistes*' desire to stimulate critical and commercial interest - metropolitan interest - in their writing.<sup>58</sup> By configuring the situation in this way Delsham makes the same criticism of the *créolistes* that they make of others; they are part of the withdrawal of the 'authentic', rather than its saviours. They are the children of departmentalisation and assimilation, projects that saw the disappearance of the few stubborn, isolated pockets of cultural distinctiveness that still existed in the islands. The outcome was the theorisation of the culture of resistance, a transformation which served French West Indian intellectuals well: 'le refus n'était plus dans l'action au quotidien et dans la rue mais dans la poésie et dans les parlottes des salons, créant ces contradictions et ces inévitables paradoxes entre la praxis et le dire.'<sup>59</sup> In essence Delsham sees writers in the French West Indies as essentially collusive creatures - unthreatening to the colonial powers that be, but petted and praised by them as successful examples of the 'œuvre colonisatrice'.<sup>60</sup>

In the novel that Delsham devotes to this question, *Tracée sans Horizon* (1985), his alter-ego, Eric Moreau, a young Martiniquan writer who seeks publication, experiences a range of frustrations and challenges in his quest. Along the way, a former French teacher urges him to stop writing as a 'Frenchman' and begin to write as a West Indian.<sup>61</sup> Glissant, a potential source of inspiration, is criticised as 'une locomotive qui laisserait trop de monde sur le quai.'<sup>62</sup> The problematic of French West Indian literature is laid out: 'Dédain de la masse pour l'écrivain, ou dédain de l'écrivain pour la masse? Là

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<sup>57</sup> Henri Pied, *op. cit.*

<sup>58</sup> As a novelist himself, Delsham may feel personally slighted by such a statement. Confiand is doubtful that Delsham's work should be classed as 'literature': Lucien Taylor, 'Mediating Martinique', p. 327.

<sup>59</sup> Tony Delsham, *Gueule de journaliste*, p. 24.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>61</sup> Tony Delsham, *Tracée sans horizon* (Schœlcher: Editions M. G. G., 1985), p. 23.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

est toute la question, tout le problème, car quoi, cette masse lit bien tout ce qui vient d'autre part!'<sup>63</sup> Here we have a critique of French West Indian writers who, in Eric's opinion, make excuses for their inability to acquire readers at home by erroneously claiming that their countrymen and women do not read.

Eric's relationship with the successful writer Cathérine highlights the physicality of metropolitan shackles. Her international success is mediated via publication and promotion from Paris, and is reliant upon a constant but unhappy shuttling back and forth : 'en France j'ai de plus en plus mal de la Martinique, je suis obligée de rentrer pour assurer la promotion de mon dernier livre, mais dès que possible, je reviendrai.'<sup>64</sup> Her books have nothing to say about Martinique and are largely unread there; they themselves have become 'migrants', born in Martinique, estranged from their surroundings, never to return except to be unread or misunderstood (rather like the characters in *Négropolitains et Euro-blacks*). Eric is clearly Delsham's alter-ego in this novel, representing the author's assessment of Martiniquan literary and cultural production and consumption. The 'élite martiniquaise' are not spared: 'Notre élite intellectuelle secrète des germes autodestructeurs, accouche de critiques improductifs, tueurs de vocation,'<sup>65</sup> and it seems clear that Delsham has the *créolistes* in mind when Eric bemoans 'l'évocation constante de notre passé dans la littérature antillaise, dans le discours antillais.'<sup>66</sup>

While there are examples in this novel of Eric's appreciation of metropolitan France, which he describes as 'pour nous un réceptacle privilégié'<sup>67</sup> and of a 'peuple remarquable par sa civilisation, ses lois, ses idées,'<sup>68</sup> more frequently the *métropole* is seen as a problem in Delsham's writing. However, although the pull of the *métropole* is depicted as ever present, the West Indian diaspora as a settled community there is largely absent from the text. It is in a more recent text, *Paris, il faut que tu saches....* (2007) that Delsham returns to Paris as a site of degeneracy and disappointment, with the suburban

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 209-210.

riots of 2005 and other contemporary events and famous names providing a backdrop to the novel's Parisian setting. From the front and back cover it might be supposed that Thierry, an overeducated and unemployed twenty-six year old black man in Paris, might be a *négropolitain*, but on closer inspection the vista does not appear to be of a typical *banlieue*. Thierry is in fact a West Indian, born to middle class parents in Martinique, who has taken the route of previous generations to pursue his studies in metropolitan France. This book might therefore be framed as a highly contemporary version of the West Indian student novel. Some of the familiar elements are apparent: Thierry begins a passionate relationship with a young white woman, Aline, whose educational level is similar to his own although her family background is somewhat less bourgeois. Like his forebears he is interested in identitarian issues and in black history. Circulation has been a way of life for him since his youth, and the personal and professional dilemma about where to set down roots once his training is over is also present. Yet there are new complexities as well. Aline is Jewish, with an inheritance of oppression that is referred to throughout the text. Delsham clearly sees it as analogous to the experience of West Indians in European history, with Thierry explaining to Aline's brother that: 'Si le holocauste a créé [sic] un type nouveau de Juifs, l'esclavage et la colonisation ont créé [sic] un type nouveau de noirs hors leur matrice d'origine, l'Afrique.'<sup>69</sup> The myth of the *mère-patrie* is irrelevant and there is no simplistic ideological recourse to black pride. Nevertheless, Thierry seems to live in something of a cocoon until he graduates and is shocked to tears to learn from a young West Indian manager at the *ANPE* 'qu'existait un sacré racisme en France, sournois et hypocrite, mais que cela n'expliquait pas tout, que le chômage des jeunes est une plaie.'<sup>70</sup> The text is skillfully designed to allow Delsham to address a number of problems in contemporary 'France'; both Thierry and Aline are victims of youth unemployment in the noughties, which propels their sense of a shared struggle, whilst allowing Delsham to depict this problem as colourblind to some degree. Aline's presence in the text allows Thierry to discuss and evaluate West Indian history and society, whilst more unusually, the offer of employment in Martinique also allows for an exposition of contemporary West Indian problems, and particularly racial neuroses, as Aline falls victim to a traumatic rape. Finally, Thierry's indeterminate racial

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<sup>69</sup> Tony Delsham, *Paris, il faut que tu saches...*, p. 193.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

phenotype often leads to his being mistaken for a *beur* (like Kassem in Maryse Conde's *Les Belles Ténébreuses*) thus allowing him to reflect on the distinct racism faced by people of North African descent. Delsham also includes a troubled *négropolitain* cousin, and a Martiniquan veteran of the Algerian war.

This text would appear to be the most obvious recent example of Delsham's work to attempt to reach out to the metropolitan West Indian experience. It does not appear to have attracted any more critical attention or comment than his earlier novels, so it is perhaps unlikely to herald a significantly greater focus on metropolitan issues. However, more broadly, there are problems in trying to envisage Delsham as a writer who attempts to make common cause with a metropolitan West Indian readership, problems that he largely shares with the *créolistes*. If Delsham's writing is about Martiniquan identity, then this surely makes it difficult for him to focus extensively on the *métropole*.

'Delsham veut offrir à la société martiniquaise un miroir lui renvoyant son reflet; Chamoiseau semble proposer au monde un portrait de cette même société.'<sup>71</sup> What unites both of these aims is Martinique. Larose asserts that 'Tony DELSHAM donne une voix à ces héros et héroïnes de la "Martinique du *dedans*".'<sup>72</sup> Delsham himself insists on his duty to the Martiniquan project: 'L'écrivain Antillais [sic] explique la rue, le journaliste Antillais [sic] provoque la rue.'<sup>73</sup> If this is his focus, how can he offer comparable attention to the metropolitan space?

In 2004 Delsham made it clear where his loyalties lay, so far as the Caribbean region was concerned. West Indians outside the *DOM* are welcome as friends and associates, but they are also, frankly, economic competitors ('le frère cubain est devenu notre concurrent le plus dangereux'), and so consequently, 'comme tout peuple adulte mes frères sont d'abord les Martiniquais. Hors la Martinique, j'ai des amis, des relations, des partenaires, des alliés, des associés.'<sup>74</sup> This fear may limit the extent of Delsham's *créoliste* solidarity with people in the neighbouring islands, but like Confiant, he may also see a clear

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<sup>71</sup> Estelle Maleski, '*Panique aux Antilles*', p. 219.

<sup>72</sup> Véronique Larose, 'Tony Delsham', (Part 3.1). The capitalisation is in the original text.

<sup>73</sup> Tony Delsham, *Gueule de journaliste*, p. 45.

<sup>74</sup> Henri Pied, *op. cit.*

distinction between the French West Indians *au pays* and those who, with their descendants, live in the *métropole*.

However, there may possibly be a West Indian metropolitan readership for Delsham's novels. Creole is sometimes used in Delsham's writing, but it does not overwhelm, and he does not attempt to create a distinctive 'creolised French'. For black metropolitan readers who do not read Creole fluently, and who dislike glossaries, Delsham's writing does not present linguistic challenges. Moreover, according to Richard Price and Sally Price Delsham's 'popular quasi-pulp novels [are] aimed largely at Martiniquan women.'<sup>75</sup> If this is the case, then his work may have particular appeal to many of the *BUMIDOM* generation of migrants to Paris, over half of whom are women. Working-class migrants in the *métropole* may also feel an affiliation with the proletarian characters of Delsham's novels, and the fact that his settings are often contemporary may also partly explain his appeal.<sup>76</sup>

Availability is also a challenge. In Paris Delsham's novels can be found in small bookshops that specialise in black or post-colonial literature and culture; some of these bookshops are aimed at a general West Indian and/or an African readership whilst others are geared more towards an academic clientele. Academic interest in Delsham's work is increasing, and he has appeared in journal articles and in books on French West Indian literature from the mid-noughties onwards. Rarely, however, is he the primary focus of these. When Estelle Maleski points out in an interview with Delsham that his books are not always easy to obtain in the *métropole*<sup>77</sup> he insists on his presence in metropolitan bookstores and his increasing relevance to the French West Indian canon:

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<sup>75</sup> Richard Price and Sally Price, 'Migan: Review Articles', *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, 68:1/2 (1994), p. 131, <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl/index.php/nwig/article/viewFile/3299/4060> [accessed 12 May 2011]

<sup>76</sup> There is a discussion on the French West Indian webforum [www.volcreole.com](http://www.volcreole.com) in which Delsham's more contemporary work is seen as a welcome counter-balance to the historical nature of much French West Indian writing: 'La littérature antillaise: nostalgique?' *Volcréole* (22 January 2004 – 29 December 2004), <http://www.volcreole.com/forum/sujet-8594-60.html> [accessed 12 May 2011]

<sup>77</sup> This is also my experience.



Il existe déjà quatre mémoires sur ma production.... Désormais on peut trouver mes livres dans toutes les Fnac de France et dans les principales villes de France. Cela s'élargit de plus en plus. Autrement dit c'est un choix, le choix d'une stratégie difficile, sans gloire probablement mais qui commence à porter ses fruits.<sup>78</sup>

This response hints at a desire within Delsham to assert his increasing relevance to the global discourse of (Francophone) post-colonial literature and growing interest ('de Bordeaux, ou de Paris, ou du Canada') in his work. It appears he would now like to attract another readership, ('faire des clins d'œil à l'extérieur'<sup>79</sup>), to enter the academic mainstream, alongside the same elite of whom he is nevertheless critical. In *Tracée sans horizon* Eric asserts that 'je recherche, moi, l'adhésion de la masse et le respect de l'extérieur',<sup>80</sup> which suggests a quiet desire to stimulate a response from the *métropole*. However, Eric's claim that '[f]ort de cette conquête [du peuple martiniquais], peut-être vais-je commencer à faire des clins d'œil à l'extérieur. Mais je vous avoue que je vivrais cela comme un échec'<sup>81</sup> seems ambiguous. Is Delsham torn by the possibilities of greater recognition outside the French West Indies? He gives no hint as to what dangers such recognition would mean for his writing, nor which 'outsiders' (other than scholars) he would expect to be engaged by his work. Nevertheless, such an opening might be of significance to (potential) metropolitan West Indian readers.

However, this may be difficult. Bongie sees Delsham's case as a particularly instructive example of how and why postcolonial literary studies overlook the popular in favour of the literary, despite a discourse that apparently prioritises the Other and the marginalised. He says that although the paradigms of the 'authentic' man of the people, or of 'writer as local hero' might comfortably be applied to Delsham by commentators within postcolonial literary studies, they are not enough to overcome the supposedly 'sub-literary' quality of his writing.<sup>82</sup> Delsham's reluctance to present the required political credentials is also a problem for postcolonial literary studies. Bongie claims that

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<sup>78</sup> Estelle Maleski, 'Entretien avec Tony Delsham', p. 241.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>80</sup> Tony Delsham, *Tracée sans horizon*, p. 37.

<sup>81</sup> Estelle Maleski, 'Entretien avec Tony Delsham', p. 242.

<sup>82</sup> Chris Bongie, 'Exiles on Main Stream', (paras 12-14)

Delsham has sought to normalise the relationship between black, mixed-race and white Martiniquans,<sup>83</sup> and using the example of *Dérives* (1999), a novel in which *békés* and black Martiniquans, via an interracial romantic tragedy, join forces and overcome their divisions, says that Delsham ‘runs the risk of being branded both a utopian and a reactionary.’<sup>84</sup> This is unlikely to ruin Delsham’s chances of attracting a popular readership among metropolitan West Indians, even if academic and critical interest remains limited for these reasons. Indeed, it might be argued that by ensuring that his fiction keeps a certain distance from cynicism and radical political perspectives, while also keeping his distance from the literary high brow, Delsham moves closer to a potential West Indian metropolitan readership, and achieves a greater resonance with readers who are non-political but nevertheless hope for greater social harmony in their native islands.

In his preface to *Le Monde caraïbe: Echanges transatlantiques et horizons post-coloniaux*, Christian Lerat describes Delsham’s interview with Estelle Maleski as ‘de l’air frais’. Delsham, he suggests,

se situe dans une entreprise de reconquête de l’image niée et, pour ce faire, entend parler ‘au’ peuple plutôt qu’‘au nom’ du peuple. Offrant ‘un regard de l’intérieur’ il sait aussi poser les bonnes questions. Entre autres: à partir de combien de temps la répétition des gestes empruntés à l’autre cesse-t-elle d’être aliénation pour devenir geste naturel? Représentant d’une génération sans complexe, il prend ses distances par rapport au ‘modèle dominant’ mais il ne souhaite pas oublier que le ‘Blanc’ est aussi l’une des composantes de sa personnalité et se garde de tout ressassement haineux.<sup>85</sup>

Does Delsham speak for a world beyond alienation? *Paris, il faut que tu saches....* would suggest that it is possible for a Martiniquan to live without racial hang-ups, but not without racial and cultural uncertainty. The equivocal and even incoherent perspectives of Martiniquans regarding their history and future, their ‘modèle dominant’, and their *gestes empruntés/naturels* that move between remembering and forgetting are posited by Bongie not as examples of a problematic lack of cultural rootedness, but rather, they

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<sup>83</sup> Chris Bongie, ‘A Street named Bisette’, p. 246.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>85</sup> Christian Lerat, ‘Preface’, in ed. Christian Lerat, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

affirm that ‘the lack of a definitive self-knowledge, for so long lamented by cultural critics like Fanon and Glissant, can now be reconfigured as itself a potentially productive form of knowledge, and that the lack of one path into the future (or back into the past) may itself open up the possibility that there are many such paths.’<sup>86</sup>

If this multiplicity of paths represents the present and the future of Martinique, how much more must this be true of French West Indians in the *métropole*, for whom physical distance and pluralistic surroundings present an even greater impulse to both forget and to remember, for whom metropolitan and global realities crowd in and present an ever more urgent challenge to identity, no less pressing than those faced by Martiniquans ‘at home’? Delsham, while retaining a strong sense of place and a commitment to the contemporary transformations that have marked his island, has ploughed his own furrow in the face of unpropitious cultural expectations, and has also reflected something vital of the migrant experience, whether in the form, the content or the spirited assertion of independence that is reflected in his work.

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<sup>86</sup> Chris Bongie, ‘A Street named Bissette’, pp. 250-251.

### Chapter IV.3 Gisèle Pineau: Exile and Survival

Gisèle Pineau (b. 1956), a Paris-born writer of Guadeloupean parentage, is the one *négropolitain(e)* writer who has achieved ongoing critical and commercial success. Her novels, short stories and books for young people are widely available in the *métropole* via mainstream publishers, and have attracted literary prizes from the outset of her career. She has obtained an uncontested place within the ranks of respected French West Indian writers.<sup>1</sup> As well as attracting interest in the *métropole* she also appears to have successfully attracted a popular French West Indian readership, which distinguishes her from the other French West Indian writing elites.<sup>2</sup>

Pineau's acceptance in the literary arena contrasts with the sense of displacement that is a persistent theme in all of her texts, especially those that deal with migration, exile and most strikingly, circular migration. Her interviewers routinely mention the highly autobiographical nature of her novel *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996) in which she describes the constant movement of her childhood: 'Amarrages et démarrages. Allées et virées. Départs flamboyants vers le Pays-France. Retours jamais définitifs en cette colonie de vacances.'<sup>3</sup> This trajectory has marked her whole life. The major migrations in her youth were in 1961 when her family returned to Paris from Guadeloupe with her paternal grandmother in tow, then in 1972 following two years' residence in Martinique, when her parents took the family back to Guadeloupe, and then in 1975 when Pineau went back to metropolitan France for several years to attend university.<sup>4</sup> In 1980 she returned to Guadeloupe where she worked as a psychiatric nurse<sup>5</sup> and by 2002 she was again living

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<sup>1</sup> Lucía M. Suárez, 'Gisèle Pineau: Writing the Dimensions of Migration', *World Literature Today*, 75: 3/4 (Summer-Autumn 2001), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> She has spoken of West Indian men buying her books as gifts for their mothers. See Biringanine Ndagano, *op. cit.*, p. 159. I have not found any similar comments made by Maryse Condé, Edouard Glissant or the *créolistes*.

<sup>3</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, ([1996] Paris, Editions Stock, 2000), p. 28. Almost all of her interviewers mentioned here attest to the autobiographical quality of this novel.

<sup>4</sup> Biringanine Ndagano, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-146.

<sup>5</sup> See the biographical details inside Gisèle Pineau, *L'Âme prêtée aux oiseaux* ([1998] Paris: Editions Stock, 2001).

in the *métropole*.<sup>6</sup> Although as a child her early movement between the West Indies and mainland France confused her sense of belonging, Lucía M. Suárez finds Pineau to be a woman at ease with her inherited duality: ‘Pineau stated that she does not feel caught between two worlds, but rather that she belongs to both France and Guadeloupe. Her writing advocates an individuality enriched by two communities, structured by multiple, cultural inheritances where the beauty and the challenge lie in mixing language, styles, rhythm, colors, and beliefs.’<sup>7</sup> However, her work and comments suggest an ambiguous, evolving relationship with the metropolitan environment. There are signs that her metropolitan works, while certainly critical of Guadeloupean society, maintain more constant misgivings towards the *métropole*.

As a *négropolitain*, Pineau is inevitably positioned as an anomaly within the discourse of French West Indian writing, and she sees herself as something of a pioneer.<sup>8</sup> Yet ‘her early experience of France, that of a black child in a racially hostile environment, did not lead her to the adoption of a metropolitan French cultural outlook.’<sup>9</sup> Pineau’s early unhappiness in metropolitan France and her distance from the West Indies was eventually to lead to her adoption of a creole consciousness that has led to her literary inclusion among the French West Indian literary *créolistes*. This consciousness was sparked, as Pineau has repeatedly stated, by the presence of her grandmother, Man Ya (Julia), in the family’s flat in Paris for seven years, but also, as I shall suggest, to the unconscious example of her own parents. Without their decision to settle in the *métropole* she would not have become one of the few writers of West Indian origin in a position to urge others to cease writing novels of exile and uprooting, to focus instead on accounts of life in the *banlieues*.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Nadège Veldwachter, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>7</sup> Lucía M. Suárez, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter III.3.

<sup>9</sup> Beverley Ormerod, ‘Displacement and Self-Disclosure in Some Works by Gisèle Pineau’, in *Ici-Là: Place and Displacement in Caribbean Writing in French*, ed. by Mary Gallagher (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003), p. 211.

<sup>10</sup> Biringanine Ndagano, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

In Pineau's youth, the term *négropolitain* served to divide her from her peers in the West Indies: '[Q]uand je suis arrivée en Martinique, on m'appelée négropolitaine. Alors, je me suis toujours sentie écartelée.'<sup>11</sup> Or: [J]'en ai vraiment voulu à mes parents d'avoir fait de moi une "Négropolitaine", pas acceptée en tout cas par les Français, pas acceptée par les Guadeloupéens...'<sup>12</sup> She has referred to feeling 'exiled by inheritance.'<sup>13</sup> In this painful context, in which recuperating a creole identity has been a key goal, it is unsurprising that until the late 1990s much of her writing was focused chiefly on Guadeloupe rather than the *métropole*, and perhaps this is partly why some critics have found it difficult to deal with Pineau as a metropolitan writer. Pascale de Souza includes Pineau in a 'long list of female writers from Guadeloupe',<sup>14</sup> making no reference to Pineau's childhood in metropolitan France, nor including any discussion of the place of the *métropole*, if it has a place, in any of the 'versions' of *créolité* she looks at. In *Notre Librairie* Véronique Bonnet even suggests that Pineau's early childhood in Paris is somehow a problem:

[C]ontrairement à nombre de ses confrères, la jeune femme n'a pas connu une enfance créole, gage d'une certaine légitimité dans le champ franco-antillais. C'est le gris de la Cité, l'hostilité de la banlieue parisienne qui formèrent le cadre de son enfance.<sup>15</sup>

In the same edition of the journal, however, Geneviève Belugue's interview with Pineau does not attempt to explore the metropolitan context of Pineau's work. Belugue's questions prioritise *créoliste* connections, and the importance of recuperating memory.<sup>16</sup> Yet Pineau herself has said: 'Tous les autres écrivains antillais sont nés aux Antilles, y ont vécu leur enfance, sont partis faire les études et sont revenues. Par conséquent, ils

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>12</sup> Christiane Makward, 'Entretien avec Gisèle Pineau', *The French Review*, 76: 6 (May 2003), p. 1212.

<sup>13</sup> Nadège Veldwachter, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

<sup>14</sup> Pascale de Souza, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>15</sup> Véronique Bonnet, 'Gisèle Pineau: l'âme prêtée à l'écriture', *Notre librairie*, 138/139 (September 1999-2000), p. 91.

<sup>16</sup> Geneviève Belugue, 'Entre ombre et lumière, l'écriture engagée de Gisèle Pineau', *Notre librairie*, 138/139 (September 1999 – March 2000).

n'ont pas la même expérience.'<sup>17</sup> While Pineau admits certain affinities with the *créolistes*, she is clear that *créolité* does not necessarily serve her needs: 'Je n'aime pas les étiquettes. Je suis un écrivain de la même génération qu'eux, peut-être un peu plus jeune. Longtemps, j'ai écrit comme eux, en même temps qu'eux. Certains de mes livres ont paru en même temps que les leurs.'<sup>18</sup> The implication is that she no longer sees herself in quite the same terms now. Bonnet too claims that Pineau's work should not be limited by the *créolité* label since her writing has come to represent 'la redéfinition d'une écriture qui ne répond pas aux seules prescriptions des discours idéologiques majoritaires dans le champ littéraire franco-antillais.'<sup>19</sup> Pineau may now be aware of and sensitive towards the criticism of someone like Jack Corzani, who places her amongst writers on the margins of the *créolité* movement whom he describes as 'à la fois séduits par les procédés formels mis en oeuvre par Chamoiseau et Confiant et peut-être tentés par un succès facile auprès d'un public européen déjà conditionné.'<sup>20</sup> Pineau has admitted that their success with metropolitan publishers and readers opened doors for her.<sup>21</sup> In light of this, it was an astute strategy for her in the 1990s to develop a more distinct voice while carefully retaining and developing those aspects that have added to their – and her – appeal. Her stories and novels began to move away from purely Guadeloupean settings. She has written novels such as *Un Papillon dans la cité* (1992), *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996), *L'Âme prêtée aux oiseaux* (1998), *Caraïbes sur Seine* (1999), *Chair Piment* (2002) and *Fleur de Barbarie* (2005) in which she has valorised the *négropolitain* part of her identity while retaining a close focus on the creole elements that her readership no doubt expects. Through these texts I shall explore Pineau's ambiguous relationship with the *métropole* by looking at how she envisions family relationships and hybridity in the metropolitan context, and by considering what the future might hold for her writing.

*Un Papillon dans la cité*, one of Pineau's short novels for young people, prefigures many of the elements that appear in her adult metropolitan writings, uniting some traditional

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<sup>17</sup> Birminghamine Ndagno, *op cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>19</sup> Véronique Bonnet, 'Gisèle Pineau', p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> Jack Corzani, 'Antilles-Guyane', p. 164.

<sup>21</sup> Nadège Veldwachter, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

*créoliste* themes with a more contemporary depiction of the Parisian suburbs; unsurprisingly, it is studied by American university students for whom it offers a window onto both Guadeloupean and Parisian life.<sup>22</sup> The schoolgirl Félicie leaves Guadeloupe, where she has lived contentedly since infancy. Suddenly her mother, who has previously neglected all contact, sends for Félicie to join her in a Parisian suburb. Upon her departure her disorientation and voyage of discovery begin, with a new family, a new environment and a new best friend at school, Mo, a disaffected boy of Algerian origin to deal with. Félicie dreams of seeing Man Ya again and eventually goes on a class trip to Guadeloupe, where both she and Mo are re-energised and given a new sense of the possible.

Immediately we see the connections between this text and other novels of migration. Pineau uses the trope of the cold weather and relates it to the lack of human warmth, with Félicie noting that: '[L]e froid est tombé sur moi avec la même férocité qu'un cyclone jaloux de la quiétude d'une petite île des Caraïbes. Autour de moi, les gens se pressaient, un masque de clown triste jeté sur le figure.'<sup>23</sup> Loneliness and homesickness appear: 'Je songe à tous mes amis que j'ai laissés là-bas. Et mon cœur se serre.'<sup>24</sup> Christmas is a difficult time of unfamiliar food, enforced gaiety combined with awkwardness, and again memories of Félicie's 'real' home, and festivities with Man Ya: '[N]ous avons passé tant de Noël ensemble, sans dinde, sans huîtres, sans chocolat... mais quels Noël! Sans neige, sans sapin décoré, sans boules scintillantes... mais on n'était jamais restées, assises raides, les cuisses serrées, dans un seul salon avec le seul silence invité à la fête.'<sup>25</sup> In a striking juxtaposition of images Félicie, who feels obliged to tell her mother that she prefers Christmas in 'France' to Guadeloupe, looks out of her window at distant housing estates like hers where 'les petites lumières de la fête de Noël brillèrent dans le noir. Ça m'a rappelé la Toussaint à Haute-Terre et son cimetière illuminé de milliers de bougies allumées sur les tombes.'<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>23</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *Un Papillon dans la cité* (Paris: Editions Sépia, 1992), p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.



Pineau's work provides a good example of the prominence of dysfunctional mother/daughter relationships in West Indian women's fiction. The nurturing role is more usually reserved for the grandmother figure: '[O]n sait qu'aux Antilles cette dernière joue traditionnellement un rôle nourricier et éducatif essentiel. La jeune Félicie d'*Un Papillon dans la cité* souffre d'être séparée de la sienne; rien, en France, ne remplace la force d'amour qui existe entre elle et sa grand-mère.'<sup>27</sup> However, despite the importance of (and the scholarly interest in) grandmother figures, from the perspective of this thesis, Pineau's mothers are especially relevant; it is they who pave the way to the *métropole*, and they who undergo the psychological and physical stresses of trying to create a new identity in Paris. To Aurélie, Félicie's mother, what matters is to do everything the 'French' way: 'Maman m'a dit que les filles de France adorent les poupées Barbie, c'est le cadeau par excellence' despite her daughter's lack of interest in dolls.<sup>28</sup> Her interior life is not explored in depth, but to her daughter and husband she is a complicated, unstable character:

Mama n'est pas une personne carrée, comme Man Ya, qui sait différencier le blanc du noir et le jour de la nuit. Parfois, elle [...] me serre contre elle à m'étouffer et me couvre de baisers. Des fois, je la sens plus nerveuse qu'un crabe pris au piège dans une barrique. Je ne l'entends jamais arriver, mais dès que je lève la tête, je rencontre ses yeux froids braqués sur moi. Je ne m'inquiète pas trop parce qu'elle fait pareil avec papa Jo.<sup>29</sup>

There is something distinctly Fanonian in Pineau's portrayal of Aurélie's troubled mental state that compels her to prove her Frenchness. Through her daughter's eyes we see a stressed woman who with regret leaves her young baby with a slovenly child minder every day to rush to a job of which she seems ashamed. Her husband's work as a mechanic seems precarious; yet as a survival strategy she must convince herself and those around her that she is happy in the *métropole* and is a fully assimilated citizen.

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<sup>27</sup> Françoise Mugnier, 'La France dans l'œuvre de Gisèle Pineau', *Etudes Francophones*, 15: 1 (Spring 2000), p. 68.

<sup>28</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *Un Papillon dans la cité*, p. 93.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

Some of these characteristics are apparent in the novel that up to this point has been taken as Gisèle Pineau's principal immigrant/second generation narrative, the autobiographical *L'Exil selon Julia*, her first full length novel for adults to focus extensively on the experiences of a Guadeloupean family in metropolitan France.<sup>30</sup> Critics who seek to chart familial immigration to France, the effect of racism particularly on children and the metropolitan presence of the grandmother figure, Julia/Man Ya in the transmission of cultural capital, and the formation of identity have explored this text in great detail. However, few have remarked on the relevance of Julia's freshness to the metropolitan experience, although this makes her ideally suited to perform her role as a reliable representative of creole culture. As an embodiment of creole values it is inevitable in this literature that she will be unhappy in Paris: 'la France, pour Julia, c'est avant tout Tribulations et Emmerdations Associées.'<sup>31</sup> However, despite Julia's distress in Paris there is a sense that of the whole family she is the least damaged by exile and displacement (and this is no doubt connected to her specific role in the narrative). Beverley Ormerod remarks that she is an unchanging character, who when spring comes takes heart, devotes herself to the garden, and is sustained by her commitment to Catholicism, herbal medicine, her memories and her grandchildren's needs. In other words, 'there is no element of self-discovery in Julia's Parisian experience: but there is self-disclosure, a constant, unselfconscious revealing of self, which is to become the culturally determining factor in the life of her grand-daughter Gisèle.'<sup>32</sup> When she returns to Guadeloupe and resumes her rural life, she stands up to her violent husband, yet the text is ambivalent about the origins of this new sense of self-confidence: 'Man Ya l'avait avisé qu'elle était revenue femme-folle, et de plus la toucher. S'il se risquait à quelque outrage, elle ne répondait pas de ce qui adviendrait.'<sup>33</sup> While there is the implication, rare in this literature, that the returnee has been transformed for the better, the reference to madness hints at a less than affirming assessment of her metropolitan experience. Her seven-year stay in the *métropole* has benefitted her grandchildren rather

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<sup>30</sup> I shall refer to Pineau's personification in this text as Gisèle to distinguish the character from the writer, who will be referred to as Pineau.

<sup>31</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, p. 55.

<sup>32</sup> Beverley Ormerod, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>33</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, p. 215.

than herself; it has been long enough to begin the process of their creolisation ('J'ai marqué le chemin'<sup>34</sup>), but not so long that she risks absorbing the culturally and spiritually corrosive influence of the *métropole* upon her creole identity.

Hybridity is less of a priority in this text than in *Un Papillon dans la cité*, where the potential for an honest interracial friendship is raised. Here, all the metropolitan West Indian characters other than Julia are diminished as almost entirely tragic and alienated, or both. Julia's interest in her surroundings is presented as heartfelt and personal, whereas the incursions of globalisation and the indigenous community into the lives of other family members are seen as negative or superficial. Gisèle's older stepbrother Paul, who embarks on a series of racialised relationships with young white girls, is seen as a teenager in flight from his heritage, without recourse to the authenticities presented by Julia. When the family finally returns to Guadeloupe during the swinging sixties he remains in Paris: 'Il est trop grand. Il a grandi ici. Il ne rêve plus des Antilles.'<sup>35</sup> Henceforth he disappears from the text, and the one character who might reveal hybridity in formation is left undeveloped.

Gisèle's parents are undoubtedly inauthentic in a postcolonial sense; her father, a military man, Maréchal, by definition a stalwart defender of the Republic, is described by Ormerod as 'a black warrant-officer in the French army, one of a circle of expatriates that have built their careers on the acceptance of exile; Guadeloupe for them has become a sort of holiday station.'<sup>36</sup> De Gaulle symbolised the success of these men, so their loyalty to him was to be expected: 'Il est là au commencement de la vie militaire de papa. Il est celui qui donne l'honneur et les félicitations, les grades et les médailles de guerre. Si papa n'était pas entré en dissidence pour le rejoindre, où serions nous à l'heure qu'il est?'<sup>37</sup> It is thanks to de Gaulle that Maréchal becomes a man of status, a desirable marriage partner for Daisy (a class-conscious 'mulatress'), can distance his family from poverty, and can offer them a life in the *métropole*.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>36</sup> Beverley Ormerod, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

<sup>37</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, p. 161.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

However, despite the urgency with which the children's parents urge them to assimilate and forget Guadeloupe, their visits to this 'holiday station' (impossible for less fortunate families in the 1960s) keep the ties alive. These regular return visits demonstrate their attachment to, rather than their alienation from, the island. Daisy may be unwilling to talk to her children about the past, but does not apparently discourage Julia from doing so. Maréchal does not worry about the impact of his mother's Creole on his children's French. As for Guadeloupe,

[i]ls en énuméraient les laideurs comme pour se rassurer, nous convaincre aussi. Mais parfois, songeant à l'île, des reflets merveilleux scintillaient dans leurs yeux. Tous les atouts de France: beauté, liberté, facilité, chemins de réussite, ne dessouchaient pas l'amour de leur Guadeloupe. [...L]es grandes personnes balançaient sans cesse entre ivresse qui éclôt de chaque retour et la renaissance qui doit accompagner L'Exil. Ils parlaient du Pays avec amour, nostalgie et dépit... Ils l'aimaient, oui, mais d'une manière équivoque, comme un amour de jeunesse qu'on n'arrive pas à oublier même s'il n'a pas donné de fruits.<sup>39</sup>

Gisèle's parents are therefore heavily responsible for her creolisation. Pineau has dismissed the role of her own nuclear family in this process,<sup>40</sup> but in *L'Exil selon Julia* the parents' ambiguity has surely paved the way for Julia by whetting their children's curiosity. Finally, Maréchal's decision to return to the West Indies, apparently not for economic or 'lifestyle' reasons, but simply because de Gaulle has lost a democratically sound referendum suggests a tenuous, provisional attachment to metropolitan France.<sup>41</sup>

*Caribbes sur Seine* (1999), another short novel for young people, should be viewed as straddling both *Un Papillon dans la cité* and *L'Exil selon Julia* in its autobiographical focus on the problems of a young girl of West Indian parentage in the Parisian suburbs. In this case, the protagonist, Lindy, is a migrant like Félicie. However, because she arrives in Paris as a teenager and the setting is contemporary, Pineau is able to deal with themes that might more obviously be expected of *négroplittain* fiction, and to explore the changes in French suburban culture more freely than in her stories about younger girls, or

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>40</sup> Biringanine Ndagano, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>41</sup> Lucía M. Suárez, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

in her later novels that focus on adult migrants. Lindy is not expected to grapple with *assimilation* or *antillanité*, but automatically receives *une identité black*,<sup>42</sup> and is welcomed into this new fraternity by an African boy, Hamidou.<sup>43</sup> Traditionally, West Indians in the *métropole* have been unhappy to be mistaken for (black) Africans since this error serves to undermine their assimilationist claims upon a historical ‘Frenchness’.<sup>44</sup> However, the rapprochement of African and West Indian young people, represented here by Lindy and Hamidou, challenges metropolitan society, since it rejects traditional ethnic divisions, creating instead a ‘remue-ménage [...] qui menace la société de mouvement d’hybridisation.’<sup>45</sup> This hybridisation is further emphasised when Lindy and her multicultural group of friends make the unsettling subject matter of French rap their own (‘Violence dans les cités, injustices, guerre, pollution, drogue, racisme. Nous étions en quelque sorte de grands dénonciateurs. Nos chansons racontaient le monde tel que nous le voyions du haut de nos treize ans.’<sup>46</sup>) In so doing they represent a more self-assured, assertive experience of the *métropole* than the more cosseted heroine of *L’Exil selon Julia* does almost 40 years earlier.

However, this swaggering sense of ownership is challenged by the extreme brevity of Lindy’s ‘migration’, which lasts only a year. Lindy’s father quickly decides that he hates his new job with the *PTT*, and he returns to Guadeloupe only a few months later, to be followed by the rest of the family. That a French West Indian in the *métropole* in the 1990s would jettison a secure job so quickly in a declining job market seems unlikely, yet attempts to return among people of working age were becoming more frequent at this time.<sup>47</sup> In literary terms, this brief experience of migration means that Pineau needs to collapse the recognisable elements of French West Indian literature of migration into a very short time frame, which undermines the drama of the *mythe du départ* that Pineau wishes to build around the family’s initial departure, with her references to ‘le cœur serré,

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<sup>42</sup> See Chapter III.3.

<sup>43</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *Caribbes sur Seine* (Paris: Editions Dapper, 1999), pp. 151-152.

<sup>44</sup> David Beriss, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>45</sup> François Durpaire, *France blanche, colère noire*, p. 136.

<sup>46</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *Caribbes sur Seine*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>47</sup> Claude-Valentin Marie, ‘Les Antillais en France’, pp. 30-31.

des larmes aux coins des yeux, la goutte au nez. [...] Et les au revoir que j'avais dû répéter comme une petite chanson à mes amis, mes cousins, et cousines, mes oncles et tantes, mes grands-parents du côté maternel résonnaient à mes oreilles pareils à des adieux sans retour.<sup>48</sup> The sense of confusion experienced on the family's arrival also seems exaggerated when we understand the ease with which return migration is possible.

Although this provisionality undermines the possessive sense of the 'hood' it also becomes apparent that these new multicultural 'hybrid communities' do not face in two directions only, as implied by H. Adlai Murdoch;<sup>49</sup> Lindy's Corsican friend Carola raps in a blend of French and English, and America frequently appears as an alternative pole of influence to challenge metropolitan France and Guadeloupe. The two girls find American penfriends, practise their English, and dream of travelling in what could be one of the earliest examples of the English language becoming a cultural presence within the French West Indian literature of migration. Yet ironically, the ease with which Lindy can travel between the *métropole* and Guadeloupe may undermine her newfound allegiance to the Americanised metropolitan suburban culture that she has swiftly grown used to, replacing it with a freewheeling love of travel that leaves the metropolitan experience underexplored. She tells her mother: 'C'est pas que j'aime pas la France. J'ai de bons amis ici... Mais c'est pas pareil... Je préfère habiter en Guadeloupe. J'aime bien voyager. Quand je serai hôtesse de l'air je reviendrai de temps en temps voir mes amis...'<sup>50</sup> This illuminates Pineau's own evolving relationship with place and with *créolité*, in her writing: '[T]he creator is above all free. And even though I am Antillean, nobody locks me up, I want to be free to write, to describe characters that have the right to be in Paris, London, New York, even if Guadeloupe is always present in the novels.'<sup>51</sup>

This relativisation of the metropolitan space within the *métropole* itself continues in *L'Âme prêtée aux oiseaux* (1998), in which Anglophone North American connections are integral to the story. Nevertheless, Guadeloupe still provides strong *créoliste* meat,

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<sup>48</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *Caraiïbes sur Seine*, p. 16.

<sup>49</sup> H. Adlai Murdoch, 'Negotiating the Metropole', p. 131.

<sup>50</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *Caraiïbes sur Seine*, p. 74.

<sup>51</sup> Nadège Veldwachter, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

which indicates what is important to Pineau's adult metropolitan readership. The migrant protagonist in *L'Âme prêtée aux oiseaux*, Sybille, is the child of a tragic family, with mental illness, adultery and the powers of witchcraft – typical *créoliste* themes – serving to poison her youth, until she escapes to the *métropole*. Meanwhile, although the grandmother role is taken by a Lila, a white, rather than a black woman, she does not represent a European version of wisdom or cultural authenticity. Lila has no family, and her rural childhood is dismissed in barely a paragraph, whereas Sybille is troubled by a tangle of relatives, ancestors and friends in the West Indian sections of the novel. This reflects a much more fragile social connectedness in metropolitan France than in Guadeloupe, making Lila the much more tragic figure.

In addition, Lila's love affair with an Anglophone West Indian soldier, Henry, after the liberation of Paris, is depicted in highly sexualised and racialised terms: '[O]n n'a pas tardé à tomber dans les bras des Nègres. C'était excitant, tu peux pas te rendre compte. On sentait leurs cuisses plus dures que la pierre sous nos fesses. Y avait pas de comparaison avec les Blancs qu'on avait fréquentés.'<sup>52</sup> Her attitudes recall the experience of Fanon, himself a soldier in France at this time, and his critique of the equivalence of blackness to both sex and violence within the white psyche.<sup>53</sup> Psychological displacement and a degree of racial guilt drive Lila's attachment to Sybille and her young son Marcello in the 1980s and early 90s, but her issues with race make her an ambiguous anchor for the bi-racial relationships in this novel, not least because neither Henry, Sybille nor Marcello reciprocate with equivalent racial issues. In fact, Henry does not raise the equivalent Fanonian complexes about the black male, and seeks a French wife probably due to the influence of African American ideas that mainland France is largely free of racial prejudice.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *L'Âme prêtée aux oiseaux* (Paris: Editions Stock, 1998), p. 117.

<sup>53</sup> Frantz Fanon, *PNMB*, p. 134.

<sup>54</sup> Lydia Linsey and Carlton E. Wilson, 'Spurring a Dialogue to Place the African European Experience Within the Context of an Afrocentric Philosophy' in *A Turbulent Voyage: Readings in African American Studies*, ed. by Floyd W. Hayes ([1992, 1997] Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), pp. 131-143.

Marcello, born in Paris in 1976, ‘the nexus for the novel’s principal motifs: the loss of a parent, the deprivation of cultural identity, and the danger of excessive love’<sup>55</sup> further undermines any sense of authentic engagement with metropolitan life. He is not seen in dialogue with the metropolitan cultural environment, except insofar as it can direct him towards one goal: the recuperation of his lost Guadeloupean self. The black friends he recruits for this purpose are dismissed in the text as inadequate, inauthentic representatives of creole culture, ‘[m]auvaises fréquentations, fumeurs d’herbe, joueurs de tambour aux yeux jaunes et fuyants, demi-rastas à bonnets bariolés, l’air sournois de voleurs aux aguets, qui jargonnaient un créole farci de mots anglais.’<sup>56</sup> It is only when Marcello discovers that his father is alive, leaves for Guadeloupe and is integrated into his new stepfamily that he can be peacefully reborn into a newfound, acceptably creolised identity as a Guadeloupean.

Spiritual healing can only occur in the West Indies (or, for Sybille, among a West Indian family in the USA); this discourse runs deep in Pineau’s metropolitan writings, and the sense that *L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux* ‘is set within the framework of geographical displacement’<sup>57</sup> also applies to *Chair Piment* (2002), where Guadeloupe as the site of initial pain and ultimate redemption is maintained, and the Guadeloupe/*métropole* binary restored. However, *Chair Piment* goes further by setting forth the consequences that arise when West Indians in the *métropole* are unable or unwilling find redemption. The main character, Mina, lifts a longstanding family curse by returning to Piment in Guadeloupe for this purpose, but the other Guadeloupean migrants in the novel suffer because they do not make similar efforts to resolve their own long-distance family crises. Olga, Mina’s ambitious half-sister, departs for metropolitan France with her new husband in 1969, and deals with the family curse by cutting Guadeloupe out of her life; the outcome is infertility, emotional isolation and marital breakdown. Lysia, Mina’s best friend and a post-BUMIDOM migrant, makes yearly visits to Guadeloupe thanks to her frugal lifestyle and state-funded flights.<sup>58</sup> However, these trips are the unsatisfactory

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<sup>55</sup> Beverley Ormerod, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>56</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux*, p. 107.

<sup>57</sup> Beverley Ormerod, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>58</sup> Marc Tardieu, *op. cit.*, p. 156.



reflexes of habit; her conflicted feelings towards her Guadeloupean family and their lack of respect for her have created an unhealthy relationship between them: '[E]lle s'encombrait de cadeaux, à cause de la pitié qu'elle éprouvait, mais aussi pour montrer sa réussite en Métropole, Métropolitain, disaient les soeurs, prouver [sic] qu'elle avait su faire le bon choix en décidant de ne pas croupir en Guadeloupe.'<sup>59</sup> Lysia is trapped by a need for a Guadeloupean identity alongside the need to convince herself that leaving Paris has been worthwhile, and reminds us of Alain Anselin's statement that '[t]out rappelle le pays à l'émigré, rien ne paraît rappeler l'émigré au pays.'<sup>60</sup>

The one West Indian migrant in the text who does not need to return to Guadeloupe to find healing is the least assimilated and the most marginalised. Bénédicte is not traumatised by family crises, but is an elderly patient in a psychiatric hospital. She is strengthened by her religious faith, a belief in evil spirits and her gifts of prophecy ('elle faisait elle-même son diagnostic: possession. Mais il n'y avait plus rien à entreprendre, l'affaire était trop ancienne, les démons trop enracinées'<sup>61</sup>). However, she does not suffer the debilitating estrangement experienced by other West Indians in Pineau's metropolitan writing. Despite the fact that Bénédicte is the only West Indian who is formally diagnosed with mental health problems, and therefore the least assimilated, her creole rootedness saves her.<sup>62</sup> Although not a grandmother, she takes on the creole/*créoliste* grandmotherly role by nurturing and advising a younger person, and by remaining uncorrupted by metropolitan life.

The last novel to be considered here, *Fleur de Barbarie* (2005), is characterised by the similarly ambiguous benefits of circulatory migration and awkward mother/daughter relationships, but the tantalising possibilities of a genuine and contemporary hybridity are the most interesting facets of this novel. Josette, born in Guadeloupe in 1975 and

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<sup>59</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *Chair Piment* (Paris: Editions Mercure de France, 2002), p. 116.

<sup>60</sup> Alain Anselin, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>61</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *Chair Piment*, p. 102.

<sup>62</sup> The text avoids suggesting that Bénédicte's mental state has somehow been aggravated by metropolitan life, although her presence in the metropolitan mental care system raises questions about how, in a heterogeneous society, patient and practitioner can communicate effectively when they do not share a framework of reference for mental health. See J. Galap, 'La santé mentale des Antillais de France', p. 59.

taken to the *métropole* soon afterwards, is placed with a white French foster mother, Tata Michelle, for several years, at the age of four. The mutual warmth in this relationship initially inspires expectations that the text will reflect an environment where there is a true sense of equality between characters of different backgrounds and ethnicities. However, we soon see that this depth serves the purpose of reversing traditional paradigms of white power and superiority. Through Josette's flashbacks we witness the lack of sophistication of Tata Michelle and her family in rural Sarthe: Pépé Marcel talks to his favourite horse, and Mémé Georgette mangles words and phrases that are 'trop savants pour sa bouche.'<sup>63</sup> Pineau contrasts these humble European countrydwellers with Josette's grandmother Théodora, a careful speaker for whom every word is 'choisi avec délicatesse, saisi comme un bibelot de porcelaine rare sur une étagère, dépoussiéré et caressé avant que d'être énoncé'<sup>64</sup> and Margareth Solin, a world-famous black writer who becomes Josette's sponsor and mentor, and the result is a text that emphasises difference and mutual incomprehensibility over equality and shared understanding. The *métropole* is marginalised; indeed, Guadeloupe itself is marginalised by the cultural dominance given to the island of Marie-Galante in the text:

Paris et la Guadeloupe 'continentale' sont détronées de leur rôle principal par la campagne sarthoise et par Marie-Galante. Ce choix permet d'appliquer les caractéristiques traditionnellement associées aux DOMs – marginalisation, isolement, insularité, dépendance, divergence culturelle et linguistique – à la campagne profonde française et géographiquement européenne.<sup>65</sup>

In *Fleur de barbarie* Pineau's approach to *Tout-monde* is 'fondée sur la mise en relation de réseaux internationaux construit autour d'événement mineurs, qui défie le modèle de centre/périphérie.'<sup>66</sup> We therefore see Tata Michelle's obsession with Josephine Baker, references to international figures and events, Margareth Solin's international interviews, conferences and charitable work in Senegal, as well as Josette's own entrance onto the world stage as a writer. All this might be seen as an assertive representation of

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<sup>63</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *Fleur de Barbarie* (Paris: Editions Mercure de France, 2005), p. 120.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>65</sup> Valérie Loichot, 'Eloge de la barbarie selon Gisèle Pineau', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 11: 1/2 (2008), p. 138.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

globalisation in Pineau's work, but it leapfrogs a potential West Indian/metropolitan *métissage* by prioritising the world stage.

This manner of displacement suggests that Pineau may now have a desire to reaffirm her place among prominent French West Indian writers. So, alongside Pineau's connections with the *créolistes* and her Glissantian awareness of *Tout-monde* Loichot also sees hints of Maryse Condé in the Margareth Solin character.<sup>67</sup> Certainly, as writers and intellectuals Margareth and Josette are a departure from Pineau's usual female protagonists, although they do recall Condé's highly educated yet unsettled, cynical nomads who pass through Parisian and American universities and accumulate a multicultural array of experiences.<sup>68</sup> In contrast, the descent of Josette's birth mother into prostitution in Paris is only hinted at, and the dreariness of her subsequent marriage and family life is in contrast to Josette's more glamorously turbulent existence. Josette's half-brothers are briefly sketched as contemporary *négropolitain* 'types', and their common Anglophone names appear to have been chosen to reflect their ordinariness, in contrast to the distinctive names deliberately given to the Guadeloupean-born female characters.<sup>69</sup>

*Fleur de Barbarie* seems destined to be read and discussed in a way that underplays the significance of the *métropole* for Pineau's characters. For example, although the protagonists in *Chair Piment* and *Fleur de Barbarie* find white metropolitan lovers, these relationships do not represent a re-evaluation of metropolitan space, but rather, recall Sybille's relationship with Lila, her lonely, atomised friend. (In addition, Pineau's inability to create strong male characters must make it unlikely for transformation to occur via interracial love affairs in her novels.<sup>70</sup>) Pineau herself encourages such 'post-metropolitan' readings by stating that: 'J'avais un projet: je voulais écrire un roman dans

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>68</sup> Pineau resents accusations that she describes New York as Condé does, but she accepts that there is a shared imaginary and some common themes that unite both writers. See Biringanine Ndagano, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

<sup>69</sup> Chantal Hibou Anglade, 'Fleur de Barbarie: Joséphine Pineau et Gisèle Baker en langue barbare. Entretien accordé en septembre 2005', *Une Revue* (9 October 2005) <http://remue.net/spip.php?article1063> [accessed 16 February 2011]

<sup>70</sup> Biringanine Ndagano, *op. cit.* p. 158.

lequel l’histoire se situerait entre trois Saint-Louis, Saint-Louis du Sénégal, Saint-Louis de Marie-Galante et Saint-Louis du Missouri, et je voudrais tirer des fils entre ces trois Saint-Louis,’ going on to admit she felt driven to indulge her obsessions ‘et écrire contre les préjugés, la barbarie, la violence, l’atteinte faite à l’innocence des enfants, m’interroger sur la domination, le racisme.’<sup>71</sup> None of these emphases highlight the importance of the metropolitan context. Racism is present in Josette’s childhood in Sarthes, but that experience is overshadowed by the racism discussed in other environments. Pineau tells Chantal Hibou Anglade about her commitment to writing about the disadvantaged and the traumatised, admitting: ‘[J]e me sens proche des petits, des exclus. [...] C’est une forme de recherche: dire la douleur comme pour l’éradiquer’<sup>72</sup> yet it appears that there is increasingly less interest in developing these issues in a metropolitan context. As we have seen, however, the (normally Martiniquan rather than Guadeloupean) concept of the writer as a spokesperson for her people as well as a catalyst for change tends to create a literary focus on place. This is usually a non-metropolitan place, where characters seek to ‘se distancer, du moins thématiquement, de la métropole française, terre que quittent généralement les personnages pour regagner l’île perdue.’<sup>73</sup>

By 1999 Pineau was already becoming more conscious of the sense and significance of her writing as a result of being constantly questioned about it.<sup>74</sup> She is aware that much of this academic interest is based in North America rather than metropolitan France: ‘In France, [there is] nothing at all – there’s a problem. Why this interest across the Atlantic? Americans are curious about Francophone literatures – from the Maghreb, Africa, the Caribbean. We writers are invited to be in residence for a year to give courses. I salute the professors’ curiosity....’<sup>75</sup> Njeri Githire has said that the presentation of Mina in *Chair Piment* as sexually deviant may be a calculating response

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<sup>71</sup> Chantal Hibou Anglade, *op. cit.*

<sup>72</sup> Geneviève Belugue, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>73</sup> Véronique Bonnet, ‘Gisèle Pineau: Voix féminine dans le champ créole’, *Notre librairie*, 146 (October – December 2001), p. 96.

<sup>74</sup> Geneviève Belugue, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>75</sup> Nadège Veldwachter, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

by Pineau to tap into current academic – and most obviously North American - discourses: ‘Pineau and her publishers know that sex sells and are using it to an advantage. The writer probably also knows that strangely whimsical and sexually charged power dynamics have generated much interest in postcolonial, feminist, and queer studies.’<sup>76</sup> There is increasing interest in developing Glissantian readings of her work.<sup>77</sup> Valérie Loichot also refers to signs of a transnational dialogue with the work of the feminist theorist Hélène Cixous in *Fleur de Barbarie*.<sup>78</sup> All this suggests that the importance of global connections and influences in Pineau’s work is accumulating. She may continue to include the *métropole* in some way, but it is likely that her interest in global settings and themes will increase at the expense of issues that are embedded in the metropolitan context.

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<sup>76</sup> Njeri Githire, ‘Women in Exile, at Home, and Abroad in Gisele Pineau’s Works’, *Research in African Literatures*, 36: 1 (Spring 2005), p. 82.

<sup>77</sup> For example, see Bonnie Thomas, ‘Transgenerational trauma in Gisèle Pineau’s *Chair Piment* and *Mes Quatre Femmes*’, *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 13: 1, (June 2010); Valérie Loichot, ‘Reconstruire dans l’exil: la nourriture créatrice chez Gisele Pineau’, *Etudes Francophones*, 17: 2 (Autumn 2002).

<sup>78</sup> Valérie Loichot, ‘Eloge de la barbarie selon Gisèle Pineau’, p. 137. Pineau’s interest might be explained by an awareness that in the American academy, Hélène Cixous is one of the emblematic faces of ‘French feminism’: Clare Goldberg Moses, ‘Made in America: “French Feminism” in Academia’, *Feminist Studies*, 24: 2 (Summer 1998), p. 241.

## Conclusion

During the writing of this thesis, a considerable number of relevant literary texts and critical analyses have been published, making my research exciting, yet also increasingly challenging.<sup>1</sup> However, I have shown that many new novels covering migration themes have not represented a significant departure for the well-established writers concerned, while among younger or simply less well-known writers there remains a tendency to stress the centrality of the West Indian inheritance, and to downplay a metropolitan context that, from the mid-twentieth century up to 2008, has routinely been depicted as damaging and vitiated, to a greater or lesser extent.

What is new is that the commitment to depicting the West Indian as a global traveller or global consumer of culture is increasing. In recent years several writers have written novels in which French West Indians have developed international inspirations beyond the *métropole*. I have explored some of those that do include the *métropole*, but Audrey Pulvar's transatlantic novel *L'Enfant-bois* (2004) bypasses the *métropole* entirely; its Martiniquan protagonist is shown working in London. This interest in creolisation or *Relation* has occurred alongside the growing internationalisation of the reception of this literature. However, as this thesis shows, French West Indian literature of migration has taken this turn without any sense of a viable rootedness occurring in the metropolitan sphere first.<sup>2</sup> Where national belonging is perceived to be based on maintaining distinct cultural boundaries,<sup>3</sup> a focus on globalised identities seems to serve as a protective distancing mechanism. It is a way of compensating for the unresolved insider/outsider status lived by French West Indians, and particularly by their writers. Furthermore, in terms of these distinct cultural boundaries, these discourses of mixity may assist in the reception of this literature, to the extent that it stresses difference rather than mutual exchange or truly shared values in the metropolitan space. Ironically, this commitment to literary mixity, to ongoing difference, appeals to the 'French literary establishment' for

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<sup>1</sup> Several West Indian authors have also sadly passed away during the writing of this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> References to 'exil(e)' in scholarly articles are tellingly more common than references to 'migration'.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter III.1, or Richard Price and Sally Price, 'Shadowboxing in the Mangrove', p. 11.

its potential to regenerate the French language against the globalised encroachment of English, rather than for its challenging theoretical approaches to what it means to be West Indian – even in the *métropole* – today.<sup>4</sup> Such expectations inevitably undermine the potential for writing that is much more concerned about plot and characterisation than about language, thereby marginalising *négropolitain* and other writers who do not write in marketable, creolised French.

It is clear that while French West Indian literature is a permanent fixture in Francophone and world literature, this success occurs under fairly restrictive conditions, especially as far as a literature of migration is concerned. Complex historical realities culminating in departmentalisation mean that many West Indians in the *métropole* have not routinely felt challenged to carve out a new assertive identity for themselves, and high levels of circulation and the modernisation of the islands also undermine and confuse this process. For writers, this means constantly revisiting West Indian issues, particularly in terms of the recuperation of memory, rather than grappling with the contemporary environment.

French educational policy in the West Indian context has created class divisions with consequences for literature. Schooled in an assimilationist environment from a young age, the most prominent writers feel an ambivalence about the metropolitan connection as well as a reliance on it for critical and financial success, but it has also meant that such writers are often culturally divided from a potential metropolitan West Indian readership whose lives and experiences they have little interaction with. Yet it is these prominent, privileged writers who mediate to the world what French West Indian writing is about, and who create the norms that others must follow to achieve the same success. The attractiveness of the USA for academic posts further distances these writers from the reality of metropolitan life for ordinary black people, while metropolitan universities' relative lack of interest in Francophone writing from non-European cultural sources must also contribute towards this disconnect.<sup>5</sup> It is also apparent that although settlement in the *métropole* and the *négropolitain* experience can be fruitful themes, most writers find

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<sup>4</sup> Lucien Taylor, 'Mediating Martinique', p. 302.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Forsdick, 'World Literature, Littérature-Monde: Which Literature? Whose World?' *Paragraph*, 3: 1 (March 2010), p. 127.

it easier to create interest with work that prioritises a non-metropolitan setting. It is telling that Confiant and Zobel have received less attention for works that focus particularly on contemporary metropolitan life, while Condé and Pineau first achieved recognition for work with a firmly creole (or, in the case of *Ségou*, a historically African) setting, before they could write commercially acceptable novels about the *métropole*. Engagement with popular genres that might deal more naturally with these issues does not bring writers critical acclaim.<sup>6</sup>

There is much room for further research. This thesis focuses on novels, but more work needs to be done to discover and explore plays and poetry that deal with the lives of West Indians in the *métropole*. There has also been an absence of focus on particular aspects of the migration experience; although return is a persistent theme, scholars have not categorised the various experiences of return in French West Indian novels, and despite the appeal of magic realism the treatment of both magic and religion in the literature of migration is rarely explored in articles and essays.

Perhaps the most fruitful field for exploration at this time would be in the comparative context. Although North African and *beur* chroniclers of metropolitan life have received extensive attention there have been few attempts to compare them with West Indian and *négropolitain* writers.<sup>7</sup> In spite of generic studies of black Francophone writers, there appears to be no systematic comparative exploration of how black Africans and West Indians have dealt with the themes of migration. Comparisons between migrant Anglophone West Indian/Black British and migrant French West Indian/*négropolitain* literature (as opposed to general interdisciplinary studies of West Indian literature) are still rare, despite the extensive recognition by sociologists and by some novelists that the two groups have cultural and social commonalities, as well as differences.<sup>8</sup> The barriers

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<sup>6</sup> According to Françoise Naudillon the West Indian *polar* is neglected by critics: ‘Soleil, Sexe et Rhum. Le roman policier créoliste des Antillais’, *Francofonía*, 16 (2007), p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> By contrast, comparisons of works by (first and second generation) Black British and British Asian writers are commonplace.

<sup>8</sup> Several studies have been mentioned in this thesis. Alain Anselin, *op. cit.*, routinely referenced by many subsequent commentators, makes several comparisons with the West Indian situation in Great Britain. For



between the Anglophone world of literary postcolonial studies and literary Francophone studies surely explain this reticence.<sup>9</sup> It is to be hoped that increasing interdisciplinarity will break down these barriers in future. Such work might consider the contrasting modes of reception within the United Kingdom and France, and the nature of cross-Channel connections. For example, the Black British dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson is very well-received in Paris, inspiring critical and popular interest.<sup>10</sup> Why, then, has his success not apparently encouraged the emergence of similar French West Indian poets? If it has, where are they? It may be the case that, as with the lack of scholarly attention devoted to migrant or *négropolitain* novelists until they have met with the appropriate critical success, the answers to such questions will require more fieldwork on the part of scholars rather than a reliance on prior critical appraisals from elite sources.

It is tempting to conclude that the most pressing issue here is not academic but literary; although many fascinating texts have appeared, some of which are explored here, more fiction could and should be written, and there are still untold stories awaiting brave and skillful authors to commit them to the page. Yet the message from literary postcolonial studies seems to be that the production, promotion, commodification and institutionalisation of writing deemed to be Other are frequently intertwined in such a way that it is very difficult indeed to extricate them, and there is no level playing field.<sup>11</sup> I have shown that for a long time, both textual and paratextual realities have been particularly challenging to the development of a rich French West Indian literature of migration. We must hope that despite historical and current obstacles, this literature will increasingly find expression, and will receive the attention it deserves.

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the comments of Glissant and Confiant see Chapter II.2. For Maximin see Chapter III.3. Maryse Condé's reflections on the comparative Black British and the North African/*beur* condition in 'Are the Black British Setting the Example?' surely deserve to be pursued.

<sup>9</sup> See Anne Donadey and H. Adlai Murdoch, 'Introduction: Productive Intersections', pp. 5-7, in Anne Donadey and H. Adlai Murdoch, *op. cit.* It also seems that scholars of North African/*beur* fiction are rarely scholars of French West Indian literature. These are seen as two distinct specialisms.

<sup>10</sup> Caryl Phillips, *A New World Order: Selected Essays* (London: Martin Secker and Warberg Ltd., 2001), pp. 255-256. Glissant mentions Johnson approvingly in several places, e.g. in *Tout-monde*, pp. 462-463.

<sup>11</sup> See Eli Sorensen, 'Postcolonial Melancholia', *Paragraph*, 30: 2 (2007).

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