

# *Bulletin of Francophone Postcolonial Studies*

## A Biannual Publication



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## *État présent:* Rwanda, Ethnopolitics and Fiction

On 7 April 2014, the people of Rwanda will mark the twentieth anniversary of the genocide in which at least 800,000 Rwandans were brutally massacred in just one hundred days. Throughout the genocide, whenever mention was made of what was happening in Rwanda, the killings were generally explained in the international media as yet another African ‘ethnic conflict’ between what were presented as two warring ethnic groups or ‘tribes’: first Hutu killing Tutsi in the one-hundred-day genocide, then Tutsi killing Hutu in the reprisals by the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) and the subsequent rape and killings of Hutu refugees in the camps in neighbouring countries.<sup>1</sup> What has since been condemned as an international failure to understand what was really happening in Rwanda in 1994 extended to the African continent and included African intellectuals around the world. Despite critiquing the world’s indifference towards the genocide in his novel *Murambi ou le livre des ossements*,<sup>2</sup> Senegalese author Boubacar Boris Diop confesses to his own ignorance about Rwanda before he travelled there in 1998.<sup>3</sup> He describes how he expected to write about ‘les tueries entre Hutu et Tutsi, le ciel paisible au-dessus des collines, des marchandes de fruits au bord des routes, bref, la vie reprenant ses droits en attendant de nouvelles tueries, naturellement inévitables, entre Hutu et Tutsi’.<sup>4</sup>

‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’, then, are two words that have become synonymous with Rwanda and the genocide. Indeed, as my discussion of novelist Gilbert Gatore will show, Rwandan authors and their writings are still sometimes identified in these terms. Although there is no consensus on when these categories came into existence, scholars of the Great Lakes region generally agree that ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’ are imagined communities that have evolved and been manipulated by different groups of people at different points in time.<sup>5</sup> In his powerful but controversial study, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, René Lemarchand traces the construction of the imagined identities of ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’ through a series of precolonial, colonial and postcolonial myths.<sup>6</sup> The dominant myth, which has been manipulated by both imagined communities is what is known as the Hamitic hypothesis, which led to the division of people in the Great Lakes into two main groups: the Hamites and the Bantu or, in the case of Rwanda and Burundi, the Tutsi and the Hutu. There is a third group of people in Rwanda, the Twa, who make up around 1% of the population and who are largely excluded from discussions of the genocide, such is the extent of the ethnic polarization after 1994.

Grounded as it is in racist stereotypes, the Hamitic hypothesis is widely acknowledged as the source of an increasing ethnicization in Rwanda since the nineteenth century and a key factor in the 1994 genocide. According to the hypothesis, which was introduced in Rwanda by the former Belgian colonial powers, the Tutsi originate from

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<sup>1</sup> See Linda Melvern, ‘Missing the Story: The Media and the Rwanda Genocide’, in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), ed. by Allan Thompson, pp. 198–210.

<sup>2</sup> Boubacar Boris Diop, *Murambi ou le livre des ossements* (Abidjan: NEI, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Diop travelled to Rwanda as part of the Fest’Africa literary mission. See Nicki Hitchcott, ‘A Global African Commemoration — “Rwanda: Ecrire par devoir de mémoire”’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 45.2 (2009), 151–61 (pp. 152–53).

<sup>4</sup> Boubacar Boris Diop, *L’Afrique au-delà du miroir* (Paris: Philippe Rey, 2002), p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Warshauer Freedman, Harvey M. Weinstein, K. L. Murphy and Timothy Longman, ‘Teaching History in Post-Genocide Rwanda’, in *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights after Mass Violence* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), ed. by Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf, pp. 297–315 (p. 302).

<sup>6</sup> René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 49–68.

outside sub-Saharan Africa and are therefore closer to Europeans than the Bantu Hutu.<sup>7</sup> Whereas before the emergence of the Rwandan state, Tutsi and Hutu were what Mahmood Mamdani describes as ‘transethnic identities’, with ‘the Tutsi identity sufficiently porous to absorb successful Hutu through ennoblement’, colonization’s racialization of ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’ created two distinct groups in Rwanda with the minority Tutsi becoming identified as a ‘race apart’ from the majority Hutu population.<sup>8</sup> As Alexandre Dauge-Roth notes, the effect of this racialization was to divide Rwandan society in terms of the ‘indigenous’, ‘inferior’, ‘uncivilized’ Hutu on the one hand, and the ‘foreign’ ‘superior’, ‘civilizing’ Tutsi on the other, a division that was to have ‘terrible long-lasting consequences’.<sup>9</sup> Gradually the racialization of Tutsi and Hutu became embedded on both intellectual and institutional levels, with the Catholic church and the Belgian colonial state reinforcing what they identified as ‘Hamitic racial supremacy’ through a series of wide-ranging administrative reforms. These reforms included separate education for Hutu and Tutsi, the replacement of all Hutu chiefs by Tutsi, and culminated in the issuing of ethnic identity cards based on the 1933–34 colonial census.<sup>10</sup> While ethnic identity was ostensibly based on differences in physical characteristics with Tutsi deemed to be taller, lighter skinned and with smaller noses than the Hutu, distinctions were often made on economic grounds allowing wealthier Hutu who owned ten or more cattle to be classified as Tutsi.<sup>11</sup>

What began as a rather arbitrary albeit politically motivated system of social classification, quickly developed into the racialized division of Rwandan society. This racialization led to increasing resentment on the part of many of the marginalized Hutu who under Grégoire Kayibanda formed the Hutu emancipation movement Parmehutu. As the Rwandan people, particularly the Tutsi, began to call for independence from Belgian rule, so Parmehutu began to promote the idea of Hutu nationalism.<sup>12</sup> Tensions between Hutu and Tutsi began to escalate and in 1959, when it was falsely reported that a Parmehutu militant had been killed, violent reprisals against Tutsi began.<sup>13</sup> While the events of 1959 have become known as the Rwandan ‘social revolution’, they were really, as Gérard Prunier has shown in his seminal history of the genocide (1995), an ethnic transfer of power.<sup>14</sup> In 1960, the first post-independence government was elected, with the Hutu majority voting—unsurprisingly—for Hutu representatives. In 1961 Parmehutu leader, Kayibanda, became the first democratically elected President of Rwanda. More violence followed. Over the next few years, counterattacks were launched from outside Rwanda by exiled Tutsi, known by the Hutu as ‘Inyenzi’ (cockroaches), a nickname that subsequently became a powerful symbol of the 1994 genocide. Each time, the Hutu government responded with further massacres of Tutsi while at the same time introducing a system of ethnic quotas limiting the number of Tutsi to 9% in all sectors of society, including education. By 1990, at least 700,000 Tutsi had fled Rwanda to seek refuge in neighbouring countries.<sup>15</sup> In the interim period, a number of

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<sup>7</sup> See Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 79–87; Alexandre Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda: Dismembering and Remembering Traumatic History* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), pp. 14–15.

<sup>8</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p. 74 and p. 87.

<sup>9</sup> Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> See Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, pp. 88–102.

<sup>11</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p. 98.

<sup>12</sup> In this they were strongly supported by the Catholic Church and increasingly by the Belgian colonial authorities who, having previously supported the Tutsi, now felt betrayed by the Tutsi call for independence. See Gérard Prunier, *Rwanda: le génocide* (Paris: Dagorno, 1999), p. 67. Prunier’s study was first published in English as *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (London: Hurst, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Prunier, *Rwanda*, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> Prunier, *Rwanda*, p. 67.

<sup>15</sup> Precise figures are not known (see Prunier, *Rwanda*, pp. 82–84).

these exiles came together to form the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and its military wing, the RPA.

Then, on 1 October 1990, the RPA launched an attack on Rwanda. This was the beginning of the civil war that helped fuel the extremist Hutu Power claim that the Tutsi were not in fact an ethnic minority but an alien race that was not welcome and had to be eliminated. In January 1994, three months before the genocide, the Hutu Power newspaper, *Kangura*, began to explicitly incite anti-Tutsi violence writing, 'We will begin by getting rid of the enemies inside the country. The Tutsi "cockroaches" should know what will happen, they will disappear'.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the hundred days of horror, the Hutu extremists continued to manipulate the racialized myths of Tutsi difference to fuel ethnic hatred, mobilize the militia and systematically eliminate the Tutsi. In other words, the Hamitic myth that had created a racialized society in Rwanda had become translated by Hutu Power into what Lemarchand describes as 'a coherent body of categorical imperatives'.<sup>17</sup>

Since 1994, it is no longer acceptable to classify the people of Rwanda in terms of ethnicity. Although the use of the terms Hutu, Tutsi and Twa in public discourse is not, as many critics have suggested, actually illegal, the RPF-dominated government's introduction of laws on discrimination and genocide ideology has been commonly interpreted by the Rwandan people as a ban on speaking about ethnicity at all.<sup>18</sup> The crime of ethnic divisionism is now included in the Rwandan penal code and a number of individuals have been arrested on these grounds, including the relatively high profile case of political opponent to President Kagame, Victoire Ingabire, who was given an eight-year prison sentence in October 2012. Ingabire publicly challenged the absence of reference to Hutu victims at the Kigali Genocide Memorial and was subsequently prosecuted for genocide denial and divisionism.<sup>19</sup> For many critics, this new crime of ethnic divisionism is potentially incompatible with the politics of peace and reconciliation. While the government argues that because divisionism was the cause of the genocide so the new Rwanda must be a nation without Hutu or Tutsi, critics such as Lemarchand emphasize the importance of acknowledging ethnicity for remembering and understanding what happened in 1994. For Lemarchand,

The clash of ethnic memories is an essential component of the process by which the legacy of genocide — [what Primo Levi calls] the 'memory of the offence' — is being perceived or fabricated by one community or the other. Once filtered through the prism of ethnicity, entirely different constructions are imposed on the same ghastly reality, from which emerge strikingly different interpretations of why genocide occurred.<sup>20</sup>

As Lemarchand notes, the different groups of people involved in the genocide will all see the events through different lenses that might be, but are not necessarily, ethnically inflected. The Tutsi group includes witnesses and survivors, but also RPA soldiers who killed and tortured Hutu civilians when they returned to Rwanda to stop the genocide. Among the Hutu are the perpetrators of crimes against humanity, but also heroes who protected their Tutsi neighbours, witnesses to the RPA killings and Hutu who were killed simply because they looked like Tutsi or had chosen to marry Tutsi.<sup>21</sup> These Hutu victims and survivors are

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p. 212.

<sup>17</sup> Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence*, p. 60.

<sup>18</sup> Nigel Eltringham, 'The Past is Elsewhere: The Paradoxes of Proscribing Ethnicity in Post-Genocide Rwanda', in *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights after Mass Violence* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), ed. by Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf, pp. 269–82 (pp. 273–74).

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/10/30/rwanda-eight-year-sentence-opposition-leader> [accessed 11 December 2013].

<sup>20</sup> Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence*, p.101.

<sup>21</sup> Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence*, pp. 101–03.

excluded from the official narrative of genocide in Rwanda, resulting in 'Tutsi' becoming synonymous with survivor and 'Hutu' with perpetrator.<sup>22</sup>

In a published response to Lemarchand, Rwandan President Kagame condemns the former's analysis as 'flawed' and based on a premise that is 'mistaken'.<sup>23</sup> Yet, at the same time, Kagame's own words reveal precisely the exclusionary discourse that Lemarchand critiques. What Kagame says is: 'There were other Rwandans who were killed during the genocide, especially those perceived as opposing the agenda of the genocidal government—but, make no mistake, the agenda of the perpetrators was to exterminate the entire Tutsi population'.<sup>24</sup> Although the heroism of some Hutu is mentioned later in the article, Kagame seems to stumble between his own anti-divisionist promotion of the people of Rwanda as 'Rwandans' and a politically-motivated desire to reinforce a monolithic, simplified version of the story in which, as he claims, 'It is an established fact that the victims of the genocide were the Tutsi'.<sup>25</sup> Of course, strictly speaking, this is true, in that genocide can by definition apply to only one group of people. What this official narrative refuses to do, however, is to allow any Rwandan Hutu to be identified—or to identify themselves—as victims or survivors. At the same time, as Helen Hintjens explains, it also risks labelling all Hutu as collectively guilty.<sup>26</sup>

This paradox of implied collective guilt of all Hutu in an ethnicity-free Rwanda has important implications for writers of genocide fiction, as illustrated by the reception of *Le Passé devant soi* by Rwandan author Gilbert Gatore. This book is an important example of a novel by a Rwandan author with first-hand experience of the genocide. A writer in exile, Gatore left Rwanda with his family in 1994 when they fled to what was then Zaire and later settled in France. *Le Passé devant soi*, his debut novel, was published in 2008 and, unlike the other genocide novels by Rwandans published since 1994, has been something of a commercial success. It won the Prix des Etonnants Voyageurs in 2008, was quickly reprinted as a *livre de poche* by 10/18 and has already been translated into both English and Italian.

Throughout the novel, Gatore emphasizes the parallels between perpetrator and victim, the text alternating between perpetrator Niko's story and that of Isaro, a survivor. Both are presented as traumatized individuals, struggling to recover from their experiences of genocide. After hearing a radio programme about her unnamed birth country, Isaro realizes that her attempts to repress her memories of what happened to her family have been in vain, so she begins a journey of remembrance in an attempt to work through her trauma. The attempts of Niko, the perpetrator, to repress his memories are also unsuccessful. Despite living in a cave, isolated from any visible reminders of the crimes he has committed, Niko is the victim of recurrent nightmares and flashbacks. In his case, whenever he finds himself forced to remember his role in the genocide, he experiences a kind of fit, trembling, vomiting and falling unconscious.

During his initiation into the militia, Niko is given three seconds to murder his own father. Counting down from three to one, a militiaman stands behind Niko with a gun against his head. Niko chooses a club as a weapon so he won't see any blood. He then looks away as the body is dragged to one side, constantly trying to convince himself that his first victim was not in fact his father, but someone who looked like him, sounded like him, 'n'importe quel homme, ou animal d'ailleurs'.<sup>27</sup> Gatore's description of the killing, as Elizabeth Applegate remarks, 'complicates our judgment' of Niko, identifying him as

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<sup>22</sup> Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence*, pp. 105–06.

<sup>23</sup> President Paul Kagame, 'Preface', in *After Genocide: Transitional Justice, Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Reconciliation in Rwanda and Beyond* (London: Hurst, 2008), ed. by Phil Clark and Zachary D. Kaufman, pp. xxi–xxviii (p. xxiii).

<sup>24</sup> Kagame, 'Preface', p. xxii.

<sup>25</sup> Kagame, 'Preface', p. xxiv.

<sup>26</sup> Helen Hintjens, 'Reconstructing Political Identities in Rwanda', in *After Genocide*, pp. 77–99 (p. 87).

<sup>27</sup> Gilbert Gatore, *Le Passé devant soi* (Paris: Phébus, 2008), p. 130

perpetrator but also suggesting that he too was a victim and perhaps even a survivor.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, what is striking about this novel is that both survivor and perpetrator of genocide are presented as victims. As Applegate points out, ‘Symmetrical images, which locate Niko and Isaro as linked opposites, demonstrate the ways that both were defined and victimized by the genocide’ (p. 75). This blurring of the conventional notion of the victim is not, however, unique to Gatore’s novel; other texts that have now become part of what we might identify as the canon of Rwanda genocide fiction, also create ambivalence around the distinction between victims and perpetrators.<sup>29</sup> What does mark Gatore’s text out from the other successful novels on the genocide is the fact that its author is from Rwanda, which may go some way towards explaining the controversy that *Le Passé devant soi* has unleashed in the academic world.

Gatore’s attempt to paint a fictional portrait of a *génocidaire*’s subjectivity has led Catherine Coquio to dismiss *Le Passé devant soi* as a failed genocide novel because it encourages the reader to empathize with a killer, an empathy that she claims is neither possible nor true.<sup>30</sup> Charlotte Lacoste takes a similar view, accusing Gatore of literary revisionism.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Coquio suggests that Gatore’s own position as a genocide novelist is complicated by the accusations following his literary success that his own father is a wanted perpetrator. According to some sources, Gatore’s father is Pierre Tegera, an exiled Hutu living in France and charged with crimes of genocide.<sup>32</sup> For Coquio, the story of Gatore’s father sheds a rather ambivalent light on the novel, ambivalence without which, in her view, the novel is difficult to understand.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Gatore has responded to the allegations also with ambivalence, choosing to write about himself in the third person in Laurent Beccaria and Patrick Saint-Exupéry’s journal, *XXI*: ‘Son père a-t-il pu à la fois sauver des gens et en tuer d’autres? [...] Ses pensées se brouillent. Rien de tout ce qu’il se rappelle avoir vu ou entendu ne met en cause son père. Mais d’où viennent ces accusations alors?’<sup>34</sup> Whether the allegations are true or not, they have clearly affected the reception of the text, with critics such as Lacoste and Coquio shocked by the novel’s suggestion that *génocidaires* have important stories to tell.<sup>35</sup> Gatore, however, is unapologetic in this regard, explaining that his novel is indeed inspired by an interest in the experiences of perpetrators as well as victims.<sup>36</sup>

While Coquio’s criticisms of the novel are ostensibly framed in literary terms, it seems that what she and Lacoste are actually doing is imposing an ethnopolitical reading on both Gatore and his text. This very much runs counter to the author’s own attempts to resist being identified in ethnic, or even national, terms. Just as he refuses to label himself as a ‘Hutu’ or even as a ‘Rwandan’, so his novel makes no mention of ethnic or national labels.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth A. Applegate, ‘Reimagining the Swallow and the Toad: Narrating Identity and Reconciliation in Postgenocide Rwanda’, *Research in African Literatures*, 43.1 (2012), 71–87 (p. 72).

<sup>29</sup> See for example, Diop’s *Murambi* and Véronique Tadjo, *L’Ombre d’Imana: voyages jusqu’au bout du Rwanda* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2000). Tierno Monémbo also plays with this distinction in his portrayal of Faustin in *L’Aîné des orphelins* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Catherine Coquio, ‘Poétiser l’enfant tueur. Questions sur *Le passé devant soi* de G. Gatore,’ in *J’ai tué. Violence guerrière et fiction* (Geneva: Droz, 2010), ed. by Déborah Lévy-Bertherat and Pierre Schoentjes, pp. 231–65 (p. 258).

<sup>31</sup> Charlotte Lacoste, *Séductions du bourreau. Négation des victimes* (Paris: PUF, 2010), pp. 347–48.

<sup>32</sup> Coquio, ‘Poétiser l’enfant tueur’, p. 262.

<sup>33</sup> Coquio, ‘Poétiser l’enfant tueur’, p. 263.

<sup>34</sup> Gilbert Gatore, ‘L’Enigme’, *XXI*, 4 (2008), 200–03 (p. 203).

<sup>35</sup> Coquio ‘Poétiser l’enfant tueur’, pp. 262–65.

<sup>36</sup> Pierre Schoentjes, ‘Guerre et fiction: représenter la violence personnelle. Une rencontre avec F. Bernard, P. Chauvel, G. Gatore et L. Mauvignier, animée par Pierre Schoentjes’, in *J’ai tué. Violence guerrière et fiction*, pp. 267–302 (p. 295).

<sup>37</sup> See Nicki Hitchcott, ‘Between Remembering and Forgetting: (In)Visible Rwanda: Gilbert Gatore’s *Le Passé devant soi*’, *Research in African Literatures*, 44.2 (2013), 76–90.

Here again, Gatore's novel stands apart from other works on the genocide for, despite the suppression of 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' in public discourse in Rwanda, there are few examples of texts published since and about 1994 that do not use these terms.<sup>38</sup> Describing the burial of bodies in mass, unmarked graves, Gatore also writes that 'plusieurs mots qui avaient un lien plus ou moins évident avec les massacres furent bannis du langage'.<sup>39</sup> Here, Gatore's text appears to criticize the current government's determination to reinvent an ethnicity-free Rwanda after the genocide. By apparently conforming to Kagame's decree on the suppression of ethnicity in his novel and then comparing this political decision with the concealment of dead bodies, Gatore implicitly critiques what René Lemarchand describes as the 'enforced ethnic amnesia' that the latter sees as an obstacle to reconciliation.<sup>40</sup>

Paradoxically, although Gatore appears to be condemning ethnic amnesia inside Rwanda, his critics have turned him into a victim of the over-ethnicized representation of Rwandan society in the eyes of the rest of the world. Indeed, what the critical reception of Gatore's novel seems to symbolize is precisely the ambivalence of ethnicity in post-genocide Rwanda. On the one hand, he personally resists labeling himself or his novel in ethnic terms; on the other, he is outlawed from the canon of Rwandan genocide fiction largely, it seems to me, on the grounds of his (father's) ethnicity. It is perhaps not surprising then that Gatore himself is so ambivalent, slippery even, when it comes to talking about his own identity: just as the myth of 'Tutsi' evolved from superior, civilizing Hamites to evil, foreign cockroaches, so the myth of 'Hutu' has also transformed from indigenous, inferior farmers to guilty perpetrators. Whereas 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' no longer officially exist, Rwandan society remains divided. As Hintjens writes, 'Dividing the world into categories of victims and perpetrators is unhelpful—to say the least—to individuals' own efforts to reconstruct their own political identities in the family and the wider community along non-racial lines'.<sup>41</sup> Gatore's attempts to reconstruct his own identity have been thwarted by the insistence of some scholars on labelling him in ethnopolitical terms. Similarly, his novel has been rejected by some for reasons that are equally divisionist. While *Le Passé devant soi* has an important role to play in increasing our understanding of ethnopolitics in Rwanda, the controversy around the novel and its author shows just how difficult it is to think about Rwanda beyond polarized, ethnopolitical lines.

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<sup>38</sup> Another example is found in Chadian author Koulsy Lamko's novel, *La Phalène des collines* (Paris: Le Serpent à Plumes, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Gatore, *Le Passé devant soi*, p. 136.

<sup>40</sup> Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence*, p. 106.

<sup>41</sup> Hintjens, *Reconstructing Political Identities*, p. 89.

## *Créolité, Pan-Créolité* and Creole Translation: 'Quoi écrire, pour qui écrire, comment écrire?' Interview with Rodolf Etienne (Part I)

The author, translator and journalist Rodolf Etienne was born in 1970 in Martinique, twenty-four years after the *loi de départementalisation* transformed the island into a French Overseas Department. He grew up in the southern town of Sainte-Luce, and became aware of local politics from a young age, particularly on the left, through figures such as Alfred Marie-Jeanne, the leader of the *Mouvement indépendantiste martiniquais* (MIM) since 1978. Etienne trained as a journalist and played an active role in local cultural associations from his adolescence. Aged nineteen when the manifesto *Éloge de la créolité*<sup>1</sup> was published, Etienne's intellectual development was profoundly influenced by the call by the *créolistes* to move beyond the movements of *négritude* and *antillanité* by adopting a 'vision intérieure' (p. 23) which, according to their manifesto, would comprise 'un regard neuf qui enlèverait notre naturel du secondaire ou de la périphérie afin de le replacer au centre de nous-mêmes.' (p. 24).

2014 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *Éloge*, and despite the significant success of *créolité* as a literary and cultural call to arms, Etienne is part of a post-*créolité* generation of Antillean authors and cultural figures who have struggled to define themselves in the movement's wake. The *créoliste* author Raphaël Confiant has expressed his concerns about the relative lack of new voices emerging from the French Caribbean, commenting: 'Je suis très inquiet sur l'avenir de la littérature antillaise, parce que jusqu'à maintenant, la plupart de la génération qui arrivait publiait leurs livres vers vingt-huit, trente, trente-cinq ans; Césaire et Glissant ont publié très jeune, Chamoiseau et moi aussi. Et là, la génération qui a trente ans aux Antilles ne publie pas beaucoup [...] c'est inquiétant, parce que la relève ne me semble pas assurée.'<sup>2</sup> Confiant proposes that this discernable lack of new literature can also be linked to the information technology revolution and the cultural shifts it has engendered: '[...] les nouveaux moyens de communication viennent d'arriver aux Antilles, donc les jeunes se jettent là-dessous et le livre paraît quelque chose d'arriéré.'<sup>3</sup> Etienne certainly confirms Confiant's observation about the massive changes in how and where Martinicans are communicating: he has an active media and online presence as a journalist at the leading French Caribbean newspaper *France-Antilles* and as a television presenter of the cultural programme 'Plumes d'Ici: Le Mag Littéraire — Martinique', which is broadcast every week on the channel *Zouk.tv*, and can also be viewed online.<sup>4</sup> The show has an accompanying Facebook page, updating visitors on cultural events from Martinique and the wider world through postings which include video content.<sup>5</sup>

It is perhaps in Etienne's work as a literary translator that the heritage of *créolité* has found its most eloquent expression, as he has taken the innovative decision to translate canonical works of Martinican literature from the original French into Creole. In one sense, this decision can be understood as a corollary of the *créolité* project, bringing it to its natural conclusion by undermining, and undoing, the linguistic domination of French. However, it was regarded with some scepticism, as he explains in this interview, and the translations

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la créolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990 [1989]).

<sup>2</sup> Louise Hardwick, 'Du français-banane au créole-dragon: entretien avec Raphaël Confiant', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 9.2 (2006), 257–76 (p. 260).

<sup>3</sup> Hardwick, 'Du français-banane au créole-dragon', p. 260.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8A857A6E4F93C8F4> [accessed 8 January 2014].

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/Lemaglitteraire> [accessed 8 January 2014].



have, surprisingly, received scant cultural—and critical—attention in both his native Caribbean and elsewhere. In 2005, Etienne published *Lézenn*, his Creole translation of Édouard Glissant's *Les Indes* (1956), with the Canadian publishing house Le Serpent à Plumes, which received a warm reception on the leading Creole website *Potomitan*.<sup>6</sup> In 2008, this was followed by his translation of Glissant's *Monsieur Toussaint* (1961), as *Misyé Toussaint*, with the Presses Nationales d'Haïti. His Creole publication of Aimé Césaire's *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* (1963) appeared two years later as *Trajédi Rwa Kristof* with Caraïb'Editions. Most recently, his publication of the *Décrets d'abolition de l'esclavage*, translated into Creole as *Dékré labolisyon lesklavaj* appeared in May 2012, timed to coincide with the annual celebrations across France taking place in the month of May. Under Chirac, the 10 May was designated as a national day of official commemoration for the memory of slavery and its abolition, and in 2008, Glissant published *Tous les jours de mai*, a brief manifesto reflecting on the themes of emancipation and rebellion, in which he posits the revolutionary act as a daily struggle rather than an official decree granted by the *mère-patrie*.<sup>7</sup>

Etienne has also contributed a short story, entitled 'Célestin', to an anthology of Creole funeral rites, *Yé krik! Yé krak! Bouladjel: Contes et légendes autour de la mort et des rites funéraires aux Antilles antan lontan*.<sup>8</sup> The story recounts a young boy's first encounter with death and is told in the traditional narrative style of the *conteur*. Gaining increasing recognition for his varied cultural contributions, Etienne is a member of the *Association Internationale des Critiques de Théâtre*, as well as serving on the editorial board of Editions Dagan where he directs the Creole Collection for this specialist publishing house which aims to distribute works on neglected cultures from Africa and the Antilles.

His involvement with two socio-political movements testifies to the enduring presence of *créolité* and its aftermath in his own activities. As Caribbean Co-ordinator of the *Organisation Internationale des Peuples Créoles* (OIPC) and as a member of the association *Tous Créoles!* he takes a leading role in developing Creole cultures, languages and identities at an international level. Through his involvement with these projects, Etienne has published numerous articles on his concept of 'pan-créolité'. In the essay 'La pan-créolité ou la dynamique d'une identité créole internationale',<sup>9</sup> he traces the development of Creole as a valued cultural asset, from Gilbert Gratiant to the work of Lambert Félix-Prudent who, in 1980, published *Des baragouins à la langue antillaise*, a study which helped to redefine the status of Creole across the Caribbean basin.<sup>10</sup> Etienne pays particular attention to the fact that in the 1980s, after the progress made by *créolité* and Glissant's conceptual work on *créolisation* and *relation*, new international networks were formed which exploited these theoretical developments, and which sought to embed them in their own working practices. The most notable of these is *Bannzil Kréyol*, which arose from a conference of the *Comité International des Etudes Créoles* held in Saint Lucia in 1981,<sup>11</sup> and is a network comprising members from the Seychelles, Mauritius, Reunion, Rodrigues, Guadeloupe, Martinique and the wider Creole diaspora.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.potomitan.info/bibliographie/glissant\\_lezenn.php](http://www.potomitan.info/bibliographie/glissant_lezenn.php) [accessed 7 January 2014].

<sup>7</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Tous les jours de mai* (Paris: Institut du Tout-Monde, 2008). Since 2012, a revised digital PDF edition has been available for download on the *Institut du Tout-Monde* website: <http://tout-monde.com/touslesjoursdemai/nouvelleedition.pdf> [accessed 6 December 2013].

<sup>8</sup> *Yé krik! Yé krak! Bouladjel: Contes et légendes autour de la mort et des rites funéraires aux Antilles antan lontan* (Fort-de-France: Editions Desnel, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Rodolf Etienne, 'La pan-créolité ou la dynamique d'une identité créole internationale' <http://www.touscreoles.fr/2013/01/05/la-pan-creolite-ou-la-dynamique-dune-identite-creole-internationale/> [accessed 6 January 2014].

<sup>10</sup> Lambert Félix-Prudent, *Des baragouins à la langue antillaise* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1980).

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.bannzilkreol.sc/> [accessed 8 January 2014].

Etienne situates *pan-créolité* as the next stage in this ongoing dialogue to emerge from and engage with the rich—yet geographically disparate—Creole world. His essay ‘La pan-créolité ou la dynamique d’une identité créole internationale’ provides the following definition:

Quand on parle de pan-créolité ou de créolité internationale, il s’agit de définir une démarche globale, tendant à intégrer les différentes cultures créoles du Monde dans une dynamique de relation et de rapprochement, synonyme d’un vaste projet d’unification de ces identités et des traits spécifiques qui les caractérisent. Envisager toutes les identités créoles, réunies autour d’une identité unique ramifiée, rhizomique, avec un but commun, une volonté affirmée, c’est définir explicitement la notion de pan-créolité.

For Etienne, the Creole language must achieve its potential as a force for communication and unification rather than exclusion. His enthusiasm for connectivity is also reflected in his consideration of the potential of the Internet, in which respect he appears more optimistic than the older generation. Glissant and the *créolistes* expressed a much more ambivalent judgement about modern technology, and *Traité du tout-monde* memorably cautions:

L’internet, que nous choisissons comme symbole et modèle pour le moment, nous jette au plein du déferlement de notre totalité-monde, il semblerait, et même si on peut cliquer pour en revenir à un sujet, que nous ne saurions là mettre deux fois le pied dans la même eau, que la littéralité du monde y est pour nous à la fois actualité et fugacité, que nous ne pouvons y retenir quoi que ce soit qui nous ancre, dans ce perpétuel courant. Ou bien faut-il apprendre aussi à apprendre sans retenir?<sup>12</sup>

While Glissant and the *créolistes* stressed the creative potentialities of relation, communication and rhizomatic identities in the digital age, they are also critical of the risks of information overload, learning without any deeper comprehension, and the danger of standardization, homogenization and the global reach of Anglo-centric and techno-economical jargon and cultural models. In contrast, in Etienne’s vision, *pan-créolité* embraces and harnesses the hitherto-unparalleled potential offered by modern technology to bring geographically isolated groups of peoples into contact in new ways under the banner of a shared Creole heritage.

Translating canonical works of Caribbean literature for a Creolophone audience has not been without controversy, but, true to the ideals of *pan-créolité*, Etienne aims to raise difficult but necessary questions about literature and audience in the early twenty-first century. In a similar manner, his vision of *pan-créolité* aims to harness the potential of modern technology to generate new and ongoing dialogues between formerly isolated communities across the planet, and to give voice to previously little-known and under-represented experiences which challenge hegemonic discourses of modernity.<sup>13</sup>

Alessandro Corio: Pour commencer, peux-tu nous raconter un peu ton parcours?

Rodolf Etienne: L’écriture a toujours été en moi. La littérature a toujours habité mon souvenir et de manière assez prégnante, d’aussi loin que je remonte. Ensuite, je suis venu à l’écriture... En 1994, j’ai écrit un premier recueil de poèmes qui s’appelait *Les Chants Maudits ou Regard vertical sur les Amériques*.<sup>14</sup> Et à partir de là, j’ai considéré qu’il était temps de pénétrer le monde de l’écriture, et de produire. Mais j’étais face à un choix complexe, parce qu’en fait je me demandais quoi écrire. Quoi écrire, pour qui écrire, comment écrire? Ce sont des questions

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<sup>12</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Traité du tout-monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 160.

<sup>13</sup> The authors would like to thank Tiphaine Malfettes, a PhD candidate at the *Centre International d’Etudes Francophones* (Paris IV: Paris-Sorbonne), for her kind assistance with the preparation of this interview.

<sup>14</sup> This work is unpublished, as Etienne’s third answer explains.

qui, ici, en Martinique, dans notre environnement local, ont vraiment du sens, parce que notre littérature est une littérature du cri et chaque cri est un cri de naissance. Nous sommes un peuple jeune, nous avons une littérature très jeune, et par rapport à ça, l'engagement que l'on prend vis-à-vis de la littérature aux Antilles est, chaque fois, un choix qui se veut conscient et qui impose par conséquent des directions...

AC: Selon toi, l'engagement est incontournable pour l'écriture?

RE: Oui. L'engagement est incontournable, certainement partout. Mais ici, pour l'auteur, pour l'écrivain, pour celui qui a acquis la possibilité de manier le langage, pour lui, il y a une responsabilité particulière, parce qu'il est conscient, de fait, que la population à laquelle il s'adresse, la population dont il est issu, n'est pas forcément une population tout indiquée pour ce genre de message ou ce genre de discours, et pour, en particulier, l'écriture. Nous sommes quand même dans un imaginaire très habité par l'oral et où l'écriture n'est qu'une seconde façon d'être, de se positionner face au monde. Aujourd'hui encore, pour toucher le cœur même du peuple, c'est surtout par l'oralité que cela est possible, puisqu'il n'a pas forcément accès aux livres. Ecrire... Il y a quelque chose de didactique dans la démarche. Il s'agit de conscientiser, il s'agit d'éveiller, même quand on distrait. Tout ce qu'on écrit possède une double charge, parce que l'écriture se veut engagée dans la métamorphose. Il faut transformer les gens, transformer leur mentalité et transformer leur imaginaire.

AC: Et est-ce que tu as commencé à écrire en créole?

RE: Non, en français, mais cela n'a jamais été publié... Mais pour en revenir à la langue créole, il me semble, notamment après le courant récent de la créolité, et l'assise intellectuelle offerte par le mouvement de la négritude, et par le mouvement aussi de l'antillanité ou de la caraïbéanité, voire du 'Tout-monde' de Glissant—avec toutes ces assises donc, il me semble aussi important d'assurer la légitimité de la langue créole et de la créolité dans notre sphère intellectuelle, culturelle, identitaire. Donc j'ai décidé d'œuvrer en créole, en traduisant des textes d'auteurs martiniquais exclusivement pour commencer, parce qu'il me semblait qu'il y avait un décalage assez manifeste entre la pensée de nos grands auteurs en français et puis, l'imaginaire créole qui nous habite tous.

AC: À ton avis, quelles sont les motivations d'un tel décalage? Comment est-ce que tu en as fait l'expérience?

RE: Pour moi, en tout cas, il y avait une énorme distance entre mon imaginaire créole, renié, mal vu, malmené, et puis mon imaginaire français. Mon imaginaire français était l'imaginaire de la liberté et de l'extase intellectuelle, alors que mon imaginaire créole était plus enfermé dans des stéréotypes de l'imaginaire. Et à partir du moment, donc, où j'ai traduit des œuvres en créole, cela m'a permis de rééquilibrer un petit peu mes imaginaires, créole et français, jusqu'à ce qu'il y ait une sorte de paix relative et d'échange et de relation entre les deux. Et puis après, il m'a semblé aussi qu'il était important de mettre en relation notre créolité avec celle du monde et celle d'un monde le plus élargi que possible, qui soit à l'image de la réalité même du monde. Le monde d'aujourd'hui est un monde élargi, un monde agrandi, où les frontières tombent, notamment les frontières de l'imaginaire. J'avais une volonté d'ouvrir, d'où le concept de pan-créolité.

AC: Donc, comment te positionnes-tu par rapport à *l'Éloge de la créolité*, par exemple, ou aux positions des créolistes qui ont émergé dans les années 1980 et 1990?

RE: Mon premier choc créole, et j'aime beaucoup que cela soit su, c'est *Kôd Yanm*<sup>15</sup> de Raphaël Confiant. *Éloge de la créolité* est apparu, à cette époque en 1989, comme la réponse qu'intellectuellement nous attendions. Parce que la créolité nous offrait cette diversité, cette complémentarité qu'en fait nous vivions déjà mais qui n'était pas exprimée dans l'écriture. Nous la vivions dans la réalité, mais dans l'écriture, non. Et donc, le concept de 'créolité' a ouvert les vannes à un nouvel imaginaire, l'imaginaire créole, qui a repris des couleurs et des forces. Et cela a donné, par la suite, une littérature beaucoup plus engagée en direction de tous ces aspects identitaires et culturels créoles. De plus, sur le plan du concept, le mouvement de la créolité élargit au maximum le champ de vision, parce que c'est la première fois que la créolité s'engageait aussi dans cette relation internationale, dans cette dynamique internationale.

AC: Et alors, comment te places-tu par rapport aux critiques qui ont été faites au concept de créolité, au mouvement et au manifeste de la créolité, lui reprochant de retomber dans une idée essentialiste de l'identité, un peu, comment dire...

Louise Hardwick: Nostalgique?

AC: Oui, une idée nostalgique, qui voudrait revenir en arrière, peut-être même conservatrice. Voilà un peu toutes les critiques qui ont été faites contre l'idée de la créolité. Glissant, mais pas seulement lui, faisait la différence entre créolité et créolisation. La créolisation, ce serait plutôt un processus, donc en devenir, global, et la créolité, encore une fois, conduirait plutôt à s'enfermer, à définir une identité culturelle, ethnique, avec le risque de retomber dans un discours racial.

RE: Je conçois qu'il puisse y avoir des critiques, et les critiques se justifient dans la mesure où elles permettent de faire avancer le débat. Les critiques nourrissent la pensée. Mais, vue de l'intérieur et de manière fondamentale, la créolité a quand même été un mouvement qui a fait date et qui a ouvert, vraiment, nos cultures et nos identités aux autres identités du monde.

AC: Est-ce que la créolité a changé quelque chose, à part produire une très belle littérature, et un très bel imaginaire? Est-ce qu'elle a changé quelque chose dans la façon de vivre, de se concevoir des gens d'ici, du peuple créole?

RE: Il y a un aspect de la créolité, qui, à mon avis, mérite la critique. C'est l'aspect politique. Et effectivement l'aspect politique peut apparaître sectaire, parce que le mouvement de la créolité est quand même emmené par des hommes qui s'affirment indépendantistes. Ils ont tous des relations au concept d'indépendance, des relations différentes, parfois divergentes, opposées, mais ce sont quand même des indépendantistes qui parlent. *Éloge de la créolité*, ou tout au moins un aspect de l'œuvre, répondait à des questions qui étaient des questions totalement locales, totalement martiniquaises, totalement antillaises, totalement créoles. Ce sont vraiment des questionnements de l'individu, de l'identité créoles, et qui intéressent l'individu ou l'identité créoles au premier chef. Donc, cet aspect-là aussi peut dérouter, mais aussi bien dans la sphère des créolistes qui ne sont pas forcément des Fondal-natal,<sup>16</sup> et dans

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<sup>15</sup> Raphaël Confiant, *Kôd Yanm* (Fort-de-France: Editions KDP, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> The term 'fondal-natal' rose to prominence at a period when Creolists from Martinique and other Creole regions considered that they had made important strides in Creole studies. It was used by Jean Bernabé as the title for his three-volume study of Creole grammar, *Fondal-natal: grammaire basilectale approchée des créoles guadeloupéen et martiniquais* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1983). The same period saw the emergence of 'maximal deviation' in matters of orthography, as researchers moved away from earlier French-based transcriptions of Creole (a technique criticised by the Bannzil Kréyol group). 'Fondal-natal' has also passed into posterity through its

la sphère des Fondal-natal, le rapport a été aussi éloquent d'un côté comme de l'autre. Le mouvement de la créolité a convaincu à tous les niveaux, même s'il a posé des questions, et tant mieux qu'il les ait posées. Il a convaincu quand même d'une réalité marquée dans le temps, la réalité créole. Et par ailleurs, je n'ai jamais considéré ce mouvement de la créolité comme quelque chose de fixe, parce que l'analyse suivante de Glissant, le concept de *créolisation*, vient immédiatement rajouter ce qui manque peut-être, cette ouverture, cette ouverture au Tout-monde, le mouvement au lieu de la fixité. Cet aspect est déjà présent dans *l'Éloge de la créolité*, où dès le début de l'œuvre, on trouve: 'Ni Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons créoles'.<sup>17</sup> Et ici, en Martinique, dans notre sphère, dans notre imaginaire créole, cette dynamique d'ouverture a du sens. Je me considère comme un créole, eh bien je peux me considérer un peu chinois, un peu haïtien, un peu français, un peu mauricien, un peu de tout le monde et de tout.

AC: Il s'agit donc d'une identité en devenir, pas d'une identité fixe.

RE: Oui. Et *l'Éloge de la créolité* marque un point intellectuel dans l'écrit, fixe la pensée, à un moment donné. Mais cela n'a jamais été un concept figé et encore moins pour nous, la génération qui suivait. Au contraire, la créolité était plutôt une ouverture. La négritude avait été une ouverture à un moment, mais s'affirmait de plus en plus comme une étroitesse. Caraïbéanité et antillanité aussi. Créolité et créolisation, là cela avait du sens, cela nous ouvrait le monde. La négritude nous avait ouvert l'Afrique, la caraïbéanité et l'antillanité nous avaient ouvert les Antilles, mais la créolité nous ouvrait le monde. Et la créolisation encore plus largement.

AC: C'est vrai que ces concepts peuvent, à un certain moment et dans certaines conditions, ouvrir quelque chose, et après, avec le temps, s'enfermer ou devenir quelque chose d'autre. Cela s'est passé ainsi pour la négritude, peut-être aussi pour la créolité. Je ne sais pas si, en ce moment, il y aurait besoin d'un autre concept, d'une autre idée, et si l'idée de "pan-créolité" pourrait relancer encore une fois, vers autre chose.

RE: J'en serais très honoré [Rire]. C'est le but finalement, la pan-créolité, et j'y pense de plus en plus...

AC: Quelle est la différence, pour toi, entre la créolité et la pan-créolité?

RE: En fait, la pan-créolité, selon moi, veut réaliser la fusion. Je l'appelle aussi la modernité créole. La pan-créolité veut ouvrir encore plus le débat avec la notion de pont établi. Il ne s'agit plus de se définir créole, ou au-delà de créole. Il ne s'agit plus de se définir tout court, dans un espace clos, enfermé dans un imaginaire clos. La pan-créolité, dans sa dynamique la plus marquée, la plus forte, la plus élargie, se veut réunissant tous les imaginaires, toutes les identités, pour atteindre l'essentiel qui est l'humain. Et la démarche, en tant que créole, en tant que Martiniquais, c'est d'abord de se reconnaître dans notre aspect créole, ce qui fait nos ressemblances en tant que créoles. Mais, prenant Glissant à témoin, il y a aussi à prendre en compte le mouvement de créolisation. C'est donc un mouvement qui est en perpétuelle réalisation. Le mouvement est perpétuel. C'est une révolution permanente. Depuis que l'homme existe, les populations se sont toujours rencontrées, l'homme a toujours rencontré d'autres hommes, d'autres natures, d'autres identités, etc. Ce mouvement de rencontres, nous le vivons aujourd'hui de manière beaucoup plus manifeste, grâce aux transports dont nous

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association with Aimé Césaire, who is often referred to as the *Nègre-Fondamental*, particularly since the polemical exchanges between Creolists and Césairists.

<sup>17</sup> *Éloge*, p. 13.

bénéficients, grâce aux nouvelles technologies. Les mentalités, les identités, les peuples se rencontrent de plus en plus et partagent, échangent. A mon avis, le monde vers lequel nous allons est basé sur la relation et sur l'échange. En tant que créoles, donc, nous avons une responsabilité. Là je parle exclusivement en tant que créoles, parce que nous partageons les identités qui sont explosées dans le monde. Un Mauricien partage avec un Martiniquais une histoire, une identité communes et des traits culturels communs, mais un Martiniquais a aussi des traits culturels communs avec un Irlandais, un Italien, un Chinois, etc., et c'est valable pour chacun, pour tous. Cela crée donc une humanité qui, dans l'essentiel, est la même, et la pan-créolité c'est aussi cette dynamique-là. C'est la dynamique de la relation jusqu'à ce que l'autre soit accepté dans sa différence, dans ses différences les plus absolues. Bon, évidemment, il s'agit d'une utopie...

AC: Et donc, par exemple, qu'est-ce que donnerait, sur un plan concret, la relation entre un Martiniquais et un Mauricien? Ou un immigré guadeloupéen à Paris?

RE: Moi, pour avoir vécu cette relation, j'ai ressenti cela comme un choc culturel et identitaire. Quand j'ai eu l'occasion de discuter avec des Mauriciens, et quand j'ai été là-bas, il y avait toute une partie de moi qui se reconnaissait comme Mauricien. Le choc n'était pas là. Le choc était dans cette relation que moi j'entretenais avec ce choc, c'est-à-dire que ce choc je l'avais déjà vécu avec des Français, avec des Haïtiens, avec des Saint-Luciens, avec des Japonais. Je me reconnaissais en tant que Mauricien, et je m'étais aussi reconnu sous d'autres aspects de ma personnalité dans d'autres identités. Donc, l'intérêt de cette relation est justement qu'elle permet de créer des ponts entre les humanités, entre les identités. En plus de créer des ponts entre des imaginaires et des aires culturelles et géographiques, elle permet d'en créer entre les hommes et les individus. La pan-créolité rentre dans le cadre de la globalisation internationale.

AC: Est-ce que tu pourrais essayer de définir un peu une géographie de la pan-créolité? Quelles régions du monde touche-t-elle?

RE: La sphère Caraïbe, dans laquelle nous sommes, est directement intéressée, avec Haïti, la Guadeloupe et ses anciennes dépendances, la Dominique, Sainte-Lucie, la Martinique, et puis d'autres îles qui ont été créoles à certains moments, ou alors où la créolité est menacée: Cuba, Trinidad, et aussi la Jamaïque, où la créolité prend de plus en plus de sens.

AC: Pourquoi dis-tu que la créolité y est menacée?

RE: Parce que, dans ces pays-là, elle n'existe quasiment plus dans l'écriture. À Cuba ou à Trinidad, la créolité n'est présente que dans l'oralité, et même parfois uniquement dans la mémoire. Elle ne s'exprime même plus. Cela c'est pour la sphère caraïbe. Pour la sphère de l'Océan Indien, il y a donc la Réunion, Maurice, Rodrigues, Seychelles, Madagascar. Il y a bien évidemment la créolité africaine avec le Cap Vert. Ça, c'est pour les créolités qui sont les plus marquantes, qui émergent le plus, qui sont les plus vivantes. Mais au sein de l'Organisation Internationale des Peuples Créoles, dont je suis le coordinateur Caraïbe, nous considérons aussi l'apport des diasporas comme essentiel dans le mouvement de la créolité et dans le mouvement de la pan-créolité, parce que là, il y a d'autres échanges et d'autres relations qui sont en œuvre. Paris est une diaspora créole vivante... Paris, Londres, Montréal, Boston, Miami, New-York, Sidney, Melbourne un peu moins: de grandes capitales européennes, de grandes capitales du monde de l'Amérique du Nord et d'Australie. Il y a également dans le monde international des identités créoles menacées ou alors qui s'expriment autrement que par le langage, où il est question de traditions créoles. Là on a l'exemple fameux de Bahia au Brésil, certaines populations argentines aussi sont des

populations créoles.

AC: Qu'est-ce qui définit alors, selon toi, l'être créole—bien sûr ce n'est pas la définition d'un être—mais quelles composantes entrent dans la créolité? Si tu devais par exemple, l'expliquer, à un étudiant qui ne connaît rien de la créolité, ni de l'histoire de l'esclavage.

RE: Pour donner une explication simple, à mon avis, le premier lien créole, c'est l'esclavage. Le creuset même de l'identité créole, la forge, c'est l'esclavage, et c'est aussi son lieu de naissance, sa matrice. C'est à partir de l'esclavage que les populations et les cultures se sont mises en relation, avec les répercussions modernes que l'on connaît: conflits, ou à l'inverse, passions, entre les communautés, les individus, les peuples, les races. Au-delà de ça, c'est certainement aussi la colonisation, qui va mettre en œuvre un mouvement de relations entre les populations, des relations établies sur la force, sur la liberté et la libération. Ce qu'on partage en commun, en tant que peuples créoles, c'est donc bien cette histoire esclavagiste. Aussi bien pour les Européens que pour les Africains, les Indiens, les Amérindiens, toutes les populations qui ont été ainsi mises en relation partagent inévitablement l'esclavage. Elles baignent toutes dans la matrice créole. Avec cette définition-là, on peut élargir la créolité à une ancienne définition, sa première définition, le créole étant le blanc né aux colonies. Et quand on aborde cette identité, blanc né aux colonies, la sphère créole prend encore plus d'impact, elle intègre tous les pays sud-américains, tous les pays nord-américains, tous les pays de la Caraïbe, tous les pays de l'Océan Indien, beaucoup de pays africains, et tout le reste du monde quasiment. Et tout cela sur la même base, la base de l'esclavage moderne, enfin le dernier esclavage connu à l'échelle internationale. Et en cela nous sommes quasiment tous engagés dans cette définition créole. Ce qui fait de nous des créoles c'est que nous partageons la même planète, le même monde, le même avenir. C'est aussi dans cette dynamique là que nous sommes tous créoles.

AC: Donc, cela pourrait toucher n'importe quel homme, cette sorte d'humanisme global?

RE: Oui, cela pourrait toucher n'importe quelle humanité, n'importe où dans le monde, sur cette base de la rencontre et de la relation qui nous ont fait naître, sur cette base de la rupture qui nous a fait naître.

AC: Mais avec l'esclavage, ce sont donc une violence et une tragédie fondamentales qui, paradoxalement, définissent cette identité.

RE: Oui, mais pour moi, quand tu parles de tragédie, cela n'est pas une tragédie nègre. Pour moi, la tragédie, elle n'est pas nègre, elle est humaine. Cette tragédie a recréé le monde, dit-on aujourd'hui, et cela a toujours été comme ça, du néant naît toujours l'existant, l'être, et inversement. Donc, pour moi, l'esclavage moderne, tel que nous l'avons connu, c'est un point d'ancrage, c'est une force, une zone de l'imaginaire qui est partagée par tous les hommes et toutes les femmes du monde. Cet esclavage-là a essaimé partout dans le monde, et pas seulement en Caraïbe. Cette *circum* navigation qui a donné lieu à la *circum* exploitation, à la *circum* libération, c'est tout cela qui est créole.

LH: C'est aussi une manière de changer le rapport entre le centre et la périphérie...

RE: Oui. C'est aussi une manière de voir le monde comme une totalité. Dans l'utopie, c'est beau d'imaginer le monde faisant un seul, et les hommes tous harmonieusement engagés dans la même dynamique de survie de l'être. La pan-créolité c'est tout ça. La souffrance, on l'a vécue, on la partage, et moi, en tant qu'intellectuel, même si cette souffrance je ne la porte pas

en moi, je suis forcé de la porter à bout de bras, parce que je la partage d'une manière ou d'une autre avec d'autres. Et cette souffrance particulière, qui est liée à l'esclavage, je la partage aussi avec le colon, l'Autre, parce que je porte en moi tous ces gènes, de colon, d'esclave, de libérateur, j'ai tout cela en moi. Je suis aussi bien le colon que l'esclave, que le marron, et c'est cela aussi la créolité, la pan-créolité. Dans la dynamique de pan-créolité, j'ai été confronté à un problème à Maurice. Il y a des blancs créoles là-bas. Et les blancs créoles sont très mal vus. Comme les blancs créoles en Martinique, ils possèdent toutes les colonies, et le Mauricien veut, lui, prendre plus de place. Il y avait donc un discours anti-blancs créoles quand j'y étais. Mais considérer la pan-créolité comme excluant l'une ou l'autre de ces identités, c'est totalement absurde. Le blanc créole a autant de valeur créole que le nègre créole, et inversement. C'est comme cela que je conçois les choses, il n'y a pas de rupture, chez moi, entre blanc créole, nègre créole, mulâtre créole. Nous sommes tous engagés dans la même histoire, et c'est cela qui est formidable. La pan-créolité veut aller plus loin dans le fait d'abaisser et de faire tomber les murs.

AC: C'est une vision néo-humaniste, que je partage (avec quelques réserves ...), mais il est vrai qu'il y a aussi des inégalités et des différences, sur le plan politique, économique. Comment est-ce que ce mouvement, si l'on peut parler de mouvement, pourrait lutter contre cela? Y a-t-il des directions politiques qu'on pourrait suivre?

RE: Là, on aborde un aspect essentiel de la démarche pan-créole, qui n'est pas seulement une utopie, mais qui a aussi la prétention d'offrir des solutions à un certain nombre de problèmes sociaux, politiques, culturels, identitaires, écologiques, que vivent, et là de manière quasi-exclusive, les populations créoles. Nous sommes des économies fragiles, des écologies fragiles, des petits pays. Nous avons une histoire complexe, une histoire tragique. Nous sommes face à des notions comme la diglossie, pour rester dans le langage, face à des notions comme l'aliénation, pour parler de la relation du peuple au monde, du peuple à lui-même. Nous sommes vraiment confrontés à des problèmes cruciaux, qui ne menacent pas forcément l'identité créole, mais qui menacent plus particulièrement l'individu créole. Nous sommes des petits pays, avec des atouts, qui peuvent attirer la convoitise de forces plus grandes que les nôtres, ce qui fait partie aussi d'un jeu, le jeu du monde.

AC: Est-ce que tu envisages ou as-tu la possibilité de créer une communauté pan-créole aussi sur le plan politique, qui se fasse reconnaître en tant que communauté, donc peser géopolitiquement?

RE: Aujourd'hui, nous sommes reconnus en tant que peuples créoles. La littérature rend compte de notre identité. Plus généralement, les arts divers également. Il y a la journée internationale du créole le 28 octobre, une journée de l'UNESCO, qui légitime cette identité créole au niveau international. Pour autant—et nous insistons—la démarche pan-créole se veut apolitique. Mais, c'est déjà là une position *politique*. Ce que je veux dire, c'est qu'au sein de l'Organisation Internationale des Peuples créoles, nous considérons que chacun est maître chez soi. Nous ne sommes pas une police politique. Notre seul engagement est humain, humaniste et, sur ce point, nous pouvons, nous devons nous montrer intransigeant. Mais, une fois de plus, nous ne sommes pas une police. Nos actions visent à une harmonisation culturelle, identitaire, linguistique si possible. Si la question est de savoir si nous nous engageons en matière statutaire par exemple, la réponse est clairement non! S'il s'agit de savoir si la question de l'archipel des îles Chagos à Maurice est pour nous à considérer, la réponse est clairement oui! Partout où les droits fondamentaux de l'individu sont bafoués, nous sommes solidaires de la souffrance humaine. Si c'est cela être politique, si c'est ainsi que se conçoit un 'mouvement' politique, alors oui, nous sommes politique. Pour autant, notre démarche défend l'idée du respect de cette part d'imaginaire commun, en la valorisant et en la



développant. Nous défendons aussi l'idée du respect de nos divergences, comme, par exemple, les différents statuts politiques, les différents modes de gouvernance, les différents groupes économiques auxquels appartiennent ces différents peuples créoles. Le but politique est de mettre en valeur tout ce qui représente notre identité créole, et donc de promouvoir notre patrimoine et notre spécificité, le noyau qui nous forme en tant que peuples créoles. C'est cette identité qui nous a fait naître et qui nous soutient aujourd'hui encore dans notre relation au monde.<sup>18</sup>

15 April 2013, Fort-de-France, Martinique

LOUISE HARDWICK AND ALESSANDRO CORIO  
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<sup>18</sup> The second and final part of this interview will appear in issue 5.2.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Writing the Nomadic Experience in Contemporary Francophone Literature.* By KATHARINE N. HARRINGTON. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2013. 154 pp. Pb \$60.00 ISBN: 978-0-7391-7571-2 (Cloth); ISBN: 978-0-7391-7572-9 (Ebook)

This compelling analysis of the nomadic experience in the lives and the literary works of four key contemporary Francophone writers examines the work of J.M.G. Le Clézio, Nancy Huston, Nina Bouraoui, and Régine Robin. Emphasizing the problematic nature of efforts to classify writers by country or language, the author argues that the challenges which these writers pose to such categories point to the multi-faceted subject and writing positions opened up by nomadism, and which defy constraining notions of traditional, fixed identities. The author closely examines the evolution of nomadism in both literal and figurative terms to refer both to 'the reality of a plethora of individuals in transit around the world' and to 'a philosophical mindset and aesthetic based on the experiences of nomadic people' (pp. 1–2). Reading the texts of these four writers against other literary as well as ethnographic and sociological works which examine nomadism, exile, diaspora, and home, Harrington argues that they indicate a nomadic style that is only set to become more prevalent in response to our globalizing era of cultural homogeneity and greater border controls.

Exploring a wide range of Le Clézio's fictional and non-fictional texts, the first chapter examines how the writer's personal background and openness towards foreign cultures and languages translate into a 'cultural nomadism' that is manifest both in his writing style and across his body of work. By moving outside the culture of his birth and exposing himself to a nomadic confrontation with other peoples and mindsets, Le Clézio is shown to have achieved an overarching nomadic perspective and literary style. In the conclusion to this chapter, Harrington raises the question of whether he has in fact not 'normalized' this alternative model through his impressive corpus of nomadic subjects, thus risking provoking 'the disappearance of otherness' (p. 45). The second chapter analyses Nancy Huston's negotiation of the bilingual individual's 'linguistic nomadism', focusing initially on the Canadian writer's non-fictional writing and, to a lesser extent, on her only novel to be set in her native Alberta, *Cantique des plaines* (1993). Here Harrington argues that Huston exemplifies the inadequacy of existing identity categories for those who fall, or rather, move, between countries, languages, and cultures, and underscores the writer's sustained engagement with the meaning of home and belonging. Particularly illuminating in this chapter is Harrington's reading of Huston's fictionalization of the experience of being a stranger in one's own country in *Cantique des plaines*.

Ambiguity is the focus of the third chapter, devoted to the writing of Nina Bouraoui, a writer who, perhaps moreso than the others that form the focus of this study, lacks and indeed resists identification within fixed identities. Harrington traces the evolution of nomadism from Bouraoui's early novels to her later autobiographical novels, wherein she identifies Bouraoui's unique nomadic writing style that destabilizes language and conventional narrative. Approaching writing as a way of 'seeing', Bouraoui is shown to gain privileged access to insight and knowledge through her nomadic origins and stance. The fourth and final chapter examines the wide-ranging work of Régine Robin, wherein nomadism becomes an intellectual and theoretical notion that does not necessarily involve travel. As this chapter convincingly demonstrates, while Robin has certainly experienced displacement away from her country of birth, 'she has in fact, always been a de-territorialized subject, and seems destined to remain in an intermediary space' (p. 106). Robin's fragmented writing style is shown to reflect Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic model, inspiration for the nomadic model, as is her foray into cyberspace, deemed the 'logical next step as a space of

identity exploration and writing [of] the postmodern self' (p. 131).

Engaging and well-written, *Writing the Nomadic Experience in Contemporary Francophone Literature* achieves its proposed aims of attempting to widen the scope of the study of nomadism in contemporary French and Francophone literature, and to expose the wide range of nomadic subjects and experiences that are present in literature today through the study of four key authors. The author might have further explored the contentious links between nomadism and privilege, which demand further discussion than that dedicated to considerations regarding Huston's privileged nomadism, particularly with regard to Le Clézio and the discrepancy between his own privileged nomadic lifestyle and that of his less privileged nomadic characters. The author duly recognizes that '[a] nomadic existence is simply not possible for every individual' (p. 53) in recognition of the fact that nomadic wandering and the discarding of constraining identities is, after all, a question of privilege. A more sustained acknowledgement of imposed, undesired nomadism, and the lack of freedom this entails, might have more clearly highlighted that the key to the possibilities opened up by nomadism—the freedom of leaving home—is only experienced as freedom if one also has the option of staying home.

Timely in its anticipation of the current proliferation of nomadic identities and cultural expressions of hybrid identities, and innovative in its selection of four highly diverse and significant Francophone writers today, this book is an important contribution to its field, and will be of interest to scholars of contemporary French and Francophone literatures, transnational writing, and nomadic identities.

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*The Métis of Senegal: Urban Life and Politics in French West Africa.* By HILARY JONES. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013. 277 pp. Pb £18.99. ISBN: 978-0-253-00674-5

In this scholarly history of the *métis* community of Saint Louis, Senegal, Hilary Jones presents the results of meticulous research that draws on archives and interviews as well as various primary and secondary sources. The contents are ordered in part chronologically, with a specific focus on the roots of *métis* society and the founding of Saint Louis in the mid-eighteenth century (in Chapter 1) and the two concluding chapters devoted to developments between 1870 and 1890 (Chapter 6), and 1890 and 1920 (Chapter 7). The central section, which deals primarily with the period 1820–70 but extends to the early twentieth century, adopts a thematic rather than chronological approach, examining *métis* and broader Saint Louis society from the perspectives of the economy (Chapter 2), religion, marriage and material culture (Chapter 3), education, association, and the independent press (Chapter 4), and colonial conquest, republican institutions and civil society (Chapter 5). The advantages of this thematic approach are that it allows the author to trace developments in each broad area over a long period, and to offer a many-angled perspective on the modern political history of Senegal, distinguishing itself from previous work that has tended to focus on economic, nationalist, political or military questions within a pro-colonial versus anti-colonial framework. In addition, by using *métis* family histories as part of the organizing dynamic of the book, Jones is able to offer a nuanced exploration of the family alliances that were crucial to political and commercial developments and to place greater emphasis on the role played by African women than has hitherto been achieved. The inevitable disadvantage

of this approach is that a certain amount of repetition is unavoidable, and the repeated jumping back in time can be a little destabilizing for those reading the book cover-to-cover rather than as a reference work.

As a work of reference, the book is extremely valuable: the seven chapters (plus introduction and conclusion) are supplemented by forty-six pages of notes, five maps, one sketch, eight photographs, a detailed bibliography, and a well-designed index, as well as a seven-page appendix summarizing the lineages of the most important *métis* families from the mid-eighteenth century to the twentieth century. The main insights and points of interest of the book will vary from reader to reader; from the perspective of Francophone postcolonial studies and postcolonial theory, it is perhaps the book's extended and detailed illustration of the inadequacies of theoretical paradigms based on traditional dichotomies (colonizer–colonized, Western–African etc.) that is most striking. Jones shows not only that such dichotomous models are problematic when urban centres with large *métis* populations are the focus of study, but also that the relevance of any divisions along racial or religious lines varies significantly over time: in the 1870s and 1880s, for example, Jones argues that 'race had little to do with the formation of political coalitions' (p. 167), whereas in the mid-1890s, 'race and class consciousness began to inform political coalitions in new ways' (p. 167). Jones's study also provides detailed and fascinating evidence for the view that, while being a key component of French colonial discourse, assimilation was a policy that was never truly desired, and that assimilated individuals often came to be seen as a threat to French interests on African soil. The case of Gaspard Devès, for example, described in detail in Chapter 7, offers a compelling case in point for this line of argument.

Overall, Jones's book represents an important contribution to studies of the French colonial presence in Africa, exploring that presence through a new and productive perspective that offers nuanced and often surprising insights. It is perhaps a shame that the historical study of key *métis* families does not extend beyond 1920, particularly given the stress, in the opening lines of the book, on the prominent role played by descendants of mixed-race Saint Louis families in the newly independent Senegal of the 1960s. The book nevertheless remains a valuable and well-written addition to existing scholarship.

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*Mémoires et Imaginaires du Maghreb et de la Caraïbe*. Edited by SAMIA KASSAB-CHARFI AND MOHAMED BAHİ. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013. 332 pp. 75€. ISBN: 978-2745325310

Editors Samia Kassab-Charfi and Mohamed Bahi—Kassab-Charfi working out of the Tunisian academe and Bahi within the Moroccan academe—have assembled a volume of twenty-three texts from writers and poets (Patrick Chamoiseau, Abdelwahab Meddeb, Monchoachi, Ernest Pépin, and Boualem Sansal) and academics from Algeria, Canada, England, metropolitan and departmental France, Lebanon, Morocco, Québec, Tunisia, and the United States of America on cultural and historical studies, philosophy, literature, poetry, and the visual arts. The texts are each, without exception, rigorous in their analyses of topics as varied as the sugar industry to the resonance of a Glissantian *Tout-monde* in Maghrebian poetics.

The stated intention of the volume is to compare two 'géomorphologique' (p. 27)

spaces: the Caribbean and the Mediterranean (p. 29). As with any comparative project, the task is essential, and yet always seemingly impossible. Few scholars in their individual work, and few editors in their collaborative projects (edited volumes or grant applications) take up the task of making connections across geographic, linguistic, and/or cultural frontiers. Kassab-Charfi and Bahi readily admit that they go about the task with a hesitant approach (p. 27). Yet they courageously challenge their contributors and their readers to involve themselves in the intellectual travail of opening up new critical complexities (p. 29), of quite literally disorienting thought (p. 29).

The comparative approach adopted by the volume took me through phases. First, as a Caribbeanist, I was excited at how avidly scholars engage in applying, comparing, or integrating the theoretical import of work by *créolistes* (Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant), and texts by Ernesto Cardenal, Aimé Césaire, Ina Césaire, Frantz Fanon, or Édouard Glissant, to and with Maghrebian and Mashrekian novelists and poets: Tahar Ben Jelloun, Mahmoud Darwich, Mohammed Dib, Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, Fouad Laroui, Albert Memmi, Boualem Sansal, Tayeb Salih, Ali Tür, and Kateb Yacine. I was also thrilled to note the central place that French Caribbean thought took in the deliberations within the volume of what it means to write from a space of postcoloniality (Corina Crainic's piece on 'mémoires souffrantes') or of non-identity (Jean Khalifa's article on Fanon). A second phase set in, whereby, already intimate with much of the discussions around the work of Guadeloupean and Martinican intellectuals, I was avid to learn more about and from North African thinkers; yet unlike Césaire, Fanon, or Glissant, who literally permeate the volume, no North African writers dominate the discussion as does the Martinican (male) triumvirate. The next phase, was a feeling of insatiability, to find answers to fundamental questions. Why were women missing from the volume? For, aside from Ina Césaire, there is absolutely no mention of Maryse Condé, Assia Djebar, Gisèle Halimi, Fatima Mernissi, Malika Mokeddem, Gisèle Pineau, or Leïla Sebbar. Why, besides passing references to the complexity of two poly-lingual spaces (on p. 94, p. 125, and Ahmed Hafdi's chapter on Maghrebian orality), does the French language seem the accepted and unquestioned status-quo? Finally, why the complete absence of Haitian writers? In addition, more articulated questions began to formulate themselves. Given the importance allotted to the French language, why was Assia Djebar, the *grande dame* of Francophone literature, the first non-*français de souche* woman elected to the Académie française missing? With the significant number of women contributors to the volume, why were the contributors not writing about women writers and intellectuals? In light of the cultural history of the past decades, imbricating identity politics, race, religion, sexuality, and political sovereignty, not to mention the so-called 'Arab Spring,' inaugurated in Tunisia, why do so many of the discussions deal with decades-old issues of colonial intervention? With a writer as 'prized' as Dany Laferrière, why is Haitian-literature-in-French absent? Indeed, my questions emerge from absolute ignorance due in part to my participation within the US-American academe: notably my lack of knowledge as regards the circulation of material and online book culture and the intellectual thought that accompanies it; and, of the subtle structures of censorship and its associated perils. With the excitement of the points-of-interrogation that emerged, I realized that the volume does as it announces: it lays out new comparative twists (p. 29).

And as such, unlike any edited volume I have ever read, it desperately invites us as scholars deployed throughout our various academes—especially Caribbeanists and North Africanists—to discuss this volume, to reorient the successful intended *dépaysement* of the volume within our own specific academic points of reference. The esteemed journal *Small Axe: A Caribbean Platform for Criticism* often concludes its issues with a 'book discussion,' by which three scholars offer short critical analyses of a recently published book. *Mémoires et Imaginaires du Maghreb et de la Caraïbe* beckons such a discussion. How and why does a volume, dedicated to Fanon and Glissant, one man a militant in his anti-colonialism, the other working

impossible poetic acrobatics to be inclusive of all members of the *Tout-monde*, end up skirting the issues of women's voices, of political and communal sovereignty, of the constantly evolving complexities of the French language in Caribbean and North African poetic landscapes? What are the underlying and unsaid stakes involved in these uncomfortable and all-too-obvious silences? Enticingly, Kassab-Charfi and Bahi's volume, unlike any other, offers a 'postcolonial site' (Charles Forsdick, 'Colonial History, Postcolonial Memory,' *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, 2007) whereby those aware of, and engaged in the postcolonial spaces, find themselves in Crainic's words:

at the very source of the recognition of the Other as a valid partner and even as an unavoidable element in the constitution of an awareness of self, understood as both intimate and communal—à la source même de la reconnaissance de l'Autre comme partenaire valable et même comme élément indispensable à la constitution d'une conscience de soi entendue à la fois comme intime ou communautaire. (p. 230)

Similarly, in her recent talks, Kaiama L. Glover has spoken of 'bypassing the center,' of creating more dialogue among so-called postcolonial spaces, avoiding centrifugal mega-forces such as Paris, London, or New York. Kassab-Charfi and Bahi's volume, with its all-star cast of contributors—both the 'big intellectuals' and those who comment on their work—beautifully takes up the challenge of creating such a conversation, one generative of myriad interrogations, which must urgently be addressed to better understand how 'postcolonial sites' may better articulate themselves not just to themselves but among each other.

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*Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film.* By MAX SILVERMAN. New York: Berghahn, 2013. 206 pp. Hb £55. ISBN: 978-0-85745-883-4

In this elegant study Silverman tackles the vicissitudes of memory studies within the overlapping contexts of the Holocaust and French colonialism. If the widespread memory boom of recent years has encouraged a vested interest in processes of anamnesis and memorialization, scholarship has nonetheless tended to view particular historical events (and concomitant memories of them) as separate and distinct. This is particularly true of the Holocaust as fears over revisionism and instrumentalization mean it is often conceived as an unspeakable or untranslatable singular event. Following on from the work of Paul Gilroy (1997), Fatima Naqvi (2007) and Michael Rothberg (2009), Silverman suggests that group memories often emerge as monolithic narratives that foreclose interconnections between communities and histories; the result is a competitive form of victimhood—defined by Benjamin Stora as a *guerre des mémoires* (2007)—that sees different groups vying for socio-political recognition. This separatist approach is also evidenced in the humanities, as the (largely) autonomous fields of postcolonialism and Holocaust studies attest. Silverman's argument hinges on the notion that a new ethics of memory must begin with an acknowledgment of the traces and interconnections between different communal memories. Building on Rothberg's influential conception of 'multidirectional memory', the author proposes 'palimpsestic memory' as the term which best accounts for the 'superimposition' and 'spatialization' at stake in transversal mnemonic models (p. 4).

The monograph is informed by several theoretical models including the Derridean

trace, the Deleuzian concept of *mémoire-monde*, and Benjamin's understanding of the 'image' or 'constellation', all of which are described as inherently palimpsestic. The conception of 'palimpsestic memory' also has much in common with Gilroy's idea of 'the knotted intersection of histories' (p. 29) (which Silverman references several times) as well as Mireille Rosello's recent theorization of memory work as translation (2010). Where it departs from these is in its focus on 'the figurative "staging" of memory by which memory traces overlap, intersect and are transformed' (p. 22). For Silverman, literature and film are privileged sites for the emergence of a staged 'poetics of memory' (p. 22) since they enable memories to come together across putatively fixed spatio-temporal boundaries. Thus if scholars across the humanities have been reluctant to engage with the interconnections between histories, Silverman deftly reveals how literature and film, by their very nature, have always been open to traces of the other. Focusing on several canonical texts from Holocaust and postcolonial literature, he teases out the intersections between them to reveal 'an overlapping vocabulary, lexicon, imagery, aesthetic and, ultimately, history shared by representations of colonialism and the Holocaust' (p. 30). His sensitive intertextual readings put these categories in productive dialogue with each other, allowing for the emergence of a hybridized historical narrative that cuts across putatively disparate texts.

While Silverman is highly attuned to the dangers of framing histories in terms of equivalences or similes, there is always the risk that, in the wrong hands, such an approach might facilitate identitarian narratives that exploit or distort interconnections for their own ends. This problem is duly broached in the monograph but a more in-depth exploration of the dangers might have further reinforced and nuanced the author's line of reasoning. This caveat aside, Silverman's argument is compelling and well-developed throughout, with each chapter serving to tease out a further dimension of 'palimpsestic memory'. Focusing on an array of filmmakers and authors including Alain Resnais, Mohammed Dib, Georges Perec, Patrick Chamoiseau and Hélène Cixous, Silverman's case studies are consistently well-researched and thought provoking. A particular highlight is Chapter Five, which interweaves Benjaminian thought on the dialectical image with close readings of films by Jean-Luc Godard and Michael Haneke. While the study of a wide range of texts allows for a more holistic approach, however, the reader risks being disappointed by the seemingly brief attention afforded some texts. Nonetheless the study is highly readable and will be of particular interest to scholars interested in the Holocaust, French colonialism and memory more generally. As academics begin to question the future of memory studies, Silverman's book is a timely intervention, encouraging us to think beyond the insidious binds of victimhood and competition. And in our globalized age, in which historical events and memorial narratives are increasingly diffracted and deterritorialized, the term 'palimpsestic memory' is as apt as it is welcome.

LUCY BRISLEY  
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*Antillanité, créolité, littérature-monde*. Edited by ISABELLE CONSTANT, KAHUDI C. MABANA and PHILIP NANTON. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013. 164 pp. Hb £39.99. ISBN: 1-4438-4203-6

This collection of essays emerged out of a 2010 conference held at the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill, Barbados. It explores the relationship between *créolité*, *antillanité* and *littérature-monde* and the ways in which these concepts aid understanding of contemporary writing in French. The first essay in the collection, by Lydie Moudileno, examines the theoretical issues surrounding the categorization of literature produced in French outside the Hexagon, arguing that the proliferation of labels is a symptom of a need to articulate the contours of the field of study, paired with anxiety about avoiding exclusionary or utopian classifications. Cheryl Toman looks at the ways in which Gabonese female writers have interwoven elements of French with elements of the Fang language to question what it means to be a 'Francophone' writer and to open up the novel to the Fang poetic traditions of *m'vet* and *mégane*. Savrina Chinien examines the different guises taken on by the narrators of Chamoiseau's fiction and writings on childhood. Kahiudi C. Mabana's essay also looks at Chamoiseau, arguing that the features of *Texaco* and *Solibo Magnifique*, later seen as defining novels of the *créolité* movement, were also present in the 1986 *Chronique des sept misères*. Analysis of *Chronique des sept misères* continues in Elisabeth Lore's piece. Lore draws on John J. Gumperz's theory of metaphorical code-switching to offer perceptive close readings of instances of dialogue in the novel which demonstrate that *Chronique* associates Creole with the positive values of family, friendship and community.

In a refreshing move beyond the oral/written binary, Virginie Jauffred argues that Chamoiseau's work fuses two kinds of orality: that of Creole culture and that of epic poetry. Mamadou Wattara's article on René Philoctète's *Le Peuple des terres mêlées* looks at the ways in which Philoctète's novel draws on aspects of *antillanité*, *créolité*, *spiralisme* and *onirisme* to confront the legacy of the painful historical relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Florence Ramond Journey examines the portrayal of sexual violence and its effect on identity formation in Gisèle Pineau's *L'Espérance Macadam* and *Fleur de Barbarie*, arguing that it is knowledge of one's genealogy, rather than spatial rootedness, which allows the formation of a stable identity. Françoise Cévaër's essay looks at the work of Nick Stone as an example of *littérature-monde*. Cévaër argues that Stone's interweaving of tropes from the crime novel and thriller with figures and stories from *vodou* shows how ancestral traditions can be transformed and adapted in the context of globalization, emigration and diaspora. Nicolas Pien's essay explores Le Clézio's *Le Chercheur d'or* from the perspective of Édouard Glissant's study of the connections between language, place and the self. Lucy Swanson's stimulating piece compares the use of the figure of the zombie in a range of literary manifestos to contest the view that *négritude* is outward-looking, while *antillanité* and *créolité* are more focused on the local.

The strongest essays in this volume explore connections between the three literary movements named in the title, or produce original analyses of the implications of one for the work of a given author. At times, though, the reader is left tantalized by glancing references to points of comparison between two or more of the movements which could have been explored in greater detail. Although the work of Patrick Chamoiseau is of course important to the questions the volume seeks to examine, the dedication of four of its eleven chapters to his work, two of which focus solely on *Chronique des sept misères*, is surprising, and no explanation for this weighting is given in the introduction. Errors and inconsistencies in spelling and punctuation sometimes distract from the arguments presented, and the English translation of the postscript contains a puzzling number of calques which occasionally obscure meaning. This collection does contain some insightful readings, and its geographical



range gives a sense of the variety of contexts in which contemporary literature in French is produced, but at times the reader is left wishing for greater depth, especially in the editorial framing of the book's project.

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*Perceiving Pain in African Literature.* By ZOE NORRIDGE. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 239 pp. Hb £53.00. ISBN: 978-0-230-36742-5

Although pain is a pervasive feature of African writing, the nuances of literary pain narratives have rarely been explored in any great depth. Susan Sontag has argued in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) that there exists a strong sense of complacency in the viewing of pain, with Western media representations essentializing Africa as a place of suffering. Zoe Norridge's *Perceiving Pain in African Literature* immediately dispels this blanket conception of a 'suffering Africa' (p. 158) and highlights the vast range of responses to individual pain experiences in African literature. Challenging Elaine Scarry's suggestion that pain is unspeakable, Norridge explores how writers find a voice with which to narrate pain, foregrounding the practices of African writers working against homogenizing representations of African suffering. As Norridge indicates in the introduction, the book provides a nuanced exploration of 'the particularities of individual pain experiences' (p. 22) and the complexities of personal pain.

The book is divided into five chapters and examines a range of genres including testimony, autobiography, memoir and the novel, which are grouped according to geographical region and the type of pain experience depicted, including female circumcision in West Africa, apartheid in South Africa, and the mass suffering inflicted during the genocide in Rwanda. Drawing on anthropology, trauma theory, postcolonial thought, and human rights discourse, *Perceiving Pain* offers an illuminating close reading of the narrative features of the texts, thinking about pain in terms of 'both emotion and sensation' (p. 3) and treating the selected texts as exceptional rather than exemplary. The first chapter focuses on a single text, Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002)—while the rest of the book is comparative in its approach—and sets up the framework for the subsequent chapters, emphasizing the role of literature in accessing personal narratives of pain. Norridge argues that, through the aestheticization of the pain experience, fiction has the potential to create new systems of meaning for the person in pain, and points to the ways in which pain is also accorded meaning through the interpersonal. The second chapter focuses on Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (1974) and J. M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K* (1998), reconsidering the traditional mind-body dualism through the intertwining of emotional and physical pain in the texts.

Of particular interest to Francophone scholars are the third and fourth chapters on narratives from West Africa and personal testimonies from Rwanda. The third chapter examines novels by Ahmadou Kourouma, Mamadou Samb, Abdoulaye Ndiaye and Calixthe Beyala, as well as Khady's autobiographical text, *Mutilée* (2005). Norridge draws attention to how pain experiences are determined by cultural, personal and symbolic meanings, and then goes on to explore the (often political) appropriation of pain meaning and how such appropriations are resisted by the authors in question. In the chapter focusing on Rwanda, the testimonial accounts of Yolande Mukagasana and Marie Béatrice Umutesi are read alongside the fictional texts of Boris Boubacar Diop and Véronique Tadjo, showing how the

personal aspects of both testimony and fictional narrative can deepen our understanding of pain, stressing the 'singularity of suffering' (p. 164) even within the experience of mass violence. Norridge shows how, unlike other African pain narratives, 'overt descriptions of pain are strangely absent from literary narratives about the 1994 genocide in Rwanda' (p. 135). Nevertheless, Norridge demonstrates how the writers convey pain by writing around and pointing towards it, in particular by foregrounding the sensory experience of pain, thus inviting the reader to 'visualise' (p. 153) suffering.

The final chapter shifts towards the realm of human rights, exploring the healing potential of narrative while considering the complex social and political contexts in which pain is inflicted and endured. Norridge identifies three types of healing in the context of pain: removing the source of pain, treating the symptoms of pain and reconciling oneself to living with pain (pp. 172–73), the latter being the reality for the vast majority of wounded individuals represented in African pain narratives. The texts discussed in the final chapter in particular emphasize 'the necessity of living with the pain of the past' (p. 174) and what it means for individuals to endure in the aftermath of loss. This chapter compares Aminatta Forna's novel about the war in Sierra Leone, *The Memory of Love* (2010), with Antjie Krog's account of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Country of My Skull* (1999), and Canadian doctor James Orbinski's memoir about his work in Somalia, Rwanda and the DRC, *An Imperfect Offering* (2009), demonstrating how these authors 'expand on their specific experiences to speak to human rights concerns' (p. 207) and issue a call for action to the reader. Norridge is sensitive to the complex and often problematic 'social settings for the articulation of suffering' (p.168), arguing that literature can provide an 'alternative space' (p. 174) in which to consider the nature of enduring pain.

Throughout the book, Norridge repeatedly makes the case for the role of literature in exploring and communicating pain, focusing in particular on the ways in which pain moves from the realm of the individual to the interpersonal through narrative. She concludes with a final interrogation of the purpose of such literary representations of pain and suffering, questioning what literature can *do* in terms of healing, preventing further suffering and inviting an active, empathic response from the reader. Norridge's rich and eloquent analysis offers an invigorating contribution to the debate surrounding the intersection of literature and human rights, and calls into question the generic boundaries of testimony and fiction. Overall, *Perceiving Pain in African Literature* is a lucid and compelling book that offers original insights into both 'classic' and less well-known African texts. A welcome addition to existing scholarship on African literature in both French and English, this book will be of great interest to scholars working in and beyond the fields of postcolonial, literary, and memory studies.

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## CONFERENCE REPORTS

### *The Black Jacobins* Revisited: Rewriting History Conference International Slavery Museum Liverpool

27–28 October 2013

To mark seventy-five years of C.L.R. James's pioneering anti-colonial classic *The Black Jacobins*, a text which revolutionized the writing of colonial history, this major international two-day conference shed new light on this underexplored foundational work. Held at the International Slavery Museum, Liverpool, the conference was a great success, with seventy-five attendees, including twenty postgraduates, eight keynote speakers (Robert Hill, Bill Schwarz, Yvonne Brewster, Rawle Gibbons, Nick Nesbitt, Matthew J. Smith, Selma James and Selwyn Cudjoe), academics from many disciplines (History, French, English, Geography, Sociology, Politics, Drama), participants from many countries across the world (with a good representation from the Caribbean), and theatre practitioners—notably the *grande dame* of black British theatre, Yvonne Brewster, who set up the first black British theatre company (Talawa) and whose maiden production was *The Black Jacobins* play in 1986. Also present was radical feminist and leader of Global Women's Strike, Selma James (C.L.R. James's former wife).

Overall, the conference generated radically new approaches on *The Black Jacobins*—a text which is always held up as a classic history, but about which many have found surprisingly little to say regarding its actual detail. Previous studies had tended to focus on questions of James's political biography with the result that this standard reference work itself still remains underexplored. One previously uncharted area explored in depth by several papers was the little-known feature of *The Black Jacobins* that it both began and ended its life as a play.

A particularly exciting feature of this event was the first performance since 1936 of James's play *Toussaint Louverture*. The precursor to C.L.R. James's classic history of the Haitian revolution *The Black Jacobins*, the play was performed in 1936 with Paul Robeson in the lead. This play is much less well known than its famous history counterpart. The readings by Tayo Aluko & friends also included material never published or performed before now; of particular note was an intriguing epilogue which fast-forwards in time, recasting all the Haitian Revolutionaries in the present.

The conference was closely linked to, and timed to coincide with, October Black History Month in the UK. All events were filmed by the citizen TV production company Worldbytes: <http://www.worldbytes.org>, which will allow us to create a publically accessible record of them, and to reach as wide an audience worldwide as possible. Fantastic photos of the event were taken by Steve Forrest, director of photo co-op, workers' photos, and can be accessed here: <http://workersphotos.photoshelter.com/gallery/Liverpool-Rachel/G00004i49.blaOIw/C0000QhwmHOf4TKY> (password CLRJames). It is anticipated that an edited volume will arise from the conference entitled *The Black Jacobins Revisited: Rewriting History*.

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## *Bulletin of Francophone Postcolonial Studies*

Contributions on any topic related to Francophone Postcolonial Studies are invited for inclusion in future issues. Authors should submit electronically two copies of their article, 4,000 words maximum, in English or French to a member of the editorial team. Articles should conform in presentation to the guidelines in the *MHRA Stylebook*, providing references in footnotes, rather than the author-date system. All articles submitted to the *BFPS* will be refereed by two scholars of international reputation, drawn from the advisory and editorial boards. To facilitate the anonymity of the refereeing process, authors are asked that their manuscript (other than the title page) contains no clue as to their identity. Book reviews (between 600 and 1000 words in length) and conference reports (500 words max.) should also be sent to the editorial team.

The deadline for the receipt of articles to be included in the autumn 2014 issue is 15 August 2014.

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